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Saying No to Say Yes: Mediating Student Technology Needs in Times of Crisis

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Introduction

Sonoma State University (SSU) is a public, master's-level, liberal arts–focused institution of approximately 8,600 students as of fall 2019 (93 percent undergraduate) located in Rohnert Park, California,[1] a 1960s-era suburban community less than an hour north of San Francisco. SSU is one of twenty-three campuses in the California State University (CSU) system, which educates nearly 500,000 ethnically, economically, and academically diverse students annually.[2] As of March 2020, the library employed eight full-time librarians and twenty administrators and staff members, plus student assistants.

Within the CSU, librarians are faculty. Various researchers have discussed the relative merits of academic librarians receiving faculty or quasi-faculty status.[3] At SSU, a central benefit to librarian faculty status is that the library has full voting representation in faculty governance, including seats on all regular committees and subcommittees, as well as the Academic Senate. While university service must be optimized and decided upon collectively by the faculty because of our small size, such involvement situates librarians in many places where issues relevant to the entire campus are discussed and decided. Thus, we have a high-level understanding of university operations broadly and possess deeper opportunities for advocacy based on our professional expertise, union protection, and faculty status.

At the same time, as an academic services provider, we partner and collaborate with other campus entities, such as student advising, information technology, and facilities. This liminal status helps the library faculty bridge gaps between student services staff, administrators, nonlibrary faculty, and students themselves.

Meanwhile, crisis experiences at SSU starting in fall 2017—including multiple regional wildfires, air quality issues, and fire-related power outages—primed the SSU library faculty and staff to anticipate how typically siloed portions of campus would react in a crisis, what challenges might arise, and how faculty concerns would likely differ widely from student concerns. As each of these events impacted our university, we learned important lessons: Regional power shutdowns informed us that not all students, staff, and faculty have internet access at home. Power outages on campus, with multiple failures of backup resources, might affect university systems such as websites, learning management systems, online library authentication, doors, and so on. Wildfires and evacuations demonstrated that students do not always feel agency regarding their own safety, instead relying on campus to advocate for their safety; however, campus often leaned on resiliency narratives rather than proactively protecting student health and safety. A unified support center in response to disasters was located within the library because space elsewhere on campus was unavailable. The Emergency Operations Center was also housed in the library due to limited space in its original location for the necessary body of individuals and equipment. In general, we learned that people turn to the library during an emergency for many things—technology, spaces, and so on—including some that are outside our scope of work and responsibility.

This chapter details the mediating role embraced by the SSU Library in managing university-wide technology and learning challenges during an unanticipated pivot to remote instruction and is organized according to lessons we learned. Responding to COVID disruptions in real time. we identified key areas where our expertise and relationships allowed us to advocate for and support students, while also saying no or limiting our participation in others. Limiting the services provided during a crisis to only those that fit within the core scope of our mission was a powerful tactic that libraries should exercise often and widely communicate. Rather than answering every call to service and overextending ourselves, libraries must embrace saying no and exercise transparency around decision-making. In doing so, libraries conserve energy and resources to deliver core services, thereby ensuring that primary services are thriving, robust, and able to withstand instabilities wrought by crises.

Core mission work included a technology-lending program that prioritized support of underserved populations. In addition, we leveraged our position in the campus community to underscore students' remote learning challenges, including privacy, surveillance technology, and the interplay of basic needs and student success. During this process, we quickly learned that we would have to establish and enforce boundaries to ensure a focus on the students most in need of learning resources and empathetic approaches to remote instruction. Saying no to different stakeholders—in the administration, peers in the university such as faculty or staff, and students—when we felt it was appropriate, was difficult and possibly politically problematic, but necessary in the pursuit of equity.

Saying No to Performative Equity

As COVID-19 cases began to climb in the US in March 2020, one of the librarians' earliest instances of exercising equity-informed pushback came as the campus pivoted toward physical closure and remote instruction. On March 12, 2020, SSU suspended face-to-face classes, thereby giving instructors a week plus the short spring break to move course content to online modalities, anticipating a worsening public health crisis. Initially, campus decision makers intended to resume classes remotely for the remaining seven weeks of the spring term, while still providing access to essential on-campus resources, such as residential halls, dining locations, the health center, and the library.

The library had concerns regarding this long-term plan for maintaining physical access, even at reduced hours, despite the equity justifications for this arrangement. The rationale supplied by administrative powers primarily rested on the need to supply students with the technology necessary to complete their coursework online. Discipline-specific faculty also expressed concerns around shutting down the library. However, despite classifying the library as an essential campus resource, SSU leadership originally issued no additional custodial support, no guidance around cleaning or distancing protocols, conflicting internal communications, and incorrect or incoherent campus-wide messaging regarding library services between what was on the library website versus the university's electronic communications. Examples include messaging that technology was provided on a first-come, first-served basis or that the library was responsible for hot spots, using the library's laptop request form for a separate nonlibrary effort and distributing widely the laptop request form during a period when it was to be distributed only to prioritized student groups. Much of the university-led communications worked from a set of assumptions about library practices without consulting the library, creating inconsistent messaging and more work for the library. After some advocacy from the library, these issues were largely ameliorated by the campus simply linking to the library's service page rather than trying to restate information about library offerings.

The lack of institutional support for ensuring the health and well-being of all persons in the building prompted library faculty to petition SSU's cabinet to close the building. On March 20, 2020, two days after the Sonoma County health officer ordered a shelter-in-place,[4] library faculty sent a letter to the university president and provost—patterned after similar statements at other CSU libraries—strongly urging the closure of the library building as long as shelter-in-place directives remained. Aside from outlining plans for continuing service in a remote capacity, our letter cited as a rationale the undue burdens placed on campus populations with the least amount of leverage, namely students and library employees. Indeed, the letter ended with a distinct denunciation of the campus plan as one that propagated disparities, stating

> We pride ourselves on supporting those within our communities who are often overlooked and underserved. We recognize that the students who would continue to use our facilities during this time constitute our most vulnerable populations. However, we refuse to perpetuate further inequities by upholding the university's current stance requiring

> vulnerable students to use shared facilities and forcing them to weigh their and their families' safety against their grades.

Remaining open meant putting at risk those employees and students without further recourse—soliciting employees to choose between their livelihood and their wellness and students to prioritize their education above their health. Instead of supporting these scenarios for the sake of access and casting the library as a savior for those interested in using the facilities, library faculty refused campus administration. Rejecting the role of library savior necessitates that service delivery first focus on internal capacity, resisting the pressure to promise a library solution. While emergencies certainly heighten the urgency to respond and relieve, libraries must strike a healthy balance between timely reaction and taking time to lessen the gap between expectations and the complexity of outcomes. By enacting our stated commitment to equity while exercising our privileges as a largely tenured or tenure-track faculty to advocate for those without the same influence and protections, we framed our refusal to offer in-person services as equity over access, which proved compelling enough for campus administrators to close the library building as of March 25.

The rapid initial measures taken to protect public safety proved prescient in light of the ensuing closures and intermittent re-closures adopted by libraries across the country, as well as the subsequent mass gathering guidelines established at state and federal levels. In addition to bringing our library into prevailing best practices, the closure of our library's physical doors hastened the opening of other, remote opportunities. The library team immediately shifted to the planning and adoption of remote reference, contactless borrowing, and virtual instruction services. Moreover, framing the library's closure as a means of protecting our most vulnerable populations necessitated a conscientious, prioritized effort toward replacing in-person access for those most impacted by lack of access to our physical resources. Refusing to acquiesce to the university's planned response allowed the library to develop an equitable and student-focused approach.

Leveraging Connections to Enact Boundaries

Responding to the building closure, the library quickly adapted to providing innovative, off-site services to accommodate changing user needs. Among these was the rollout of a laptop mailing program to connect students dispersed across California with the tools necessary to complete online coursework. This project entailed reconfiguring our pool of more than 100 MacBook laptops (from either in-house instruction or short-term circulation pools) for semester-long use. Given the immediacy of digital learning support further exacerbated by unavailability of in-person library technologies, the library laptop lending program was more of an impromptu, on-the-spot process as opposed to the more methodical, slow bureaucratic planning normally reserved for launching library initiatives. As a result, policies, workflows, marketing, and logistics were developed concurrently with the rollout of the program.

Enacting boundaries proved essential in getting to a decisive space. Early on, the small internal working group tasked with overseeing the library's emergency laptop delivery program refused certain user groups in an effort to conserve resources for those deemed most in need. First, our task force determined that only students would be eligible to receive a laptop loan, thereby declining to fill technology access gaps among faculty and staff. As further demands on library technology arose—including those from junior college students in the region, supervisors looking to support telework, faculty seeking equipment for student research assistants, students requiring technology for non-curricular purposes, and so on—we further narrowed eligibility only to students currently enrolled in SSU courses requiring technology for course-related learning.

The evolution of the emergency program's eligibility criteria reflects the largely improvised nature of any disaster response. Yet it also reveals the nature of disaster planning as a largely local matter, requiring flexible solutions that can be properly tailored or pivoted to address cultural, regional, and community considerations. A strong sense of institutional identity and values can also ease the process of saying no when establishing or managing emergency services. Our student-focused, course-bound eligibility parameters aligned well with the library's strong identity as a teaching organization whose collections and service models already prioritized curricular support and student learning first, above faculty research.

Additionally, the strong culture of university service and strategic campus partnerships intentionally cultivated by SSU's library faculty as part of our liaison role allowed us to anticipate that student learning would likely be left out of campus considerations for remote technology, bringing clarity to decisions about the purpose and mission of the library technology lending program and eligibility criteria. Prior to the pandemic, SSU had not attempted to comprehensively survey technology access across campus. The library lacked such local empirical data; yet given our service positions in relevant committees, we understood that campus information technology (IT) likely did not envision student technology fulfillment as part of its central mission and anticipated that IT would instead allocate much of its efforts toward outfitting and supporting employees for telework. In this way, embedded librarianship in campus governance helped inform and bolster our decision-making around the core value of equity, identifying students as the user group with the highest level of unmet needs during the coming months.

Faculty status for librarians ultimately allowed us to proactively place ourselves in governance positions and participate in conversations that likely otherwise would have taken place without our being able to advocate for those most likely to be left out of the equation. Our limited faculty librarian cohort necessitates that we be quite selective in our service commitments, opting for committees focused on administrative policies and programs as opposed to advisory bodies or curricular matters. Our pre-pandemic placement of library representatives on high-level governance groups proved to be an effective strategy in helping shape our own crisis response within the library. Beyond simply using these service commitments as opportunities for gathering information, librarians also used our committee platforms to be transparent about library emergency measures, share challenges and obstacles in supplying provisional services, mediate the gap between

Student Affairs and Academic Affairs via our liminal position as an academic unit with a student-oriented service model, and ultimately advocate for equitable, long-term planning around student technology support.

A community-focused approach to emergency preparedness, then, entails cultivating a seat at the table before the crisis hits, building rapport with community stakeholders, and demonstrating the library's value and expertise in joint activities and non-LIS contexts—all prior to the onset of an emergency.

Opting for Restorative over Broad Access

Saying no to equipment requests from faculty, staff, and community to instead prioritize student needs reflected the scarcity mentality that should be integral in any library's emergency response. While "serving all" and "equity of treatment" are common messages across library institutions, crises often create contexts where deliberately providing access to some while refusing service to others is, in fact, the more equity-minded path. With limited capacities and supplies, libraries must make intentional choices to allocate resources to their most vulnerable users, even if that may be at the expense of other user cohorts. The SSU library found itself in this very situation when launching our emergency technology lending program.

Where the library had previously provided a larger number of short-term laptop loans and served a more expansive patron pool, circulating our limited number of laptops on a long-term basis rendered obsolete our previous definition of equity. The campus closure and the wide diffusion of our student population to their places of origin during remote instruction meant we could no longer provide a larger quantity and faster turnaround of loans via shorter checkout periods. In reimagining equity in our new contexts, we shifted from an inclusive service model with higher volume to a triage approach focused on high-impact, user-targeted service. Rather than asking "How can we better serve?" or "Whom are we not serving?" our focus turned to questions such as "How many can we serve?" and "Whom should we serve first?"

Thus, we arrived at a measure of equity that shifted from equal distribution to restorative access—that is, centering those users at the far edges of social privilege. At the onset of the emergency laptop delivery program, we introduced a priority period in which under-served students would be able to request laptops before the general student population. This priority mechanism relied on sharing an unpublished link to the online request form with Student Affairs departments specifically dedicated to serving undocumented, first-generation, low-income, Latinx, foster, and disabled students. Rollout of this strategy benefited from relationships and strategic infusion of librarians across campus committees prior to the pandemic: One librarian was the chair of the Student Affairs Committee, while another had cultivated an informal liaison relationship with cocurricular campus units. In this way, the library pivoted from a more traditional sense of equity—that is, access for the masses—to service delivery that contributes to countering prevailing hierarchies of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, physical ability, and citizenship. This approach proved particularly salient during a pandemic that exacerbated and laid bare these very inequalities.

Yet even among these priority student populations, saying no was still necessary to sustainably improve access to library technology during a time when so much was unknown about the longevity of pandemic measures. For example, the library limited the priority loan period to this underserved constituency to two weeks only, after which requests were opened up to the remainder of eligible students. Another boundary enacted was to limit loans and require students to return their laptops at the end of the term, without exception. While this return mandate allowed library personnel to conduct repairs and system reimaging necessary for longer term circulation, it also allowed for more frequent circulation to a broader range of students. Though a remnant of the broad access mentality, limiting laptops to a single-semester loan bridged our previous model of broad service to the more restorative focus of our emergency lending program.

Predictably, the library faced some pushback in the face of these restrictions, albeit relatively infrequent and restrained in nature, including students requesting renewals for subsequent semesters and entities serving underrepresented students wanting to extend the priority request period. However, library measures proactively anticipated and ameliorated concerns, including prepaid mail return slips to eliminate barriers for end-of-semester returns, as well as early and consistent communications regarding priority requests. Ultimately, political capital formed from our relationship building with students and student-serving departments prior to the pandemic enabled us to generally obtain buy-in around prohibitory policies and ease instances when the library chose to say no.

Rejecting Library Saviorism

In addition to our laptop lending program, the library partnered with campus stakeholders to facilitate additional technology lending programs, including Wi-Fi hot spots and noise-cancelling headsets. While the headsets were a library initiative, the hot spot program was managed by IT—at the insistence of the library. The library also embarked on measures to support faculty in their delivery of online learning, namely the introduction of emergency digitization services in lieu of physical reserves. While each of these new services presented its own unique challenges, one emergency initiative owes its relative success over the other in large part to the mentality adopted by the library: one of pragmatism over saviorism. Indeed, our approach to the laptop program is revealing of this tactic. Our decision to pivot our laptop lending program for a finite period of time was ultimately shaped with what was feasible under current conditions rather than what was desired by the university. Rather than promise a long-term solution to the digital divide and scramble to launch a new permanent service, the SSU library instead offered a makeshift program that was functional yet imperfect: a winning combination for the rapid response required. In offering a stopgap only, the library largely met a major need, conserved resources for other emergency programs, and bought the university some valuable time for arriving at a wider, more sustainable solution to the digital divide on campus. On the whole, our emergency programs were more fully realized when the library clearly voiced reluctance and inserted itself in a provisional capacity, rather than offering solutions that cast the library in a savior light.

In defining library saviorism, it is useful to draw on the work of Fobazi Ettarh and her concept of vocational awe.[5] Ettarh describes how a prevailing narrative around academic librarians has emerged: one that portrays them as "priest and savior" whose work is to singularly uphold and defend age-old institutions of democracy, freedom, access, lifelong learning, and the civic good. This savior archetype contributes to a "vocational awe": a "set of ideas, values, and assumptions" librarians hold about themselves that contributes to their aggrandized self-image. Notions about the profession then portray the library as an inherently sacred site of societal improvement and librarianship as a divine calling. While vocational awe insulates the library and its attendant profession from critique or reproach, it does so at the expense of the individual worker, who is perpetually held to an insatiable occupational "purity test." Therein lies the trap of vocational awe: veneration of the institution itself ultimately leads to low morale, depreciation, and burnout among library professionals. Altruism and self-sacrifice characterize the labor of the individual librarian, whereas self-preservation is left behind in fulfillment of our hallowed mission. Going above and beyond to serve the needs of our users is not as innocuous as it first appears, then. As Schlesselman-Tarango notes, under the guise of service, we diminish our users as "deficient, inherently needy, or in need of saving," which renders the library-patron relationship lopsided, denies the agency of our users, frames the librarian as the evangelizing missionary, and activates the vicious cycle of exhaustion and stress so prevalent within our profession.[6]

The urge to promise beyond our means, a common symptom of library saviorism, hindered both the hot spot and headset lending programs and, in the case of the building and facilities, could have had detrimental effects if the library had attempted to stay physically open. In the cases of the hot spots and the headphones, the library was unable to resist this temptation, resulting in inefficiencies in the program rollouts, user confusion, and even failure to launch, as in the case of noise-cancelling headsets.

With the fall 2020 semester about to begin and students clamoring for support, tremendous pressure existed to reassure students that help was on the way. Almost as soon as funding was identified, administrators asked that we implement programs and create request forms. Yet in respect to both headsets and hot spots, we had to contend with supply chain and purchasing issues that were and remain endemic. Despite SSU's notoriously idiosyncratic procurement process and the broader uncertainty of supply chains, request forms went live on the library's website before the hot spots or headsets had been purchased. As students began populating these request forms, we continued to face significant setbacks in locating suppliers, heightened by pandemic-induced demand spikes and shipping delays. As a result, we spent considerable time responding to student queries about their request status or arrival times for sought-after equipment.

While IT eventually procured hot spots and delivered them to students, the library was unable to acquire noise-cancelling headphones and deliver the goods on the student requests that were, in hindsight, prematurely solicited. In retrospect, particularly during a crisis, it's far easier to say no at the outset when solutions are not certain than it is to say yes and then have to retract it. By going above and beyond to provide service in the face of anticipated pitfalls, libraries contribute to the fallacy that systemic problems can be sustainably solved with singular, and not multifaceted, solutions.

Another major failure of library saviorism is the concealment of those problems we seek to mitigate. When a library steps up to offer solutions, it must not obscure associated costs, potential pitfalls, or an issue's intricacies from key stakeholders. For the SSU library, perhaps the use of equipment waiting lists most clearly demonstrates this lesson. Funding for the hot spot lending program covered IT's purchase of 180 devices and a one-year service plan for each. IT did not plan to provide access beyond the 2020–2021 academic year, uncertain that more devices or plans could be purchased if needed. It was suggested that we could utilize a waiting list for the request form so that if additional hot spots became available, those requests could be filled. The headset lending program also incorporated a waiting list while the library futilely shopped around for equipment.

We strongly advised against using waiting lists, suggesting that instead we institute or reopen a request form and market availability after acquiring the necessary devices. We had two concerns: that students would take from the existence of a waiting list the hope that devices would become available soon and their request was likely to be filled, and that campus stakeholders would come to believe from the continued availability of a request form that student needs for adequate internet access or other technology were being adequately addressed. Despite our concerns, the waiting lists were enabled. Eventually, we had to notify students on the initial list and in the wait-listed group that headset supplies were unavailable. And, as anticipated, because the request form for hot spots and its lengthy waiting list remained live on the library website long after all hot spots had been distributed, a prevailing false narrative began to emerge on campus that student connectivity needs had been amply met. Waiting lists in this context, then, only served to set up an unfulfillable expectation, sow confusion among patrons, and insulate ongoing student requests on a spreadsheet restricted to a handful of operational personnel and largely neglected once the supply of devices ran dry.

Our wait-list system attempted to expedite lengthy pre-circulation processes (i.e., procurement, delivery, systems integration, technical services, and funding additional equipment). But in this case, waiting lists presented the appearance of activity and momentum in service delivery while library personnel scrambled behind the scenes. The pursuit of seamless service hid the expansive work of creating and sustaining library lending. However, this emphasis on frictionless service ultimately hurt our users as much as it set up our organization for failure and diverted attention away from the seemingly solved problem via assurances of a forthcoming solution.

Though the library limited its involvement in the hot spot program, we did partner with IT to help provide a more consistent user experience, finding a middle ground. Given that students and faculty already identified the library as a source of technology support, the library hosted the request form on our site and worked with IT to develop a process that aligned with the laptop lending program and thus would be somewhat familiar to students. After some negotiation, we were able to draw firm boundaries around ultimate responsibility for hot spot management.

In this way, the library rejected the savior ethos to instead opt for a secondary, supporting role to IT's lead. Beyond our consultative work at the program launch, the library's meaningful contributions to hot spot lending have largely occurred on the sidelines, via continued

advocacy within faculty governance for extending the service beyond its one-time, emergency scope and pushing for an institutional solution to bridging the digital divide.

That is not to say that libraries should not experiment, pivot, and potentially expand service during times of crisis. If a library identifies sufficient capacity and resources to address a pressing need that was either surfaced or worsened by a present crisis, it should move forward with a healthy dose of skepticism and hesitancy. The SSU library found itself better positioned when it stepped into a service arena with the expectation at the outset that we would eventually step out of that emergency function once the crisis had abated. Our emergency digitization service illustrates this process.

When we closed our building, we were acutely aware that online learning would require renewed reliance on digital copies of print materials. Given the pressing needs of disciplinary faculty while pivoting to online environments, we opted to provide a more rapid, makeshift response rather than seek a long-term, more sustainable alternative. At the outset, we also communicated definitive boundaries regarding practical and copyright constraints and offered information via virtual workshops and targeted messaging dedicated, in part, to providing insight on how the library was managing copyright compliance under this new paradigm.[7]

We also successfully emphasized the impermanence of the effort through consistent branding as an emergency service that would sunset eventually (later determined to be spring 2022). The success of our crisis response with respect to offering short-term digitization largely rested on our ability to precipitously look ahead and identify an exit point. Beyond simply filling a need, we were able to communicate our limited capacity and gained valuable insight into an uncharted service area; a path we intend to investigate post-pandemic when our organization is better positioned to consider an established digital reserve system.

Maintaining Lines of Communication in Crisis

Libraries have long been hampered by our impulse to be all things to all users, to repeatedly demonstrate our worth to our users and administrators, and to advocate for our position in the academy. Saying yes is the easy response and certainly appeals to our users, but as Douglas notes in her plea to push back against "library magic," "We need to get into complex explanations and uncomfortable conversations and we need to assume that our students and faculty can handle it."[8] For a no to be successful, however, uncomfortable conversations cannot end discussion completely. When further communication shuts down, the siloed decision-making that seems to permeate academia fills the void. The library's decision to purchase smart lockers, such as those used to allow secure pickup of packages held at an apartment complex, for contactless pickup exemplifies how such situations might occur and play out.

Smart lockers were proposed early during pandemic response planning as a means to offer safe contactless pickup services. The library's COVID response working group,

charged with developing protocols and establishing priorities evaluated the proposal. (Although a number of the CSU libraries had implemented or were in the process of implementing a contactless pickup program via lockers, our library had not previously considered this technology.) After much research and discussion, the group recommended against the purchase due to bureaucratic challenges with the procurement process, the immediate and ongoing costs, uncertainties about workflow implementation and technology compatibility, and concerns about the time line.

We communicated our no and our reasoning to decision makers; however, the locker project moved forward without further consultation with the working group or the stakeholders responsible for implementation. Although sound reasons existed for exploring the use of lockers to facilitate contactless pickup, our concerns about this project have been borne out. More than a year after their purchase and weeks after the library reopened, the lockers were finally operational and thus were of little benefit in our pandemic response.

The peril of the no also was evident in another decision-making process. Libraries walk a thin line between gathering data that can inform and improve our practice and protecting user information and privacy.[9] The desire to demonstrate our worth through data collection goes hand in hand with the impulse to say yes to users, and quantitative data is a highly prized means of communicating this value. As a library, we are aware of the potential for harm in our data practices. While ensuring that library services meet our goals and user needs, we must also be mindful to not place additional burdens on our students.

Our faculty status within the university and our focus on programs and services in the library give us a unique perspective on both university priorities and student needs. As noted earlier, the library faculty are active in governance, have strong relationships with disciplinary faculty, and work closely with student services and cocurricular programs. As a result, we are attuned to both student and faculty concerns as well as administrative priorities and initiatives.[10] Our laptop lending program filled a critical, urgent need in the pandemic crisis and was a clear success for the library, and the program offered an obvious opportunity to quantify our impact on student success. Lee, Jeong, and Kim found that significant numbers of students suffered from moderate to severe stress, anxiety, or depression and that these experiences were most common in vulnerable populations.[11] Indeed, our laptop lending program was designed to alleviate some of the stressors by providing access to adequate technology.

But despite ample data about the laptop program, a further survey to provide data for use in garnering future support for the program was suggested. While we consider the opportunity to gather qualitative feedback from students as a chance to learn more about student needs during the pandemic, as well as what was and was not working in our laptop lending program, multiple stakeholders across campus had expressed concern that students were being over-surveyed. Library faculty within the laptop lending working group noted that such a survey would be counter to student interests at that time. Nevertheless, a survey was created with no further input from the faculty and disseminated to all students who had received a laptop. The resulting data provided no new information or insights yet undermined a library and university commitment to streamlining communication and preserving student bandwidth during a period of crisis.

Meanwhile, the library was particularly successful in forging clarity around our capacity to support hot spot lending in large part due to consistent, clear communication across campus. From the outset, the library pushed back on any suggestion that we take on the hot spot program as a whole. While laptop lending was a logical extension of the significant services and technology we offered prior to COVID—which also included desktop computers, printing and scanning capacity, and extensive Wi-Fi access—hot spot loans and the technology support required were not. We have long advocated that university IT take a more prominent role in supporting student technology needs in addition to faculty and staff support. The issues that have surfaced during the pandemic have highlighted the need for a holistic and university-wide approach. Libraries must be protective of their labor and capacity whenever considering mounting additional programs, particularly those that come without additional funding or resources, and communicate that to campus stakeholders. These examples highlight the need to maintain communication with stakeholders across the library and across campus, especially when disagreement about priorities exists.

Looking Forward

The SSU library faculty are considering how our response to the COVID crisis and recurring crises of wildfire threats will inform our future practice. We recognize that the normal structures of communication in the university, which tend to be both hierarchical and siloed, are ineffective and often detrimental in crisis response. To respond nimbly in a crisis, units across campus must be prepared to manage laterally in addition to managing up and down. Our experiences in the library responding to a succession of crises reinforced the value of our liminal role in the university structure as both faculty members and service providers. The pandemic and the preceding disasters highlighted the importance of aligning our service work and relationships with our own strategic goals and priorities. Moreover, present and other crises reveal the tangible harm caused by an ecosystem that praises library professionals who provide an excess of service despite insufficient means while failing to criticize the organizations demanding these very excesses. Moving forward, we are committed to using our relative power as faculty to draw attention to and disrupt these lopsided expectations.

Beyond the lessons of flexibility, collaboration, self-advocacy, and communication in uncertain times, the pandemic has foregrounded structural inequities and gaps within the university, particularly in the area of student technology. Though the landscape of higher education today requires consistent and reliable access to a wide range of technologies, the approach to providing that access has oftentimes been haphazard. The COVID crisis has revealed the need for a coherent, comprehensive, and sustainable system to support student technology in the university. Our experience providing a bridge between student needs and university expectations has demonstrated that such a program is beyond the library's current resources. We continue to both advocate strongly for the university to take on this issue and reject calls to convert our temporary program to a permanent service.

While advocating for student access to technology, we have also identified a need to push back against many of the surveillance technologies that have been hastily adopted

during the pandemic. We are aware that, as the university considers a pivot to increased online instruction post-pandemic, such efforts will likely come with an increased use of this type of surveillance. Plagiarism detectors, proctoring software, and indeed the learning management system all raise significant privacy and data collection concerns in addition to issues of bias, the unequal impact on marginalized student groups, and the exacerbation of inequities already present in the system. As conversations and consciousness around technological surveillance emerge on our campus, librarians are bracing to enter these dialogues and amplify our practiced noes on behalf of our affected students.

Finally, we recognize that, for our institution and others contending with climate change, crisis response is the new normal. Although the circumstances of each new challenge may differ, our experiences have highlighted for us that our mission and our core values do not change. We have recognized the importance of setting boundaries and saying no while working to maintain communication. Going forward we are prepared to respond in ways that support our students, promote equity, and make clear that we are neither saviors nor magicians.

Notes

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