What is the New Normal in the Library?

By: Gavin Ferriby

What has changed with University Library services and collections, and what has remained?

After academic year 2020-2021 (“the pandemic year), the beginning of the academic year in August 2021 was a relief—almost normal (well, not quite). The vaccination requirement certainly paved the way for more normal interaction on campus—and yet there seems to be a difference, not just a reversion to a pre-2020 mean.

The library has made subtle adjustments to its routines: students can now reserve and claim the group study rooms on their own using their phones, as they did with study seats last year—an alteration prompted by the pandemic, but which has remained useful in a limited way. Without the various noises generated by the Library Café, the library’s first floor seems more like the “quiet study” second floor than ever before. Users are far more likely to make research and help inquiries via chat than ever before—even users already seated in the library. The changes in foot traffic across campus that have accompanied the increase in residence halls on the Hill have certainly contributed to library usage rising towards rates seen before the pandemic.

A sense of “new normal” seems hard to describe, nevertheless—let alone quantify. Part of this may be many students’ journeys back to the routine of in-person classes, since many experienced no (or hardly any) in-person classroom interaction since March 2020. Part may be some reluctance to trust any sense of “new normal” in light of whatever conditions another pandemic wave might bring.
Before the pandemic, many of the library’s users were those students most dedicated to their studies, especially those in the health sciences. Those students have returned, but it’s hard to miss the sense of increased intensity on the part of more of the library’s users. They seem more than ever to stay on task, whatever they need to do in the building or with the resources. If this greater seriousness is a post-pandemic new normal, does it reflect greater clarity about what students really want to take away from their time at SHU?

**Documenting the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Sacred Heart University**

*By: Sharaya Smith*

I love a good story!

At some point, during the quarantine of 2020, I realized that I wanted to write my own.

I figured out the parts of my story that I was ready to tell, and I immediately began researching and writing a little bit, here and there, every day.

Several things can be credited for helping to nudge me from reader to writer/author. The process has taken place over the course of many years, but it has intensified the longer that I’ve been involved with libraries.

It was very important for me to find some inspiration from the stories of other people who have already written and published various parts of their own life stories.
(Several of the books that helped keep Sharaya on track are included in the list “Books That Kept Us Sane in Trying Times.”)

Numerous other members of the university have written about their experiences — writing that has been collected as Community Reflections, and Oral Histories, in Digital Commons: Remember COVID-19 Community Archive. The History Department collaborated with the Library to collect, preserve, and share our community’s experiences of and responses to the pandemic. Submissions are still being sought — follow the directions on this page: https://library.sacredheart.edu/rememnuerCOVID

This documentation will be vital for future generations, since there is a prospect of future pandemics related to global climate change. Through this project in Digital Commons, the Library seeks to serve not only current University students, faculty, and staff now, but those in the future.

**Gifts to the Library**

When it rains, it pours! The Library has been the beneficiary of some high-quality print book donations in the past few months. Following the large donation of books from retiring Professor Michael Higgins in 2020, the Library has recently received books on a wide variety of academic subjects (and in good condition) from faculty and former faculty members including Christine Greenleaf, Bob Marsh, Mary Alice Donius, Valerie Kisselback, and Rhea Paul. The Smith Richardson Foundation in Westport donated 10 boxes of new hardcover books on international relations and foreign affairs. And we are excited to have the Blau Collection, supported by the Community Foundation for Christian-Jewish Understanding, increased by over 50 books. The Community Foundation for Christian-Jewish Understanding also made a
monetary donation that enabled three years of access to *The Long Search: Exploring Basic Beliefs of the World’s Major Religions* video series.

If you would like to make a book donation to the library, please contact Susan Luchars, Resources Development and Assessment Librarian. If you would like to make a monetary donation to the library, please see the University’s Give Today page, and select “Ryan Matura Library” from the drop-down menu. Thank you!

**New Resources for a New Year**

- In anticipation of the M.S. in Human Clinical Nutrition and the overall growth of Health Professions and Nursing programs, the Library added a subscription to **UpToDate**, a leading online, evidence-based point of care tool with topic reviews covering medical symptoms, tests and diagnosis, and treatment options for over 8,500 conditions. Other new databases include:

- **READEX a division of NewsBank.** Primary source material on historic regional newspapers as well as African American periodicals will support undergraduate coursework in History. These include **African American Periodicals, 1825 – 1995¹** and **Early American Newspapers, Series 1, 1690 – 1876²**.

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¹[library.sacredheart.edu/db_aap](https://library.sacredheart.edu/db_aap)
²[library.sacredheart.edu/db_eans1](https://library.sacredheart.edu/db_eans1)
• Play texts, audio plays, scholarly text and video from across the history of the theater, ranging from Aeschylus to the present day in the Drama Online database will support coursework in Languages and Literatures. Individual play texts are also being actively acquired to fill a previous gap in the library print and e-collections.

Digital Commons Approaches Milestones - 500,000 downloads in 12 months; nearly 2 million total since 2010

Digital Commons now averages 1,000-1,500 downloads per day, and is approaching the milestone of 500,000 downloads in the previous (rolling) twelve months. Since its inception in 2010, nearly 2 million documents have been downloaded. This represents a remarkable contribution by faculty writers and researchers to world-wide research and teaching, and has raised the University’s international scholarly profile. Beverly Lysobey, the Library’s Scholarly Publication and Metadata Librarian and Deana Santoro-Dillon (Scholarly Publication & Metadata Assistant) have created this valuable resource for teaching, research, and outreach.

3 https://library.sacredheart.edu/db_dramaonline
In 2009 the University Library received the gift of Gloria Naylor’s papers. Naylor (1950-2016) was the author of *The Women of Brewster Place, Linden Hills, Mama Day,* and other novels. In 2019, the Archive was loaned to Lehigh University for the purpose of digitizing its contents and supporting scholarship. On November 5-7, 2021, Lehigh sponsored a symposium on Naylor’s creative process and pressing contemporary political issues such as mass incarceration, religion and sexuality, racism and sexism in higher education, and the enduring legacies of enslavement and colonization in North America.

Gavin Ferriby, University Librarian, spoke briefly to thank Lehigh University for its initiative with the digitization process, and to express Sacred Heart University’s gratitude to the projects founders, workers, and the scholars who have contributed to keeping Naylor’s legacy alive and relevant. “The Archive is a source of inspiration for researchers whose creative and intellectual projects will continue to expand transnational networks” of writers and activities to do justice to Black lives, as well as continue Naylor’s insistence on the value of knowledge that exceeds documentary records.
Books That Have Kept Us Sane in Trying Times

Librarians recommend:

- *Daisy Jones and the Six*, by Taylor Jenkins Reid (Deana Santoro-Dillon)
- *Gender Queer*, by Maia Kobabe. Available in the Library’s Graphic Novel Collection. (Sharaya Smith)
- *Harlem Shuffle*, by Colson Whitehead (Geoffrey Staysniak)
- *Monday’s Not Coming*, by Tiffany D. Jacksons (available in the Library’s print Juvenile Collection) (Sharaya Smith)
- *Native: Life in a Vanishing Landscape*, by Patrick Laurie (Gavin Ferriby)
- *The Night Circus*, by Erin Morgenstern (Emily R., a Student Library Assistant)
- *Sadie: A Novel*, by Courtney Summers (Deana Santoro-Dillon)
- *Street Gang: The Complete History of Sesame Street*, by Michael Davis (Geoffrey Staysniak)
- *The Summer Isles: A Voyage of the Imagination*, by Philip Marsden (Gavin Ferriby)
- *Tiny Beautiful Things: Advice on Love and Live by Dear Sugar*, by Cheryl Strayed (Erin Thompson)
- *Vienna Secrets: A Max Libermann Mystery*, by Frank Tallis (Gavin Ferriby)
• *Waking Up White: And Finding Myself in the Story of Race*, by Debbie Irving (Available from the Library’s print collection) (Sharaya Smith)

• *All the Devils are Here*, by Louise Penny (Beverly Lysobey)

**Staff Changes**

The Library has said farewell to Zach Claybaugh (now at Babbidge Library, UConn/Storrs), Dan Fitzroy (now at the Library of The Claremont Colleges, California), and Melissa Volman (who has moved to another state). We will miss all of them!

The Library has said welcome to Erin Thompson (our new Research Librarian for Health and Social Sciences), Kristina D’Agostino (our new Evening & Weekend Reference Librarian), and Emily Komornik (our new Discovery & Metadata Services Librarian) who will be starting December 6. We are so glad you have joined us!