

The Southeastern Librarian

Volume 69 | Issue 1

Article 4

Spring 5-7-2021

Steadfastly We Serve: Library Resilience during the 1918-19 Spanish Influenza Outbreak and Current COVID-19 Pandemic

Blair Stapleton

University of Louisiana at Lafayette, blair.stapleton@louisiana.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seln>

 Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Stapleton, Blair (2021) "Steadfastly We Serve: Library Resilience during the 1918-19 Spanish Influenza Outbreak and Current COVID-19 Pandemic," *The Southeastern Librarian*: Vol. 69 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seln/vol69/iss1/4>

This General Interest is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Southeastern Librarian by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.



Steadfastly We Serve: Library Resilience during the 1918-19 Spanish Influenza Outbreak and Current COVID-19 Pandemic

Blair Stapleton^a (blair.stapleton@louisiana.edu)

^aUniversity of Louisiana at Lafayette, Lafayette, Louisiana, USA

ABSTRACT

Disruptions occur regularly, regardless of size of impact. Disruptions libraries face can include budget cuts, environmental disasters, building issues, and technological failures. Any type of disruption can and will dampen the level of service provided by libraries but the ability to quickly overcome the disruption while moving forward with organizational goals is vital. Resilience in organizations is not a new concept, but the high level of resilience exuded by libraries despite the disruptions they face is worth noting. The Spanish Influenza and COVID-19 pandemics have significantly disrupted library operations. The similarities between the two pandemics are astounding and in both cases, libraries did, and continue to, go beyond to provide high levels of service to their communities. This article will highlight the resilient nature of libraries and provide examples of how libraries combatted the issues they faced during the Spanish Influenza and COVID-19 outbreaks.

KEYWORDS

pandemic libraries, library resilience, library disruptions, Spanish influenza libraries, COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

Librarians often find themselves in situations that can, and sometimes do, negatively affect their jobs or organizations. Resilience in the face of (and often in spite of) disruption is extremely important for successfully overcoming adversity. Communities rely on resilient organizations to help them through crises, and libraries are no exception. While implementing innovative practices on a “normal” working day is no easy feat, creating innovative practices during times of immense disruption is a true hallmark of a resilient library. Resilience can be inherent and a quality that is developed over time and provides a great deal of force behind innovation. Allison (2011-2012) describes how to gain resilience: “Perhaps we are each born with a starting point for resilience. Perhaps events in each of our lives strengthen or compromise our resilience over time” (p. 82). For libraries, both of these statements are true. People are born with a starting point and librarians build on that with experiences gained during their time with their boots on the ground and noses to the grindstone while navigating one crisis and disruption after another.

Aldrich (2018) suggests there are several different types of disruption including economic, political, environmental, social, and technological. These types of disruptions frequently experienced by libraries have allowed libraries opportunities to not only exhibit high levels of resilience, and to also gain experience about disruptions. Experience gained during disruption lends to future development of policies and procedures to combat each type of disruption, especially those that frequently occur. There is a lot of library literature about library experiences with disruption and crises. When searching for information about how libraries handle hurricanes, tornadoes, and other environmental disasters, the amount of available information is overwhelming. When searching available databases (Academic Search Complete, Library, Information Science Technology Abstracts with Full Text, NewsBank, and JStor) for “hurricanes and libraries” 2,849 resources for library response to hurricanes are available. A search for “social crisis and libraries” resulted in 80 resources. For economic and technological disruptions, the similar results exist. For example, a search for “economic crisis and library” resulted in 655 resources. There is, however, relatively little literature published about the effects of pandemics. In a search using the same databases as previous searches, using the terms “pandemics and libraries” 255

resources are available. Most of those resources discuss the Spanish Influenza, AIDS pandemic, and the seasonal flu and most of these articles discuss book discussions and library events held to bring awareness to each of these pandemics. Today's libraries would benefit from scholarship on the subject, given the present circumstances involving the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. It is important to note that since research for this particular article began more scholarship on the topic of pandemics and libraries is available.

Thankfully, pandemics are not a disruption that libraries frequently encounter, but the problems created by the COVID-19 outbreak should not be ignored or overlooked. The only other documented pandemic that had a dramatic effect on libraries in the United States was the Spanish Influenza pandemic of 1918-19. The circumstances involving this historic pandemic and COVID-19 are eerily similar. One of the most important aspects to note of both pandemics is that libraries were/are supporting their communities despite the fear, confusion, and lack of guidance provided by federal, state, and local officials through both events. This article discusses library resilience in the face of disruption caused by the Spanish Influenza and COVID-19 outbreaks and highlights examples of library resilience during these two unprecedented times in American history, including evidence of library roles in providing research assistance to administrators and government officials. Guidance for future pandemic preparation is also offered.

RESILIENCE IN LIBRARIES

In a 2002 interview with BuzzFlash, filmmaker, author, and TV host Michael Moore talked about how librarians helped get his book, *Stupid White Men*, past publisher scrutiny on the comments he made in the book about former president George W. Bush. About librarians, Moore said, "I didn't really realize that librarians were, you know, such a dangerous group" (BuzzFlash, 2002, para. 22). In the BuzzFlash article, Moore elaborated by saying, "You know, they've had their budgets cut. They're paid nothing. Their books are falling apart..." (para. 22). The interviewer responded, "But they saved the day" (BuzzFlash, 2002, para. 22). Saving the day is what librarians do and the driving force behind this proclamation of hero status is resilience. Libraries are successfully navigating the digital age, rising above budget cuts and dismal outlooks, finding ways to preserve moldy and deteriorating materials, and embracing social media platforms to market their services in innovative ways. These are just a few examples of the resilient nature of libraries and the personnel that work in them. According to Allison (2011-2012), "Resilience is often defined as a personal quality that predisposes individuals to bounce back in the face of loss" (p. 79). Allison (2011-2012) goes on to say that "resilient leaders do more than bounce back – they bounce forward" (p. 80). Library leaders develop resilience throughout their organizations by creating and maintaining an environment that promotes the safety and well-being of employees while also promoting services that benefit the campuses and communities that they support. Resilient organizations begin with resilient leaders.

When there is a strong foundation, resilience shines through in spite of disruption and disaster. Resilience is not a skill taught in library schools, but seasoned professionals can offer a wealth of advice to aspiring librarians. As libraries grow more resilient, so does the positive impact they have on their communities and campuses. Disruptions occur regularly, regardless of size of impact.

Allison (2011-12) suggests that "With speed and elegance, resilient leaders take action that responds to new and ever-changing realities, even as they maintain essential operations of the organizations they lead" (p. 80). Any type of disruption can and will dampen the level of service provided by libraries but the ability to quickly overcome the disruption while moving forward with organizational goals is vital. Libraries are in the business of serving the public. When faced with adversity, choices must be made regarding how to best serve library users while also maintaining the safety and security of library personnel. Having resilient administrators and personnel goes a long way in successfully navigating crises while also maintaining a high level of service. Resilient librarians do not dwell on the negative aspects of the disruption for long. They observe what is happening and immediately begin developing solutions and plans to keep the organization moving forward in a positive way.

DISRUPTION

In her book, *Resilience*, Aldrich (2018) discusses resilience in libraries. When describing the “For the Future” section of Aldrich’s book, Miguel A. Figueroa states in his foreword that Aldrich, “points to the urgent need for resilience strategies in our communities and the ways that libraries can work to not only make our own organizations more resilient to disruptions, but also create a system of resilience that benefits all members of the community” (p. vii). According to Aldrich, “We live in uncertain times. Uncertainty on many fronts— political, economic, technological, environmental – confronts our everyday lives and our planning for the future” (p.1). Aldrich is correct, libraries encounter disruptive events almost daily. The usual suspects include budget cuts, personnel changes, facilities issues, and patron dissatisfaction. Other disruptions, such as issues created by global health crises like the current COVID-19 outbreak, the stresses caused by an election year, and the ongoing opioid epidemic, are considerably more complicated and overwhelming. Regardless of the crisis, resilient libraries do not let disruptions slow them down and oftentimes find ways to use the disruptions to benefit their communities.

Aldrich (2018) also mentions her theory of amplified disruption and how this influences the ways in which libraries approach and overcome adverse crises. Aldrich describes how important situational awareness is to building and maintaining resilience and uses the phrase “amplified disruption” to emphasize the importance of its significance (p.2). Aldrich (2018) explains amplified disruption like this:

There has always been, and always will be disruption. However, disruption in the modern world is amplified by a 24/7 news cycle and the content- and engagement-hungry social media landscape. Reaction time is on a fast cycle, causing people to say, do, and think things in ways they did not when they got their serving of the day’s news from one of the three television channels or two newspapers thirty years ago. (p. 3)

This scenario is very evident in the United States today with the coronavirus pandemic. Evolving news coverage about COVID-19 continues to influence every aspect of library operations. Breaking COVID-19 coverage has influenced how libraries informed patrons about what is going on in the world, while also trying to maintain a safe and peaceful environment. Communities across the country are continuously inundated with information from media and through social media about the virus. Amplified disruption often creates mass hysteria, but librarians have figured out how to calm their patrons while using these same modern platforms to their advantage. When libraries began shutting down, personnel and administrators used news outlets and social media platforms to inform patrons that they were still there for them and continue to serve their communities. Historically, amplified disruption has played a minor role when libraries are combatting normal disruptive situations, but as evolving technology has empowered individuals with instant access to information, libraries must act on situations more quickly than ever before. Resilience helps library organizations to move forward as quickly as news is accessed, and that is because libraries face disruption so often.

With the current COVID-19 pandemic, many libraries had to shut their doors and shift their services from in-person to virtual overnight. In the midst of this uncertainty, personnel were left scrambling to acquire sufficient equipment for their staff to access resources from home. Some libraries sent their staff home to telework, some remained in the building, and others split their staff and arranged schedules to minimize contact between personnel. Administrators decisively implemented policies that protected their librarians while providing print materials to patrons. Luckily, the resilient nature of libraries did not allow for this disruption to deter them from standing behind their respective missions for very long.

PANDEMICS

Lavigne (2020) writes that, “Communicable diseases have been in existence since the days of the hunter-gatherer more than 10,000 years ago but were contained within their nomadic circles” (p. 55). As cultures evolved and travel became more prevalent, contained diseases quickly turned into epi-

demics and pandemics. In his book, Doherty (2013) states, “A novel infection – new and previously un-confronted – that spreads globally and results in a high incidence of morbidity (sickness) and mortality (death) has, for the past 300 years or more, been described as a ‘pandemic’” (p. 42). According to Rosenwald (2020), the Antonine Plague swept across Rome between 165 and 180 A.D. killing an estimated 5 million people. Since that time, disease outbreaks have ravaged the globe. Most recent examples include the 2002 SARS outbreak in Asia and the 2009 H1N1 Swine flu (Rosenwald, 2020). No other documented pandemic has caused more deaths globally than the Spanish Influenza pandemic of 1918-19 that killed an estimated 50 million people worldwide (Rosenwald, 2020). Although the current COVID-19 pandemic, that as of December 2, 2020, has infected 63,965,092 million people resulting in 1,488,120 deaths is not nearly as deadly as the Spanish Influenza pandemic was, the experiences and efforts of librarians of 1918 and today are eerily similar (World Health Organization, 2020).

Unfortunately, libraries of today are not as prepared for facing pandemics as they should be. Academic libraries benefit from the guidelines of their institutions’ safety and compliance departments. Even though public libraries rely on information provided by their local and state governing bodies, they often have to improvise. Whether in 1918 or 2020, librarians never stop serving their communities. Parallels between library reactions to the Spanish Influenza pandemic and COVID-19 can inform and prepare librarians for future pandemic disruptions.

Spanish Influenza, 1918-1919

According to Lavigne (2020), “The most noteworthy large-scale pandemic that occurred closer to our modern day was the Spanish flu of 1918-19, which manifested at the very worst time possible when the world was engaged in the First World War” (p.55). Quinlan (2007) describes how the Spanish flu spread rapidly from country to country, killing an estimated 50-100 million people who were infected with the virus, including more than half a million in the United States. The disease spread first among soldiers fighting in the war, then easily from person to person. Schools, businesses, restaurants, sporting events, and government offices closed to slow the spread. Fewer cases of the virus were noted in the summer of 1918, and the economy began to reopen. A second wave of the virus in the fall of that same year proved significantly more deadly than the first, infecting and killing individuals between the ages of 20 and 40. The disease finally ended in the summer of 1919.

Libraries were not immune to the effects the virus had on the patrons and communities they served. They added this new threat to the long list of economic, political, and cultural disruptions they were already experiencing at the time. Much like today, libraries a hundred years ago faced multiple challenges simultaneously. In 1918, libraries were already dealing with World War I and the strains it was putting on day-to-day operations. Quinlan provides great insight into this disruption. Quinlan (2007) says:

In 1918, libraries were already coping with a multitude of issues: the changing needs of users now wanting information on the war; the breakdown in the acquisition of materials, especially from Europe; the demands of new immigrants for services; fuel shortages and the rising costs of supplies; and a commitment to the American Library Association’s war effort. (p.51)

The influenza outbreak added another layer of challenges for libraries to confront. In 1918-19, as most certainly is still true now, libraries served as a haven for children and individuals that were suddenly locked out of schools and kept from their jobs. Library materials that provided entertainment and continued education were available for use despite limited access to information on other fronts. Dealing with a global health crisis was uncharted territory for libraries of that time but trying to figure out how to navigate around disruption was not. Librarians tried to determine how to keep libraries open and information flowing freely while also fearing for their own lives and the lives and safety of their families and colleagues (Quinlan, 2007).

According to Quinlan (2007), “On October 7, [St. Louis] Mayor Henry Keil ordered closed or

canceled until further notice all theaters, moving picture shows, schools, pool and billiard halls, Sunday schools, cabarets, lodges, societies, public funerals, open-air meetings, dance halls, and conventions” (p. 51). Quinlan goes on to say that the public library in St. Louis was not initially included in the mayor’s announcement, so the building remained open and there was an increase in its use “particularly by children who had nowhere else to go” (p. 52). Many libraries were overwhelmed with the number of materials that were being requested at that time. Miss Edith Williams, who oversaw the children’s reading room at the St. Louis Public Library said that library staff was issuing nearly 800 books daily (Quinlan, 2007). A week after October 7th, the mayor went on to close reading rooms and assembly rooms in the main library and closed all branches. Quinlan writes that it was reported that “One branch even put a truck of books near the door and assisted children there” (p. 52). In many states and cities, public libraries were excluded from planned closures that were supposed to slow the spread of the virus. Some libraries, like libraries in St. Louis, were included in later announcements, but many others were left to decide on their own. Those who could remain open or chose to remain open struggled with staff shortages and tougher restrictions for library patrons but continued to offer library services to their communities anyway (Quinlan, 2007).

When the Spanish flu began to spread, many libraries closed for several weeks. Despite the closure, the level of assistance that libraries were able to provide to their communities was unprecedented. For example, according to Quinlan (2007), Worcester Public Library closed its buildings for several weeks, although staff continued working and offered phone reference. Libraries on the west coast had more time to prepare for the virus, and the library at the University of California in Berkeley served as a site for the distribution of masks made by female students and wives of faculty members (Quinlan, 2007).

In 1918-19, library personnel found ways to serve their communities that were not traditional to regular library services. This is not surprising though, as librarians (even in 1918) were used to taking on other duties as assigned. Librarians are known for their ability to overcome disruption in the face of adversity. That has never been more evident than now during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19, 2019-Present

The current Coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, is testing the resilience of libraries and personnel in ways not experienced since the Spanish flu. In an article written for PBS, Vinopal (2020) observes that “Like so many other services, libraries around the country have had to quickly adapt to the shutdowns and distancing measures put in place as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, but also to figure out how to reach the most vulnerable members of their communities under the new restrictions” (para. 4). As seen in 1918, and again now with COVID-19, library personnel have had to figure out how to navigate the crises on the fly without much consideration or guidance from federal and state administration and agencies. This impediment has not stopped libraries from serving their communities. Fallows (2020a) writes, “When libraries closed their doors abruptly, they immediately opened their digital communications, collaborations, and creative activity to reach their public in ways as novel as the virus that forced them into it” (para. 3).

Skills and knowledge gained from experience with other types of disruption has proven useful in finding ways to resume library services under circumstances that are anything but normal. During the Spanish flu pandemic, many libraries were closed, some for varying lengths of time. Despite the closure, they found ways to provide library services. When COVID-19 began to spread in the early winter of 2019, libraries began to close to protect the health of personnel and library patrons (Fallows, 2020a). During these two events, librarians learned how to offer services to their communities despite the unusual work environment created by these pandemics.

Evidence of library resilience during the current COVID-19 pandemic is conspicuous to see. Libraries are developing partnerships and utilizing their own equipment to assist their communities in unique ways, including offering their spaces for services outside the normal scope of library activities and providing research assistance to administrators and government officials. There is strong evidence

that suggests that librarians will go above and beyond to support their campuses and communities.

In the COVID-19 outbreak, libraries have partnered with local organizations to offer food pickup for children and families in need. The resilience of the St. Louis Public Library system, previously noted in the discussion of the Spanish flu outbreak, remains a core value in the 21st century. St. Louis libraries have partnered with Operation Food Search to offer drive-through pickups in nine of their libraries (Fallows, 2020a). Similar services have been established in Columbus, Ohio and in Cincinnati (Fallows, 2020a). Libraries in Maryland, Wisconsin, Montana, and California are using their makerspaces to create personal protective equipment (PPE) for first responders and healthcare workers (Fallows, 2020a). Libraries opened as emergency childcare centers for essential workers. According to Fallows in Anchorage, Alaska, “the city’s emergency operation system has moved into the Loussac Library building, with ample space and robust Wi-Fi connectivity” (Keeping people productive, safe, healthy, informed, and connected to each other section, para. 4).

In addition to providing spaces for collaboration with local government officials and organizations, libraries are assisting campus administrators and local agencies with researching solutions for issues caused by COVID-19. At the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, the Interim Dean of University Libraries served on the Ragin’ Cajun Resiliency Plan task force and one of the librarians was asked to provide research assistance to the members of the task force’s Instruction sub-committee. According to Fallows (2020b) in Erie, Pennsylvania, several library staff members were “reassigned to the county Health Department as part of the COVID-19 response team for public communications, public-health research, and health equity” (Shoring up and expanding collaborations section, para. 9). Ford (2020) writes that librarians are also being asked to staff food pantries and aid in contact tracing. Each of these examples highlight the ability of libraries to quickly adapt to the needs of the campuses and communities that they belong to.

Even though technology can create disruptions of its own, it can also be used to provide access to information in ways that have not been available before. When COVID-19 first hit and libraries closed seemingly, a multitude of electronic materials and resources was still available to patrons despite closed facilities. Users have access to electronic databases and books 24/7. Users do not have to flock to the physical building to get the materials they need. If there are items that are not available online, library users can contact personnel via email, phone, or through online chat services to request the items they need. Libraries have also used social media platforms to let their communities that they are still ready and willing to help.

Virtual platforms provide libraries with the opportunity to serve users amid the disruption caused by COVID-19 closures without missing a beat. In an article written for the Atlanta-Journal Constitution, Bentley (2020) observed that “Georgia public libraries may indeed be physically closed, but they are finding virtual ways to stay open” (para. 5). Bentley further notes that “From prerecorded story times to boosting Wi-Fi capacity, to virtual book clubs, the state’s 408 libraries are trying to serve patrons despite social distancing and emergency stay-at-home ordinances” (para. 5). Other libraries have added Wi-Fi amplifiers to create hotspots for users to access the internet from their parking lots. At the University of Louisiana at Lafayette instruction and reference services continue as well. Like many libraries, they are utilizing virtual chat services and platforms like Zoom to host synchronous instruction sessions. Library laptops are also available for check out to users who do not have access to computers in their homes. Assistance does not stop with providing access to resources that fit academic needs or provide entertainment-libraries continue to support their communities in other ways as well.

During this pandemic, public libraries are supporting homeless people in their areas. According to Wilburn (2020), Seattle public libraries opened for restroom-only access in late April in hopes of slowing the spread of COVID-19 by making handwashing easier. Fallows (2020a) also provides examples of public libraries providing assistance to the homeless populations in their communities by highlighting the Spokane Public Library opening as a temporary homeless shelter and the Richland County Library system in South Carolina collaborating with United Way to collect and distribute sanitization stations for local homeless shelters. At Edith Garland Dupré Library at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, li-

library administrators worked with campus safety officials to add sanitation products to public service areas for both patron and personnel use. Protecting the health and safety of library personnel and library users is vital during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Librarians in 2020 are working under much different circumstances than librarians who operated during the Spanish flu outbreak. Now modern technology allows library personnel to work from home, creating an even safer environment that protects them from the risk of contracting COVID-19. Ever since COVID-19 began spreading in the United States, librarians at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette have hosted virtual Zoom meetings to set up policies and procedures to follow during the pandemic, created online modules for library instruction, and hosted virtual library events from the comfort and safety of their own homes. While several libraries have their staff telework, they do not want to lose sight of what is most important to libraries, the human connection. For example, according to Fallows (2020b), libraries in Adams County, Colorado, libraries have staffed their libraries as call centers so that users can call just to say “hello.” Although a call center is not a traditional service offered by this library, it is a sign of resilience and innovation under unusual circumstances. Furthermore, providing this service offers a lifeline of hope during these disruptive times. Going above and beyond the traditional mission of libraries is necessary to successfully navigate disruption, even if that means stepping outside of comfort zones and taking on roles that may not always be pleasant. The resilient nature of libraries and library personnel helps campuses and communities overcome difficult times by showing library users that libraries will not back down from adversity. Resilience exhibited by libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic is both extraordinary and commendable. Library administrators and personnel can draw from their experience during this pandemic to plan for future ones.

BUILDING RESILIENCE BY PLANNING FOR PANDEMICS

It is important to consider the preparations that went into library operations during the Spanish flu and COVID-19 pandemics. Library resilience is built with experience and documenting what happens during disastrous situations is vital. Librarians were caught off guard by both the Spanish flu and COVID-19 pandemics. The fallout and library response that followed each outbreak highlights the resilient nature of libraries. Experience gleaned during these two pandemics will go a long way toward helping librarians prepare for the possibility of future pandemics. Edwards (2019) provides insight for how libraries can prepare for disasters, “Even if a disaster is the result of a freak accident or a once-in-a-lifetime storm, library staff should never take it for granted that a similar disaster (including on a smaller or larger scale) will not happen again” (p. 41). Taking steps to prepare for disruption helps establish resilience to disaster-inducing situations. The usual suspects, environmental disruptions, are easy to prepare for because libraries deal with these types of situations most often. For example, in areas prone to hurricanes, flooding, or earthquakes, libraries maintain procedure manuals and plans for dealing with these types of disasters. Measures include creating committees and planning regular meetings and training sessions to remind library staff members to remain prepared for environmental disasters so that these crises are dealt with quickly and efficiently. Similar protocols should be put in place when dealing with pandemics, though this is not a type of disruption that libraries deal with often. The crucial process for building resilience to global health crises starts with documenting what is happening right now in our libraries. The documentation of events, policies, and procedures that were followed during the Spanish flu outbreak and the current COVID-19 pandemic will be helpful toward implementation of closures, remote services, and innovative services in similar disasters in the future.

By mid-March 2020, most libraries across the United States had closed their buildings and shifted their services from in-person to virtual. In most cases, these changes occurred overnight and rapidly evolved as situations changed. With hurricanes, libraries have days to prepare, with the COVID-19 pandemic, some libraries only had hours. At Edith Garland Dupré Library at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, administrators and personnel began preparing for possible closures and a shift to remote services about a week before the university closed campus. Even though they had no historical information to guide them in preparing for closure during the pandemic, librarians and other staff members worked

together to determine what services would be affected and how to best assist users without causing them any additional stress.

While it was a frantic and stressful time that involved a lot of questions from library personnel and campus administrators, library administrators used this time to assess what resources library staff members would need for teleworking and began compiling data about the steps required to prepare for a shutdown. As plans were created to fulfill the needs of students, faculty and staff, the library began restricting access to the building to members of the university community. A station for checking identification cards was set up to facilitate this measure. Guidelines by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provided recommendations for social distancing measures in public spaces. According to the CDC (2020), “social distancing” (or “physical distancing”) means that individuals who are not part of the same household must maintain a distance of at least six feet (What is Social Distancing? Section, paras. 1 - 2). This distance, along with other safety measures including the use of face masks and frequent hand-washing, helps to minimize the spread of the virus among people who are in close contact (CDC, 2020). The library at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette followed these guidelines while also trying to prepare for library closure and teleworking.

Following these guidelines, library personnel placed signage throughout the library reminding patrons to be mindful of the space between themselves and other library users. Library staff also researched the plans of other libraries and consulted information provided by the Louisiana Library Association and the LOUIS Consortium, which helped guide library administrators in shifting services online and personnel to remote work. Library personnel are proactively constructing a timeline of events and compiling documentation of meetings and university procedures implemented by the library while developments are fresh on everyone’s minds. This information will serve as a guide and inform action plans for future pandemics.

Though it is difficult to establish pandemic plans in the midst of an evolving situation, library administrators and staff should retain copies of all relevant information gathered since the onset of COVID-19 so the data can be utilized to create plans for pandemics. It is also important to preserve this information for future librarians who may face similar issues. Here again, the past can guide and inform the present. According to Fallows (2020b), Blane Dessy, director of Eerie, Pennsylvania’s Raymond M. Blasco Memorial Library came across his library’s report from 1918 that documented the shuttering of the library during the Spanish Influenza. This discovery inspired him to create an Eerie County print and digital archive for COVID-19. Documentation of previous disruptions and disasters are beneficial for establishing new pandemic preparedness plans. Utilizing historic documents while also drawing from existing plans for other disasters will also make the process easier.

Since hurricanes are a constant concern for the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, the library has a plan already in place for this type of disaster preparedness. The library can use this plan as a starting point for establishing a plan for pandemics. Other libraries should also consult their existing preparedness plans as well as those established by their respective parent institutions and local, state, or federal agencies to begin planning for future pandemics. The library’s hurricane plan provides directions for preparing the building for closure and procedures for personnel to follow, including updating contact information, recording voicemail messages to detail the closure, and the process for returning to work after the disaster. All of these measures provide a great foundation for creating a pandemic plan, especially if the building will be closed and staff will be physically displaced from each other. Dupré Library will draw from the information and experience gained during the COVID-19 outbreak, existing plans for other disasters, and resources from the university’s Office of Environmental Health and Safety to build a similar plan for pandemics.

While it requires an upfront investment of time and effort, now is the time to build upon and strengthen connections and collaborations with campus and community organizations. While relationships with safety and compliance offices and communications and marketing departments are always important to maintain and utilize, these partnerships are even more critical during a global health crisis. For example, the staff at Dupré Library are working with the Office of Communications and Marketing throughout this ongoing pandemic to provide updates about library services, including the addition

of curbside pickup for library materials. Library administrators also partnered with university facilities and maintenance staff to build and install temporary plexiglass shields for public service desks to ensure safer conditions for staff and patrons when the building reopens. It is worth noting that the library was the first department on campus to raise this concern. The library's Head of Instruction and Head of User Engagement are also working with the First Year Experience program to create virtual information literacy instruction for incoming freshman.

Each of these are prime examples of how libraries can collaborate with other departments and organizations. As resilient as libraries are on their own, they should establish active partnerships with other departments, agencies, and organizations that will ensure they can continue to serve their patrons in times of disruption. Communicating and collaborating with individuals outside of the library field can benefit all parties involved, including library users. According to Allison (2011), resilient leaders cultivate networks before disaster strikes: "Resilient leaders continually work to sustain buy-in from individuals who are inspired by what the leader's organization achieves and who will gladly provide support and resources" (p. 82). By maintaining a positive relationship with campus departments and agencies within their communities, librarians gain insights into specific situations that they do not have expertise in. Conversely, librarians can offer their own insights that other departments or partners do not have.

Two additional resources for dealing with disruption and moving forward are library staff and users. Libraries should solicit feedback from these two groups about their experience during this time and their thoughts concerning the library's response to COVID-19. This feedback need not be a formal collection of data. Invaluable information can be gleaned from simple surveys or conversations with patrons or among library departments. According to Bodenheimer (2018), "Developing and maintaining employee well-being and work engagement are essential in developing inherent resilience, and organizations can support resilience among their employees by crafting an environment that promotes it" (p. 368). The key to successfully navigating the COVID-19 pandemic thus far has been communication. Resilient library leaders work diligently to inform their respective staffs and the campuses/communities they serve of the latest updates regarding their library's response to the outbreak.

Compiling relevant information regarding pandemics and library responses to these crises is crucial. This effort should include compiling historical information about the current COVID-19 outbreak, the Spanish Influenza pandemic of 1918-19, and other epidemics that have affected other countries around the world. The experiences provided by library personnel will formulate well-educated responses to future pandemics. As evident by the diverse array of university plans for reopening, there is no universal solution for any organization or institution. Most libraries, academic and public, will have to create multi-level plans to combat disruptions caused by pandemics. For example, these plans should account for various levels of space and service availability based on the severity of circumstances, ranging from full availability to only virtual. There will be no one-size fits- all plan for libraries to draw from concerning what they have learned about past pandemics and from their experiences with COVID-19 to create a plan that works best for them.

CONCLUSION

Although a century has passed since the last pandemic brought daily activities to a halt in the United States and much has changed in the ways that libraries provide access to information and resources, there is a lot to be learned from evaluating library responses to pandemics (past and present). The current COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates that history repeats itself. Fortunately, history also points to a proven record of librarian resilience during times of disease and pestilence. Just like their counterparts during the Spanish flu outbreak, librarians are reinventing themselves and their institutions during this pandemic. In 2020, libraries can use modern technology to instantly communicate changes in access or policy to their campuses and communities. Libraries also found unique ways to provide services to their campuses and communities through research efforts, acting as safe havens for homeless communities, and serving as outlets of entertainment for patrons. Librarians of the Adams County, Colorado Public Library used the physical isolation imposed by COVID-19 to strengthen human

connection by establishing call centers. Librarians have a proven record of significance in society. They can and will weather this pandemic as they have in the past, while continuing to dutifully serve and support their campuses and communities.

Constant strife and inherent strength make for resilient libraries that are led by resilient leaders and personnel. To successfully navigate crises and disruptions, libraries concurrently rely on resilient leaders and use the experience gained and documented amid disruptions to become stronger organizations. A closely aligned construct to resilience is hope, described by Duggal et al. (2016) as “they both include a tendency towards maintaining an optimistic outlook in the face of adversity” (Introduction and Background section, para. 3). This statement could not be more accurate. During disastrous times, hope is often lost. Because of their resilient nature, libraries stand firm, offering guidance, assistance, and hope during trying times. As Fallows (2020b) learned from Pam Smith, director of Anything Libraries in Adams, County, Colorado, the message libraries want to convey is that “We are here for you” (Looking back to the present and future section, para. 1). Pam Smith, is right. Despite disruption from COVID-19 today and the Spanish Influenza over 100 years ago, libraries are here for everyone (Fallows, 2020b).

REFERENCES

- Aldrich, R.S. (2018). *Resilience*. ALA Neal-Schuman.
- Allison, E. (2011). The resilient leader. *Educational Leadership*, 69(4), 79-82. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/dec11/vol69/num04/The-Resilient-Leader.aspx>
- Bentley, R. (2020, April 7). Libraries continue to offer resources during pandemic. *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. <https://www.ajc.com/news/local/libraries-continue-offer-resources-during-pandemic/FUhuHrseyJWjzWfuSMKo2J/>
- Bodenheimer, L. (2018). Leadership reflections: Resiliency in library organizations. *Journal of Library Administration*, 58(4), 364-374. <https://doi.org/10.10.080/01930826.2018.1448651>
- BuzzFlash. (2002, March). *A BuzzFlash interview with Michael Moore, filmmaker, TV host, and author of “Stupid White Men.”* BuzzFlash. <https://buzzflash.com/flashback/moore-2002>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020, July 15). *Social Distancing: Keep a Safe Distance to Slow the Spread*. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html#:~:text=Social%20distancing%2C%20also%20called%20%E2%80%9Cphysical,both%20indoor%20and%20outdoor%20spaces.>
- Doherty, P. C. (2013). *Pandemics: What everyone needs to know*. Oxford University Press.
- Duggal, D., Sacks-Zimmerman, A., and Liberta, T. (2016). The impact of hope and resilience on multiple factors in neurosurgical patients. *Cureus*, 8(10), e849. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.849>
- Edwards, E. A. (2019). Disaster preparedness and recovery in libraries: Bracing for the worst, helping the community heal. *ILA Reporter*, 37(1), 38-42. <https://www.ila.org/publications/ila-reporter/article/102/disaster-preparedness-and-recovery-in-libraries-bracing-for-the-worst-helping-th>
- Fallows, D. (2020a, March 31). Public libraries’ novel response to novel a novel virus. Reporter’s Notebook. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/notes/2020/03/public-libraries-novel-response-to-a-novel-virus/609058/>
- Fallows, D. (2020b, May 12). The post-pandemic future of libraries. Reporter’s Notebook. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/notes/2020/05/post-pandemic-future-libraries/611458/>
- Ford, A. (2020, April 24). Other (pandemic) duties as assigned: During shutdowns, librarians take on additional tasks. *American Libraries*. <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/other-pandemic-duties-as-assigned/>
- Lavigne, S. E. (2020). A history of pandemics: Lessons we can learn from the past. *Canadian Journal of Dental Hygiene*, 54(2), 55-56. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7668271/>
- Quinlan, N. J. (2007). In Flew Enza. *American Libraries*, 38(11), 50-53. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27771411>

- Rosenwald, M. S. (2020, April 7). History's deadliest pandemics, from ancient Rome to modern America. *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/local/retropolis/coronavirus-deadliest-pandemics/>
- Vinopal, C. (2020, April 28). *'Truly the safe haven': Libraries serve vulnerable communities during the pandemic*. PBS News Hour. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/truly-the-last-safe-haven-libraries-serve-vulnerable-communities-during-the-pandemic>
- Wilburn, T. (2020, June 16). Libraries are dealing with new demand for books and services during the pandemic. Special Series: The Coronavirus. *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/16/877651001/libraries-are-dealing-with-new-demand-for-books-and-services-during-the-pandemic>
- World Health Organization, (2020, December 3). *WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard*. Retrieved from <https://covid19.who.int/>