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Georgia Librarians Working from Home during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Georgia Librarians Working from Home during the COVID-19 Pandemic

By Stephanie Bennett, Maxine Hines Chriszt, Jolene Cole, Marie Day, Chelsee Dickson, Karen Doster-Greenleaf, Rachel Evans, Susan Foster, Sarah Grace Glover, Kristy Greene, Karen J. Harris, Austina Jordan, Gail Morton, Scott Pieper, Shannon Plummer, Judy Reardon, Sala Shierling, Gail A. Spears, and Gina Viarrael; compiled by Virginia Feher

In Mid-March of 2020, libraries across the United States began closing in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, sending employees home. To document this period in time, Georgia library employees contributed short essays on their experiences with working from home, including how they continued to provide library services and resources to their users.

Stephanie Bennett

*Assistant Department Head of Access Services
Georgia Gwinnett College*

“Does your email ever do the weird thing where it says you have email, but nothing is new in the inbox?” It was business day 41; well past the initial expectation of being out for two weeks remotely. My husband, whom I shared an office (correction: I now shared his office with him), grunted in the negative, IBM products didn’t do that. I rolled my eyes; I was about to throw my laptop with flaky Microsoft Outlook out the windows (see what I did there?).

Working remotely was nothing new for my husband; he had been doing so for the past 10 years. When SARS-COV-2 dropped, we were suddenly an entire family working and going to school from home. While we both worked, our first-grade daughter completed her digital learning content. Oddly enough, my husband

was perhaps the most uprooted (quite literally) in all these changes. His normal workspace became mine, and his days of having the house totally to himself during the week were no more.

When it was announced that instruction would continue remotely through the summer, I really worried for our students. This once-a-century event had completely turned their lives upside down. The ones on the path to commencement were pushed back to an undisclosed date, and the number of them possibly now completely without a job was concerning. Thankfully, the urgency of the problem was not lost on my supervisor. After approval from our dean, we

drafted a successful proposal for our students to work remotely.

Prior to the move to remote work, access services (circulation and information commons), reference, and the security students moved to a single service point. We were at a point where all parties could do the

circulation duties, but teaching reference was a bit more time consuming. We were nowhere close to ready for students to begin providing reference services prior to the move to remote work. Through very fortunate kismet, my department head and I had fuel for our argument to keep our students working.



Our students were successfully able to work remotely by training them for the high impact practice of providing reference services. Some of their work thus far has included reviewing Credo for its usability for when we introduce it to the larger student body in the fall, and weekly meetings to discuss learned content. They wrote weekly reflections based off one of the guided reflection questions presented from [IOWA Grow](#). Some of these reflections were even shared with our provost as students were able to explain how their current job working with us in the library prepared them with flexibility and remote skills in the workplace. This work has been very rewarding and groundbreaking.

The pandemic has forced so many to work outside of their comfort zone, and the need for flexibility and willingness to take on new tasks basically became inevitable for everyone regardless of job or employment status. Just like our students, the library staff also needed to adjust how they approached work.

I can see how a remote environment can be hard for the more extroverted of individuals. Working remotely is all about how you control it. Control your priorities, control your work life balance, and control your mental health. Set appropriate boundaries, and remote work is manageable by anyone, but that's just my humble opinion. Control your remote experience; don't let the remote control you!

Maxine Hines Christ

Library Assistant

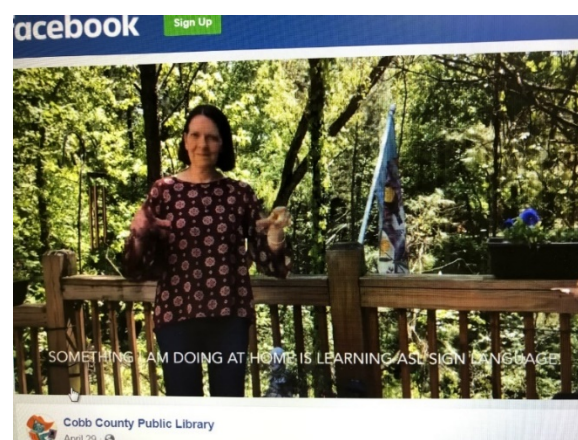
Cobb County Public Library System

The Cobb County Public Library System (CCPLS) has multiple online resources for our patrons, and we consistently incorporate information about those services when interacting with our patrons. However, I am embarrassed to admit that prior to COVID-19, I had not taken advantage of many of those terrific tools. When the sheltering in place order closed our physical doors, I completed one online course in

American Sign Language (ASL), and started ASL Level II, then used my new skills to help promote our online resources on social media by creating a short video in ASL!

My "second life" career as part-time staff in the children's department at CCPLS Charles D. Switzer Library is my dream job. I love engaging our youngest patrons, assisting students and parents, working with dedicated staff who genuinely care about our community, and handling the day-to-day library responsibilities, including shelving, organizing, and maintaining materials; issuing or renewing library cards; and checking out resources for patrons. All of it is both gratifying and fulfilling to me. So, when COVID-19 required the closure of the libraries, my dream job as I knew it came to a halt. The challenge for all of us: what could we do from home that would honor the mission of the library system and benefit our patrons and communities?

Fortunately, CCPLS is directed by creative leaders who quickly identified concrete ways for staff to contribute to our mission. Leadership teams organized book review rotations, virtual story times, and workforce enrichment webinars. Staff were "loaned" to essential county services such as Elections and Meals on Wheels. And all staff were encouraged to be creative while working from home. At Switzer Library, several staff members are fluent in Spanish, and I have seen how beneficial it is for ESOL patrons to have



someone who speaks their native tongue when utilizing library services. I remembered the ASL GALE online course that had caught my attention earlier in the year and thought it might be beneficial for our library to have someone who could communicate with our deaf patrons. I was not sure if I had the necessary technical skills for an online class, since the last time I was a student George H. W. Bush, Sr. was president, but I hoped for the best and registered. And it was amazing! The instructor communicated regularly with the class, the online materials were engaging and concise, and the discussions section of the class allowed students to interact with each other easily. Before long, I was trying to translate commercials on TV and cajoling my 17-year-old to allow me to teach him so I could practice.

I wanted to share my positive experience, so I asked my supervisor if I could create a short video promoting the GALE resources using ASL. After getting the go ahead, I wrote a short script using the vocabulary I learned in Level I class and some additional resources on the internet with ASL terminology specific to library services. I recorded a first draft, which both my GALE online instructor and a CCPLS librarian who is fluent in ASL reviewed for errors, then made the necessary corrections and recorded the final version.

I am excited to say that after the video posted on the CCPLS Facebook page, several people reached out to me about taking a GALE class. I am proud of our system for offering these services and look forward to the day when I can promote these resources in person again, and with complete enthusiasm. To see the video, follow this link: <https://www.facebook.com/cobbcountylibrary/videos/2741919542697607/>

Jolene Cole

*Instruction & Research Librarian, Associate Professor of Library Science
Georgia College and State University*

The COVID-19 Pandemic is one of the handfuls of times in history that librarians have experienced such a drastic and sudden change to how they deliver their services. Each of our pandemic experiences is different; we are facing a world that has changed before our eyes and altered the very nature of our lives.

As the instruction coordinator for the Russell Library at Georgia College and State University, my job has shifted to 100% remote work. I've had to learn to manage my usual job duties, homeschool a kindergartner, keep an insanely wild toddler contained, and I may also have picked one of the worst times ever to go back for my doctorate. On top of everything else, I am married to a first responder, which means

that our exposure to COVID-19 has been a constant strain on our family. We are continuously cleaning and disinfecting to keep our family safe, even at home. His physical safety is a more significant concern than usual, adding a great deal of stress to an already stressful situation.

However, at work, our instruction program was lucky enough to transition to a remote environment easily. During a regular semester, the majority of our work is conducting individual research consultations with

students, which we typically do in person with very few exceptions being online. With the new model, we were able to use our scheduling system to smoothly transition the meeting location to a student's preference for WebEx, Phone, or email. We continued our scheduled



consultations for the spring with minor to no interruptions. However, we did have a few in-person instruction sessions that were canceled or moved to WebEx.

Several librarians from our instruction team also took the time, during the pandemic, to create mini instructional videos from “evaluating information online” to “how to add students and faculty scholarship to our campus institutional repository.” These were short videos that we could pop into our social media accounts for easy access to students.

As we move forward, we will be encouraging faculty to schedule consultations in lieu of one-shot instruction for the fall semester. We will also be promoting our NimbleWise modules, which we can add to our learning management system. We are going to work on expanding our consultation program and continue to offer those services virtually to maintain social distancing. It will also provide us the opportunity to smoothly transition back to remote instruction if the need arises.

I will say transitioning my work environment to a work from home situation was probably the easiest part of this

pandemic. The process of re-adjusting our family’s routine, managing the anxiety of possible layoffs and furloughs, the concern for our health (physical and mental), and the overall raised strain of the pandemic has been the real taxing part of this new normal. As the universities and public libraries weigh their options on re-opening, I hope that we can find a

way forward safely with minimal interruptions for the sake of all of us and our students.

Marie Day, *Systems Librarian/Librarian Assistant Professor*

Chelsee Dickson, *Scholarly Communications Librarian/Librarian Assistant Professor*

Shannon Plummer, *Liaison Coordinator/Librarian Assistant Professor*

Judy Reardon, *Reference Coordinator/Librarian Assistant Professor*
Kennesaw State University

The authors started librarian positions at Kennesaw State University (KSU) just prior to and even during the pandemic shutdown. This collaborative essay reflects on their experiences as new hires during this time.

Chelsee Dickson sets the scene for us:

Think back to the very first day of your current job: the anticipation of meeting brand-new

coworkers; the excitement of laying eyes on your desk; the tingle of nerves when shaking hands with your supervisor. Now, push those feelings aside and make way for the new normal: working from home. I began



Clockwise from top left: Judy Reardon, Shannon Plummer, Chelsee Dickson, and Marie Day

my employment as the scholarly communications librarian in the middle of the COVID-19 Pandemic in a completely virtual setting. I expected all of the aforementioned feelings associated with beginning a new position, but instead I’ve swapped human coworkers for barking canines, professional slacks and heels for sweatpants and slippers,

and my as-of-yet unseen office in Sturgis Library for a semi-secluded spot in my own home.

Starting a job virtually is certainly not the same as stepping into a new position in real life. It's a bit awkward, surreal, and almost unheard of... prior to March 2020. I've been living in limbo on Microsoft Teams, attending virtual meetings and training sessions while wishing for normalcy in a sea of the uncertain. And now, to pivot again: returning to what was once considered a normal work environment while trying to recapture that feeling of wonder at the possibilities of all the untapped potential waiting for me in my new position.

Judy Reardon had two weeks on campus before returning home to telework:

A commonly used formula called the 70:20:10 model describes a practical training plan for new employees. It maintains that individuals learn 70% of useful job knowledge needed through on-the-job experience. Twenty percent comes from interaction with others and only 10% comes from studying, reading, and other educational events (such as webinars). This model makes sense to me, as I learn best by doing and collaborating.

Shifting to socially distant library services is an interruption, no matter how you view it. My primary assignment as reference coordinator involves daily management of reference services; however, all in-person reference was suspended. My training was limited to reading reference transaction logs, policies, and procedures. I found myself in the awkward position of trying to perform my job without having the hands-on experiences or face-to-face interactions that I prefer. I was disconnected from acquiring the unwritten knowledge of this new culture, and its processes didn't always make sense without context.

In a new workplace, even a veteran librarian such as myself can feel lost. Fortunately, colleagues anticipated the need to over-guide

me as we moved forward in this new normal. Their patience in online communications has been a saving grace as I progressed beyond a sense of disorientation to one of familiarity and control.

Shannon Plummer was on campus for six weeks until COVID-19 interrupted daily life:

As a recent MLIS graduate, I was especially grateful for the opportunity to serve as the new liaison coordinator, effective February 1, 2020. My primary goal in this new position is to focus on building relationships by meeting with people and attending as many events as possible, to position myself (and the library) as an active listener within the KSU community. In July of 2019, the KSU Library implemented a new approach to their liaison program, creating collegiate teams tasked with evaluating our community's needs. Creating more communication opportunities and promoting greater cohesion within the teams was my top priority. Six weeks in, the COVID-19 Pandemic made my new mission quite challenging.

To maintain interconnection within the collegiate teams while working remotely, I created many Microsoft Team channels for each college/department as well as specific to the roles of outreach, instruction, and selection liaisons. The channels include relevant research guides, college web pages, events, and most importantly, a place for support and collaboration. Despite the current restrictions, I am grateful I was able to find a way to address one of the challenges of the liaison program.

Despite all these interruptions and challenges, Marie Day found a balance within this social distance:

I have been fortunate that most of my work can be accomplished remotely, as long as I have a good internet connection. When I started as systems librarian and moved to live closer to the university, I had a few obstacles to overcome—such as a lack of home office space

and internet connectivity. On the plus side, I'd had two weeks of time at the library, so when later using email or chat, I often knew who I was talking to on the other end. Although I feel a little behind the curve in getting to know my coworkers and the campuses, overall, I am still making progress in learning where I fit into the organization.

As the stay-at-home period lengthened, I grew to appreciate my colleagues' reminders to step outside daily. I really enjoyed the nice weather, the break from so much screen time, and air that was fresher than usual due to a lack of air pollution. It underscored for me that the exciting work being done to reduce pollutants is a consideration for the good of our whole society. In comparison, libraries have always seen, acknowledged, and acted for the good of our communities. No matter where we are located, it's good to be part of that work.

Like Marie, we're all grateful to have jobs and be part of the Kennesaw State University Library System. We have bonded through this shared experience and now use an online cohort chat to connect, support, and grow as professionals together. We're ready to return to campus and make it work.

Rachel Evans

*Metadata Services & Special Collections
Librarian
University of Georgia Law Library*

In reviewing my own social media posts and photos, as well as professional blogging and inter-office communications since our library's COVID-19 closure in mid-March, it was eye opening to look at my own timeline and the personal transformation that has taken place. The third week of March, I was organizing teleworking tools for my colleagues, giphy messaging them in real-time in Slack, and excitedly encouraging everyone around me to join in to the tune of "this isn't so bad, it is actually quite fun!"

By April, I had set several major projects in motion to clean up tons of catalog and repository records, OCR hundreds of files from our earliest digitized special collections, and finish a massive harvesting of digital-born photos from our school website to archive. I was also submitting way too many proposals for articles I hoped to write or presentations to virtual conferences I hoped to attend. At this point, I was still feeling like teleworking was a blessing in disguise—giving me the time I always wanted, but never had until now, to focus on starting and finishing projects. I had less unplanned interruption from colleagues (they had to schedule with me in advance!) and less face-to-face meetings.

Then came May, and the looming threat of budget cuts coupled with the complete uncertainty of what fall 2020 would bring proved to be a bigger stress than I was prepared for. Less face-to-face meetings spiraled out of control fast, and translated to more Zoom hours than I thought was humanly possible. This left me drained, both mentally and physically. Home office interruptions proved far more frustrating as time wore on. I found myself searching for more ways to relax and trying to schedule that too. I experimented with more mindfulness techniques, reading as many books on these subjects as I could, and ultimately disconnecting from social media. It was the one part of my new fully online life that I could remove.



In June, several conferences and webinars started eating away at more and more of my work schedule. There were never enough hours in the day. I would spend several days in a row going from one Zoom room to the next, with occasional WebEx, GoToMeeting, or Skype's sprinkled in between. I live in the country, with shaky internet. The best solution for rural connection was hot spotting from my cell phone, eating up my family's data plan before the cycle finished every single month. Roaming around the house, my home-office sometimes moved several times in a day depending on the random spot with the best cell signal or the activity of family members.

Throughout the closure, I would go into the building one morning a week to change our catalog's physical backup tape and do some ILS work I could only access from the library. Over the months it was harder and harder to get it all done in a single morning, and before I knew it I was behind. What happened to the time? Where did it go? It felt like there was so much of it, and during the day it would drag on endlessly—yet here I am writing this essay and wondering how the past five months went by so fast. My energy is zapped, and although I am happy to have been very productive, I'm exhausted and more worried than ever. If there is one thing I have learned, it is that I need to practice pacing myself. This experience has shifted my professional perspectives and personal priorities forever.

Karen Doster-Greenleaf

*Director of Research & Instructional Services
Kennesaw State University*

Amid the University System of Georgia (USG) university closures due to COVID-19, I received a career changing phone call. I was offered and accepted the position as director of Research and Instructional Services (RIS) at Kennesaw State University (KSU) Library System. I was thrilled by the offer, but my mind immediately started to race about what my transition would look like. I had just started to get a handle on

what working from home entailed in my previous position. Now I'd be starting all over, in addition to transitioning into a management position without any of the familiar face-to-face onboarding and training experiences I've learned to lean on. I would have to get to know KSU, its staff, and my new team virtually.

To help me put my best foot forward, I sought advice from several colleagues of mine who had transitioned to managing their teams online due to the pandemic. Two pieces of advice that came up often were, one, become familiar with whatever meeting/communication platform KSU was using—and QUICK; and two, set realistic expectations for myself. They reminded me that everyone was in a state of flux, and no one is going to expect me to be sprinting out of the gate on day one. A friend also recommended reading *The First 90 Days* by Michael Watkins to help establish a game plan. While the book is geared towards individuals making transitions in the corporate world, the core message was still applicable to my new role. It provided insight on how to structure a learning plan and prioritize what information was essential, how to identify cultural norms, and how to build a strong team and new networks.

Utilizing Microsoft 365®, especially SharePoint and Teams, as much as possible has been key to meeting some of these goals. In a pre-pandemic transition, I would have sought out a colleague to answer institutional questions rather than look for it in a library policy or standing document. In the virtual world I now found myself in, this was not possible. Instead, I took advantage of the library's repository of institutional knowledge via SharePoint, to build my knowledge base and get up to speed regarding library initiatives. This approach also afforded me the opportunity to take my time with the information, process it thoroughly, reflect, and determine new questions that would help me better understand my new team and library.

During my first month, establishing reliable lines of communication was vital. Thankfully, both the library and the RIS unit took full advantage of the multimodal Teams application. From using the Meeting Notes section to tracking weekly one-on-one meeting agendas, to having specialized Teams channels just for professional development suggestions, this robust usage helped make professional and personal connections possible. The RIS unit's group project Teams channels also provided me with the opportunity to familiarize myself with the unit's projects and their statuses without the need to set up time-consuming meetings.

While the process has seemed foreign and challenging at times, making this transition into my new role while working from home has pushed me to consider new ways of effectively operating and maintaining a library unit with minimal in-person contact. While not free from their own unique challenges, I believe that some of these adaptations can be used to make our work and our services better when I can finally return to campus.

Susan Foster

*Library Associate, Youth Services
Cobb County Public Library System, Charles D.
Switzer Library*

Imagine Your Story. That is the 2020 theme for the library Summer Reading Program. Could any of us have imagined this story we are living?

With much of the world shut down due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, many people have had to adjust to new ways of life and work. For the last five years, I have been blessed to work at a job I truly enjoy, with people I enjoy being around. When concerns over the dangers and spread of COVID-19 forced us to close our library doors

and stay home, my head was spinning! This COVID closure was sudden and shocking and filled with uncertainties.

The first few days at home, unsure what was expected of me, I cleaned a few things around my house and began to attack some long-overdue projects. As work from home expectations crystallized, my coworkers and I carefully crept back into the library and grabbed books, puppets, and anything else we thought we might need for virtual story times and other programs.

With newfound direction and purpose, I was ready for the adventure of working from home. Email and virtual meetings enabled my coworkers and me to stay in touch and plan programming. In addition to assigned reading and book reviews, there was no shortage of webinars and learning opportunities to help fill each day with work-related tasks.

I enjoyed having my own workspace at home. Fortunately, one of the projects I worked on in those first few days resulted in a nice reading nook which became a great setting for virtual meetings and programs. Early on, I realized the importance of staying organized and focused to be productive. As one who is easily overwhelmed, I am grateful for tools to help me organize, plan, and conduct my work. The Google Suite services provided by the Georgia Public Library System were invaluable for

working from home and have continued to be useful through the transition back to working in the library. In addition to G-Suite, here are some steps that helped me focus and find a good work/life balance:

- Each morning, I got dressed, down to the shoes, and had breakfast to start my day.



- I worked approximately the same hours I would have at the library.
- I took a lunch break.
- I kept a running list of tasks to complete.
- I listed all meetings attended, webinars viewed, and virtual programs produced while working from home.
- Each evening, I made a schedule for the following day.
- I kept a quiet workspace with all needed supplies nearby.
- The TV stayed off when I was working.
- When my workday was done, I logged off until the next morning.

Working from home was a challenge I gladly accepted. I found what worked for me and created a comfortable routine. During this time, I learned a lot from my coworkers and from people around the world through webinars, virtual presentations, and online meetings. I was thrilled to be able to produce virtual programs to reach some of our littlest library patrons online. I am grateful for the days I had at home, enjoying the quiet and having a little more control over my schedule. In spite of the chaos in the world around me, I found rest and peace as I prepared for the next adventure of gradually reopening the library.

Sarah Grace Glover

*Reference Services Librarian
University of North Georgia*

I finished my MLIS degree in January 2019 and started my first, full-time library position in August 2019 at the University of North Georgia (UNG). I had just started to feel settled in and confident in my position when COVID-19 struck and shut down our campuses. I'm a pretty extroverted person, so this experience has felt extremely isolating. I've become aware of how important seeing my coworkers and students daily is to me. A lot of my creativity comes from interactions in the library, which still happens

thanks to all we can do virtually, but it's just not the same as being in-person.



Before all this, I commuted to the Dahlonega and Gainesville UNG campuses. I taught classes, worked the reference desk, and had research consultations with students. Now, my commute is to my home office (kitchen table). I still teach classes, work reference chat shifts, and hold research consultations online—thank you technology! I usually take a break and put on my “work clothes” around lunch. My coffee intake has skyrocketed. Some bright spots are that through Microsoft Teams I've really gotten to know the librarians at other campuses much better through working on assignments that are not campus specific, and through our greatly anticipated weekly Tea Times.

Tea Times started as a daily workday break where all UNG Libraries' staff got together and took turns presenting a hobby. Now that we have all become more settled in to working from home, the Tea Times are once a week. We've had great sessions where we learned and

played 30 Rails—a print and play game where you build your own railway network. We’ve had cooking and gardening lessons, quarantine art shows, home renovation updates, and virtual travel, where we shared stories and pictures from our favorite trips. I hosted a session on making mocktails—and how to make them cocktails after 5:00 p.m. In a time where I can’t physically work with my colleagues, I feel closer to them than ever.

Kristy Greene

*Assistant Director Materials Management
West Georgia Regional Library System*

In mid-March I left my office at the West Georgia Regional Library System’s (WGRLS) Administrative office with my laptop and an optimistic milk crate full of materials requiring original cataloging. A few weeks later, when there seemed no end in sight, I returned to the empty building for my dual monitors, Reese’s stash, and a peace lily a member of my team gave me when I first started in my position four months prior.

My days at home fell into a rhythm of a daily 9:30 a.m. COVID-19 status update meeting with our Admin team, catalog clean-up projects, materials orders, invoices, and suddenly pivoting to build up our digital collection. Our Cloud Library collection is my proudest accomplishment in my new role.

Meanwhile, my two teenage sons, tween daughter, and corporate trainer husband were all remotely learning and working from home as well. We soon discovered the new AT&T fiber wasn’t as reliable and fast as we hoped with five devices running at any one time. After seeing the workload my children were assigned as their teachers scrambled to come up with

digital lessons, I wished my children Godspeed and told them to do what they could, not stress, and rest knowing they all had As and Bs that wouldn’t be lowered per our school system’s guidelines. I had no time, energy, or focus for their schooling; but, mercifully, my husband did for our child with ADHD who needed extra help to stay on track.

The perks of teleworking during a stressful global pandemic were staying in my pajamas if I wished, not wearing makeup, cutting out the two-hour roundtrip commute each day, and connecting digitally with my coworkers in our daily meetings. My husband and I began taking walks together each evening and sat on the patio for our lunch each day. During one such lunch, my husband asked if I noticed there were

more birds this spring than usual. I replied that perhaps there have always been that many birds—we just never took the time to notice them. Online yoga classes helped my anxiety over the unknown future. This forced slowing down rejuvenated me individually and us as a family.

It also meant that sometimes the lines blurred between work and home. My eight-pound rat terrier, Pip, loved making appearances in our daily virtual meetings. He would come running from wherever he was

in the house as soon as he heard the library director’s voice. My daughter also held me accountable to our quarantine work schedule of 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. One afternoon as I was engrossed with my work on the couch, my daughter cleared her voice and said in a stern voice, “it’s past four o’clock!” I turned to see her sitting at the kitchen table with a board game set up and her expectantly waiting for me to begin playing.



While I was able to do almost all my job remotely, I also learned to add margin to my days and engage more than ever with the people and space around me.

Karen J. Harris

Branch Library Manager

Gwinnett County Public Library

I live in my den/office. In addition to technological tools in this space, I have one of five sets of bookshelves each that have 100 or so titles totaling 510 volumes. This library collection serves as an autobiographical record of professional roads traveled during my 45-year career. Before COVID-19, I could not imagine working at home. I would hear colleagues speak about doing this and could not picture it as a workstyle for me. Boundaries are important and for most of my career the idea of a complete separation between my personal and professional life seemed like not only a good idea but one that would provide balance in both areas. Enter COVID 19; the change maker that has upended life as I have known it.

Gwinnett County Public Library (GCPL) quickly devised a plan for staff to work effectively during this two-month hiatus. Front-line managers were provided with clear expectations for keeping current with strategic expectations, professional development, and staff management. This was accomplished through an array of technological platforms that provide information and visual immediacy needed for staff support.

After the first two weeks, a system evolved that served staff across the organization. The Leadership Team had meetings several times a week to carve out directions for the system. The Training Team created a weekly digital course list designed for all staff to complete during the library closure. The weekly course list included technological topics, customer service review, and courses on how to use different platforms in Google Suite to create classes for staff. The management team had weekly Google

Hangouts that provided system updates and served as a forum for discussion and team building at the frontline managerial level.

My experience working from home during the next weeks featured a slow but sure quieting of the mind. Managers are customer service providers for both external and internal customers, which focuses them outward most of the time. Having the worktime at home fostered creating thinking, planning time, and time for my own professional development. This envisioning time proved to be invaluable for me. The day began for me at 9:30 a.m. with a perusal of email from the day before and an updating of my professional log of activities accomplished daily. There was always a Training Team offering, a webinar, and a streaming meeting with the System Opening Task Force, library administration, or another core department in the library system. During my working from home time I was able to complete Lynda.com courses on Managing During Times of Changes and COVID-19 webinars and podcasts, with the most memorable being the



National Network of Libraries of Medicine
Leading with Compassion during COVID-19
Crisis webinar, now available via YouTube.

Weekly digital Hangouts with staff created a dialogue that was important, providing system updates, allowing everyone to report on projects, and serving as a conclave to interact with each other after the meeting. Keeping the connections alive and fresh increased investment in the success of each other.

While challenging in the extreme, COVID-19 has introduced me to a new way of working that has proven to be restorative and fulfilling to me as a public library professional. It has also forged a new appreciation for my vocation as a librarian and provided me a zeal for an energetic return to work that is meaningful and adds value to Gwinnett County.

Austina Jordan

Head of Access Services

University of North Georgia

I took the GRE for the second time on January 24, 2020. The first time I sat for that exam was back in May 2001, the Monday after I graduated from college. I often tell people I went to graduate school because I didn't really know what else to do after graduation. I entered reluctantly, unsure if I could really handle the work. It ended up being one of the best educational decisions I made because it led me into librarianship. Shortly before I took the GRE this year, I set up a small little home office in our newly converted guest bedroom. I figured if I was going to start graduate school, I would need a designated space to do my schoolwork.

The home my husband, David, and I live in originally belonged to his

grandparents, and there are still a few pieces of their furniture in the garage. I dug out his grandmother Jewel's writing desk, cleaned it up, and we lugged it back into the house.

Less than two months after we set up my office, COVID-19 turned my work life upside down. Over the course of a few days it became apparent that a health crisis was knocking on the door of our state and things at work were rapidly changing. I packed up some black flair pens, my steno pad, Post-it Notes, and for some reason, grabbed a webcam. I thought I'd be back in a few weeks.

A few weeks turned into a few months. I've started easing back into working at my library—two days at the office and three days at my home office. Over the course of the many weeks at home, I struggled to find a routine that made sense for me; I think the thing that made it so difficult was not knowing how long all of this would last. Eventually I let go of the need to know when this would end, and things felt more manageable, and my routine naturally started taking shape.

After realizing that working in the guest bedroom was too claustrophobic, I came up with a plan to relocate my workspace into our TV sitting room. The change is definitely a better arrangement and feels more purposeful than a little desk tucked in the corner of a guest bedroom. As I think about my time working from home, I realize how fortunate I am to have designated office space. I can close my door for meetings and close my door when the workday

is over. I acknowledge not many have had the luxury. I'm grateful, despite the reason for this work-from-home season, that I had the opportunity to

give my home office a test run. Graduate school



begins the middle of August, and I can say with confidence that my home office is ready to go.

Gail Morton

*Research Services Librarian
Mercer University*

I take a deep breath and click “Join Meeting.” Our first Zoom meeting of the Age of COVID-19 will have about 15–20 coworkers depending on who can attend. I am here, but I don’t quite know how to interact. This won’t be a meeting that has an agenda, nor will it be an office party where slipping in and out of conversations and groups is the norm. It’s a way to keep in contact with one another during quarantine, so interaction with one another, though not mandatory, is probably expected. I am very comfortable with Zoom. I’ve taught library instruction classes with 20 or more students and am fine with handling the platform’s features. I have no anxiety about the video or the chat or doing both at the same time. However, those other times library instruction was the focus, and I was the librarian. This time the aim is socializing, something I don’t really know how to do through video and chat, especially with such a large group.

I think of my coworkers, and I know what I want to talk about. Some of them have pre-existing conditions, making it very dangerous for them to be out. Others have family who are vulnerable and alone due to social distancing. One of my coworkers had just bought a home at the beginning of the quarantine and will now be moving. I want to ask everyone: how are you? how is your family? are you eating well? do you have enough supplies? can I help you with the move? But a large Zoom meeting is not the place for that kind of conversation. So, I venture into the meeting somewhat reserved, thinking that I will just watch and learn, all the while hoping someone will need a research consultation soon, and I can gracefully decline the invitation.

No such luck. And even watching and learning prove difficult at first. It is hard to tell who is talking or whose turn it is next. Once in a while, someone’s audio stops working in the middle of a sentence. Other times, the whole platform freezes, making it hard to tell what is going on. A parade of pets, children, and spouses march through backgrounds. Still, conversations seem to flow, and there is a general feeling of comfort mixed with unease about the pandemic. Finally, my 30 seconds of fame come, as I talk and chat at the same time. For that brief moment, it all comes naturally. I converse about how others are doing, the foods we have been preparing, and the shows we have been binging (Tiger King seemed to be in vogue.) Just as my comfort level is rising, I am visibly interrupted by my son bringing me a casserole he has baked for my lunch. That innocent interruption makes it easy for me to bow out of the meeting with a “lucky me.”

Reflecting back, I realize that, while the Zoom session left me mentally exhausted, it was worth it. A new way to interact has begun, and I



think I can do this. At first what seemed to be chaos in the Zoom hang out turned into a tranquil symphony, the combined voices of all the people I work with almost every day. As the sounds became cohesive, the chat had its own flow, and it carried me long with it into this brave new world of teleworking.

Scott Pieper

*Associate Department Head
Georgia State University Library, Decatur
Campus*

When I take a step back and think about how our response to COVID-19 has unfolded, the common theme that I keep dwelling upon is disconnection. In a time of crisis, I would look to my community for support and mutual aid. A big part of my community is my library. I miss students. I miss faculty. I miss my colleagues. I work with some very funny, dedicated, and thoughtful people. COVID-19 has robbed me of that shared experience. Zoom or Microsoft Teams or WebEx doesn't cut it for me. I miss the hallway moments, the unexpected outbursts of laughter from an adjacent office, and cake in the breakroom. I miss the rhythm of the semester. I missed graduation and saying good-bye to students this spring. I missed the relief and smiles on students' faces when they finish their last final. In a two-year institution, students might be there for just a semester or two, so it is especially tough to miss opportunities like that. We also had to say good-bye to a long-serving colleague who retired in April via WebEx.

With that said, I have adjusted somewhat to this new normal of working from home. I have a routine, for the most part. I have watched hours upon hours of webinars about working from home. My new colleagues are my family. I have a wonderful spouse and two young sons. The boys are learning that Dada is at work even though he's home. With no commute, I have gained about two hours each day to exercise and spend time with them. I also give myself some grace to take a break and watch a cartoon

or read a book or have a snack with them. As a manager, I think about my staff and their mental health a lot. I think about budget cuts and furloughs. I think about bringing folks back into an uncertain and changed environment. We've been working on return-to-work protocols and guidelines, which give me hope and focus some of my energy.

In addition to COVID-19, I can't ignore the momentous events that have sparked nationwide protests against police violence aimed disproportionately at Black Americans. The murder of George Floyd has again exposed the depths our unequal justice system. And, again, I feel disconnected. I feel disconnected from people I know that can't see their privilege and can't see (or are unwilling to see) the systemic racism and white supremacy embedded in our culture. I am committed to using my expertise as a librarian to fight misinformation, disinformation, and mal-information used to confuse, obfuscate, and cast blame. As a white male who is increasingly aware of my privilege and my family's



generational privilege, I am committed to learning, listening, teaching, and acting. I am ready to reconnect.

Sala Shierling

*Part-Time Research Services Librarian
Georgia Gwinnett College*

I have worked in the public services area of libraries my entire career and have enjoyed a variety of work experiences. However, until COVID-19, during a reference encounter, I had never glimpsed into a student's home and watched through topsy-turvy camera action as the student yelled, "you can't see my face!" Yes, I have been remoted! I can now add to my list of library experiences remote reference, instruction, and liaison service during a pandemic.

Initially, I was a bit doubtful about remote work. I thought I would feel isolated rather than part of a team. I assumed that reference and instruction would dwindle to nothing. Perhaps the deepest concern was whether there would be opportunities to make a difference in the lives of students and faculty. With the above thoughts in mind, my work plan was to update and create LibGuides during the down times, and if things were slow catch up on professional reading.

Something quite surprising happened. I not only liked remote work, I am loving it. Rather than causing the connection and service gulf to widen, remote work removes the restrictions brought on by the physical reference desk and allows the invisible fence to disappear. Four surprising outcomes arose.

Surprise 1: Meeting attendance. While monitoring chats in the quiet of my home, I can virtually attend meetings and have audio,

something that is not an option while sitting at the public reference desk. This has allowed me to attend Dean Chats, liaison meetings, and Research Services meetings.

Surprise 2: Connecting with colleagues. With options for internal chats, screen sharing, and voice and camera options, I am able to make quick connections with colleagues. (A "how's your mama, love your hair" comment is always good for networking!)

Surprise 3: Access to software and maker time. While not feasible during usual reference desk hours, as a remote reference librarian, I can easily create, record, and edit Camtasia modules for my LibGuides, liaison work, and instruction while simultaneously monitoring LibAnswers.

Surprise 4: Embedded librarianship. Since the building is closed, embedded librarianship is a measurable service option for both teaching faculty and librarians. In a class in which the professor advertised me as class librarian and embedded a LibGuide with Camtasia modules into his

course site, students viewed the LibGuide more than 200 times within 14 days.

When I return to in-building work, I am hopeful that the positive outcomes during my season of remote reference service will continue. Perhaps in-building meetings should also be available virtually so that those juggling public service duties can attend. Perhaps all employees need to use Microsoft Teams so that even part-timers can chime in with a quick chat to a colleague. Perhaps public service employees (even part-timers) need scheduled "maker time" for completing projects. Lastly, I am hopeful that my successful experience as an embedded librarian can serve as an example as the library



continues to move forward with this initiative. While stately buildings and beautiful reading rooms inspire great thoughts and studious productivity, perhaps the walls of academic libraries should be permeable, and the invisible fence around the reference desk removed so that information can flow as quickly as the pandemic that started this brave new phase of librarianship.

Gail A Spears

Cataloger

NPS SERO Library, Contractor

This essay, is from a cataloger's perspective, now teleworking. March, month and day of the 16th, to be remembered! A day seared in my brain as rumors had swirled about the potential closure of this government research library due to COVID-19. But we didn't know when. Well, that Monday, somewhere around mid-morning, we were told to leave. With that, laptop and other needed resources were gathered up to be taken home for who knew how long. I sure didn't. The following day, Tuesday, would be my first experience as a cataloger, teleworking. This would be fascinating and intriguing I thought to myself. It was a jarring first day. Reminder, no commute. Going to have to get used to that, though a once a week office visit would be in order.

First things first. How am I going to do this—I mean catalog at home? I had ideas such as copying or scanning title pages and versos if need be. But wait, I tried this trick before leaving, with a few titles. While a good try, I found this process painfully slow and inefficient. This wasn't going to work. I had brought home an old shelflist of titles cataloged in the previous integrated library system (ILS), but no longer in the most recent ILS. Something horrific happened during the migration process. I'll leave it at that. But, hang on, another idea seized my brain. We at our library are not completely automated and have no circulation system. However, we do still have those things called pocket cards or date due cards in the

back of the book with pertinent information that can be utilized for cataloging purposes. Let's just say we went full throttle with that! So, this thing called telework began to take hold. I began to settle in with this new work reality not knowing how long it would last.

Well, March went by quickly with me settling into the transition, continuing with once a week office visits to pluck cards from pockets for cataloging. Oh, I should say we began with an un-cataloged general collection. In case you are wondering, the collection was un-cataloged due to migrations issues some years back. April, and well, still teleworking. Thank goodness for those cards. Periodical titles posed a problem; the solution was to copy cover and/or title pages and write down pertinent information needed to add copy/items and heaven forbid actual cataloging of a periodical title. I'm settling in with this new work routine, though I miss seeing people face-to-face, office noises, meetings, and such, even though I consider myself an introvert. This thing called telework is growing on me. In the beginning, I was so much more productive. I'm not quite sure why, but I've slowed a bit; maybe it's because I could feel myself burning out and realized I had to slow down. I have, thankfully. Besides I wouldn't want to work my way to having nothing to do. No! I've tried to work on a more even keel if you will, taking short breaks, getting up for a bit of fresh air, and a bit more exercise to boot. Telework/work from home, I could get used to this, and a couple of days a week would work for me!

Stephanie Summers

Library Associate

Gwinnett County Public Library, Snellville Branch

In March 2020, I was in a state of transition. I had transferred to the Snellville branch of the Gwinnett County Public Library (GCPL) after two-and-a-half years of working as a part-time library associate at the Buford-Sugar Hill branch. On March 15, 2020, less than two months after I began work at Snellville, GCPL

announced it would close to the public due to COVID-19. Shortly after, we suspended all in-branch operations. For the next two months, I joined the legions of Americans working from home.

My homework (as I started calling it) during the shutdown consisted of online training and virtual meetings. I bargained with my parents for the home office computer so that I could complete Google classrooms and Lynda courses. Every Wednesday afternoon, I sat with my phone on the office bed in front of a mirror decorated like a window for staff meetings over Google Hangouts. Getting my hair, make-up, and outfit perfect for the camera became as normal as working in shorts.

I began to feel like a workaholic as the invisible boundary between work and home disappeared. Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday at 3:00 p.m. are my work hours, I told my long-distance boyfriend (used to calling me whenever he wanted) so that he would not interrupt my meetings or my training. Make sure the dog doesn't bother me, I told my



parents, not wanting her to whine and scratch on the office door during Hangouts.

Finding a new work-life balance was not the only challenge of working from home. Video conferences and virtual classrooms are not the core of library work. Working with the public is. As the weeks went by, I began to worry that I would lose my customer service skills. I missed seeing faces, shaking hands, and learning names. I missed helping patrons at computers—playing amateur tech support. I also missed the social aspects of work. My life felt emptier now that I could not walk through the doors of my branch and greet my coworkers.

The good news, though, is that the time in isolation was productive. Our wonderful training department kept us busy with their weekly Online Learning Guide newsletter. Their efforts prepared me to help customers again. I reviewed Flipster and Pressreader so that I could introduce customers to digital magazines and newspapers. I learned about a resource that could help both students and job seekers (tutor.com). I refreshed my readers' advisory skills (with Novelist) and found out how to host virtual programs (with a tutorial on Google Hangouts). Meanwhile, I was also able to take self-selected trainings on improving focus, organization, and time management. These were courses that had been impossible to fit into a part-time day when the system was operating under normal conditions.

Above all, I found that the bonds between librarians hold strong even across the distance. My supervisor was never too busy to send me emails thanking me for all my hard work. Snellville staff shared cute pictures and helpful resources though email. I kept in constant phone contact with a former coworker from Buford and helped her with training. And seeing my Snellville coworkers' faces on my phone every week lifted my spirits. Meanwhile the administrative, business service, human resources, youth services, and IT departments worked together with branch staff to provide all

the customer service we could and worked on reopening the system.

The challenges as GCPL reopens seem endless, but so did the challenges during the shutdown. We got through that horrible time with teamwork and dedication to the library's mission. I believe there are brighter days ahead.

Gina Viarrruel

Library Associate

Gwinnett County Public Library

My job entails assisting customers daily with various information and technology needs, as well as offering opportunities to learn more. Hence, when all 15 of our branches at Gwinnett County Public Library (GCPL) closed until further notice on the same day, it was a shock. We didn't close for all the reasons deemed normal for a library shutting down. No one started a fire in the stacks, we weren't suddenly underfunded, and sewage wasn't gushing from our pipes, flooding our floors. We closed to keep our library staff and patrons safe from a virus that was unpredictably spreading through our communities.

Our teleworking journey partially began on Tuesday, March 17, 2020. I will admit that during those first two weeks I did almost nothing traditionally considered productive. I read my work emails, listened to podcasts, read a lot of news, obsessively checked coronavirus statistics for the state of Georgia, listened to Georgia Peach Book Award audiobooks, and caught up on the kind of sleep I thought I'd only missed a lot of in college. As someone who considers themselves to be an optimistic opportunist who had had enough therapy to understand the importance of self-care during a crisis, I knew that if my attention wasn't immediately needed somewhere, this would have been my one and only time to rest and rejuvenate so that I'd be ready for whatever came next.

Two weeks later, our whole library system started to focus on continuing education and planning the details for the conversion of our summer programs to a virtual programming model. As I worked from home, I started to notice that my productivity shot through the roof, more than it seemed to on a normal workday. Of course, I was completing a lot more continuing education webinars in an effort to fill in for the time I usually spent interacting with customers, but I also found that I had all the time I needed to think and be the extreme night owl that I am. I was sometimes wide awake at 3:00 a.m. completing Lynda course after Lynda course while my partner slept in the next room of our tiny apartment. He would look at me incredulously when he'd wake up to (still) go to work the next morning and see me on the couch still wide awake and flying through three projects at once. It made me wonder if what I was doing was normal for me or if the combination of the disruption of my normal work routines and my introversion re-awakened by so much time alone somehow gave me superpowers.

Around the same time as discovering my new abilities, I picked up old and new hobbies so that I wasn't all work and no play 24/7. I bought a pair of roller skates in anticipation that I'd be brave enough to step outside and skate around my neighborhood as my neighbors walked and jogged the same paths. I played classic Battleship and Ms. Monopoly with my partner; neither of us had played board games in years. I joined sewers around the country making cloth masks for local hospitals, family members, and friends. These activities took my mind off the crisis, and the tragedies that came with it. The shutdown of our library system was a new experience. We took steps towards reopening on May 18, 2020. Going back to work in a mask and keeping six feet apart has been another adjustment, but one that's worth the livelihood of our employees and customers.