

Visioning the (im)possible: Experiences of Librarian-caregivers During the Pandemic and Strategies for the Future of Library Work

[Panel session](#), Art Libraries Society of North America
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Moderator

Kate Joranson, University of Pittsburgh

Speakers

Rebecca Friedman, Princeton University

Gabriella Karl-Johnson, Princeton University

Lauren Puzier, University at Albany

Alice Whiteside, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Presented by members of the ARLIS/NA ALPACA Special Interest Group
(**Art Librarian PA**rents and **CA**regivers)

Sponsored by The Rebecca Crown Library, Dominican University

1. Kate Joranson, University of Pittsburgh: Welcome! We are so happy you are here joining us for “Visioning the (im)possible: experiences of librarian-caregivers during the pandemic and strategies for the future of library work”
 - a. Land acknowledgement -
 - i. The 2022 ARLIS/NA conference is being held on the traditional unceded homelands of the people of the Council of Three Fires, the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa as well as the Menominee, Miami and Ho-Chunk nations. It was also a site of trade, travel, gathering and healing for more than a dozen other Native tribes. Today, one of the largest urban American Indian communities in the United States resides in Chicago. Members of this community continue to contribute to the life of this city and to celebrate their heritage, practice traditions, and care for the land and waterways. Over 100,000 tribal members reside in the state of Illinois.
 - ii. We want to acknowledge that we did not do the research and work on this land acknowledgement. We were given this statement to read. We want to acknowledge that the point of a land acknowledgement is to do

the work and go through that discovery process, and to do the inner work that is required as you learn about the land you're standing on.

- iii. We encourage you to support the Chi-Nations Youth Council <https://chinations.org/> Their mission is "to create a supportive, open environment for Native Youth, raise awareness of cultural identity, and promote a healthy lifestyle through arts, activism, and education."
 - iv. Image: You are on Potawatomi Land, by Andrea Carlson (Ojibwe)
- b. We want to acknowledge that we are all white cis-gender women at academic institutions within the United States, and come from a place of considerable privilege. Some of us are straight and some of us are queer. We were all able to continue working full time throughout the pandemic. We hope that each of you will share your experience if you are so moved.
 - c. We would like to thank the Rebecca Crown Library, Dominican University for their generous support for this session.
 - d. We welcome everyone into this discussion today, whether you are a caregiver or not. Our intention today is to support caregivers and facilitate dialogue, and that work can and needs to come from everyone. We are all here to learn from each other.
 - e. This panel grew out of the parents and caregivers SIG, and we want to acknowledge that the SIG welcomes all caregivers, whether you are a caregiver for a child or parent or sibling, partner, or friend.
 - f. I'd like to share how we will structure our time together today:
 - i. I'll introduce our topic and lead a short reflective activity, and then you will hear from each panelist. We will pause periodically to take a minute or so of quiet, to reflect, and write in the blank pages in your zine.
 - ii. You will hear from Rebecca Friedman, who will present information she has gathered about working and caregiving during the pandemic.
 - iii. Next you will hear from Alice Whiteside, who will share her insights on universal design, and how what is good for caregivers is often good for all workers. Alice is joining us via zoom.
 - iv. Lauren Puzier will then share a specific example of this from her institution, how she has worked to transition a tenure and promotion committee to all virtual.
 - v. After Lauren's presentation, we will have a short discussion of hybrid work policies.

- vi. Gabriella Karl-Johnson will then talk about the history of zines, why we chose to make a zine, and how we went about making this zine. Gabriella is joining us via zoom.
 - vii. We will close with a short writing prompt and time for reflection.
- g. As part of our presentation, we have a gift for each of you, a zine, that is packed full of personal narratives, scraps of thoughts, photos, schedules, and reflections on what it has been like to be a librarian and a caregiver during the past 2.5 years. I'd like to read to you from the zine, and I invite you to take a moment to breathe and reflect.
- i. Read from zine: "Caregiving is an impossible, implausible pose. It's a tenuous perch, it's one foot placed gingerly in front of another. It's a stance that asks one to stop time even as the world revolves. It's a motionless nap and tossed sheets. It's a five-day quarantine, overdue assignments, missed deadlines, and mussed hair. It's a disheveled room hidden by a Zoom background of a photo taken at a conservatory two years ago in the Before Times. It's loads of laundry piled with misshapen cloth masks. It's unsustainable and yet week in, week out, caregiving is the unspoken mistral never cited."
 - ii. The person who wrote this describes caregiving as something that is happening continuously, even as the world revolves. Even now, as we are here in this room together, caregivers elsewhere are supporting our work here. I invite you to take a moment and think about the people in your life who are being taken care of right now. Children, elders, disabled loved ones, anyone in your life who needs caregiving, or who has needed caregiving at one or more points in their lives. We have some blank pages in the zine, and so let's take a moment to write a bit about the human beings in your life who are being cared for right now. Who are they? Who is caring for them? (2-3 minutes to reflect and/or write)
- h. Ok, let's bring our attention back to this room, and our amazing colleagues. As we listen to them and to each other today, let's hold all caregivers in mind.
- i. Let's transition to listening to Rebecca Friedman share what she has learned from the literature about working and caregiving during covid.
2. Rebecca K. Friedman, Princeton University: "Working & Caregiving during COVID-19: Overview & Media Review": 9 themes presented:
- a. Nature of work in US
 - b. Loss of jobs/mass resignations

- c. Impact on women/moms, in particular
- d. Parenting/caregiving during this time (general)
- e. Pros and cons of remote work
- f. Libraries (during pandemic)
- g. Museums & greater art world (during pandemic)
- h. Art & design schools
- i. Higher education
- j. **Resources:**
 - i. ALA Executive Board recommends closing libraries to public (press release), 3-20
<https://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2020/03/ala-executive-board-recommends-closing-libraries-public>
 - ii. The Campus Caregivers Project (Visionary Futures Collective: a group of humanists looking to improve higher education)
<https://visionary-futures-collective.github.io/caregivers/>
 - iii. COVID-19: Resources for Higher Education and Academic Libraries (Ithaka S+R) <https://sr.ithaka.org/our-work/covid-19/#Online>
 - iv. “Graduate Student Experiences of Support and Stress During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” National Science Foundation, 12-20
https://www.montana.edu/covid19_rapid/updated%20NSF_RAPID_GraduateStudentExperiences_Covid19_White_Paper.pdf
 - v. “The Impact of COVID-19 on Gender Equality,” National Bureau of Economic Research, 4-20 (see also other studies by M. Doepke)
https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w26947/w26947.pdf
 - vi. “The Impact of COVID-19 on Women,” United Nations, 4-20
<https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/report/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-en-1.pdf>
 - vii. Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson nomination hearings, U.S. Congress (YouTube), 3-22, “Not as good as a mom as I’d like to be” (see c. 23:30 mins. in) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIOYnxYQWwY>
 - viii. Marshall Plan for Moms <https://marshallplanformoms.com/>
 - ix. Measuring the Impact of COVID-19 on People in the Museum Field, American Alliance of Museums, 4-21
<https://www.aam-us.org/2021/04/13/measuring-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-people-in-the-museum-field/>
 - x. National Snapshot of COVID-19 Impact on United States Museums, American Alliance of Museums, 10-20 and 4-21

<https://www.aam-us.org/2020/11/17/national-snapshot-of-covid-19/>
<https://www.aam-us.org/2021/06/01/national-snapshot-of-covid-19-imp-act-on-united-states-museums-fielded-april-2021/>

- xi. “The Quarantine Question: How has the past year’s quarantine affected your professional life?” College Art Association, 12-21
<http://artjournal.collegeart.org/?p=16055>
- xii. “The Sound of COVID-19,” Eric Drass (music)
<https://www.fastcompany.com/90471306/it-turns-out-covid-19-sounds-more-like-synth-pop-than-we-thought>
- xiii. US Academic Library Response to COVID19 Survey
<https://tinyurl.com/covidlibrary>
- xiv. Women in G7 countries (poll), CNN, 3-22
<https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2022/03/world/covid-recovery-G7-women-poll-as-equals-intl-cmd/>
- xv. “Women, Work and Families: Recovering from the Pandemic-induced Recession,” Brookings Institution
<https://www.brookings.edu/research/women-work-and-families-recovering-from-the-pandemic-induced-recession/>
- xvi. “Working from Home could Shake Up Family Dynamics,” CNN, 4-20 (video)
<https://www.cnn.com/videos/business/2020/04/23/dads-share-moms-work-at-home-coronavirus-suffrage-orig-ec.cnn-business>

3. Alice Whiteside, University of North Carolina: “What’s Good for Working Caregivers”
 - a. I’m going to speak, optimistically, about imagining that better is possible - not just for working caregivers and parents but for everyone. I will briefly touch on some frameworks that I think can support working towards a different reality (and include anecdotes & reflections from my own experience)
 - b. Universal Design - <https://universaldesign.ie/what-is-universal-design/> Universal design is a process for creating products & built environments that are accessible to people w/ a wide range of abilities & disabilities
 - c. The global movement of universal design practice was initiated at the North Carolina State University School of Design. In 1997, a group of practicing architects, product designers, engineers, and environmental design researchers developed the 7 principles of universal design. These are used to evaluate existing designs, guide the design process, and educate designers and consumers about the characteristics of more usable products and environments. The idea being that designing a space or product to accommodate different abilities

results in better design & better experience for everyone (shout out to the panel “Evaluating, Optimizing, and Remediating Physical Accessibility in Library Spaces” also happening now!)

- d. This idea that although society is not built for everybody... maybe it could be? Has been adapted to other contexts as well - derivatives of UD include UDL: Universal Design for Learning - <https://www.cast.org/impact/universal-design-for-learning-udl>
- e. Recognizing people learn in different ways; we can improve learning for everyone by improving how we teach (this is not a one size fits all approach, but rather creating an experience that is varied, flexible, and works best for everyone) The point of universal design (and derivatives) is that you’re not singling out certain populations, you’re creating space/product/policy/practice that is better for everyone.
- f. How can we apply the spirit of universal design to how we manage our libraries? What’s good for working caregivers is good for everyone.
- g. The pandemic has been a time of reimagining possibilities - change happened, so quickly! While not all changes were welcome, there were instances where adapting to the pandemic created opportunities and removed barriers - for users and for staff
 - i. Pre-pandemic my library discussed having a service to mail library materials to enrolled students located elsewhere (rise of online programs) and decided it was too expensive/we couldn’t do it – now we’re doing it.
 - ii. Pre-pandemic I told students they had to come into the library for a research consultation; now the majority of consults I do are over Zoom, and it works really well.
 - iii. I’m currently teaching a semester-long course in a hybrid format. The option to participate over Zoom accommodates students who have health needs that make it harder to come to campus, sometimes unpredictably); I am really delighted to be joining you all for this panel, even though I’m missing the conference.
- h. I think we can all identify some positive aspects of working remotely
 - i. My wife works long hours, but working from home without a commute she’s able to be present for mornings and evenings with our kid
 - ii. I have colleagues who have windowless offices at the library and are now getting to work from home in a space with natural light.
 - iii. The ability to do a load of laundry during the day, or prep something for dinner, can sometimes make an impossible schedule feel possible -

integrating life and work can allow for some balance when there literally are not enough hours in the day.

- iv. I became a parent during the pandemic (a few days before NC shut down) and that has been extraordinarily challenging in many ways, but I can't imagine not having some flexibility with my work schedule (it would have quit)
 - v. For many of us, the "return to normal" is reconstructing barriers
- i. Reality check? "We need to keep the library open!"
- i. I'm the head of a branch library - we have two full time employees (including myself) and a handful of students keeping the doors open
 - ii. Some of my colleagues at UNC libraries can do their work entirely remotely; others can't; but a policy that allows for a hybrid work environment and gives agency to different levels of an organization to propose what works best for them IS possible. I'm very happy to say that has happened at UNC. In my library, we each work from home one day a week.
 - iii. While the work from home day is great - I can get in that laundry, have a little more time because I skipped the commute, I also need flexibility in my schedule.
 - iv. We are lucky to have a nanny, but I have to leave work at 4:15pm four days a week because we can't afford to pay her more than 40 hours per week (and most of the week I have a commute). I need the flexibility to do this and to work in the evening to wrap up the work day; one day a week, I close the library and my wife leaves work early.
 - v. My direct report does not have kids, but I've been transparent about my scheduling needs, regularly check in about coverage and make special arrangements when needed, and I have encouraged him to alter his schedule as needed/for any reason. Over the summer, a few times, on his work from home day, he drove 3 hrs to the beach to surf at sunrise, taking a work call on his drive back. He worked his usual number of hours but around an activity that gave him joy & renewal (something we all need)
 - vi. He also visited his mother for a week to help her get her Covid vaccine (she's elderly, physically able, but has debilitating anxiety, particularly around medical appointments). He was able to work some remotely and was able to use sick time for the remainder of that week - our institution allows for the use of sick time to care for a sick family member.

- vii. Flexibility is both important and possible. And I think we could build greater flexibility - adaptability, resilience - in our organizations.
 - viii. One area where I see potential is in cross-training... At unc, during the pandemic many of my subject librarian colleagues were cross-trained in circulation – our main library remained open, and staff from across the library volunteered hours to make that possible – and now I can draw on a wider pool of colleagues to help cover the Art Library desk when I’m in a pinch. This is great, and the rare times I’ve asked it has worked well; however, while available it is not encouraged, has not been normalized.
- j. My counter reality check: things weren’t that great before – the pandemic has given us an opportunity to reimagine possibilities - imagining is the first step. I have drawn a lot of inspiration from ARLIS/NA’s own Heather Slania, director of the Decker Library at the Maryland Institute College of Art. In a symposium talk last fall titled “Managing without Capitalism: Transforming Library Leadership in Service of Anti-Racism, Inclusion, and Equity” Heather examines the legacy of white supremacy culture in American libraries and how many library leadership and management concepts and practices are rooted in capitalism. If we truly want to transform our libraries to be more diverse, equitable, accessible and inclusive, we need to avoid the old status quo entirely. Heather Slania points us to adrienne maree brown’s Emergent Strategy as a framework for approaching work, success, and leadership in a new way. Emergent Strategy draws on the work of visionary sci-fi author Octavia Butler to suggest modes, means, and pathways to change ourselves, our organizations, and our society in needed ways. The elements of emergent strategy are:
- i. Fractal (what we practice at the small scale sets the pattern for the whole system - how we are in the small is how we are in the large)
 - ii. Intentional adaptation (how we change)
 - iii. Interdependence and decentralization (who we are and how we share)
 - iv. Nonlinear and iterative (the pace and pathways of change)
 - v. Resilience (how we recover and transform)
 - vi. and creating more possibilities (how we move towards life)
- k. **As caregivers, the pressures of life are vivid. How can our libraries move towards life?** I hope this provides some inspiration to begin to think and believe that we can make organizational changes that truly support library workers - and, in the spirit of universal design, not just working caregivers but everyone.

4. Lauren M. Puzier, University at Albany. “Virtual Meetings at Academic Libraries”

- a. The faculty at the University at Albany Libraries have taken the time and found a way to make even the most traditional of 'in-person' responsibilities work virtually -- mandatory Term and Promotion and Tenure meetings for academic faculty -- which has made the promotion practice more accessible for all members of staff. To design the protocols we consulted with
 - i. librarians and staff who had held virtual meetings with constituents before the pandemic
 - ii. some had parliamentary procedure expertise,
 - iii. some were experts on the formal P&T process.
 - iv. *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*
 - v. current University Libraries documentation

- b. Key Requirements for Initial Academic Review: Consultation of Library Faculty
 - i. Attendance
 - ii. Vote by secret ballot
 - iii. Confidentiality

- c. Assistant Facilitators. We found that electronic meetings do not require the teller's role, a role traditionally used for in-person meetings. This role may assist in such duties:
 - i. designated to monitor chat
 - ii. lower participants' raised hands
 - iii. mute attendees if needed
 - iv. track attendees that may drop out
 - v. contact an on-call IT expert should the hosts encounter technical problems

- d. Future Considerations: As we move back into the library buildings, only one concern regarding the virtual meeting process has arisen. That is for those librarians who do not have an individual office with a door that closes - how could they maintain confidentiality if others happened by and heard the meeting? Our solution is for those librarians to reserve a private space either in the library or on campus where they can close the door to attend the meeting. The P&T meeting dates are shared far in advance, so there is ample time to reserve a space.

- e. These tools can help you design protocols and build a case for virtual meetings beyond the pandemic.

- f. Resources:
 - i. [Example of the Procedures for a Virtual Promotion and Tenure Meeting for Library Faculty](#). University at Albany, University Libraries. (2021)
 - ii. [Sample Rules for Electronic Meetings](#). *Robert's Rules Association*. (2020, June 22) [Permalink](#) (Web) [Permalink](#) (PDF)
 - iii. [Using Qualtrics for Faculty Merits & Promotions Voting](#). UC Davis. (2020, April 24) [Permalink](#)

- 5. Gabriella Karl-Johnson, Princeton University:
 - a. "Our Zine is a Collective Memoir"
 - i. An outline and overview of the ALPACA zine
 - 1. Why we chose to make a zine, and how we made it.
 - 2. A brief history of US zines from the 20th century to present day
 - b. A definition from the Barnard Zine Library: A zine, short for fanzine or magazine, is a DIY* subculture self-publication, usually made on paper and reproduced with a photocopier or printer. Zine creators are often motivated by a desire to share knowledge or experience with people in marginalized or otherwise less-empowered communities. (*do-it-yourself)
 - i. Zines can function as oral histories on paper, as unofficial records of events, as communication venues for populations whose stories are not otherwise being recorded.
 - c. The experiences of caregivers in the workplace have historically been part of an unspoken and private burden, frequently borne by women but experienced by persons of all genders who hold active caregiving roles.
 - d. Our zine documents the experiences and stories of working caregivers, bringing to light the challenges and struggles that have defined our working lives over the past two years.
 - e. The zine is a collection of reflections on caregiving while working during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
 - i. The semi-anonymous format of the zine was selected as a means for participants to share their unedited experiences
 - f. We solicited information via an anonymous Google form.
 - g. Our questionnaire included a short list of open-ended questions.
 - h. We invited visual materials from form respondents (photos, drawings, etc)
 - i. We did not omit any responses to the google form. all contributions were included in the final printed zine.
 - j. The work distribution of the zine production was as follows:
 - i. Kate Joranson hand-copied respondent content into love-letter form

- ii. Alice Whiteside created the cover design and designed the layout
 - iii. Gabriella Karl-Johnson printed, collated, and stapled
 - iv. Rebecca Friedman delivered the zine to the conference in Chicago
- k. The zine was distributed to all attendees of the conference session, and forwarded to various repositories.