News from New Brunswick

News from Mount Allison

Laura Landon, Head, Access Services, R. P. Bell Library

In the ever-relevant words of the Grateful Dead, "what a long, strange trip it's been." And—as the constant and continually changing flow of Covid news shows—it's far from over.

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Libraries & Archives

Mount Allison's main library re-opened to front-line staff in mid-June, although the building remained closed to patrons. Most staff and librarians continued to work from home during the summer unless their work required them to be in the building.

"Curbside" pick-up, which operated from the library lobby, launched on June 17. Patrons could place orders three ways: e-mail; a customized LibGuides form; or the Novanet catalogue. Upon receiving a request, staff fetched the book, checked it out to the patron, and placed it in the library lobby for pickup on one of two designated drop-in pick-up times or by appointment. The service was an immediate success, with around 550 items circulated between its launch and Aug. 31. It was low-tech and easy to administer.

September Re-Opening Brings a Changed Library

July and August brought planning—and more planning—for September. The list is one with which every library is now familiar: Plexiglas; arrows and signage; hand sanitizer; limited seating; and contact tracing. Re-arranging library furniture to comply with COVID-19 safety protocols also involved a little humour.

Librarian Elizabeth Millar and Head of Access Services Jason MacDonald joust with the library's two-metre pool noodles
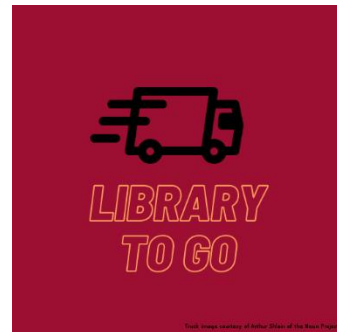
"I bought pool noodles and attached a yardstick to their ends, so each noodle measures two metres," says University Librarian Dianne Keeping. "It's an easy way to test distances—and it's provided opportunities for a bit of laughter amid the serious work of pandemic planning."

To mediate access to the building's spaces and seats, the library subscribed to Springshare's LibCal booking software, with its Covid-inspired add-on, LibCal Seats. Book a Seat, which Mount Allison Libraries launched on Sept. 4, allows patrons to book space by the hour or in three-and four-hour slots up to a week in advance. At present, The R.P. Bell Library has roughly 100 spaces on three floors and the Music Library has 14. All seats are at least two metres apart. The stacks remain closed and seats on the R.P. Bell Library's second and third floors, which house the majority of the stacks, are not available. For now, access to the libraries is restricted to Mount Allison students, faculty, and staff.

People needing books or other library materials can request them through their librarians or the Library to Go service—an expanded version of curbside pick-up, which now operates from the library's entrance area near the Access Services desk. Patrons do not need to book a seat or time to pick up books, to use the printers, or to get take-out from the Library's Flying Bean Café. Access to the building beyond these quick pick-up areas requires a seat booking, and patrons must check in at a new check-in desk run by Access Services staff.

With a mix of in-person and online classes at Mount Allison this fall, it's unclear what demand for the library's facilities will be. Services such as reference help remain online for the term, and building hours have been somewhat reduced.

 "We expect we will need to modify things as we go along and as we hear from patrons. The main thing we want people to know is we're here to help them and we'll do everything we can to get them the resources they need," says Dr. Keeping.

Staff News

Jason MacDonald is the Head of Access Services and Interlibrary Loans for the 2020-21 academic year. Jason has worked as the library's Interlibrary Loans Coordinator since 2016.

Laura Landon is filling in as a Public Services Librarian for the 2020-21 academic year while librarians Jeff Lilburn and Anita Cannon are on sabbatical leaves. Laura has worked as Head of Access Services since 2015 and has served in several librarian replacement roles at Mount Allison since 2013.