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## **Create, Check, Comeback: Using a Solutions-Based Approach to Tackle Instruction, Reference, and Research Support Challenges**

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# CREATE, CHECK, COMEBACK: USING A SOLUTIONS-BASED APPROACH TO TACKLE INSTRUCTION, REFERENCE AND RESEARCH SUPPORT CHALLENGES

VERONICA BIELAT AND KATRINA ROUAN

## INTRODUCTION

Like most higher education institutions, Wayne State University faced unprecedented challenges with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. Our campus, located in the midtown cultural center of Detroit, transitioned most courses and services to remote learning on March 16, 2020. This included shutting our Library doors and shifting our focus to virtual instruction, services, and research support. Happily, we were able to reopen for limited library access and on-site services on September 1, 2020.

The continual shifting policies and limitations relating to COVID-19 protocols impacted almost every area of our work, creating layers and layers of decision-making and the need for quick, conscientious action. According to Jackson and McKergow, solutions-focused thinking works to highlight strengths over deficits, and is best when this approach is focused on interactions between people, emphasizes small changes, and recognizes that each situation is different (2007). A solutions-focus can be fostered by emphasizing questions such as:

- What do you want as an outcome?
- Are we seeing this solution taking place?
- Under what circumstances, are you seeing this solution?
- How can we do more of that?
- What small changes can we make?

In recent years, our library system invested in being strengths-based with many of our staff participating in Clifton StrengthsFinder (<https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/strengthsfinder.aspx>) and a year-long, system-wide leadership series which complemented this work. In facing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, we utilized these skills further by adopting a solutions-focused mindset which enabled us to remain efficient and focused on action.

We present four challenges where we successfully engaged in a solutions-focused approach.

## SOLUTION #1 – COVID FAQ

The response to the COVID crisis quickly and dramatically changed our campus. During the initial closures, information and guidelines were sometimes changing hourly. Our existing lines of communication, such as e-mail, or sharing new policy at a meeting, were no longer adequate to respond to the constantly shifting landscape. In addition, our staff and users were desperate for accurate information—it was difficult to know who had the “right” answer at any given time. We needed to develop a quick and responsive system that could capture the correct information and make it available to everyone. The paradigm had shifted from one of “information dissemination” to “information capture.”

Our library system licenses LibAnswers, through which we manage our email reference service. LibAnswers includes an FAQ, which allows staff with access to create question & answer pairs on the fly. Entered pairs and revisions are available in real time, there is no need to wait for overnight server uploads. This system also allows the creation of different groups of answers, where permissions can be set for viewing. LibAnswers provided a way to maintain one central location for retrieving the most current policies, procedures and information resulting from the library system's response to the COVID closure. We created a publicly accessible group titled "Library Support During COVID-19" (<https://ask.lib.wayne.edu/covid-19>) and included 20 question/answer pairs specifically addressing library services and information on campus resources. We also added 18 questions to our Internal FAQs, with access limited to library staff. The process to add or change information in LibAnswers is simple, and our staff informally communicated with a small management team when information had been changed or a question/answer pair added to the system. We would also send an email to our all staff listserv to notify and link them to a question/answer pair in the FAQ, enforcing the use of the FAQ as the authoritative source of up-to-date information.

The use of our FAQs increased by 185%, measuring a March-to-March time period, from 4,735 hits on our entire FAQs inventory to 13,518, almost 50% of which were recorded views of the 20 questions in our COVID-FAQ group. Our top three accessed questions were all related to circulation.

By changing our perspective of this challenge, we stopped trying to create more communication channels and instead focused on finding an easy, accessible, flexible, already-existing system for capturing information, without imposing an approval process and encouraged our colleagues to share updated information in one place.

## **SOLUTION #2 – CANVAS COURSE MODULE**

When you have been a subject specialist librarian for a decade and built a strong relationship with a department, it can be easy for both sides to fall into routine. This was the case with our course integrated instruction for PSY 3993 – Laboratory in Experimental Psychology. PSY 3993, a required course for Psychology majors, benefitted from in-person instruction by a librarian every semester for up to twelve sections. Previously, the Psychology department had delivered asynchronous instruction on scholarly literature searching via a lengthy PowerPoint presentation that students would read through in their own time. This delivery was less than ideal and any subsequent conversations around asynchronous instruction were met with significant hesitation. Furthermore, the long-time lead instructor for PSY 3993, a strong library advocate, was retiring in August 2020 and the future of this course integrated instruction was to be determined by new instructor.

Our Libraries' acquisition of LibWizard in early 2020 provided an accessible, flexible tool for the development of asynchronous instruction content. In fact, the PSY 3993 content was used as an example to demonstrate the possibilities of the new platform. This example was improved and sent to the two PSY 3993 lead instructors to proactively illustrate the potential to deliver this instruction effectively and interactively in the virtual learning environment. Both instructors offered their support after viewing the sample module and actively engaged in further development. The final product, a combination of the LibWizard tutorial, a quiz to self-check learning, and a Qualtrics feedback form, was packaged into a Canvas course module which was imported into each section of PSY 3993.

Every semester, the feedback is compiled and shared with the lead instructor, along with proactive plans for improvements. Upon completion of the tutorial, PSY 3993 students overwhelmingly indicate that the tutorial helps them (1) find scholarly articles in a database and (2) use database tools to limit searches for the types of information they want. In the future, most students indicate they will (1) look for information in new or different places and (2) use a library guide on their general topic to help them get started. Two-thirds of the students rate the tutorial as "very useful" or "extremely useful."

Utilizing the resources at hand and embracing the unexpected remote learning situation, we were able change the conversation around PSY 3993 from problem-based to one that allowed for a more sustainable set of communication and instruction delivery to this important course.

## **SOLUTION #3 – REINVENT THE SERVICE**

As we prepared to open our physical doors for the fall of 2020, we were confronted with complex decisions around what services to offer and how to deliver them. Our campus community was sending clear messaging that they expected an in-person reference presence at our Undergraduate Library. How were we going to reconcile that with the strict COVID precautions in place on our campus? And how would an in-person service work in the redesigned-for-COVID Undergraduate Library space?

We formed a working group with the goal of reproducing our reference desk in the virtual environment via Zoom. This drop-in service was offered via a kiosk in our Undergraduate Library, located not far from our single service desk but in a space that allowed for social distancing. Students could approach the kiosk, launch the personal Zoom room which served as our virtual

reference desk, and speak with a librarian face-to-face. This pilot service launched in mid-September and proved to be unsuccessful. No one made use of our kiosk. Our chat reference statistics were higher than ever, and our building was seeing over 100 visitors each day. After giving the service three weeks to develop, it was clear a change was needed.

While cautious about demand, we wanted to support the work of our on-site colleagues. We made the decision to open the Zoom virtual reference desk for off-site use. In mid-October, advertisements for the service began appearing on our library homepage and social media accounts. Our users began using our Zoom desk and we were open for business.

Revisiting the service in December, we saw our original hours (11am-3pm), conceived to match the most popular reservations time for library building use, no longer aligned with peak library service demands. We shifted our hours at the start of 2021 to 1-5pm and within a few weeks saw the 4-5pm hour become our busiest of the service. Our Zoom reference desk is growing in popularity and provides more accessible access to librarians than appointment-based research consultations. In fact, approximately two-thirds of our Zoom reference questions fall into the extended reference category which indicates librarians are providing longer and more in-depth research assistance than we previously had through our physical reference desk service.

We even found a way to repackage the service when students shared their desire to have a “place” to gather and work on research papers with staff available for assistance. Our Zoom reference desk was opened for additional hours and branded as our Research Paper Refuge. Faculty have taken notice and are referring students. Building these services off of one another and using our successes to drive decisions for small change has resulted in larger and more lasting impact on the future trajectory of our research support services.

#### **SOLUTION #4 – REPACKAGE AND PUSH**

Our 2020 fall semester, like most higher education institutions, was fully online. As time wore on, librarians became more concerned about our new freshmen, transfer and graduate students, and their engagement and understanding of library resources and services. Traditionally, our new student orientation included a fun, engaging game that introduced students to our resources and services, and the people who staffed our library. This activity always received high ratings, along with enthusiastic comments from student participants about how comfortable and confident they felt about using the libraries. Although our staff had created a robust information page regarding using the libraries under COVID-19 restrictions, along with two short LibWizard tutorials to introduce students to the libraries, we were not sure if our newest students were engaging with them. In addition to this challenge, most courses had been moved to online, asynchronous formats. As a result, the only library integration in many courses that traditionally had in-person instruction relied on faculty facilitating library instruction materials integrated into the Canvas LMS.

From a campus perspective, basic library information dissemination was also significantly impacted, as new student welcome and orientation activities were asynchronous and, in many cases, optional. Many students had never been to campus. Even though the libraries were open to a limited capacity, several students we spoke with expressed reticence to come on campus and use the libraries, as they were unfamiliar with the location, the environment, and the required procedures to visit the libraries in-person. By late fall semester, we realized we did not need to create new guides, resources or services, but needed to find a repackage our existing content and push it out to our students.

A small team began to consider how we could accomplish this in a fun and engaging way. In 2014, BuzzFeed’s social media quizzes logged over 100 million users. Our library’s Instagram feed has over 1,000 followers. They may not all be our students, but it was a place to start. How could we leverage the popularity of social media quizzes with the ability to push content through our Instagram feed? We started with the idea of creating an online quiz to gather basic information about an individual student’s study habits, interests and academic goals, and use their responses to create a personalized list library resources and services that aligned with their responses.

We identified eleven library services and resources we felt were critical to new students. Using our institutional Qualtrics account, we created a logic-based quiz that asked simple questions, using “I” statements to personalize (Figure 1). When completed, students were presented with a screen of library resource and service recommendations, and were also sent an email of the same content, which aligned with statements to which they responded “Definitely Yes” and “Probably Yes” (Figure 2). This was branded as our *Research Personality Quiz*. Our beta testers provided very positive feedback. The Quiz was pushed out through our Instagram, university portal and directly to our Student Success program leaders. By reimagining how we could engage with students, we created a fun and fast way to introduce students to the library’s services and resources.

#### **CONCLUSION**

By using a solutions-focused approach to these four challenges, our staff was able to reframe the overwhelming challenges presented by COVID related to communication and library engagement. Instead of focusing on the problems and the roadblocks

ahead of us, we considered what was already working. We focused on the positive aspects—dedicated and creative staff along with robust array of synchronous and asynchronous tools—and how to best leverage these assets. This perspective gave us the confidence to implement new ideas that were not grand in scale, but had significant, positive impacts on our users and staff.

### **Solutions Focus Resources**

Hammond, S. A. (2013). *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thin Book Publishing.

The InterAction Collection <https://sfio.org/interaction-collection/>

InterAction: The Journal of Solution Focus in Organisations - <https://sfwork.com/interaction>

Jackson, P. Z. & McKergow, M. (2007). *The Solutions Focus: Making Coaching & Change SIMPLE*. Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Lewis, S. (2016). *Appreciative Inquiry for Change Management: Using AI to Facilitate Organizational Development* (Vol. 2). Kogan Page.

Peelle, H. E., III. (2006). Appreciative Inquiry and Creative Problem Solving in Cross-Functional Teams. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 42(4), 447–467.

SFiO (Solution Focus in Organizations) - <https://sfio.org/>

### **Wayne State University Library Project Links**

Researcher Personality Quiz <https://rebrand.ly/researchpersonality> (complete it using your email address and you will receive your profile)


## Images for Tables and Figures (Editor will put in body of the text later)

**Figure 1**

My instructors are always asking me to find scholarly or academic peer reviewed articles. I'd like to learn an easier way to get to those through the libraries.

Definitely yes	Probably yes	Probably not	Definitely not
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Figure 2**



**WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY**

Based on your answers, here is a personalized list of library resources you will likely use!

*After you review, click the Submit button at the bottom and you will receive an email with your results.*

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