

Fordham Law School

FLASH: The Fordham Law Archive of Scholarship and History

Staff Publications

Law Library

2020

In Second Pandemic Wave, College Libraries Again Adjust to Shutdowns

Jennifer Dixon

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/staff_publications

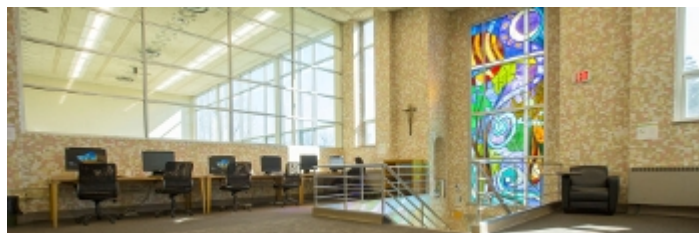


Part of the [Law Commons](#)

In Second Pandemic Wave, College Libraries Again Adjust to Shutdowns

by [Jennifer A. Dixon](#)

Dec 01, 2020 | Filed in [News](#)



Villa Maria College Library

Many colleges and universities across the United States cautiously welcomed students back to in-person classes for the fall 2020 semester, after shutting campuses down early in the spring. Despite precautionary measures against the coronavirus, such as regular testing and social distancing rules, as a second pandemic wave picks up across the country some schools are opting for an early shut-down of in-person learning. With classes pivoting to all online and residential students being sent home ahead of their Thanksgiving break—or being instructed not to return to campus afterward—academic libraries are once again adjusting to support their communities' needs.

Villa Maria College in Buffalo, NY, started the semester with hybrid in-person/online classes. Campus services were open during regular hours. In mid-November, in light of testing and hospitalization data from the county and state governments, college administration determined that the coronavirus situation was becoming more dangerous and transitioned to what it termed a “campus oasis” model—all instruction and campus services, where possible, will be conducted virtually. According to Director of Library Services Lucy Waite, the college is prepared—if needed—to transition to a fully “virtual campus” model, with all instruction remote and the campus entirely closed. For now, the “campus oasis” model “won’t actually be that large of a shift of library services at this point,” said Waite, “as campus remains open.” The library will be implementing a new chat reference service and rotating its two librarians every other day. “A shift to the third ‘virtual campus’ prong will trigger more drastic changes,” she said.

At Syracuse University, NY, the campus reopened to in-person instruction this fall with a plan to have students leave at Thanksgiving, finishing their semester online. Residential instruction ended 10 days earlier than scheduled, transitioning to fully online instruction for the remainder of the semester, as a result of increased COVID-19 cases among students and the broader community. The library, which had opened to the university community for the start of the semester, closed physical buildings to students and transitioned staff to virtual help desk

services. “The staff are tired and stressed after months of serving the campus in a pandemic, but I am proud to say that moving back to more restricted campus access in November went smoothly,” said Dean of Libraries and University Librarian David Seaman.

St. John Fisher College in Rochester, NY, also started its semester with a hybrid approach, with library services provided both online and face-to-face. Most library staff have worked from home all semester, with the exception of some front desk and administrative staff who work on a rotating basis. In early October, a campus resident tested positive for COVID-19, and within 10 days, 267 people were isolated or quarantined. By the end of the month, the school had switched to entirely online learning, and the residence halls closed. The library—the only academic building to remain open for student access—reduced its hours, but otherwise maintained services. According to Library Director Melissa Jadlos, “As we were planning for the fall we decided early on to provide all services in a digital format from day one. Since the services were already in place, the transition in October was seamless. We just dusted off our services LibGuide from the spring and modified our message on the library homepage.”

The University of Maryland (UMD) libraries also recently reduced hours and the number of people allowed in their spaces in light of surging COVID numbers. This was an unexpected modification of the campus’s original reopening plan, reducing the in-person access that had started in mid-September. Overall, the library “followed decisions the campus made, in terms of how fast and far we would move along in our implementation of the phases,” according to Dean of University Libraries Adriene Lim. “This was a necessity because we had to align with the campus’s readiness in terms of testing and tracing protocols, facilities issues such as air exchange, ASHRAE [American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers] standards, staff-related policies, and more.” Lim told *LJ* that the library debated closing down in-person services altogether, but opted to maintain services with reduced capacity because many students will remain on campus, even with most undergraduate courses transitioning to online. She said, “I think this is the most challenging part: Knowing that library users need us while we’re still trying to balance health risks and safety of our library staff and faculty.”

THE SECOND TIME AROUND

Librarians already have experience pivoting their services in light of the pandemic, as institutions shuttered within days in March. In some ways, this more recent transition has proven easier, as library staff have more experience providing virtual service. According to Waite, “This semester, we have a better idea of what will be needed and how to set it up, and everyone has been prepared for this possibility from the beginning.” While March’s switch to virtual learning and library services took schools by surprise, libraries have now developed many of the tools they need for remote work. “The greatest challenge for us was not having a plan or the right

technology last semester,” said Waite. “Now, having been through it once, and planning extensively throughout the summer for the possibility of it occurring again, we are in a much better position.”

Seaman confirmed that lessons from the past months of the pandemic have served his team well, telling *LJ* that “we have had months of experience now, and time not only to plan more but to learn from our experience and modify processes to provide high-quality services safely.

Furthermore, we prepared contingency plans in advance so that we would be prepared for just about any scenario this fall.” This transition has been “smoother” than in March, he said, as staff have been able to enter buildings and access physical collections, and already have the hang of technology needed to effectively work from home.

Lim said of the lessons learned from UMD’s quick pivot in March, “now we have a roadmap that we are more familiar with,” and have already created necessities like signs and detailed policies. “We can more easily ramp up or ramp down as needed, according to our planned phases,” she said.

Jadlos told *LJ* that while in March the greatest challenge “was ensuring staff had the proper technology and the confidence to know they could do their jobs remotely,” with months of experience, the team can confidently provide library services remotely. Now, she said, the “greatest challenge has been staff uncertainty.... Since there were heavy furloughs in the summer, staff members are uncertain as to what will happen during the next intersession period. Like everyone, we are suffering from COVID fatigue and we really miss interacting with each other.”

In light of the stress the pandemic continues to place on library staff, Seaman included “attention to our own wellbeing” on his list of priorities and lessons learned since March. He also listed “frequent communication and check-ins with staff” and systems “for quick campus-wide and library-wide communications” as essential, as well as the need for “innovating quickly in our service offerings and collections,” and “being analytical about what works and what doesn’t—and acting on that quickly.”

COVID-19

coronavirus

campus closings