

Jennifer L. Murray and Christopher Boyd

Technical services and systems

Supporting student success during COVID-19

When faced with COVID-19 in March 2020, the University of North Florida (UNF) and Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) libraries quickly shifted gears to provide support for continuity of instruction and learning in a remote environment. Staff not only had to make the shift towards working remotely, but also had to find new and innovative ways to handle resources and services and make them as visible and accessible as possible. Fortunately, due to current technology and available tools, both libraries already had many resources and services available online, and it was easy to transition to those that were not. It wasn't all easy though, and both libraries faced personnel and work challenges. Still, everyone worked together to do the best they could during a time of much uncertainty.

About UNF Library

At UNF, the Technical Services and Systems (TSS) department is comprised of five units: Acquisitions & Collection Development, Discovery Enhancement, Digital Projects & Preservation, Special Collections & University Archives, and Library Systems, led by the associate dean of TSS. Together the units support the educational goals of UNF by acquiring, processing, and maintaining scholarly content to make it discoverable, and by coordinating the implementation, management, and maintenance of systems that facilitate access to library services and preservation of scholarly content. During the pandemic, staff worked to continuously enhance collections and services to support UNF faculty and student success.

About FGCU Library

At FGCU, the Technical Services department is comprised of Acquisitions, Cataloging, Serials, Material Processing, and Electronic Resources, led by the head of Technical Services. Each of these responsibilities is handled by a single person. Nevertheless, as a unit, the department was able to put virtually every resource to which the library has access at the fingertips of all users—students, faculty, and staff alike, whether on campus or remotely, in a short amount of time. In this way, despite the department's relatively low public profile in the back offices of the library, it is having an enormous positive effect on student success, as well as support for faculty teaching and research.

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Adapting work to support student success remotely

At UNF, TSS faculty and staff were able to adapt quickly to continue to provide support for student success from anywhere. They all did an outstanding job to provide new access methods for a variety of resources and services and identify, negotiate, acquire, and provide access to many new e-resources. They did all of this quickly, creatively, and with flexibility to ensure UNF students and faculty had the resources and services they needed to carry out remote instruction and learning. This benefited students and faculty by giving access to reliable scholarly content and services from wherever they were teaching and learning.

At the UNF Library, there was a big shift from print to e-resources. The number of e-books purchased to support teaching faculty in their new online courses increased dramatically, and electronic duplicates of print titles already held were sometimes purchased to maximize access. There was also a big increase in the number of streaming videos licensed, and Acquisitions staff assisted teaching faculty with transitioning their courses that incorporated films to an online format. In addition, many publishers and content providers offered temporary free access, which required Acquisitions staff to set up, manage, track, and communicate these new/expanded resources. New access methods for resources were also established, such as the Visible Body, which allowed faculty and students in biology, physiology, nursing, health science, anatomy, etc. to continue instruction with 3-D and virtual delivery.

UNF faculty and students could no longer access the print collection in the traditional way because the library building was closed from March through August 2020. Acquisitions staff at UNF focused on ordering electronic materials rather than print whenever possible. However, there was still a need for some print materials. Staff had to rethink how to offer access, which was still needed since not everything is available online. Acquisitions staff negotiated with HathiTrust, a repository of digital content, to provide access to almost 40% of the library's print collection online. Both UNF and FGCU took advantage of HathiTrust to add electronic access to much of their print collections. In addition, the library services specialist for cataloging came into the building as needed to catalog print materials. Library Systems staff then created an online form for two new services in which UNF faculty and students could request pickup of print materials in the collection or electronic delivery of course reserve materials. TSS staff at both libraries worked with others in the library to create a COVID-19 information guide to keep students and faculty up to date on resources, services, and other important information.

Library Systems, Digital Projects, and Special Collections staff at UNF also worked to develop an online Digital Exhibits site to highlight materials in Special Collections and University Archives and to share the library's unique and diverse collections with the world and provide access to collections that were not accessible while the building was closed. The site went live in January 2021.

The FGCU Library's gradual shift from print to e-resources was thrown into high gear by COVID-19 early in 2020. Acquisition of print resources is currently limited to requests by academic faculty members specifically for this format. With upwards of half the student body attending classes online, parity among classmates can only be achieved through online resources. The addition of two new flatbed scanners, one for public use and one for library staff to use to email book chapters to users off-campus, has also been a boon to student success, garnering roughly 3,000 uses to date. Major vendors such as GOBI and ProQuest offer both print and electronic versions of the same book, so it is easy for subject specialist librarians to choose.

The FGCU Library now also makes heavy use of Demand Driven Acquisitions options offered by several vendors. A much larger corpus of e-books is visible to users, and it is only when defined

levels of usage are reached that purchases are triggered. These generate a corresponding file of MARC records so that the bibliographic records can be added to the Integrated Library System and made available to students, faculty, and staff.

To further cement the commitment to e-resources, the FGCU Library has canceled several standing orders for print materials. Rarely consulted other than at the Reference Desk, the “must-have” print journals have been going straight to the Reference Collection, where they age off their retention patterns untouched. By and large, electronic versions already exist, or they can be found in databases instead. As a corollary, subscribing to fewer print journals corresponds to increased physical space for individual and group study, well-known to be a top priority among students. Naturally e-resources, such as e-journals, databases, and link resolvers that connect users to individual online articles, play an even greater role in supporting student success now than they did pre-pandemic.

UNF and FGCU both implemented OpenAthens to improve accessibility of resources online. This new single sign-on solution to limit access to electronic content to those associated with the university replaced EZproxy as part of a statewide project and is familiar to faculty, students, and staff across campus, and very user-friendly, whether on campus or not. With OpenAthens, access to the library’s licensed electronic resources is simplified, streamlined, and easier to manage, providing users with the resources they need quickly. It also generates robust platform-level data to assess usage. At UNF, interactive reports were created using Tableau to illustrate the usage of the library’s electronic resources. As of October 2021, more than 16,000 UNF and 14,000 FGCU faculty, staff, and student OpenAthens accounts have been created.

Looking ahead

The UNF and FGCU Libraries remain singularly focused on student success. The COVID-19 pandemic led staff to think of new ways to offer resources and services. There was an extensive reliance on online resources and services for remote instruction and learning during this time, so it was critical to meet the demands of students and faculty. The expanded access staff were able to offer for electronic and digital resources, and many services provided faculty and students with the tools they needed in unique, innovative, and creative ways.

At UNF, TSS staff continuously work to improve and enhance collections and advance the library from a technical perspective in support of faculty and student success. These enhancements ranged from adding new and enhanced access to resources to developing new ways for users to access library services and will continue to have a positive impact on library staff, along with UNF students and faculty. There will be a “new normal” because of the pandemic that everyone will have to adjust to. Online instruction is here to stay even after the pandemic, and the work that has been done will help library staff manage and support it more efficiently and effectively. It will provide UNF students and faculty with what they need in a timely manner to meet their needs in a remote instruction environment.

The FGCU Library has been transitioning its resources from print to electronic for some time now, and the pandemic has only increased the pace of that transition. Because Technical Services now encompasses an electronic resources librarian, it is the department that is ensuring articles, e-books, e-journals, and databases are available in support of faculty and student success. Everyone worked together as a team, whether from their desks at the library or from their homes, and they were proud to do it. ♪