

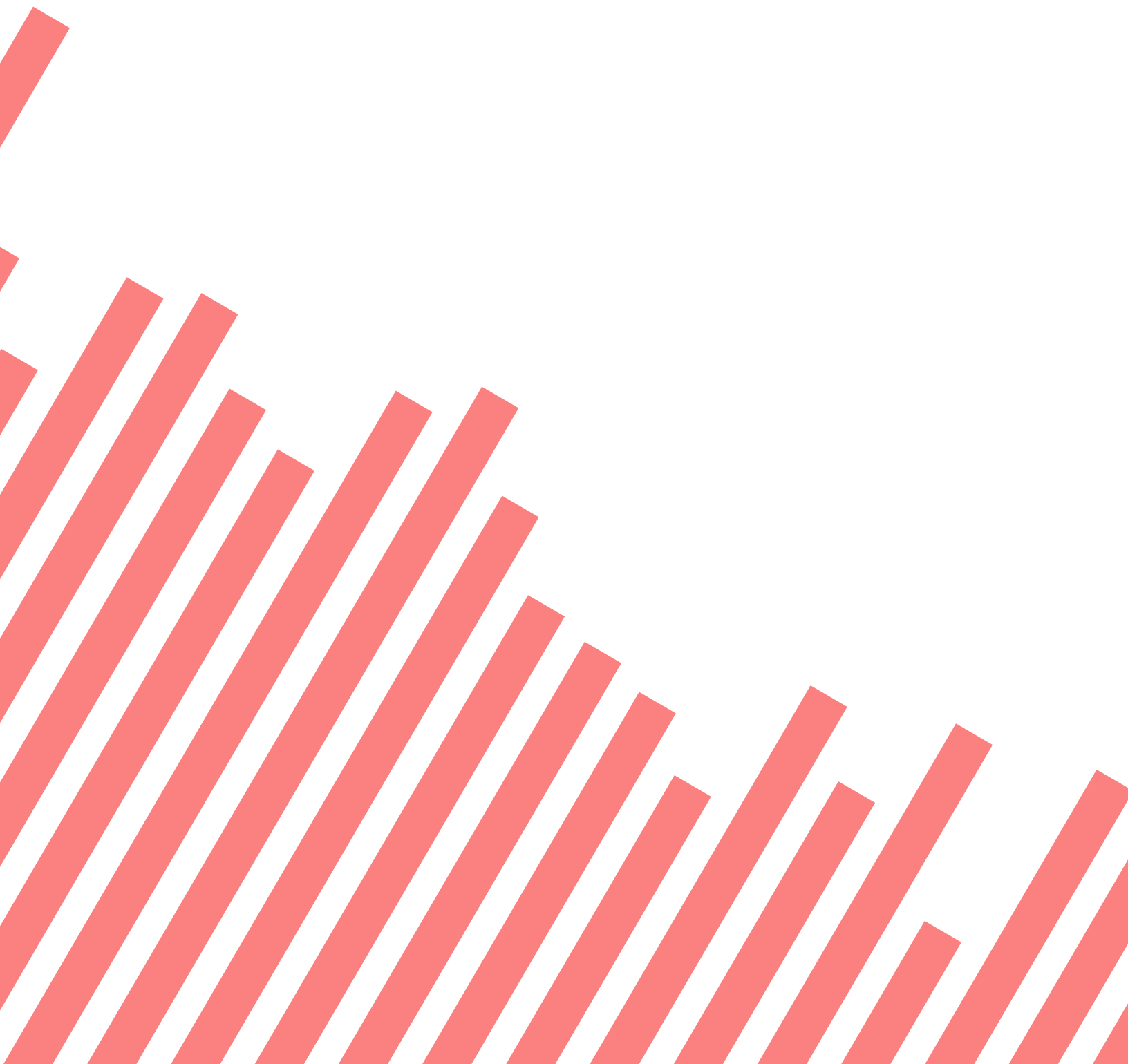
Research Library Issues

ASSOCIATION
OF RESEARCH
LIBRARIES

RLI 303:

Future States of the Research Library

2022



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Future States of the Research Library

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What can be said about the year 2021 that hasn't already been said? Challenging, unprecedented, extraordinary in almost every way, 2021 even surpassed the previous *annus horribilis*, 2020. Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to ripple humanity-wide, ceaselessly rebounding off, and cruelly amplifying, almost every kind of inequity and social challenge. A long overdue reckoning with the legacies of racism in the United States did not materialize in any truly transformative way, political discord worsened, and anti-science voices grew to dominate what should have been rational conversations about a coherent and collective response to a profound global health threat. It was within this context that the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) planned its 2021 meetings, which continued as virtual gatherings for a second year. Recognizing the monumentality of the change upon us, the committee of organizers planned the spring and fall 2021 meetings as a series, devoting the spring meeting to hearing from experts, mostly from outside of research libraries, on a set of broad issues, with the fall meeting more specifically focused on the library response and to understanding its evolving context. “The Big Pivot,” as we dubbed the meeting sequence, gave us time and space to grapple with major forces reshaping every aspect of our society, to work to understand them more deeply, and to contextualize their implications for our libraries and institutions. In this issue of *Research Library Issues (RLI)*, we reflect on some of the topics explored in 2021 with a forward look to the conversations and work continuing into 2022.

Radical Changes to Teaching and Implications for Libraries and Our Workforce

In early 2020, most of our libraries closed, at least temporarily, amid abrupt cancellations of in-person classes and the dramatic and rapid shift to online teaching. While most research libraries have for many years been constructing and using a robust online library toolkit of

electronic content subscriptions, remote research consultations, email- and chat-based help, and online library course guides, the impact of the change on teaching faculty was profoundly disruptive. In his introduction to the spring meeting's "COVID-19: A Catalyst for Innovative Course Delivery" session, Matthew Rascoff, who recently moved from a role leading teaching innovation at Duke University to a new position at Stanford University, suggested that we did not experience a transition to true online learning so much as a yearlong experiment in faculty professional development. This experiment did, however, set the stage for significant and meaningful work towards innovative online learning, conversations that eventually led to real curricular advances, particularly, as Dominique Scheffel-Dunand (York University) submitted, at network scale. She referenced initiatives in Canada to create teaching portals and repositories, where above-the-course sharing and affordances of networked learning demand more sophisticated approaches to reuse, knowledge classification, and intellectual property, areas where librarians' expertise is particularly valuable. Opportunities have also arisen to leverage the technology to responsibly recommit to core values, particularly those, like privacy, that librarians have long championed, and to create more equitable spaces in which to provide the support and connectedness so diminished by the loss of a physical teaching environment. Josh Eyer (University of Mississippi) underscored an imperative to confront the tremendous emotional and physical toll that pandemic-forced remote teaching was having not only on students, but also on faculty and staff. Rascoff posed a challenge to embrace a new, overarching, and galvanizing goal, one that might be a worthy successor to the unprecedented achievement of successfully transitioning entire institutions to online teaching. Perhaps a similar, unifying goal to place equity and care squarely and immovably at the core of the educational experience, and to ground decisions that profoundly impact student success, such as course grading policies, to the learning goals they seek to advance, might not be out of reach for an academic community that has achieved what we have with the big pivot of 2020.

In the Fall 2021 Association Meeting, the conversation about teaching and learning continued with a focus on the impact a massive and sustained shift (if time proves it to **be** a sustained shift) to online might have on physical library spaces. So many libraries have transformed in recent decades to include active and social learning spaces, critical extensions to the in-person classroom and indispensable resources for student communities that vanished from campus in the span of a few short weeks in 2020. While acknowledging that the subsequent pressure to reopen and restaff libraries itself signaled some measure of our enduring centrality and value, it was also clearly an occasion to reconsider the meaning of library as place. Closing physical collections for months on end, curtailing service, and dramatically reducing seating capacity to meet social distancing requirements: what would the return to the library space post-pandemic look like, and what would it mean to the institution? Justin Moore, of the Mellon Foundation's Humanities in Place initiative, and Shrey Majmudar, a Duke University student, spoke both to the traditional and to the unique and evolving concepts of library space. Community, connectedness, healing, and serendipity loomed large. Kornelia Tancheva (University of Pittsburgh) spoke of the imperative to focus on spaces for people and active knowledge creation over spaces for general collections and passive information consumption. She expands on the session's conversations in her article in this issue.

The fall 2021 meeting concluded with critical conversations about diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) with librarians from underrepresented groups and about the future of library work. The ARL Leadership and Career Development Program (LCDP) fellows led the closing session, speaking to the assembled membership about the cohort learning communities they built and sustained under incredibly difficult circumstances, and of their high expectations that library leadership will follow through on promises to center DEIA, to more decisively move to dismantle systemic barriers within organizations, and to shift from thinking about low representation of Black, Indigenous, and other persons of color (BIPOC) in the

profession as a pipeline problem to a problem of lack of commitment. Martha Alvarado Anderson (University of Arkansas), a member of the LCDP cohort, reflects on these conversations and experiences in her article.

Understanding the History and Impact of Misinformation and Anti-intellectualism

Two sessions of the spring 2021 ARL meeting brought attendees into dialogue with scholars whose research interrogates key information phenomena with deep impacts on contemporary life. In their article exploring misinformation and disinformation, Jeffery Loo and Erik Mitchell (University of California, San Diego) consider the perspectives on disordered information discussed in a panel with Clara Chu (University of Illinois), Sarah Sobieraj (Tufts University), and Whitney Phillips (Syracuse University). Summarizing and jumping off from the context discussed in the meeting, Mitchell and Loo focus on health misinformation and potential interventions where libraries may be able to play a role.

Anti-intellectualism and anti-science attitudes are not phenomena born of the COVID-19 era. Three social scientists provided historical context and theories explicating their origin and current dynamics, with a particular focus on the impact of anti-intellectualism on public health. Matthew Motta (Oklahoma State University) started by revisiting the origins of the term's three frames in Richard Hofstadter's 1963 book, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life*, putting emphasis on the negative affect towards scientists and other experts as the most crucial of the three. Motta noted anti-intellectual attitudes' persistent presence in longitudinal US opinion polls, and the continuity from George Wallace's invocation of "pointy-headed intellectuals" in the late '60s to former President Donald Trump's frequent invectives against science and academics.

Eric Merkley's (University of Toronto) research measures connections between political polarization and anti-intellectualism, finding that,

while anti-intellectual views seem to be as prevalent in the United States as in Canada, in the US, they are more sorted by political affiliation. In studies of response to changing advice around masking in Canada in 2020, his research shows anti-intellectual views have much stronger connections with responses to expert advice than with political ideology or science literacy, indicating the profound impact such views have had on public health response. Colleen Shogan (Georgetown University), a scholar of the US presidency, expanded on the instrumental and political value of anti-intellectual views, with examples dating as far back as the Eisenhower era and as recent as the concerted attacks on Anthony Fauci's credibility.

In these contexts, a link between anti-intellectual views and rejection of recommended COVID-19 precautions isn't all that surprising. But seeing the strong connection Motta's research shows between episodically intense periods of anti-intellectual feeling and public funding for US educational initiatives underscores the extent to which these are no brief storms to be weathered. Anyone who has observed the erosion of financial support for public higher education in the US may not be taken aback to see how clearly this links with correspondingly clear patterns of anti-intellectual attitudes, counterproductive as it may be that funding for scientific research and development is poised to decline in the very periods in which we are best able to manage threats in our world thanks to that very research.

Perhaps most critical for those of us in the information professions, scholars in both panels conclude that solutions can't be found in amplifying visibility of higher-quality information, providing more and better information, fact-checking, or boosting science- or information-literacy skills in our college student populations. Emotions, the interplay of content creation and consumption, the mechanisms of social media platforms, and even the perverse incentives of more traditional mass-media platforms, shape our information diets much more profoundly. So too do the complex relationships and connections between systems and structures, what Phillips terms the information

ecosystem. As Loo and Mitchell explore in their article, a whole-society approach, deploying everything we know about psychology and the importance of the familiar to building trust in information messages, will be essential to redressing a now heavily polluted information ecosystem.

Where does this lead our profession? We have been deliberately interrogating traditional assumptions of library as neutral party, fostering a far more complex conception of our role. The world around us seems to want to redefine and challenge the meaning of previously self-evident values at the heart of our professional work: truth, facts, and free speech, for example. And in the case of the latter, as Phillips indicates, this attempted redefinition frequently unfolds in bad faith contexts that do not genuinely seek to advance freedom of speech, but which often serve as vectors of misinformation. We are also challenged by Chu's emerging concept of de- or sub-information, a disordered approach to information that silences or appropriates voices, or that relies on stereotypes to devalue the stories of certain communities. The opportunity is ours to pursue projects that preserve agency, a broader conception of knowledge, and that embrace appropriate regimes of information access: mindful of historic traumas and supporting culturally appropriate restrictions based on community values and Indigenous sovereignty.

Truth Commissions and Roles for Libraries and Archives

ARL and the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) have been exploring the connections between libraries and archives and national truth movements for several years, including in sessions at our recent Association Meetings. A fall 2017 session focused on the University of Manitoba's response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the University of Virginia's work to document the Charlottesville "Unite the Right" rally and the community response to that deadly event, along with increasing incidents of violence and violent threats by white supremacist, anti-government, and insurrectionist groups. A Spring 2019 Association

Meeting session heard from American and Canadian higher education leaders working to advance a US Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation movement and follow through on the 94 calls to action from the 2015 Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission.¹ At the fall 2021 meeting, Bryan Brayboy (Arizona State University) and Sheila Cote-Meek (York University) offered Indigenous perspectives on the generational trauma inflicted on their peoples through residential school programs and the ongoing legacies of colonialism in Canada and the United States. Cote-Meek emphasized the importance of truth and the imperative that non-Indigenous people should confront the truth before any reconciliation would be possible. Brayboy and Cote-Meek both spoke of the complex challenge of understanding truth in a pervasive context of stolen land, devaluation of traditional knowledge, and an educational framework almost entirely constructed around a colonial and western concept of learning.

Two weeks after the Fall 2021 Association Meeting, ARL hosted a conversation with the co-leaders of the United States movement for Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT). Charles Chavis (George Mason University) and Marcus Hunter (University of California, Los Angeles) introduced the Association to the movement for a national commission to study the legacy and systemic impacts of slavery and to the plans for a corresponding digital archive. The proposed archive, known as the Archive for Racial and Cultural Healing, or simply ARCH, will contain digitized historical materials as well as the capacity for communities to “archive themselves.” It will be a living, growing, interconnected digital archive to serve communities and learners at all levels, and to bring resources to the communities themselves. A frame for the work of truth-telling is deeply embedded in the concepts of both commission and archive, and in an indispensable prerequisite to any consideration of transformation or reconciliation.

Future States of the Research Library

A thread running strongly through the 2021 ARL meetings emphasizes connection, community, trust, care, and truth-telling. What should

this mean for research libraries, especially those in historically white institutions, as we look to the future? How do we reposition our intellectual, financial, and physical resources for the greatest good? As Bryan Brayboy tells us: “One of the things institutions have to figure out is that people come with knowledge, so you can’t just take our systems of knowledge and our beliefs and extract them...people have to be present. [Knowledge is] lived, it’s embodied, it’s embedded in our very beings.”² Current approaches to knowledge and its organization are far too narrow to sustain the needs of a diverse society that seeks to understand why our systems perpetuate such profound inequities. Everything from intra- and inter-organizational power structures to concepts of ownership and funding must be deeply interrogated. We are deeply aware of the dysfunction in academic publishing and reward systems but struggle to effectively change it. We may be actively working to address gaps and silences in library collections, to elevate voices that have been ignored historically, but if anything, the dominant contemporary information ecosystem is even more toxic and hostile to women and minorities than past systems. The information phenomena it promotes negatively impact public investments in education and thwart science-based public health programs. To have any hope of countering these at times overwhelming realities, our commitments must be far-reaching, for these are no brief storms. Myths of our national origins and racial identities were intentionally constructed and have been built upon for centuries; they have inflicted disproportionate harm on Indigenous and Black communities, but, as the co-leaders of ARCH and the THRT movement note,³ all citizens have suffered, everyone has a race, and everyone must be involved in the truth-telling essential to racial healing. In the preface to its 2015 report, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada notes: “Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian one. Virtually all aspects of Canadian society may need to be reconsidered.”⁴ That breadth should also frame our thinking about future states of the research library, with every part of our work open for reconsideration as we continue these conversations into 2022.

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Library as Place

Kornelia Tancheva, University of Pittsburgh Library System

In October 2021, about a year and a half into the COVID-19 pandemic, which, among other things, altered the way we interact in and with public and communal spaces, the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) held its annual meeting called “The Big Pivot Continues.” Virtually, for the second year in a row. It doesn’t take too much imagination to deduce that the pandemic and its consequences loomed large in all of the programming and the conversations among research library deans and directors.

One of the overarching themes in the program was that of “Library as Place,” highlighted in the October 6 panel, moderated by Joan Lippincott, the associate executive director emerita of the Coalition for Networked Information (CNI). The panel featured Justin Garrett Moore, the inaugural program officer for the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation’s Humanities in Place initiative; Shrey Majmudar, chief of staff and former VP of Academic Affairs, Duke Student Government, and a past member of the Duke Library Council; and myself, representing the perspective of an ARL university librarian whose institution is in the midst of a multiyear, multimillion-dollar complete renovation of the central library on the Pittsburgh campus, Hillman Library.

In what follows, I will summarize the points each of the speakers made (with apologies to my fellow panelists in case I am misinterpreting some of their points) and offer some additional thoughts about the future of the library as place.

Prior to assuming his current position, Justin Garrett Moore, whose background is in urban design and architecture, had been the Executive Director of the City of New York Public Design Commission, and as such, he focused on the ways public library spaces allow us to experience the connections between learning, understanding, and civic

life. Through the examples of new or renovated public library spaces (the NYPL, the Brownsville Public Library in Brooklyn, the Elmhurst Library in Queens, the Hunter’s Point Library, the Greenpoint Library in Brooklyn, and a quick detour to the Tenerife Library on the Canary Islands), he discussed the importance of the community context in which a library is situated, the need for accessibility and inclusiveness, and the role libraries can and should play in bridging the gap between the natural world and the built environment. Through the examples he gave, Moore positioned library spaces as part of the social infrastructure, and advocated for spaces that encourage diverse types of interactions and mindful reflection, cultivate knowledge and respect for the environment, and mix programs and people through meaningful partnerships, e.g. with an environmental education center (Greenpoint) or an arts and culture center (Tenerife). In response to a question from the audience, he also cautioned against the “paradigm shift narrative” of completely remote work environments, which is rife with issues of equity and access and concluded that the pandemic has shown that public infrastructure, i.e. shared common physical spaces, need investment, care, and innovation, as much as the virtual world does.

Shrey Majmudar opened with some student trends—current college students are more diverse and nontraditional in every respect, including having a variety of academic and learning needs; they expect a greater emphasis on mental health and well-being; they are accustomed to hybrid and online learning; and they expect and are interested in new technologies. Prior to the pandemic, the traditional and unique uses of academic libraries by students included individual study, non-academic-setting learning, collaborative work, conversations with fellow students and faculty, organized gatherings with faculty; larger program gatherings, such as academic presentations; use of archival resources; and interactions with library staff. The pandemic shattered many of these uses and affected, in particular, the communal aspect of library use. Students, Majmudar emphasized, miss gathering in places, academic talks, lectures, and events in the library. Moving on to the future of academic libraries

in a post-pandemic world, he focused on the need for meaningful partnerships, that stems, among other things, from the need for accessibility, and saw the library as the quintessential one-stop destination where students are able to locate not just the traditional library resources or IT help, but also, for instance, multicultural offerings, which, in turn, make library spaces safer, more welcoming, and more accessible. In a response in the follow-up Q&A session, he stressed the importance of working with student library-advisory groups to understand what the most desired partnerships on each campus might be. The other trends in the future of library spaces post-pandemic that he focused on included the need for wellness/meditation spaces; private spaces (conference spots); and technologically enhanced spaces where students experience and learn about emerging technologies, such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and mixed reality.

The points that I tried to get across were organized around the redesign of Hillman Library and the question of whether it is worth it for a university to invest in physical library spaces in a post-pandemic world. The principles that underlie our redesign are: the library is not a mere facility, it is a place for people who are engaged in the active creation of new knowledge, not in a passive consumption of information; the library is a place where ideas are exchanged and debated; and the library is a place where emerging technologies are deployed to support both the curricular and the extracurricular engagement of our communities. It is also a place that emphasizes the unique—unique collections, unique services and expertise, unique programming, unique partnerships. The examples I used included the creation of spaces such as our book lab, called Text & conText, a partnership with Pitt's Center for Creativity, where classes and individual students come to learn how to make paper, print books, bind them, digitize them, and examine the tensions between the analog and the digital world; our Open Lab, a partnership with the Center for Teaching and Learning, which deploys innovative teaching technologies, such as VR; and our digital interactive wall for Archives

& Special Collections, which has already allowed classes to create their own special collections digital exhibits. Looking at the visitor numbers for the fall 2021 semester, and specifically at the use of these new spaces that allow for active interactions and creation, underpinned by new technologies, I concluded that library space that affords active engagement and is based on user needs and behaviors, as well as on institutional priorities (or “institutional desires,” as Shrey called them), will endure post-pandemic. To counteract this point, however, I cautioned that not all library spaces are the same, in other words, not all will endure and one-size solutions do not fit all contexts.

Barely a month and a half has passed since the panel as I write this, and the news is full of pieces on a new COVID “variant of concern” and countries are beginning to close borders again. The idea of a post-pandemic world seems ever more elusive. Even if there is a post-pandemic future for libraries, I can’t help but be reminded of a [recent piece](#) in *Inside Higher Education* by my colleague David Banush, the dean of libraries and academic information resources at Tulane University, in which he discussed what climate change and natural disasters mean for libraries in affected areas, and posited that libraries need to focus on collective services, rather than just on collective collections.¹

The common theme that emerges for me from the panel, and as I try to think about the future of the library as place, whether in a post-pandemic or a permanent-pandemic world, is that of partnerships. Partnerships between libraries (to offer collective services); partnerships with instructional and research faculty around the creation of new knowledge; partnerships with the community (to provide equitable access, to address the issues of concern to the community, such as environmental degradation); partnerships with student and other campus organizations (to enhance accessibility, meet students’ current and anticipated needs, and support institutional strategies); and ultimately a partnership with the (natural, built, or human) context of the library.

It seems to me that in building those partnerships, adapting them, and evolving them, the library as place will endure.

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Impressions from a Former ARL LCDP Fellow of the Pandemons Class

Martha Alvarado Anderson, University of Arkansas Libraries

The Plan

As I start to write this article, I recall a quote from Napoleon Hill, American author, stating, “Strength and growth come only through continuous effort and struggle.” When I applied to the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Leadership and Career Development Program (LCDP) at the end of 2019, I was dreaming of an opportunity to improve myself professionally and to discover new approaches to contribute to the growth of my own institution by learning what it takes to be an ARL organization.

I was to be the only fellow participating in the 2020–21 cohort as a non-ARL organization member. I was ready for the challenge and the opportunity to visit in person institutions like the University of British Columbia in Vancouver and Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. Also, there was going to be a lot to learn from The Pandemons class and its home institutions.

Eager to learn, I attended the ARL LCDP orientation session March 4–6, 2020, in Washington, D.C. This is the last normal trip and conference I can remember. I am fond of having the privilege to interact with all involved in the program and being able to share experiences, spaces, and meals without fear. I recall leaving the orientation session so excited to start the training and enthusiastic to reunite with my cohort in the summer of 2020 at the University of British Columbia.

The ARL LCDP

The program pre-pandemic was described as a yearlong fellowship that aims to prepare mid-career librarians from historically

underrepresented racial and ethnic groups to take on leadership roles in their careers and in the profession at large.¹ Unexpected to us was the importance the program would have after the inception of the pandemic, social unrest initiated by the tragic murder of George Floyd, and the turbulent Trump years at the end of his presidency.

Instead, the program's sessions, institutional visits, and mentorship transferred to online venues. All stakeholders had to adapt to finding new ways to provide meaningful programming and resources. Migrating to originally unintended platforms took time to implement, and the ARL LCDP for the Pandemons was extended to 18 months. The program leaders provided flexibility to replan events, to reschedule, and to seek feedback from fellows and partners to adjust to the unmistakably changing climate. Resiliency is the best word to describe membership in this program as we all—fellows, mentors, program administrators, and institutions—had to adjust to new approaches for delivering agreed resources and services.

It was clear to me that although there were stated objectives to achieve during the program, this was indeed a new experience in which ability to adapt, to regroup, and to redirect were essentials for succeeding in the program and throughout the almost two-year pandemic.

The Unthinkable

What is a fellow to do under these changing circumstances? One of the first resources created by the Pandemons was a Slack channel through which we communicated about projects and held informal conversations. This was a much-needed space when feeling the isolation and the mental stresses from the pandemic, and the sudden move from in-person to virtual demand for services in March of 2020.

Unintended consequences during these challenging times were the furloughs and changes in leadership across institutions in the first pandemic year, along with the impact that reduction of personnel, leadership transitions, and demand for more online platforms had on

the new, driven-to-learn ARL LCDP fellows.

2021 ARL Fall Meeting

As we successfully completed our training, we were invited to attend and participate in the 2021 ARL Fall Meeting. Some of the central topics during this meeting were activating physical spaces of research libraries; pursuing truth, reconciliation, and transformation; and leading through disruption and change.² These three topics highlighted concerns raised by galleries, libraries, archives, and museums (GLAM) organizations while attempting to adjust and to deliver services during two very challenging calendar years.

Collaborating on the fall meeting meant that my cohort was going to participate with a broader community in which administrators, mentors, and fellows would share lived experiences intended to enhance understanding, cultural proficiencies, and strategizing about discovering more intentional methods for dismantling systemic barriers in our organizations.

One of the main sessions I participated in during the fall meeting was “Transformation in This Time of Disruption,” held on October 6, 2021. Some of the points raised during the presentation were recognition of the Pandemons’ unique experiences and how those experiences were informed by the disruption and trials of the previous year. We were to share with attendees our reflections on what worked and did not work for us.

The first conversation emerged from reflecting on takeaways from the program. I shared that community and confidence were two takeaways from my personal experience. Community because during 2020, most of us had questions about the future of our profession and our own organizations. After the George Floyd tragedy, most of us were asked to contribute to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) efforts at a higher level. Although this might have seemed like a proper request at the time, the cohort was already facing the pandemic trials;

adding the emotional stresses from implementing DEIA work required having a community of peers. It was comforting to be able to have this group and to have the confidence to ask any questions related to the pandemic, social unrest, furloughs, etc. Confidence because the cohort built it by confirming that several of us had the same concerns. In addition, there was an understanding that those involved in the program also wanted to remove systemic barriers for the new Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) leadership. We appreciated the solidarity statements pre-pandemic. This time around, there was an apparent commitment to make changes and to realize that removing barriers required the involvement of everyone participating in these conversations.

Another topic discoursed was related to professional organizations providing DEIA resources through several pipeline programs for underrepresented groups. Considering the new virtual environments and more access to DEIA resources, the question remained: as new emerging leaders, what is it that we needed from the Association of Research Libraries.

Most of the fellows agreed that we do not perceive a pipeline problem but rather a lack of commitment to BIPOC personnel and to empowerment of the same. Lack of commitment was discussed as the realization that although several organizations offer internship opportunities, training, and webinars, most of these opportunities are transient. There is no commitment to hire after the residency and/or internship programs are completed. In other words, there is a lack of commitment to hiring and to retaining BIPOC personnel.

It is my experience that BIPOC personnel are often over-mentored and under-sponsored. We asked for hiring opportunities and the possibility of ceding power, of allowing personnel to do the jobs we were hired to do.

Perhaps another topic I would have liked the ARL to consider is how to benchmark for assessment and accountability. For instance, I

would have like to learn more about what indicators are being used for measuring progress on DEIA efforts. It is my understanding that some institutions are using diversity dashboards to display current demographic composition, then following with disclosure statements about their benchmarks for improving DEIA in the next year.

Some of the leadership recommendations provided at the 2021 ARL Fall Meeting revealed the unequivocal awareness that it was going to take that, the leadership, to elevate DEIA efforts in all organizations if we wanted to realize change. Some examples given of leadership courses of action were fostering cultures of continual feedback, making the commitment to work intentionally, avoiding tokenizing the doers, assessing privilege and anti-racism training, and taking the lead in anti-racism efforts as a practice. There were many more recommendations contributed, but these are the ones resonating with me.

Effort and struggle have been key words used quite often during the fellowship experience. It is true that to improve our organizational cultures it does take everyone's engagement. Throughout my experience of the ARL LCDP, I witnessed various leaders attempting to make the best out of the disruptive environments and social climates faced. Strength and growth were demonstrated many times by all having the courage to disagree, to voice different opinions with colleagues who we were just beginning to know at the time. Those challenging conversations provided a window into the decision-making processes leadership goes through every day.

It was reassuring to know that despite the unpredictable climate, we were all vested in providing services to as many users as we could. There were, after all, access barriers to both physical and virtual environments. There was a strong emphasis on assessing DEIA efforts in our profession, along with reflections of scenarios and processes unperceived before. Indeed, "Transformation in This Time of Disruption" was the precise title for a session from which I believe we had hoped to emerge as better professionals.

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Mitigating Health Misinformation: Potential Roles for Academic Libraries

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1. Introduction

False information can diffuse significantly “farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly” than true information.¹ The dissemination of false information could be intentional or unintentional, and that misinformation may address a variety of domains, including political, social, scientific, and health matters. Given the many forms of false information, we will focus on health misinformation to illustrate the definitions, implications, challenges, and potential mitigation roles for academic libraries.

2. Background

What is Misinformation?

Misinformation is false or misleading information that contradicts the best available evidence.^{2, 3, 4} Misinformation may be unintentional, but disinformation is false information that people intentionally spread to deceive others.⁵ Misinformation is related to other forms of information that may cause harm. There is **mal-information**, which may be factually correct but is shared in a way that is intended to harm,⁶ as well as **invisible or silenced information**, specifically related to the unheard voices and perspectives of minoritized communities.⁷ Additionally, “**fake news**” is a widely known form of false information that aims to resemble news media and journalism.⁸

Why is Misinformation Challenging to Mitigate?

Misinformation can be challenging to mitigate because people may not know that information is false when they use or share it. Furthermore,

misinformation has been politicized and may form elements of an individual's worldview, making it tougher to address.⁹ Additionally, there are different types of misinformation to counteract. The Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee of the UK House of Commons has recognized six types of false information: fabricated content, manipulated content, impostor content, misleading content, false context of connection, and satire and parody.¹⁰ In the health domain, the content of misinformation speaks to a wide range of topics, including immunology, epidemiology, medical technology, regulation, prevention, and interventions. For instance, CDC has listed common “myths” (i.e., misinformation) surrounding COVID-19 vaccines, which speak to these matters.¹¹

What is Driving Health Misinformation?

Social media and networking sites are driving misinformation spread. Their limited regulation, lack of verification, and limited consequences for sharing false information are contributing factors.^{12, 13} Moreover, algorithmically generated recommendations in social media can amplify specific messages and may not present alternative evidence or perspectives. This quality may lead to echo chambers and filter bubbles that fix people's existing views and knowledge (e.g., selected exposure and confirmation bias).^{14, 15} Furthermore, Sarah Sobieraj observed that economic models in social and other media platforms reward engagement activities that may lead to misinformation spread.¹⁶ The dissemination of misinformation is not limited to social media. For example, the open sharing of non-peer-reviewed research studies in preprint servers contributed to COVID-19 misinformation when news media cited unvetted findings.¹⁷

Negative Impacts on Human Health

With the rapid dissemination of new health information, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, people may experience confusion and difficulty identifying credible information.^{18, 19} As a result, misinformation proliferates, potentially sowing distrust in social

institutions and resistance to health interventions and public health precautions. Misinformation and disinformation have been significant setbacks to the COVID-19 pandemic response, having contributed to an increased risk of illness, mortality, disruption, and disorganization.²⁰ Given this negative impact, the Surgeon General characterizes health misinformation as a significant problem that affects all of society, and the WHO has named the situation an “infodemic.”²¹

3. Strategies to Counteract Health Misinformation

Public Recommendations

In the United States, the Office of the Surgeon General and the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security have proposed national strategies for counteracting health misinformation. Table 1 summarizes the key action areas of their recommendations.

Table 1. Strategies and recommendations for counteracting health misinformation

<p>Office of the Surgeon General: Confronting Health Misinformation: The US Surgeon General’s Advisory on Building a Healthy Information Environment²²</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Equip Americans with the tools to identify misinformation• Expand research that deepens our understanding of health misinformation• Implement product design and policy changes on technology platforms• Invest in longer-term efforts to build resilience against health misinformation• Convene federal, state, local, territorial, tribal, private, nonprofit, and research partners [to explore the issue of health misinformation and its mitigation]

The Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security: National Priorities to Combat Misinformation and Disinformation for COVID-19 and Future Public Health Threats: A Call for a National Strategy²³

- **Pillar 1:** Intervene against false and damaging content as well as the sources propagating it
- **Pillar 2:** Promote and ensure the abundant presence and dissemination of factual information
- **Pillar 3:** Increase the public’s resilience to misinformation and disinformation
- **Pillar 4:** Ensure a whole-of-nation response through multisector and multiagency collaboration

Opportunities and Challenges for Academic Libraries

Across both public strategies, there are common themes that present opportunities for academic library participation.

- **Theme 1:** By adopting a **public strategy** with collaborative initiatives, libraries could build on existing efforts to share trustworthy information and broaden our reach.
- **Theme 2:** By involving a **broad range of stakeholders**, libraries could build the social capacity to address the scale and speed of misinformation spread. The stakeholders include social media and technology companies, news organizations and journalists, educators and educational institutions, health professionals, government (including policymakers, national security organizations, and public health agencies), researchers, scientific and public health institutions, funders, foundations, and members of the public.^{24 25} These different parties reflect the “whole-of-society effort” advocated by the Surgeon General.
- **Theme 3:** By building people’s awareness of misinformation and their skills to detect it, libraries could support **misinformation resilience** in communities. Misinformation resilience relies on

information-, health-, scientific-, media-, and digital-literacy skills.²⁶ It includes the ability to detect misinformation, verify information (i.e., fact-checking), find credible information, share information ethically, and engage with people who share or give credence to misinformation.

These themes align with the established library values of education, literacy development, information dissemination, and collaboration. Furthermore, the Surgeon General recognized the potential for libraries to develop health literacy among communities, emphasizing the value of our information resources and educational services to address misinformation.²⁷ In practice, recent library initiatives to deal with misinformation center on resource guide development, referral to fact-checking sources, information-literacy programs, and advocacy to mitigate misinformation.²⁸

While libraries have a role, counteracting misinformation can be challenging for our organizations. Firstly, there is a call for proactive interventions to remove or control the spread of false information, including platform-based detection and crowdsourced identification. An example is the WHO's campaign for citizens to report health misinformation.²⁹ These interventions are necessary since the rapid rate of health-misinformation spread requires an equally quick response. However, libraries do not have a history in this role. Secondly, misinformation can spread heavily on social media and networks. People may not find library resources and services for unbiased and credible information in their preferred online networks. Lastly, misinformation is often framed in a more "emotional and sensational manner."³⁰ Libraries may therefore need to address sensitive issues like people's emotions and biases in dynamic information environments.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, more opportunities may arise for academic libraries to engage with health misinformation. For instance, on August 31, 2021, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors declared health misinformation a public health crisis.^{31, 32} Focused on the negative

impact of misinformation on COVID-19 prevention and vaccination, the Board approved recommendations aligned with the Surgeon General's advisory.

In support of the county's campaign against health misinformation, the San Diego Circuit consortium libraries aim to collaborate and use the strategies described in this article. Circuit is a consortium comprising private and public academic libraries and public libraries. The members include San Diego County Library, San Diego Public Library, San Diego State University, UC San Diego, University of San Diego, and California State University San Marcos. Our consortium is partnering in a coordinated and strategic way to counteract misinformation regionally. In planning our initiatives, the steering team emphasized the benefits of building on members' diverse expertise with instruction, resource sharing, and community engagement for maximum public impact.

4. Future Directions

Looking towards the future, De Paor and Heravi have proposed a framework for libraries to address misinformation, consisting of the following four action areas.³³

Advocacy. De Paor and Heravi posit that libraries should promote their traditional role as safe and inclusive spaces people can turn to for information support. By leveraging our historic role as a trusted organization in a fragmented information ecosystem, libraries can address misinformation in a unique and impactful way. To act on this approach, libraries might promote our resources and services for information-literacy development and provide factual information to address misinformation. In support of this strategy, our outreach activities may need to shift to social media and networking sites, where misinformation can spread rapidly.

Revisit and reevaluate library values. While libraries have traditionally taken a neutral stance around information sharing, our

organizations may need to reexamine our role in intervening and limiting the spread of misinformation. There are calls for tools and processes that detect, flag, and restrict misinformation (Table 1). However, these functions are opposite to libraries' traditional support for the unrestricted use of information. Additionally, libraries need to examine the value of the open flow of information against the reality that unvetted information may go unchecked in our information ecosystem. While libraries could incorporate our information resources into social media and networking sites to provide context for suspected misinformation, these partnerships may be challenging to forge due to licensing restrictions and organizational capacity. Moreover, would additional information sharing be helpful, or would it intensify overload and confusion?

Collaboration. Libraries can contribute to a “whole-of-society” effort to mitigate misinformation by cooperating with diverse stakeholders. We might leverage our connections with users and communities, serving as a rapid communication channel that promotes information resources and services to help citizens respond to current events. Furthermore, there are opportunities for academic libraries to engage with the public to develop information literacies across all levels of society—perhaps through public and school library partnerships. Additionally, academic libraries have opportunities to work with government agencies, public organizations, and community groups—particularly by strengthening our presence in isolated or marginalized communities—as recommended in the proposed national strategies.

Reframe information literacy. De Paor and Heravi recommend positioning misinformation resilience as an information-literacy outcome and helping individuals develop the skills to manage the rapid and fragmented dissemination of online information.³⁴

While established information-literacy programs help users locate, evaluate, interpret, and effectively use information, there is an increasing need to integrate scientific, digital, and media literacies as a toolkit for misinformation resilience. Mackey and Jacobson propose

“metaliteracy” as another important ability to address the dynamism of online information ecosystems.³⁵ This ability combines media literacy, digital literacy, visual literacy, cyberliteracy, transliteracy, and information fluency. Metaliteracy may help people engage with online environments responsibly and detect manipulated or doctored information.

Furthermore, critical evaluation skills for information could include metacognitive and analytical skills, such as fact-checking, information synthesis, and recognizing a vulnerability to misinformation. Effective information evaluation may also depend on scientific and health research literacies to interpret methodologies and conclusions. By building these skills, libraries could help people succeed at flagging and reporting suspected misinformation,³⁶ engaging in ethical sharing (e.g., “if you’re not sure, don’t share”³⁷), and addressing health misinformation with our family, friends, and community.

5. Conclusion

Misinformation can spread quickly with a negative impact on individuals, society, and public health. Although misinformation comes in various forms and spreads through different channels, libraries can play an essential role in mitigating its threat through a whole-of-society collaboration. Academic libraries have opportunities to engage in advocacy, revisit and reevaluate library values around responsible information sharing, collaborate with new partners to engage our broader society, and reframe information literacy with new skills for misinformation resilience.

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