

Shooting at Florida State University Libraries: The Act, Aftermath, and Response

Julia Zimmerman, Dean of University Libraries, Florida State University

Susannah C. Miller, Associate Dean for Administrative Services

Shortly after midnight on November 20, 2014, a Florida State University (FSU) alumnus, Myron May, opened fire with a semiautomatic handgun at FSU's Robert Manning Strozier Library, injuring two students and one staff member before the police shot and killed May. This article describes the events of that night, the aftermath, and the responses of the university, libraries, and students. We hope this will be helpful to others who want to prepare for the possibility of something like this happening in their libraries.

Part 1: That Night

Wednesday, November 19, 2014, had been unseasonably cold in Tallahassee. At midnight there were over 500 students in Strozier Library, Florida State University's main library. Open 24/5, "Club Stroz," as it is affectionately known, is situated at the north end of Landis Green in the midst of residence halls and classroom buildings. Strozier Library is FSU's most popular late-night gathering place. On the early morning of November 20, with final exams just a few weeks away, Club Stroz was buzzing.

Library security had become a priority at FSU's libraries several years ago in the wake of a criminal incident—a sexual assault in Strozier's stacks. A security force of four full-time staff, supported by student workers and public safety officers from the FSU Police Department (FSUPD), monitored visitors at a counter in the library's lobby. There, visitors checked in, were quietly vetted, and then received a temporary swipe card for the nearby turnstiles. Members of the FSU community

went directly to the turnstiles to swipe their personal IDs. The turnstiles controlled entrance into the busy first-floor Learning Commons.

These security measures, along with a close relationship with the FSUPD, had dramatically reduced problems in Strozier and established it as a safe and secure destination all hours of the night and day. On November 20, however, the security measures were put to the test.

In the days that followed, this account of the November 20 shooting at Strozier Library emerged:

Myron May, the shooter, had graduated from FSU 10 years earlier. He left to earn a law degree in Texas and then worked as an attorney, but had recently returned to Florida, reportedly suffering from mental health issues. Security camera footage shows May entering Strozier Library's lobby at 12:26 a.m. He approaches the turnstiles and stares at them, apparently perplexed. He turns, walks out of the lobby onto the library steps, and starts shooting. One student falls, seriously injured. A second student is grazed by a shot. For a third student, two library books in his backpack stop a bullet from entering his back. Fear sends everyone in the area running for shelter.

May then re-enters the lobby, brandishing his gun, as the two security desk attendants dive under the counter. May fires at them once and tries a second time, but the gun misfires. He then turns and retreats to a far corner of the lobby to check his gun. One of the security attendants emerges from under the desk clutching his leg and hops as fast as he can through the turnstiles and into the Learning Commons.

May then exits onto the library steps again, unaware that the police have arrived. Within seconds gunfire explodes, clouds of smoke erupt, and one of the plate glass windows shatters. With that, Myron May is dead and his rampage ended.

In hindsight it's a simple, though horrifying, narrative. As that night unfolded, however, the events were anything but straightforward.

Christian

Christian was the nighttime security manager in Strozier Library. His shift started at midnight, and arriving at work he followed his usual routine: a brief chat with the two security staff in the lobby, followed by a top-to-bottom walk through the building. He was in the basement when a voice crackled over the radio. “There’s an emergency up front!” As he ran up the stairs to the main service desk on the first floor, Christian asked everyone he saw what was happening. No one knew. Fireworks? Maybe a gunshot? He heard shouts and screams. He ran into the lobby—straight into the source of the commotion.

Zachary

The first-floor Commons was packed with students. From his office in the Commons staff suite, “Zachary,” Strozier Library’s overnight coordinator who would like to remain anonymous, heard a loud pop. The noise seemed to come from the library entrance just around the corner. A book dropping to the floor? A turnstile mishap? Not an uncommon sound in busy Club Stroz.

But when Zachary walked out onto the floor of the Commons, “it was as if time had frozen. Everyone stopped what they were doing to see where the sound came from.” Just then he saw Nathan, a security desk attendant, jump over the turnstiles that separated the lobby from the Commons, yelling, “There’s someone with a gun!” Zachary was horrified to see that Nathan was wounded and bleeding: the pop had been a gunshot to Nathan’s leg. While a coworker tended to Nathan’s injury, another dialed the campus police. Zachary called his supervisor, Michelle, at home.

Christian

As Christian frantically warned students to seek protection, many ignored him, instead filming him with their phones. “Some students

actually walked closer to the sound of the gunfire to see what it was. Other students continued to study and didn't take the situation seriously—like it was a fire drill.” As reality hit, though, students sought shelter in the corners of the Commons or raced up the stairs to other floors. A few fled the building, seeking safety on the campus green in front of the library.

But it was eerily quiet in the lobby. Where was the shooter?

Christian crossed into the lobby, and could see that things weren't right. The security desk was empty but students continued to walk in and out of the building like nothing was amiss. A delivery driver came in with a pizza order. Then Christian noticed Myron May in the corner, and Christian's blood froze. “I heard the distinct metal-on-metal sound of a revolver or a clip being reloaded.” As unobtrusively as possible, Christian headed back into the Commons. “I saw everyone congregating near the service desk and I immediately begin clearing the floor. I was telling students, staff—anyone—to get off the floor now. On the other side of the desk, Nathan was collapsed on the floor, stark white and clutching his leg. ‘He shot me in the leg,’ he said, and I froze. Those were the longest few moments of my life.”

As Christian ran to retrieve the first aid kit from the security office, he heard gunfire in the distance—POP POP POP POP POP POP POP—and dropped to the floor, only to jump up immediately and start herding people to the nearest escape route, a nearby stairwell. “Then, to my immense relief, here came Sergeant Wiley and Officer O.J., armed to the teeth.”

The Police

The first call to FSU Police Communications was placed at 12:25 a.m., and police were immediately dispatched. Within 90 seconds of the first call, officers from the FSU Police Department and the City of Tallahassee Police Department were on scene. Because of the strong partnerships

between law enforcement in Tallahassee, Florida, neighboring agencies often scan the radio frequencies of nearby partners. One nearby City of Tallahassee Police officer was within one block of the FSU campus when the call for help went out. Over the next 30 to 40 seconds, FSU Police Department and City of Tallahassee Police officers observed a man in front of the library waving a gun. Police officers instructed him to drop the weapon. Responding, “You’re going to have to kill me,” he fired a shot in the direction of an FSUPD officer. The police returned fire. At approximately 12:27 a.m., the subject, Myron May, lay on the library steps, no longer a threat to students or law enforcement officers.

The investigation into the shooting and background of Myron May was led by the City of Tallahassee Police Department, with assistance from the Florida State University Police Department.

Michelle

Michelle, the librarian with oversight of the overnight team, was at home that night. She was accustomed to receiving texts from Zachary at night because he was new to his position and sometimes sought advice. He knew to phone after midnight, when Michelle was likely to be sleeping, if he needed her guidance in the middle of the night. When Michelle’s phone rang around 12:30, she answered and was alarmed to hear yelling and sirens in the background, with Zachary saying calmly, “There’s been a shooting in the library.”

“I bolted straight up,” Michelle recalled. “Zachary said much more, but it’s become a blur. You think you’ll remember everything about a night like that but all I recall is saying, ‘Wait, what?’ Zachary said he had to go but would call back, and that he thought everyone was okay.”

Michelle called her supervisor, Bridgett, and then called Dirac Science Library, which was also open. News of the shooting had gone viral on social media, and many students headed for Dirac. “The staff there was letting students in without a thought as to whether they might be

potential criminals or victims.” No one knew, at that point, who the shooter was, whether he had acted alone or what his motive might be. Michelle instructed the Dirac staff to lock the building down. If people were scared and seeking shelter, staff were to let them in, but weren’t to let anyone leave until there was an all-clear signal from police. Winging it, Michelle wasn’t sure she was giving staff the best advice. “There could have been multiple shooters, but many students were panicked about being left in the open in the dark with nowhere to go,” and it seemed cruel to deny entrance to them. But other students already in the library were mad because they weren’t allowed to leave.

Meanwhile, in Strozier Library, the staff led students to the upper floors, barricaded the stairwell doors, and tried to keep people calm. Some students had escaped in the first moments after they heard shots but now the building was in lockdown and no one could leave. There was little solid information about what had happened and plenty of fear-fueled speculation and rumors. Students made fortresses out of furniture, hiding behind overturned tables and in dark corners of the stacks.

It would be hours—an agonizingly long time—until police were finally ready to clear the building.

Katie

The news of the shooting spread rapidly by phone and text. Katie, one of the FSU Libraries’ associate deans, got the call shortly after 12:30. With other library administrators out of town or unreachable, Katie felt the need to respond. She checked Twitter, Facebook, and local news outlets trying to get a clearer sense of what was happening, but it was futile. Calls to FSUPD and city police dispatchers revealed nothing. So when she heard that the all-clear had been announced around 1:30, she drove to campus.



Strozier Library, November 20, 2014. Photo credit: Florida State University.

Parking near Strozier Library, Katie saw a sky eerily lit by the flashing lights of police cruisers and emergency vehicles. Barricades and crime-scene tape surrounded the library building. “I approached an officer sitting in his cruiser. ‘Excuse me, officer. I’m an associate dean in the libraries. I need to speak to someone about what’s going on.’ I was lucky. The officer’s wife was a PhD student so my title meant something to him. He told me what little he knew and went off to find his sergeant.” The sergeant wasn’t sure what to do with Katie, but brought her through the lines to stand alongside FSU’s director of communications, who was also trying to gather facts and make sense of the event, in anticipation of a press conference. Bridgett, Katie’s colleague and head of the Learning Commons, texted to say she was on her way.

A few minutes later Katie was leading Bridgett through the police lines. They shared information with each other, trying to develop a coherent understanding of what had taken place. Bridgett was texting with her employees in Strozier and Dirac Libraries, but questions and confusion prevailed over facts.

More and more news trucks and reporters arrived. Katie and Bridgett spotted two university officials—the vice president for student affairs

and the chief of police—heading to a nearby parking lot to start the impromptu press conference. Katie approached them, again asking for information and expressing concerns about staff and students inside Strozier and Dirac. From that moment, Katie and Bridgett stayed with the officials, who were in communication with a team of administrators in a “situation room” not far away.

Gradually, students and staff were being evacuated from Strozier Library. Videos from cell phones show students being led through the building in small groups, hands in the air, ordered to leave their belongings behind. In the background is a chaotic scene with tables and chairs turned into barricades.

While the police were sensitive to the students’ fear and confusion, there were still too many unknowns to take chances. No one knew who the shooter was or why he did what he did, whether it was the isolated act of a deranged individual or the first phase of a terrorist operation or something else entirely. Everyone begged for answers, but no one—not the police, not the university administrators, not the eyewitnesses—had any.

Katie and Bridgett learned that staff and students evacuated from Strozier were sequestered in a classroom building adjacent to Strozier Library for questioning. Some were then allowed to leave but those most likely to have seen or heard something were retained. At about 3:00 a.m. the witnesses were put aboard a bus to the Tallahassee police station for additional debriefing. Katie and Bridgett were allowed to board the bus. “For a moment or two, we were able to hug staff and let them know we knew what they had been through,” Katie recalled. “I didn’t really even know the overnight staff, but I hugged them all the same.”

Another press conference was scheduled for 6:00 a.m. With nothing left to do in the interim, Katie took Bridgett to her house to drink tea and warm up. “Bridgett and I wrote out what we knew, what we didn’t know, and a list of what we thought needed to be taken care of. We sipped

our tea, thawed out, and got to a mental state where we could think somewhat clearly.”

In a telephone call with the dean of libraries, who was out of town, it was determined that both Strozier and Dirac Libraries should be closed the next day. Katie and Bridgett sent e-mails to staff members who worked in those buildings. With Strozier Library sealed, they decided to gather key library managers at 10:00 a.m. in Dirac Library. They notified these managers as well.

Katie and Bridgett then drove back to campus to catch the 6:00 a.m. press conference. Entering the FSUPD’s building with other campus officials, they were able to slip into the pre-press conference briefing. They were gratified to receive a warm welcome. Here was an opportunity to get some answers: How long would Strozier be closed? What kind of cleanup would be needed? Did the police know anything about the state of the library interior? Were they aware that library staff would need to sort out library property—like loaner laptops—from student property when we were allowed back in? Katie and Bridgett took notes and made lists of additional tasks to be done.

In the press conference, new information was shared and, bit by bit, a clearer picture of the night’s events was forming.

After the press conference was over, Katie and Bridgett walked to Strozier Library to intercept any staff members who hadn’t heard about the library’s closing and might be arriving for work. Katie and Bridgett were able to take a brief tour of the building to assess its condition. The only obvious signs of violence were the shattered window in the lobby and the crime-scene tape, but the rest of the building was chaotic with backpacks and other paraphernalia strewn everywhere. The furniture was in wild disarray.

Meanwhile, employees who had endured five hours of questioning at the Tallahassee police station were returning to the library. “Emotions were

running high,” Katie recalled. “We worked with police officers on site to help employees gather some of their belongings. One of our security desk workers was unable to retrieve her keys, since her workspace was in the middle of the investigation zone.” They made sure she had someone to come pick her up and a place to stay, and promised to get her belongings to her as quickly as possible.

Christian

“When they brought us back to Strozier around 6:00 a.m. to get our cars and go home, the scene was what you see in breaking news segments on hundreds of thousands of TVs about thousands of other issues plaguing the world: a circus of news vans and reporters and crews. I sent texts to everyone I care about saying ‘I’m not dead.’”



News trucks on Landis Green, November 20, 2014. Photo credit: Florida State University.

Part 2: The Aftermath

“Surreal” was a word frequently used to describe the hours and days following the shooting at the FSU Libraries. We all were in a kind of

shock, and yet we felt compelled to channel our mental and physical resources toward healing and returning the FSU community to normalcy.

And it was certainly surreal to arrive on campus the morning after the midnight shooting. The streets surrounding Strozier Library and Landis Green, iconic landmarks at the center of campus, were clogged with news trucks. Technicians milled around and reporters thrust microphones in front of anyone willing to talk. Neon-yellow crime-scene tape still circled the library. Eyes were drawn to Strozier Library, with plywood covering the shattered front window, and to its front steps, the site of so much violence.

As morning dawned, the story was beginning to form. We now knew the identity of the shooter, Myron May. There was every reason to believe that he acted alone, but no one knew why he did what he did. That question would never be fully answered.

Classes were canceled for the day. Strozier Library, still the site of an open investigation, remained closed, but other libraries were expected to reopen around noon. Library managers gathered in Dirac Science Library to assess the situation and plan next steps. Few of them had slept more than an hour or two, so due to sleep deprivation and a lack of credible information, it was hard to assess or plan. But in this time of crisis, it was comforting to be together.

Communication from University Administration

At 5:21 a.m. on Thursday, a statement prepared by campus administrators had been sent to FSU e-mail lists and posted on the FSU homepage:

The Florida State University community is extremely saddened by the shootings that took place early this morning at Strozier Library, in the very heart of campus. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and loved ones of all those who have been affected.

We are increasing security measures and providing a strong law enforcement presence on and around campus. I have great confidence in the abilities of our local law enforcement agencies to handle this matter.

In order to provide services for our students, the university will remain open today but all classes scheduled for Thursday, Nov. 20, are cancelled, including exams scheduled to be held at the Testing Center on Thursday. Strozier Library will be closed until further notice.

As we try to make sense of what is a senseless incident, the University Counseling Center and Employee Assistance will provide counseling and support for FSU faculty, staff and students affected by these events. Should anyone need or desire such services, please contact the University Counseling Center at the Askew Student Life Building or call 850.644.2003.

Information will be updated regularly on the www.fsu.edu Alerts page.

At 9:30 that morning there was an emergency cabinet meeting. The provost, vice presidents, and other key officials awaited the arrival of the president, who was flying in from New York. Cabinet members wanted to reassure the community that the crisis was over and that necessary follow-up tasks were underway. More importantly, they wanted to communicate plans for assisting everyone affected, whether directly or indirectly. Trustees and alumni boards needed to be contacted. There were still few confirmed facts, but the press, faculty, staff, students, parents, and the local community were hungry for information.

And there were many decisions to be made. Should classes be canceled for tomorrow—Friday—as well as today? How could resources such as the University Counseling Center for students and the Employee Assistance Program be marshaled quickly to support a shocked and frightened community? What about new student orientation, Board of Trustees and

Foundation meetings, athletic events, all of which were on the calendar?
What other employee expectations and needs must be met?

Mary Coburn, vice president for Student Affairs, sent this e-mail to her senior staff:

Subject: protocol for calls today

Classes have been canceled for today. Orientation will continue as planned.... Let's be sure to cover calls today, especially from parents, with staff who will handle them well. Please be compassionate and thoughtful.

Here are some points of info that may be helpful:

- The most updated information will be posted on www.fsu.edu and <http://alerts.fsu.edu>. The police investigation is ongoing.
- Families of the injured students have been contacted.
- The incident is assumed to be isolated at this time, campus is safe today but FSU police will be very visible to assure students and the FSU community.
- Those in need of support may contact the University Counseling Center.
- If people are concerned that they did not receive the FSU Alert that went out at 12:36 a.m., please encourage them to check their phone information on line to make sure that the correct info is listed. Any questions, comments, or concerns regarding the FSU Alert system should be directed to help@emergency.fsu.edu. FSU Alerts will do their best to address concerns in a timely manner, but request patience.

University faculty received an e-mail from Sally McRorie, then vice president for Faculty Development and Advancement, at 11:20 a.m.:

By now most of you are aware of the tragic events that occurred early this morning at Strozier Library. Three students were injured, one critically, and the shooter was killed by law enforcement officers after refusing to put down his weapon and firing upon officers.

Classes remain cancelled for today... FSU Police and Tallahassee Police officers and leaders have been on scene since the initial call... Although their quick response and the wide range and immediate nature of FSU notification systems may well have diminished potential injuries, our entire community is saddened by the shootings of three students that did occur.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to them and their families and friends. Counseling services are available through the University Counseling Center, Victim Advocate program, and Employee Assistance Program.

We will notify you as more news is available [and] whether classes will resume tomorrow.

Thank you for all you do for Florida State University. At a time like this, our focus is on our students, and our climate of collegiality and academic purpose stand us all in good stead.

Counselors

Across campus, the first reaction to the shooting was shock, followed by the imperative to figure out what to do—quickly. Few felt prepared. The university's two main counseling offices, the University Counseling Center and the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), clearly had an important role to play. Staff of both offices had been contacted before dawn with instructions to come to work as early as possible.

At the University Counseling Center, staff began arriving at 6:30 a.m. and were bombarded by texts, while phones were ringing off the hook. They

quickly divided into two teams: one to handle phone calls, and another to focus on walk-ins and scheduling counseling sessions. “Group sessions worked better than individual sessions because of the volume of clients,” recalled one counselor. “And being with peers helped students realize that their responses were normal.” Students were worried not just about their personal safety but about missing class assignments and tests. The sessions, therefore, were designed to provide reassurance, care, and information so badly needed. In retrospect, the counselors were grateful for training they’d had for crisis situations—which seemed to be effective both in the immediate wake of the event and in its aftermath.

A counselor in the EAP office recalled getting a call at home from his supervisor in the middle of the night. “We went into the office very early, cleared our schedules—rescheduled clients, meetings, trainings—and reached out to various departments to coordinate our efforts.... We made ourselves available to anyone who needed to be seen. To my knowledge, everyone who needed or wanted help was accommodated.” They saw people individually as well as in groups. “What stood out to me most was the communication between Administration, FSUPD, TPD, Student Counseling, EAP, and other departments on campus. Everyone was alert and ready to help.”

Another counselor shared a glimpse into her own mind-set: “I was very nervous about what that day after the shooting would bring and how it would be handled. I remember walking into the office—it was still dark since it was so early. You could just feel the pressure of the day in the air. I remember being surprised at how strong my emotions were upon hearing the news, and the trepidation that followed.”

Counselors were seeing—and personally experiencing—classic crisis reactions: fatigue, difficulty sleeping, increased or decreased appetite, difficulty concentrating, confusion, frustration, fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, and grief or sorrow. An important part of their work was to explain to clients that these reactions were all normal. Fortunately, they

already had handouts about coping with crisis, and these were especially useful for people who couldn't directly access counseling services.

Library Managers' Situation Room

We set up our own situation room in Dirac Library. Each of us was experiencing those classic crisis reactions, but being together provided the therapeutic value of sharing feelings with peers. There was little we could actually do, as the decisions were being made by top administration, so we rehashed the night's events again and again. We ate donuts and drank coffee. Concrete information was still in short supply and we monitored social media and the news media for any new facts. We went over lists prepared the night before by Katie and Bridgett of things to be done. We still didn't know how much damage Strozier had sustained or how much disarray to expect. We wondered when we could re-enter the library and when we could reopen. We were unclear about whether belongings of students and staff were still in the library and were concerned that they were not secure. We worried over our colleague, Nathan, who had been shot.

Inevitably we talked about how prepared we had been for such an event. It was obvious that the turnstiles had prevented a much worse tragedy by keeping Myron May out of the library, with 500-plus students inside and countless places to hide. On the other hand, it was impossible not to dissect our security program, looking for things we should have done differently.

We listened for announcements of press conferences. As the day wore on and we heard about various gatherings, we made sure to attend. These public events, both spontaneous and planned, occurred throughout the day. They drew crowds numbering in the hundreds or even thousands. A prayer circle was scheduled for mid-morning on Landis Green, in front of the library. The Student Government Association organized a Gathering of Unity to be held at 5:00 p.m.



FSU community comes together for a Gathering of Unity, November 20, 2014.
Photo credit: Matthew Paskert/FSView.

The Counseling Center held an open meeting in the afternoon to help the university community understand their reactions to the crisis and how to care for themselves, and to inform them of resources available to them. Michelle was on the program. It was packed with people who were upset but seemed reassured by the quick response of the university. Although it was difficult for her, Michelle thanked everyone for their support and expressed gratitude that the community had come together in such a meaningful way.

At the several press conferences that occurred throughout the day, more details emerged. We learned the identity of the victims. Most grievously injured was an engineering student, hospitalized with multiple gunshot wounds and probably paralyzed. Nathan Scott, our employee, was in the hospital awaiting surgery to his leg. Aside from them and the student who was grazed by a bullet, and of course the shooter himself, no one else was hurt, even though hundreds of students had been in the line of fire for those few crucial minutes.

Finally, at a mid-afternoon press conference, we learned that the FSU president and a few other administrators were going to visit Strozier Library at 4:00 p.m. The library dean was asked to accompany them.

We who toured the library that afternoon ducked under the yellow crime-scene tape to enter the building. The steps, site of the worst violence, had been scrubbed clean. The lobby was spotless. A large contingent of maintenance staff was waiting for us inside the entrance, clearly proud of their work. As we toured, we marveled at their efforts. The floors were gleaming, the furniture carefully arranged, desk surfaces wiped to a high shine, everything—books, computers, desk equipment—neatly in place. Aside from plywood over one front window, there was no sign of the chaos of the night before.

FSU's president, John Thrasher, had been in office for just 10 days. He was deeply shaken by the shooting. As we walked through Strozier, he pulled the dean aside and said, "I want us to reopen just as soon as we can." And it was agreed that we would reopen the next morning, Friday, November 21, at 9:00 a.m.

The Library Reopens

Library management sent an e-mail to the staff on Thursday afternoon, asking them to be at work by 8:00 a.m. the next day. An early-morning meeting for all library employees was hastily arranged. A breakfast spread provided nourishment and comfort. Speakers from the University Counseling Center, EAP, the FSU Police Department, library security, and library administration shared the latest information and promised ongoing support for our staff, as well for as the entire FSU community.

Friday was a gorgeous fall day. The media presence on Landis Green had not abated. News trucks and reporters were everywhere, but this time they were enabling FSU to make a public statement about its resilience in the wake of such a horrifying event. After brief statements by the president and the dean of libraries, other campus officials joined them in

leading a long line of waiting students up the library steps and into the building. Starbucks offered coffee samples and treats, and the library staff were in place, ready to resume normal operations.

At the lobby desk where his coworker had been shot less than 36 hours earlier, Greg, a security staff member, greeted the incoming students. It was “a powerful thing. Seeing the emotional faces of those gathering around, the strong police presence throughout the day, and the many students who bravely reentered the building for the first time, some even stopping to thank us and shake our hands, was very moving.”

Supporting the Libraries' Staff

Counseling for library staff and student workers was a vital step in the recovery process within the library. Michelle was part of the team of library managers who assembled to coordinate plans after the shooting. She had reached out to the University Counseling Center and the Employee Assistance Program to arrange for counseling sessions for staff and student workers within the libraries, and counselors were available around the clock. Michelle required all overnight staff to attend, even though a few were reluctant. Some sessions lasted only a few minutes, while others took over an hour. Michelle encouraged library staff to seek additional counseling, cautioning them to not try to tough it out.

Reactions to the shooting varied widely. Two staff members were thinking of submitting their resignations. Later they changed their minds, perhaps due to the support that was provided. Others seemed to take it in stride. A staff member who had been on-site that night said, “[We] just wanted to move on with life without being reminded by people who were amazed that we would come back into the building or who wanted to talk about it and relive it over and over ... every family member and friend and stranger that you would run into in the grocery store would want to talk about that night.”

Counselors warned us that delayed reactions, sometimes occurring many months out, were commonplace in such situations, and to be alert to needs that might arise much later. This proved to be true. Lingering feelings remain among staff who were working during the time of the shooting. Some discount the important roles they played that night, barricading doors and keeping people as safe as possible, while keeping supervisors and first responders informed of what was happening, helping off-site colleagues to breathe more easily. Their calm under stress and their ability to keep hundreds of students calm was an incredible feat.

An important part of the healing process was the support received from around the country and even the world. In the hours, days, and weeks that followed, library managers and staff received thousands of e-mails about the shooting. One of the first was from ARL's executive director, Elliott Shore. There were hundreds from other library colleagues, including some who had experienced traumatic events within their own libraries. Subsequent conversations with these colleagues were extremely helpful.

We received a particularly touching note from the librarian at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut:

I am the librarian at Sandy Hook School. I just wanted to reach out to you today and say that our thoughts are with you and our hearts are broken for you. I received my MLS from FSU, ironically.... If you want to pass along my contact info to anyone who might be needing to talk, please feel free. I know it was very helpful to me when the librarian from Columbine reached out to me after our shooting.

Student Response

Student groups contacted the library to show support. One group was given permission to post a vigil banner in the lobby. We put up our own banners saying “#FSU Strong” on which students could

write expressions of support. Thousands of messages were added in subsequent weeks.

At the same time, we heard anecdotally that some students were too frightened to return to Strozier. Indeed, attendance dropped for a few days. With Thanksgiving less than a week away, many students left town to start the Thanksgiving break early.

After the break, however, we were gratified to see Strozier Library packed once again for the run-up to exams. Student use of Strozier Library has only increased over time.

Moving Forward

The shooting caused us to look closely at our security operations within the FSU Libraries. Although we had a security staff, turnstiles with card swipe access for admittance, surveillance cameras in strategic locations, and an incident-reporting practice, we looked for ways to improve. We consulted with several groups, including the campus police department, top administration, and student groups. We also engaged in a crime prevention audit with the campus police and conducted research on best practices in the industry.

As a result, we identified areas that could be strengthened. With campus police, we outlined needed improvements and requested a modest budget increase in order to fund the enhancements. With administrative support we have since implemented the recommendations, resulting in a stronger program and a better-equipped, more professional staff.

Our new staffing model replaced the library security department's student workers with permanent staff. We now have 10 full-time and 3 part-time security staff, including the head of security, 3 supervisors, 6 full-time security guards, and 3 part-time security guards to oversee our busiest and largest facilities, Strozier and Dirac. Appropriate coverage requires that a supervisor be able to move freely among all library

facilities while also overseeing staffing of the security desks in the library lobbies. Supervisors conduct routine patrols, answer calls and requests for assistance, and respond to issues as they arise.

We require public safety officer training for all security staff. Provided by the FSUPD, this consists of 30 hours of training and includes basic security functions, crowd control tactics, proper use of police radios, patrol techniques, emergency response, and CPR. Mandatory training takes place for all library employees each spring and includes active-shooter training conducted by certified trainers, evacuation procedures, and de-escalation skills.

Security personnel are now uniformed for easy identification. The uniforms provide a professional look and increase deterrence of bad behavior. They are also equipped with OC spray (pepper spray) with a holster, and a uniform jacket for cooler or inclement weather. The police radios are worn by supervisors, providing direct access to the FSU Police Department's dispatch center, and can also be patched through directly to responding officers. The radios minimize delay in communicating with the police department in emergencies.

Our head of security continues to have a direct reporting line to the libraries' administration, as well as a "dotted line" reporting relationship to the officer in charge of the FSUPD Special Operations Division. The head of security keeps both organizations apprised of issues and needs related to safety and security in the libraries. They meet every two months.

Conclusion

The FSU Libraries evolved in important ways—in our strength, resilience, and cohesiveness—as a result of this experience.

In November of 2015, FSU president John Thrasher echoed these thoughts when he said, "One of my proudest moments occurred a little

more than 24 hours [after the shooting] when students lined up to return to the library. All eyes were on us that morning as television cameras from national news outlets rolled, but our students demonstrated their strength and determination to move forward.... The university bravely carried on.... I often say that at Florida State University, we are family. Never was it more apparent than that night. One year later, this university is stronger than ever.”

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