

The UGBC Library's Experiences across the Pre-, During-, and Post-COVID-19 Timelines

Simmons La Rose^{1*}, Rachel Peters¹, Keon Schwiers²

¹Library, University of Guyana Berbice Campus, Guyana

²Registry, University of Guyana Berbice Campus, Guyana

*Correspondence to be addressed: E-mail - simmone.larose@uog.edu.gy

Cite this article as: La Rose, S., Peters, R., & Schwiers, K. The UGBC Library's experiences across the pre-, during-, and post-COVID-19 timelines. *Texila Int J Acad Res.* 2026;13(4).

<https://doi.org/10.21522/TIJAR.2014.13.04.Art012>

Received: 17.07.2026

Accepted: 21.08.2026

Published: 30.10.2026

Article Type: Original Research

Abstract *The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a wave of disruptions worldwide and its effect on the higher education systems significantly impacted their service units, among them being their academic libraries. This study discusses the transformation of the University of Guyana Berbice Campus (UGBC) Library operations and services across three phases: Pre-, During-, and Post-COVID-19 periods. This study utilises a content analysis, a qualitative research approach to discuss the UGBC Library's experience before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the findings are that prior to the pandemic, the library was heavily dependent on traditional modes of operations, with the face-to-face services, the physical resources, and integrated minimal digital applications into its operations. In the face of the pandemic, although the abrupt and forced response to remote operations exposed various weaknesses, it also accelerated digital adoption and resulted in forward thinking and innovative work behaviour. During the pandemic timeline, the library first adopted full online operations, then gradually incorporated the hybrid service delivery model, pulling together both the physical and digital service modalities. Library operations in the post covid period can be described as being a continuation of the hybrid service model. The study concludes that despite the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the UGBC Library utilised the experience as an opportunity to transform its services and build greater resilience for the future. Some future recommendations for the UGBC Library include adopting a flexible work schedule, strengthening the hybrid service model, improving ICT infrastructure, and engaging in continuous Professional Development (PD) activities.*

Keywords *Academic Libraries, COVID-19 Pandemic, Lifelong Learning, University of Guyana Berbice Campus Library, Work from Home.*

Introduction

Academic libraries are important hubs to their parent institutions, since they provide access to services and resources and support teaching, learning and research.

The University of Guyana Berbice Campus (UGBC) Library was established in 2000 and is an arm of the main Library at the Turkeyen Campus. It provides a range of resources, supporting the teaching and research programmes of the University of Guyana Berbice Campus.

In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the way institutions operated and many universities and their support services, like the libraries, closed operations due to the hard lockdowns and social distancing measures. With this, library professionals were forced to find a quick and focused response to transform operations and sustain its services, so as to continue serving its clients. Academic libraries swiftly moved from physical service delivery to entirely digital platforms. This was the impetus for the future of academic libraries.

While this transition was challenging for developing countries like Guyana due to the limitations of its ICT infrastructure, digital inequality and overall limited technological readiness, this did not deter the University of Guyana Berbice Campus Library. The staff at the University of Guyana Berbice Campus (UGBC) began to strategise, in order to continue its operations. The sudden closure of the university in March 2020 was a test for the library in terms of providing its support remotely. This required quick adaptation, innovative delivery methods, while relying heavily on digital technologies.

It must be noted that before the great disruption, the UGBC Library had already introduced initiatives to support various technological modernisation, by firstly implementing Koha Open-Source Library Management System, expanded the electronic information services and further embarked

upon minimal digitisation of its materials.

This pandemic accelerated innovative thinking and opened new avenues for the library staff to transform its services, and more importantly, ensure uninterrupted service for its patrons. Some of the initiatives undertaken by the UGBC Library during this wave of COVID-19 were either being introduced for the very first time, or were tasks that existed before, but were now being done with greater intensity. The works executed ranged from verifying book records, facilitating online payments and patron's registration, conducting Information Literacy (IL) sessions using virtual platforms, designing virtual exhibitions and library tours, among other initiatives.

Then emerged the post COVID period of the hybrid service model where operations remained in a dual mode and continuous efforts were made to strengthen the library's digital infrastructure.

This study discusses the UGBC Library's experience during the COVID-19 phases, that is, pre, during and post timelines. It highlights the library's operations before the pandemic, the responses taken by the library during the pandemic and the challenges encountered as well as the transformation of the library's operations and services after the crisis.

The findings from this study provides valuable insights into technological adaptation, organisational resilience, and the future of academic libraries in developing countries. It can also be a support for future crisis preparedness for sustainable library services in this digital era. Further, it can contribute meaningfully to the body of scholarly literature, providing evidence for research in the future.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Identify the operational and technological characteristics of the UGBC Library during the Pre-COVID-19 phase.
2. Discuss the responses and service adaptations implemented by the UGBC

Library during the COVID-19.

3. Investigate the challenges experienced by the UGBC Library during COVID-19.
4. Assess the transformation of the UGBC Library services and operations post COVID-19 phase.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical model underpinning this research was the resilience theory, the social innovation typology model and the technology acceptance model (TAM).

Resilience Theory

The resilience theory originated through the work of Norman Garmezy, Emmy Werner, and Ann S. Masten in the 1970s. This theory provides a framework to understand how persons develop strengths and coping mechanisms to overcome challenges and focuses on the importance of protective factors and adaptive processes that promote resilience in persons [1]. The resilience theory basically places emphasis on an organisation's ability to adapt and thus recover from disruptions while maintaining essential functions. This is evident in the actions taken by academic libraries globally, that were forced to quickly modify operations during COVID-19. An abundance of literature has documented the new norm for academic libraries, which was brought on because of the pandemic, ranging from online teaching, hybrid environments and digital policies [2]. Another instance is in the context of the Poland academic libraries where they encountered immediate challenges including the lack of relevant benchmarks for service delivery and the absence of universal guides for safety and procedures for COVID-19 [3]. Nevertheless, the Poland academic libraries adjusted well by digitising their collections, expanded infrastructure and increased the online resources [3].

Social Innovation Typology Model

Another model that is applicable at this juncture is the social Innovation typology

model, with the leading proponent being Frances Westley, the category of emergency response, and understanding how social innovation occurs. Its important to note how new ideas, services and practices create value especially when existing systems cannot serve any longer [4]. The relevance of this theory is that in the context of libraries, it explains the new ways of service delivery.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Finally, the TAM theory model, also referred to the individual's adaptation but with a focus on new technologies [5]. This model suggests that the adoption of technology is influenced mainly by perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. During the COVID-19 period, both library professionals and users were required to engage with digital platforms, electronic databases, online catalogues, and virtual communication systems. TAM provides a useful framework for understanding how the stakeholders of academic libraries adapted to increased reliance on technology.

Together, the resilience, social innovation typology model and TAM theories provide a framework for understanding both technological adaptation and institutional responses to a crisis.

Methodology

The study utilised a qualitative research approach in the form of a content analysis, discussing the experience of an academic library experience before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The content analysis approach was chosen for its sustainability in analysing the UGBC Library's experience within the pandemic phases. The data were gathered from institutional reports and other relevant materials within the time period. The researchers' lived experiences further served as the primary source of data.

Additionally, scholarly articles retrieved from various academic databases and websites including EBSCOhost, JSTOR, ResearchGate,

Google Scholar, among others, were used to support the study. The combinations of search terms that were used to gather scholarly articles include “academic libraries”, “pre-COVID”, “during COVID”, “post-COVID”, “university libraries response to the pandemic”. The results obtained from the search were filtered based on full-text, publication year, and subject area which provided about 36 scholarly articles for analysing.

A thematic analysis was conducted after reviewing the documents, resulting in a number of sub-themes, with the three major themes being:

1. Pre-COVID-19 Phase (before 2020):
UGBC Library Operations before COVID
2. During COVID-19 Phase (2020-2021):
COVID-19, A Disruptive Force Leading to WFH
3. Post-COVID-19 Phase (2022-Present):
Transformation of the Library Operations & Services

Findings & Discussion

Analysis of the literature revealed that the pandemic served as a catalyst for accelerated transformations in the library sector. The findings also revealed that although the library experienced some technological readiness before the pandemic, the encountering of significant challenges prompted rapid innovative thinking that transformed service delivery.

Pre-COVID-19 Phase: UGBC Library Operations before COVID

Library Resources and Collection Development

Before the pandemic, one of the UGBC library's primary focus was acquiring, organising and disseminating physical and electronic information resources. The collection development efforts focused on supporting teaching, learning, and research activities across the university programmes. Highlights were usually focused on the growth

in print collections, databases, and efforts to improve access to scholarly materials within the Caribbean.

Further, the literature also suggested that academic libraries in the less developed countries were gradually incorporating digital resources before the pandemic, although physical collections remained the central to the services. Academic libraries in Africa, since the pre covid period, were already expanding digital resources, research support, and their technological enabled services, but the pandemic accelerated these developments [6]. Closer home, UWI's St. Augustine Theses collection was digitised and there was also a small but growing e-book Caribbean Collection through the EBSCOhost database etc [7]. Likewise, as also experienced by UGBC Library, UWI would have accelerated work and expanded what existed from the onset of Covid.

Notably, educators in various African universities utilised innovative methods including Web 2.0 applications, repositories, databases, mobile websites, professional development among others in an effort to transform academic libraries in the three stages of global revolutions (pre, post and current COVID-19 eras) [6]. This indication has strengthened the case of an innovative operation mode of institutions, even before the crisis, and continuing after.

On the contrary though, and of interest is for the lock down phase, readings show that universities in Nigeria did not provide online resources to support their parent institutions' online executions [6]. Further, for developed countries, this was not the same [6]. From the researchers' point of view, it is difficult to comprehend, however, this revelation again solidifies the case of another instance of the technology gap and challenges.

Physical Library Services & Operations

The pre-COVID period is widely characterised with services being mostly delivered through face-to-face interactions. At

UGBC Library, these services included:

1. Borrowing & Returning of Materials
2. Renewals
3. Equipment Loans and Miscellaneous Loans
4. Reservation
5. Library Instruction and Tours
6. Reprographic (Printing, Photocopying, Scanning & Binding)
7. Inter-Library Loan
8. Registration & Clearance of patrons
9. Photography & Videography
10. References & Information Literacy Sessions
11. Library's Online Public Access Catalogue and Electronic Resources
12. Social Networking

At UWI during the Pre COVID-19 period, in person photocopies of materials were done or the other option was to photograph the materials using mobile devices [7]. Further based on personal experience of their operations, they also offered reference assistance, reader advisory, circulation and printing services, information literacy training and research topic guidance as their services pre COVID.

Information and Communication Technology Infrastructure

It is important to note that the use of technology and providing virtual assistance are nothing new for the UGBC Library operations, our Head campus library and many other libraries as a whole. This statement is supported by The NMC Horizon Report Summary 2017 Library Edition which indicated that technological applications as they emerge is certainly not new for academic libraries [8].

At the UGBC Library, prior to the emergence of the pandemic, the library utilised various forms of technology to interact and serve its patrons. There was the use of the landline telephone, fax and email as means of interacting with patrons and vendors.

Subsequently, a Facebook account was established to connect with the library, thereafter, Twitter and Instagram were also introduced as other platforms. As time progressed and more internet of things (IOT) became available, the Library introduced a mobile phone service with the call and SMS feature only, then in 2016 transitioned to the use of WhatsApp.

The Library also offered other aspects of online services, providing patrons with access to a wide range of subscribed electronic databases. Additionally, in 2011 in collaboration with the Turkeyen Campus Library, the Koha, an Open-Source Library Management System was launched. This represented one of the most significant technological steps taken before the pandemic. Koha significantly improved the cataloguing procedures, circulation management, and resource discovery.

In terms of social media, its use in academic libraries was widespread, but it was more for the basic and informational purposes, focusing on outreach rather than interactive or for heavy service engagement [9].

A study of university libraries in Asia, North America and Europe found that 71.1% of libraries participated already used social networking tools with Facebook and Twitter being the most widely adopted [10]. This in itself shows the relevance and importance of social media even before COVID-19.

Our Caribbean counterparts at UWI were also positioned to use technology that ranged from institutional repository and UWInC an information portal with information resources including the university's intellectual output, electronic resources (journals, databases, books) and the catalogues for all UWI campuses. The Mona Online Research Database (MORD) comprised faculty research but with specific emphasis on HIV/AIDS [11]. Further, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube Flickr have all been introduced and in use at UWI [12].

These initial developments were merely intended to improve operational efficiency rather than prepare the library for a global crisis. Nevertheless, in particular the automated systems and Web 2.0 applications became crucial once physical operations were disrupted. Therefore, in this case it can be seen that technological investments prove beneficial beyond their original purpose. A mere routine modernisation effort before 2020 became a very essential component of the library's emergency response strategy during the pandemic and continuing to the present day.

Opportunities and Challenges Pre- COVID-19

While the UGBC Library succeeded in staff development initiatives, expanded its collection, engaged in collaboration both internally and externally, challenges did not spare our territory. These challenges included limited funding for technological projects, lack of ICT infrastructure, and growing demands for various electronic databases and subscription services.

Likewise, with technological advancement, there has been an increase in published works, and this compelled information professionals and modern libraries to pursue and adopt these

modern digital tools and procedures in carrying out its activities [13]. For example, libraries have adopted electronic devices and methods in its service delivery including the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) for cataloguing and online searches, electronic devices for browsing and emails for registration, among others [13].

Additionally, a study revealed that the libraries investigated were delivering their services with functional library buildings, however, their collection varies and there is inadequate staffing [14]. The study further highlighted that many of the libraries lack collection development policies, the non-book materials are very meagre, digitisation of collections are not widely adopted, and as such it's critical to strengthen service delivery and increase staffing [14].

During COVID-19 Phase: COVID-19, A Disruptive Force Leading to Exclusive WFH then Phased Re-Opening/Blended Modes

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there were two (2) modes of operations at the UGBC Library namely: Telework/Remote Work/WFH (March 26 -September 4, 2020) and Blended Modes (September 7, 2020-April 29, 2022) (see Figure 1 below).

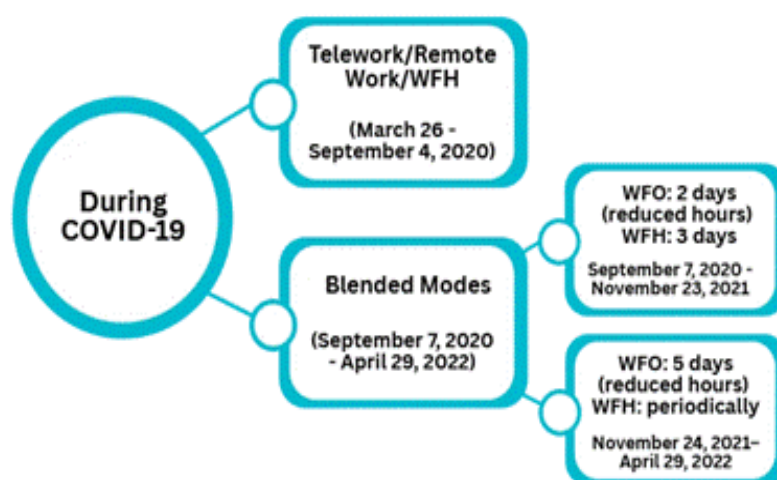


Figure 1. UGBC Library Operation Modes During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Adapted from Ref. [15].

Telework/Remote Work/WFH in Brief

The practice of telework, remote work or work from home was forced upon us and made more popular due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is important to note that this concept is not new. In 1972, Jack Niles, a NASA engineer coined the term telecommuting since he was working from home on a complex communication system [16]. The growth of WFH in the pre-pandemic period was a viable option owing to the advancement of technology. Although Video-call software (Teams, Zoom, Webex), cloud file-sharing packages (Box, Drive, Dropbox) and connectivity software (Asana, Gmail and Slack) were widely available in 2019, are essentials for remote work but were not in existence during 2000, hence working remotely was executed by utilising telephone and emails at that time [17].

However, at the UGBC Library, during the pre-pandemic era, although the telephone, emails and the web 2.0 technologies existed there was no official mandate in terms of working from home. But from time to time, staff would engage in working from their homes in order to complete tasks to meet deadlines etc. This was, however, not under an official capacity, since this feature was never a practice here.

In general, there was some amount of growth in remote work, however, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the drastic push towards this growth, making it official. As is evident, the work from home initiative is nothing new, and was referred to by various titles. In the early years home-based jobs were in agriculture or the craft, however, in 1965 around 0.4% of full paid days in the US were WFH, then by the 1990s the WFH rapidly increased in the United States, due to the advancement in information and communication technology [17]. As personal computers became common, by the 1990s the WFH in the US doubled, and kept increasing as the internet became widely available [17]. However, with the pandemic

and with this arrangement being forced upon us, organisations adopted, then adapted, and this quickly became the order of the day. In the beginning of the pandemic, remote work was made an option for all staff irrespective of their roles [18]. Further, for some, it meant an adjustment in the type of task they performed, i.e. shifting from a service desk to a chat service [18].

For online stores, call centres and teaching staff, the WFH/Telework/Telecommuting is readily visible. The recurring question that information professionals often faced during this pandemic period were “what really would WFH entail?”. Some people thought that WFH meant sitting on the couch, watching TV, with the laptop lying nearby, however, that was not the case because there is a desk, monitor, post-it notes and all other necessary materials set up to execute work [19].

In giving some explanation for the above discussion, it must be noted that for information services or libraries, this WFH was repeatedly questioned, given that information resources and the entire internet are already accessible remotely, - what value can library or information services professionals be engaged in or continue to provide?

Generally, library activities range from virtual reference and other enquiries, ordering and requesting invoices, locating vendors and materials, social media outreach, online document delivery, demonstrating the use of online resources, convening meetings etc., and these have definitely ensured that information services have secured a place and with no more guessing, easily fits into Telework. It must be noted that some jobs are more appropriate for telework such as engaging in indexing and cataloguing, working on websites, creating aids for patrons, facilitating virtual reference, among others [20].

Initiation of WFH at the UGBC Library

With the lockdown at UG on March 16, 2020 which was anticipated for only a few days, the administration made arrangements for the way forward. Some staff at UGBCL continued to be available, engaging with the basics of its services i.e. answering queries from patrons, extending due dates for items etc. via the usual virtual mode of operations, e.g. using social media, emails and WhatsApp. With the reality of the shutdown no longer being a few days, staff commenced utilising the staff's WhatsApp group more frequently. At this point an engagement ensued on the way forward, for our mission resulting in the grab work -take home initiative. It must be noted that this proved to be a great way for collaborating and to serve our patrons. One librarian mentioned that following the pandemic, a WhatsApp group was created by the library management to post updates, share views on providing library service, and also engage in sharing words of encouragement; it was then that they discovered that WhatsApp is a great tool that can be used in service delivery [21]. Likewise, the UGBC Library staff, with pride supports this sentiment that indeed, during the lockdown, we also discovered the great advantage of the WhatsApp tool and appreciated the same.

With the UG's lock down orders in effect, on March 26, 2020, UGBC Library staff visited the Library to retrieve selected Library assets in order to be able to work from home. The work tasks were divided among the staff and those who chose not to visit the Library, their work materials were packaged and placed at the security hut for pick up, while others were delivered to those staff in nearby residences [15]. What is interesting is one library professional with only four months on the job, indicated that before she left on the day of the lockdown, she took materials which required original cataloguing and her laptop in order to continue her work at home [23]. In another instance, another library professional noted that

after work from home emerged, the staff decided to creep back into the library and grab items such as books, puppets, and others that are necessary for programmes like virtual story times, etc. These collaborative efforts demonstrate that library professionals were ready and willing to beat the odds in order to continue providing services.

During the WFH period, the UGBC Library staff used a variety of spaces including hammocks, sofas, in the kitchen area and even some set up designated office spaces, with work activity durations often extending into the evenings [15]. Many transformed these sections of their homes into their work environments in order to be of service to patrons. Similarly, working remotely, from various locations at home e.g. from backyard to garages, resulted in staff being in new virtual spaces, away from the library building [23].

For the UGBC Library staff, they were indeed in this new virtual space away from their physical offices, commencing duties early in the mornings with late night endings, and at the same time enjoying the benefits of the forced work from home experience. The WFH initiatives resulted in staff members completing the following tasks [15]:

1. Verified catalogue card records
2. Cleaned and organised files and folders on flash drives
3. Sorted and uploaded files and folders on cloud storage
4. Organised, classified and labelled photography and videography projects in hard drives
5. Prepared books for repairs
6. Cleared patrons using the tray with registration cards
7. Listed old Reading Room tickets
8. Transformed ledgers to the soft copy format, this is referred to as our green projects where all information in the accession ledger, staff research ledger and clearance ledger were manually digitised (typed) and stored on the cloud

9. Scanned accession slips and examination papers
10. Engaged in administrative tasks including report preparation, following-up on vendors, planning for reopening, etc.
11. Attended meetings, seminars, workshops and training sessions
12. Explored open access sites
13. Catalogued materials
14. Fulfilled patrons' requests thru digital platforms for articles following copyright guidelines
15. Promoted the use of the IL trainings, accessing our databases, & open educational resources
16. Created virtual tours, exhibitions and instructional guides.
17. Conducted IL sessions via digital platforms
18. Responded to patron inquiries
19. Retrieving relevant newspaper clippings
20. Collaborated with overseas colleagues for assistance in fulfilling patrons' requests.
21. Assessed the status of the workplan and added new areas where necessary
22. Assisted patrons with various research needs: referencing, editorial work, etc.

On reflecting upon other literature, it was found that an information professional commenced work at 9:30 in the morning with status updates, cataloguing work, procuring materials and working towards building a digital collection [22]. Additionally, during the initial stages of the outbreak, library staff engaged in professional development activities, focused on social media engagement, conducted administrative tasks, built the collection and prepared for the reopening of the library [18]. Further, library staff working from home were expected to provide updates pertaining to the tasks and services they provided to the senior management [21]. It is important to note that during this time, communication was important since some persons were new to some tasks and needed guidance. In terms of this communication, in

the face-to-face operational mode, persons could have engaged in direct and immediate interactions which promote a better understanding and more effective communication than the virtual mode due to disruptions from the internet, etc.

Extensive Use of Virtual Services

Virtual services at the UGBC Library are nothing new. However, in order to make patrons aware that the library was still strictly serving from home during the lockdown, notices were created indicating that while the physical doors were closed, the library was still open to serve its patrons. These notices quickly became the library's WhatsApp status and were featured on all its social media platforms. Libraries in their quest to reach out to their patrons utilise various means where information and communication technologies (ICTs) tools become useful for delivering services during the lockdown [21]. For instance, although libraries were closed, librarians at Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) continued to assist students via email and zoom sessions [24].

At UGBC Library, our virtual services became increasingly demanding and therefore, major attention had to be given to this service. Patrons were bombarding us for hardcover books from the collection but because of the Campus being off limits, this was not possible. Notably too, these requests were received at all hours of the 24-hr. day period via social media platforms, emails, chat, WhatsApp, SMS, and calls. To fulfil the requests, staff members began searching the library's available databases like EBSCO host, JSTOR, Research4Life, etc., to find an article or the entire book or journal of exactly what was requested or appropriate alternatives. This was then sent to the patron electronically. The libraries' role should be highly valued during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the increase in provision of quality databases such as JSTOR, PubMed, ERIC, etc. which bridged the gap in

relation to gaining access to scholarly materials [21]. In addition, library staff continued to fulfil requests for articles and book chapters through interlibrary loan and document delivery as well as reference and instruction via Google Meet, email, chat, and phone [24]. Moreover, library staff while working from home were handling queries online pertaining to providing books, articles, among others [25]. Further, other library staff highlighted that they were providing 24/7 service which includes providing open digital contents, books/articles, responding to queries, updating the library's websites, among others via email, WhatsApp and phone to accommodate patrons [25]. The intense searches by the UGBC Library staff in the pursuit of finding digital copy matches for the patrons' requests, resulted in us discovering many free/open sites as well as organisations who had generously made their scholarly materials available at no cost.

During the pandemic many vendors provided open access to some of their academic resources [25]. Further, to ensure the delivery and sustenance of the service, staff even reached out to colleagues at other overseas universities in order to ascertain if access could be given to some materials that were not available from the UGBC Library staff searches. Overall, it's important to note that patrons appreciated the efforts of the UGBC Library staff in fulfilling their requests and as such would leave comments on various platforms like "very helpful", "love the instant feedback", among others.

Promoting the services at the UGBC Library, was also done via social media platforms, in this case, by creating step by step instructional ads/guides on database usage and how to recognise scholarly work, among others. One librarian highlighted that during the pandemic, several librarians from their team created mini-instructional videos, demonstrating how to evaluate online information, among others; and these videos were easily accessible to students via social media [22].

Further, numerous IL sessions were conducted (both by whole class & one-on-one sessions), focusing on plagiarism, referencing materials, identifying credible sources, utilising the various databases, etc. using various methods of delivery. Research assistance was also given to patrons which entailed editorial works, formatting of papers, among others.

Other virtual services provided by the UGBC Library included clearances, exhibitions, library tours, etc. Interestingly, there are mixed views on library operations, for example, the pandemic just accelerated the trends for which already existed rather than created entirely new ones [26]. However, this may not be entirely true to be used as a generalised statement since for example, UGBC Library introduced for the first time virtual library tours, exhibitions and web conferencing tools for the IL training following the pandemic.

Blended Modes

This mode was done in two phases (see Figure 1 on page 9) with all health and safety precaution measures in place.

- **Phase 1** - Work from Office (WFO) 2 days with reduced hours & Work from Home (WFH) 3 days & more per week.
- **Phase 2** - WFO: 5 days per week with reduced hours & WFH –periodically.

During this mode of operation, the UGBC Library staff engaged in the following tasks:

- **WFO:** Digitised materials that were in demand including examination papers, catalogued materials, quarantined materials, offered reprographic and circulation services.
- **WFH:** Fulfilled request for materials, responded to queries, edited photographs, conducted social media outreaches and gave IL assistance.

Opportunities Emerging from WFH Due to the Lockdown

While there are many benefits reported by other researchers regarding WFH, there are four major aspects from the UGBC Library experience [15].

Firstly, Library staff were given the opportunity to complete projects that were previously on hold due to competing work demands. It is quite interesting to note too that at the UGBC Library, certain projects that were previously overlooked, such as digitising of accession slips, ledgers, backing up files on cloud storage as well as organising photographs and video recordings regarding UG matters, were all worked on during this period. Similarly, one librarian pointed out that teleworking was considered a blessing in disguise since it gives her time she always wanted but never had until now [22]. Further, she was able to focus on commencing and completing projects like cleaning up catalogue and repository records, converting hundreds of files from one of the earliest digitised special collections, among others [22].

Secondly, there was a shift in focus, for example, to digitise examination papers since a void in this work activity was discovered. Particularly, there were overwhelming requests for past examination papers which were only stored in the hard copy format. At this point it was clear that UGBC Library was indeed digitising information as we referred to it as the green projects. However, the examination papers were not yet done and subsequently had to be given priority because of the increasing demand. The fact was that indeed UGBC Library initiatives included digitising materials using traditional means, however, the question

was what items were given the priority. As noted by D. Cort (personal communication, February 10, 2020), digitising of materials indeed might for some only be commencing now- (due to the pandemic), however, other libraries would have been digitising information long before the crisis, but the question is what resources precisely were being digitised by the latter? From a Pakistani standpoint, patrons from the social sciences and humanities required more library support since information relating to their subject areas were mostly available in printed formats at the university libraries [25]. There is a need for digitisation of both print and special collections because in the future there will be the need to shift digitised content from a preservation/review tool, to becoming the point of access to the collection [25]. For many, the COVID-19 pandemic must be credited to paving the way and making essential print materials now readily accessible via the virtual platforms and not just for preservation purposes, something that the UGBC Library can relate to.

Thirdly, for the first time, the UGBC Library staff undertook the WFH approach and the experience indicated that it provided a balance between work and home duties due to the flexible work schedule. It is interesting to note that for some staff, this working from home enhanced their output [18]. For some staff at the UGBC Library, it indeed had a positive impact on their productivity in terms of completing tasks that were overlooked due to demanding normal onsite work routines, as was evident in their reports/statistics submitted. In terms of providing evidence of positive productivity levels discussed herein, Table 1 presents these outcomes.

Table 1. Comparison of Some Statistics: Pre-exclusive WFH Period vs Exclusive WFH Period (For the 5 Months Duration)

Activities/Tasks	Pre-exclusive WFH (March 26-Sept 4, 2019)	Exclusive WFH (March 26-Sept 4, 2020)
Records verified	251	1362
Catalogued e-resources	41	143

Located E-resources for patrons' access	NIL	537
---	-----	-----

Finally, the UGBC Library staff worked across assigned duties. For example, the book binder, although not practically being able to the binding equipment, she nevertheless assisted with some of the tasks like verification of catalogue cards and digitising of materials which were normally performed by the Library Assistants. Additionally, the UGBC Library staff engaged in PD activities to improve service delivery due to the setback caused by the pandemic [15]. For instance, when technical difficulties are experienced by the UGBC Library staff, they would solicit the services of the technicians, to rectify the problem. However, due to the isolation and the urge to get work done, staff willingly participated in and completed short courses or utilised the trial by error option in order to rectify these problems. As library staff adapted to remote working, they spent more time on professional development and took advantage of learning opportunities online; this is evident in a poll at an Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) virtual town hall where 81% of the respondents reported an upward trend in their participation with professional development opportunities since the start of the pandemic [27]. At the UGBC Library every professional development opportunity that was provided by the administration and others, staff were always ready to take the opportunity. Of interest to note is that some staff who were considered the traditional type, were resistant to change and did not want to use the collaboration tools like Google Docs, were forced to incorporate the same into their routine, and now cannot envision themselves not continuing with it. During the pandemic, some staff refreshed their knowledge of existing procedures while others developed new skills, and this is reflected in preceding sections of this discussion [15]. Likewise, one of the opportunities for academic libraries was technology acceleration,

especially as it relates to Artificial Intelligence such as the BOT introduction etc [28]. It's important also to highlight here that some staff perform duties beyond their designated roles, willingly taking up the challenge to learn and work. The staff undertook this for the love of doing what they do and keeping occupied, library counterparts the world over were doing it, and for the obvious - staff felt their obligation to contribute since the library is the support hub for teaching staff.

Challenges Emerging from WFH due to the Lockdown

Aside from the positives that emerged from the lockdown, the UGBC Library encountered four major challenges from this WFH practice [15].

Firstly, there was competition for resources including workspaces, devices, among others within the staff home settings. For example, with families where both parents were working and children were studying, it was a challenge sharing the resources at the same time, resulting in poor internet connectivity, taking turns to use devices, among others. Library staff while working at home periodically experienced bandwidth issues since their partners/children were also having online meetings [29]. For others, lacking resources like the internet prompted them to visit locations other than their home in order to get work done. It is critical to note that for the effective WFH process, staff needed technological tools and internet access [18]. It is an additional cost for libraries to support remote work since internet access, equipment and furnishings are needed [30].

Secondly, the work hours increased for some staff at the UGBC Library since there were increasingly overwhelming requests from patrons which resulted in mental exhaustion and limited self-care. However, other library staff encountered similar issues where they

mentioned that due to providing 24/7 services, the extended work routines add pressure to them [25]. Likewise, many librarians have faced depression/burnout, with varying degrees of intensity due to them being deeply immersed in their daily tasks, thus overlooking the importance of monitoring their own mental well-being [31]. Quite notable is the common trend of working extended hours during the pandemic. This might have been due to the sudden impact of the COVID-19 pandemic where staff felt an increased sense of duty to maintain productivity at all costs. However, amidst this commitment, staff failed to acknowledge the importance of slowing down and taking breaks for self-care. Consequently, this continuous pace led to burnout for many.

Thirdly, some of the library work could not be done offsite. For example, the binder could not have carried the necessary equipment home for binding and book repairs. Another pertinent example relates to the library attendant, whose duties specifically required that the staff be onsite, and further due to lack of internet and other resources, the attendant could not have assisted with other work aspects during this exclusive WFH period. Therefore, her contribution to overall productivity was limited.

Finally, some staff encountered various disruptions (internet and power outage) and also other disturbances from within the family (e.g. children, especially those in online classes), housework, visitors, outside noises, among others while working from home. Similarly, some employees found it challenging to concentrate with family and pets nearby, forcing them to adjust their work hours to late nights or off-peak times when distractions are reduced [23].

Post COVID-19 Phase: Transformation of the Library Operations & Services

Resumption of Library Operations

The UGBC Library began to open gradually, and in-person services were increasingly

restored during the post-COVID period. The restoration of physical operations occurred with health and safety measures in place.

The Lauinger Library building and facilities were used but with various restrictions, for example, daily checks and bookings were required before using the campus [32]. Further, the staff were to be vigilant and ensure health and safety guidelines are observed such as wearing of masks, maintaining physical distancing, complying with quarantine requirements, among others [32].

Additionally, some notable strategies that were considered for post-pandemic entails development of human resource, digitisation of resources, adopt flexible work systems and focus on health and wellness of staff and patrons [33].

Adoption of Hybrid Service Models

While the UGBC Library resumed face-to-face operations during the post-COVID period, it adopted a hybrid service model where some of its services including IL sessions (class and one-on-ones), registration, among others were offered both face-to-face and online. This development reflects a broader trend within academic libraries globally. It is evident that the current era, post covid 19, organisations have already been shaped by the crisis and as for academic libraries the operations have been retained continuing in full force.

Libraries now provide services both on campus and online, allowing users to access resources regardless of location [4]. Libraries continue to provide online assistance through Live chat, video consultations (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet) SMS and WhatsApp services [34]. Likewise, during the crisis library's role included wellness programmes like mental health and awareness, job search assistance, digital skill training and many of these programs continued in both the virtual and in-person formats [35].

Strengthening of Digital Infrastructure

The UGBC Library in collaboration with the Turkeyen Campus Library continued to invest in electronic resources post-COVID since the University programmes continue to be in blended modes.

Additionally, the UGBC Library in collaboration with the UG's Tactical Online Services (TOS) Unit set up a library zoom account to accommodate IL sessions online since these requests outnumbered the face-to-face ones.

Further, the UGBC Library began working on various technological projects including:

1. Establishing an institutional repository which will make staff and student research works accessible to patrons electronically rather than just physically
2. Using a chatbot for routine queries so that staff could focus on other important projects that were sidelined
3. Developing a website to provide IL support to patrons.
4. The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the importance of information accessibility and more importantly digital readiness by academic libraries resulting in more emphasis being placed on technology enhancement at the UGBC Library.

Interpretations of Findings Through the Theoretical Framework

Resilience Theory

As it relates to the resilience theory, it can be seen that although the UGBC Library experienced a significant disruption in its services it nevertheless maintained its main function of providing support to the teaching, learning and research at the University of Guyana. The UGBC Library adapted to the changing circumstances by quick thinking, collaboration and technological integration. The UGBC Library's capacity to adapt while continuing to provide its critical services demonstrated the characteristics of a resilient

library. Also, the continuation of many innovative projects post pandemic further suggest that resilience is not only recovery but transformational.

Social Innovation Typology Model

The social innovation typology model was used to discuss how the UGBC Library adapted its services pre-COVID, during COVID and post COVID. In the pre-COVID phase, the UGBC Library mainly offered face-to-face services; during COVID, it expanded its access to online resources and virtual support to meet patrons' needs; and the post-COVID period, the library adopted a hybrid service model, strengthen its digital infrastructure and expand its electronic resources.

Technology Acceptance Model

The technology acceptance model is evident at the UGBC Library. For example, in the pre-pandemic period, while digital tools like Google workspaces, zoom, were available, they were not central to everyday library operations. However, during the pandemic, staff increased their reliance on these tools because they were seen as both useful and necessary. Therefore, the acceptance of these digital tools increased as familiarity and use increased. While some of the UGBC Library staff previously preferred traditional tools, their level of comfort increases as their use of the tools increased. Hence, this pattern aligns with the model that proposes that perceived usefulness and ease of use influence the adoption of technology.

Conclusion

With the appropriate theoretical frames integrated, the study discussed the UGBC Library's experiences before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic by reviewing a number of literatures suggests that while the UGBC Library entered the pandemic with a predominantly traditional service model, prior investments in technology and the ability to adapt quickly paved the way for the transition to remote operations. The role of library

professionals evolved to embrace technologies and the use of other initiatives to remain relevant, capturing the resilience and substance mandate. Resilience resonates with words like ability to survive, adapt, and thrive despite the situation; and this requires commitment, flexibility and quick thinking.

During the COVID-19 phase, the UGBC Library through its initiatives, that is, fulfilling patrons' requests, conducting information literacy sessions, providing research assistance, digitising documents, converting file storage to the cloud, organising photography and videography projects, engaging in administrative work, among others did manage to show through the pandemics our transformation to the sustainable and resilience of libraries. During this period, UGBC Library had the opportunity to complete projects that were side-lined and refocused processes after discovery of various work gaps. Additionally, staff members embraced a flexible work schedule, worked across designated duties, had the opportunity to learn & re-learn, and also engage in professional development opportunities to stay current to effectively deliver job outputs. Amidst the challenges staff experienced during the WFH stint were lack of resources and skills, competition for resources within the home setting, increased workload in hours, burnt out and a variety of disruptions. Periodically, WFH initiative remains high as a recommended adjustment for the future from the staff perspective. Hence to make this possible there is need to adjust work policies and improve technological infrastructure.

In the post-pandemic period, the library adopted a hybrid service model that combines both the traditional face-to-face and digital modes as well as continued to seek ways to strengthen its digital infrastructure.

This study concludes that the COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for digital transformation and emphasised the importance of technological readiness and resilience in academic libraries.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for the UGBC Library based on the findings of the study.

1. **Adopt a flexible work schedule:**

Consideration can be given to the implementation of aspects of administrative work to fit a blended mode and a flexible work schedule supporting work and home life balance. Likewise, staff who had experienced working from home during the pandemic shared similar sentiments. For example, the results of the 2020 State of Remote Work revealed that 98% of persons expressed their interest to continue working remotely for the remaining of their lives, however, he emphasised that for remote work to be new norm, changes have to be made to the work culture [36].

2. **Strengthen its hybrid service models:**

The UGBC Library should provide more of its services to its patrons using a hybrid mode, that is, both face-to-face and via various social media platforms, zoom, emails, chats, WhatsApp, SMS, calls, etc.

3. **Develop crisis management plans:** In order to adapt to the changing library environment brought on by the advancement of technology and natural disasters like the pandemic, academic libraries including the UGBC Library should have plans and policies in place.

4. **Improve its ICT infrastructure:** The UGBC Library should invest in more ICT infrastructure to support hybrid service models.

5. **Continue to expand its electronic resources:** The UGBC Library should increase its database subscriptions and build its digital collections to better serve its patrons evolving needs.

6. **Engage in professional development**

activities: The UGBC Library should expose its staff to ongoing PD sessions in order to keep up with this constantly changing environment.

Conflict of Interest

There was no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express heartfelt gratitude to Mr. P. DaSilva for his constructive feedback on this research.

Ethical Approval

The University of Guyana Research Ethics

References

- [1]. Ow G. Resiliency. MedEdMentor; 2023 Apr 14. Available from: <https://mededmentor.org/theory-database/theory-index/resiliency/>
- [2]. Appleton L. Trendspotting - looking to the future in a post-pandemic academic library environment. New Review of Academic Librarianship. 2022;28(1):1-6. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13614533.2022.2058174>
- [3]. Fitzgerald SR, Hutton S, Reznik-Zellen R, Barlow C, Oldham W. Decision-making by and for academic libraries during COVID-19. Portal: Libraries and the Academy. 2023;23(1):45-65. Available from: https://preprint.press.jhu.edu/portal/sites/default/files/06_23.1fitzgerald.pdf
- [4]. Chigwada J. Adaption and reorganisation of academic libraries following the COVID-19 pandemic. South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science. 2024;90(1):1-8. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.7553/90-1-2302>
- [5]. Davis FD. Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. MIS Quarterly. 1989;13(3):319-40. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.2307/249008>
- [6]. Adarkwah MA, Okagbue EF, Oladipo OA, Mekonen YK, Anulika AG, Nchekwubemchukwu IS, Okafor MU, Chineta OM, Muhideen S, Islam AYMA. Exploring the transformative journey of

Board has accorded exemption for this research.

Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to this research.

Funding

This research was conducted without any external funding.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

academic libraries in Africa before and after COVID-19 and in the generative AI era. The Journal of Academic Librarianship. 2024;50(4). Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2024.102900>

[7]. Wright J. Securing the cultural heritage of the West Indies: The role of the West Indian and Special Collections, The University of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago. Caribbean Library Journal. 2023;7:17-28. Available from: <https://journals.sta.uwi.edu/ojs/index.php/clj/article/view/8988>

[8]. Wenborn C. How technology is changing the future of libraries. Wiley; 2018 Apr 11. Available from: <https://www.wiley.com/en-us/network/research-libraries/libraries-archives-databases/library-impact/how-technology-is-changing-the-future-of-libraries>

[9]. Dickson A, Holley RP. Social networking in academic libraries: The possibilities and the concerns. New Library World. 2010;111(11/12):468-79. Available from: <https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/slisfrp/33/>

[10]. Chu SKW, Du HS. Social networking tools for academic libraries. Journal of Librarianship and Information Science. 2013;45(1):64-75. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000611434361>

[11]. Harris S. The role of the University of the West Indies Mona libraries in HIV/AIDS information access and dissemination. West Indian Medical Journal. 2013;62(4):346-9. Available from:

https://www.mona.uwi.edu/fms/wimj/system/files/article_pdfs/dr_s_harris_hivaid.pdf

[12]. University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus. Annual report 2010/2011. University of the West Indies; 2011. Available from: https://uwispace.sta.uwi.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/936dad9f-9a48-4025-a72a-5882a99e894d/content?utm_source=chatgpt.com

[13]. Uwakwe BS, Onyeneke CO, Njoku IN. Effect of user education on law students' use of the library: A case study of the Faculty of Law Library, Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria. *Information Impact: Journal of Information and Knowledge Management*. 2016;7(1):70-85. Available from: <https://distantreader.org/stacks/journals/iijikm/iijikm-144902.pdf>

[14]. Gurikar R, Mukherjee B. Information technology usage scenario in academic libraries of higher education in Chhattisgarh: Challenges and opportunities. *DESIDOC Journal of Library & Information Technology*. 2015;35(4):273-9. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.14429/djlit.35.4.8844>

[15]. Peters R, La Rose S, Schwiers K, Bhagwandin N. Prepared to function in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic: An academic library's experience in resilience and sustenance [poster presentation]. *Acceso. Puerto Rican Journal of Library Science and Documentation*. 2022. Available from: <https://revistas.upr.edu/index.php/acceso/article/view/20336?articlesBySimilarityPage=1>

[16]. Allied. The history of telecommuting. [date unknown]. Available from: <https://www.alliedtelecom.net/the-history-of-telecommuting/>

[17]. Barrero JM, Bloom N, Davis SJ. The evolution of working from home. 2023. Available from: <https://wfhresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/SIEPR1.pdf>

[18]. Goek SS. The future of remote work is flexibility. *Public Library Association*; 2021 Apr 16. Available from: <http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2021/04/the-future-of-remote-work-is-flexibility/>

[19]. Gormley KJ. Work from home like LibraryThing does. *LibraryThing*; 2020 Mar 17.

Available from: <https://blog.librarything.com/2020/03/work-from-home-like-librarything-does/>

[20]. Chad. Librarian perspectives on working from home, flexible work schedules, and telecommuting. *Library Voice*; 2020 Apr 13. Available from: <https://libraryvoice.com/libraries/librarian-perspectives-on-working-from-home-flexible-work-schedules-and-telecommuting>

[21]. Chisita CT, Chiparausha B, Tsabetse V, Olugbara CK, Letseka M. Remaking academic library services in Zimbabwe in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*. 2022. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2022.102521>

[22]. Bennett S, Chriszt MH, Cole J, Day M, Dickson C. Georgia librarians working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Georgia Library Quarterly*. 2020;57(3):1-18. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.62915/2157-0396.2328>

[23]. Mitchell C, Magnuson L, Hampton H. Please scream inside your heart: How a global pandemic affected burnout experiences in an academic library. *Journal of Radical Librarianship*. 2023;9:159-79. Available from: <https://journal.radicalibrarianship.org/index.php/journal/article/view/93>

[24]. Connell RS, Wallis LC, Comeaux D. The impact of COVID-19 on the use of academic library resources. *Information Technology and Libraries*. 2021;40(2):1-20. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.6017/ital.v40i2.12629>

[25]. Rafiq M, Batool SH, Ali AF, Ullah M. University libraries response to COVID-19 pandemic: A developing country perspective. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*. 2021;47(1):1-10. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2020.102280>

[26]. Osorio NL, Droog A. Exploring the impact of the pandemic on reference and research services: A literature review. *New Review of Academic Librarianship*. 2021;27(3):280-300. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13614533.2021.1990092>

[27]. Streams S. Library staff learning surges on WebJunction amid COVID-19 closures. *OCLC*; 2020 May 7. Available from:

<https://blog.oclc.org/next/library-staff-learning-surges-on-webjunction-amid-covid-19-closures/>

[28]. Dube TV, Jacobs L. Academic library services extension during the COVID-19 pandemic: Considerations in higher education institutions in the Gauteng Province, South Africa. *Library Management*. 2023;44(1-2):17-39. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1108/LM-04-2022-0039>

[29]. Paterson AM, Eva N. "Always at work": Canadian academic librarian work during COVID-19. *Partnership*. 2022;17(2):1-24. Available from: <https://journal.lib.uoguelph.ca/index.php/perj/article/view/6783/6740>

[30]. Hosoi M, Reuter L, Zabel D. Reshaping perspectives on flexible work: The impact of COVID-19 on academic library management. *Libraries and the Academy*. 2021;21(4):695-713. Available from: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1317786>

[31]. Civica. Librarian's mental health in the time of COVID-19. [date unknown]. Available from: <https://www.civica.com/en-gb/thought-leadership-library/librarians-mental-health/>

[32]. Georgetown University. Resumption of graduate hybrid courses; continued pause on undergraduate hybrid courses. 2021 Feb 10. Available from: [https://www.georgetown.edu/news/resumption-of-](https://www.georgetown.edu/news/resumption-of-graduate-hybrid-courses-continued-pause-on-undergraduate-hybrid-courses/)

[graduate-hybrid-courses-continued-pause-on-undergraduate-hybrid-courses/](https://www.georgetown.edu/news/resumption-of-graduate-hybrid-courses-continued-pause-on-undergraduate-hybrid-courses/)

[33]. Nero LM, Ramtahal K. A post-pandemic future for library planning: Perceptions of Caribbean academic library leaders. In: Kerr PA, Marshall JL, Palmer NA, Drysdale DA, editors. *Continuing change, constant engagement: Caribbean academic libraries at the forefront of transformation*. Emerald Publishing Limited; 2025. Chapter 15. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1108/S0065-283020250000057016>

[34]. Ashiq M, Jabeen F, Mahmood K. Transformation of libraries during Covid-19 pandemic: A systematic review. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*. 2022;48(4):102534. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2022.102534>

[35]. Gillum S. The changing face of public services in health sciences libraries post-pandemic. *Medical Reference Services Quarterly*. 2024;43(2):152-63. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02763869.2024.2330244>

[36]. Safin K. Top 5 articles on remote work in librarianship. *ACRL DOLS*; 2022 Sep 9. Available from: <https://acrl.ala.org/dols/2022/09/top-5-articles-on-remote-work-in-librarianship/>