

News from New Brunswick

News from Mount Allison

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Library Services in the Time of COVID: The Story from Mount Allison

The COVID-19 lockdown at Mount Allison University began with a snow day on St. Patrick's Day. There was no snow, but the swiftly moving coronavirus caused the University to declare a storm day while administrative and academic departments scrambled to figure out what to do next.



"In many ways, eight weeks has felt like eight years," says University Librarian Dianne Keeping, looking back on the ever-changing landscape of the pandemic.

In the first week, busy academic libraries faced unique challenges. Do we remain open to the public? How do we lend and receive? Can we provide interlibrary loans? What about course reserves? What kinds of copyright issues do we need to consider about digital lending?

On March 18, some of our Access Services staff with experience in public libraries set up a quick curbside pick-up system in the library lobby, wrapping books with coloured paper and writing patrons' last names on the spines.

Then, on the evening of March 19, the province of New Brunswick answered some of our logistical questions by declaring a state of emergency. We would not be open to the public. Staff would be allowed to enter the building for emergency purposes and essential work only. We needed to move online.

Librarians contacted students and faculty to let them know they weren't being abandoned. "Even though the library is closed," one message of reassurance read, "I wanted to let you know that



Public Services Librarian Elizabeth Millar providing Live-Chat reference services from her home office.

I'm still working and available to help you with your research." They also got to work on a LibGuide listing available services and resources, and packed up materials they would need to work from home—including print copies of citation manuals, "just in case."

Next came setting up VPN access for managers, ensuring staff had the appropriate computer equipment and Internet connections to work from home—and quickly transitioning from in-office library work to remote e-work.



Library Technician Roseanna Terrio's home office, where cataloguing assistants Sophie Mae and Jasmine Grace lend a paw.

Our newly minted e-librarians and e-staff rose to the occasion. Technical Services staff shone as they worked tirelessly to set up new e-books, in many cases providing same-day access. They also learned the joys of cataloguing from home, in some cases, with helpful new co-workers.

Eight weeks into the pandemic, we continue to learn and adapt. One thing is abundantly clear: Library services are vital and libraries can adapt quickly.

"It's been a difficult year, but instead of dwelling on the negative, we must focus on the positive," says UL Dianne Keeping. "We

were able to pull together in an unprecedented worldwide emergency to help our students and faculty finish this roller coaster term. We have food, shelter, health care, the support—albeit virtual—of our loved ones and our colleagues, and an ample supply of toilet paper. With a clear vision of our purpose, patience, kindness, and a little good humour, we'll get through this."