

The Socially Distanced Academic Library

A Case Study Series of Best Practices during COVID-19

How the Louis J. Blume Library at St. Mary's University Supplemented Access with the Internet Archive

Founded in 1852 as San Antonio's first institution of higher learning by Marianist (Society of Mary) brothers and priests, St. Mary's University is the oldest Catholic university in Texas and the Southwest. It is also nationally recognized as a Hispanic-serving educational establishment with an enrollment as of fall 2019 of over 3,500 undergraduate and graduate students (61% are Hispanic), including 281 international students. Its four schools — Greehey School of Business; College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences; School of Science, Engineering, and Technology; and School of Law — offer 40 majors.

The university's Louis J. Blume Library employs four professional librarians, three of whom work closely with the faculty as liaisons, along with a small support staff. "We're a shrinking number of librarians," says Reference/Instruction Librarian Diane Duesterhoeft, who has been at the library since 1993. The current library director retired at the end of May 2021, and another librarian, who retired the previous May during the coronavirus pandemic, was not replaced. Her work was divided among the remaining librarians.

By March 23, 2020, the city of San Antonio was under the mayor's "Stay Home, Work Safe" order, and the Blume Library had transitioned into virtual services within a day or two. "We had been offering online services for a number of years," notes Duesterhoeft. The only change was in terms of providing physical access, and several employees still worked out of the building to provide curbside pickup services. With students staying at home, Duesterhoeft and her colleagues now handled research requests via email, phone calls, and Zoom. "In terms of meeting with students, it was pretty much through Zoom."

Meeting Overseas Needs

The need came up on a case by case basis, but Duesterhoeft realized that she had to use an online resource for students in other countries requesting books and other materials from the Blume Library. "The assumption is that if students are here in the U.S., they can purchase a lot of these items online," notes Duesterhoeft, "But that's not always the case with international students." Likewise, providing access to physical books through the library's interlibrary loan service is not a viable option for patrons overseas.

The Highlights

The Challenge:

As in-person services shut down during COVID-19, internationally based students at St. Mary's University didn't have the same access opportunities to books and other materials as domestic students.

The Solution:

Titles that were not readily available in the school's e-book collection or demand-driven access pool were located on the Internet Archive's Open Library and Books to Borrow platforms.

The Results:

Students were able to fill in specific resource gaps, and the experience has led to new ideas for using OER materials in a variety of ways.

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For titles not found in the Blume Library's e-book collection or in its demand-driven access pool, Duesterhoeft turned to the Internet Archive's Open Library and Books to Borrow open-source services, which offer free online access to books selected, digitized, and uploaded by participating libraries from their collections. Unlike Google Books, which she found to have very few titles that are fully accessible, the Internet Archive includes books still under copyright and follows a more traditional library model that allows the full text to be borrowed.

One patron she served through the Internet Archive was a graduate theology student in Nigeria. "I actually met with one of the classes he was in through Zoom," Duesterhoeft recalls. "The class was meeting at 6:30 at night, and it was 12:30 in the morning his time." Following the session, she learned that the student lacked the textbooks he needed for that class and for another course he was enrolled in. "So, I tried to find what I could."

The three texts he requested—Kurt Stasiak's *Sacramental Theology: Means of Grace, Ways of Life* (<https://archive.org/details/sacramentaltheol0000stas>), William Bausch's *A New Look at the Sacraments* (<https://archive.org/details/newlookatsacrame00baus>), and Judith A. Merkle's *From the Heart of the Church: The Catholic Social Tradition*. (<https://archive.org/details/fromheartofchurc0000merk>)—could only be borrowed for an hour through the Internet Archive's BookReader interface. So Duesterhoeft suggested doing a screen capture for the pages the Nigerian student needed.

Thanks to Duesterhoeft's assistance, an English Literature and Language graduate student in Saudi Arabia borrowed for two weeks Edward de Bono's 1985 *Six Thinking Hats* (<https://archive.org/details/sixthinkinghats00debo>), a book she was using in her research. "It seems like there are books where you can only borrow them for one hour and then there are books you can borrow for two weeks," notes Duesterhoeft. While titles loaned for 14 days can be downloaded to the Adobe Digital Editions platform, books with one-hour restrictions must be read online.

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Supporting In-Person, but Online

When a faculty member in the Education Department had to move online the Read-Aloud book club that she and her students ran with a local elementary school, the Internet Archive provided most of the classic children's titles on the recommended reading list, including Kate DiCamillo's *Because of Winn-Dixie* (<https://archive.org/details/becauseofwinndix00dica>), Tomie DePaola's *Strega Nona* (https://archive.org/details/streganonaoldtal00depa_0), and Gene Luen Yang's *American-Born Chinese* (<https://archive.org/details/americanbornchin00gene>). "I was so grateful for the service," says a relieved Duesterhoeft.

Prior to the pandemic, the reference librarian might have made one referral a semester to the Internet Archive/Open Library/Books to Borrow services. "It's been four times via email so far this semester (plus the student in Saudi Arabia with whom I was in a Zoom session)," explains Duesterhoeft. "During the Fall 2020 semester, I made three email referrals (that includes the student in Nigeria)."

A Gateway to OER

Considering her positive experiences, Duesterhoeft is also exploring how to use this open-source digital resource in other ways. She has already started investigating and promoting to her faculty the beta version of the Internet Archive Scholar, a full-text search index of over 25 million research articles and other scholarly documents. "Unlike Google Scholar, where items get removed and no longer show up in the search engine, the Internet Archive

Scholar will provide access to the archived versions."

Because the library had to cut back on its periodical and database subscriptions during the pandemic, Duesterhoeft is eyeing the Internet Archive as a possible alternative resource. "I haven't found as many periodicals or journal articles but definitely for books it has been helpful." In her opinion, the more open access material that can be available to online-dependent and budget-constricted libraries the better. She has made it a goal to learn more about open educational resources.

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