

Editor's Column: Year in Review (Sort Of)

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It is upon us: our collective COVID-19 anniversary. A year ago, many of us went into lockdown, working from home (WFH) and learning a new normal. I went back to work in the physical workplace in July 2020, though I know many of our library colleagues – in the state and beyond – are still WFH. Some libraries have still not reopened. My institution is already talking about returning to near-normal or normal operations for the fall 2021 semester. The institution where I am working on my doctorate, which is in Mississippi, is also having a similar conversation. My father, brother, brother-in-law, and one of my best friends had the virus (thankfully, all recovered just fine). I know several medical and healthcare workers, including my brother-in-law who is an ER doctor, who are absolutely physically and emotionally burned out. Family friends have died from the virus. Several of my employees have had the virus. They have had family members who have had it – some recovered, some did not.

Higher education as a discipline and an enterprise is still trying to figure out how to deal with the ramifications of what happened; how to make up lost time (and revenue); move forward safely and smartly; and how to pandemic-proof (or at least pandemic-prep) better in the future. I hope these conversations will take place across all levels of every institution. At my institution, there seemed to be imbalances in how different types of

positions were treated in terms of being “essential” and how the administration seemed to arbitrarily respect (or ignore) individuals who rightfully self-identified as vulnerable. Arguably, this also happened in the larger context of society as well. Frustrations have abounded, as much because of misinformation about the virus and masking in general and how former president Donald Trump chose to handle the pandemic (not to mention his own brush with COVID) as about competing interests (socio-economics vs. safety).

We all learned a lot in pandemic. Supposedly. I say *supposedly* because while a lot of great information and research has come out since last March, there are still some fundamental issues. Several of my colleagues who are parents talked about the pros and cons of WFH and hoped that lockdown would start conversations about the importance of flexible scheduling for parents...but that does not seem to be coming to fruition. Several of my colleagues as well as friends in other industries and fields talked about how hopefully pandemic would show the feasibility of WFH for other reasons...but that too does not seem to be coming to fruition as widely as one might have hoped. The digital divide, within education and beyond it, has become painfully clear. It is also clear that virtual education for K-12 is not necessarily the greatest thing. It's not even necessarily the greatest for higher education. What many of us knew at the higher ed level – that online/virtual education isn't for everyone – has been confirmed at the K-12 level, without a doubt. However, alternatives have not emerged to help K-12 students, beyond the hope of vaccines and herd immunity. Never mind the issues associated with people *still* somehow resisting masking, social distancing, and vaccination.

It was easy when the pandemic began to get overwhelmed. It's still easy to get overwhelmed even as things seem to be easing up. I'm not sure I feel confident that the

pandemic is truly winding down yet, as some headlines seem to suggest. As of writing this column (March 16, 2021), we aren't even a month out from the 500,000 daily COVID death record in the United States. I do have a lot of hope and faith in the vaccines to improve circumstances. But. I think it is a mistake to start partying too soon – lest we invite a relapse of bad habits that nurture the virus. I do not think it is time to let down our guards just yet. We need to continue being smart. Vaccinations do not mean we are invincible or that the danger has entirely passed.

The events of January 6 must also be acknowledged. By and large, I consider *Codex* a nonpartisan publication – apolitical, as it were. However, what happened at the Capitol cannot be ignored. An unprecedented insurrection occurred which will have significant ramifications. As the daughter of a social studies teacher who taught me and continues to espouse the virtues of democracy, watching the events unfold that day was mind-blowing. I don't think this country has recovered yet, and it's unclear how long it may take to recover from that emotionally and psychologically. Lives were lost. Damage, literal and figurative, was done. Families and friendships have been torn apart. It is a mistake to think that what happened that day won't touch libraries or how we do things. It may not be clear yet how that event will affect libraries, but I believe we will feel some sort of ripple from that event.

However, in case I sounds too much like a doomsday prophet, there is good to see and embrace. We have vaccines, way faster than I think any of us imagined! Life has gone on in spite of the pandemic. I attended the wedding of my college best friend via Zoom! People had babies! People adopted babies! My doctoral cohort and I and countless other students at all levels continued their educations and even graduated! Libraries may

have scrambled to support their stakeholders, but amazing solutions emerged which make me proud of my colleagues and coworkers. Publishers and vendors came through to help libraries and schools support their faculty/instructors and students thrive. Businesses across industries and domains altruistically came through to help those in need. People learned new skills, discovered new passions, rediscovered themselves, and found new ways to connect and to be themselves. *We were still able to thrive somehow.*

Though he did not necessarily mean it in an entirely positive way, Dr. Ian Malcolm – played by the inimitable Jeff Goldblum – perhaps said it best in *Jurassic Park* when he said, “Life finds a way.” Libraries found a way to keep supporting their patrons. People found ways to keep supporting one another and connecting. Hopefully, we all learned how to be more patient and gentle with one another and ourselves. Hopefully, those practices will remain after social distancing is a distant memory and masks return to simply being a Halloween staple, an industrial goth must-have, and the purview of medical/healthcare professionals.

This issue contains some great research (as always) – some practical (like dealing with microfilm decay) and some conceptual (librarianship versus archivists). It heartens me to see that research continues as our colleagues dealt and deal with their own personal and professional fears, challenges, and demands. As always, I appreciate the efforts of my peer reviewers (what would I do with y’all?!) and the interest and contributions of the authors who submit to *Codex*. Here’s to wishing everyone a better time in 2021!

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