

Library Experiences of Technical Services and Special Collections During the COVID-19

Pandemic at Edith Garland Dupré Library, University of Louisiana at Lafayette

Zachary Stein, Sheryl Curry, Janelle Zetty, Michael Mitchell, and Scott Jordan,

University of Louisiana at Lafayette



Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic put a major strain on everyday life. Academic institutions were forced to close, leaving many employees to resort to teleworking. Academic libraries were put in an unusual position, as they strove to provide access to library materials and services, despite limited to no access to the actual sites. This proved to be especially tricky for technical services and special collections departments, which heavily rely on being present at libraries. Therefore, these departments needed to develop solutions that would allow them to continue performing their duties while adhering to stay-at-home orders. With careful preparation and frequent communication, the technical services and special collections departments of Edith Garland Dupré Library at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette were able to successfully adapt to teleworking and continue providing needed library services. This article details the teleworking experiences of five departments within technical services and special collections during the pandemic, including strategies developed and challenges faced.

Keywords: COVID-19; Coronavirus infections; libraries; technical services (libraries); electronic information resources; cataloging; libraries--special collections; archives; archival materials--digitization; digitization; telework

Introduction

Higher education institutions all over the world were affected in one way or another by the COVID-19 pandemic. Most institutions temporarily closed their doors and transferred classes to online environments. While students and professors proceeded with classes, other departments, especially libraries, were put in unusual positions. With the library buildings closed to patrons, access to physical library materials and study resources were put on hold. Nevertheless, library operations did not cease.

The Governor of Louisiana issued a stay-at-home order on 22 March 2020. Edith Garland Dupré Library (Dupré Library) at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (UL Lafayette) officially closed two days later. When it became clear that COVID-19 was forcing the closure of public facilities, Dupré Library prepared for teleworking operations. Each department developed plans for faculty and staff to work from home. This proved to be tricky for Technical Services and Special Collections, as much of their work depends on staff members being present at Dupré Library. However, each department within these divisions carefully planned out how they would carry out their operations and successfully and efficiently continued providing library services.

This article details the experiences of Dupré Library's Technical Services and Special Collections departments teleworking during COVID-19. Sections cover technical services as a unit, electronic resources and serials, cataloging, archives, and digital archives projects.

Technical Services

The Assistant Dean of Technical Services oversees both Technical Services and Special Collections. These departments consist of, but are not limited to Library Information Technology (IT), Collection Development, Electronic Resources and Serials, Cataloging, and Special Collections. This section reports on the Assistant Dean of Technical Service's perspective and

discusses the operations of selected departments.

Background

When the COVID-19 virus began to rapidly spread throughout the New Orleans, LA area, UL Lafayette commenced plans for transitioning operations to remote environments, leading to frequent meetings and uneasy conversations. Once these plans were implemented, UL Lafayette moved most employees to teleworking. Thanks to technological devices such as computers, laptops, and smartphones, teleworking has become a more flexible possibility for employees unable to be physically present at their worksite (Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garcés, 2020). The institution developed work-from-home policies and identified essential staff. Employees of the university were asked to develop teleworking plans and to sign agreements. The goal was to maintain operations remotely so that there would be no loss of personal time or pay. In order to ensure successful teleworking, employees needed to keep best practices in mind, which include access to proper technological training and accommodations to employees' needs (Lister and Harnish, 2019).

UL Lafayette was compelled to make significant changes and decisions regarding its transformation to online learning and teleworking. As Louisiana's cases of COVID-19 multiplied each day, the university administration advised the deans that continuity plans needed to be created and shared among their departments and units. Continuity plans are used to outline processes and documentation for the continuation of operations during emergencies or other difficult circumstances. While some library staff had already conducted cross-training and documented procedures on different platforms, it was important that all staff be able to identify responsibilities and critical tasks. The continuity plan identified backup personnel to help reduce interruptions to essential services, and specified available or pending documentation, including

relevant web sites, wikis, or tutorials. With this mandate, the plan recognized the critical need for Dupré Library to be able to function, no matter what uncertainty lay ahead.

Technical Obstacles and Operations from Teleworking

Soon after, UL Lafayette announced that classes would be held online and employees would transition to teleworking. For most of Dupré Library's Technical Services staff, it was generally held that many tasks could be performed remotely, including ordering materials online, checking for broken links, updating OCLC master records, and performing mass inventories. Staff also identified professional development webinars, training from the university's Office of Human Resources, and many other sources of online learning. IT services were frequently needed for teleworking preparation. Before employees departed the building, Library IT worked tirelessly, installing SirsiDynix WorkFlows and the Connexion client on laptops and computers that employees were taking home, providing other equipment and instructions for home computers, and documenting inventory that was leaving the building.

This was just the beginning of the multiple responsibilities of Library IT, which consists of the IT Coordinator, IT Systems Specialist, and a graduate student within Technical Services. As expected, the initial few weeks presented a variety of technical obstacles. Employees realized that they needed more credentials or secure remote access to a virtual private network on their home computers. Other employees realized they needed static IP addresses on their computers for certain functions. Staff neglected to bring their flash drives with essential information home from the library. Employees needed advice on setting up a dedicated office space with wired or strong wireless access. With so many family members using the Internet simultaneously, sharing bandwidth often presented a challenge. Also, some employees needed to be educated quickly by Library IT on how to perform various functions, such as setting up and sharing teleworking

reports, checking work voicemail on their home phones, and scanning paperwork and other documents remotely.

In constant demand during the initial few weeks of this period, Library IT soon realized that they needed more administrative credentials from the university's IT Service Desk in order to perform more efficiently. This included obtaining remote desktop privileges (RDP), which is used to connect to an employee computer using a secure network connection. But with so many burdens on University IT, it made sense for them to loosen some of the restrictions on departmental IT managers so that they could assume more responsibilities. Library IT used RDP for various purposes: installing software, administering SirsiDynix WorkFlows, facilitating access to applications such as WebAID, UL Lafayette's personal leave application (which was designed long ago and required an outdated version of JAVA), and using the virtual private network. Unfortunately, Library IT also had to deal with a pre-arranged upgrade of the SirsiDynix Enterprise catalog during the first week of teleworking, not to mention a pending user load. Fortunately, everything went smoothly. Since Technical Services staff utilized SirsiDynix applications, it was also necessary for Library IT to provide information about accessing SirsiDynix Training Portal for its webinars and modules. Although the IT graduate student did not have the higher level of administrative privileges, he also contributed to several long-term projects, including collecting URLs for alias designation, and recording broken and incorrect links. The LOUIS team at the Louisiana Board of Regents (<https://www.louislibraries.org/>) provided much assistance during this time to libraries, faculty, and students, offering free webinars, collections of temporary free resources, and Friday afternoon "Watercooler Discussions" for LOUIS library members.

Dupré Library's website, managed by the IT Systems Specialist, demanded much

attention due to the change to remote services. Although it was designed so that potential new pages could be built in with little effort, it was not clear where some critical new resources should be located, or whether they should be combined with existing items. For immediate recognition, library staff decided to place a short banner with a yellow-shaded background at the top of each web page. This message contained a link to the COVID-19 Library FAQ, which was an integration of a Public Services LibGuide about remote library services with a LibGuide on COVID-19 information, originally created by the IT Systems Specialist. After a few weeks, the background shade changed to a light brown color, since staff assumed that users were aware of the closure by then. To assist remote users, the Frequently Used Resources box, located on the main page, was refreshed, and renamed "Library Closure." These resources included links to the COVID-19 Library FAQ, Circulation, Interlibrary Loan Services, Research FAQs, and Virtual Tutoring Services. Another resource was created in collaboration with the university's Academic Vice-President and the Distance Learning Librarian to support efforts to ensure that students had adequate access to materials. The IT Systems Specialist created a page with a search box to locate temporarily free online supplemental course materials, available from a service called RedShelf (<https://www.about.redshelf.com/>).

Challenges and Solutions

Working remotely presented different challenges throughout Technical Services. Longstanding university policy and procedures were changed and sometimes difficult to grasp. For example, the university's Office of Purchasing changed its procedures to submit credit card logs, requesting that card holders maintain their logs and statements in their homes. This impacted Collection Development staff, who used credit card accounts to order books and materials. They were also under pressure to meet the fiscal year purchasing deadline at the end of

April. Simply being away from the building presented problems. Collection Development staff often consulted and worked with the many resources that resided in their offices or elsewhere in the building. Even though the unit ordered materials through SirsiDynix WorkFlows, they often performed other essential functions that required them to be in the building. Special Collections needed to work with materials in their physical space, as did Cataloging and U.S. Government Information/Cajun and Creole Music Collection. In addition, the longer a unit's staff member had been employed at the library, the more items they likely had in print that might be needed at any given time. Consequently, several trips to the library were necessary throughout this period to obtain materials. Collection Development took a step further, ordering shipments of books to staff residences. They also increased purchasing of streaming media or electronic resources rather than physical materials.

Microsoft Teams

Maintaining communication channels was essential. During the first few weeks of remote work, contact with colleagues and university administration was usually through email. However, email was not always the ideal method; important messages could get buried or completely missed. Chat, video, and other conference applications were becoming popular solutions for public and workplace remote communication. Fortunately, the university was already in the process of implementing selected apps within its license to Microsoft (MS) Office 365 and was on the verge of launching MS Teams. This application is a work-place collaboration suite that can be used for chat, video and audio conferencing, document and resource sharing, online teaching, and other functions. The university's IT Service Desk provided live training on MS Teams, sometimes offering two sessions a day. The instructors emphasized its integration with MS Office 365, auto-population of university contact information, file sharing, and

unlimited video and audio calls. Despite the university's efforts to promote MS Teams, some library staff persisted with the widely popular Zoom application, perhaps because they were already familiar with it or did not require such a full-featured application. Recognizing the potential utility of MS Teams, however, the Interim Dean of Libraries requested that the IT Systems Specialist establish a University Libraries Department Team. By the end of March 2020, the Team was established, featuring a separate "channel" for general library purposes, channels for individual departments, faculty and staff, committees, and other administrative divisions. Many library employees quickly adopted MS Teams, using it for departmental meetings, chats, uploading work reports, document sharing, and other activities. With its rich features and support, MS Teams provided a terrific way for library staff to connect.

Maintaining Communication

Preserving the structure of routine meetings and dialogues with staff required a change in approach. As stated, many library employees adopted MS Teams for departmental meetings. After some practice, the Assistant Dean of Technical Services intuitively determined that it was more efficient to have periodic meetings with smaller groups of people, usually supervisors, or with individuals. She also quickly recognized that some staff members preferred one-on-one communication to larger groups, which facilitated richer, open, and honest discussions. Communication formats varied on an individual basis, including verbal, online chat, email, or video. The Assistant Dean of Technical Services attempted to be as flexible as possible, but still requested weekly work reports from department heads. She, in turn, had weekly meetings with the Interim Dean of Libraries and the Assistant Dean of Public Services. These meetings provided updated information and helped to convey ideas and concerns. The Interim Dean of Libraries also held monthly meetings with the library faculty and staff. She was very

communicative and prioritized staff members' well-being, acknowledging their dedicated service during this period.

Final Thoughts

Although working from home and maintaining technical services operations was a challenge, the experience was relatively successful. Each department within Technical Services adapted, worked creatively, and communicated effectively. The following sections review select departments overseen by the Assistant Dean of Technical Services and how they responded to teleworking protocols.

Electronic Resources and Serials

Electronic Resources departments are, at least in theory, especially well placed to continue their duties with only minor interruptions in teleworking environments. Given that the electronic resources field is already a digital domain by its nature, most of the concern for switching to teleworking lies in project planning and goal setting rather than infrastructure. For Dupré Library's Electronic Resources and Serials (ERS) department, this was mostly true. Much of the change involved in working from home as a response to the COVID-19 situation centered around changes in projects and project management, though there were still logistical considerations that had to be taken care of to ensure work continued to run smoothly.

Overview of ERS Department

The ERS department was, at the time of the initial stay-at-home order, a department of five full-time employees: the Head of ERS, a department supervisor, and three department staff. Prior to the COVID-19 situation, the Head of ERS had enacted a cross-training policy to allow more flexibility among the department's work force. This involved ensuring that all staff had some knowledge of how to handle any aspect of ERS work: serials processing, cataloging, and

online maintenance. This was done in anticipation of two retirements: the department supervisor at the end of April, and the most senior department staff in August. Because of this cross-training, all staff members had some degree of working familiarity with the variety of digital tools and resources utilized by the department. This meant that training would not be required to achieve basic projects such as digital collection inventories or basic online communication. Staff could be assigned to projects that utilized the breadth of the library's online resources and reliably work with those materials.

Switching to Teleworking

Both areas of ERS had to be considered once planning for teleworking began. Regarding electronic resources, working from home did not present many obstacles in terms of logistics or security. Because ERS staff would not be working on confidential or private documents, security would not present an issue. Since online library resources are typically accessed through authentication, whether on-campus or remote, ERS was able to perform maintenance projects.

Serials, however, were different. While many of Dupré Library's journal subscriptions were online, a large collection of physical journals remained that needed to be handled, processed, and circulated. New issues for these physical journals arrived in the mail and started a backlog while staff were teleworking. Each new issue needed to be physically handled for integration into the collection, including processing (tagging, stamping, etc.) and cataloging (creating and updating item records). In order to manage this process and prevent further backlogs, the Head of ERS oversaw a monthly process sorting out newly arrived issues to each department staff, who would process and catalog using library equipment at home.

Given the combination of work staff needed to complete from home (processing physical journal issues and performing online maintenance of digital materials), the necessary equipment

was limited. Processing physical journals requires library tags and stamps; barcodes were not necessary as individual journal issues are not barcoded under current procedures. All other work required a computer with access to Dupré Library's Integrated Library System (ILS) and a web browser. For this, staff brought their work computers home to maintain access to the library's ILS software. To prepare for the switch to teleworking, ERS staff also asked and were approved to take home extra monitors; they found working with two to be easier than one. This movement of equipment presented minimal security risk due to the lack of confidential or sensitive files stored on staff computers.

Working from Home

ERS's switch to teleworking involved a focus on specific and measurable projects. When ERS staff were based physically in the library, work was divided into a mix of planned maintenance projects such as troubleshooting and access checks of resources, and ongoing inventory projects, which were in collaboration with different departments. These inventory projects were impossible to accomplish since they relied on staff presence at the library. With all library employees at home, these projects were no longer available, leaving only the online maintenance work.

In order to ensure that staff were working adequately to fulfill their time obligations to the university, the Head of ERS assigned projects which would demonstrate the work performed and the time spent on them. Since ERS staff received cross-training on the variety of department resources and materials ahead of the switch to teleworking, there was much flexibility in resource assignments.

The initial project chosen for the staff members was a proactive access check of the library's online journal collection. The objective was to curtail the numerous access errors found

by students and researchers that have occurred over the years due to changes in subscriptions. The collection numbered tens of thousands of titles, so this was an important, yet time-consuming project. With staff at home and no longer working with on-going inventory activities, this proved to be the perfect time to undertake such a large-scale project. Three staff members took sections of the online journals and performed daily access checks for titles across all possible access points available to the library. To ensure staff maintained a reasonable output on the project and that all performed their work adequately, the Head of ERS set weekly metrics for the number of titles staff should check. These metrics helped confirm that staff were performing their required duties and completing their assignments.

The fourth staff member was given a different work assignment as a continuation of her earlier cross-training. Before the stay-at-home order, she had planned to focus more of her time on online maintenance and troubleshooting rather than physical processing. While the other three staff members performed the access check project, the fourth staff member worked on a broader database access activity. The work was roughly the same, but it involved her working with a wider range of the library's electronic resources. This allowed her to adequately familiarize herself with the resources and to focus on online maintenance and troubleshooting following the physical return to the library.

Moving Forward

For the duration of the stay-at-home order, ERS work was confined to goal-oriented projects centered on the library's online resources. Given the timeline that the university was expected to follow for its stay-at-home order, at least one of the department's two retirements was expected to occur while working remotely. This presented some unique challenges, particularly due to the retiring staff member having university equipment at home. It was also

disappointing because department members could not see their colleague off as a group.

The sudden switch to teleworking showed the possibilities and limitations for the ERS department to work remotely. Routine maintenance of online resources, especially in identifying and correcting access issues, was easily accomplished by staff from their homes. Sustaining project milestones and setting deadlines allowed the department to refine the library's online resources in terms of identifying and correcting access errors and facilitating remote use of resources. Departmental operations were expected to improve once staff could physically return to the library because the resolution of these access issues provided more efficiency in maintenance performances. Teleworking also provided the groundwork for future routine maintenance, especially as the department moved into its new staff structure after the two retirements. The necessary shift to working exclusively remotely for several months allowed for uninterrupted work on the backlogged access checks and preventative troubleshooting of online links; work which will make future preventative maintenance easier.

Cataloging

The Cataloging department at Dupré Library consists of four employees: the Head of Cataloging, two original catalogers, and one copy cataloger. The most junior member has six years of experience; the most senior member has thirty-one. Hence, staff members are knowledgeable about the department's policies and procedures. Before the pandemic, no one in the department worked from home.

Preparation

Library staff started preparing for teleworking a week before closure. In compliance with their teleworking plan, the Cataloging staff continued their regular workflow consisting of record cleanup projects, discards, and cataloging of archival materials. Since the book budget did not

allow for many purchases, staff had few books to catalog.

Equipment and Software

While Dupré Library allowed staff members to take computer hardware home, Cataloging staff utilized their own equipment. Two staff members had personal laptops and brought them to work during the week before the library closure to install needed software such as SirsiDynix Workflows and OCLC Connexion. The transition to teleworking was less complicated thanks to the ease of installing programs and configuring settings ahead of time. Another staff member had a personal computer at home and installed programs using instructions provided by Library IT, who was available for assistance if anyone experienced difficulties. Despite initial complications with Internet connectivity and outages, Cataloging was able to swiftly transition and proceed with teleworking.

Projects

Teleworking gave Cataloging a chance to catch up with name authority heading creation. Dupré Library became certified by the Name Authority Cooperative Program (NACO) in 2017 after attending training sessions through the Library of Congress Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC). Presently, Dupré Library does not have full independence, which is the ability to submit headings without review by an experienced NACO member. To gain independence, the library must provide approximately 100 records to an experienced reviewer. The department was able to submit more name authority headings to attain this goal.

Before the stay-at-home order, one of the original catalogers scanned folders of archival material to work on at home. When cataloging on most of these materials was completed, she started creating name authority headings. She reviewed the training from the PCC and used Gary Strawn's authority toolkit for corrections and verifications. Recent activities of this project

included locating unauthorized headings in the catalog and creating authorized name headings for Louisiana-based people and organizations.

Another original cataloger created MARC records for the University Archives and Acadiana Manuscripts Collection using collection descriptions on the Special Collections webpage. She used course materials from the *Original Cataloging of Archival Materials Using RDA* training provided by Midwest Collaborative for Library Services, which the Cataloging department took in September 2019.

The copy cataloger worked on a project overlaying bibliographic records, in which the MARC record was in a foreign language. She also worked on other general record cleanup projects using reports created through SirsiDynix BlueCloud Analytics and shared on Google Sheets.

Resources

Departmental resources are almost entirely online. The Cataloging department manual is available as a wiki on PBworks and kept up to date. Cataloging also subscribes to LC ClassWeb, a web-based version of the Library of Congress Subject Headings that is updated daily, and RDA Toolkit, a service that provides Resource, Description and Action (RDA) instructions and guidelines to access current cataloging rules.

In addition to cataloging projects, staff members worked on professional development through the Cornerstone Suite, provided by the UL Lafayette Office of Human Resources. Supervisors would log onto Cornerstone and assign web-based training to their staff members. Cataloging staff also took advantage of many other training courses outside of Cornerstone. Ultimately, these training assignments helped Cataloging stay updated on professional practices.

Communication

Employees mostly stayed connected through MS Teams. Since the software was not widely available until after the stay-at-home order, many employees needed training. The University IT Service Desk offered many live online training opportunities. Each staff member logged into MS Teams each morning and remained available during the day for questions. One staff member commented that the availability of the supervisor was helpful. Employees maintained accountability by submitting a daily work log on the department's MS Teams file folder. They used an Excel spreadsheet template, which the Head of Cataloging checked regularly.

Reflections

Cataloging staff kept a sense of normalcy and morale by maintaining structure, following routines, and creating efficient workspaces in their homes. They faced difficulties such as distractions at home and a lack of physical materials on hand for more research. Techniques used to remedy these difficulties included keeping notes in one place with an iPad Pro, operating a white noise machine, and using the Pomodoro time management technique, in which workers take consistent breaks in between work intervals. Some staff coped with teleworking changes by socializing with colleagues through virtual lunches, online chats, and family support. Others enjoyed the solitude and the ability to work at their own pace, although they missed their coworkers and their office space.

For the most part, the Cataloging department adapted well to the new normal. While there may have been some initial complications, teleworking proved effective for the department, as the staff were able to continue with their projects. This experience provided evidence that teleworking could be a feasible option when necessary.

Special Collections

The Special Collections department is divided into several parts: the University Archives and Acadiana Manuscripts Collection, Louisiana Room, Rare Books Collection, and Digital Archives. There are six employees: the Head of Special Collections, Reference Archivist/Louisiana Room Librarian, Digitization Archivist, Archives Processing Specialist, and two library specialists. Before COVID-19 struck, two temporary contractors were assigned to work in the department to fill in vacant spaces for the two library specialist positions (both positions have been filled as of this writing).

Much of the work conducted in Special Collections consists of processing archival collections, communicating and meeting with donors, providing reference to holdings, organizing databases, and digitizing collections for preservation and accessibility. These tasks, though diverse, mostly require staff members to be present at the library. This is due to necessary equipment, access to university files, supplies, and processing space. In order to continue services and tasks during COVID-19, Special Collections staff were not only required to bring materials home with them, but also needed to strategize how to adapt to archival work remotely. Certain services had to be put on hold, but Special Collections was able to continue functioning during Louisiana's stay-at-home order.

Preparations for Teleworking

As stated earlier, most of the work conducted in Special Collections must be done at the library. This is to ensure the safety of the collections, as the library tries to maintain a consistent environment and contains more space than an employee's home. The need to telework forced the Special Collections staff to modify this model. Each staff member took one to two collections home, depending on how much work was feasible for a member to conduct. For example, the

Archives Processing Specialist brought home two medium-sized collections and the Digitization Archivist took one smaller collection. This is because most of the Archives Processing Specialist's duties are devoted to processing, while the Digitization Archivist has various other projects to handle. Collections were transferred to staff members' homes before the library was ordered to shut down, which made closing the department easier.

In addition to collections, Special Collections staff also brought home supplies and files that would be necessary for ongoing work. These supplies included folders, staplers, plastic clips, tape, and foldable boxes. Each staff member made sure to take an appropriate amount based on the collection sizes and conditions. While several library employees decided to bring their computer towers and monitors home, Special Collections staff chose not to since it acted as an extra burden alongside the boxes of collections. Instead, staff members placed their vital files onto external drives, which were then used for transfer to personal computers. This acted as an easy and efficient method for transferring the office to home.

Staying Connected through Telework

Once teleworking commenced, the Special Collections staff were able to adapt easily. A best practice that particularly benefitted the staff was establishing a "clear understanding of expectations" (Lister and Harnish, 2019, p. 156) between the Head of Special Collections and the staff. Before transitioning to home, each member constructed a draft schedule to assist in navigating through day-to-day work. This exercise helped the staff strategize about how to spend their time wisely. For example, the Head of Special Collections spent most of the mornings processing a collection, took an hour-long break for lunch, and spent the afternoons on administrative work, professional development, and research. In addition, the Head of Special Collections held departmental meetings via MS Teams the first days of each week. These

meetings, in which staff reported on individual projects, helped everyone remain connected and stay updated. Furthermore, each member was required to submit a progress report to document the tasks that were being completed for the week. The meetings and reports allowed for transparency and opportunities to ensure that everyone was on the right track, consequently making teleworking function more effectively.

Challenges

Though Special Collections was able to successfully navigate through the pandemic, the work was not without challenges. The biggest challenge came from the scarcity of supplies. Before the stay-at-home order was enacted, the library had already placed an order for more supplies to be delivered to Special Collections, mainly archival folders and boxes. The order was halted and the staff had to settle with the few folders that were left over. The staff had to reuse old folders for the time being, though these were not up to archival standards. Some were in bad condition, which could potentially lead to damages in the papers. The supply order eventually went through, but the materials in old folders needed to be transferred to archival folders. This was frustrating because the staff had to reprocess once back in the archives. Nevertheless, the process did not take as long since the papers were already in their correct order.

Another challenge involved the need to make trips to the library. While staff members were technically supposed to remain at home during this time, there were certain tasks that demanded presence at the archives. One of these tasks included the completion of already-processed collections. The staff took home decently sized collections, but some took less time to process than others. After collections were completely processed, the staff member was required to return to the library, drop off the finished collections, and bring home new ones. The Head of Special Collections also needed to return to the library to record temperature and humidity

readings and tend to vital requests from university personnel. Whenever members made trips to the archives, they were mindful to minimize their time there and complete tasks quickly and efficiently. Members always notified each other when they were coming in so that schedules could be coordinated. Although staff members needed to step out of their homes, the visits helped them continue with their teleworking responsibilities while also ensuring the safety of the archives.

Final Thoughts

Overall, Special Collections was able to thrive during the pandemic. The transition may have been a little awkward at first, but staff were able to effectively continue with their work to ensure the success of the archives. While there were challenges, the staff members gave all their effort to overcome them, and the mission to preserve and make accessible the history and cultures of Acadiana was always at the forefront. This experience provided much perspective to Special Collections on how to prepare for this kind of crisis.

Digital Projects

The Digital Archives section of Special Collections required significant attention when planning for teleworking. In order to proceed with conducting digital projects, the Digitization Archivist needed to establish and maintain a sound and secure software and hardware environment in a remote location. This involved an appraisal of personal equipment and tools that would provide the continuation of digital operations.

Preparing Digitization Work

Digitization involves multiple steps, processes, and activities. According to the Federal Agencies Digital Guidelines Initiative (FADGI), these steps include plans, assessment, scanning and conversion to digital, metadata creation, editing, quality control and verification, policy

creation, and submission of digital objects to a repository (FADGI, 2009, p. 11-12, 14). Because digitization follows a general workflow of activities that progress through multiple (Bandi, 2015, p. 335-336), though not necessarily successive stages (FADGI, 2009, p. 12), the situation called for organizing telework into components that could be reintegrated later into the normal processes of the library. Activities such as scanning and accessing physical collections were inherently confined to the library. More technical activities such as creating metadata, editing digitized images, and project planning could be accomplished remotely.

Since much digitization work is performed on a computer, the Digitization Archivist made an assessment to determine if a personal laptop would function proficiently. His laptop, with regards to its operating system and software compatibility, was comparable to the office computer. It reliably ran multi-media software applications and efficiently downloaded and uploaded files. The laptop was securely stored at home, used by a single individual with a private Wi-Fi, and was logged out and shut off when not in use. Therefore, the laptop was sufficient for performing digital tasks and was deemed relatively secure for teleworking.

Software Programs for Digitization

Digital projects depend largely on software programs for editing and quality control. Adobe Photoshop is used on a regular basis in digitization projects, so a software test needed to be conducted ahead of time to see if any issues arose from running the program. Because many software programs at the library are accessed through the Adobe Creative Cloud, the Digitization Archivist logged into his account, ran the software, and edited a couple of images without any problems. He also ran Dreamweaver for reading and editing a document in XML code. This proved to be slightly difficult due to the laptop's single monitor instead of the two monitors normally used at the library. Despite the limitations in comparing code in two different versions

of an XML MODS form, the software functioned well enough.

Digitization Efforts

Some of the digital project tasks required migration to a remote work area. Due to the enormous size of digital collections and the time constraints for copying substantial amounts of data, only a small portion of digital archives could be securely and efficiently transferred. One such project involved an extensive collection of unedited, digitized photographs. Approximately 16 GBs of this collection were copied onto a separate SATA 2.0 TB hard drive and transferred to the personal laptop, while preserving the file structure and filenames of the collection. By maintaining the integrity of the file structure and names, the digital materials could then be transferred safely back to Digital Archives without the concern for disorganization. The digitization workflow in the teleworking setting remained the same as it would have been in the normal office environment.

Challenges and Reflections

There were some challenges to working with digital collections and performing other digital-related tasks remotely. Without knowing how long the stay-at-home order would last, a finite amount of digital collections was initially taken from the library to the remote environment, which potentially could (and, in fact, did) run out before returning to the office. Another notable handicap to telework was that the original materials were not available for making comparisons to verify the accuracy of the digitized copies, as well as addressing potential scanning issues (FADGI, 2009, p. 8). In another area, lack of access to digitization equipment and library infrastructure caused a temporary suspension in fulfilling digitization requests for patrons.

Aside from digitization work, many upcoming conferences and organizational meetings

were moved to video conferencing venues, including one where the Digitization Archivist presented. While this acted as an uncertain hindrance at first, the Digitization Archivist was able to use Zoom to proceed with the presentation.

Despite the challenges, however, some aspects of the job were accomplished in the telework setting. The Digitization Archivist was able to continue working on digital projects from home, keeping in mind careful consideration of software and hardware capabilities and security assurance. By following a consistent workflow and maintaining the integrity of the file organization, the Digitization Archivist could subsequently reintegrate files and collections back into the permanent work infrastructure.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic was a struggle for all. Libraries had to adapt in ways thought impossible to continue providing services. Dupré Library faced some challenges, but ultimately, they persevered. By preparing in advance and providing open communication, the Technical Services and Special Collections departments successfully adapted to teleworking. The experience may have caused employees to make unusual accommodations, but each employee was able to make the most of this challenging time.

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