Our research project examined community perspectives on Miami University's proposed Arena District development and the potential relocation of a new arena to Cook Field. The project sought to understand how different stakeholders, students, faculty, staff, alumni, and Oxford residents, use existing campus spaces and how they perceive the potential impact of the large-scale development. The project aimed to gather evidence that could inform decision-making and contribute to broader conversations about institutional planning and shared governance. Conducting this research required developing a thoughtful research strategy, learning to use library resources effectively, and adapting our approach as challenges emerged.

The first stage of our research focused on building background knowledge about campus planning, higher education decision-making, and the social role of campus spaces. We began by exploring existing scholarship through Miami University Libraries, which helped us situate the project within broader conversations about how universities balance development, tradition, and community priorities. Using the library's research guides and discovery tools, we searched for literature related to university needs, stakeholder engagement, and public opinion in higher education contexts. This step was important because it helped clarify what kinds of questions have previously been used and what gaps have existed in similar contexts. Instead of simply collecting articles, we focused on identifying patterns in the literature, like how researchers measure community sentiment, what methods they use to gather data, and how they interpret stakeholder perspectives.

Miami University Libraries' resources were essential in this early stage. The library's online catalog and discovery system allowed us to locate books and articles related to urban planning, higher education administration, and community-based research. In addition, subject research guides created by librarians helped narrow our search and introduced strategies for refining keywords and identifying relevant academic sources. These guides helped us think more intentionally about search terms and how changing terminology could yield different results.

As the project developed, existing literature and previously collected institutional data provided an important foundation for understanding campus planning processes and community engagement around large development projects. However, because the Arena District proposal is a current and highly localized issue at Miami University, these sources could not fully capture the perspectives of the specific stakeholders most affected by the potential development. From early in the research process, we anticipated that collecting primary data is necessary to understand these viewpoints more directly. Building on the context provided by prior research, our team developed a large-scale community survey to gather input from multiple stakeholder groups. Designing the survey required translating broader research questions into clear, measurable items. This process proved important as early drafts of questions sometimes produced ambiguous responses or did not fully capture the nuance of community perspectives. Through revision and feedback, the survey questions were refined to ensure they were understandable, neutral, and capable of generating meaningful data.

The process of distributing the survey and collecting responses introduced additional challenges. One challenge was ensuring that the survey reached a diverse range of participants rather than a narrow subset of the university community. Another was interpreting responses in a way that remained faithful to the data rather than imposing assumptions onto the results. Addressing these challenges required careful attention to methodology and transparency. Throughout this stage, we returned to library resources to review examples of survey-based research and to better understand how researchers present and interpret community data.

Once responses were collected, the project shifted into a phase of data analysis and synthesis. More than three thousand individuals participated in the survey, which created both an opportunity and a challenge. The large number of responses provided a strong foundation for identifying patterns, but it also required careful organization and interpretation. At this stage, the research process involved moving between quantitative findings and qualitative responses describing personal experiences with campus spaces. Synthesizing these forms of data helped reveal broader trends in how community members view Cook Field and Millett Hall.

Miami University Libraries again played a role during the analysis and writing stages. Access to academic articles through the library helped guide how the results were contextualized within broader research about community engagement and institutional planning. Rather than presenting the findings in isolation, we used these sources to frame the results as part of a larger conversation about how universities make decisions that affect their communities. The library also provided access to

research support services and citation tools, which helped ensure that sources were documented properly and that the report followed academic standards.

One of the most valuable lessons we learned from this project is that research is not a linear process. Instead, it requires constant adjustment as new information emerges. Early in the project, we assumed that understanding the Arena District proposal would primarily involve reviewing institutional plans and policy documents. However, as the research progressed, it became clear that community perspectives were central to understanding the issue. This realization shifted the project toward a mixed-methods approach that combined literature review with primary data collection.

The experience also deepened our understanding of the role libraries play in the research process. Rather than serving simply as repositories of information, Miami University Libraries functioned as a starting point for inquiry, providing tools that helped refine research questions, locate relevant sources, and contextualize findings. Learning how to navigate these resources made the research process more efficient and more intentional.

Ultimately, this project taught us that effective research requires curiosity, persistence, and flexibility. By combining scholarly sources accessed through Miami University Libraries with original survey data, the project was able to produce a clearer picture of how different stakeholders view the future of campus development. The process strengthened our ability to ask meaningful questions, evaluate evidence, and communicate findings in a way that contributes to informed decision-making. Most importantly, it reinforced the idea that research is not just about gathering information. It

is about using evidence thoughtfully to better understand complex issues and support constructive dialogue within a community.