Remote work in technical services: What have we learned? Where are we going?

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HELLO!

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Slides: https://go.uncg.edu/ncsc2022
I acknowledge that the land we are gathered on has long served as the site of meeting and exchange amongst a number of Indigenous peoples, including the Eno, Keyauwee, Occaneechi, Saura, and Shakori. We also want to acknowledge the long history and lasting legacies of slavery on these lands.
Remote Work in Library Technical Services: Connecting Historical Perspectives to Realities of the Developing COVID-19 Pandemic

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OA version: https://go.uncg.edu/sr2020
First, some questions
Share your thoughts:

Go to: https://www.menti.com/

Code: 7174 7851
Next, some context
UNCG University Libraries

- The UNCG University Libraries include the Walter Clinton Jackson Library and the Harold Schiffman Music Library

- The University Libraries are staffed with approximately 90 FTE

- The Libraries are leaders of collaborative, inter-institutional projects, including the Carolina Consortium and NC DOCKS
“Technical services” means different things to different people (and to different institutions!)

Tech Services at UNCG: What do we do?

▸ **Acquisitions**: buying, ordering, approval plans, etc

▸ **Cataloging and metadata**: all formats, for special, general, electronic, and other collections, including collaborative work with the Digital Projects Unit

▸ **Electronic resources**: licensing, vendor relations, managing access to databases, ebooks, ejournals, streaming media, etc

▸ **Scholarly communications**: management of institutional repository, open journals (OJS), and other open access initiatives, including outreach and education

▸ **And more! (Plus collaborative, interdepartmental work!)**
Technical Services at UNCG

- “Technical services” at UNCG can mean a group of people, a suite of activities/services, and a specific location
- One large, open workspace
- 17 full-time personnel
  - 11 staff members
  - 6 tenured or tenure-track faculty
  - 1 temporary worker
- Mission, goals, and more info: https://go.uncg.edu/ts-goals
Before the pandemic, almost everyone in Technical Services at UNCG worked exclusively in-person in our open office work area in Jackson Library.
UNCG University Libraries, Pre-COVID

- In-person work culture; remote work only allowed in limited circumstances (both in the Libraries overall and in Technical Services)
- Meetings held almost exclusively in-person
UNCG, mid-March, 2020

- Residential halls closed
- Face-to-face classes suspended, moved to virtual
- Campus buildings closed
- Events canceled
- Transition to remote work for most employees, almost overnight
To make an understatement, this was a huge change
Back to the column on remote work....
To be clear, I’m not an expert on remote work (I’m interested, and I’ve been making an effort to learn in this area)
Why did I write this column?

It was spring 2020:

- My library had recently transitioned to remote work, services, and instruction.
- My department was having a lot of conversations about how to handle our work in the remote environment.
- My *Serials Review* column deadline was approaching, and it was hard to think about anything other than the pandemic.
Since I was thinking so much about the pandemic and remote work, I decided to look into connecting those topics.
Before I could propose the column idea, I had to look at what had already been written. Was there literature about remote work in library technical services? And if so, was it enough to turn into a literature review?
My regular column for Serials Review is called “Electronic Resources Forum”

I’m not an e-resources librarian, so I usually take a broad interpretation of e-resources, sometimes opening up the focus to include technical services

My main interest was in remote work and its impact on library personnel and TS departments—not library users

I wondered if existing literature on remote work in TS could inform our experience of remote work in the pandemic
What I was *not* trying to do:

- Understand the entire history of remote work in all types of libraries and library departments
- Tell people/departments how to “do” remote work
- Get into the history of pandemics
- Examine other public health issues that have affected libraries
- Predict the future of how the pandemic would ultimately affect libraries and technical services
In early 2020, what did you find if you searched for articles on remote work in library technical services?
In short,
Not a lot
Remote Work in Library Technical Services: Connecting Historical Perspectives to Realities of the Developing COVID-19 Pandemic
AR Craft - Serials Review, 2020 - Taylor & Francis

The concept and practice of remote work in library technical services is not new, but the scale and speed of the transition to remote work for many libraries due to the COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented. This column provides an overview of pre-pandemic literature ...

[PDF] Remote library users—needs and expectations
R Cooper, PR Dempsey, V Menon, C Millson-Martula - 1998 - ideals.illinois.edu

... Likewise, their technology backgrounds may be more limited, and they may have less access to technical computer support (Rosenquist-Buhler,1996) with the bulk of their experience gained in the work setting ... Page 4. COOPER ET AL.//REMOTE LIBRARY USERS 45 ...

Remote locations for technical services: An exploratory survey
MJ McGurr - Technical Services Quarterly, 2011 - Taylor & Francis

... Falling in and out of Love: The Impact of Moving to a Remote Location on ... Isacco, "Work Spaces, Satisfaction, and Productivity in Libraries": 27–30 ... Harvard College Library Technical Services Resource Web Site http://hcl.harvard.edu/technicalservices/ (accessed March 22, 2010 ...)


Subjects: Library technical services; Academic libraries; COVID-19 pandemic
Did you mean...?

Related searches

library technical services communication and collaboration
remote locations technical services
technical services managers library association
remote work instruction librarians
change in technical services
remote students library services
remote library users
library instruction for remote learners

library resources and services
service perspectives digital library
library technical services york university
library technical services abu dhabi
remote work theoretical and applied approaches
relocation or dislocation technical services
exploratory survey technical services
distant students library services
Many of the top results were about:

- Remote work in non-library settings
- Library services for remote users / distance learners
- Remote access to electronic library collections
- Remote locations for technical services
- Remote reference services
- Libraries in remote locations
- Library services for remote communities
Only a very small number of articles addressed both remote work and library technical services.
So, what did I find?
Let’s break it down by:

- Types of literature available
- Dates and terminology
- Type of technical services work
- Remote work planning considerations
- Remote work challenges
- Remote work benefits
What types of literature informed this column?

**Case studies**
Documenting TS remote work involving one person or one dept

**Reports**
From conference discussions about TS remote work

**“Other”**
Generalist (not solely TS) literature about remote work(ers) in libraries
The literature only reflects what is published, which doesn't include all perspectives.

Not all library personnel write, present, and/or publish about their work experiences; so the literature only tells part of the story.
Full-text online access wasn’t available for some articles that sounded promising, and print collections weren’t available due to closures.

The literature I did find was focused on academic libraries.

Also, I may have missed some things!
According to the literature, remote work in library technical services was being discussed, tested, and implemented in the 1990s (on a limited basis).

Articles published in:

- 1995
- 1996
- 1998
The literature reflects one particular area within technical services as testing (and publishing about) these early implementations of remote work.

Any guesses as to which area?
The early-adopter award for piloting (and publishing) about remote work in technical services goes to...

Cataloging!

Image from Flickr by user kyz, available at https://www.flickr.com/photos/77047514@N00/3962573662 (CC BY 2.0)
Terminology changes over time

What terms and strings appeared in the titles of relevant literature?

- “Telecataloging”
- “Telecommuting”
- “Cataloging coast to coast”
- “Flexibility in the management of cataloging”
- “Flexible staffing”
- “Working from afar”
What else can we learn from the literature?
Planning for remote work

▸ Institutional / departmental policies
  ▷ Liability considerations

▸ Technology
  ▷ What is needed, what will be provided, and by whom?

▸ Agreement on tasks, schedule, time frame, performance evaluation, etc
  ▷ Some institutions require an MOU or MOA
Remote work challenges

- Technology
- Isolation
- Socialization
- Work-life balance
- Equity
Remote work can be an equity issue

- In institutional settings, organizations usually provide physical facilities, technology, internet access, and other job-related needs.

- Not all organizations provide hardware, software, and/or internet access (or financial support for such) to personnel working remotely.

- In such situations, remote work may essentially be reserved for personnel who can provide these resources themselves.
Potential remote work benefits

▸ Offer flexibility for employees
▸ Improve employee morale
▸ Increase efficiency
▸ Improve employee retention
▸ Opportunity for employers to rethink physical spaces (and attain savings on such)
What has been published on this topic in the meantime?


Subjects: Library technical services; Academic libraries; COVID-19 pandemic
Recent searches didn’t find much new literature on this topic, but my column on remote work is getting cited – so what are those publications about?
Library-based, but not focused on tech services

- “Library resilience and leadership in a global crisis”
- “The impact of COVID-19 on reference services: a national survey of academic health sciences librarians”
- “Transition of University Libraries to Adapt to the New Normal: A mid-and post-COVID-19 Response”
- “Evaluating research support facilities to university students during COVID-19”
- “Echoes down the corridor. Experiences and perspectives of library and information science education (LISE) during COVID-19 through an African lens”
Other fields

- “Remote work at the time of COVID-19 pandemic and beyond: A scoping review,” *HR Analytics and Digital HR Practices*
- “To Change or Not to Change: A Study of Workplace Change during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*
International perspectives

Krizler Fırsat Yaratır Miy? Covid-19 Sürecinde Akademik Kütüphaneler, Yenilenmiş Bir Vizyon: "MEF Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi"


Biblioteka 2020. Zderzenie wizji
R Ciesielska-Kruczek - Biblioteka i Edukacja

Artykuł podzielony jest na dwie części, zaprezentowano oficjalne informacje o bibliotece oraz przepowiednie, jakie byłyby w przyszłości.

Biblioteka 2020. Zderzenie wizji
R Ciesielska-Kruczek - Biblioteka i Edukacja

Artykuł podzielony jest na dwie części, zaprezentowano oficjalne informacje o bibliotekach i przepowiednie, jakie byłyby w przyszłości.

Save 99 Cite Related articles
There is undoubtedly more research and scholarship on this topic on the way.
Where are we now?
Are we back in the office?
How has required remote work shaped what we’re doing now?
Planning

Now we have planning opportunities and an understanding of needs that we didn’t have before

- Institutional and departmental policies, guidelines, and expectations
- MOUs/MOAs
- Technology
- Procedures and workflows
- Remote work evidence
Challenges

- Navigating new and changing hybrid situations
- Balancing business needs and personal interests when it comes to remote work
What changes and challenges are you seeing in your departments when it comes to remote work experiences and expectations?
What about the future?

- We still don’t know the full and lasting effects of the pandemic and associated changes on libraries and our work, spaces, services, and users

- I don’t have answers; I do have questions
Some questions

▸ How did library technical services units handle the transition to remote work?
▸ What challenges did they face?
▸ What innovations were made, resources were created, or lessons were learned in supporting and managing the transition to remote work?
More questions

How have libraries handled provision of technology, isolation of personnel, and other issues discussed in the literature?

How will the pandemic affect library TS operations in the long-term?

Will remote work remain common in TS units, even after remote work and social distancing measures are no longer required or recommended?
It is hard to imagine remote work in a pre-internet time.

But it is not hard to imagine tech services personnel testing out new and different ways to get their work done.
Personnel in library technical services handle change all the time!
THANKS!

Any questions?

▸ Anna Craft: arcraft@uncg.edu

▸ Slides link: https://go.uncg.edu/ncsc2022

The full article is also available via open access in UNCG’s institutional repository: https://go.uncg.edu/sr2020
More resources:


More resources, continued:


More resources, continued:

  [https://doi.org/10.1300/J124v19n02_04](https://doi.org/10.1300/J124v19n02_04)
  [https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/libcat_pubs/6/](https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/libcat_pubs/6/)
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