

# Fiesole Retreat 2025: Learning from the Past, Informing the Future

April 7–9, 2025 | European University Institute, Fiesole, Italy

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The 25th Fiesole Collection Development Retreat, held April 7–9, 2025, at the European University Institute (EUI) in Fiesole, Italy, brought together an international group of librarians, publishers, technologists, and thought leaders to reflect on the evolving landscape of scholarly communication. With just over 100 attendees, this milestone retreat was a rich blend of tradition and innovation, engaging participants through a curated program of keynotes, panels, discussions, and cultural experiences—including a stunning conference dinner overlooking Florence’s Duomo from the historic Hotel Baglioni.

## Setting the Stage: Pre-Conference on AI and Libraries

The Retreat opened on Monday, April 7, with a compelling pre-conference session focused on the theme “AI and Libraries – Innovating for the Future”. Convened by Pep Torn, Library Director of the EUI, the panel featured real-world case studies demonstrating how AI is reshaping library services. Laurie Bridges highlighted AI literacy efforts at Oregon State University, while Paris O’Donnell from I Tatti Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies discussed generative AI’s role in collection management. Carme Fenoll’s imaginative take on “Rewriting Cervantes” illustrated the cultural potential of AI, and Piero Attanasio from the Italian Publishers Association underscored the opportunity for collaborative innovation between libraries and publishers. This session set a forward-thinking tone for the Retreat, emphasizing the balance between technology’s promise and libraries’ enduring values.

## Opening Remarks and Intellectual Provocations

After a convivial lunch, the formal program began with a warm welcome from retreat organizers Michele Casalini and Becky Lenzini. The opening from the event hosts at the EUI was done by Pep Torn filling in for Patricia Nanz, the President of EUI, who was unable to attend due to a last-minute conflict. Michael Keller of Stanford University then offered a thought-provoking opening talk, “Re-Framing the Retreat,” inviting attendees to reconsider traditional approaches to collection development in light of global shifts. He looked back at developments that have happened in the last 25 years since the found-

ing of the retreat and provided a comprehensive list of innovations that came about during that time period. He also paid tribute to Mario Casalini and his dedication to innovation in founding the retreat and acknowledged both Michele and Barbara Casalini for picking up the reins and carrying on the tradition.

Richard Gallagher, President and Editor-in-Chief of Annual Reviews, followed with a keynote that challenged the audience to think critically about knowledge production and dissemination in a complex, polarized world. His presentation titled, “Can we lower



*Retreat venue at the EUI Badia Fiesolana*

the knowledge barrier? Using academic publishing to empower society” spoke of “postnormal publishing,” a concept drawn from the problem-solving approach called “postnormal science”. He described Annual Reviews’ new strategy using a Brains Trust team to fund mission-aligned projects to move forward and invited participation or ideas from attendees.

## Session 1: Biodiversity at the Margins: Spaces of Innovation in Scholarly Communication

The theme of “Biodiversity at the Margins” framed the first major session. The panel was originally to be convened by Charles Watkinson, Associate University Librarian at the University of Michigan and Director, University of Michigan Press, but he was unable to attend in person. Instead, he provided an engaging and cleverly created video introduction to set the stage. Carol Mandel, Dean Emerita from New York University Libraries, convened the panel in his absence. Borrowing from ecolog-



*Attendees enjoying an afternoon coffee break.*

ical metaphors, the session explored the “ecotones” in scholarly communication—spaces where institutions, communities, content, and platforms collide. Presentations spanned topics from engaged scholarship to platform design and user experience, with speakers including Jenny Evans (University of Westminster), Sy Holsinger (Operas), and Georgios Papadopoulos (Founder of Atypon) sharing cross-sector perspectives.

The afternoon culminated in a lively panel discussion, moderated by Carol Mandel, where audience members engaged with panelists to unpack the tensions and opportunities in these interstitial spaces. The discussion reinforced the idea that innovation often emerges from the fringes—not the center—of established systems. It also included a sidebar conversation with a lively debate on the value of preprints.

The evening reception at the picturesque Villa la Torrossa, home of the Cassalini family, provided an elegant close to the first day, fostering collegial connections and informal dialogue.

### Session 2: Through the Lens of the Humanities

Tuesday’s program began with a deep dive into the role and reinvention of the humanities. Convened by Ann Okerson, Director of the Offline Internet Consortium, the session examined how humanities disciplines are adapt-



*Captivating view of Florence from the conference dinner*

ing to institutional pressures, digital shifts, and broader cultural transformations. Ann opened by noting that one could argue that the humanities started in Florence, so this is a fitting location for the topic. Joy Connolly (ACLS) emphasized the importance of quiet revolutions over grand restructurings and started by grounding the conversation in the value of humanistic scholarship and the importance of plurality in scholarship. She also discussed the challenges of convincing this value to parents and potential employers, since less than 20% of STEM majors end up in a STEM career. Karla Pollmann (University of Tübingen) made the case for open access as essential to the humanities’ future, noting that the old structures from a 19th century imperialistic agenda aren’t fit any more, and the standards that were developed for those structures don’t fit either.

Kristine Rose-Beers (Cambridge University Library) offered a powerful argument for the preservation of physical books, reminding attendees that advocacy for heritage collections is as vital as ever. In the 20th century, conservationists were gatekeepers, limiting access to delicate and endangered historical artifacts. The new, evolving practice focuses on digitization for preservation and to allow wider access. This session resonated strongly, blending pragmatism with a reaffirmation of the humanities’ intrinsic value in shaping ethical, inclusive scholarship.

### Session 3: Metrics, Monitoring, and the Arithmetic of Prestige

The afternoon sessions addressed the central and increasingly contentious role of metrics in academia. Julien Roche, University Librarian and Director of the Libraries at the University of Lille and current LIBER president convened the first part of the session, featuring Laetitia Bracco (University of Lorraine), Tasha Mellins-Cohen (COUNTER), and Christine Dunn (Clarivate). These speakers discussed the evolution of measurement in open science, usage tracking, and research integrity.

The second part, titled “The Perverse Arithmetic of Prestige,” interrogated the persistence of outdated benchmarks and misaligned incentives in scholarly publishing. Charles Henry (CLIR), Stephen Rhind-Tutt (Coherent Digital), Michael Levine-Clark (University of Denver), and Alison Mudditt (PLOS) provided historical context and future-forward proposals for reforming reputation systems. Themes of inclusivity, transparency, and mission-driven publishing emerged as guiding principles.

### Conference Dinner: Celebrating Collaboration in a Historic Setting

Tuesday evening’s conference dinner, held at the elegant Hotel Baglioni and sponsored by EBSCO, was a standout moment of the Retreat. Guests dined on 5 courses of

traditional Tuscan cuisine while enjoying panoramic views of the Florence skyline, including the iconic Duomo. The atmosphere was celebratory yet intimate, offering space for reflection on the past 25 years of the Retreat and the vibrant professional community it has fostered.

#### Session 4: Equitable Partnerships for an Equitable World of Knowledge

The final day took place at EUI's Villa Salviati, offering a new vantage point for continued exploration. The morning keynote by Buhle Mbambo-Thata (University of Lesotho) addressed the strategic imperative of inclusivity in knowledge development. Her powerful call to action anchored the day's theme of equitable partnerships.

Giannis Tsakonas, Director, Library & Information Centre, University of Patras, convened a panel titled "Equitable Partnerships for an Equitable World of Knowledge" with Sharon Memis (President, IFLA), Mpho Ngoepe (University of South Africa), and Heli Kautonen (University of Turku), examining the structures, values, and cultural dynamics that shape effective collaboration. Topics ranged from cross-continental partnerships to the role of library technology in enabling or inhibiting equity. This session emphasized that partnerships must be critically examined, not just celebrated, to ensure they do not replicate old power imbalances. The panel urged institutions to adopt principles of transparency, mutual benefit, and shared decision-making in all collaborative endeavors.

#### Closing Reflections and Forward Momentum

The Retreat concluded with final remarks from David Worlock (Outsell) who offered a moment of quiet relaxation, giving a synthesis of the themes and challenges explored over the three days. Ever the storyteller, David began with a tale of John Milton on the road from Rome to Florence in 1648. This connected with the story of a letter-writing campaign from Samuel Hortleib, whose letters are in the collections of the University of Sheffield, which comprise a treasure trove of questions connecting scientific and academic luminaries of the day. He offered a "tasting plate" of quotes and ideas presented over the course of the retreat, and noted the generative tension between tradition and innovation, centralization and decentralization, and called on the community to embrace complexity rather than retreat from it.

A farewell lunch on the grounds of the Villa Salviati provided a fitting close, grounding participants once more in the collegiality and warmth that defines the Fiesole experience.

#### Takeaways

The Fiesole Retreat 2025 reinforced its position as an essential stage for meaningful, often provocative dia-



EUI's Villa Salviati

logue about the future of knowledge systems. Key takeaways included:

- AI is no longer speculative: It is already shaping workflows, ethics, and educational priorities in libraries and publishing.
- Diversity strengthens the ecosystem: Representation from global and underrepresented voices highlighted the necessity of inclusive approaches in building sustainable and equitable knowledge infrastructures.
- Metrics must be reimagined: Prestige, impact, and evaluation need to be redefined with a focus on equity, openness, and integrity.
- The humanities remain vital: Even as they evolve, they provide critical context and ethical grounding for the entire research ecosystem.
- True partnerships require work: Equity in collaboration must go beyond rhetoric and be embedded in structures and shared practices.

As the Retreat enters its second quarter-century, the themes of innovation, margin, and transformation continue to resonate. Fiesole 2025 did more than celebrate its 25th anniversary—it offered a roadmap for navigating the next 25 years of change with courage, curiosity, and care.

The full program and presentations can be found at [https://www.fiesoleretreat.org/fiesole\\_2025](https://www.fiesoleretreat.org/fiesole_2025). Information on next year's retreat will be available soon; as the Fiesole Retreat looks ahead to its 2026 gathering, the momentum from the rich conversations of the past will continue to inspire deeper collaboration, bold innovation, and a renewed commitment to equity and inclusivity across the global knowledge community. |



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