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Quick Pivots: Maintaining an Agile Approach to Outreach During an Evolving Crisis

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Abstract: As the University of New Mexico responded to the coronavirus pandemic during the spring and summer of 2020, the University Libraries piloted enhanced virtual outreach initiatives, including an online event series and scaled-up social media activity. The Summer of Sci Fi (SoSF) consisted of three Zoom-facilitated programs that offered fun activities designed to engage a socially distanced campus community while highlighting various library resources. Numerous “quick pivots” were necessary to accommodate unpredictable circumstances throughout the pilot implementation. This experience has demonstrated the advantages of approaching outreach with an agile stance, particularly during a crisis.

Keywords: Outreach, organizational agility, social media, event planning, coronavirus

Introduction

On a typical March day, approximately 5,000 students, faculty, staff, and local community members pass through the doors of the main campus libraries at the University of New Mexico-Albuquerque (UNM), availing themselves of a range of materials, spaces, and services offered by these three libraries. In mid-March 2020, gate count numbers dropped, precipitously, to zero. The campus-wide emergency response to the novel coronavirus led to an unprecedented decision to close all libraries mid-semester. UNM administration required almost all university employees to work remotely. The libraries shifted all services online for several weeks; some staff returned to the library buildings during the summer to facilitate limited access to physical collections (primarily through contactless held-item pickup available to users through carryout service). Library spaces remained restricted to only library

personnel until three weeks after classes began in the subsequent fall semester.

Amid limited operations, UNM librarians grappled with how they could maintain connections with users sans building access or face-to-face contact while promoting revised and expanded online services. Most large libraries are not particularly “nimble.” The sweep of events and social upheaval of 2020 challenged UNM’s University Libraries to respond quickly and continuously adapt to a rapidly changing landscape. Exceptional circumstances provided an impetus for the accelerated development of pilot outreach and engagement programs using readily available tools/platforms, such as Zoom, Springshare, Kanopy, Buffer, Microsoft Forms, and Google Forms. Additionally, University Libraries were able to scale their social media activity and launch a virtual event series. The unpredictable circumstances demanded flexibility, necessitating numerous “quick pivots” during the pilot implementation of the virtual event series, Summer of Science Fiction (SoSF). Although efforts ultimately produced mixed results, these pivots allowed librarians to develop reusable outreach tools, such as new workflows and programming materials, while maximizing benefits, anticipating and countering potential problems, and creating opportunities for engagement with users. This experience has demonstrated the advantages of approaching outreach with an agile stance, particularly during a crisis.

Institutional Context

UNM offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs to more than 21,000 students on the flagship campus of the University of New Mexico college system in Albuquerque (Office of Institutional Analytics, 2020). University Libraries refers to the Zimmerman Library, UNM’s main library, plus two branch libraries, the Centennial Science and Engineering Library and the Fine Arts and Design Library. Organizationally, University Libraries is part of the College of University Libraries and Learning Sciences, alongside UNM Press and the Organization, Information, and Learning Sciences program.

To share news and promote library collections and activities, University Libraries contribute to an all-college blog and maintain library-specific Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube accounts. A standing social media committee creates most of the content for these accounts. On a rotating basis,

one committee member is responsible for generating content. Before the pandemic, the committee set a goal of publishing three social media posts per week at a minimum.

Within UNM Libraries, several departments have a record of robust outreach programming, such as the Center for Southwest Research, the Indigenous Nations Library Program, and Research Data Services. However, the subject liaison librarians, particularly in the relatively new Learning and Outreach Services (LORS) department, formed in 2018, are still developing their burgeoning programming strategy. In the past, LORS librarians had not planned events simply for fun; their occasional outreach programs typically attracted low or no attendance.

Some noteworthy recent LORS successes include reference-oriented events: research parties based on the model presented in Wengler (2018); research clinics (Koelling & Townsend, 2019); pop-up libraries; and book-distribution programs (Beene et al., 2019). Through these events, librarians sought to connect users with needed services or materials “where they already are.”

In 2018, LORS librarians implemented an instruction-oriented escape room program designed to teach information literacy concepts. The LORS librarians successfully ran the escape room for several different groups, including first-year writing classes, college transition classes, library student employees, writing tutors, and other UNM librarians. However, lack of registrations forced them to cancel their “open-to-all” escape rooms (Koelling & Russo, 2020).

Outreach in Academic Libraries

The lack of a widely accepted, authoritative definition of “outreach” is evident in the library literature (Blummer & Kenton, 2019; Carter & Seaman, 2011; Diaz, 2019). To arrive at a consensus for defining outreach in a library context, Diaz (2019) conducted a concept analysis, identifying common defining attributes of library outreach activities. These include “work attributed to library employees; communication between library employees and people not employed by the library; a targeted current or potential user subpopulation; temporary or periodic work; goals focused on changing

attitudes, awareness, use, or knowledge of library-related issues” (Diaz, 2019, p. 189).

Generally, the literature emphasizes aligning outreach efforts with a library’s organizational goals, as well as centering the institutional mission of the university as a whole (Bell, 2009, as cited in Del Bosque et al., 2012; Blummer & Kenton, 2019; Kelly, 2020; Morris, 2008). Napp & Sabharwal (2019) advocate using outreach to “directly support institutional strategic goals related to research and diversity” (p. 1).

Given this goal-oriented focus, it is unsurprising that many articles stress the importance of planning outreach strategically in ways tied to assessment metrics as a corrective to widespread ad hoc approaches. Kelly (2020) states, “Cohesive outreach strategies are in growing demand on campuses to support student success” (p. 330). LeMire et al. (2018) and Diaz (2019) comment on the discrepancy between librarians’ intention toward proactive, programmatic outreach (i.e., surveyed librarians described their outreach as planned work) and their more reactive actual practices. The researchers note that evidence suggests a lack of clearly defined, library-wide outcomes for outreach and a tendency to more often initiate outreach in response to a problem or user request.

Some authors highlight the need for flexibility even with carefully planned outreach efforts. When reviewing outreach literature from 2008–2019, Blummer & Kenton (2019) identified flexibility as one of four key themes drawn from papers describing library programming during that period. Freeman & Freeman (2017) urge librarians to adapt their outreach efforts as new information about the intended audience becomes evident, for example, by keeping abreast of and accommodating shifting support needs of an ever-rotating student population on an academic campus. Staff at the University of Georgia’s law library note, “For both Instagram and Twitter, it has been our spur-of-the-moment content that gets the most engagement,” recommending that librarians “use these moments to create a sense of community with patrons” (Bradley et al., 2020, p. 16). While Owens & Bishop (2018) acknowledged that tying outreach/programming to institutional strategic planning from inception enabled them to experiment with buy-in from their administration, they also commented: “When we are able to try new things, assess, and adjust quickly, we send a message to students that we support them and are in tune with their needs” (p. 81).

Outreach in the absence of physical library space can prove exceptionally

challenging. Wilson (2013) described the need for “more aggressive and proactive” outreach after two libraries transitioned to e-libraries (p. 69). Chizwina et al. (2017) reported on library social media communications at the North West University Library – Mafikeng Campus during a crisis-induced campus closure, which included apprising users of campus and library developments as they evolved and dealing with mischief-makers and bad-faith actors.

Literature searches about academic libraries’ outreach and programming in a virtual or online environment conducted in Library & Information Sciences Abstracts (LISA), Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts (LISTA), and Google Scholar yielded few scholarly studies of webinar-based special events directly comparable to the type implemented by UNM Libraries during limited operations. Nearly all of the articles retrieved from these searches dealt with online instruction or social media.

Over the last decade, academic libraries’ use of social media for user engagement has become widespread and increasingly important. Librarians are now expected to understand how to exploit these tools to build and maintain relationships with stakeholders (Anwar & Zhiwei, 2020; Chawner & Oliver, 2013; Harrison et al., 2017; Peacemaker et al., 2016). Academic libraries use social media to: highlight resources and services; advertise events; promote librarians’ expertise (particularly in novel areas such as data management); make informational announcements (e.g., changes in hours, deadlines); invite users to visit library spaces; convey organizational values; and create impressions of community connectedness through conversational posts and formal or informal interactions with users (Del Bosque et al., 2012; Harrison et al., 2017; Kriesberg, 2014; Peacemaker et al., 2016; Phillips, 2011).

Social media outlets, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, are free tools requiring minimal time commitment to yield tangible benefits. Significantly, social media humanizes librarians for students who may perceive library employees as intimidating authority figures. These marketing vehicles allow librarians to approach users remotely through channels used daily by students (Del Bosque et al., 2012; Phillips, 2011; Wilson, 2013).

However, challenges can exist, including lack of necessary infrastructure (e.g., equipment, Internet speed, or bandwidth), marketing expertise, training, and skills. Ineffective or nonexistent coordination within the library, among managers and staff, can also confound academic libraries’ use of social media.

The absence of staff enthusiasm, characterized by individuals lacking interest in new technologies (or otherwise reluctant to learn or use them), can also impede the uptake of social media (Anwar & Zhiwei, 2020; Sachin, 2014).

Del Bosque et al. (2012) note the widespread inconsistency of maintaining posting frequency, types of content posted, and creation/deletion of academic libraries' Twitter accounts. The researchers attribute these inconsistencies to repeated changes in staff assigned to administer or generate content for an account, the flux of institutional priorities, and the rhythm of the academic calendar.

Some authors discuss social media best practices for libraries. For example, Harrison et al. (2017) point to libraries that assign a dedicated librarian or staff member to maintain their libraries' social media accounts. Blummer & Kenton (2019) recommend pursuing administrative support to identify students' preferences, creating posting policies, monitoring posts, and hosting professional development workshops on how to write posts. Along with Blummer & Kenton, Peacemaker et al. (2016) note that libraries exhibiting best practices strategically post on social media platforms according to a defined social media management plan or content strategy, evaluating social media activities according to planned assessment protocols. Researchers also suggest that libraries link to social accounts from their websites (Blummer & Kenton, 2019; Harrison et al., 2017) and prescheduling and/or automating posts using online tools (Bradley et al., 2020; Peacemaker et al., 2016).

Initial Outreach Design During UNM Limited Operations

Emergency decisions to cut off building access and otherwise limit in-person operations during the pandemic while expanding online services and resources forced University Libraries to increase the frequency of messaging to the user community simply to keep them informed of those changes. Beyond communicating through the crisis, the librarians wanted to maintain user engagement in supportive and entertaining ways, which led to the LORS librarians' first attempt at "just-for-fun" programming. The librarians wanted to emphasize human connection and stress relief during trying circumstances and attract audiences during a quieter time of the academic year when fewer classes were in session.

Expanding Outreach via Social Media

In the absence of face-to-face interactions, the social media committee decided that an enhanced social media presence would serve a dual purpose by providing opportunities to promote the library's virtual services while simultaneously reaching out to the campus community with humanizing empathy. To increase the number of social media posts while decreasing the burden on committee members, the committee devised a novel method to engage the entire library in developing content. The committee circulated two online forms to employee email lists requesting contributions of podcast recommendations and photos of pets "helping" perform work-from-home tasks during the pandemic lockdown. Figure 1 presents two library staff contributions. The forms allowed the committee to compile a significant collection of posts quickly. Using the social media scheduling tool Buffer, committee members were able to preschedule content to post once a week on set days throughout the summer (e.g., podcast recommendations every Wednesday). The scheduled content augmented other types of posts developed by committee members as usual. Other content shared during this time included attractive images of library locations that patrons could download and use as virtual meeting backgrounds and a photo series that used the science library's circulating model skeleton to illustrate how to return books safely during limited operations.

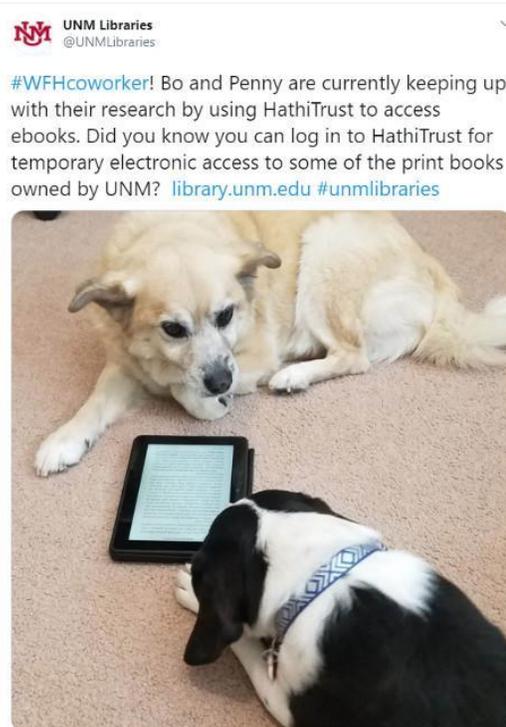


Figure 1: Examples of Work-from-Home Pet Tweets

Summer of Sci Fi (SoSF) Virtual Event Series

The Summer of Sci Fi (SoSF) virtual event series was the LORS librarians' contribution to expanded outreach efforts. SoSF included the following elements: 1) three newly developed hour-long events, 2) a LibGuide serving as a central hub for information about programming and promotion of relevant library collections, 3) linked social media activities, and 4) consistently themed marketing materials.

SoSF emerged from conversations related to an endowment earmarked for developing collections in the areas of science fiction and women's studies that had not previously received much public recognition. SoSF started with an initial idea to use an online book discussion event to celebrate the endowment and direct attention to the library's e-book collections when access to print collections was limited. Eventually, it grew to include many fun and engaging events designed to feature various library resources. Several library departments collaborated to plan, promote, and implement SoSF within a short time frame, including subject liaison librarians, access services and electronic resources staff, special collections archivists, and the marketing manager.

The SoSF programming schedule kicked off on June 15, 2020, with a movie watch-along. During this event, the library invited users to join a communal viewing of a collection of science-fiction short films accessible through the library's Kanopy streaming media service. Users could choose from two methods to join a real-time discussion of the films as they aired. Twitter users could contribute to a live-tweeting event using a unique hashtag (#UNMsoSF); others could join a private Zoom session with a moderated chat. Several librarians participated in both venues. A staff member with a film studies background took the lead in live-tweeting from the library's official Twitter account. Librarians viewed this event as an opportunity to highlight access to Kanopy—one of several streaming media services available through the library—as digital library services became increasingly important during the pandemic. Librarians crafted simple messages promoting Kanopy for use by the hosts during the event and for the SoSF LibGuide.

The second SoSF event on July 15, 2020, consisted of a virtual book discussion of a science fiction title hosted via Zoom. For this event, librarians used endowment funds to purchase an unlimited license for an e-book. Based

on availability, relevance, and content, they selected an award-winning collection of science fiction short stories written by a female LGBTQIA+ author.

For the final event (July 20, 2020), the LORS librarians decided to host a team science fiction-themed trivia event using Zoom's breakout rooms. During four timed rounds, teams in breakout rooms worked together to submit an online form with answers to ten questions related to a theme. The four rounds' themes included literature, television, music, and film. Between each round, teams could socialize together in the main Zoom room while the hosts, aided by an online spreadsheet with preset formulas, shared correct answers and tallied the scores. Inspired by "poorly drawn cats" Internet memes, teams competed to have their team logo drawn by the trivia hosts and posted on the SoSF LibGuide. This reward avoided the security and bureaucratic challenges associated with distributing physical awards or monetary incentives.

The SoSF LibGuide (<https://libguides.unm.edu/SummerOfSciFi>) promoted these programs with one page dedicated to each event. Librarians and archivists augmented the guide's content with pages highlighting science fiction in the circulating and special collections. The LibGuide connected patrons with science fiction novels, short fiction, literary commentary, children's books, and notable unique items, such as early works by H. G. Wells. It also invited users to reach out to University Libraries through social media to share fun photographs of themselves, their families, or their pets dressed up as their favorite science fiction character. Librarians shared their costumed photos through the official library accounts in promotional social media posts at various times during the summer. Importantly, language in the LibGuide repeatedly emphasized using SoSF to connect with other members of the campus community. Librarians directed attention to the LibGuide through social media posts, a blog entry, a flyer, and targeted email messages.

Detailed programming planning documents and other SoSF artifacts are available to download from the UNM digital repository (https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/ulls_fsp/175/). Librarians at other institutions can use these materials, including host guides, sample survey forms, and marketing text, as an inspiration for hosting similar science fiction-themed events.

Quick Pivots

The piloted outreach approach represented a rapidly developed response to an unusual scenario. UMN librarians needed to work swiftly to plan and implement SoSF, and other efforts, within a short time frame. Notably, the two primary SoSF organizers took the event series from idea conception to launch in only 32 days. Evolving circumstances required additional “quick pivots.” These pivots demonstrated agility in rethinking planned actions and making adjustments as needed.

Immediately before the SoSF rollout, University Libraries experienced a hate/bias incident in which an unknown actor misused the library’s LibCal appointment system by sending hostile messages to faculty of color via automated confirmation emails. Combined with an unrelated “Zoom bombing” incident during a library meeting, these incidents prompted SoSF organizers to make a last-minute change to mandate preregistration using a UNM email address to participate in SoSF events. Unfortunately, this eliminated some demographics previously considered target audiences, including incoming first-year students attending virtual orientations who had not yet received a UNM email address. The librarians subsequently adjusted the SoSF events’ promotional plans, inviting current students and staff who were likely to be available during the summer months. By sending targeted emails to faculty and encouraging subject liaison librarians to publicize the event to their departments, the LORS librarians hoped to expand participation in the SoSF events.

The deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in May 2020 spurred a nationwide reckoning on racial and social justice issues just as SoSF and other Universities Libraries’ outreach efforts kicked off. UNM librarians acknowledged the need for careful review as outreach crafted as light-hearted distraction in the wake of one crisis, the global pandemic, could prove insensitive in response to an entirely different type of upheaval. Recognizing that the library communications needed to reflect the societal mood of pain, anger, and calls for change, this was an opportunity for University Libraries to participate in critical conversations.

Members of the social media committee started immediately by reviewing and shuffling previously scheduled posts in the Buffer queue. Then, they compiled a slate of posts highlighting Black Lives Matter resources and added them to the queue (Figure 2).

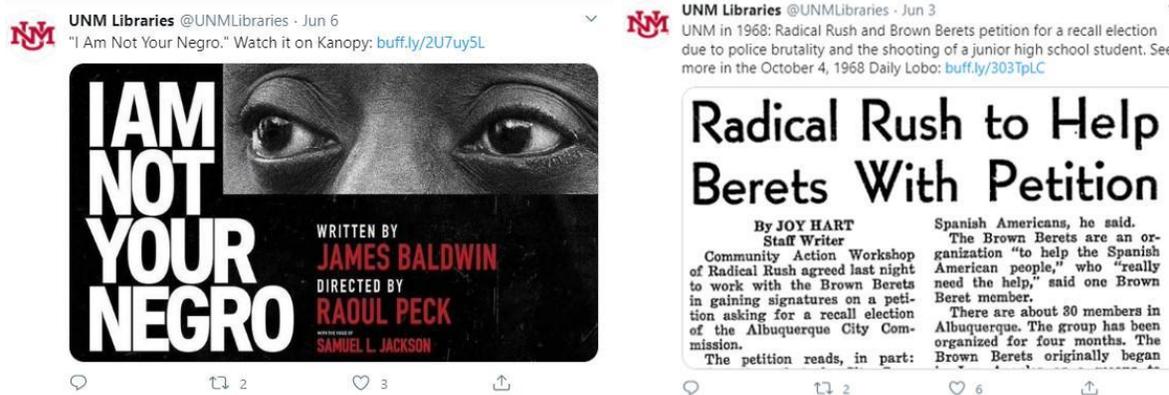


Figure 2: Examples of Tweets in Response to George Floyd Protests

The primary SoSF organizers seriously considered overhauling the theme of the event series. They considered focusing on equity or scrapping it entirely. Instead, they opted to rewrite the book discussion guide to incorporate prompts related to current events.

Unfortunately, as with previous programming attempts and despite the campus-wide promotion, the first two SoSF events attracted a scant number of preregistrations and almost no actual attendees. Seven registrants and one family joined the movie watch-along. Although the book discussion attracted a handful of registrants, there were no attendees. However, one registrant who contacted the SoSF organizers later expressed regret about an unavoidable conflict. As librarians analyzed the outcomes and reflected on how to best salvage the remainder of the programming, they again pivoted. They reimagined the team trivia event for a different target audience, rapidly transitioning it from a public program to a virtual social mixer and team-building exercise for library staff operating in stressful conditions at a distance from their colleagues. Among the ways the organizers tweaked the trivia materials to align with the new goals, they included one amusing bonus question about themselves as the event hosts at the end of each round.

Assessment

SoSF event attendance remained low throughout the June–July 2020 series. The movie watch-along received six registrations, but only one family joined the Zoom session. Four people registered for the book discussion, but no one attended. As previously stated, turnout for the first two events prompted a shift in the target audience for the final event, the team trivia. Ten people on five

teams—a mix of library employees and their friends and family—joined the game.

The SoSF organizers designed a brief satisfaction survey for each event but ultimately distributed only the movie watch-along survey. The one response proved overwhelmingly positive. Given the change from a public event to internal morale booster, the organizers opted not to distribute a survey for the team trivia, though they received complimentary feedback from attendees.

The SoSF guide received 428 views during the months between kick-off and the end of the event series, with a one-day peak of 94 views. This moderate level of traffic placed the SoSF guide as the 16th most active among the University Libraries' 390 guides during that period. At least three percent of traffic were promotional social media posts referrals.

Comparing social media activity and engagement during the initial library closure (March 2020) and through the end of SoSF (July 2020) to the same period in the prior year, UNM Libraries accounts posted more frequently and experienced small but measurable gains in engagement metrics. The reported metrics for different platforms vary according to the available data points, as defined and captured by each platform:

Facebook “posts” refers to the number of items added to the library’s account during the reporting period; “page & post engagements per month” indicates the number of times users have interacted with posts; “daily average engagements” is the average number of times users interacted with posts per day during the reporting period; and “engaged users” is the number of unique users who have liked the library’s page or interacted by liking, commenting, or sharing the posts (Williams, 2019a).

On Twitter, “tweets” are the number of tweets posted to the library’s account during the reporting period, not including retweets or replies; “engagements” refers to the number of times users interacted with tweets, including likes, replies, retweets, quotes, link clicks, and profile clicks; and “average engagements per tweet” refers to the average number of times users interacted with each tweet during the reporting period (Williams, 2019c).

Instagram “posts” refers to the number of items added to the library’s account during the reporting period; “likes” refers to the number of likes the library posts received from users during the reporting period; “comments” refers to the number of times users added a response to a post; “post saves” refers to the number of times users saved a post; “engagement rate” refers to

the percentage of impressions (or the number of times people saw posts) that resulted in an engagement, calculated by dividing the number of engagements by the number of impressions; and “reach” refers to the number of unique users who viewed posts (Williams, 2019b).

Figures 3-5 represent the social media metrics pulled directly from Buffer. The number of posts across all three platforms increased by 90%, from 155 posts in March-July 2019 to 295 in March-July 2020. Facebook posts increased by 22.7%, year-over-year, March-July. On Twitter, the average number of engagements per tweet doubled, from five to 10. The engagement rate on Instagram increased to 7.7% in March-July 2020 from 7.1% in March-July 2019. Posts saved via Instagram more than doubled year-over-year, with 77 in 2020 vs. 33 in 2019. The library’s reach via Instagram increased from 6,926 to 18,273 during the same period, 2020 over 2019.

Facebook Metrics				
	Posts	Page & Post Engagements per Month	Daily Avg. Engagements	Engaged Users
<i>March-July 2019</i>				
March 2019	10	313	10	189
April 2019	32	539	18	330
May 2019	9	184	6	125
June 2019	15	262	9	220
July 2019	9	173	6	144
Period Total	75	1,471	10	1,008
<i>March-July 2020</i>				
March 2020	13	495	16	314
April 2020	11	220	7	167
May 2020	25	720	23	450
June 2020	28	253	8	181
July 2020	15	158	5	136
Period Total	92	1,846	12	1,248

Figure 3: Comparison of Facebook engagement metrics March-July 2019 and March-July 2020

Twitter Metrics

	Tweets	Engagements	Avg. Engagements Per Tweet*
<i>March-July 2019</i>			
March 2019	7	18	3
April 2019	23	174	8
May 2019	6	11	2
June 2019	11	35	3
July 2019	4	18	5
Period Total	51	256	5
<i>March-July 2020</i>			
March 2020	12	274	23
April 2020	14	283	20
May 2020	25	256	10
June 2020	57	266	5
July 2020	14	117	8
Period Total	122	1,196	10

Figure 4: Comparison of Twitter engagement metrics March-July 2019 and March-July 2020

**Buffer Analytics rounds Avg. Engagements per Tweet to the nearest integer.*

Instagram Metrics						
	Posts	Likes	Comments	Post Saves	Engagement Rate	Reach
<i>March-July 2019</i>						
March 2019	3	48	1	4	5%	846
April 2019	11	346	1	16	8.3%	2,652
May 2019	4	127	1	1	6.9%	1,164
June 2019	6	179	0	9	7.3%	1,641
July 2019	2	40	0	3	5.3%	623
Period Total	26	740	3	33	7.1%	6,926
<i>March-July 2020</i>						
March 2020	10	295	3	11	6.5%	3,762
April 2020	13	285	7	11	7.5%	3,258
May 2020	18	579	13	11	9.3%	3,967
June 2020	26	457	3	27	6.7%	3,949
July 2020	14	331	0	17	8.3%	3,337
Period Total	81	1,947	26	77	7.7%	18,273

Figure 5: Comparison of Instagram engagement metrics March-July 2019 and March-July 2020

Lessons Learned and Next Steps

There are several plausible explanations for low SoSF attendance. It is conceivable that the very crisis the event series aimed to counterprogram proved overwhelming for our community. Assuming that the campus community is smaller, more distant, and/or more preoccupied with other activities during the summer, the same event series might succeed if scheduled at a different time of year. This hypothesis was tested in January-February 2021 when the SoSF event was repeated. By modifying their outreach efforts, the librarians were able to increase participation in the movie watch-along and trivia events; participation in the book discussion was negligible. If offered again, the librarians are considering replacing the book discussion with a faculty talk.

Based on anecdotal, cross-departmental conversations within the library, other well-established library events with previously strong attendance also reported lower numbers of attendees when they transitioned online during the spring and summer of 2020. This reduction in participation could reflect a broader trend of discomfort or fatigue with using Zoom. Also, LORS librarians acknowledge that science fiction may not interest our university community, so experimenting with another genre might yield better outcomes. In the future, the librarians will confer with faculty to connect the event with teaching interests.

Recognizing that attendance did not match their expectations, for future iterations of SoSF and related endeavors, the LORS librarians will retool event marketing and promotion. Sending additional reminders to program registrants with a more welcoming tone, motivating all subject liaison librarians to promote the event series within their departments, and soliciting media coverage in the UNM student newspaper have all been discussed as potential boosters for event participation. Lowering barriers to participation is also high on the list of changes to be made. The overabundance of caution in developing the SoSF pilot can be attributed to the Zoom bombing event during the early part of the pandemic. The librarians are confident that they can create a safe, welcoming virtual event space in the future, allowing them to accommodate users without UNM credentials.

Librarians will also act on several pragmatic observations stemming from how the specific SoSF events unfolded. The SoSF organizers originally planned to host the event as a watch-along, with all attendees accessing the

same Kanopy content independently and hitting “play” at a preset time. This change would avoid issues experienced by participants related to bandwidth when streaming the content directly via Zoom. However, it may make sense to offer both options in the future. Although live-tweeting may still be encouraged, the SoSF organizers will likely place less emphasis on Twitter moving forward. Initially, providing more than one option for participating seemed more inclusive. However, instead of splitting the discussion across multiple channels, focusing on the moderated Zoom chat makes more sense for a smaller-than-anticipated audience.

The lack of science fiction titles available for purchase as unlimited e-books from UMN’s vendors dictated the SoSF organizers’ decision to use a short fiction collection for the book discussion. The advantage of discussing short fiction is that it allows attendees who may not have time or inclination to read an entire book to join even if they have only read as little as one story. For future iterations of the watch-along, the SoSF organizers will opt for a full-length feature movie instead of a collection of short films, reducing the logistical complexity of the watch-along event. Additionally, more mainstream content could potentially appeal to a broader audience.

Some minor technical glitches, primarily encountered with Google Forms, created snags for the team trivia hosts. Overall, the established event plan worked. Among the lessons learned for hosts of a similar event: Preassign attendees to Zoom breakout rooms to avoid downtime during the event. Event hosts should be prepared to facilitate group discussions or an alternate form of entertainment between rounds. Tallying scores takes longer than one would assume, even with some level of automation. For this reason, the SoSF organizers will also schedule future iterations at 90-120 minutes in duration. In the future, the social media committee will continue to use forms as a workflow for efficiently soliciting content contributions from library employees, particularly when implementing a recurrent theme or responding to current events.

The most important takeaway from our outreach experience was the need to act quickly, pivoting with sensitivity in response to fluid situations. During the pandemic, the ability to be agile gave library personnel opportunities to demonstrate emotional intelligence and be responsive to audiences, continuously improve the quality of outreach efforts, manage risk, and minimize wasted effort. This approach allowed University Libraries to increase continuity and engagement with social media posts without

significantly more effort by social media committee members. Timely adjustments to the social media content and posting schedule during the social justice protests helped University Libraries express sympathy and solidarity. Spontaneously refocusing the trivia event as a team-building exercise allowed the organizers to effectively test the program materials in preparation for rerunning the event at a later date. The trivia event also boosted morale for both library employees who attended and the organizers, who might have felt discouraged in the wake of having to cancel a program. Overall, the librarians developed novel workflows, tools, and program plans that can be repurposed over time. These “pivot-ready” aids can be redeployed even more efficiently in the future.

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