

## **Disaster Librarianship: Reflections on Teaching and Learning from the Heart of the Campus**

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*Abstract: This reflection article explores how a library on a regional university campus adapted its services in response to the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. It delves into some of the novel conclusions drawn by its librarians about how the library has and will continue to contribute to the teaching and learning efforts of the campus community during and after the pandemic. Existing library services continued to be offered during the pandemic, albeit in modified capacities and in more digitally focused environments. Novel services were also created. At its core, the heart of the library is the human connections that librarians and library staff make with patrons, so choices were intentionally made to transform services in ways that still encouraged human connectedness and belonging within unprecedented circumstances. Specific topics include outreach and marketing; access services; reference and research services; information literacy instruction; grants; the role of physical and digital library materials in distance education; and faculty–student mentorship. The article also explores the novel conclusions drawn from the process of adaptation that will have far-reaching implications for the future of library services, as they contribute to the teaching and learning missions of campuses, once normalcy returns to higher education. Issues concerning the digital divide; equity of access; advocacy; and the implications of interactive, experiential learning are discussed.*

*Keywords: access services, COVID-19, distance education, information literacy, librarianship, libraries, marketing, mentorship, outreach, pandemic, reference services.*

### **Introduction**

As Zora Neale Hurston wrote in her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, “there are years that ask questions and years that answer” (1937/2000, p. 25). The year 2020 has certainly been forcing librarians within and outside of higher education to ask really difficult questions about past and current practices, but in asking these questions, today’s librarians have been able to answer in compelling and novel ways. Gone are the days of the misconceived stereotype that libraries are nothing more than closely guarded, obsolete citadels of dusty old books—or, at least, they should be. Unfortunately, the library-as-book-warehouse misconception persists, but nothing could be further from reality: “Today’s library is less about what we have for people and more about what we do for (and with) people” (Feldman & Rich, 2015). Academic libraries, through both their physical and their digital collections and services, are indispensable institutions that support the teaching, learning, and research missions

of universities across the globe (Association of College and Research Libraries [ACRL], 2018). As many have said, the academic library is the heart of a university campus (Leupp, 1924).

While libraries do provide necessary information resources to learning communities, such as books and articles, they also provide rich educational environments where students gain knowledge and hone the skills of information literacy (ACRL, 2013, 2018), which, on the authors' campus, is a general education requirement. Furthermore, the teaching and learning opportunities that libraries offer embody the principles of democratic, egalitarian education, for students and faculty are not restricted by discipline, methodology, or need. In other words, the university library is that one nexus on a campus where the diverse and seemingly disparate requirements of different disciplines, research interests, courses, and assignments all converge within a single paradigm of meaningful interactions. "Furthermore, because these interactions may often contain pedagogical elements, librarians [have the ability to] advocate for the growth of a more compassionate, critically thinking, and democratic society" (Block & Proctor, 2020, pp. 558–559). In addition to supporting academic belonging, these services and interactions also foster social belonging and contribute to a sense of community. Thus, as the medieval proverb goes, "all roads lead to Rome"; it would not, therefore, be inappropriate to adapt its message to read that all roads on a university campus lead to the library—or, at least, they can.

However, the emergence and persistence of the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has radically affected higher education across the United States (Sorenson Impact Center Staff, 2020). In March 2020, campuses began closing their physical doors and, for their own safety, transitioning their students and faculty into digital learning environments. Moreover, due to the continued rise of COVID-19 cases, many universities, the authors' included, encouraged distance learning for the fall 2020 and spring 2021 semesters. University libraries and faculty librarians, as key contributors to the teaching and learning efforts of their campuses, are responding creatively to ensure that their services and pedagogical methods continue to foster the needs of all students and faculty. The changing landscape of pandemic-driven education provides an opportunity for library faculties to reassess their own services and practices, while also exploring creative possibilities. In fact, now is the time to refuse to go back to normal; instead, now is the time to create a new normal that is even better than before.

What follows is a series of some of the questions asked, answers proffered, and reflections undertaken by three faculty librarians swimming their way to a "new normal" in response to the vicissitudes caused by the disorienting eddies of the COVID-19 pandemic. Each librarian is responsible for a different department within the library, yet all three share certain responsibilities in common. It is the authors' hope that the resulting panoptic view of the library, its services, and the responses of its faculty and staff to the teaching and learning needs of its campus community will provide readers with a multifaceted glimpse into how one academic institution is continuing to serve the needs of its students during an unprecedented disaster. What follows is a tale of disaster librarianship and collective leadership; specific topics include the role of physical and digital library materials in distance education, information literacy instruction, reference and research services, mentoring, and outreach and marketing.

## **Access Services and Physical Library Materials**

### *Library Mailing Service*

Access Services is the department responsible for maintaining and circulating the library's physical collections (e.g., monographs, DVDs, CDs, course reserves, etc.). One of the more significant challenges for Access Services during the Spring 2020 transition to distance learning and the resulting

suspension of face-to-face services was how to satisfy the pedagogical and research need for physical library materials on campus. While students and faculty retained remote access to the library's vast digital collections of electronic books (ebooks), electronic journal articles (ejournals), and other electronic resources, data found in the literature suggest that these formats, specifically when it comes to ebooks, may not necessarily enhance teaching and learning nor contribute to the user experience of individual students. Access Services relies on current data to make informed decisions when implementing change, and the department's responses to the pressures of COVID-19 and the increased focus on distance learning were grounded in this research. In particular, Access Services was able to implement the Library Mailing Service so that physical library materials might still circulate to those who needed and wanted them most.

There seems to be an unspoken assumption that younger traditional students, those who carry the moniker of *digital natives*, bring with them a penchant for ebooks and other electronic resources (Turner & Chung, 2020). This assumption may be particularly common when evaluating the needs and preferences of students enrolled in primarily online classes and programs. However, the research strongly suggests the opposite: that is, students, both traditional (digital natives) and nontraditional (digital immigrants), prefer physical books to their digital counterparts, both for academic purposes and for pleasure reading (Alhammad & Ku, 2016; Baron, Calixte, & Havewala, 2017; Carey & Pathak, 2019; Edmondson & Ward, 2017; Turner & Chung, 2020). It seems, therefore, inappropriate to force ebook use on students when, as we demonstrate below, there is an overriding preference for physical books. As Carey and Pathak (2019) observed:

the purpose of collection development in academic libraries is to acquire resources that support the research and curricular needs of students and faculty within an institution. However, in addition to selecting the right titles for their collections, librarians must also provide these resources in a manner that will best maximize their usefulness for patrons. (p. 1)

Similarly, Turner and Chung (2020) corroborated this assertion:

Simply providing ebooks in place of print books does not necessarily result in high levels of adoption from students. Despite changes to the provision of printed texts and the improvements in the functionality of digital texts, students continue to state a preference for printed books over ebooks. (p. 1224)

Thus, the utility of building digital collections only goes as far as the willingness to use them.

Turner and Chung (2020) conducted a survey of undergraduate students ( $N = 142$ ) at their own academic institution and concluded that 75.0% of respondents preferred physical books over digital. Similarly, conducting a larger survey across five countries, Baron et al. (2017) determined that 67.5% of respondents preferred physical books for academic purposes, and 67.0% mirrored this preference in terms of their pleasure reading. However, what is particularly interesting in this study was the insight into usage versus preferred usage and the role of price as a deterrent to using the more desired medium. While 67.5% of the respondents reported that they preferred physical books when completing academic work, 86.9% responded that if the cost disparity between physical and digital books were to be removed, they would prefer the former to the latter. Also interesting to this discussion was the conclusion that 91.8% of those students surveyed believed that their concentration and comprehension were both enhanced when reading physical books, although it should be noted that results of empirical studies investigating differences in reading comprehension between the two media are mixed (Baron et al., 2017; Jesse, 2014; Schugar, Schugar, & Penny, 2011; Tanner, 2014).

Results of a study conducted by Carey and Pathak (2019) also show that the majority of students (51.9%) preferred physical texts, but this number is significantly lower than the percentages found in other studies. They did, however, corroborate Alhammad and Ku (2016), who concluded that graduate students, as a whole, are more likely to prefer physical books over their electronic cousins.

Particularly interesting to this discussion—in multiple ways—is the work done by Gregory and Cox (2017), who distinguished between students' preferences for physical and digital textbooks and their preferences for physical and digital library books. First, the authors discovered that in addition to preferring physical textbooks for classes, 60.8% of students also preferred physical library books when doing academic work, and 76.4% preferred physical library books for pleasure reading. Second, the graduate cohort surveyed, which primarily consisted of distance education students, yielded a significant insight:

As the graduate students were mostly online students who might not have easy, daily on-site access to an academic library, the researchers anticipated that they might indicate a general preference for online materials, but in actuality distance from the campus library did not affect their preference for print or electronic.” (Gregory & Cox, 2017, p. 80)

Third, they provided helpful data distinguishing the types of materials students preferred to read digitally. In their opinion, students preferred physical copies of books and novels but digital copies of articles.

With these data in mind, Access Services needed to devise a method to continue serving those students—and given the research it would be realistic to assume that they constitute the majority of students—who not only prefer physical library materials but also those who believe they learn better from their use. To accomplish this, the Library Mailing Service was instituted in early March 2020. Once all of the components were in place, videos detailing the new service were created and circulated on the library's various social media platforms, and within 5 days of its launch, students began using the new service. At the time of the writing of this article, there have been 20 requests, which, considering the abruptness of the changes needed to transition face-to-face classes to online learning, and the relatively few circulation transactions that typically accompany summer semesters, was considered a promising indicator of potential fall 2020 usage. Of the four patron types indicated in the Library Mailing Service request form, graduate students made 65.0% ( $n = 13$ ) of all requests. This is not surprising given the data for graduate-student preferences provided by Carey and Pathak (2019), Gregory and Cox (2017), and Alhammad and Ku (2016). The remaining percentages per patron type were undergraduate students at 25.0% ( $n = 5$ ) and faculty members at 10.0% ( $n = 2$ ); staff made no requests. With the exception of faculty members ranking below undergraduates in the number of requests, these numbers were not surprising. However, it should be noted that as the fall 2020 semester approached and the majority of faculty returned from summer vacations to prepare for their upcoming courses, we expected that more faculty would begin using this service. As a result, the general five-items-per-semester limit was rescinded for faculty members, and they were allowed unlimited requests.

### *Contactless Pickup*

While the Library Mailing Service has continued to serve those students unwilling or unable to venture onto campus in fall 2020 and spring 2021, additional solutions needed to be developed for those students matriculating face-to-face. While they most certainly could take advantage of the Library Mailing Service, another option was developed for those students and faculty wanting physical library materials: contactless pickup. With this service, patrons are able to request physical materials to be

placed on hold through the university's online catalogue. The following morning, Access Services receives a report of all requested items, and then staff retrieve and process those items. Once retrieved, physical library materials are scanned using the integrated library system (ILS), which automatically notifies patrons that they are available for pickup. Second, each item is checked out to its respective patron. Last, items are bagged to protect the reading privacy of individual patrons; names of patrons are written on the bags; and all bags are placed in alphabetical order according to patrons' last names on a range of bookshelves that are in the immediate view of Access Services staff. At this point, patrons have 14 days to pick up their items, after which they are removed from patrons' accounts in the ILS and returned to their collections. With this service, no patron need even interact with library faculty or staff as they enter the library's doors, retrieve their items, and exit.

### *Novel Conclusion*

The continuation of the Library Mailing Service beyond the confines of pandemic necessity is one such example of how faculty librarians, teaching faculty, and students may emerge from this crisis stronger and better prepared to tackle the challenges of higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For example, an increasing focus on distance education is a reality of the future. The National Center for Education Statistics (2020) reported that “in fall 2018, some 34 percent (5.7 million) of all undergraduate students participated in distance education. Some 2.3 million students, or 14 percent of total undergraduate enrollment, exclusively took distance education courses.” This 2018 data of 34.7% is an increase from the 2016 data of 33.1%, and the number of students projected to take at least some online courses in the years to come is expected to rise, even though the total number of enrollments is expected to decline (Lederman, 2019). With increasing numbers of students taking distance education courses online, faculty responsible for the teaching and learning efforts of their students—this includes library faculty—must respond appropriately to foster success. One way of doing this is to ensure that all students have access to physical library materials when their preferences—and possibly their reading comprehension—demand it.

## **Information Literacy Instruction**

### *Enhancing Information Literacy Through Learning Management Systems*

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to work from home, one of the primary concerns of the library was to ensure that students were still able to access and receive information literacy instruction. Information literacy instruction is a substantial focus for academic libraries. With this focus, librarians can ensure that students' information literacy skills are being practiced and challenged. It is even more crucial since information literacy is a core component of the general education requirements at our university (Indiana University Southeast, 2020a). The mission of our Information Literacy Library Instruction Program is, in fact, “to empower student success through development of information literacy skills and abilities that enable students” to critically evaluate concepts of credibility, find relevant information, and apply these skills both in academia and within their personal and professional lives (Accardi, 2020).

Like many other libraries, our library already had an online instructional component to support our information literacy program. Circa 2017 we developed, along with the help of a library science student intern, a Canvas course that fellow faculty members could embed within their classes. Modules were created that align with the different information literacy program outcomes, such as identifying information, accessing and using information, and evaluating information. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, however, this Canvas course was scarcely used, mostly because it was in its infancy, and we

still focused on in-person instruction. The pandemic provided us with the opportunity to both market and build upon this special Library Instruction Canvas course to help meet the distance-learning needs of our students and faculty members. Using the detailed modules that were already created, we embedded quick tutorial videos on such processes as navigating the library's website, requesting interlibrary-loaned journal articles, and beginning to evaluate information for credibility. In the first few months of marketing this new Canvas course 15 students independently registered for it. Subsequently, it has been embedded in over 40 First-Year Seminar sections for fall 2020. We continue to add content to this course, and our Coordinator of Library Instruction has created robust marketing materials informing faculty on how to embed this Canvas site within their online classes.

### *Zoom Library Instruction: A Case Study*

In summer 2020, the library's liaison to the School of Education taught a synchronous library instruction session using the video conferencing software Zoom. In the face-to-face classroom, this course is very hands-on, involving the examination of children's literature used to design lesson plans in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) for elementary classrooms. Typically, physical books would be brought into the classroom, and students' hands would be all over the colorful, mylar-covered children's resources. For this session, efforts prior to instruction included ordering ebook versions of the National Science Teacher Association lesson plans and updating an essential LibGuide (a digital pathfinder used to supplement instruction). The virtual instruction session allowed the librarian to engage in an up-close way with resources and students. The Zoom method of instruction allowed the librarian to see every student's face straight-on, versus at a 90-degree turning of their heads or bodies as they sat at perpendicular screens in the library classroom. According to the librarian:

After a decade and a half of teaching as a sage at the front of the stage, it felt very different to be inside the book with the students at the same time, all seeing the text from the same distance. It felt like a more intense level of engagement with the text. It allowed me to observe and remark on the book in different ways.

The professor of the course commented afterward that she enjoys team-teaching with the librarian, that the students are always impressed with the library resources that are available to support their work, and that they are happy to know that the librarian is just a few clicks away to connect them with resources.

### *Novel Conclusion*

This pandemic has led to some novel conclusions regarding information literacy instruction. For instance, a new service model centered around digital distance learning could allow us to reach more students. Many students used the library digitally prior to the pandemic, but now students had little choice *but* to engage digitally to meet their information-gathering and information literacy needs. As everyone is focused on using services remotely, we have a captive audience, if you will, that may allow us to reach more people than ever before. Additionally, we have an opportunity to embed information literacy into courses that typically did not seek our services. As mentioned, the majority of our information literacy is taught to First-Year Seminar students, but in this strange new world hopefully we will see the infusion of courses that fall outside this category. Furthermore, Zoom creates a new classroom environment that deconstructs the power dynamic in traditional classrooms and provides novel perspectives for teaching librarians.

## Reference and Research Services

### *Enhancing Digital Reference Services*

Reference and Research Services (henceforth, Reference) is a one-stop shop where students and faculty can receive expert assistance with their unique research and information needs. These services support the campus's core value of providing holistic learning for its students by fostering "a rich educational environment of academic excellence that extends beyond the classroom" (Indiana University Southeast, 2020b). Reference accomplishes this by co-opting the student's participation in the Reference interaction, thereby encouraging active learning and the acquisition of both the knowledge and skills needed to become savvy, independent information consumers. In other words, the Reference experience offered is not based on a transactional customer-service model where students are simply provided with the information they need; they learn through guided participation how to meet those needs for themselves.

It is certainly true that digital reference services have been around for years, and the library was already able to provide assistance through email, chat, and telephone. However, these digital methods of delivery were of secondary importance: that is, the primary mode of Reference interaction was face-to-face, in the library, at the physical reference desk. This physical Reference space was equipped with the technology needed to make the learning experience more conducive and effective. For example, when a student walked up to the desk and quick Reference assistance was needed, the librarian was able to use an outward-facing monitor connected to their own computer, along with a keyboard for student use, to guide the student through the process of meeting their own information need. In cases where longer, more in-depth assistance was needed, the librarian was able to invite the student to sit with them behind the reference desk at an additional computer that was provided for such instances. In both cases, students were ultimately in control, and the librarians acted as educational guides. Therefore, when COVID-19 forced all students and faculty into digital learning environments, the library faculty necessarily followed, but Reference being one of the most important and forward-facing services offered by the library, it became imperative for the librarians to devise strategies that would allow them to provide the same level of prepandemic educational quality.

Switching to a digital focus allowed the librarians to assess how easily and effectively users were able to access them beyond the library building. Three responses were made. First, for those students using the campus's technology, an icon linking directly to the library chat service was placed on every desktop computer on campus. Second, for distance education students, it was decided that more invasive chat features designed to actively grab the attention of students navigating the library's website were needed. Additionally, these features were put on all pages of the library's website and not just on the few where chat contact information had already been housed. Third, chat would simply not be enough to recreate the rich active learning environment the librarians were accustomed to providing. Zoom was selected as the best conduit for guided Reference instruction. Integrating this tool into the digital Reference paradigm has allowed the librarians to share their own screens with students as they walk them through the multifaceted process of information collection. Similarly, with this software, students are able to share their own screens, thereby allowing them to take guided control of their own information inquiries. Another helpful feature of Zoom is that it allows librarians to record one-on-one sessions and then provide students access to those recordings so that they might use them as tools in the future.

Although the library's chat service was selected to be the primary mode of student-librarian contact, we experimented with other features offered by Zoom, for example, Zoom meeting rooms. One of us, the user engagement librarian, created a recurring meeting room and made the other two authors cohosts. The link to this meeting room was then advertised through the library's social media

outlets, and anyone with the link was able to drop in to access a librarian during one of their shifts. Specifically, at three points throughout the week (Monday morning, Monday evening, and Wednesday evening), one of the librarians staffed the Reference Zoom meeting room as if staffing the physical reference desk in the library. While this service was not heavily used in March 2020, this was very likely due to the confusion engendered by the pandemic and the rapid switch to online learning. However, with additional marketing in the future, this pathway may prove to be a helpful addition to the chat-first model. This scenario is an excellent example of the value of experimentation and a willingness to try new service models while also being willing to adapt or scrap them as needed.

We believe it is worth noting that when the library ceased providing face-to-face services in March 2020, it reduced its building's hours from 79 hr per week to 20. Despite this significant reduction—and it should be noted that the building remained open as a physical space only to accommodate students' technology needs—the librarians continued to provide Reference beyond this restricted schedule. In total, librarians continued interacting with students for 56 hr per week throughout the summer months. In the fall 2020 semester, the building's hours were expanded to 45 hr per week, Monday through Friday, but the librarians provided digital Reference for 64 hr per week, Monday through Sunday. The primary modes of initial contact during this period were and will continue to be the digital chat and email services accessed via the library's website.

### *Bolstering Digital Collections*

With the circulation of physical materials restricted, librarians identified an opportunity to enhance access to digital collections to meet our users' research and pedagogical needs. In addition to ebooks made available through the HathiTrust Digital Library Temporary Emergency Access Service, many vendors provided temporary, free access to electronic resources, which was a strategy to create exposure to their products. In response, the librarians started reassessing our collection development policy and deciding which formats we would purchase during the pandemic and beyond. Recently, we began asking faculty to select preferred formats, electronic (ebook or streaming video) or analog (print book or DVD), when requesting new acquisitions; however, during the pandemic, we have strongly encouraged electronic formats.

In addition to our collection development policy, the librarians also reassessed our future plans for the digitization of archival materials. When physical access to archives is restricted, they cannot contribute to the teaching, research, and administrative efforts of universities. Previously, we had digitized our student newspapers published between 1947 and 2007, and as a result, we have seen increased interest and usage of this archival collection through its digital access. During the pandemic, we have continued indexing each article, assigning Library of Congress subject headings and decade ranges to increase access. Additionally, a special collection of music by women composers from before 1800, *Ars Femina*, previously digitized but not yet delivered online, was made more accessible through an electronic finding aid created by an archival practicum. This project resulted in a unique outreach program in conjunction with the local public library where performances of this music is livestreamed. A final example of the importance of having access to digitized archival materials occurred when the university administration needed access to archival materials for the development of a new revenue-generating program for the campus.

### *Book-a-Librarian*

The pandemic has provided an opportunity to reassess the library's Book-a-Librarian program. This program began in fall 2016 as a way to supplement the efforts of the library's instruction and reference programs. This service, which students request via a simple Google form, offers a one-on-one

consultation with a librarian based completely on the student's schedule and needs. Some librarians may balk at the notion of letting students pick their own date and time, but the coordinator of this program wanted to test this method to see if it was feasible. As it turns out, this method has been abundantly successful, and librarians have been able to meet the needs (and the schedules) of each student who has requested a session. Of course, it helps that ours is a relatively small campus—we acknowledge that every campus has its own set of circumstances that drive decisions surrounding something like this. For us, however, it works and so it has remained a feature of the Book-a-Librarian service from the beginning. Since fall 2016 the library has conducted 188 sessions, ranging from 20 min to 2 hr and averaging about 45 min. Each session is unique and completely tailored to the information context of the student.

Over the course of the pandemic, we have continued to promote this service. There were four Book-a-Librarian sessions with students in summer 2020, and while this may seem like a small number, our spring semester was nearly over by the time campus went to online learning, and our summer enrollment is consistently fairly low. To help increase awareness of this service during the pandemic, librarians created tutorial videos on how to request this service and what this service entails. These quick tutorial videos were advertised both on the library's social media pages as well as embedded within the aforementioned Canvas library course.

Additionally, a new way to reserve a Book-a-Librarian session was embedded into the preexisting Google form. Previously, the form simply asked students to provide a few dates and times convenient for them. Now, however, we have embedded reservations within the form that are linked to the library's Canvas site and calendar feature. Students are able to view the calendar of availability and immediately reserve a spot. Within these reservations, details regarding the Zoom address are provided. All students have to do, then, is log in to Zoom at the time of their reservation, whereas prior to the pandemic there was an email exchange between librarian and student to determine and confirm the best date and time. Of course, students still have that option—if there are no feasible dates and times within the Canvas calendar, their form submission and suggested availability will still be sent to a librarian who will then email them to confirm one of their suggested times and/or suggest another.

### *Novel Conclusion*

In terms of Reference and Research Services, the librarians identified several important novel conclusions that we will be able to take with us into the future. First, both digital and face-to-face modes of reference delivery should be given equal focus when postpandemic environments allow academic libraries to return to normal operations. Doing this will inevitably allow librarians to cast a much wider net when making themselves available for the myriad information services offered to campus communities. Second, as educators firmly entrenched within the teaching and learning mission of the campus, faculty librarians should strive not to sacrifice the integrity of their own pedagogical methods when shifting their Reference interactions to digital learning environments. Last, as can be seen in the Book-a-Librarian service example, librarians have realized the importance of providing opportunities for one-on-one interaction, now more than ever before. We take great pride in establishing connections with our students and getting to know them, and the digital learning environment can often put that dynamic at risk. Reflective digital Reference interactions, like those in the Book-a-Librarian service, through their inherent nature, help us keep that ideal afloat and still offer students a way to interact in a more personal manner.

## **Mentoring**

### *Graduate Practicum*

One of a librarian's great joys is being able to share the profession with students. Teaching and learning extends beyond the traditional classroom in practicums, internships, and student-work experiences with librarians, library collections, and services. Therefore, it was important for us to be able to continue providing these learning experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. A prescheduled graduate practicum in archival collections took place in our Library from March to July of 2020. The special collection was previously digitized, and the student worked remotely to create a digital finding aid and to reclassify digital files. One challenge of a virtual practicum was creating experiences that allow for growth, such as assigning the student to complete informational interviews with other librarians. These meetings allow the student to explore the profession more deeply. For example, they help students understand why and how people enter the profession, and that their journey is not necessarily a direct, well-planned experience, but a circuitous and sometimes meandering path of growth. To provide this type of experience, our student conducted an informational interview via Zoom with a university archivist who had created a COVID-19 archival collection. The student's recorded interview documented the work that archivists are doing to preserve the history of living in this interesting time. The student also participated in a virtual mock interview with two other librarians to prepare for a professional interview and conducted oral histories with the donors of a special collection.

### *Grant-Based Project Employees*

Another area where librarians engage in mentorship with students is through undergraduate hourly employment on faculty research projects, such as our grant-based 3D digitization project of local history artifacts. The pandemic disrupted in-person aspects of our grant work, which included traveling to our state museum to take photographs of an early Girl Scout uniform. These photographs would be used to create photogrammetric 3D models of the artifact to teach local history. This would provide greater, online access to an item of material culture that is housed in archival storage and not on public display in this cultural heritage institution. However, because photographs had already been taken at three other county institutions, including the public library, the undergraduate students were able to create other 3D models remotely. We held weekly team meetings with the principal investigators, the library's technical support provider, and the students to talk about their work and workflow challenges. This was also an opportunity to check in with them about their classwork and families during the pandemic, allowing for mentoring activity that normally took place when out working in the field.

When the pandemic struck, this group became aware of the urgency to communicate more frequently and directly with the granting agency from which it received funding. Because we were working on a federal subgrant with deadlines through the Institute of Museum and Library Services, we negotiated the feasibility of extending deadlines of spending and reporting. Our team also wrote a digitization grant for the next year's grant cycle, but the university administration questioned the feasibility of completing the project during a pandemic. To overcome this hurdle, our team brainstormed ways to continue working with local cultural heritage institutions to photograph their collections securely and remotely. Again, communication with stakeholders was key.

### *Novel Conclusion*

The traditional role and quality of mentorship that librarians value in both practicums and student-based projects has faced uncertainty due to restrictions in face-to-face interactions. Therefore, intentional communication via multiple modalities has become increasingly important during the pandemic. With conventional daily interactions and information sharing removed from the student–librarian mentoring relationship, the importance of creating personal connections and a sense of belonging has been magnified in this environment of remote working. In terms of novel conclusions, the librarians have recognized two things: (1) Students can be empowered and trusted to work remotely sans direct physical supervision, and (2) increasing intentional communication beyond face-to-face interactions helps foster a greater sense of belonging and allows for increased levels of professional engagement.

### **Outreach and Marketing**

While some may not immediately see how outreach is connected with teaching and learning, the following examples directly support the University’s targeted values of holistic learning, connectedness, and a nurturing environment. For example, the activities outlined in this section support connectedness in that “we engage with and support the many communities to which we belong and from which we draw our strength and potential. We go to extraordinary lengths to serve our communities efficiently and knowledgeably” (Indiana University Southeast, 2020b). Teaching and learning on university campuses exist in formal and informal ways, and an important function of libraries is to support human social interactions. As such, the following examples help create a holistic environment of teaching and learning, serving both our campus and the community.

### *Social Media for Engagement and Emergency Information Dissemination*

It became abundantly clear in the first few weeks of the pandemic that the library needed to provide clear messaging to its constituents. Social media was a natural source of providing this information. Prior to the pandemic, our social media platforms provided information on how to access services, highlighting certain databases, providing entertaining bits of library news, and marketing events from the library and other departments on campus. During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, our social media pages have become the medium through which we deliver rapidly changing news that impacts not only access to information, but health and safety as well.

One of the most important things our user engagement librarian has identified is engaging informally through video conversations on the social media pages. Engaging via video content personalizes the message in a way that text so often fails to do. By literally putting our faces front and center, it feels as if the librarians are having a direct conversation instead of passively sharing some tidbit of information. Additionally, the content of our social media pages has changed. Standard weekly content such as “Libraries Around the World” or “Throwback Thursday” has been eschewed in favor of getting the most up-to-date information to our users. Such information has included drastically reduced hours, the mandate for wearing masks, the cessation of certain in-person services, and information on how to access librarians and services digitally. Tutorial videos have been created, showing faculty and students how to access information and use our website, for example.

We have also expanded the conversation beyond library services and have conducted online interviews with local mental health professionals as a way to help our patrons who may be struggling with the rapidly changing world they suddenly find themselves in. Additionally, we have also begun

highlighting the various collections, databases, and services freely available from other libraries and organizations in an attempt to market as many resources as possible to our students.

### *Newsletter*

The user engagement librarian had been toying with the notion of creating a newsletter prior to the pandemic, and the COVID-19 outbreak provided the perfect environment in which to finally pursue this notion. Fortunately, the university provides software, free of charge, that allows departments to create personalized newsletters and email them directly to relevant constituents. In May 2020, librarians met with the appropriate personnel to begin setting up a newsletter account. All library staff were given a heads up regarding this upcoming outreach effort to begin gathering ideas for what to promote. While the first issue is still pending publication as of this writing, the library has already identified certain services and news to include in the initial issue. The issue will include an introduction to contactless pickup of library materials and various ways to receive assistance from librarians, as well as highlighting digital resources. Most importantly, this newsletter will manage the message that the library is more than just a physical building. One of the biggest advantages of the newsletter is that it will allow us to reach those who are not following any of the library's social media pages, thereby allowing us to reach a wider audience.

### *Email Collaboration with Student and Academic Affairs*

To keep our students and faculty colleagues informed on library services and updates, the user engagement librarian collaborated with the offices of Student and Academic Affairs. These offices have the ability to send direct emails to all students and all faculty members, respectively. The library alone does not have this ability, and, as mentioned above, social media only reaches a select and, therefore, noncomprehensive audience. As such, emails were sent to both faculty and students reminding them not only of the library's reduced physical hours but also of the many ways they could access resources and librarians. A primary goal of these emails was to ensure that people did not automatically associate the library's reduced physical building hours with reduced access to resources or librarians. Moving forward, the newsletter will reduce the need of relying on these departments to send out information, but in an emergency situation, these collaborations proved immensely fruitful.

### *Online Book Clubs*

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the library offered a monthly in-person book club consisting primarily of retired faculty and staff, as well as a handful of local community members. Needless to say, that service (as it currently existed) was indefinitely postponed beginning in March 2020. The user engagement librarian, however, identified a way to continue providing engaging and entertaining book clubs while being as safe as possible. In June 2020, the library launched the Online Summer Book Club, which consisted of five meetings through the months of June, July, and August. Each meeting was an hour long, during which attendees met via Zoom to discuss a selected short story. Given the time constraints that many of us find ourselves under in general, not to mention the collective energy slump that many have felt in this pandemic, the short story is a natural engagement tool for book clubs that does not require an enormous time commitment for members. The user engagement librarian identified five short stories and created a LibGuide where attendees could download these stories, access the Zoom link for discussions, and sign up for email reminders.

In the initial launch, 75 people signed up for email alerts about this program. It was important that interested parties knew that campus affiliation was not a requirement. In other words, community

members were welcome and encouraged to join and emails to faculty and staff about this new program encouraged them to invite their partners, friends, and family. Even though community members were strongly encouraged to join, this program also serves as a way to keep campus employees connected with one another in a leisurely way. In other words, this book club is a place for employees to disconnect from their professional agendas for a moment and simply engage personally and informally with their colleagues. The first meeting attracted more than 20 attendees, and each meeting since has attracted anywhere from 14 to 20 people. Family and friends of campus staff have joined the discussion, as well as a small sampling of students. It has proven to be a wonderful way to remain connected to one another outside of work obligations, and participants expressed a desire to continue meeting even after the end of this special summer program.

Additionally, the library's coordinator of access services partners with the campus's local public library to offer a monthly book club open to the community. In an attempt to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, public libraries throughout the country, like their academic counterparts, suspended in-person programming and events, thereby reducing important social and intellectual interactions in the lives of participants. In response to the isolation that the pandemic and quarantining has caused, the coordinator of access services and representatives from the local public library decided to continue offering monthly meetings of this book club via Zoom. This effort has witnessed an ongoing utility as many participants have continued to attend—even enhancing the group's discussion by situating their interpretations of works of classic literature within the scope of the pandemic.

### *Novel Conclusion*

Relying on social media and other online technologies has greatly enhanced our attention to aspects of accessibility. We were, of course, sensitive to these issues prior to the pandemic, but now more than ever it has become apparent that if online services are the primary service point, we absolutely need to ensure that every aspect is accessibility friendly. The pandemic has provided a bit of a wake-up call, if you will, that made us question if the ways we had been providing information were truly accessible to all. The Online Summer Book Club also reinforces our commitment to providing programming not related to work or school. Many attendees have commented that the book club provides a ready escape from the obligations of the day. Furthermore, the conversations and details shared among attendees has created a stronger bond between students, staff, faculty, and community members who otherwise knew very little about one another. In this instance, the use of Zoom does not feel as wearisome.

Three important additional conclusions were drawn from these book club outreach programs. First, libraries, both academic and public, are crucially important institutions that are providers of far more than information resources to communities: They are centers of social interaction where lives are enhanced. Second, utilizing Zoom, which started as a pandemic necessity, is a means to increase accessibility for those who are unable to attend face-to-face meetings. As such, when book clubs are able to once again meet in person, an online alternative will continue to be integrated so that the groups can continue to be more accessible. Third, and no less importantly, the continued integration of Zoom—or some other video conferencing software—in programming allows academic and public libraries to go beyond their geographically defined community, thereby reaching more people. For example, using virtual modes of attendance has allowed participation from as far away as Finland. Thus, the integration of virtual and physical modes of attendance breaks down the barrier of a defined community by creating concentric circles of communities.

Last, the pandemic has greatly enhanced our realization that a newsletter is an important engagement tool. It eliminates the need to constantly ask another office to send emails on our behalf,

and it allows us complete control over messaging and updates. Furthermore, it will allow us to reach a wider audience since social media, as discussed, reaches only a small percentage of all constituents.

## Conclusion

We now find ourselves coming back full circle to Zora Neale Hurston: “There are years that ask questions and years that answer” (2000, p. 25). As librarians engaged in disaster librarianship, we have shared the questions that have plagued us during the pandemic, and we hope that our answers help illuminate a path for others. These new services are not intended to be temporary solutions to the unprecedented challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The faculty librarians on our campus are looking forward not to “returning to normal” but rather to creating a new normal as we emerge from an academic year that has challenged us to reconceptualize traditional services offered to the campus and surrounding communities. Thus, the pandemic has allowed us to analyze and reevaluate services in the face of shifting foci.

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