

# The Socially Distanced Academic Library

A Case Study Series of Best Practices during COVID-19

## How Delaware State University's William C. Jason Library Rolled Out Video Tutorials to Support Reference Services

Established in 1891 as the State College for Colored Students, Delaware State University (DSU) in Dover, DE, (with satellite campuses in Wilmington and Georgetown) is celebrating its 130th anniversary in 2021 as one of America's 107 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The institution offers 44 undergraduate degree programs and 23 graduate degree programs, along with its DSU Online distance education component.

For the 2019–2020 academic year, DSU broke enrollment records with a total of 5,054 students, 91% of whom were undergraduates. Sixty-three percent of the student body is African American, with an increasing number of white, Hispanic, Asian, and international students. Eighty-two percent of freshmen live on campus. (In a historic first purchase for a HBCU, DSU this July will complete its acquisition of 147-year-old Wesley College, expanding its student body to almost 6,000.)

Prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the staff of DSU's William C. Jason Library was seeking ways to help DSU's international students access the library's resources remotely. [DSU has several formal partnerships with international academic institutions to facilitate research and student exchanges.] "We have students from as far away as China and Korea, and we have a contingent in Jamaica," explains former Director of Library Services Dr. T. Hunter Hayes, who retired from the position in February 2021.

### Video Tutorials

One idea was to create video tutorials on how to use the library and its online resources. Then came the March 2020 shutdown. "The tutorials weren't up yet, but we had the YouTube channel ready to go," comments Interim Library Director Monifa Carter, who is also Government Documents, Reference and Serials Librarian. "It was just a matter of adding content, which we did very quickly."

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### The Highlights

#### The Challenge:

When it became apparent that DSU's William C. Jason Library was going virtual, the staff needed a way to maintain instructional services to students. They also needed a way to help students remotely explore the library's collection.

#### The Solution:

Every library staff member was asked to record an instructional video. Nine videos were uploaded to the library's YouTube channel. Videos included an outline of the library's Virtual Services Plan, LibGuide and Interlibrary Loan overviews, and lessons on accessing online databases. Further, research guides were created for the library's LibGuide site.

#### The Results:

The library services LibGuides collected a total of 17,237 views in 2020. The YouTube channel, which now includes 17 videos, shows a current total of 2,231 views.

When it became apparent in mid-March that the university and the library would soon be going virtual (students had left for spring break and were told to stay home), Ms. Carter and Rejoice Scherry, the University Archivist and Special Collections Librarian, approached Dr. Hayes with the proposal to create instructional YouTube videos for the library's eight service areas—circulation, reference, interlibrary loan, special collections, cataloging/collection development, government documents/serials, access services, and administration. Dr. Hayes requested that every library staff member record a video. "We wanted everyone from the library assistant to the most senior librarian to participate so that they all could feel part of the team."

By March 18 when spring 2020 classes resumed online and the library staff was working remotely, the initial nine videos had been uploaded to the library's YouTube channel and linked to the library's website through its LibGuides platform. Tutorials included Dr. Hayes's outline of the library's Virtual Services Plan, Rejoice Scherry's quick LibGuides and Interlibrary Loan overviews, Monifa Carter's lesson on accessing online databases, Library Assistant Mark Harris's troubleshooting guide for remote access to DSU Library resources, and Circulation Technician Mario Watson's tips for renewing books.

"A lot of our librarians, who were used to reference desk interactions, liked visually showing patrons how to access our resources," comments Ms. Carter. Once they started working from home, she and her colleagues were able to do that kind of visual instruction using the videos, as well as through Zoom reference interviews. "We found that the tutorials really helped people."

### Remote Service Via LibGuides

Reference and Public Services Librarian Ronald Davis also credits the LibGuides content management and information sharing platform for enabling the staff to continue offering library services remotely during the six months the physical library building was closed. "LibGuides really kept us alive," says Mr. Davis, who notes that the library administration at one point prior to the pandemic considered canceling its subscription because of the expense.

While the library provided curbside delivery of physical materials twice a week, the online research guides created

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by librarians through the LibGuides platform allowed patrons to explore the library's collections and services virtually. In 2020, the library's guides had a total of 17,237 views. Of the 15 most popular LibGuides, "A to Z Databases by Library Services" took the number-one spot with 5,918 views, "Our library services LibGuide saw more views than any other type of LibGuide, including our academic subject LibGuides," remarks Ms. Carter. Other frequently searched guides included "Library Circulation Policies," "Interlibrary Loan," and "Ask a Librarian."

The platform also allowed the staff to deliver remote reference services via LibGuide's chat function. According to statistics kept by Ms. Carter, virtual chat reference transactions during the February 2020–February 2021 period jumped dramatically to 221 from the 63 transactions recorded during the pre-pandemic year of February 2019–February 2020.

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### Functioning in a Ghost Town

The DSU campus was a ghost town during the pandemic's early months. "But the library was still functioning," recalls Dr. Hayes. "I wanted to make sure that our patrons understood that we were present." Support staff was expected to respond to online queries within five minutes during the business day. But the professional librarians never wavered about

pitching in and doing library assistant tasks when necessary. As library director, Dr. Hayes also wanted to ensure that there was activity to demonstrate the staff's value and that there would be no layoffs.

His team's efforts in providing library service during a challenging year were duly noticed by the administration. "My associate vice president would always say we were ahead of the curve," notes the former director. He also was vindicated by accounts of the faculty referring their students to services like the YouTube tutorials.

Dr. Hayes also credits Delaware State University's forward-thinking Digital Learning Initiative (iPads were given to entering freshmen in 2018 and 2019) that enabled the school to convert 1,700 classes from an in-person to a virtual format in five days. Most importantly he acknowledges his staff's flexibility, nimbleness, and resourcefulness in pivoting so quickly. "We don't say, 'think outside the box' here. We say, 'there is no box.'"

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