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Essential Library Services for College Students in the Time of Social Distancing

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Essential Library Services for College Students in the Time of Social Distancing

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty
of the Department of Leadership Education
College of Education
of Winona State University

by

Wail M. Kailani

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Science in Organization Leadership

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Abstract

This research examined the essential online library services that college students used and found useful while remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Students at a small community college in southeastern Minnesota were surveyed and additional usage data about some online library services were collected. The link to the online survey was posted to the students' newsletter and some faculty shared the link on their course pages in the college's LMS. The survey asked the students to rank and rate four online library services. The service "Email a librarian" was ranked and rated higher than the other services by the survey participants. The results of the survey showed that students were very satisfied with their ability to find desired services and appreciated the service of placing a hold on a book for easy pickup. The data extracted from the library showed that the usage of some services like "Email a librarian" and "Chat with a librarian" doubled during remote learning in comparison to the previous year. The researcher worked in an academic library of a community college for several years including the period of remote learning and social distance regulation due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Online/remote learning, academic library, social distancing, COVID-19 pandemic

Introduction

From the Library of Alexandria, the largest in the ancient world, to the Library of Congress, the largest in the modern world, libraries maintained the same purpose throughout human history as the place where knowledge is collected. From clay tablets and papyrus scrolls to encyclopedias and article databases, libraries continued to keep information and catalog it for its potential users. In the age of the Internet, libraries reached more people and it became easier to access and find the desired information. Although the basic function of libraries has stayed the same, a place where the population could have access to needed information and literature, it morphed beyond that in the modern era. In addition to what they offer online, public libraries helped their communities improve the quality of their life and play important social roles. Academic libraries are an important subset that is a cornerstone in learning institutions around the world and was the focus of this study.

As nearly all colleges and universities in the United States moved online in spring 2020 because of COVID-19 (Kelly & Columbus, 2020), it became a challenge for academic libraries to continue providing essential services to students. Cox (2020) predicted that the landscape of academic libraries may change significantly in terms of collections, services, spaces, and operations. Many academic libraries adapted and implemented drastic measures to stay safe and continue to provide their essential services to their population (Breeding, 2020). This research will explore the core library services that were provided online to college students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Problem Statement

This research was to establish if online academic libraries were fulfilling the needs of their students in the time of social distancing. It was an attempt to answer the question of what key library services college students feel were essential and needed to be replicated for them online due to COVID-19 and social distancing regulations. Kelly and Columbus (2020) predicted that digital learning is going to boom because of social distancing regulations, so it was important for academic libraries to be proactive and forward-thinking. Distance learning was not a new concept for colleges and universities but providing essential library services online was a challenge. Since the school year was not completely canceled and students were continuing their learning remotely, libraries had to find out how to reach out to students and provide them with library services that they need to complete their course work. The purpose of this research is to find out the key library services provided to college students online to help them during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background of the Problem

In early March 2020, as COVID-19 reached most colleges and universities in the United States, some argued that academic libraries will change in significant ways because of the pandemic (Cox, 2020). Others believed that libraries were generally well-positioned to continue to fulfill their core mission even when their physical facilities were closed due to the pandemic (Breeding, 2020). While some fell back on their existing online footprint, many others had to create impromptu online learning capabilities (Kelly & Columbus, 2020). Everyone associated with academic libraries had to adapt to new norms. This new normal was described by Cox (2020, para. 2) as "one where in-person classes and service interactions may be impossible or no longer preferred, where collections in physical format may be a barrier to access, and where

collaborative study is shunned in favor of social distancing," Teaching and learning operations were going to change because of the pandemic and libraries had to change as well and adapt and find out how to continue to serve students. Innovation was much needed in times like these and this research aimed to assist with that.

Academic libraries started trying to figure out how to replace some services and deal with the physical absence of students on campuses. Distance learning was not a new concept but providing essential library services online was a challenge. Would it be possible to have a virtual reference desk that could help students with their research needs? Could physical items still be checked out while still abiding by social distancing regulations? Some libraries had the task of making student ID cards, could that process be replicated online? These were some of the inquiries that this research will answer.

Many articles and research have already been produced investigating and documenting the effects of COVID-19 on higher education and academic libraries. Several of those authors and researchers were quoted in this study and their work will be referred to multiple times. This research will add to the current literature by using the researcher's own experience with academic libraries as a staff and a student during the pandemic.

Research Questions

The questions that this research will attempt to answer were:

RQ1: What were the key library services that college students felt were essential and needed to be replicated for them online due to social distancing?

RQ2: What were some of the new services that libraries started offering to students during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Limitations/Delimitations

The data collection for this research was limited to the patrons of the library of a midwestern community college. The college got around 8000 students enrolled annually. The library services were offered to the students and employees of the community college as well as students enrolled in a nearby university taking classes in the same buildings and using the college's facilities. Community members have some access to the library resources and may be included in the study. Students' demographics varied from high school students taking advanced classes at the college, to adult learners starting new careers. There were a limited number of international students enrolled in the institution and they were included in the research.

Definition of Terms

Since the term online learning or a variation of the term appeared several times in this paper, the researcher found it useful to use the definition of two professors of library and information science at the Indiana University School of Library and Information Science in Indianapolis. Even though their definition is fifteen years old, it still holds. Lamb and Callison (2005) defined online learning as the following:

Online learning involves information, instruction, and/or interaction through the Internet using instructional materials and tools such as Web-based resources, email, discussion boards, blogs, chats, and video. Schools increasingly are offering structured online learning programs as primary or supplementary learning opportunities. Students may select from individual courses or enroll in a virtual school. These *cyberschools* offer a complete range of courses for graduation. Some virtual schools are part of a traditional school system, while others are statewide programs. (p. 29)

While the term *cyberschool* is an outdated term, it can be used interchangeably here with the phrases *online learning* and *virtual school*. For purposes of this research, the phrases digital, online, remote, virtual, and electronic library were all synonymous.

Other terms that have been used interchangeably throughout the research to refer to the current pandemic were COVID-19 and Coronavirus. Some of the online databases used to search these keyword terms were ERIC, JSTOR, and Google Scholar.

Summary

When mostly all colleges and universities in the United States shifted to online learning in spring 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Kelly & Columbus, 2020), it became a challenge for academic libraries to continue providing their essential services to students. Cox (2020) predicted that the landscape of academic libraries might change significantly because of the pandemic in terms of collections, services, spaces, and operations. This research is attempting to explore the core library services that were provided online to college students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The next chapter will review the literature that covered the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education, the historical context, and the theoretical framework that will guide the researcher with the study.

Review of the Literature

As the COVID-19 pandemic reached higher education in the spring of 2020, most colleges and universities in the United States moved to online learning (Kelly & Columbus, 2020). It became a challenge for academic libraries to continue providing their essential services to students. Cox (2020) predicted that the landscape of academic libraries may change significantly in terms of collections, services, spaces, and operations. Many academic libraries adapted and implemented drastic measures to stay safe and continue to provide essential services to their population (Breeding, 2020). This research explored the core library services that were provided online to college students during the COVID-19 pandemic and found out which services were deemed useful by the students.

Historical Context

Kelly and Columbus (2020) looked at past outbreaks and plagues to find a silver lining amid the current global pandemic. They found important work in science and literature throughout history was completed during pandemics. Some of the famous plays of Shakespeare like *King Lear* and *Macbeth* were done during episodes of the bubonic plague in the early 1600s and Newton produced an important scientific understanding of light and optics during an outbreak in the mid-1600s (Kelly & Columbus, 2020). One silver lining of the current COVID-19 pandemic, one might argue, was that it provided the opportunity for higher education including academic libraries to invest and invent new services that would make a difference in the future of remote learning and academic libraries.

In early March 2020, as COVID-19 reached most colleges and universities in the United States, some argued that academic libraries would change in significant ways because of the pandemic (Cox, 2020). Others believed that libraries were generally well-positioned to continue

to fulfill their core mission even when their physical facilities were closed due to the pandemic (Breeding, 2020). While some fell back on their existing online footprint, many others had to create impromptu online learning capabilities (Kelly & Columbus, 2020). Everyone associated with academic libraries had to adapt to the new norm. This new normal was described by Cox (2020, para. 2) as "one where in-person classes and service interactions may be impossible or no longer preferred, where collections in physical format may be a barrier to access, and where collaborative study is shunned in favor of social distancing". Academic libraries had to adapt to the new pandemic reality and social distancing regulations. This study will focus on essential library services provided to students online during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Theoretical Framework

This research takes a qualitative approach using the personal experience of the researcher who has worked in an academic library for more than a decade and was still employed there at the time this research was conducted. The research used several methods of collecting data like conducting an online survey and extracting usage data from the library integrated system (LIS). This research adds to the current literature by using the researcher's own experience with academic libraries as a staff member and a student during the pandemic. Having access to two separate academic libraries, one as a staff and one as a student helped present two different perspectives.

The researcher used a case study conducted by Marcia L. Baker of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to support the methodology of the research. Backer (2013) conducted a case study of how the University of Nebraska College of Law and Schmid Law Library used visible buttons on their website to guide learners. Google Analytics was used to track the usage of those buttons. Backer describes how the project was implemented, how feedback was collected via

surveys, and how the data was analyzed. In his research, Backer (2013) provided a sample of the four-question survey that was used to solicit faculty feedback using Survey Monkey.

Petch et al. (2016) conducted a study including focus groups and online surveys to find out how the Library and Learning Services (LLS) of De Montfort University could better fulfill the need of postgraduate researchers. The research came out with recommendations for the library to enhance its digital offering and better its communications with researchers. Aside from learning how to improve the online library resources and communicate better with postgraduate researchers, this research was a good example of how to conduct a case study research.

Another study that was used to help with the research methodology of this paper was by Rose T. Kgosiemang of the University of Botswana Library that was published in the *Education Reform Journal* in 2016. The researcher investigated the role of the online library in the University of Botswana in bridging the digital divide. The role librarians and library professionals played to bridge that gap by teaching information literacy skills were discussed. Kgosiemang (2016) relied heavily on observation as a tool for data collection and the analysis of information collected from reports presenting library usage statistics (p. 60). The same methods were used to answer the research questions of this paper, what were the essential library services that were provided to students online because of the COVID-19 pandemic and what new services were offered.

Library Services Moving Online

Hinchliffe and Wolff-Eisenberg (2020) produced a report on the 10-day trends in the academic library response to COVID-19. Hinchliffe was the professor/coordinator for Information Literacy Services and Instruction and an affiliate professor in the School of Information Sciences, University Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-champaign and

Wolff-Eisenberg was the surveys and research manager. They published their analysis on March 24, 2020, of the 253 institutions that responded to their survey. The trend that they found right at the beginning of the pandemic as it started to impact higher education was that libraries started pivoting their reference services to online/phone delivery and that access to print collections, whether on campus or via delivery, had declined significantly (Hinchliffe & Wolff-Eisenberg, 2020). This trend of services moving online was what prompted the researcher to investigate the essential library services that were provided to students remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Christopher Cox was the dean of libraries at Clemson University and his article was submitted on June 5th, 2020 three months after closing his library facilities due to the pandemic. He told his personal experience of being blindsided by the COVID-19 and having to decide to close his library facilities at Clemson to protect the safety of their patrons and employees and move to online services only. Cox (2020) wondered how this new crisis would help create new and innovative collections and services that would improve academic libraries. The author predicts that academic libraries would change in a big way during the COVID-19 pandemic, changes that would last for decades to come. The article goes through all the author's predictions, based on trend analysis, of how the landscape of academic libraries may change in terms of collections, services, spaces, and operations. One of Cox's (2020) predictions was that print collections would diminish in value and that libraries would invest more in electronic resources. Even though the author advised the libraries to encourage its staff to learn online collaborative technologies like Zoom and Microsoft Teams, he was not clear on how these services would help students. Cox was not specific on what online services libraries would provide their students and

patrons. Therefore, this case study would focus on the core library services provided to students during the pandemic and remote learning.

Another article used to understand some of the academic libraries' core services was by Breeding (2020) published in the journal of *Computers in Libraries* in their May/June issue. The article helped the reviewer learn about what libraries went through as the pandemic arrived at colleges and universities and how they tried to adjust their services to continue to assist students while staying safe. The author, Marshall Breeding, was an independent consultant, writer, and frequent library conference speaker and is the founder of Library Technology Guides (<https://librarytechnology.org/>). The article discussed how academic and public libraries adapted and implemented drastic measures to stay safe and continue to provide their essential services to the public and the community, in the case of public libraries, and to students and faculty, in the case of academic libraries. Breeding (2020) offered information on the libraries in the U.S. and how they were positioned to continue to fulfill their core mission even when their physical facilities were closed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Although Breeding's premise was that academic libraries were positioned to handle online learning and fulfill their core mission even if their physical facilities were closed, like Cox (2020) he was not specific about the services provided to students during the pandemic. This might be because the pandemic was just starting to affect higher education as the spring semester was coming to an end and it was not clear yet how libraries would provide services. Breeding (2020) and Cox (2020) both mentioned separately in their writing about using online collaborative tools to replace in-person learning, but neither went into detail on how those tools would provide library services to students. The common theme in both Breeding and Cox's writing was that libraries would have to switch rapidly to all-digital services with librarians

working remotely from home. This research dove deeper to find and name those library services that were helpful to students during the pandemic.

Kelly and Columbus (2020) in their research on the challenges facing the United States higher education during the time of Coronavirus, indicated that there was little evidence to support that students prefer remote learning over the fact-to-face experience. Nevertheless, digital learning and online learning tools became ubiquitous in traditional colleges out of necessity (p. 14). Kelly and Columbus published their research in July 2020 amid the pandemic where it was not clear yet how most of the institutions would handle the challenge. Their research predicts how digital learning was going to boom because of social distancing regulations and how forward-thinking institutions would take advantage of that. The report showed that not all students preferred online learning and the authors doubt it would emerge as the preferred mode of learning among most students. The report did advise colleges and universities to improve their virtual learning options for the upcoming school year. Both researchers worked for the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) a well-known think tank research institute. Kelly and Columbus (2020) research provided current information on how higher education faced the challenges brought by the Coronavirus pandemic, but the research lacked details regarding what services academic libraries should provide remotely to their students.

Remote Librarians

With more courses being provided online due to the pandemic and social distancing regulations, librarians in academic libraries had to change the way they provided services to students. Cox (2020) used the phrase “embedded librarianship” to refer to the integrations of library resources and library personnel deeper into learning management systems. Cox believed that librarians should have helped faculty with developing their course content by help link them

to library resources, co-teach by appearing with faculty during their virtual class meetings to provide research help, and hold virtual office hours to be able to assist students remotely.

Breeding (2020) added that these new demands required that librarians become savvier with using online collaborative communication tools like Microsoft Teams, Skype, or Zoom.

Summary

Many articles and research were produced investigating and documenting the effects of COVID-19 on higher education and academic libraries. Several of those authors and researchers were deans, librarians, or staff who worked in academic libraries and had firsthand knowledge of the impact of the pandemic on their institutions. The COVID-19 pandemic allowed academic libraries to improve and reinvent some of the services they provide to the students with most of them becoming digital and online. According to Kelly and Columbus (2020), the pandemic was viewed by educational institutions as an opportunity for improvement. This paper took a qualitative research approach aiming at finding the essential library services that were provided to students online during the COVID-19 pandemic by using surveys and extracting usage data from the library as well as using the researcher's own experience working in an academic library. The next chapters of this paper provide the methodology for collecting the data for this research as well as the summary of the findings.

Research Methodology

The researcher used statistics available in the library to collect usage data. An online survey was created and sent to enrolled students in the college. According to Ruane (2016), a survey was the most utilized measurement option in research. The population targeted by this research were the users of the library where the researcher was employed. Patrons of the library include students, faculty, and community members. This research added to the current literature by using the researcher's own experience with academic libraries to explore the services that were found useful by students while remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Design

The researcher identified some available online library services and tracked their usage for the period when social distancing regulations were enforced due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the switch to online learning was made. The data collected was then compared to the data usages from the period before the switch was made for added analysis.

The survey was then designed to ask the participants to rate and rank those services. The survey was posted on the college's online student newsletter for three weeks. The rating used a five-scale point system from very satisfied to very dissatisfied. To rank the four services, the user either chose a number from a dropdown menu or used the drag and drop feature which the survey offered. The four online library services that were used in the survey for users to rank and rate were:

1. Chat with a librarian.
2. Make an appointment with a librarian.
3. Email a librarian.
4. Place a book hold.

A fifth item was added to the survey asking users to rate their ability to find desired library services. A sample of the survey can be found in [Appendix A](#) of the paper. Observation was used based on the researcher's experience working in an academic library to identify new services and important data regarding the library services that were provided during the social distance and online learning period. Placing a hold on books online was a new service that the library implemented during the pandemic for easy pick up especially that access to the library book stacks was closed.

Sample

The population of this study was the users of an academic library of a community college in southeastern Minnesota. It was an assumption that most of the users were students at the college. The sample size was determined to be the entire student population of the college which was around 8000. The library website averaged to have around 500 unique users monthly.

Instruments

The online survey was created using Springshare LibWizard, a platform for creating and analyzing surveys for libraries. The researcher had to use an admin account to be able to create the survey. The survey was created to be design-responsive, meaning that it would adjust automatically to desktops, tablets, or mobile screens. The users of the survey were asked to provide their suggestions in the form of text input. For that reason, spam control was enabled on the survey to prevent spam bots from submitting false data. The online survey consisted of four questions, two were required and two were optional. The two required questions were to rate and rank some library services identified by the researcher. The optional questions asked the participants to provide text input regarding library services that they use and find useful as well as asking them to provide general suggestions.

Data Collection Procedure

The data was obtained from the library after receiving permission from the librarian in charge and after ensuring that no confidential data were included. The study followed Kgosiemang's (2016) method of collection of data from library usage reports for the research. Most of the data was gathered through separate vendors who were specialized in academic library systems and the researcher was required to have a system administrator account to extract the data. Some of the data were extracted by the researcher and some required vendor support. The products that were used for usage data collection were LibWizard and LibAnswers by Springshare and Alma and Primo the integrated Library System (ILS) by Ex Libris.

Data Analysis

LibWizard, the library tool used to create the survey, included a reporting system that analyzed the data and made it visual by providing different charts. The reporting also produced a data table that could be filtered by different fields. The data collected had the option of exporting as a CSV file for further analysis on a spreadsheet. Two sets of data were collected to help identify trends, a year before the pandemic affected higher education and a year after. To analyze the text input provided by students to the last two questions of the survey, the researcher used a word cloud generator to help identify common themes.

Summary

The study used a qualitative research method by collecting usage data from the library as well as asking students to fill out a survey that inquired about their preference regarding the online library services that were provided during the social distance period because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study obtained online services usage data from the library which was

helpful to the researcher in determining the most used services. The next chapters present and discuss the results and the conclusions of the study.

Results

Introduction

This chapter will present the results observed in this study from an online survey of current college students as well as tracking the usage of key online library services. The data was extracted from existing library management systems. The usage data was gathered from two periods, a year before the pandemic reached higher education (March 1, 2019, to February 29, 2020) and a year during the pandemic (March 1, 2020, to February 28, 2021). This was to separate the periods where students were mostly learning on campus from the period where students were mostly learning remotely.

Description of Sample

The online survey was open between February 17, 2021, to March 20, 2021, and was intended for current college students at least 18 years of age. The survey received 52 responses. The link to the survey was posted online on the college's official students' newsletter and blog for three weeks. Some faculty members volunteered to share the link to the survey with their students via the college's LMS.

The usage data for the online services presented in this study were extracted using the library's existing reporting systems. There were two date ranges for collecting usage data for the online services. The first date range was from March 1, 2019, until February 29, 2020, this represented the year before the pandemic affected the colleges and universities in the United States. The second date range was from March 1, 2020, until February 28, 2021, representing the time frame while the pandemic affected higher education and remote learning became reality. The method of extracting data for research from the library management systems was similar to

Zhang's (2016) study of online students' behavior by extracting data from a learning management system.

Data Analysis

This study addressed two research questions:

RQ1: What were the key library services that college students feel were essential and need to be replicated for them online due to social distancing and the limitations of the pandemic?

RQ2: What were some of the new services that libraries started offering to students during the COVID-19 pandemic?

To explore what library services students found useful, the researcher based on observation and working in an academic library picked four library services and collected data on them through tracking those services usages and asking students about their opinions on the services through an online survey. The data analysis of these services was an attempt to answer the first research question RQ1.

Two new online library services were implemented during the pandemic. The first service gave students the ability to place a hold on a book they want from the library's online catalog. That book was then pulled from the shelf by library staff and placed on a hold shelf. The book was then picked from the library by the student while adhering to social distance regulations. The second new service the library implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic gave students the option to schedule an online appointment with a librarian for a virtual consultation. Librarians posted their date and time availability online for students to pick a slot that worked for them. Those meetings were conducted remotely via Zoom. Analyzing these two services, "placing a hold on a book" and "making an online appointment with a librarian", helped the researcher answer the second research question RQ2 of the study.

The survey had two required questions about rating and ranking four online library services, “Chat with a librarian”, “Email a librarian”, “Make an appointment with a librarian”, and “Place a hold on a book”. The survey had two optional text input questions the first asking for comments regarding library services that were used and found useful and the other was asking for general suggestions. These comments are shown in Table 4.

Table 1

The Results of Question One on the Survey to Rank the Library Online Services

Rank Services						
	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Total	Score
Chat with a librarian	7	18	16	11	52	125
Email a librarian	15	20	10	7	52	147
Make an appointment with a librarian	10	8	17	17	52	115
Place a hold on a book	20	6	9	17	52	133

Note. The report was generated using Springshare LibWizard.

The score in Table 1 was calculated by giving the higher-ranked choice a higher score. Because there were four rank options, the choice with a higher rank gets 4 points, the second gets 3 points, and so on. The score of 147 representing the highest-ranked choice in the survey, which was “Email a librarian”, was calculated as follows: $(15 * 4) + (20 * 3) + (10 * 2) + (7 * 1) = 147$. The online service that allows students to place/make a hold on a book was ranked second overall with 20 responses out of 52 ranking it first. According to Table 2 and Figure 2, the service “Place a hold on a book” was rated “Very Satisfied” by 23 of the survey respondents which was 44% of the total number of survey participants.

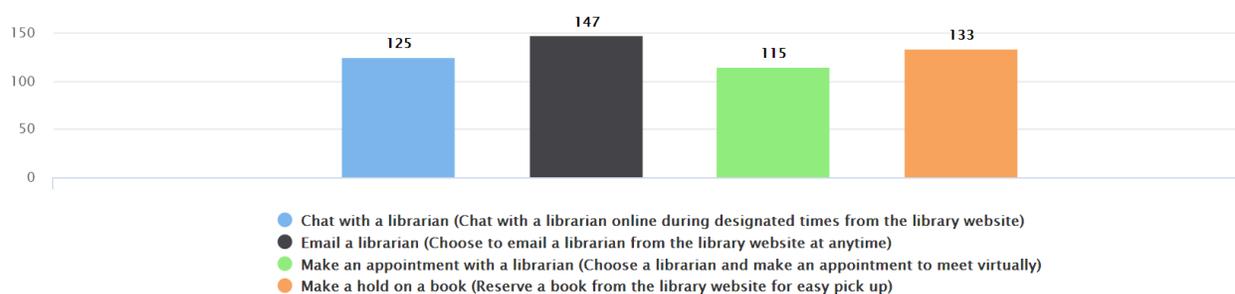
Based on Table 1, the ranking of the online library services was as follows:

1. Email a librarian.
2. Make a hold on a book.
3. Chat with a librarian.
4. Make an appointment with a librarian.

Email a librarian also got more “very satisfied” votes than the rest of the services on the second question of the survey as shown in Table 2. The ranking order of the four online library services is shown more clearly as a column chart in Figure 1.

Figure 1

A Chart Showing the Results of Question One on the Survey to Rank the Library Online Services



Note. The report was generated using Springshare LibWizard.

Table 2

The Results of Question Two on the Survey to Rate the Library Online Services

Rate Services					
	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
a) Chat with a librarian	21	16	14	1	0
b) Email a librarian	25	14	13	0	0
c) Make an appointment with a librarian	16	16	20	0	0
d) Place a hold on a book	23	15	13	1	0
e) Ability to find the service I need	27	17	8	0	0
Total responses: 52					

Note. The report was generated using Springshare LibWizard.

Table 2 shows that 27 of the students responding to the survey were very satisfied with the ability to find the services they need in the library and 17 were satisfied. With eight of the

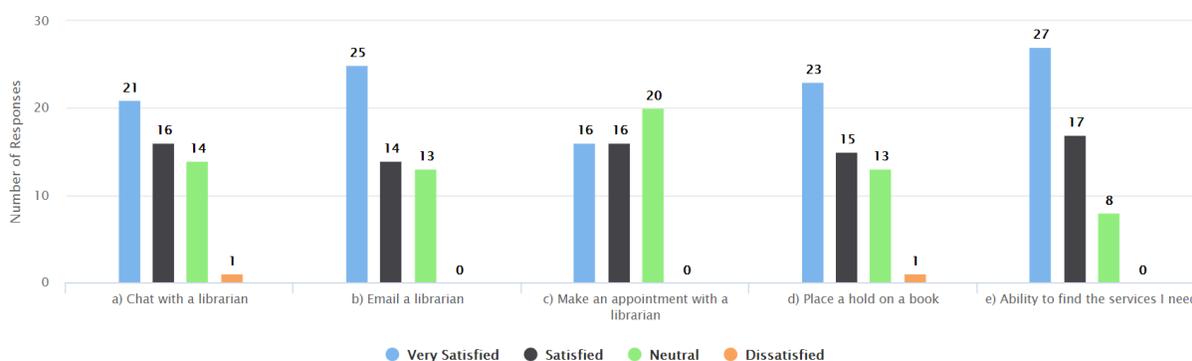
total 52 choosing be neutral, 85 percent of the students responding to the survey were at least satisfied with their ability to find the services they need in the library.

No respondents chose “Very Dissatisfied”, two responses however chose “Dissatisfied” with the “Chat with a librarian” and “Place a hold on a book” categories. The same student who was dissatisfied with placing a hold on a book was very satisfied with the category “Email a librarian” and indicated in the comment section of the survey of using that service and finding it useful.

According to Table 2, the “Email a librarian” service was rated higher than the other services where 25 responses rated it very satisfied and 14 were satisfied with no students responding dissatisfied. This means that 48% of the responses rated the service of emailing a librarian to be very satisfactory and 27% rated satisfactory. This meant that 75% of the responses were satisfied with the service of emailing a librarian. Emailing a librarian in this context is referring to the service of clicking on the link labeled “Email a Librarian” on the library webpage which leads to the library questions management (tickets) system.

Figure 2

A Chart Showing the Results of Question Two on the Survey to Rate the Library Online Services



Note. The report was generated using Springshare LibWizard.

Table 3***Report on the Usage of New and Existing Online Library Services a Year Before/After the Pandemic***

Library Service	Before Pandemic (March 1, 2019 – February 29, 2020)	After Pandemic (March 1, 2020 – February 28, 2021)	Change
<i>Existing Service Usage Count</i>			
Chat with a librarian	44	88	+44
Email a librarian	50	111	+61
<i>New Service Usage Count</i>			
Make an appointment with a librarian	2*	4	+2
Place a hold on a book	15*	89	+74

Note. The data for this report was extracted from Springshare LibAnswers and Ex Libris Alma.

*Count started before the pandemic when the services were tested but not fully implemented.

According to Table 3, the two existing library services “Chat with a librarian” and “Email a librarian” usages increased 100% and 122% respectively from the year before the pandemic to the year after. The two new services, “Make an appointment with a librarian” and “Place a hold on a book”, were experimental before the pandemic and were implemented fully after the pandemic motivated by the remote learning environment got some usage as well with the “Place a hold on a book” service being more popular.

As Table 4 shows, 45 out of 52 chose to leave an answer to the optional question, what are the library services that you use and find helpful? Eighteen left a comment under the “Please leave any additional suggestions below” question. Related themes of the comments have been placed by each other and coded with the same color in the table. The researcher removed three

comments from Table 4 that were deemed to be either not useful to the research, revealed identifiable information, or was just a simple “N/A”.

Table 4

Table Showing Some of the Students' Responses to the Two Optional Questions on the Online Survey Grouped by Common Themes.

What are the library services that you use and find helpful?	
	Comments involving holding, reserving, or locating a physical book through the library
	Comments involving emailing or chatting with a librarian
	Comments involving online research and online library resources
	Comments involving using the physical library on campus
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Hold book</i> • <i>Place a hold on a book</i> • <i>Holding books and reserving spots for quiet study times</i> • <i>The ability to get books</i> • <i>hold on a book</i> • <i>Being able to order a book.</i> • <i>Finding the books I need easily online on the library website.</i> • <i>Using the librarian to help me locate a general location of a book</i> • <i>Holding books, emailing librarians.</i> • <i>Checking out a book.</i> • <i>I have checked out books and chatted with a librarian.</i> • <i>Hold a book, order books from other library locations</i> • <i>The library website helps us to find books that are available in the library.</i> • <i>Reserving books</i> • <i>Having a librarian answer question via phone call and finding books for class projects.</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Email</i> • <i>I use email the most and it works for me the best.</i> • <i>Email a librarian and make an appointment to meet virtually</i> • <i>emailing the librarian</i> • <i>Chatting with librarian</i> • <i>Chatting with a librarian is always helpful!</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Library website and database mainly due to covid.</i> • <i>Films On Demand</i> • <i>College Online Library</i> • <i>Online research databases.</i> • <i>Online databases</i> • <i>I looked up the War of 1812 for a history assignment. I found exactly what I needed, easily!</i> • <i>I love the online library for myself with doing online classes! It is easy to navigate and easy to contact someone when I need help!</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Easy access to magazines for school work. ID card process is a very easy process</i> • <i>The circulation desk help, very good at helping with problems</i> • <i>It is helpful that the computers are open for use during the pandemic.</i>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>the workspace and computers</i> • <i>The quiet atmosphere.</i> • <i>the computer lab is great and whenever I have an issue I just ask, whoever is on duty, to help me.</i> • <i>Using the computers and study area</i> • <i>Quiet and spacious reading space, readily available assistance from staff, and access to so many learning materials.</i> • <i>Before COVID, I mainly used the library as a quiet place to study and complete homework. I also used the database for research papers. Since the pandemic started, I have not used the library.</i> • <i>computer lab, printers, resource desk when I have questions.</i> • <i>Usually, I just order/check out books online, I don't usually use online services. But If I am in the library, I like to chat with the librarian and talk about books.</i> • <i>I have not used any library services.</i> • <i>I do not use the library</i> • <i>All</i>
Please provide any additional suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Continue to become friendly and open and accessible to people</i> • <i>All good</i> • <i>Maybe make it more obvious where to email and contact a librarian on the website.</i> • <i>Very easy to access</i> • <i>Thanks for all your hard work!!</i> • <i>I love it</i> • <i>make an appointment with a librarian</i> • <i>Due to Covid, I don't go to the library often but find the online services great when I need them.</i> • <i>Fully staff the library.</i> • <i>Show new and prospective students how to check out a book, put one on hold, find their way through the library, etc.</i>

The first emerging theme from the comments obtained from the survey shown in Table 4 with a light green background all involves holding, reserving, or locating a physical book through the library. The second theme identified with a blue accent background involves emailing or chatting with the librarians. The third theme marked by an orange background was about online research and online library resources. The last theme marked with a yellow background was about being in the library physically. A word cloud generator was used which helped the researcher extract themes from the answers to survey question three, “What are the

library services that you use and find helpful?” The word cloud is shown in [Figure 3](#). Additional comments were provided by participants of the survey in response to the last item on the survey and are shown at the bottom of [Table 4](#).

Figure 3

A Word Cloud Showing the Results of Question Three on the Survey About the Library Services that were Used and Found Useful



Note. The report was generated using WordCloud Generator by MonkeyLearn.

The research showed that some students choose to email the librarians directly since the email addresses for the three librarians were publicly available on the library website. Those interactions were not counted in this study. The “Email a Librarian” service mentioned in this study refers to a link on the library website titled “Email a Librarian” which led to an online reference platform with a question management system (tickets). Through that system,

Springshare LibAnswers, the researcher was able to extract some of the usage data captured in this study.

To answer RQ1, the researcher analyzed the data usage collected for the four library services as well as the results of the online survey. For RQ2, the two new library services were tracked and surveyed. Conclusions based upon the data analysis will be shared in the next chapter.

Summary

In this chapter, the results of the study were presented. The results of the data usage of the library services and the online survey were displayed using tables and figures. There were 52 participants in the online survey that was open for five weeks and was posted to the students' online newsletter and on the LMS for some of the classes. Four library service usages were tracked one year before the pandemic reached higher education and learning was shifted remotely, and one year after. Two of the library services were experimental before the pandemic and were implemented seriously after the pandemic. The usage for all four services increased during the remote learning period. The next chapter shares conclusions about the results.

Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to find out which online library services that students used during the remote learning period because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Students in a community college were surveyed and library usage data was collected. The author of this paper worked in the library of the college for several years and some of his observations were documented. This last chapter explored the results obtained in the previous chapter and drew conclusions and recommendations.

Discussion and Conclusions

The survey was posted online on the college's official student newsletter. To get more students to participate in the survey, some faculty members posted the survey link on their D2L Brightspace course pages. Using the college's learning management system (LMS), which in this case was D2L Brightspace, to reach students so they could participate in the library survey, proved Cox (2020) "embedded librarianship" concept that libraries needed to reach students in their learning management system. The researcher recommends that the library reaches the students more through the LMS by providing links to the library's online services within courses. This was in agreement with Cox (2020) who believed that academic libraries could help faculty with developing their course content by help link them to the online library resources.

The library was able to check out physical items and books to students while abiding by social distancing and health safety regulations. This was accomplished by implementing a hold system in the library online catalog which enabled students to request a book. This was done simply by clicking on a "Request" button that appeared under the desired item or book. Library staff will then get a notice from the system and will pull the desired book off the shelves and

place it on a hold shelf accessible to students. The book stacks in the library were closed to the public during the first year of the pandemic and this service made it simple for students to get books from the library during the remote learning period. This was an innovative way to help students get what they need while been physically away from campus.

The majority of students' responses to the third question in the survey, "What are the library services that you use and find helpful?", involved leaving a comment about holding a library book service as shown in [Table 4](#). For purposes of this research the phrases "hold a book" and "reserve a book" were used interchangeably. Out of 45 responses to this question in the survey, 15 responses mentioned something to do with the service of holding a library book. This might correlate directly with how the usage of that service was popular during the pandemic and the remote learning period. The usage of the service "Hold a library book" during the first year of remote learning is shown in [Table 3](#). This service was being tested before remote learning started but was implemented fully by the library after the pandemic to encourage students to check out books online. The requested books were then sanitized and placed in a safe location by the entrance of the college for easy access and pickup while abiding by social distance regulations.

According to the results of the second question in the survey regarding rating library services shown in [Table 2](#) and [Figure 2](#), 73% of the responses were satisfied or very satisfied with the ability to place a hold on a book. This might directly help answer RQ1, what were the key library services that college students felt were essential and needed to be replicated for them online due to social distancing? The researcher's recommendation was to continue providing the service of "Holding a book" and expand advertising about it through the different student communication channels available within the college.

The two library services that were experimental before the pandemic and were implemented fully in this library during the pandemic as an attempt to help students were, make an appointment with a librarian and place a hold on a book. While placing a “hold on a book” service showed to be popular by this research, the same conclusion cannot be drawn regarding the service “Make an appointment with a librarian.” Students were reaching the librarians directly through email and the chat feature, only four appointments were made through the service “Make an appointment with a librarian” during the year after the pandemic reached higher education as [Table 3](#) shows.

In answering the second research question RQ2, what were some of the new services that libraries started offering to students during the COVID-19 pandemic? The library where the researcher worked implemented two new services, only one showed to be popular among students during the remote learning period. While students seem to like contacting librarians, making an appointment first might be a thing of the past as students prefer instant contact through email or chat. Making an appointment might still be a useful tool when the library could offer learning opportunities for students. The researcher recommends offering certain classes on how to use the library effectively instead of the generic office hours appointments.

Another conclusion that the researcher reached by observing students and library staff was that not everyone used an online service the way it was intended. Although there were dedicated online library services for students to use, some will choose to contact a librarian or a library staff directly either through email or phone and request those services. For example, instead of searching for the desired book online and reserving it using the “Request a book” system, some students will ask library employees to do it for them by emailing or calling the library directly. Based on the researcher’s observations, the usage data extracted from the online

services were more likely to be undercounted and did not reflect the real number of students being served. This was because library staff often provided services directly to students without going through the designated “link” for that service or documenting their interactions, which meant that data did not show up on the usage reports of that particular service.

Even though emailing and chatting online with librarians did create a virtual reference desk experience for students and replicated the physical reference desk, making an appointment with a librarian online did not attract many students. That could have been due to the limited time slots that librarians were able to offer to students, especially with the reduced number of librarians and library staff due to cutbacks and layoffs prior to the pandemic. As this research was being conducted during the pandemic, the college eliminated several positions including a full-time librarian as a saving cost measure. This was part of the long-lasting impact of the COVID-19 on higher education as Cox (2020) predicted.

Leadership Implications

Some of the recommendations of this study could be implemented directly by the researcher since he works in an academic library and his position allows for further research and data collection. The researcher recommends future research in collaboration with other academic libraries and comparing online services and their usages to get a better understanding of students' needs and the emerging online trends. The researcher will initiate communications with other academic libraries for joint research and data collection.

Going through the comments left by respondents to the survey questions and coming up with emerging themes helped the researcher learn what services students needed. For example, there was a suggestion that a respondent provided in the survey asking to make email a librarian

more visible ([Table 4](#)), the researcher will be able to implement that and place a clear button to the service on the library website.

Recommendations for Practitioners

The author of this paper realized from conducting the research the importance of tracking the data usage of online services and how it helps with making informed data-driven discussions. The researcher learned important data collection techniques and the importance of surveying students and recommends that academic libraries seek to

Based on the results of the library online service's usage data shown in [Table 3](#) and the observations of the researcher during the period of online learning, the researcher agreed with Kelly and Columbus's (2020) early prediction that digital learning was going to boom because of social distancing regulations. Some of the services that proved to be useful to students during that period were likely to continue to be provided into the foreseeable future even after pandemic regulations were lifted. Even when campuses return to normal operations, online learning would remain a valuable option.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research was limited to a small academic library at a midsized community college, to draw a larger conclusion of the core library services that students needed during the pandemic, broader research involving several academic libraries in the United States would be required. The researcher recommends that academic libraries participate in Hinchliffe and Wolff-Eisenberg's (2020) *U.S. Academic Library Response to COVID-19 Survey* and view their results and live dashboards to gain a better understanding of other libraries' responses and their students' needs.

Summary

This research was conducted to find out the key library services that college students felt were essential and need to be replicated for them online due to social distancing regulation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research explored some of the new services that libraries started offering to students during the remote learning period. The researcher worked in an academic library at a community college for more than fifteen years. Data usages for some online library services were extracted and analyzed a year before and a year after the pandemic reached higher education. A short online survey was posted to students asking them to rank, rate, and provide suggestions on some of the online library services. The usage of existing online library services doubled during the period of online learning. Students found the service of “Placing a hold on a book” useful during the pandemic. Students were very satisfied with the services that allow them to communicate with the library online via email or online chat. The library at the college adjusted well to the new norms that came with the COVID-19 pandemic and were able to provide useful services to the students during the time of remote learning and social distancing.

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Appendix A

Sample of the online survey used in the research.

Library Online Services Survey

Are you age 18 or older? If you are not, please close this window to exit the page.

YES

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CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study of the RCTC library services. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a current RCTC student. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Wail Kailani as part of the thesis submitted to the department of Leadership Education at the College of Education of Winona State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Organization Leadership.

Study Purpose

The purpose of the study is to determine what impact the COVID pandemic had on library services and what key library services college students feel are essential and need to be replicated for them online due to COVID-19 and social distancing regulations.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a brief survey that will take less than 5 minutes.

Risks of Study Participation

There is a slight risk that the questions posed may frustrate you as you reflect on your use of library services during the Covid-19 pandemic. This risk is very minor.

Benefits of Study Participation

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. In any publications or presentations, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject. To these extents, confidentiality is not absolute. Study data will be encrypted according to current College policy for the protection of confidentiality.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with Rochester Community and Technical College, Winona State University, or the Minnesota State colleges and universities system. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions

The researcher conducting this study is Wail Kailani. Feel free to contact the researcher at wkailani15@winona.edu. You can also contact the faculty advisor of this study at steven.baule@winona.edu. If you have any questions regarding your participation in the study, or if you want to verify the authenticity of the study, please contact the Winona State Institutional Review Board at IRB@winona.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact Institutional Effectiveness and Planning at 507-285-7245. You may also contact this office in writing or in person at Institutional Effectiveness and Planning, 831 30th Ave SE, Rochester, MN, 55904.

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Library Online Services Survey

1. Please rank the following services based on how important you think they are. This can be based on past use or possible future use. Each field can be ordered either by selecting a ranking from the dropdown on the left or by dragging and dropping the option into the desired order. (1 is most important and 4 is least important). *(required)*

+	▼	Make an appointment with a librarian (Choose a librarian and make an appointment to meet virtually)
+	▼	Email a librarian (Choose to email a librarian from the library website at anytime)
+	▼	Make a hold on a book (Reserve a book from the library website for easy pick up)
+	▼	Chat with a librarian (Chat with a librarian online during designated times from the library website)

2. Please rate the following services. It can be based on past use or if you think you might use any of them in the future when needing help from the library. *(required)*

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
a) Chat with a librarian	<input type="checkbox"/>				
b) Email a librarian	<input type="checkbox"/>				
c) Make an appointment with a librarian	<input type="checkbox"/>				
d) Place a hold on a book	<input type="checkbox"/>				
e) Ability to find the services I need	<input type="checkbox"/>				

3. What are the library services that you use and find helpful?

4. Please provide any additional suggestions below.

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Submit

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