

“Sorry, the library is closed” and “We’re still here!”

Since March 2020, most libraries have communicated the same message: “Due to the COVID-19 outbreak all library locations remain closed.” But our messaging did not end with the closure notice, it continued with, “we’re still here.” Our social responsibility as librarians transitioned into new avenues as we experimented with Facebook Live and other social media, expanded our chat reference hours, and created new online research guides. We told our communities, “Our physical libraries may be closed, but we’re still here.” In 2020, “here” has taken on a new meaning.

Sustaining education, literacy and information services in the coronavirus crisis is a tall order, and, as we have learned, a complex challenge. We moved our operations, core functions and services online as much as we could. We helped to ease the pivot to remote education and work. We developed creative ways to reach our communities digitally. We became differently attuned to access and affordability issues. We saw how sudden COVID-19 closures impacted the digital divide and saw how digital resources and services could start to fill in this gap. We encouraged instructors to explore open textbook or library-licensed e-book textbook alternatives during the transition to online teaching, which are always free or affordable. We saw firsthand that some students were experiencing greater financial stress than usual because they were not able to work due to the coronavirus. We struggled to help job-seekers find jobs that no longer exist. We invested our time in testing resources and tools that will continue to be free to us and our users after the crisis is over. And on and on.

Our libraries have been closed, but our efforts to support our communities without a physical library demonstrate unequivocally that “we’re still here.” This is true on our campuses, and we suggest it is also the case on yours – our efforts to support our users during this time have been and will continue to be, key components of our institutions’ instructional continuity plans.

Schools are now focused on the upcoming 2020–2021 academic year. Some of our library buildings will remain closed. Some will reopen. Some will reopen and then close again. Regional, local and campus alerts and news will continue to keep us on our toes and impact re-opening and operations. Questions about library closures reflected a range of community and stakeholder concerns. When can I start borrowing books and materials again? How can I return or renew items? When are my books and materials due? Will curbside pick-up be available to access physical materials? When will the library open again? What collections and services are available online? Can I donate my used books to the library?

This much is certain – the upcoming academic year will be different than any other academic year. Over the past months we have seen what it means for librarians and staff to support students, faculty and staff without a physical library or libraries. Focusing on *Reference Services Review*, over the past months we have also experienced the pandemic’s impact and reach. Our authors and reviewers have faced unprecedented demands at their home institutions and in their personal lives. Continuously shifting priorities have impacted both their service to the profession and scholarly and creative work. Disrupted workflows have led, in turn, to requests for extensions, delays in completing both reviews and revisions. The annual bibliography included in this issue has a few gaps due to inaccessibility of some print materials. But our reviewers’ service ethic is strong, and our authors have persevered and continued to share and refine their work as you will see in this



issue. We draw your attention to what has become a hallmark of the 4th issue of each volume – the annual annotated bibliography of library instruction and information literacy. In this issue Tessa Withorn and her colleagues in the California State University and Colleges system present recently published resources on library instruction and information literacy, providing an introductory overview and a selected annotated bibliography of 370 publications covering various library types, populations and social contexts. As we close Volume 48 and look ahead to the new year, we are hopeful as we continue to tell our communities, colleagues, and ourselves, “we’re still here.”

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