ODU Libraries: Moving Forward Through the Unprecedented Challenges of 2020!

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Fall 2020 - ODU Libraries Reopen

Moving Forward Through the Unprecedented Challenges of 2020!
When ODU announced the decision to close campus in efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19, ODU Libraries promptly migrated services to meet the needs of an online learning environment. The shift in access to scholarly resources also transitioned Libraries’ employees from well-organized offices and cubicles to the make-shift settings of telework. However, the Libraries’ Department of Systems Development served as a key connector from remote locations to campus and out to the Monarch community.

The Systems’ Team—Junfang Zhang, Lynn Litherland, Kenneth Watson, Crystal Willis, Michael Price, Tonia Graves, and Pete Bruce—equipped Libraries’ staff with 21 loaner laptops for at-home use, plus eight all-in-one computers procured from ITS for remote work. Additionally, the department helped 20 staff members set up their personal computers with ODU server access and mapped network drives for all staff who needed assistance. All of this set up was accomplished in just two weeks!

“After the initial adjustment to teleworking, we’ve done well,” shared Graves. “Resource discovery and electronic resource management have always been a priority, and in our teleworking environment, we will continue to identify ways to meet user needs and provide a positive user experience.”

Adapting to a telework environment in such a short time span created challenges, but Systems Development made the journey down unknown paths easier for all serving the Libraries and ODU. As the Monarch community approaches the fall semester, the Systems’ team continues to provide remote support and software installations as needed, while facing down obstacles created by the COVID-19 pandemic.
On a typical day at Perry Library, the Learning Commons staff continually receive requests for print materials, whether for immediate use or to place materials on reserve. But the COVID-19 pandemic ended any typical procedures for accessing print materials when all teaching and learning transitioned to an online platform during the middle of the Spring 2020 semester. The Libraries’ Learning Commons was faced with a daunting challenge: how to provide print materials to students and faculty following the transition. The answer was found in the power of scanning.

“Frances and I sent emails to faculty for 42 courses with print materials on reserve for Spring 2020,” shared Kathryn Boone, Head of Learning Commons & Branch Libraries. Boone refers to Frances Everette-Gayther, the Libraries’ evening services coordinator, who she teamed up with on March 17 to assist ODU faculty. “I pulled the materials needing to be scanned and put the email with the specific pages requested in the book,” Boone added. Notably, that was just the start of a scanning project like no other at ODU Libraries.

Strategically, the emails included specific references that allowed faculty to select what materials were still needed by their students to complete the Spring 2020 semester. Once the responses came in, a larger Learning Commons team prepared to make digital copies. Frances, Karen Vaughan, Head of Scholarly Communication & Publishing Services, Jared Hancock, Learning Commons assistant, and several others tackled the job of operating the equipment and producing quality materials to send out electronically for courses ranging from chemistry to international business. “Most of the files were book chapters, but some of the chapters were close to 100 pages, so it was quite the undertaking,” Boone recalled.

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ODU COVID-19 Archive Shares Experiences During the Pandemic

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread globally, it also represented a historic time across ODU’s campus. The Libraries’ Special Collections and University Archives (SCUA) decidedly offered an outlet for the Monarch community— the ODU COVID-19 Archive— to share individual experiences during an unprecedented time in which the virus continues to change how higher education approaches teaching and learning. In doing so, SCUA also holds up its commitment to document what will become a topic of research for decades to come.

“When we look back at history, it’s important to capture what is going on with these events, and, as archivists, it’s important that what we’re capturing is very diverse,” shares Jessica Ritchie, Head of SCUA. “We weren’t sure how long it was going to last at that point, so we really pushed to get stuff off the ground as quickly as possible right after the closure.”

Recognizing how each experience connected to the COVID-19 pandemic is unique, the Libraries’ SCUA team designed an archive to welcome stories that are expressed in diary entries and poetry, photos, works of art, and recorded interviews. As these experiences are submitted, they then become a documented form of history and a resource for further research once we leave the pandemic in the past.

Terri Jordan, SCUA’s digital projects specialist, monitors the ODU COVID-19 Archive entries from the Monarch community and from individuals across Hampton Roads. She notes that, so far, the submissions are more immediate, short-term responses to the crisis. However, she expects that more in-depth descriptions will flow in over time.

“What we’re hoping for, what we’re anticipating, is that people will document a longer term, so we’ll get a more complete spectrum,” Jordan explains. “That’s something that we’ll all have to work on.”
The digital projects specialist notes that attention to detail and the ability to obsess over the small stuff provide the motivation necessary to direct this project along a successful path. A trained folklorist, Jordan has a fascination of people and culture, which helps connect the cultures of the past to how people interact in our current communities. Moreover, she appreciates groups like ODU’s alumni for participating in the archive, and she credits the skilled approach of SCUA’s archivist, Steve Bookman, for keeping the project on target.

“I supported here. I did a lot of the administrative stuff - forms,” the archivist says. “Terri did a lot of the front work.” One for maintaining order while remaining calm, Bookman explains that aligning SCUA projects with the goals across all of ODU Libraries centers on organization, multitasking, and, above all, having a good sense of humor.

Ironically, Bookman recognizes that his sense of modesty sometimes overshadows his achievements. “I usually downplay my role,” he admits. Yet, Bookman’s colleagues share that the ODU COVID-19 Archive requires his professional expertise to be fully successful. “I think his role in the future as the university archivist will be to engage the Monarch community once the students are back – engage people with it – provide access to it – among the ODU community in the future,” the head of SCUA predicts.

Ritchie stresses that the Libraries’ Special Collections and University Archives is designed to welcome the unexpected. From a Scotch taped cookie found in a scrapbook to a set of dentures discovered in a box (shocking, but true), she says empathy and trust allow her team to reveal the significance behind each item collected and story documented. “I personally teared up at some of the submissions,” Ritchie recalls. “It’s really powerful that people are sharing that kind of personal information with you. It made me feel like something good was happening.”

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ODU Libraries traditionally hold the Librarian/Faculty Administrator & Staff Member of the Year Awards every spring, usually in a Learning Commons conference room full of colleagues, catering, and mixed conversation. However, this year, social distancing kept the reception from happening on campus, so the Libraries turned to technology and creative planning to recognize the excellent service and professional commitment of two individuals: Special Collections Metadata Specialist Kathleen Smith and Engineering & Physical Sciences Librarian Abbie Basile.

The 2019 winners were announced via Zoom on June 5 with nearly 60 people attending the annual event, but not before offering a snapshot of the honorees. Jessica Ritchie, Head of Special Collections and University Archives (SCUA), shared that Kathleen Smith completed several high-profile projects for SCUA, including the grant-funded WTAR/WTKR archival news film digitization pilot project. “She kept meticulous records and collaborated closely with colleagues across multiple departments to make sure the project was a success,” Ritchie recalled. “I honestly don’t think we could have completed the project in the time that we did without her.”

Referred to as a go-to guide for inquiries within the department, colleagues appreciate Smith’s caring attitude and consideration, her ability to solve problems, and her sincere interest in the welfare of others. As for the honored staff member of 2019, she credits the influence of her family for her professional accomplishments. “I have always been a humble person. I just work and do my best,” Smith shared. “It’s a work ethic that me and my brothers learned from our late father Don.”

And just like Smith, Abbie Basile accepted the 2019 Librarian of the Year award with appreciation and reflection. Recognized for serving ODU students, faculty, and colleagues with equal respect and thoughtfulness, the liaison was also honored for placing the Libraries’ work environment as a high priority and encouraging professional development and collaboration across campus. Her colleagues noted that Basile approached each query and request with the same level of attention, making the Monarch community aware that every question is worth asking.
“I also am lucky to be able to help terrific faculty and students who have made me feel like I can make a real contribution to their success,” Basile said. “It’s great to work with great people.”

Dorothy Lockaby, who serves as the head of Liaison Services at ODU Libraries, shares the same opinion about Basile. During the virtual reception, she highlighted Basile’s dedication to librarianship at local, state, and national levels. From serving as a peer reviewer for professional journals to leading a task force of the Association of College & Research Libraries Graduate Student Services Interest Group, the honoree’s positive, upbeat personality helps fulfill the mission of Liaison Services, while setting an example for others to follow.

“Her generosity and willingness to share her knowledge by mentoring and collaborating with others makes her a positive presence for everyone she works with,” Lockaby said of the 2019 librarian of the year. “Our honoree is at her best, however, as a highly proficient librarian who serves the needs of her college and departments, and most importantly, her students.”

Regardless of the adjustments made to make sure this event continued for another year, the attendees received the virtual opportunity to thank the winners for their achievements, even if they joined from their living rooms and, possibly, with a favorite feline or canine by their side. The attendees also took time out to acknowledge the nominating committees, along with the collaboration of the Libraries Staff Assembly, Libraries Faculty Assembly, Library Staff Organization, and Libraries Administration, all who kept the nomination process going through the COVID-19 pandemic.

“When you absolutely positively have to know, ask a librarian.”
American Library Association
Reflection from ODU's Interim University Librarian

Stuart Frazer, ODU Libraries Interim University Librarian

I am probably in good company in being made a fool of by COVID-19. I recall saying at a meeting in February 2020, “There aren’t even any confirmed cases in Virginia.” A couple of weeks later, I suggested there was no way the University could transition so many classes online so quickly. Well, the COVID-19 wave certainly did reach Virginia, and the University did, in fact, move classes online with impressive agility. At the Libraries, our major challenge was migrating employees to telework while continuing to provide necessary services to students, faculty and others affiliated with the University.

Prior to the pandemic, telework was already common for some employees. For others, it was entirely new. Even those of us who had been teleworking occasionally were caught off guard by the need to suddenly perform all duties remotely. Yet, I think the technical challenges of telework pale in comparison to the domestic challenges. If you speak with different employees, you will hear varied battles described. For some, losing contact with the physical workspace and coworkers brought loneliness. It is easy to forget that the workplace is the primary social space for many people. Others might describe the struggle to focus and stay motivated within a tornado of distractions, including partners, animal companions, kids, and/or parents.

For me, a creature of habit and routine, working at home sometimes felt terribly disorienting, like parts of my life—not meant to meet—were suddenly vying for the same spot at the same time. Yet, I have a hunch many of us will find something of this period to remember fondly. For me, I think it will be the experience of spending many weekdays with my wife and nine-year-old step-grandson, Duffy, while his school was closed. Three people and three dogs, sprawled around a small living space, circling the wagons and taking care of each other while the world seemed to be spinning out of control outside. I like to think that sometime in the future, long after I am gone, Duffy will remember those days and feel warm inside.
In Our Spare Time.....

Time moved differently during a shelter-in-place setting, leaving those who serve ODU Libraries with something quite rare: spare time. The necessary steps taken to create social distancing placed many Libraries’ staff members in their own backyards, allowing them to work on all kinds of projects once they were off the clock— from delving into home cooking and baking to coming up with creative ways to keep their kids and pet pals entertained. Here are some reflections from remote locations. —

Being quarantined has actually meant I spend my time outside than I ever did before. Usually, during work hours, I would remain within the walls of the library... maybe eating lunch outside...maybe. Now, I go on long walks around my neighborhood, play t-ball in the backyard with my daughter and even bring work with me while I sit on my deck. Yet, all my wellness activities are being thwarted by my husband’s amazing cooking. He has been making pizzas nearly every week, cakes, brownies and 6 pounds of cookie dough, which is rapidly disappearing (can’t really complain though). Overall, my days are filled still with work and family, but I very much miss my library community.” —Lara Canner

“I love to cook! When I’m working in the library and supervising the student workers, I’m usually bringing in something I’ve baked to share with the staff and students, such as cheesecakes, pies, cookies, brownies and dessert recipes I’ve never done before.” - - Sam Lopez

“Staying positive and bringing kindness with a Rainbow! Bryx and I drew a rainbow with chalk on the sidewalk in front of our house with the message “Stay Positive” (in pink) and “Be Kind.” We want to share some positivity in the neighborhood and remind everyone to be kind to all.”

-Gay Acompanado
Starting a New Job... From Home!

I started with the University Libraries on April 10th, four weeks after the Libraries—alongside most everyone else—closed their doors physically. While my start date meant the move was significantly scarier and more stressful than it would have been had it occurred in normal times, I was fortunate that, by the time I started, the Libraries had successfully made the transition to working from home and offering services online so my colleagues were able to focus on helping me get situated. I have to credit my boss, Lucy Wittkower, the Libraries’ Head of Teaching and Learning Initiatives, and Stuart Frazer, Interim University Librarian. Their organization and hard work made the complicated process of onboarding while working from home relatively pain free and ensured that I’ve been able to start my job as normally as possible.

Like most others in higher education, the biggest challenge of starting my new position during the pandemic has been uncertainty about what my work is going to look like in the fall. Developing co-curricular learning experiences and finding opportunities for the Libraries to meet students where they’re at is a big part of my position, so it’s been a challenge to game out scenarios for what I’ll be doing without knowing exactly what university life will look like. I’m trying to stay flexible and learn to be comfortable with ambiguity while proactively exploring ways that the Libraries can support students through a trying period in their education.

Under normal circumstances, I would have started work this spring inside the Perry Library, but due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, my new employee orientation as Electronic Resources Management Specialist changed from an in-person introduction to a virtual meeting. However, my supervisor and colleagues have done an excellent job making me feel comfortable and welcome as I’ve transitioned into this role, and I couldn’t be happier. I’m originally from Chicago where I received my Bachelor’s in Finance. I was accustomed to tall buildings, the fast-moving city life, and bracing against Chicago’s infamous cold weather while making daily downtown commutes. Yet, after moving to Norfolk nearly two years ago, I adapted to the vast differences in the serenity of the city. I’m an outdoors-type of person, so while I normally would be walking or shopping, I’ve found being in the home to be quite productive and relaxing. Writing and journaling help me to share my inner thoughts and express myself, and I’ve even been making it a point to get back into writing poetry. Surprisingly, teleworking has made it easier to connect with the Libraries’ team, and regardless of COVID-19 challenges, I have maintained a joyful attitude while protecting my wife and family. I greatly appreciate ODU and the ODU Libraries. No matter what odd transition we face, we can still overcome and make decisions that are in the best interest of those around us.
Instructed classes as Lecturer of Journalism and Professional Writing since 2008 and had earned my Masters as a fellow Monarch. My memories of Perry Library range from card catalogs to computer labs. Prior to renovations, patrons usually found other locations to collaborate, and with no place to buy coffee, they also became experts at sneaking in snacks. This opportunity to join the Libraries in 2020 as the head of Libraries’ Engagement meant more than accepting a new position. Yet, following the spread of COVID-19, I needed to shift the goals set for the department to fit the needs of a community that was no longer on campus. Fortunately, the Libraries consist of experts on several levels, which allowed all of the Libraries’ departments to serve the Monarch community through virtual services while working toward interconnectedness. I’m honored to work with such an impressive team, and I look ahead to spending time inside Perry Library this fall.

“Tough situations build strong people in the end.”
Roy T. Bennett, Author
Adapting in the Archives: Digital Platforms During the COVID-19 Pandemic

By Lara Canner, Allan Blank Curator of Music

One of Liz Zanoni’s upper level history classes had been utilizing Special Collections and University Archives (SCUA) for a few years. The purpose was to move students away from relying so heavily upon Google and give them an experience that can only be found in an archive — the chance to hold history in the palm of your hand.

Using a scaffolded approach over the course of the spring semester, students would visit Special Collections in person to complete a final research paper. The initial class trip to the archives would involve an assessment project. Dividing the class into different groups, each was assigned an artifact from separate collections, with the only instruction being to describe what you see. This would encourage the students to think critically about their topics, make deep observations of the objects, adapt their approaches based upon the materials at hand, and, most importantly, begin to form a relationship with special collections — all skills needed to become successful historians.

Complimenting the sessions, Professor Zanoni stated, “Students had the opportunity to do hands-on exercises with specific collections, which introduced them to working with sources and gave them confidence to return for research. The sessions were also fun and inspiring! This week students mentioned how much they learned from and enjoyed their experience.”

However, since you were probably not in the class and didn’t get a chance to see the amazing artifacts on display, I’ll describe a couple. The first object—a scrapbook dated circa 1950 from the Federation of Garden Clubs of Norfolk and Vicinity Papers, 1932-1995 Collection. Beautifully handwritten on fine cotton stationary was an account of that year’s activities from the Azalea Gardens division. Filled with photographs of flowers, club events, invitations, the scrapbook is a hand-held piece of art. On the next table over were black and white photographs, so aged over time that the objects are faded and tinted brown. Due to the unique quality and rarity of the artifacts, students are required to wear cotton gloves and cannot remove the photographs from their protective plastic casing.

One student whispered excitedly, “The guy in one of the photos looks like a human version of Smokey the Bear.” The reason (although, I probably would not have used Smokey as a descriptor) is the students were viewing a photograph of Sameul Leyens Switzer in Uniform on Melamine Plate, circa 1918-1919 from the Samuel Leyens Switzer Papers, 1910-1957, 1985.
Collection. These particular artifacts highlight Switzer’s time in the United States Army during World War I. The Doughboy uniform photographed consisted of a campaign hat (strikingly like Smokey the Bear’s headwear), a trench coat, pantaloons, and boots. Making detailed observations was only the first step towards the final project.

Slowly, students from the History 201 class began to find their way to the Special Collections department, located on the third floor of Perry Library. For a few weeks, these individuals would sit at a table, pouring over letters, scrapbooks, photographs and business records. At anytime during their research, an archival staff member would be close at hand to offer assistance, answer questions, prompt new observations and give insight (Honestly, aiding research projects is one of my favorite parts of being an archivist!). Based upon their findings, the class would begin submitting overviews and drafts, leading to a final paper. Then on March 16, 2020, everything changed.

Although Professor Zanoni’s original intention for the class was a hands-on experience, the University’s transition to online learning in mid-March altered that plan. However, the core of the mission remained: using SCUA to complete an in-depth research paper. Luckily for our history class, adapting to the changing patterns in research is a primary concern for all archival institutions.

Digital platforms being the trend of the future, archival professionals knew that to remain relevant and achieve our mission of accessibility, we needed to move collections online. ODU’s own forward-thinking director of SCUA, Jessica Ritchie, has made it a priority to digitize. “Prior to the COVID crisis, our staff has worked so hard to digitize a variety of collections, ranging from Civil War histories, photographs, LGBTQ collections, music... just to name a few.”

For more than five years, Special Collections has been scanning and uploading over 20 digital collections to our online forum, Old Dominion University Libraries Digital Archives. Within the digital collections are oral histories, photographs, family papers, music scores, news reels from a local television station, and so much more. Notably, the SCUA team was prepared for the challenge, even before the first signs of COVID-19, and now hundreds of artifacts with in-depth metadata descriptions are only a click away.
ODU Libraries Reopen in Stages

Moving Toward Fall 2020: ODU Libraries Reopen in Stages

Karen Centeno, Education Reference Services Librarian, meets with an ODU patron in Perry Library’s Learning Commons following its limited reopening this summer.

ODU Libraries’ transition from physical locations, where the Monarch community spent time learning and sharing in person to an online operation of services and resources, created obstacles to overcome. Reopening the Libraries, in planned stages, offered just as many challenges. On July 6, Perry Library reopened its doors to ODU patrons under CDC guidelines, where staff are wearing face coverings and signs remind all to keep their social distance. Notably, the head of the Libraries’ Learning Commons says she never lost any sleep leading up to a physical return.

“I slept well, no worries at all,” shares Kathryn Boone. “When you have done a thorough job preparing and are willing and able to make adjustments as needed, you feel confident in your decisions.” And those adjustments are becoming more routine. Just recently, ODU announced a delay in starting the Fall 2020 semester. Yet, Boone remains ready for the unknown brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Before Perry Library reopened, the head of Learning Commons and branch libraries collaborated with a large emergency planning group on campus to discuss operating hours, clear signage for patrons and employees, policy for face coverings, and direction to stay 6 feet apart.

“The fact that we opened during the summer semester while all courses remained online allowed us to ease back into providing services in person,” notes Boone. “Flexibility and responsiveness allow you to stay on top of things and not get overly stressed out.”

She also worked closely with ODU Libraries Interim University Librarian Stuart Frazer throughout the initial planning stages of reopening. In his role, Frazer shared the Libraries’ approach to reopening with other academic libraries across the state while focusing on plans of action across campus. He also narrowed in on the layout of furniture and staff schedules to help provide the health and safety precautions necessary to successfully reopen Perry Library. Yet, unlike Boone, a sound night’s sleep was put on hold until the Libraries were ready to
welcome ODU patrons once again.

“Sleepless nights actually occurred like seven to 10 days prior to reopening,” recalls Frazer. “However, by the time of the July 4 weekend, things were in place, and there was less worry.”

The interim university librarian suggests that, although the reopening stages brought few surprises to ODU Libraries, other academic libraries preparing for the fall semester may experience challenges with supplies and policy referring to face coverings. He also recognizes that running a library with a smaller staff, due to social distancing, requires a combination of strategy, creativity, and help from other groups on campus. “Members of ODU Police, Emergency Management, and ITS played essential roles in helping Perry Library safely reopen,” notes Frazer.

As for Boone, she looks ahead to Fall 2020 as she manages a Learning Commons now redesigned to meet the needs of Monarchs while upholding CDC guidelines in place to help control the spread of a pandemic that transitioned ODU’s campus months ago. “Plan, plan, plan, and be ready to change your plans as situations evolve,” she encourages.
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