7-1-2020

Georgia Libraries Respond to COVID-19 Pandemic

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By Bettina Askew, Alicia Brown, Maranda Christy, Ali Gomez, Marquita Gooch, Josette Kubicki, Aspasia Luster, Dana Marseille, Samantha Paul, Lachelle Smith, Shafer Tharrington, Angela Thornton, Shannon Tyner, and Jason Wright; compiled by Sofia Slutskaya

In March 2020, many public and academic libraries temporary closed their physical facilities to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in their communities. Even though physical building and physical facilities were largely unavailable to patrons, Georgia public and academic libraries did not stop offering digital content, online learning, and virtual programs. Public and academic librarians shared stories about their programs and activities with the Georgia Library Association (GLA) .

Augusta University
Aspasia Luster, Bettina Askew, Maranda Christy, Ali Gomez, Josette Kubicki, Shafer Tharrington, and Lachelle Smith

At the end of every spring and fall semester, the Augusta University (AU) Libraries are busy providing free food, coffee, and relaxing activities to students preparing for exams. With both of our libraries—Greenblatt Library on the Health Sciences campus and Reese Library on the Summerville campus—closed for COVID-19, we were keen to find creative solutions to help students unwind and relax during these stressful times. This year we hosted a Virtual Finals Frenzy (April 27–May 8, 2020) by consistently posting on our social media, which pointed to a complementary online library guide (LibGuide). This virtual programming included photos of the libraries personnel's cooking during quarantine, a relaxing Zen Zone, and library pet therapy (always a

favorite!). Besides our social media posts, our LibGuide collected resources on at-home exercise and study skills for online learning to help our students get through the weirdest finals of their lives with lower stress levels and, hopefully, some smiles.

Since we were unable to offer our usual medley of nachos, pizza, assorted snacks, coffee, and tea, we converted our in-person culinary delights into a staff cooking challenge (using the libraries' e-cookbook collection). We also featured bread and lentil soup cooking videos graciously provided by one of our university faculty members. For the Cafe section of the LibGuide we provided links to quarantine cooking themed videos on YouTube, links to resources on food facts and healthy eating, and links to popular cooking shows.

Recognizing that many students were, like us, cooped up inside without regular access to physical exercise and missing the communities offered to them by their regular gyms and fitness studios, we collected resources to help fill that void. We found local yoga studios and Zumba instructors live-streaming classes by tapping into our connections and by conducting web searches. Examples include the Georgia Aquarium's Yoga by the Water series and the university's campus recreation. For students who couldn't attend live-streaming sessions, we also collected YouTube channels with at-home
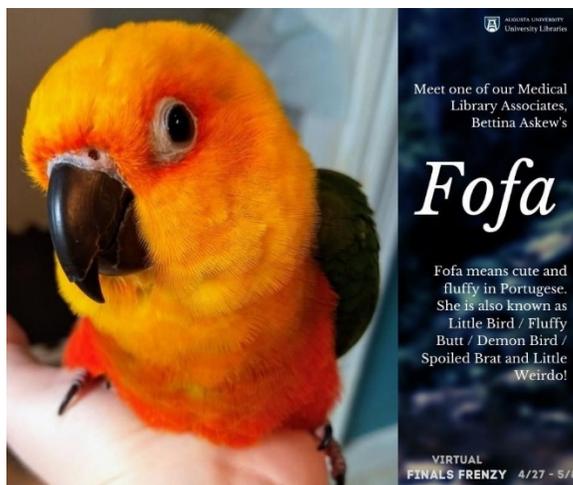
workouts for individuals of all ability and fitness levels.

Traditionally, each library provides a space for students to escape and unwind during finals time. Such spaces include jigsaw and word puzzles, coloring sheets and bookmarks, origami, scrap paper for drawing, board games, and relaxing YouTube videos quietly playing in the background. We united our spaces in the webiverse by having a Zen Zone section in the LibGuide. It includes links to virtual coloring sites and apps, puzzles and games sites, and soothing background music. This semester, we expanded the Zen Zone to include links to self-care strategies, mindfulness and meditation exercises, and ASMR (autonomous sensory meridian response) videos. We sourced links from tried and tested recommendations from colleagues and by searching for open content from reputable sites.

We know that managing stress is crucial to thriving during finals. Since therapy dogs could not physically come to each of the AU Libraries, our libraries' community decided to virtually share their fur-ever friends for students to enjoy and reduce the stress of finals. For the Pet Therapy section of the LibGuide, we uploaded photos of some AU Libraries adorable fur-ever friends, along with a description of each pet that was submitted with the photo.

While we live in a modern technological age where we rely upon the use of computers and online-based learning, it is often tricky when classes completely shift to an online-only course. Therefore, we collected several resources that assist students in this transition to fully online courses. We provided multiple links to Augusta University's Writing Center, the

Math Assistance Center, and our Academic Success Center. Similarly, we collected several YouTube videos that aim to assist the students with focusing and staying motivated, which can be very hard when suddenly required to be in front of a computer more than usual. Also, the University System of Georgia (USG) debuted its Keep Learning USG online webpage to support students with different checklists and resources to stay on top of their schoolwork.

You can visit the Augusta University's LibGuide at https://guides.augusta.edu/VirtualFinals Frenzy/home.

Clayton County Library System
Marquita Gooch

At Clayton County Library System, we've implemented a number of virtual programs in response to the library's closure and the COVID-19 pandemic. We've done everything from story time to DIY crafts like Slow Cooker Play Dough, and our technology Assistant Director Marquita Gooch-Voyd, hosts live Friday Funday Trivia nights on YouTube. We also have electronic e-books, audiobooks, and magazines via RB Digital. If patrons are looking to start a new business, they can scope out the competition by searching through the ReferenceUSA database. Children and teens can find new reads via TumbleBooks, and the whole family can stream popular music via Freegal—all with their library card!

As an official Grow with Google partner, we have also facilitated digital skills classes virtually and are currently preparing for a series of entrepreneurship resource classes with a focus on veteran-owned businesses. We are also

going to implement 60-second book reviews during the Summer Reading months and host a series called From Book to Big Screen via Netflix Party where viewers can watch the movie and simultaneously chat about it all from the comfort of their homes. Each film will be based on a popular title and screening dates will be posted to our social media sites and weekly e-newsletter.

We've begun allowing patrons back into the building with limited services offered. For our senior patrons, it's been wonderful for them to be able to physically come inside our buildings and update their accounts, browse for new library materials to check out and, of course, fellowship with their favorite staff member! This pandemic has truly shown us that human interaction is definitely needed, and we value our senior patrons for their patience with us as we continue to finds ways to serve them safely.

Clayton County Library System
Dana Marseille

One program that we have done virtually is a meeting of our Graphic Novel Club. We saw this as a great opportunity to engage and stay connected to our patrons while still operating remotely from home. The meetings that took place via Google Meet were centered around

the X-Men Universe and the villain/anti-heroine known as Catwoman.

Something fun and entertaining that Clayton County librarians were doing was a program known as Friday Fun-Day Trivia. Participants were able to view the stream on Google Meet from one device. They then had to go to the Kahoot website (kahoot.it) on a separate device to answer the trivia questions. This was a great opportunity to get everyone in the family involved and was a good way to relieve some stress during these unprecedented times.
All of Clayton County Library virtual events are advertised on our social media as well as in our e-newsletter that is sent out weekly. Check out our Instagram page at https://www.instagram.com/claytongalib/ to see additional scheduled virtual programs.

Cobb County Public Library System
Shannon Tyner

Our library system here in Cobb used social media to push our digital and online resources. The day we got word that we would be closing to the public, we created our Use the Library from Home! initiative. It included graphics to share on social media, a dedicated page on our website, and an article that was pushed out to

our subscribers. Use the Library from Home! promotes:

- Digital resources for all ages including e-books, e-audiobooks, digital magazines and newspapers, and streaming video.

- Online databases including Lynda, Mango Languages, Gale Courses, and LearningExpress Library.

- The Library PASS program. Library PASS is a partnership between us and Cobb County and Marietta City Schools in which all students can use their student number as a public library card.

- TutorATL. TutorATL provides on-demand, one-on-one tutoring services for free with a library card or Library PASS.

- The Early Learning page, which includes booklists and "storytime favorites" (nursery songs and fingerplays) videos for ages 0–5.

Cobb librarians have been posting Virtual Storytimes to Facebook and IGTV every

weekday and plan to continue until our regular programs resume.

Since students were not able to go anywhere for spring break, we've created a Spring Break at Home series for social media. Each weekday, we shared an activity (one for school age, one for tweens and teens) for students to do at home.

DeKalb County Public Library
Alicia Brown

DeKalb County Public Library (DCPL) received the 2018 Georgia Public Library of the Year award for programming that embraced the county's diverse community. This was evident through programs such as PRIME TIME Preschool, Fine Free Summer and the Human Library Project. However, during the current health pandemic known as COVID-19, DCPL had to come up with ways to continue to provide outstanding service to its patrons that are temporarily not able to visit the branches.

"We are turning lemons into lemonade" said Jonathon Myers, principle librarian at Hairston Crossing Library. Staff members at DCPL have been working together to provide fun and interactive programs that the whole family can

enjoy while being at home. The DeKalb Library Foundation is providing funding to support some of these offerings created by outside performers. Patrons have been able to watch live story times, DIY craft videos, magic shows, and more from the library's Facebook page. Not only have these programs helped to keep patrons engaged, it also gives them an opportunity to connect with their local librarian virtually. "Should we pack our swimsuit?" one patron asked on the Facebook post about DCPL's Explore More virtual spring break activities.

DCPL has also made it easy to obtain a temporary digital library card through their website or renew a current card to be able to checkout e-books, e-audio books, and more. During the temporary closure, patrons will not incur overdue fines. DCPL also is allowing patrons who checked out mobile hotspots to keep the devices until we reopen.

Partnerships have also been an integral part of the pandemic. DCPL is partnering with the American Red Cross to host several blood drives at various branches to help alleviate critical supply shortages. Although it has been a challenge to come up with ways to connect with patrons across DeKalb County during this difficult time, it has also been rewarding. This new normal has caused many staff members to think outside the box, thus developing programs that will more than likely become staples from now on. The Library's motto is "Read more. Think more. Play more. Make more. Get more." Patrons are doing just that through the efforts of DeKalb County Public Library.

Georgia Tech
Jason Wright

In response to the COVID-19 quarantine and subsequent shutdown of campus, the Georgia Tech Library adopted several online and in-person strategies to bring high-quality services and instruction to students, staff, and faculty.

Numerically, the most impactful has been moving all library-led workshops online. The library offers 20–30 classes a month in everything from data visualization, to multimedia instruction, to reference management. Typically, instructors see a maximum of 25 students per in-person workshop for subjects like Introduction to R Studio or Introduction to Python. However, since moving online, the cap for students has been lifted. Instructors are seeing more than 100 students per workshop.

A social media series featuring librarians introducing students and faculty to their favorite resources, plus those resources that have recently been expanded in response to the quarantine, is another innovation. The videos are posted on the library Instagram page. The resources include Overdrive, Red Shelf, Bloomsbury Databases, Films on Demand, and others, each two times a week.

In the early days of the quarantine, the library began loaning laptops to students in need so they could have the equipment to attend online classes. Faculty and staff expanded the program by using the inventory of lending laptops, plus Surface Pros earmarked for staff use. The program includes cleaning the machines and mailing them to students.

Valdosta State University Odum Library
Samantha Paul

At Valdosta State University's (VSU) Odum Library, we used the extended spring break to identify ways that we could operate an essential campus component (and socialization hub) in a
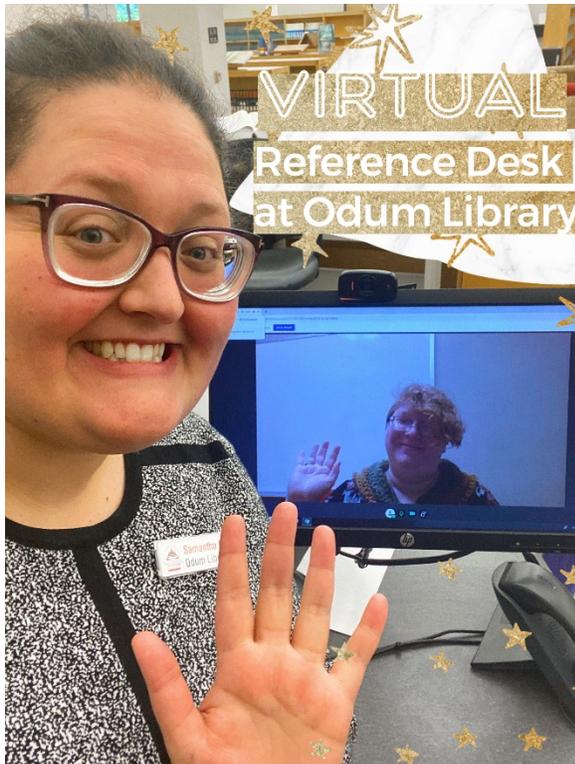
way that could reduce risk for students, faculty, and staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. Library staff worked on signage, reducing the capacity of our computer labs to facilitate social distancing, and removing extraneous shared spaces, like study rooms and additional computer labs. During these preparations, we realized that our traditional reference desk would make it difficult to maintain a 6-foot distance while assisting students at the reference desk. We were able to take advantage of our existing dual monitor setup and a web camera to create a virtual reference desk. This virtual reference desk was a group effort. The reference librarians were able to

borrow a webcam from our New Media Center and collaborate with our library systems services coordinator to create a generic computer login that would have sufficient system privileges to support a webcam. It took two days to hammer out the logistics, but we are pleased with how it is working so far. This new virtual reference desk setup has been well-received by visitors to the building and has allowed us to provide research assistance beyond chat and phone.

West Georgia Regional Library System
Angela Thornton

West Georgia Regional Library System (WGRLS) has been doing a variety of things in our WGRLS locations to keep interacting with our patrons during quarantine and social distancing. First, we've added a lot of content to our CloudLibrary selections as many libraries have. People are really responding to that. Second, we've been on a learning curve to implement more interactive online programming. We've been conducting Facebook Live storyline, of course, but we've also been posting "how to" videos on things like crafts, art, or cooking. We've also had interactive sessions on FB Live for chats with library managers or teen tech talk sessions or Bingo with adults or book clubs. Third, we're looking ahead to changes we may want to make in future programming for all ages through virtual and online resources to retain some of our patrons who are finding these online interactions preferable to always having to come to one of our locations. It's been eye-opening for us all!