Panic, Pivot, Plan

Pandemic Course Material Management

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*F*rom 2020 through 2023, academic libraries have faced unique challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although we all encountered the same global crisis and shared many similarities in our responses to it, the nuances of the settings in which we each found ourselves at its onset shaped our experiences. For us, the context of Pitts Theology Library, which serves the Candler School of Theology, at Emory University became a crucible in which our roles at the Library were transformed and our philosophies of librarianship were forged.

We began our tenure at Pitts in March 2019, Caitlin as the Acquisitions, Serials, and Assessment Librarian, and Elizabeth as the Reserves and Circulation Specialist. Working in different departments on different floors of the building, our primary professional interaction was the rare physical book purchase request for a course reserve item not already owned by the Library. However, over the

next several years, our roles became increasingly linked as courses required more digital resources, a reality new to us and to faculty and students.

Like many colleagues in theological education, we see our work as theological librarians as a form of pastoral care and ministry, "tending" to the Candler community and "cultivating" the intellectual and spiritual lives of our students (Kornfeld 2005, 209). We borrow this gardening metaphor from Margaret Zipse Kornfeld, who conceptualizes pastoral caregivers as gardeners/tools, communities as ground, religious tradition as soil, and people in the community as plants (Kornfeld 2005, 209-214). As public and technical services librarians, we work to enable research and learning in our community, despite major differences in our day-to-day tasks. By being embedded in the Candler School of Theology, we can see the fruits of our labor as students and faculty meet their research and learning goals, community members attend our events, and patrons visit the library to engage with our materials.

However, viewing your job as ministry, and therefore inherently good, can come with unintended mental health consequences. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we found these consequences magnified and their causes clarified, as we became increasingly aware of the role of vocational awe in our work. Vocational awe was first explained by Fobazi Ettarh as the idea that libraries are "good and sacred," and librarianship is a "sacred calling. . . regardless of any negative effect on the librarians' own lives" (2018). Many theological librarians come to the profession through bi-vocational avenues, both spiritual and intellectual, making our work substantially more personal and meaningful than just a paycheck. The self-sacrificial impulse from librarianship combined with training as pastoral caregivers increases the likelihood that theological librarians will fall victim to vocational awe, often tending to their own well-being after that of their patrons. In theological librarianship at a seminary, the burden of the spiritual formation of patrons is also placed upon the already overwhelming responsibilities of information access. The nature of these enormous expectations has long been recognized, with Raymond Morris writing in the *Proceedings of the Seventh Conference of the American Theological Library Association*, "Theological librarianship is at its best a ministry," and going on to note, after describing a difficult but not unusual day, "One does not go through that kind of a day without spending himself. You don't do these things without giving of yourself. I went home tired and

nervously exhausted" (Morris 1953, 33). It's easy to see how the challenges of a profession that already falls victim to the perception of secular "sacredness" that Ettarh describes would be exacerbated by incorporating religion and ministry into the nature of the work. Commenting on Morris' work nearly 70 years later, Karl Stutzman wrote that "even in the positive framing of librarianship as ministry... there are hints of the possible exploitation of library workers" (Stutzman 2022, 27). With a global pandemic further heightening the significant responsibilities placed on theological librarians, the role of vocational awe in librarian mental health became even more apparent.

Context

The Candler School of Theology, located in Atlanta, Georgia, is one of 13 United Methodist seminaries in the United States. A part of Emory University, Candler offers multiple graduate degree programs, including the Master of Divinity and Master of Theological Studies, and a distance education Doctor of Ministry program. Like many other seminaries, Candler has a library specifically devoted to collecting theological materials and supporting the learning and research needs of the community. At Candler, this is Pitts Theology Library. Located physically and organizationally within the Candler School of Theology, Pitts Theology Library's mission is to acquire, organize, preserve, interpret, and provide access to information resources that support the present and future teaching, research, and service missions of the Candler School of Theology, Emory University, and the public. This mission informed the service models, staffing, and organizational structure of the Library during the time recounted in this chapter.

The mission statement suggests two imperatives for Pitts staff: stewardship and service. Wallace Koehler identifies the intrinsic tension between these two objectives—stewardship focuses on the security and preservation of items, while service relies upon Ranganathan's first law of library science: "Books are for use" (Koehler 2015; Ranganathan 1957, 26, 111). To avoid addressing this tension, many libraries divide labor along the line between stewardship and service. At pre-pandemic Pitts, technical services largely handled the stewardship elements of the Library from the

fifth floor, while public services managed the patron-facing services on the public second floor, and rarely did the two meet. In this old-fashioned model of librarianship, departments worked toward the same overall objectives but were often on parallel tracks in the day-to-day work. Technical services work went unseen by patrons, while public services staff were always visible, even in their offices. There were—and still are—major differences between the work of public and technical services librarians. However, the structure of the Library and the work itself has morphed to reflect the changes happening at Candler and in theological education and librarianship more broadly. As this chapter will explore, one of the biggest factors in these changes was the enormous influx of digital materials since the pandemic and how that shift has blurred many of the existing lines between library departments.

The work of both acquisitions and course reserves was (and still is) hidden from most library users. Patrons can submit an online form requesting new book purchases and faculty and students see their textbooks appear on the course reserves shelves, all without knowing anything about the process or people who do that work. For many teaching faculty, the Library, and specifically the Course Reserves Specialist, was seen as the great problem-solver, filling the shelves and electronic reserves seemingly by magic. This is an example of the perception of "librarian as saint" that Fobazi Ettarh explains in her essay "Vocational Awe and Librarianship: The Lies We Tell Ourselves" (2018). Ettarh also explains the harmful role that this plays in librarian health, writing "Awe is easily weaponized against the worker, allowing anyone to deploy a vocational purity test in which the worker can be accused of not being devout or passionate enough to serve without complaint" (Ettarh 2018). Invisible labor, panic, and vocational awe all contributed to the growing toxicity of our work as the COVID-19 pandemic took hold.

Due to the bi-vocational nature of theological librarianship, the COVID-19 pandemic tasked librarians with not just helping students complete the semester strong academically, but also ensuring that the resources available contributed to their spiritual formation. While balancing these pressures, the relationships that helped librarians tend their aforementioned spiritual gardens were ripped away, replaced with lifeless digital ticketing systems and the cold comfort of listserv emails insisting everyone was all in this together. Pastoral care educators offered reminders that "[we] are not alone, and it is necessary for [us] to grasp this truth. Counselors and caregivers

become susceptible to burnout when they believe they must do the work alone" (Kornfeld 2005, 215). It becomes difficult to maintain the requisite conditions for a healthy garden when coming into an empty library each day. Feeling entirely alone, the stress, sadness, and burnout began to take root, as we will address later in this chapter.

Acquisitions

When she began working at Pitts, Caitlin's role was that of the Acquisitions, Serials, and Assessment Librarian. This meant that she took responsibility for purchasing and managing subscriptions for all of the print and electronic materials of the Library's circulating, reference, and periodical collections. She also handled the Library's assessment activities, including the annual Library survey and compiling data for accreditation reports. At the time, print materials made up the majority of the role. Pitts Theology Library had more than 600 print periodical subscriptions and primarily purchased print books for the collection. She had been working on gradually increasing the Library's online resource offerings but preferred to prioritize larger database purchases over individual titles. This strategy was helpful for both staff and patrons, since theology patrons were not well versed in using electronic resources, and Pitts did not have an electronic resources librarian to manage these resources. By focusing on acquiring larger databases, reference librarians could effectively teach patrons to navigate resources within specific platforms and library staff only had to import records and activate resources a few times a year when there were big purchases.

To manage the incoming print materials, Caitlin had a team of four students working on acquisitions and periodicals. This team was a mix of undergraduate and graduate students who made it possible to handle the large volume of print materials with only one full-time staff person in the department. Caitlin trained these students in Alma and GOBI software and carrying out duties such as duplicate-checking book orders, sorting and processing incoming mail, receiving books and periodicals, preparing invoices and renewals, and processing print periodicals for binding. They also completed other projects, including auditing monograph series, conducting condition assessments, and assisting with Library-wide endeavors like the annual book sale. The acquisitions and periodicals office

was located on the fifth floor of the Library, while the stacks and circulation desk were on the first and second floors. Students worked between the fifth and second floors, receiving materials on the fifth floor and shelving periodicals and prepping them for binding on the second floor. This arrangement meant that although library patrons saw people working in the periodicals section, they were not aware of the acquisitions work that primarily took place upstairs. This partial awareness contributed to a skewed perception of the amount of labor required to run this area of the Library, since it is easy to assume that the visible work is the only work happening.

At the beginning of the spring 2020 semester, before the onset of the pandemic, the acquisitions and periodicals student team had a range of experience levels, from three years to one semester, and they worked effectively both independently and collaboratively. Each student worked 10-15 hours per week and was typically busy during a shift, but the amount of work was never truly overwhelming for either the students or the librarian who supervised them. As part of their training, Caitlin told students that there is no such thing as a library emergency in their roles. If they got to the end of their shift and there were still boxes of books and stacks of periodicals to process, despite them working hard throughout the shift, it was not a problem. There were procedures in place to handle anything that needed to be rushed, and the rest could wait. Because undergraduate and graduate students already tend to have higher than average stress levels, it was important to Caitlin that their job at the Library not add to this stress. Their training emphasized the importance of their job to Library operations, but also noted that their education and well-being should always be their priority. With acquisitions and periodicals work, it is also especially important that everything be completed accurately, and stress inevitably leads to a reduction in attention to detail. In pursuit of this goal, the acquisitions and periodicals office was a calm but collegial area where students and staff worked companionably.

Course Reserves

Elizabeth's initial role at Pitts was that of the Reserves and Circulation Specialist. In this role, she was responsible for managing course materials for all courses taught at the Candler School of Theology both curricular and non-degree, as well as supervising and staffing

the circulation desk for about half of her time. Candler courses were typically offered as in-person sessions, the only exception being a handful of online Doctor of Ministry (DMin) courses each semester. DMin students were offered additional library privileges, made possible only due to the small size of the cohort. With this composition of the student body, librarians created course reserves policies and practices to meet the needs of a predominantly in-person patron base.

Prior to the 2019-2020 academic year, course reserves were mostly physical books, often numbering over 1,400 books per year, shelved behind the circulation desk with a three-hour loan period. This system was put into place to prevent a single patron from having the Library's copy of a textbook for the entire semester and was intended to provide supplementary access to course materials. The Library also scanned and licensed selections from books to further supplement the course readings, but electronic items were generally limited.

To standardize student access to course materials and enable librarians to license scanned materials, Emory required (and still requires) course instructors to use the course reserves software, which is conveniently embedded in the university's learning management system. However, course reserves were never intended to replace the need for students to purchase or otherwise procure their own long-term access to course materials. Course reserves at Candler played a bigger role in students' lives than in many other divisions at Emory. At Candler, 98 percent of all students and 100 percent of Master of Divinity students received financial aid. Although this financial support helped defray the high cost of a seminary education, book costs presented a significant barrier to many students. Course reserves became a way to reduce this financial burden, and students took full advantage of this service, with many relying wholly on Library resources. By spring 2020, books for introductory seminars were being checked out as often as a dozen times daily.

In an effort to support students as they grew more reliant upon the Library, course reserves operated under a concierge model. Each semester, Elizabeth scoured the textbook adoption system for each Candler course and individually entered and routed the books for processing and reserves shelving. In this case, faculty only had to complete their textbook adoptions at the bookstore in order for their books to appear on the course reserves shelves, adding to the magic of it all. Faculty were also able to submit requests via email, often just sending syllabi for individual parsing and processing. Each course

took several hours to process between physical book requests and the workflow for scanning reserves selections, not including waiting for books to be delivered from other Emory library locations and remote storage.

Under the concierge model, the Reserves Specialist often worked *for* faculty rather than *with* faculty. There were few requirements for faculty to submit requests, and the deadlines were only loosely enforced. It was a benefit to all parties if the reserves were entered into the system properly, which meant it generally had to be done by the Specialist. Students benefited because materials were processed quickly and accurately and were easy to find with consistent formatting, and faculty benefited because their course materials were available in a timely manner with little input or oversight. For the Library, having teaching faculty submit requests themselves was time-consuming due to input errors, so allowing the Specialist to take care of reserves herself became the path of least resistance, as opposed to hosting ill-attended training sessions. Maintaining this level of productivity and service felt defeating, as the labor put in was completely invisible and the output often criticized for its lack of convenience.

Generally, reserves work was all handled without student assistance, only occasionally enlisting circulation desk students to scan materials during the beginning-of-semester rush and removing stickers from the physical books at the close of each term. Physical book processing, the easiest of the reserves processes, required the Specialist to manually input each book into the course reserves system, place a hold on the book, pull the book from the stacks, recall it from a patron, or have it shipped from another campus library. Then, she had to place reserves stickers on the books, assign them a three-hour loan status, and shelve them behind the circulation desk. Scanning books required the same process, but instead of shelving the books, the Specialist then had to digitize the requested pages, perform quality control and copyright compliance checks on each scan, and upload the completed scans into the system. Fully digital items, like e-books and database articles, required manually inputting bibliographic information and proxied links into the reserves system. Realistically, this meant that one staff person was handling over 1,400 physical books and 1,100 scans for 250 courses per academic year. Considering an average work week and the hours of work required to process each course's materials, it became clear that this workload was unsustainable.

The seemingly servile nature of this service model was softened by the relationships that the Specialist built with faculty members through interactions via email, phone calls, and office visits. Faculty would regularly see Elizabeth at the circulation desk or stop by her office with a question about their course reserves. In this way, relationships were created that made the Course Reserve Specialist part of the larger culture of Candler. She was one of the most well-known people at the Library, a problem-solver who could save the day when somebody needed a course resource on short notice. Although this perception was gratifying, when the pandemic came and reserves moved online, the perception of the Reserves Specialist as the one solution to everyone's problems persisted, while the relationships themselves were lost.

Pandemic Panic

On March 11, 2020, Emory University announced that it would transition to remote learning for all graduate and undergraduate classes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, extending spring break by one week to allow time to prepare for the transition. Despite the global upheaval, higher education continued on as it had always been, just shifting to virtual coursework. Alongside the commitments to keep classes running, administrators expected libraries to continue making resources available for students and researchers. From the day that Emory announced the remote learning transition, libraries across the university received panicked emails and phone calls from faculty members concerned both for their students and for their own access to library resources. Although the entire world was facing unprecedented challenges, there was also somehow the bizarre expectation that higher education would still operate under business as usual, with students still expected to complete coursework and staff still expected to find ways to support them.

On Thursday, March 19, 2020, Pitts Theology Library shifted to a request and retrieval-only model for access to the circulating collection. An email to staff and faculty explained, "There will be no physical access to the library space, but all Emory faculty, staff, and students can make requests for circulating books. Items will be pulled by Pitts staff and held at the circulation desk." This transition represented an enormous shift in staff workloads and priorities, but most

notably, this model did not work for course reserve books. Because staff had to receive a request, go pull the books, notify the patron, and then the patron had to make a special trip to campus to pick up the requested items, three-hour loans did not make sense for either patrons or staff. Patrons and staff alike were panicking that the campus had shut down and there was no longer access to the Library space. How were the students who were relying upon course reserves supposed to finish their courses without their course readings?

Higher education administrators did not seem to fully understand the massive infrastructure changes required for online education. Many universities' decisions indicated that administrators thought that moving all classes online would allow things to continue as usual. In retrospect, this idea was both short-sighted and misguided, since online courses require a lot of in-person support. For course reserves, this need for extensive support was especially true for items that were not available as electronic resources, or were too expensive to purchase in that format, forcing staff to find creative ways to electronically access materials.

The first method we pursued to provide remote access to course reserves was purchasing e-books. The Course Reserves Specialist and the Acquisitions, Serials, and Assessment Librarian immediately searched for digital copies of every print book that was assigned for a Candler School of Theology course. Working extraordinarily quickly, these librarians were able to process hundreds of titles in less than a day. However, since the semester was already halfway over, there was a possibility that some books would not be used during the remainder of the semester. To prevent any more emergency spending than was absolutely necessary, the Library Director sent out lists of the titles available as e-books to faculty members and asked them to identify the titles that were necessary for their students to finish the term. This communication let faculty know that the Library was working to support them, explained the limits of acquiring electronic resources, and kept the Library from buying superfluous e-books.

In addition to purchasing e-books, Caitlin took advantage of offers from publishers who had expanded access to online resources to assist during the crisis. Librarians across the country put together shared documents detailing the various offers that were available. Caitlin reviewed these options and worked with reference librarians to communicate their availability to students and faculty. This review helped with access to certain key resources, but also created additional layers of complexity in terms of resource availability.

Most initial emergency resource offerings had an expiration date of June or July 2020, which meant that they would not be available in future semesters, and the fluctuating availability caused confusion among patrons. Even with these efforts, purchasing e-books and activating emergency access materials did not come close to getting all of the resources needed for the spring 2020 courses. After buying all of the e-books possible, staff turned to scanning sections of the print books within the library. A skeleton crew of dedicated library staff and student assistants scanned and licensed thousands of excerpts and uploaded them into the electronic reserves system. Patrons were always pleased to hear that more items were available than anticipated, but this had an unforeseen downside. Suddenly being able to provide things previously deemed inaccessible gave the same misguided impression that Morris wrote about 70 years ago—that theological librarians "are the good angels who can, with almost a stroke of magic, uncover the needed book, or identify the garbled quotation" (Morris, 33). By providing exceptional patron service during a time of global panic, library staff unintentionally set a standard for themselves that would be impossible to maintain in the coming years.

Policy and Procedure Pivots

As the pandemic progressed, Pitts Theology Library established new policies and adapted services in response to the changes in policy from the University. It was hard to know the importance of the work in a context where being physically at the Library felt both essential and frivolous, but the work needed to be done and people needed to be in the Library to do it.

Circumstances also required changing the way that student assistants worked in circulation assisting with course reserves and in acquisitions and periodicals. When pandemic restrictions were first put in place and the campus closed, students' lives were upended. Most student jobs were dependent on being on campus, but many students were not able to come to campus. All four acquisitions students stopped working for the semester and only two of the previous fifteen circulation students remained able to come to campus. For course reserves, this change to staffing levels meant that there were only two remaining circulation students available to assist with the

new duties of request and retrieval services and scanning course materials.

Students did not return to work in acquisitions until the fall of 2020. During this time, "doing the work alone," (Kornfeld 2005, 215) became the order of the day. Much like the gardener-counselors in Kornfeld's work, theological librarians felt obligated to work through difficulties and rely only upon themselves to meet patron needs, rapidly leading to burnout and isolation. Without the help of student workers and other support systems, this effect became more acute. Even when students did return, University restrictions on their ability to come to campus meant only one student could work on campus and the other acquisitions student had to work remotely. This restriction halved the number of student workers compared to the period prior to the pandemic. Campus access limitations and high stress levels of students made it difficult to find students to work, so having these two students available at all was a stroke of fortune. The on-campus student was needed to process the hundreds of back-logged periodicals and print book acquisitions, so assisting with electronic resources fell to the remote student. For the on-campus student, it was sobering to see a workload that had once been busy but manageable become seemingly insurmountable. A work area where previously staff were able to come and go while chatting or commenting on new library materials became one where a sole student methodically plowed through a literal mountain of books and periodicals. There were still no library emergencies with his work, but now the whole world felt like an emergency. The silence of the previously chatty work environment now felt apocalyptic.

Although having students was helpful, it required creating entirely new processes for managing a student remotely. Because remote student work was only permitted due to a COVID exception, the expectations for managing their work were high and there were no existing procedures to fall back on. To meet these requirements, Caitlin scheduled working hours with the remote student and checked in with him at the beginning and end of every shift to assign work, provide training, answer questions, and address anything else that arose. Like the rest of us, the remote student did not have much experience with online resources; he required a lot of supervision, but once trained, his work was extremely valuable for taking the Library into the maintenance phase of pandemic e-book purchasing. Throughout the next few semesters, he helped keep track of the changing licenses from the emergency access e-books, remotely

Personalizing the Pandemic

duplicate-checked print orders when they resumed, and assisted with reviewing the myriad online e-book packages that now needed consideration. With the exception of duplicate-checking orders, all of these were new duties for the Acquisitions Department, and they were now being conducted with an eye toward speed and accuracy.

The addition of regular e-book purchasing to the Acquisitions Department's duties dramatically changed the nature of the work. In addition to managing one-time purchases of e-books, Caitlin needed to figure out the most efficient and cost-effective way to bulk up the overall electronic resource offerings. Many vendors had begun advertising electronic resource packages specifically targeting academic libraries struggling to support the switch to remote learning. With the help of the remote student assistant, Caitlin reviewed these packages for content, access, and licensing, and purchased several of them for the Library. This process became something of a crash course in licensing and negotiations. Previously, the Library had worked with vendors on things like expanded access to content and bulk rate discounts, but never under the dire circumstances of the pandemic. Licensing terms, like unlimited simultaneous users and availability of downloadable content, that used to be "nice to have" when purchasing electronic materials were now deal-breakers for the Library, but without backup methods of getting the material, the Library had to either accept the terms available or find a way to live without the content. Working closely with publishers and vendors became a necessity as staff tried to come up with creative ways to get resources for patrons.

One of the biggest successes in this area came when a faculty member especially committed to textbook affordability assigned her own book to a class. The book was a recent publication and fairly expensive, and although the professor wanted her class to read it, she did not want them to have to purchase anything for which she received a kickback. She proactively reached out to the Library months before her class and asked if there was anything Pitts could do about getting access to this book. Unfortunately, the e-book was only available with a single-user license, which is unworkable as a course reserve. Caitlin told her the bad news, but instead of insisting that the Library find a way to make the book available, the professor asked how she, as the author, could help get the purchase options changed. It is difficult to overstate how revolutionary this was. By asking the question, she was recognizing the librarians' role as partners in the cultivation of theological education. Her simple request cut through the miasma

of vocational awe in which staff had been working and energized the groups to work collaboratively; the Library, the professor, the publisher, and the e-book vendor together got the license changed. After several long email threads in which the professor explained her plight and leaned on her contracts with the publisher, they agreed to change the license available for library purchase to an unlimited simultaneous user, DRM-free e-book license, the Library's gold standard for e-book purchases.

Just as staff were acclimating to the most recent iteration of the "new normal," they were collectively thrown another challenge. On December 28, 2021, while the University was closed for winter break, Emory University announced that due to an increase in COVID-19 cases as a result of the Omicron variant, the spring 2022 semester would be starting remotely for a month before resuming on-campus instruction on January 31. This decision helped protect the health of Emory students, faculty, and staff, but it drastically impacted the carefully planned course reserve policies for the coming semester, and that was an enormous blow to morale. The last time there had been an email like this, it had been the first step in a year and a half of uncertainty, upheaval, and tragedy. Pivoting again with just a week of notice sent many staff members back to the mental and emotional state of March 2020. Because of this, they came up with plans not only for January 2022 but also contingencies in case the university did not resume in-person instruction that semester at all.

For January 2022, it was necessary to plan for the first three weeks of regular semester courses and the entirety of J-Term courses. J-Term courses are intensive courses that are offered during the first week of January, before the start of the spring semester. These courses shifting to online instruction was especially concerning because they began the same day that staff were scheduled to return to campus. Further complicating this, staff were not supposed to work during official University holidays, so processing could not begin until the day classes began. For these courses, Elizabeth searched the catalog for existing electronic versions of textbooks and then sent the remainder to Caitlin. Caitlin then looked for electronic versions of the rest of the textbooks. Unfortunately, relatively few e-books were available to be purchased for J-Term courses, since instructors were planning on students being able to use texts that were only available in print at the Library. For regular semester courses, library staff worked with faculty to identify texts that were particularly important for the first weeks of classes so that the Library could prioritize

Personalizing the Pandemic

access to these resources. For these texts, library staff licensed and uploaded portions of assigned texts to provide readings for the first few weeks of classes. This process was the best way available to provide access, but it would be unsustainable financially if classes remained remote. After the first few weeks, scans would begin to hit copyright licensing limits, and the continued strain of limited staffing with ramped-up scanning demands would again make providing other library services difficult.

On January 31, 2022, in-person classes resumed at Candler School of Theology. The fears for a second unplanned fully remote semester were not realized, but the impact of this potential shift was notable. It demonstrated the need for instructors to maintain awareness of the electronic availability of required texts regardless of the intended mode of instruction for their courses. It also made clear that library staff had set a dangerous precedent during March 2020. Staff had shown that despite unimaginably difficult circumstances, the Library would do everything possible to provide students with access to textbooks. However, the Library had only been able to accomplish this due to a combination of emergency policies, the temporary cessation of other services, and adrenaline-fueled staff overwork. The expectation that library staff could, in January 2022, immediately pivot back to the once-in-a-lifetime emergency-induced services provided in spring 2020 is an example of how vocational awe set unattainable expectations for librarians in a post-pandemic world. Ettarh explains, "Awe is not a comforting feeling, but a fearful and overwhelming one" (2018). The idea that Library staff might repeatedly be expected to match the level of service provided in spring 2020 with the same limited notice about the change was indeed both overwhelming and fear-inducing.

Where Expectations Meet Reality

As described in the section *Pandemic Panic,* the quality and speed of the pandemic response inadvertently set very high expectations for electronic course materials. Despite concerns about fulfilling course needs, the Library was able to provide much more content than initially expected. However, the amount of work it took to make this happen was not made clear to the larger campus community, and there was little understanding among students and faculty of the

labor needed to acquire e-books and the licensing limitations of such resources. For all the upheaval and uncertainty that staff had faced, students and faculty were in equally difficult positions. They had not expected to be studying and teaching remotely, and many were ill-equipped to do so from both a logistical and technical perspective. As semesters with both in-person and online courses continued throughout the pandemic, it became clear that the Candler community expected the Library to provide all course materials electronically. However, there were many limitations on electronic resources that the community did not understand.

During the pandemic's building closures and vaccination requirements for campus access, there arose a misconception that because electronic resources were more convenient for patrons than print materials, they were also easier for librarians to manage. Anyone who has ever worked with electronic resources knows the opposite to be true. For course reserves especially, the difference in effort between placing a physical book on reserve and scanning, uploading, and licensing content from the same book was hours of work. Additionally, there were misconceptions about the availability of electronic editions of books. Faculty wanted to use the same titles they had previously taught from, not realizing that those titles had not been released as library-licensed e-books. Library staff had many conversations with faculty, explaining that they were not trying to limit what material faculty could teach, but were facing circumstances far beyond the Library's control that dictated what material was available. Faculty would see titles available on Amazon as Kindle editions and wonder why the Library could not get those e-books for their courses. Other e-books would be available for libraries, but only with single-user licenses, which would never work as a course reserve item when an entire class may need simultaneous access.

In addition to difficulties with the initial purchases of e-books, there were also workflow challenges in making them available. On one of the first large e-book orders in the spring of 2020, technical services' inexperience in managing e-books led to a great deal of wasted time and energy when both time and energy came at a premium for everyone. Staff had not realized that our e-book vendor was making records available via FTP server free of charge as an emergency pandemic measure. After acquisitions ordered a large number of e-books, the cataloging staff manually imported the records before receiving a link to download them just a few days later. All

Personalizing the Pandemic

of the catalogers' work had been unnecessary! Although librarians resolved the workflow issues after this experience, this shows what it was like working in library technical services in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic and is also an important example of the difficulty of job creep that staff are still facing. Processes and workflows that had been carefully considered for years prior had to be thrown out. Worried and stressed people had to pivot to areas in which they were inexperienced, and the lack of experience led to mistakes, causing more work and more stress. Practically speaking, technical services librarians were not on the "front lines" of COVID. They did not face the health risks from patron interactions that public services librarians encountered, and they were able to work from home with less overall disruption to their jobs. However, the long-ranging impact of the pandemic on technical services should not be understated. Because supporting Candler School of Theology courses is a primary mission of the Library, the workflows surrounding the materials for these courses impacted every part of the Library.

Through all of these difficulties in providing the electronic materials, there were also difficulties with patrons using them. The general perception was that electronic resources were readily available and easy to use, though there was a competing expectation that librarians would need to facilitate their use. During this time, reference transactions became less about the details of conducting graduate-level research and more about how to access online resources. Reference librarians patiently guided patrons through the complexities of VPNs, proxy servers, and a variety of e-book and e-journal platforms. Because the demographics of Candler's student population made them less likely to be digital natives than the average graduate student, librarians fought an uphill battle simply by teaching students to use the resources that were already a struggle to procure. Electronic resources, while the perfect solution in theory, proved to be difficult for faculty, students, and librarians alike.

The compounding expectations of librarians during this time can be characterized as an extreme form of job creep as a crisis response mechanism. Staff could not make the library a safe physical space, but they could acquire electronic resources and teach patrons how to use them from a distance. For many librarians, expanded service models were a form of panic. They catastrophized about the potential outcomes if students could not access the resources they needed, and filled those imagined gaps by spreading themselves thinner and thinner. By the time there was a true return to campus, library jobs

had expanded so much that it was difficult to imagine how manageable workloads could return.

Staff Well-Being

The negative impacts of the workflow disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic go deeper than simple one-time misunderstandings. Librarians as a group have a higher-than-average fear of making mistakes, a psychological phenomenon that has been linked to burnout among academic librarians (Reno 2023, 161). Although Lindsay Reno notes that explanations for this fear are varied, a significant contributing factor is the role of vocational awe in librarianship. Reno (2023) suggests, and the authors agree, that vocational awe places librarians upon a pedestal that attaches personal value to the profession. Librarians are taught from an early stage of their careers that their profession is one of accuracy and precision. They are taught that their value comes from their ability to complete tasks accurately, to guide patrons correctly, and to do all of this efficiently, because time and budgets are limited. When they make mistakes, no matter how big or small, it can feel as though they are not simply making an error, but that they are diminishing their value.

In the crisis circumstances of the pandemic, making mistakes is unavoidable. However, these circumstances, combined with the existing fear of making mistakes among academic librarians, created an environment conducive to burnout. When the Library closed to patrons, the many relationships with faculty and students were lost. Along with this, staff lost a key component of what Reno calls "positive error management," in which "an employee contextualizes their mistake in a positive way and holds positive beliefs about their mistake [and] believes that they can learn from their mistake and that it can have a positive outcome" (Reno 2023, 163). The circumstances of the pandemic made it very difficult to believe in positive outcomes since Library staff frequently saw only their patrons' unmet needs and criticism. Working in acquisitions and course reserves during COVID-19 was like trying to feed an insatiable beast. No matter how many electronic resources were purchased and scans delivered, there were always more requests. This seeming inability to meet patron needs, combined with the missteps born of significant

Personalizing the Pandemic

job creep, made it feel as though the deeply embedded fear of letting down the profession was being realized.

As the Library moved through the pandemic and into the cessation of most of the emergency response measures, the need to plan for the additional work required to keep up with these expectations became clear. As demonstrated, offering e-books at the same levels as 2020 was not feasible long-term for a number of reasons, not least of which is staff time. In 2020, staff were able to make this magic happen with a mixture of overwork, adrenaline, and partial suspension of other duties. With the resumption of duties like service desk supervision, it became impossible to continue providing e-books the same way while maintaining library services. In order to codify the necessary limitations for e-books, staff established policies for what types of e-books would and would not be purchased for various parts of the library collection. For course reserves, policies established that the Library would only purchase course materials as e-books if the course was being offered online. If students were required to come to campus to attend class, logic follows that they should be able to come to the Library, located in the same building as their College, to get a physical course reserve book. For general acquisitions, policies required that e-books meet a certain standard of demonstrated need before they would be added to the collection. In both cases, there were also licensing standards and price limits that had to be upheld.

Establishing e-book policies helped set boundaries on what the Library was able to provide for these new course formats, but it was ultimately necessary to comprehensively evaluate services and staff to realign them with the new expectations and priorities of the School of Theology. As part of this process, Elizabeth was promoted to Coordinator of Digital Initiatives, moving her into a newly established Digital Initiatives Department, and shifting course reserves responsibilities to the Resource Sharing Coordinator, who was previously the Interlibrary Loan and Circulation Specialist. These changes also made Caitlin the Head of Acquisitions and Access Services, which placed Acquisitions and Course Reserves within the same department.

The experience of the 2022-2023 academic year demonstrated how much the Library has changed since the start of the pandemic and showed the necessity of this reorganization. Even though the majority of courses at Candler were taught in person, physical course reserves have not returned to pre-pandemic levels. This shift required additional work to place items on electronic reserve because they needed

to be scanned or purchased electronically. Student use of the Library also changed this year, with fewer students coming to the Library in person and more students relying on electronic resources, regardless of whether they were taking online courses. Along these same lines, circulation of print materials fell by 40 percent when compared to 2019, the most recent non-pandemic-impacted year for which there is data. All of this means that public services and acquisitions have become more linked together than ever before at Pitts Theology Library. Patrons are increasingly engaging with the Library in a primarily digital format, which means that the electronic collections are playing a larger role than ever in the perception and function of the Library.

Here We Stand

As the Library ramps up electronic services and resources to support the growing population of remote students, we wonder: is it still the Library's responsibility to provide all course materials to students like we had been doing before the pandemic closures? Even if not always convenient, students were able to access all their course materials for free, whether by checking out a copy of the book from the reserves shelves, visiting an Emory-licensed database, or accessing a licensed scan uploaded to electronic reserves. Is this still a feasible expectation for librarians, faculty, and students in the reality of remote programs? With remote students located far from campus, they would certainly not be able to check out short-term loans, and we are not able to provide all materials electronically. Perhaps more important than a concrete answer to that question is addressing what amount of autonomy we, as librarians, have in determining our role in online learning.

In the spring of 2022, conversations started about creating permanent online programs, expanding the small, existing cohort of hybrid students. Throughout the semester, librarians advocated to be part of the conversation regarding modes of instruction at Candler School of Theology. We provided testimonials to the Dean of Faculty showing the difficulty of supporting online and in-person courses simultaneously, highlighting the distinct resource needs of each format and the many limitations we face in providing access to electronic materials. Caitlin spoke at two faculty meetings, once highlighting

a significant new read and publish agreement, and once as part of a presentation on Library support for digital research and teaching. It was incredibly important that librarians had an active voice during this period when the "new normal" was still being invented.

Informed by these conversations, Candler School of Theology welcomed the first cohort of the new hybrid Master of Divinity program in fall 2023. This program represents the larger shift in theological education towards flexible learning formats. The hybrid Master of Divinity will join four other hybrid and online degrees at Candler, leaving only one degree program (Master of Theological Studies) that requires full-time on-campus study. As part of the Library's mission to support Candler School of Theology, we will also support these online programs. Because the pandemic was our first experience supporting online learning, it can be difficult to disentangle those negative experiences from those of remote learning in general, but preparing for this change has allowed us to implement many of the important lessons we learned in the days of pandemic closures.

Thanks to librarian advocacy, we have plans in place to support the new online programs at Candler and the backing from campus administration to implement them. Even with our pandemic experience and planning, we will still be learning while we grow into our new organizational structure and learn the real-time needs of remote students. Although we would not like to revisit any of our experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of our panicked responses and quick pivots from that time have helped us create a more sustainable plan for the way forward.

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