The Marmot Academic Committee was formed at the 2015 Marmot User Group. The purpose is to address specific needs that academic libraries have that may be different than public or school libraries. The group meets on the last Tuesday of every month, with adjustments made for November and December and a hiatus May through August. There are two voting members from each of the six Marmot academic libraries.

The first priority of the group last fall was to discover and prioritize issues in Pika that were problematic for academic library searching. The process of academic research is different than other library activities, and Pika was not fulfilling the needs of students, faculty, and staff. However, the libraries had not had a forum in which to discuss, prioritize, and communicate a cohesive list of needs. This committee fulfilled that purpose incredibly well. The group identified a number of specific issues in Pika. We were able to help each other solve some of the issues immediately by sharing configurations different libraries are currently using. In the end, a list of 10 items was forwarded to the R & D team. Many were handled very quickly, and some have turned out to be innovations that most Marmot libraries have adopted (horizontal search bar and different interface for advanced search). As of the June sprint, all but two of the requests have been implemented, and one of those remaining has been partially fulfilled. The beauty of the R & D team’s response is that most new features in Pika are being developed with an on/off toggle allowing libraries to implement or not implement as they choose, providing customization that was previously not as universal. The responsiveness of R & D to our requests has been nothing short of extraordinary and has solidified our desire to continue to work together with the developers to create instances of Pika that are successful in meeting the needs of academic researchers.

The committee members agreed that discussing other common topics unique to academic libraries would be beneficial to share knowledge and build partnerships. The instruction librarians from each institution joined the meeting one month and have met on their own several times, including once bringing in a group speaker. In addition, the committee is currently discussing ways of combining efforts in batch loading records for electronic subscriptions to build efficiency. The group is planning a face-to-face get together at Fort Lewis College August 3 and 4, 2016, with some Marmot directors attending. Our purpose in meeting in person is not to separate ourselves from Marmot but rather to leverage additional commonalities, some of which don’t currently involve Marmot (database purchases, outreach/marketing, instruction, etc.), to collaborate when doing so is beneficial, and to communicate with Marmot any special needs the academic libraries have that may not be heard in other venues because we are so few in number.

Several Marmot staff regularly attend the MAC meeting, including Tammy, Mark, and Lloyd. There has been some discussion that the libraries would like a totally independent forum, but I have tried to reassure them that we can do that when or if necessary. Tammy has been instrumental in helping facilitate these virtual meetings, and Mark’s participation has been very helpful as we work through Pika issues. There has been discussion about broadening the committee participation to include additional librarians and staff at various libraries while maintaining a 2 votes per institution rule for official business. It is also anticipated that building relationships between individuals in similar jobs will allow us to facilitate job-shadowing and communication outside the committee and Marmot structure.

The committee is currently on hiatus until MUG 2016 when we will meet in person and develop a calendar wherein each institution will take a turn leading the meeting for one month. The committee has expressed gratitude at our ability to discuss issues relevant to academic libraries, both Marmot-related and beyond, and would like to continue to meet in the future. We thank the Marmot organization for giving us a platform to do so.