

# Rarely Disrupted: Pandemic-Informed Special Collections

Beth M. Whittaker and Lynne M. Thomas

**abstract:** The experience of COVID-19 has prompted a reckoning within both special collections and the larger library community about how we do our work. This article provides some thoughts about the “new normal” of working in the COVID-19 era. It shares some informal conversations with colleagues as well as guides to sources for further reflection.

## Introduction

As this article goes to press, the COVID-19 pandemic is far from over. Nevertheless, librarians can and should talk about what special collections work will look like in a pandemic-informed world. We need to understand and accept that the workplace has fundamentally changed, not only for ourselves but also for everyone in our organizations, at every level. Because of those changes, we have a responsibility to critically examine “the way it’s always been done” instead of automatically reverting to our previous experiences of “normal.”<sup>1</sup> We should strive to do better than before, based on what we have learned about our work and our organizations during the pandemic.

It has been a while since the authors of this article examined the state of the special collections field. They both serve in administrative roles now and have gained different perspectives since they wrote and edited their two books, *Special Collections 2.0* in 2010 and *New Directions for Special Collections* in 2016. The disruptions discussed in those books were brought on by the advent of social media, new formats of description, and digital preservation needs. Today’s disruptions, however, are driven by the pandemic and other social changes. Not coincidentally, the 2022 Rare Books and Manuscripts (RBMS) Conference, a virtual gathering, had the theme “What Now? Reflection, Reckoning, and Recovery.” At the conference, special collections librarians took “a hard look” at their field in the “wake of the pandemic.”<sup>2</sup> This article is an attempt to think through and articulate some potential answers to questions that librarians across the special collec-



tions field have raised through informal conversations on social media and elsewhere about the future of their specialty.

Thinking about a post-pandemic world does not refer solely to the medical situation, although worldwide medical and health concerns have undeniably exposed inequities and organizational failures in our libraries and other cultural institutions. The COVID-19 pandemic coincided with major shifts in the world economy and global society. Referring to “the pandemic years” has become a placeholder term for the massive social disruption that began in 2018 and ramped up from 2020 onward. The strategic choices needed for moving forward must include reexamining our organizational practices. We should consider seriously, critically, and holistically what we can stop doing and what is central to our new understanding of how we work now. It is admittedly difficult to consider long-term needs and implications during a crisis that induces us to stay reactive rather than proactive. That said, why should we not take advantage of the disruption to make things better? We should embrace this opportunity to bring our work into alignment with the personal, professional, and organizational values that we have already declared but may not have always lived up to, as the pandemic experience has demonstrated.

Such a level of systemic change is difficult. Resources are scarce. Those fortunate enough to make it through 2020 and 2021 with steady jobs in special collections and

---

**The ongoing effects from the pandemic fell disproportionately on frontline staff, but burnout is pervasive at every level of our organizations.**

---

archives feel burnt out. Many of our colleagues went through the COVID-19 years as contingent or hourly workers lacking the basic safeguards of reliable employment. The ongoing effects from the pandemic fell disproportionately on frontline staff, but burnout is pervasive at every level of our organizations. We were forced to revise our entire way of working every few months.

We had to make life-and-death choices for and with one another, with limited and constantly changing information. It has been exhausting, and none of us trained for it.

Many of these challenges conflicted with one another: decisions to open campus libraries, for example, were often made for good reasons—such as to provide students with resources—but at a potential cost of endangering the staff’s health and well-being. Choices to digitize one collection mean that other archival collections would be shoved further down in the queue. Online delivery of instruction, reference work, and outreach and programming required a steep learning curve, and few of us would argue that such offerings fully replaced the object-centric, in-person, tactile experiences that we consider to be core to our work. Prioritizing metadata cleanup and maintenance meant that newly acquired and backlog materials in need of description were not available to our patrons. Many of these tensions were present before the pandemic, but this experience illustrated how lean our organizations are and how much we have undertaken without sufficient support. The pandemic demonstrated that some things are within our control and others are not. This article will focus on what we can do and on where the authors see opportunity to advocate for change in our institutions, which will vary greatly by individuals and their respective organizations.



It is time to consider what “the new normal” looks like, with the knowledge that this pandemic is a marathon, not a sprint, and may continue as endemic for years to come. We must find ways to make decisions deliberately rather than in a crisis mode. As we seek out potential models in the literature, Jackie Dooley’s 2009 “Ten Commandments for Special Collections Librarians in the Digital Age” remains relevant if we expand Dooley’s precepts to administering special collections more broadly rather than focus solely on digitization programs.<sup>3</sup> Alice Prochaska’s “Digital Special Collections: The Big Picture” provides valuable perspective as well.<sup>4</sup> As what we hoped would be a post-pandemic recovery has turned into ongoing endemic realities, it may be useful to consider impacts and influences that extend from the special collections desk or reading room to the larger institution or society.

---

**This pandemic is a marathon, not a sprint, and may continue as endemic for years to come.**

---

### Access and Public Services

The pandemic and related phenomena coincided with (and perhaps created) changing expectations for library special collections work. Some of these changes related to specific tasks in our traditional work. Many libraries underwent state-, county-, city- or university-mandated closures, varying greatly in duration. The libraries then moved toward gradual or staged reopenings that may have prioritized different departments or buildings. Some colleagues reported being denied access to their library spaces for several months. Other sections reopened more quickly, offering service to limited clientele or by appointment. As many of us work in institutions that have long struggled to be perceived as welcoming and open, these closures and service limits feel like failures. They run counter to the current goals and practices of our field, which encourage public access.

We have also learned important lessons about how we define access. Librarians who delivered instruction using special collections and archival material radically redesigned their processes when students (and often staff) could not enter the buildings where the teaching previously took place. Revamped techniques led practitioners to learn new ways to teach or provide reference assistance with digitized special collections. They mastered providing virtual tours, remote events, and distance instruction using technologies such as document cameras. We have only scratched the surface of the potential of asynchronous technologies (such as prerecorded videos) for instruction and outreach.<sup>5</sup> Many in our field previously eschewed these approaches because they preferred hands-on activities or wanted to avoid the technological learning curves and equipment costs required. We must decide whether to continue these practices now that our institutions have mostly returned on-site. As part of that decision-making, it is crucial that we assess the differences in reach and in staff experiences offered by various modalities.

---

**We have only scratched the surface of the potential of asynchronous technologies (such as prerecorded videos) for instruction and outreach.**

---

Overall, there is increased focus on remote accessibility of our collections. When few, if any, staff could work on-site, it became clear how small a percentage of our materials were digitized and how much we depended on on-site access to our collections to serve patron needs and requests. This realization brought to the fore the sometimes unrealistic expectations of our users about not only what we should digitize but also who should do it and how quickly. A controversy over suggestions from the American Historical Association (AHA) to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) regarding reading room operations exemplified the disconnect between what was expected and what was possible. The AHA apologized for failing to hold direct discussions with NARA workers to better understand their staffing capacity and safety needs.<sup>6</sup> Other forces also act on our digitization programs, including pressures to correct past imbalances regarding gender or race.<sup>7</sup>

Another key way librarians interact with their users is through physically installing

---

**It remains to be seen if the “traditional” special collections exhibit, complete with a wine and cheese opening event, will remain an important way to engage with communities, campuses, and donors in the post-pandemic world.**

---

exhibitions. Physical exhibits take a tremendous amount of effort, time, and money, and in early 2020, many of us installed an exhibit only to be forced to shutter it for a year or more.<sup>8</sup> Pivoting to modest digital exhibits based on the minuscule portion of our collections that is digitized may fill part of that void. It remains to be seen if the “traditional” special collections exhibit, complete with a wine and cheese

opening event, will remain an important way to engage with communities, campuses, and donors in the post-pandemic world.

Other events that typically brought special collections and people together include tours, lectures, and community events. As with instruction, many such gatherings moved to remote platforms like Zoom or prerecorded videos. The Omicron variant of COVID-19 caused a spike in cases starting in November 2021 and meant that we continue to debate whether to move forward with in-person, online, or hybrid events.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, special collections work is not solely about public-facing services. The pandemic closures allowed a rare pause in the relentless pace of processing collections. Many managers sought projects for their catalogers and archivists that could be done from home, without access to collections. Unprecedented effort was devoted to tasks that had often been the last to be done, such as authority work and other metadata cleanup and enhancement projects. These duties had typically taken a back seat to the intake and processing of physical materials.

In understaffed units, public services often have priority because they are more visible to the public, to administration, and to funders than the work of enhancing descriptive metadata for materials or updating older metadata to meet current best practices. Nonetheless, such maintenance work needs to be prioritized and staffed. Robust metadata creation and routine metadata maintenance, especially as we emphasize digitization to facilitate remote access, are public service. Incorporating some hybrid or remote work as a standard model in special collections may give staff the ability to prioritize these



tasks and complete them with fewer interruptions. The future of robust metadata work depends on how we recalibrate for the future.

### Economic Impacts

Some pandemic-informed changes affect cultural heritage or educational institutions as a whole. Job losses and budget cuts, in particular, had a huge impact, including at the authors' own institutions. University of Kansas (KU) Libraries saw a 7 percent reduction in fiscal allotment in 2021 alone. The shortfall was almost entirely absorbed by eliminating salary dollars for positions through a voluntary retirement incentive.<sup>10</sup> But many staff positions may never be filled. The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign offered campus-wide retirement incentives to reduce staffing costs.<sup>11</sup> COVID-19 relief funding did not come close to balancing the budget. As welcome as additional funding was, it was distributed competitively rather than evenly, setting cultural heritage institutions against one another with no one winning.<sup>12</sup>

COVID-19 economic impacts included supply chain problems, shortages of raw materials, and price increases. Our typical means of purchasing and paying for things, such as acquiring archival folders or antiquarian books from an international seller, took longer and became more complicated and difficult. The University of Illinois is designing a capital-funded renovation of its special collections building, and the project budget has been substantively affected by these issues. Estimated costs for construction materials spiked wildly, with no future guarantees of either stability or price drops.

### Remote Work Options

One of the biggest lessons of the pandemic experience is that not all library work needs to be completed in person and on-site. Remote work in special collections libraries and archives offers benefits both from individual and organizational perspectives. Flexibility that allows people to attend to personal needs while maintaining progress on workplace goals could take the form of fixed hybrid schedules or a more responsive "adjust as needed" arrangement. Our institutions, under pressure from governing boards or state legislatures, will have different responses to requests for flexibility. At the University of Illinois, the university's rules still classify remote work as a privilege primarily granted to the faculty and professionals. The lowest-paid positions are seldom allowed remote or hybrid work, even when it can be achieved relatively easily through, for example, rota where staff work on-site 3.5 days and remotely 1.5 days.<sup>13</sup> As the library at Illinois worked through its plans for returning to on-site work, it realized that the campus rules were inequitable for its staff. Initially, campus human resources ruled out remote work for civil service library staff. The library pointed out the inequity of that choice and persuaded human resources to take library job classifications off the default "no remote work" listing in the civil service system. Illinois library

---

**One of the biggest lessons of the pandemic experience is that not all library work needs to be completed in person and on-site.**

---



workers, regardless of job classification, can apply to work remotely either periodically or steadily if it makes sense, balancing the needs of the employee and the library unit.

How do we restructure our workdays and workweeks to allow for a hybrid schedule of remote and on-site work without breaking our budgets? How do we realign our staffing so we can provide in-person services when some of our staff are in quarantine? We entrust books and manuscripts worth thousands of dollars and buildings worth millions to our staff. Trusting them to manage an occasional work-from-home session while they await a service call or changing their schedule to accommodate an early morning medical appointment should therefore be a matter of course. At the same time, someone must staff the desk and someone must pull and shelve books, so balancing duties and responsibilities will always be complex.

In addition to benefiting overtaxed staff and librarians, institutionalizing flexibility has the potential to help recruit and retain people. Flexible policies might reduce the constant churn of hiring and training new employees, only to quickly lose them, thus potentially saving money and strengthening our organizations. This organizational agility requires reordering and reprioritizing. The issues include determining what can and should be done from home, who gets to decide, and how we balance equity and the demands of different types of work. It can be done, with a commitment to a transparent process and ongoing communication. Solutions may differ not only across and within institutions but also according to changing calendars, staff availability, and other factors.

### Professional Development

Professional development, in our field and elsewhere, went entirely virtual after the outbreak of the pandemic. The Rare Book School, the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section conferences, Society of American Archivists meetings, and many regional or allied academic gatherings have long been central to advancing our collective work, in addition to individual professional advancement. Remote conferences offer benefits and are often more accessible to our colleagues who lack travel funds. But there are also significant trade-offs, particularly as frazzled people try to fit in virtual attendance among their other duties.

We have the power to create a culture where someone attending a virtual conference can lay aside daily duties in the same way they would if they attended the meeting in person. We need to model that behavior for those we supervise and encourage its practice.

---

**Leaving membership expenses to individuals unduly penalizes early career colleagues, those from lower economic brackets, and those carrying significant student loan debt.**

---

We also need to reexamine our policies about professional memberships. If tenure and promotion guidelines require professional activity as part of a service component, we need to advocate for the funding of membership costs. Leaving membership expenses to individuals unduly penalizes early career colleagues, those from lower economic brackets, and those carrying significant student loan debt. If membership in the American Library Association Rare Books and Manuscripts Section or the Society of American Archivists is considered part of our job,



we need to fund it as such. These considerations may make a difference in whether our newest colleagues remain in the profession.

### The “Great Resignation,” Burnout, and Working Conditions

The “Great Resignation” has already begun to hit libraries, particularly those that do not take seriously how much the labor market has shifted. Members of Generation X, individuals born in the 1960s and 1970s, were told in library school that a big wave of retirements was a few years away, promising plentiful opportunities for advancement. But largely due to the public sector defunding of higher education, those retirement vacancies rarely materialized. Instead, positions were often restructured or eliminated. The authors hear from younger colleagues that this optimistic description of future career prospects continues. What is new, though, is the greater contrast between what staffing looked like in the past and what it may look like in the future. When positions are redistributed or eliminated, unless the duties are significantly reduced, burnout will be higher for those remaining. Such burnout ultimately leads to difficulty retaining an experienced workforce.

Few people will risk their lives for poor pay and benefits, and many workers decline to perform minimum wage work that endangers their lives but fails to cover their cost of living.<sup>14</sup> A significant number of these workers leave the workforce entirely. Filling our lowest-wage positions may be difficult going forward, and we must consider ways to restructure that work to make it both attractive to workers and sustainable for our organizations, particularly as our budgets have either remained flat or been cut.<sup>15</sup>

---

**Filling our lowest-wage positions may be difficult going forward, and we must consider ways to restructure that work to make it both attractive to workers and sustainable for our organizations.**

---

The push-and-pull of labor relations between organizations and their workers will become more visible. We have begun to see a broader push for unionization for library faculty and staff as a mechanism to gain better working conditions and fairer pay. For example, Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, stopped paying into pension accounts for its faculty and staff during a cash crunch in May 2020; in 2021, workers in the Northwestern University Libraries sought formal recognition for a newly formed union.<sup>16</sup>

Mid-level administrators have an opportunity to think about how they can improve the working conditions of themselves and their colleagues. As they envision staffing after reopening, can they create opportunities for remote work that make sense? Can they collaborate with their peers across the organization to collectively advocate for staffing levels and models that are not so lean that a single sick day or vacation day throws everything into disarray or renders valuable materials insecure? At the least, libraries across the field, not just in special collections and archives, must be honest with students and paraprofessionals that postgraduate higher education does not guarantee entry into a professional career.

A gap has begun to appear in the experience Fobazi Ettarh called “vocational awe,” the idea that library work is inherently good and sacred. This view was common in libraries and, anecdotally, particularly in special collections work. Not everyone subscribes to the notion that library work is a “calling” anymore. Few librarians feel so valuable, and many employees have learned that their organization will not love them back. Leaving libraries open during the pandemic to provide access to computers turns out to have been bad for everyone.<sup>17</sup> Libraries that insisted on remaining open and forced staff to work without personal protective equipment before vaccines were widely available called into question the value of being perceived as essential.<sup>18</sup>

We have lost collective trust in one another that we will all “do the right thing” or that we all agree on what “the right thing” is. How do we rebuild trust when so many companies and organizations (including libraries) asked their lowest-paid employees to work in unsafe conditions or laid them off or furloughed them without pay? Managers in those organizations who want to change the narrative of “our organizations don’t care about us as humans” need to do the leadership work to demonstrate and codify the opposite in their policies and practices.<sup>19</sup>

### Disability and Advocacy

Disability is perhaps this decade’s “elephant in the room,” the obvious problem that no one wants to discuss. COVID-19 and related factors such as isolation, quarantine, and delays in receiving medical care exposed numerous systemic and individual vulnerabilities of our users and our staffs. The common requirement that employees use the accommodations process to seek permission to work remotely and the politicization of vaccines as controversial significantly increased risks to those with weakened immune systems. We must also acknowledge the disproportionate impacts of disability itself (or perhaps more widespread disability) on communities of color and otherwise disadvantaged people. Ensuring a basic level of accessibility to our buildings and our collections is not enough.<sup>20</sup>

It is our responsibility as leaders, supervisors, and managers to educate ourselves about disabilities in the workplace and to provide the required accommodations to enable

---

**It is our responsibility as leaders, supervisors, and managers to educate ourselves about disabilities in the workplace and to provide the required accommodations to enable people with disabilities to perform their job.**

---

people with disabilities to perform their job. We should do so, ideally, before an individual request comes up. Expanding our understanding—and those of our organizations—about what kinds of accommodations are possible, plausible, and available will be key to improving the accessibility of our workplaces. The Job Accommodation Network of the United States Department of Labor and the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) National Network both specialize in guiding employers and employees through available resources for accommodations. Once we

have attained that knowledge, we need to advocate within our organizations for more accessible policy choices.<sup>21</sup>





One thing we should look at is encouraging “double-loop learning,” which leads to thinking deeply about assumptions and beliefs. In organizations, double-loop learning involves routinely and critically examining how accommodations may be implemented organizationally and systemically rather than carried out individually on a case-by-case basis.<sup>22</sup> Examples might include installing door openers rather than having workers open doors for wheelchair users; having a robust, clear, and flexible remote work policy for everyone at all job classifications no matter who supervises them rather than informal accommodations based on relationships with a supervisor; making websites accessible; and captioning videos as a default practice. These kinds of accommodations can improve work life for everyone in the organization in addition to better helping the people we serve, not just for the handful of individuals willing to self-disclose and advocate but also for those who choose not to do so. Proactive approaches to accessibility must be built into plans and budgets as a default in the beginning of projects, rather than as an afterthought, and the outcomes will significantly extend our institutional impacts. As we look at our buildings and operations with fresh eyes, we can understand that the traditional models may not work in a post-pandemic world.

### Social Justice and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Threaded throughout many of these previous discussions is the issue of social justice, which affects special collections work as well.<sup>23</sup> Do we live up to the statements on our websites and in our job ads about supporting people of diverse backgrounds? Have we adapted our hiring, onboarding, and retention practices to codify such support into the routine actions and practices of our organizations?

We need to remain mindful of our own privilege and positionality while doing the work to make our organizations truly inclusive and diverse.<sup>24</sup> Libraries have historically been White institutions, and special collections has been especially so, despite calls for greater diversity that have lasted for decades. Are we making progress? Is it enough? We must do the work to understand, acknowledge, and dismantle the White supremacy that has been built into the foundations of our professional lives.<sup>25</sup>

---

**We must do the work to understand, acknowledge, and dismantle the White supremacy that has been built into the foundations of our professional lives.**

---

Other authors have covered these topics in much greater detail, including Sofia Leung and Jorge López-McKnight in their book *Knowledge Justice* and the numerous anti-racist outreach and educational efforts of the organization We Here.<sup>26</sup> Specific examples of changes to special collections work that have become more common in the past decade include:

- Discussions of collections from underrepresented communities themselves, and institutions explicitly talking about why the materials were collected and how they are described, including reparative description and other attempts to both expose the work of librarians and archivists and to amplify voices of underrepresented people.<sup>27</sup>

- Continuing efforts to make archiving of social media and community action easier and more widespread, focusing on recent social movements and unrest.<sup>28</sup>
- Recognizing the disproportional impact of recruitment, retention, and promotion decisions on staff of color.

None of these efforts are new, and yet we must continue to refine and reengage with this difficult work until the outcomes begin to shift the field toward more inclusion and equity.

### Climate Change

Ironically, the last RBMS conference held in person was 2019's "Response & Responsibility: Special Collections and Climate Change."<sup>29</sup> Focused on disaster planning and the role of the profession in documenting climate change, it was a harbinger for the challenges to come. Special collections libraries and archives have long attempted to stay ahead of disaster, whether natural or human, by planning for water emergencies, fires, and other crises. Leaning heavily on their colleagues in preservation, librarians have prepared for leaking roofs, high-water intrusions, and similar problems. As environmental conditions exacerbate weather events, however, this preparation may not be adequate.

Decisions about collection care also impact the environment. Changes to temperature and humidity in our stacks have immense importance in terms of energy use. We may need to balance the "best" environment for storage with energy costs, both financial and otherwise.

Collection development in our institutions also has the potential to be affected by ongoing climate effects. Shipping and moving materials have environmental, not just monetary, costs. Finally, the role of climate change as it affects communities should play into our collection development decisions. The RBMS Climate Readiness Task Force will soon issue its final report, and it merits a closer look.

### Conclusion: Working through Societal Trauma

The questions and concerns outlined in this piece are enormous and difficult to address, especially when the people in our organizations are exhausted. Acknowledging and working within that exhaustion is the only way to come back from it. We must find ways to build space into our work for rest, for contemplation, and for slowness. Slow librarianship focuses, Meredith Farkas says, "on learning and reflection, collaboration and solidarity, valuing all kinds of contributions, and supporting staff as whole people."<sup>30</sup>

One of the major lessons of this pandemic has been that community support and mutual aid are how we survive. Relearning to build community through healthy interpersonal and organizational relationships is daunting in an environment that has historically encouraged and rewarded toxic management and leadership practices. Nevertheless, our field's ability to do the work that we signed up for depends upon it.<sup>31</sup>

We must move away from leadership and managerial styles that emphasize rigidity, fear, and punishment, and move toward approaches that focus on learning, empathy, and flexibility. We must recognize the need to incorporate the creation and promotion of psychological safety into our leadership and day-to-day work.<sup>32</sup> This approach directly benefits all our workers because it allows us to encourage growth, education, transpar-



ency, and communication, and to create and sustain a truly inclusive workplace. The best way to do this is to create and maintain workplaces where our colleagues feel that their presence in the organization and their contributions are valued and valuable at every level.

We need more inclusive and intersectional approaches to social and racial justice.<sup>33</sup> The communities hardest hit by COVID-19 are those already underserved because of their racial, class, or disability status. We must build real, effective, sustainable equity into our organizations through approaches that get us closer to our stated goals and values.

We also need to recognize that the career expectations and outcomes for our early-career colleagues differ from those of mid-career librarians. Newcomers have entered a field lacking even the minimal support and job security that Generation X experienced in the late 1990s. We are all asked to do more, with less job security and at pay rates that have not kept up with the market over time.

---

**We are all asked to do more,  
with less job security and at  
pay rates that have not kept  
up with the market over time.**

---

It is ironic that while we need community more than ever, we must struggle to find it. Given how often we have split our time between online and in-person dealings over the past two years, we should look closely at the lessons we have learned about building and valuing community, even—or especially—when we cannot interact in person. Regardless of our preferences, we need to become comfortable with a hybrid experience for both ourselves and our users, as it is likely to continue.

Every aspect of our work in the special collections field is being reexamined, re-evaluated, and reworked, and rightly so. While we collect and interpret the past as part of our daily work, we are not obliged to uncritically repeat it. We can, and should, do better. We owe it to one another, and we look forward to continuing the conversation.

*Beth M. Whittaker is interim co-dean of libraries at the University of Kansas Libraries in Lawrence; she may be reached by e-mail at: bethwhittaker@ku.edu.*

*Lynne M. Thomas is the Juanita J. and Robert E. Simpson Rare Book and Manuscript Professor and the head of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign; she may be reached by e-mail at: lmt@illinois.edu.*

## Notes

1. Jennifer K. Frederick and Christine Wolff-Eisenberg, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Academic Libraries," *Ithaka S+R* (blog), December 9, 2020, <https://sr.ithaka.org/blog/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-academic-libraries/>.
2. Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), "Conferences," <https://rbms.info/conferences/>.
3. Jackie Dooley, "Ten Commandments for Special Collections Librarians in the Digital Age," *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 10, 1 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.5860/rbm.10.1.317>.
4. Alice Prochaska, "Digital Special Collections: The Big Picture," *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 10, 1 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.5860/rbm.10.1.313>.

5. Celia Caust-Ellenbogen, Jordan Landes, and Robin Landes, "DBQ: Document-Based Quarantine," *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 22, 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.5860/rbm.22.1.16>.
6. The American Historical Association's approach to the issue of pandemic public access to archives did not begin with directly discussing options with archivists but went straight to the sending of public letters: American Historical Association (AHA), "AHA Sends Letter to NARA [National Archives and Records Administration] regarding Planned Research Room Capacity," August 2021, [https://www.historians.org/news-and-advocacy/aha-advocacy/aha-letter-to-nara-regarding-planned-research-room-capacity-\(august-2021\)](https://www.historians.org/news-and-advocacy/aha-advocacy/aha-letter-to-nara-regarding-planned-research-room-capacity-(august-2021)); AHA, "AHA Posts to Federal Register regarding Proposed NARA Digitization Policies, February 2021, [https://www.historians.org/news-and-advocacy/aha-advocacy/aha-posting-to-federal-register-regarding-proposed-nara-digitization-policies-\(february-2021\)](https://www.historians.org/news-and-advocacy/aha-advocacy/aha-posting-to-federal-register-regarding-proposed-nara-digitization-policies-(february-2021)). The "erasure" of archival labor described by Michelle Caswell is visible in these open letters. See Michelle Caswell, "'The Archive' Is Not an Archives: On Acknowledging the Intellectual Contributions of Archival Studies," *Reconstruction* 16, 1 (2016), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7bn4v1fk>.
7. Effie Kapsalis, "What the Tech Sector Can Learn from Cultural Heritage," *Medium* (blog), June 2, 2020, <https://medium.com/@effiekapsalis>.
8. Francesca Marini, "Exhibitions in Special Collections, Rare Book Libraries and Archives: Questions to Ask Ourselves," *Alexandria: The Journal of National and International Library and Information Issues* 29, 1–2 (2019): 8–29, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0955749019876122>.
9. Cait Coker, "The Special Collections Classroom in the Time of Covid-19," *Women in Book History Bibliography*, Cait Coker and Kate Ozment, eds., <http://www.womensbookhistory.org/sammelband/2020/05/01/special-collections-classroom-in-time-of-covid>.
10. Barbara A. Bichelmeyer, Jeff DeWitt, and Jason Hornberger, "FY22 Budget Reduction Targets," Office of the Provost, University of Kansas, 2022, <https://provost.ku.edu/memos/20210505>; Sophia Belshe, "KU Offers Buyout Program to Faculty and Staff after COVID-19 Budget Blow," *University Daily Kansan*, June 9, 2020, [https://www.kansan.com/news/ku-offers-buyout-program-to-faculty-and-staff-after-covid-19-budget-blow/article\\_959dcee2-aa61-11ea-8cb3-33d3b8a9d5f7.html](https://www.kansan.com/news/ku-offers-buyout-program-to-faculty-and-staff-after-covid-19-budget-blow/article_959dcee2-aa61-11ea-8cb3-33d3b8a9d5f7.html).
11. Debra Pressey, "Coronavirus Response: UI [University of Illinois] Launching Voluntary Retirement Program to Help Offset Losses," *News-Gazette*, December 4, 2020, [https://www.news-gazette.com/coronavirus/coronavirus-response-ui-launching-voluntary-retirement-program-to-help-offset-losses/article\\_b097f3a7-89e2-5a2e-b97e-1e9dca168c97.html](https://www.news-gazette.com/coronavirus/coronavirus-response-ui-launching-voluntary-retirement-program-to-help-offset-losses/article_b097f3a7-89e2-5a2e-b97e-1e9dca168c97.html).
12. Institute of Museum and Library Services, "COVID-19 Updates," 2022, <http://www.imls.gov/coronavirus-covid-19-updates>.
13. Hannah Rosen and Jill Grogg, "LYRASILS 2019 Accessibility Survey Report," 2019, 1–42, <https://www.lyrasis.org/programs/Documents/LYRASILS%202019%20Accessibility%20Survey%20Report.pdf>.
14. Trevor Owens, "A Good Jobs Strategy for Libraries," *Library Leadership & Management* 35, 3 (2021), <https://journals.tdl.org/llm/index.php/llm/article/view/7486>.
15. Rebecca Wolfe, Kristen Harknett, and Daniel Schneider, "Inequalities at Work and the Toll of COVID-19," *Health Affairs*, June 4, 2021, <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hpb20210428.863621/full/>; Benjamin Seligman, Maddalena Ferranna, and David E. Bloom, "Social Determinants of Mortality from COVID-19: A Simulation Study Using NHANES [National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey]," *PLOS Medicine* 18, 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003490>.
16. Rob Kozlowski, "Northwestern University Stops Matching Contributions," *Pensions & Investments*, May 12, 2020, <https://www.pionline.com/defined-contribution/northwestern-university-stops-matching-contributions>; Isabel Funk, "Northwestern University Library Workers Union Seeks Recognition," *Daily Northwestern*, October 15, 2021, <https://dailynorthwestern.com/2021/10/15/campus/northwestern-university->

- library-workers-union-seeks-formal-recognition/; Maia Pandey, "Northwestern Library Workers Vote to Unionize," *Daily Northwestern*, December 7, 2021, <https://dailynorthwestern.com/2021/12/07/campus/northwestern-library-workers-vote-to-unionize/>.
17. Fobazi Ettarh, "Vocational Awe and Librarianship: The Lies We Tell Ourselves," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, January 10, 2018, <https://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2018/vocational-awe/>.
  18. Kelly Jensen, "Why Are Chicago Public Libraries Still Open amid Soaring COVID Rates?" *Book Riot*, November 27, 2020, <https://bookriot.com/chicago-public-libraries-open-amid-soaring-covid-rates/>.
  19. Sara Goek, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Library Staff: Supporting Health and Well-Being," *Public Libraries Online*, April 19, 2021, <http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2021/04/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-library-staff-supporting-health-and-well-being/>; ACRL, "Pandemic Resources for Academic Libraries," 2022, <https://acrl.libguides.com/pandemic>; ACRL, "Advocating for Library Workers during Uncertain Times," <https://acrl.libguides.com/c.php?g=1014690&p=7675549&t=58693>; Cass Balzer, "What's Lost in a Furlough," *American Libraries Magazine*, June 5, 2020, <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/whats-lost-in-a-furlough/>; Gretchen Kaser Corsillo, "A Pandemic Side Effect: Low Morale in Public Libraries," *Public Libraries Online*, September 14, 2020, <http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2020/09/a-pandemic-side-effect-low-morale-in-public-libraries/>.
  20. Jessica J. Schomberg and Wendy Highby, *Beyond Accommodation: Creating an Inclusive Workplace for Disabled Library Workers* (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2020); see particularly chapter 3, "The Library as Organization"; Kevin M. O'Sullivan and Gia Alexander, "Toward Inclusive Outreach: What Special Collections Can Learn from Disability Studies," *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 21, 1 (2020), <https://rbm.acrl.org/index.php/rbm/article/view/24458>.
  21. United States Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, "Job Accommodation Network," <https://askjan.org/>; "ADA National Network: Information, Guidance and Training on the Americans with Disabilities Act," <https://adata.org/>.
  22. See also Schomberg and Highby, *Beyond Accommodation*.
  23. Sofia Y. Leung and Jorge R. López-McKnight, eds., *Knowledge Justice: Disrupting Library and Information Studies through Critical Race Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/11969.001.0001>; Lae'l Hughes-Watkins, "Moving toward a Reparative Archive: A Roadmap for a Holistic Approach to Disrupting Homogenous Histories in Academic Repositories and Creating Inclusive Spaces for Marginalized Voices," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* 5, 1 (2018): 19, <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1045&context=jcas>; Bergis Jules, "Confronting Our Failure of Care around the Legacies of Marginalized People in the Archives," *Medium*, November 12, 2016, <https://medium.com/on-archivy/confronting-our-failure-of-care-around-the-legacies-of-marginalized-people-in-the-archives-dc4180397280>; National Digital Stewardship Alliance, "'Archives Have Never Been Neutral': An NDSA Interview with Jarrett Drake," February 15, 2017, <http://nds.org/2017/02/15/archives-have-never-been-neutral-an-nds-interview-with-jarrett-drake.html>.
  24. Meredith G. Farkas, "'Listening Theater' and Employee Voice," *Information Wants to Be Free*, December 5, 2021, <https://meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress/2021/12/05/listening-theater-and-employee-voice/>; "Statement against White Appropriation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color's Labor," WOC+Lib, <https://www.wocandlib.org/features/2021/9/3/statement-against-white-appropriation-of-black-indigenous-and-people-of-colors-labor>.
  25. See also Leung and López-McKnight, *Knowledge Justice*.
  26. We Here's website states, "We Here® seeks to provide a safe and supportive community for Black and Indigenous folks, and People of Color (BIPOC) in library and information science (LIS) professions"; We Here, "Welcome to We Here," <https://www.wehere.space>.



27. Hughes-Watkins, "Moving toward a Reparative Archive," 19; Dorothy Berry, "The House Archives Built," up // root, June 22, 2021, <https://www.uproot.space/features/the-house-archives-built>.
28. See, for example, the Documenting the Now project: "Documenting the Now," <https://www.docnow.io/>.
29. ACRL, RBMS, "Response & Responsibility: Special Collections and Climate Change," 2019, <http://conference.rbms.info/2019/>. Presentations and materials from the 60th Annual RBMS Conference, Baltimore, Maryland, June 18–21, 2019, are available at <https://alair.ala.org/handle/11213/10824>.
30. Meredith G. Farkas, "What Is Slow Librarianship?" *Information Wants to Be Free*, October 18, 2021, <https://meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress/2021/10/18/what-is-slow-librarianship/>.
31. Yvonne Nalani Meulemans and Talitha R. Matlin, "Are You Being Served? Embracing Servant Leadership, Trusting Library Staff, and Engendering Change," *Library Leadership & Management* 34, 1 (2019), <https://journals.tdl.org/llm/index.php/llm/article/download/7399/6529>.
32. LaTonya Wilkins, *Leading below the Surface: How to Build Real (and Psychologically Safe) Relationships with People Who Are Different from You* (Hartford, CT: Publish Your Purpose, 2021); Ria Roy, "Need of the Hour: Inculcating Trauma-Informed Design Principles for Our Workers, Work, Workplace, and the World," *Performance Improvement* 60, 3 (2021): 27–29, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pfi.21962>.
33. Rebecca Tolley, *A Trauma-Informed Approach to Library Services* (Chicago: ALA Editions, 2020); Lisa P. Nathan, Elizabeth Shaffer, and Maggie Castor, "Stewarding Collections of Trauma: Plurality, Responsibility, and Questions of Action," *Archivaria* 80 (2015): 89–118; Eira Tansey, "No One Owes Their Trauma to Archivists, or, the Commodification of Contemporaneous Collecting," 2022, <https://eiratansey.com/2020/06/05/no-one-owes-their-trauma-to-archivists-or-the-commodification-of-contemporaneous-collecting/>.

This mss. is peer reviewed, copy edited, and accepted for publication, portal 22.4.