



Imperfect and Flexible: Using Trauma-Informed Practice to Guide Instruction

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abstract: The rapid shift to online courses at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities (UMN) in spring 2020 prompted a change in the way instruction librarians worked with faculty and students. The librarians adopted a trauma-informed approach that provided students with a sense of stability, agency, and connection to the university and one another. UMN librarians increased the variety and number of online library workshops, reused content in new ways for online orientation and instruction, and created a choose-your-own-adventure e-book for first-year courses. After a chaos-filled year, the authors share their plans, progress, successes, failures, and hopes for the future.

COVID-19 Closures

After the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020, the University of Minnesota Twin Cities (UMN) quickly moved to remote learning. Students started spring break on March 9. On March 11, University President Joan Gabel announced the suspension of in-person classes and a switch to online or alternative instruction. On March 16, in a system-wide e-mail, the president announced that in-person classes would be cancelled for the remainder of the semester. All library buildings closed until further notice.

The abrupt shift from a lively, bustling community to a dispersed campus relying on technology unfamiliar to many users was not unique to the University of Minnesota. The rapid movement of courses to online formats changed the way that research and instruction librarians designed and delivered content for classes, workshops, and new

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student orientations. In a whirlwind of change, the UMN librarians struggled to keep the student experience in the forefront of their minds.

In the early days of the campus closure, the authors relied on anecdotal evidence and numerous assumptions to guide the modifications made to courses and orientation content. In May 2020, as planning for summer orientation began, a campus mental health

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expert delivered a presentation framing the COVID-19 pandemic as a collective trauma. The presentation shared the potential short-term and long-term impacts of trauma on students and introduced the concept of trauma-informed teaching. The pandemic experience was indeed traumatic for many students. Trauma-informed teaching principles provided a way forward, focused on decreasing cognitive load and providing students with stability, a sense of agency, and connection.

This article describes how trauma-informed teaching practices and a focus on the student mindset changed UMN librarians' approach to instruction. These new principles altered the design and delivery of library orientation activities, workshops, first-year experience instruction, and credit-bearing courses. The authors also share assessment techniques and strategies, and reflect upon successes, failures, and how the pandemic permanently changed approaches to teaching.

Student Mindset Data

Each spring, the SERU (Student Experience in the Research University) Consortium, a group of research-intensive universities, traditionally administers large-scale, cross-institutional surveys. In 2020, it conducted a special survey on the impacts of COVID-19 on student experience at 10 public research universities in the United States. UMN administered the GradSERU survey, focused on graduate students, in May. The resulting data shed welcome light on the student experience during the spring 2020 semester. Over half of graduate students at the University of Minnesota stated they struggled with decreased motivation for online learning and a lack of interaction with other students (57.6 percent and 56.3 percent, respectively). Just under half of the respondents (43.8 percent) reported challenges finding an adequate study space or working in a distracting environment.¹

In fall 2020, the SERU Consortium released additional results from its spring surveys. It collected data from over 30,000 undergraduate, graduate, and professional students at nine universities. The findings indicated that almost half of all students grappled with distracting home environments and lack of adequate study space. The most negatively impacted students were those identifying as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and those from low-income, poor, or working-class backgrounds. These learners faced the highest rates of financial hardship, food or housing insecurity, and lack of access to technology.² The SERU data helped UMN librarians stay mindful that COVID-19 had exacerbated the disparities that some students experienced.



At the University of Minnesota, all classes remained online in fall 2020, and most continued online in spring 2021. Many first-year students lived in the residence halls, but most staff worked from home. Most campus offices and student support services were available only virtually. The University of Minnesota Twin Cities surveyed 11,000 (32 percent) undergraduate students in December 2020. The results highlighted the concerns students faced prior to the spring 2021 semester. The highest-ranked concern overall was “my motivation with my classes,” followed closely by “doing well academically” and “managing stress.” See Table 1.

Sources of Trauma

The survey data did not describe the full scope of what students experienced. The swift changes in course delivery from in-person to online meant learners faced changing course expectations, shifting workloads, and overall uncertainty in course structure and requirements. Not only did students experience uncertainty because of changes to their courses but also many faced alterations to their families’ living and employment situations that impacted their overall financial and physical security. Add to this the fear and uncertainty posed by the fast spread of a deadly and little understood virus, and many students experienced heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and fear about an uncertain future.

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Police violence and resulting unrest increased students’ trauma. On May 25, 2020, police were called to a convenience store in Minneapolis to arrest a man suspected of passing counterfeit money.³ The incident ended with a police officer kneeling on the neck of George Floyd, a forty-six-year-old Black man, while Floyd struggled to breathe and then fell unconscious and died. A seventeen-year-old girl recorded the incident and shared it on Facebook.⁴

The brutality, excessive force, and disregard for humanity shown by the police sparked protests and unrest in Minneapolis and across the world. In the Twin Cities, protests turned into riots resulting in mass destruction of property, looting, and fires. The worst damage affected neighborhoods where many Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) lived and worked.⁵ The summer of 2020 was punctuated by announcements about National Guard interventions, mandatory citywide curfews, threats from President Donald Trump to send in military troops, food drives for the neighborhoods hit hardest,⁶ and calls to defund the police.⁷

The trial of Derek Chauvin, the police officer who knelt on the neck of George Floyd, concluded with Chauvin found guilty on three counts of murder.⁸ The week before closing arguments, the Twin Cities area once again grappled with a racist reality when another unarmed Black man, Daunte Wright, died at the hands of police officers in the suburb of Brooklyn Center.⁹ The killing of Wright during a traffic stop served as another reminder that Black men and women in our city were not safe.



Table 1.

Data about students' concerns for the spring 2021 semester from a survey at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities

| Concern | All students | Students of color | International students | White students |
|---|--------------|-------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| My motivation with my classes | 63% | 65% | 46% | 66% |
| Doing well academically | 60% | 65% | 67% | 58% |
| Managing stress | 59% | 62% | 42% | 61% |
| Clarity of class or assignment expectations | 40% | 43% | 34% | 40% |
| Having/finding places to study | 32% | 32% | 18% | 35% |

The George Floyd murder and the ensuing societal unrest, combined with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, traumatized the university community in the Twin Cities. Students, instructors, researchers, and staff struggled to live and work in their usual ways.

Trauma's Effects on the Brain

What do the authors mean by the term *trauma*? Since there are myriad definitions of the word,¹⁰ this article uses the one provided by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). It states, "Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being."¹¹

The truism "Maslow before Bloom"—that is, Abraham Maslow before Benjamin Bloom—holds that students must have their basic needs met before they can turn to academic tasks.¹² Educators recognize that students cannot learn until they feel safe.

The effects of trauma can manifest as being distracted, missing class, leaving work assignments incomplete, or not participating during discussions.

They must be secure physically—with food, water, shelter, and sleep needs met—as well as emotionally and intellectually. Further research has demonstrated that a learner who is traumatized has difficulties with problem-solving, learning new information and retaining old

information, being creative, taking risks, and embracing curiosity or novelty.¹³ While not all students viewed the pandemic as a traumatic experience, many struggled with

the cognitive effects caused by trauma. Students may not even recognize that they are experiencing trauma. The effects of trauma can manifest as being distracted, missing class, leaving work assignments incomplete, or not participating during discussions.

The Trauma-Informed Approach to Teaching

On its face, teaching using a trauma-informed approach is just good teaching. Students can bring their whole selves to the classroom—or should be able to—and expect that it will be a supportive sanctuary to learners. Prior to the pandemic, up to 85 percent of college students reported at least one traumatic childhood experience before college, and an additional 21 percent revealed trauma experienced in college.¹⁴ Therefore, using a trauma-informed approach broadly, and specifically in teaching, can benefit everyone.¹⁵

Jessica Cless and Briana Nelson Goff observe, “The term ‘trauma-informed’ has been most commonly applied to settings such as medical and mental health as well as prevention and intervention programs; less has been done to develop trauma-informed practices in classroom settings, especially in higher education.”¹⁶ Colleges and universities, and by extension, academic libraries, have begun to slowly adapt the principles of trauma-informed teaching to fit their mission.¹⁷ An organization that is trauma-informed adheres to SAMHSA’s assumptions; it

realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms and trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures and practices, and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization.¹⁸

Groups and individuals using a trauma-informed approach may apply SAMHSA’s framework of trauma-informed practice to their work, striving to not traumatize or re-traumatize those seeking support. SAMHSA proposes six key principles of trauma-informed practice:

1. Safety (assistance seekers are in a safe environment, both physically and emotionally).
2. Trustworthiness and transparency (assistance seekers can trust staff and processes because expectations and policies are clear).
3. Peer support (assistance seekers can create community and support one another).
4. Collaboration and mutuality (assistance seekers and staff collaborate to create or modify infrastructures or procedures).
5. Empowerment, voice, and choice (assistance seekers can choose the best option for them and make that choice known).
6. Cultural, historical, and gender issues (the organization recognizes and supports the intersectional identities and histories of its assistance seekers).¹⁹

Guidance from the SERU aligns with a trauma-informed approach to teaching. For example, one recommendation based on the SERU student data urges teachers to “work to validate students’ range of experiences.” Krista Soria, Brayden Roberts, Bonnie Horgos, and Katie Hallahan assert,



It is incredibly powerful to validate students' experiences and to acknowledge the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has on BIPOC students. Staff, administrators, and faculty should take time to be educated on the experiences and hardships plaguing the students they serve. Bearing witness to someone else's struggle is a reminder and recognition of one another's humanity.²⁰

Another recommendation from Soria and Horgos says, "Students need enhanced flexibility from their professors and institutions in this time of great uncertainty."²¹

A Trauma-Informed Approach in an Academic Library

Since March 2020, most teaching and learning has occurred at a distance. Teaching remotely requires new knowledge and skills—not only best practices for online teaching and managing technology but also welcoming students into a library space that is

Soft skills, such as approachability, kindness, empathy, clarity, and interpersonal communication, all become vital in this remote learning space.

entirely virtual. Soft skills, such as approachability, kindness, empathy, clarity, and interpersonal communication, all become vital in this remote learning space.

Librarians are not therapists, and they need not put themselves in that role to effectively use a trauma-informed approach. Alex Shevrin Venet argues that educators "seeking to become trauma-

informed can focus on developing these universal supports without seeking details about a particular student's trauma."²² Librarians can refer students to campus clinical resources for support. According to Bruce Perry, "The major challenge to the educator working with highly stressed or traumatized adults is to furnish the structure, predictability, and sense of safety that can help them begin to feel safe enough to learn."²³ Adopting SAMHSA principles in an academic library setting might look like this:

- Safety (welcome the whole student who comes to class; provide an opportunity for students to take risks and to potentially fail with library research).
- Trustworthiness and transparency (be clear about expectations regarding due dates, assignments, and Web conferencing etiquette).
- Peer support (spend time at the start of the interaction to do a quick check-in; create opportunities for students to work together and spend time with one another).
- Collaboration and mutuality (permit students to work with librarians to shape the content covered during sessions; begin a consultation by asking about the students' goals for the meeting, and end with asking whether their goals were met).
- Empowerment, voice, and choice (offer students choices on when to meet and on the meeting modality, for example, communicating via e-mails versus scheduling a Web conference; offer students options in content or assignments; acknowledge the ongoing difficulties of the pandemic).
- Cultural, historical, and gender issues (use appropriate pronouns during class, communications, and consultations; select example topics thoughtfully).



Over the past year, the authors of this article thought deeply about using a trauma-informed approach to teaching and learning and embedded trauma-informed principles in several areas of their work. The examples they will share are (in chronological order):

- First-Year Writing
- CLA 1002: First-Year Experience II
- Orientation
- CLA 1001: First-Year Experience I
- Virtual workshops.

First-Year Writing

The University of Minnesota Twin Cities Libraries provide course-integrated instruction for the First-Year Writing program in WRIT 1301 classes. During the spring 2020 semester, library instructors had already taught about half of the more than 60 Intro to Library Research workshops that were scheduled. During a typical session, lasting about 100 minutes, UMN librarians guide students through many aspects of embarking on a research project: brainstorming, choosing keywords, searching databases, and evaluating sources. When classes went online, most WRIT 1301 classes finished the semester in an asynchronous format. At that early stage of the pandemic, the authors had just begun to think about trauma-informed pedagogy. As a result, they relied on existing teaching principles to create a pedagogical strategy to fit a different modality for the remaining 30 sections. These principles included consistency, simplified assignments, and empowerment.

Consistency

The authors quickly established a routine to provide weekly communication to first-year writing instructors. They shared assignment ideas, updates on libraries services, opportunities to request synchronous instruction for their classes, and a preexisting asynchronous version of the Intro to Library Research curriculum.

Simplified Assignments

Library instructors created short Google Forms assignments using existing video tutorials, custom video content, and reflection questions. These assignments divided the original curriculum into short, 20-minute scaffolded steps that discussed strategies for picking a topic, introduced library databases, and explained peer review and source evaluation. The forms provided a streamlined version of what students would normally complete in an in-person workshop. Over 700 students responded to these forms and the preexisting Intro to Library Research online tutorial (<https://www.lib.umn.edu/introtolibraryresearch>).

Empowerment

The Google Forms assignment provided students an opportunity to request additional feedback from a librarian or ask questions regarding their work. The Google Forms video “Getting Started with Research” can be seen online at <https://z.umn.edu/GettingStarted->



WithResearch. The video “Learn More about Sources” is available at <https://z.umn.edu/LearnMoreAboutSources>. The librarians followed up with 65 students who requested additional help by sending e-mails about more search tips, helpful online libraries services, or assistance with specified issues. Here are some examples of student requests:

- “I would like to get a librarian’s personal opinion on how I should go about searching for useful info for my topic.”
- “I would like suggestions on the best databases for this type of research. I know about PubMed, but I need more on the further impact in the medical world.”
- “Since I am not good with picking key search words, I would like some help with pinpointing the keywords that will lead me to the best sources for my research topic.”

CLA 1002: Changes Based on Pedagogical Principles and Experience

In March 2020, before course modalities changed, three of the authors were in the process of teaching in-person sections of a one-credit, first-year experience course called CLA 1002. It is a required, second semester course for the College of Liberal Arts (CLA), administered online with a shared curriculum facilitated by student section leaders. Students can choose to attend face-to-face sections called “Spotlight: Research,” which focus on skills to get started on faculty-sponsored research. Librarians have taught two sections of the course since 2018. After COVID-19 struck, instructors had one week to pivot to an online format. They could choose between synchronous class meetings or running their course asynchronously. Librarian instructors made decisions based upon pedagogical principles and previous experience, including consistency, accessibility, flexibility, and radical hospitality.

Consistency

In any online course, but especially with students struggling to focus after an upheaval, consistency is important. To make the online course experience easy to navigate, library instructors for CLA 1002 established set meeting times and due dates that coincided with those of the prior course. When the course shifted to online-only delivery, the instructors took care to use consistent naming conventions for modules, pages, links, discussions, and assignments. Assignment due dates continued to coincide with the meeting days of the class pre-COVID.

Accessibility

The library instructors delivered information using multiple formats to ensure that all students could access the material. They used captioning in all videos and provided separate slide decks.

Flexibility

Since the course is pass/fail, the instructors have always been flexible with the due dates for assignments. Once the course went online, they remained adaptable and responsive to students’ questions and concerns. The final project for the course requires student



presentations. Library instructors asked students to record their presentations. All students had access to Zoom but could use whatever tool made them comfortable. The instructors also stressed that they would be flexible and welcome questions concerning the recording and uploading of presentations.

Radical Hospitality

Each week, the instructors created a short video to introduce the topic for the week and give a rundown of the week's assignments. These videos were informal yet informative. Some instructors shot the videos in their basement, in the dark, with the glow of a laptop illuminating their faces. Several videos included pets and brief glimpses into the instructors' lives. The videos provided an opportunity to acknowledge that everyone was dealing with radical changes to their routines and lives. The instructors checked in with students frequently via discussion posts and e-mails and asked how they were doing, what they struggled with, and how things had changed for them in the past weeks.

CLA 1002: Changes Based on Trauma-Informed Principles

All four of the authors taught CLA 1002 during spring 2021. Three sections were offered—one asynchronous and two synchronous sections, with a one-hour Zoom meeting per week. To make the course content consistent and accessible, while remaining flexible and radically hospitable, the authors incorporated the trauma-informed principles of safety and transparency, agency and empowerment, and connection.

Safety and Transparency

The instructors clearly communicated their expectations of the work needed to pass the course at the start of the semester and reiterated the requirements throughout the semester. They encouraged students to ask questions during or after class, or via e-mail. The instructors strove to answer all e-mails promptly. To ensure students felt safe in the course, they embraced authenticity. When technical issues happened, for example, the instructors asked for and accepted suggestions from the students. The students responded with the same understanding and flexibility the instructors extended to the class.

Agency and Empowerment

Trauma-informed principles emphasize that providing a sense of agency to people experiencing trauma is important. One way the instructors gave students agency was to have them set the rules and expectations for the synchronous class time. During the initial class meeting, students divided into small groups and used Google Jamboard to brainstorm Zoom etiquette. Instructors consolidated the ideas on the Jamboards and presented them during the next class meeting as the expectations for the Zoom course.

Trauma-informed principles emphasize that providing a sense of agency to people experiencing trauma is important.

The library instructors also provided an opportunity for students to choose the modality of their final projects for the synchronous sections. Students completed a poll to



determine preferences for in-class Zoom presentations or recording and sharing videos asynchronously in a Canvas discussion. Both synchronous sections favored recording their presentations. The asynchronous section had no option since presenting synchronously would reduce the flexibility provided by the asynchronous modality.

Connection

Based on an understanding of trauma-informed teaching and data from the SERU surveys, the instructors adjusted the lesson plans to give students opportunities to connect with one another. In the synchronous sections, they conducted small-group activities during each class session. They divided students into breakout rooms after explaining the activity and providing links to the needed materials. In both the synchronous and asynchronous sections, discussion questions gave students a chance to interact with one another, ask follow-up questions, and share thoughts.

Halfway through the semester, the instructors asked students for feedback on the course, including a question about feeling connected to others in the course. One adjustment they made as a result was to keep students in the same small groups each class session instead of moving them around. Another change was to ask a “fun” check-in question in the synchronous sections. The question started a “popcorn” discussion, where one student answered and then chose the next person to speak until everyone had a chance to speak. Instructors added an optional, “fun” question to the asynchronous course each week. These questions provided a space for students to get to know one another, celebrate successes, share challenges, and commiserate about school, work, and homelife.

Orientation

In April 2020, the university decided to offer summer orientation in an online format. In the past, new students had received a two-day orientation in person in June, July, or August. Existing content would not meet the needs of incoming students since the orientation materials focused on physical buildings and other campus features. The authors decided to prioritize expanding students’ awareness of the UMN Libraries website as a robust source of information and to emphasize online resources and services as opposed

... messaging centered around introducing the libraries’ website as the gateway to the services offered, access to online newspapers, streaming music and documentaries, and librarians as friendly people who can help.

to books and buildings. Research shows that high school students lack familiarity with library websites and have little knowledge of what is available online.²⁴ This situation became even more problematic during a pandemic, when physical buildings were closed or had limited access.

Guided by trauma-informed teaching principles, the authors decided to focus on what was important to students in the short term. What could the libraries offer to new students that would be useful to them in

June, July, and August 2020? As a result, messaging centered around introducing the libraries’ website as the gateway to the services offered, access to online newspapers, streaming music and documentaries, and librarians as friendly people who can help.



Figure 1. An informal welcome video featuring a librarian's photograph greets new students at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities.

The authors also created short videos for new students—one with welcoming messages and an overview of the libraries (see Figure 1), which received more than 475 views; one with a tour of the website, which got more than 370 views; and a set of eight videos tailored to specific colleges. Some videos had content made for specific groups of incoming students. For instance, in partnership with International Student and Scholar Services, some videos featured an international student who shared their experience with using the libraries. A video was even created for a campus-sponsored TikTok dance challenge (170 views). This personalized approach helped to make the academic library seem welcoming.

The videos were shared with orientation staff and campus partners and were embedded in a new student orientation LibGuide (more than 1,070 views). Overall, they served as an effective tool to inform and connect with students and the wider university community. The videos demonstrated trauma-informed teaching practices by acknowledging that circumstances were difficult. They also showcased the librarians' humanity, their work from home reality, and even their pets.

The UMN campus traditionally hosts a "welcome week" with six days of programming for the incoming class of students—about 6,000 students. In May 2020, the university decided to offer that programming exclusively online, to extend it over multiple weeks, and to facilitate the content using a Canvas course. A week was devoted to a module on academic resources called "Study like a Gopher" because a gopher is the mascot for the University of Minnesota and its athletic teams. Three activities that week highlighted the university's academic support resources, including the libraries (see success.umn.edu). Students could earn badges in the course (see Figure 2) and enter to win a campus-wide grand prize provided by sponsor the Coca-Cola Company.



Figure 2. A libraries badge is among the promotional materials created by the orientation staff at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities.

Flexibility and Choice

As the authors planned programming, they used trauma-informed principles and worked to provide flexibility and choice to students. Asynchronous content formed the core of the programming, a radical change from past years, when events and activities were almost entirely in person.

In the Canvas site, students watched an eight-minute video with highlights of a variety of peer tutoring services along with basic library information. Students then responded to the prompt "After watching the video—what is one Academic Success Center you think you will use? Why?" Over 850 students replied, with such answers as:

- "Because I won't be living on campus, I think I'll use the libraries website for their online resources."



- “I’ll probably use researching, writing, and peer tutoring because I think that these Academic Success Centers would help me with my college life and to improve my academic skills.”
- “I’m pretty excited to check out the library. I enjoy a quiet learning environment and some library ambiance.”

Reading the comments and interacting with students in the discussion fostered community in the Canvas course and demonstrated that library staff are helpful and eager to assist students. The discussion format revealed the academic needs students anticipated and their feelings about the upcoming semester.

Personalization

The libraries work with a variety of peer tutoring and academic support units on campus, and giving students a list of all these units is overwhelming. The authors brainstormed ways to tap into students’ past experiences with studying and academic work and what they anticipated about the upcoming semester. An intern in one of the libraries’ partner offices designed a short, online “BuzzFeed”-style quiz using Quiz-maker.com. Students answered a few questions and then were matched with three support services (try it at z.umn.edu/matchedforsuccess). For example, multiple-choice questions asked, “What are some of your biggest stressors in academic work?” or “How do you plan to spend most of your study time, based on the classes you are taking?” The results included libraries as a study space and the peer-tutoring service, Libraries Peer Research Consultants (lib.umn.edu/services/prc). This format made it easy for students to personalize their experience. During summer 2020, over 1,100 quizzes were taken.

CLA 1001: First-Year Experience

In past years, the libraries worked with the CLA 1001: First-Year Experience course during the fall semester to offer information about the humanities and social science library. A 45-minute session included an introduction to the libraries’ website, finding a book in the libraries’ search tool, writing down the call number and finding the book on the shelf, and a short building tour. The libraries usually offered about 40 tours and taught over 900 students a year for this introductory activity. In fall 2020, the team set to work to consider options. Inspired by *Professor Penelope Pincher & the Search for Affordable Content*, a digital textbook from Indiana University, they created an e-book. The UMN Libraries had recently rolled out campus-wide access to Pressbooks, an e-publishing platform that offered a simple content editor. The library team used Pressbooks to draft pages with context and links to services, mixing in GIFs (graphic interchange formats), images, and existing library videos. The final product was a “choose your own adventure” e-book, *Gopher Library Adventure* (see Figure 3, or view it online at <https://pressbooks.umn.edu/umnlivadventure/>).

The *Gopher Library Adventure* was an optional assignment for CLA 1001: First-Year Experience students. Students received credit for making their way through the adventure and completing a brief reflection survey via an embedded Google Form. The team selected a “choose your own adventure” format to highlight content that might be overwhelming if delivered all at once. In September, over 400 students completed the adventure and received credit.

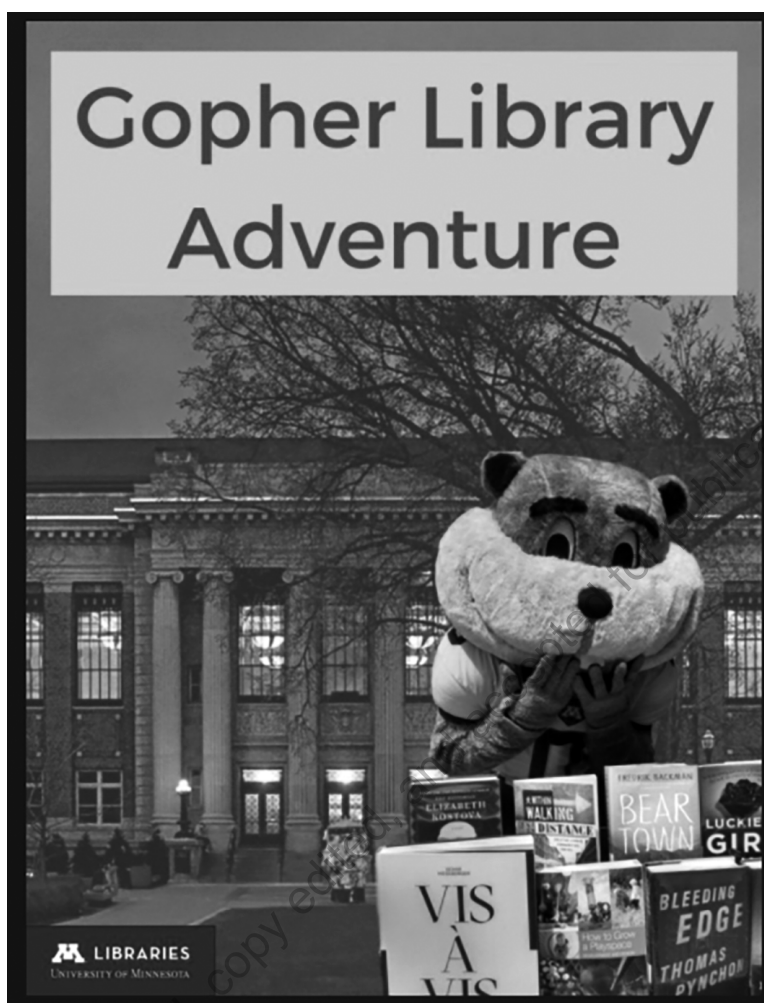


Figure 3. *Gopher Library Adventure* is an e-book in which students can choose their own adventure, created for a First-Year Experience course at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities.

The “choose your own adventure” format allowed students choice and control on how they engaged with the content.

The “choose your own adventure” format allowed students choice and control on how they engaged with the content. There was no one right way, and all paths led to the reflection. Students could request follow-up from a librarian in the reflection form. UMN librarians responded to students by e-mail, providing answers to questions, insight about research within their subject areas, resources for finding undergraduate research opportunities, and connections to other library services.

Here is a sample of student reflections from the *Gopher Library Adventure* activity in response to the question “What surprised you about the libraries on this adventure?”

- “I was surprised how easy the library website makes it to sort through lots of information to get the specifics that are needed for whatever research I am doing.”
- “I didn’t know that there would be resources on learning about politics to be better informed when I go to vote.”
- “That undergrads could help professors and other staff in big important research things.”

Virtual Workshops

In spring 2020, the team piloted a handful of “Try the Pomodoro” virtual workshops. The workshops gave students an important element that had vanished when the libraries closed—focused study time in their community. The Pomodoro technique is a simple yet effective method to help with procrastination and motivation. It relies on working in sprints combined with short, frequent breaks. The name Pomodoro comes from the Italian word for *tomato* because the inventor of the method, Francesco Cirillo, originally used a kitchen timer shaped like a tomato. Library instructors developed a simple workshop where they explained the technique and asked students to use the chat feature to share what they were working on. Then everyone worked quietly for 25 minutes in a Zoom session.

The first workshop took place on April 17, 2020, as an activity option for the CLA 1002: First-Year Experience course. The 17 registrants who attended received course credit. The libraries provided more of these workshops during finals week.

Over the summer, the team experimented with online workshops, and the registrations and attendance were encouraging. As the fall semester 2020 approached, many of the traditional orientation methods, such as fairs and other events, were cancelled. In response, the libraries increased the number of online workshops offered (see Table 2). An open call to librarians and library staff to either teach or co-teach a workshop went out. Trauma-informed approaches provided academic support in new ways, focusing on community and peer support.

Community and Peer Support

Most workshops were aimed at undergraduate students, but graduate students, staff, and even faculty attended them. In most sessions, instructors welcomed attendees and used the chat feature to ask where they were located (with students literally scattered around the world) and how they were feeling. Instructors acknowledged that the pandemic was a unique time and worked to reassure attendees that their feelings were normal. The workshops

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Table 2.

Virtual workshops on academic and library skills at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities in fall 2020 and spring 2021, with enrollments

| Semester | Workshop | Enrollment |
|--------------|-----------|--------------|
| Fall 2020 | 35 | 2,242 |
| Spring 2021 | 39 | 944 |
| Total | 74 | 3,186 |

provided an opportunity for students to come together virtually and feel part of a community. Popular workshop titles included:

- Tips for Taking Notes (IRL [in real life] and Zoom lectures)
- Increase Your Reading Efficiency
- Bullet Journaling for Motivation
- Start Strong: Early Semester Tips and Tricks.

UMN librarians taught over 35 online workshops in the fall and 39 in spring with content focused on research and academic skills. Instructors e-mailed links to slides and the services and tools mentioned to all registrants, thus ensuring that students got the content even if they could not attend. One student wrote in the evaluation, "I like all the different workshops on study skills offered by the library and would like more!"

Think Like a Researcher

Since 2016, the UMN Libraries had taught workshops for early undergraduates called Think Like a Researcher. The workshops, created in partnership with the Office of Undergraduate Research, explained how to get started with undergraduate research. They were scheduled to run again in fall 2020. The planning team determined to change how they offered Think Like a Researcher content rather than just moving the workshop to Zoom. They used a trauma-informed approach to redesign the workshops, focusing on choice and peer support.

The planning team decided that asynchronous content was best for flexibility. Additionally, an asynchronous design would give students more choices about how and when they would engage with the material. The campus learning management system, Canvas, was used to change delivery from a synchronous workshop to a minicourse. Librarians and staff from the Office of Undergraduate Research organized the content into learning modules. The modules included newly created five- to seven-minute videos, recorded panel sessions with student researchers and faculty mentors, a discussion question, and text content to introduce concepts and connect it all together.



In the face-to-face Think Like a Researcher workshop, students often interacted with people sitting near them to collaborate on a short activity to practice a new concept or skill. In the minicourse, these short activities were transformed into discussion posts. Through the discussions, students connected to others and expressed the feelings of uncertainty and enthusiasm associated with faculty-sponsored research. The discussions gave students a chance to apply the content to their own interests and plans for getting involved in research. Librarians gave supportive feedback to introductory posts and followed up as needed.

The discussions gave students a chance to apply the content to their own interests and plans for getting involved in research.

In fall 2020, 95 students enrolled in the Canvas course, and 135 took the spring 2021 minicourse. Students have ongoing access to the Canvas site and have continued to use the minicourse sporadically months after its official end. The evaluation sent to students at the end of the course asked, “What did you like about the Think Like a Researcher minicourse?” The answers included:

- “I liked that it was a really manageable amount for each module, and that it moved in really coherent steps. It also helped me feel like research is still a thing I can try and do in upcoming semesters even with COVID.”
- “It wasn’t super long and got right to the point.”
- “It is flexible, and I finished at my own pace.”

Assessment

Assessment of these library initiatives has been challenging. During the first weeks of the pandemic, everything was so new and shocking that many decisions required quick educated guesses. In the beginning, with no idea how long the pandemic would last, we assumed it would be over soon. From this perspective, it seemed unnecessary to assess what we were doing. Looking in the rearview mirror, we might have been more conscientious about assessment in the early weeks and months of the pandemic. Information collected in the early days could have led to a more informed post-pandemic future.

The radical changes to our work necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic encouraged us to try new strategies, revise on the fly, and ultimately take more risks in teaching standard library skills.²⁴ Typically, librarians create and use pre- and posttests, pre-session surveys, and personal check-ins. Currently, assessment happens in a less formal way but still provides information we can use to make decisions and improve our practice.

By utilizing new strategies to reach students, such as videos, orientation LibGuides, virtual workshops, Canvas activities, and Google Forms, we can see student participation in a concrete way. At in-person outreach events, it was difficult to count interactions

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with students, but online activities make recording interactions straightforward and meaningful. Online platforms such as MediaSpace and YouTube provide view counts and useful analytics to illustrate which videos are most watched and when viewers lose interest. Google Forms and Canvas discussions allow for more nuanced assessment of an activity, video, or synchronous instruction session. Overall, the authors recorded over 10,200 interactions with online material in fall 2020.

Learning outcomes are different now than they were before the pandemic. In the past, the goals for library classes or sessions focused on increasing student understanding of information literacy concepts—Can students list the characteristics of scholarly journal

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articles? Can they articulate the merits of using a citation manager? Now, many library lesson plans include a goal that students know how to follow up for additional support.

Providing opportunities for students to create community and connect with peers became a goal of activities and classes. Whether a one-shot session or a semester-long course,

offering a chance for the creation of community became a priority. Here is a brief list of techniques employed that align closely with the six key principles of trauma-informed teaching:

1. Ask students a “popcorn” icebreaker question at the start of class to establish an open and welcoming mood for the session to come, with the added benefit of getting to know the students and co-instructors better.
2. Ask a “What’s still muddy?” question near the end of the teaching session. Students can indicate by a quick self-assessment what concepts or skills might need more reinforcement.
3. Make time for reflection during sessions. For example, embed an image of a speed bump at several points in slide presentations. Tell students that whenever the speed bump image is visible, they should pause, reflect, ask questions, and check in together. During the speed bump interludes, notice the types of questions students ask. Let the questions guide you—to reframe, add more explanation, or to demonstrate the skill again.
4. Use tools for interactivity. Zoom allows for polling. Multiple choice or fill-in-the-blank questions can be answered via chat or Google Forms. Be flexible! Permit students to respond in the way they feel most comfortable, such as audibly, in chat, or via Google Forms.
5. Show and tell. Invite students to share their process with the rest of the class for feedback and peer learning.
6. Share results via Google Docs, Google Slides, or Google Jamboard. Ask students to record answers as they discuss a question about the content. This allows the instructors to gauge how quickly the work has gone and to look for themes. Work can then be synthesized and reported by students or instructors.

Reflection on Successes and Failures

Trauma-informed teaching provided principles to guide instruction and outreach decisions during a chaotic and confusing time when it was hard to perceive a path forward.



Mistakes were part of the process. Kari Goin Kono and Sonja Taylor from Portland State University in Portland, Oregon, interviewed faculty on their experience during the pivot to remote instruction. They reported,

Participants also acknowledge that there would be mistakes and that patience would be required from both students and faculty. However, within the space of patience and forgiveness, several faculty acknowledged the opportunity to grow as a professional and gain a new appreciation for what remote learning and digital spaces could provide them.²⁶

In some ways, a trauma-informed approach gave us permission to embrace our mistakes, learn from them, and move on. As a result, we grew as teachers.

Mistakes can become opportunities for your humanity to show. Other glimpses of humanity were views of homelife, including cats and dogs or children and partners. Showing students that you are just like them helps ease their anxiety and honors their own range of experiences. According to Kono and Taylor, “Importantly, when faculty employed pedagogy that honored the student experience, namely flexibility, simplification, and care, many witnessed higher levels of student engagement.”²⁷

Showing students that you are just like them helps ease their anxiety and honors their own range of experiences.

We learned to match the time to create with the audience and needs. For example, using formal instructional design principles can create a durable, high-quality learning object. But the desire to create a lasting, top-notch learning object can coexist in a world where the instructor simply clicks “record” and demonstrates a technique, tool, or search strategy without much thought to learning outcomes or backward design. In the past, striving to get something “right” or “make it the best” could result in it not being made at all. The pandemic experience broke through the need for perfection and replaced it with the need to just get things done.

Finally, this work allowed us to see students as individuals—*really see* them as individuals. In the one-shot session or one-time workshop situation, common in library instruction, it can be difficult to appreciate the individuality within the group. Not all students struggled, and some even thrived with online instruction. An awareness of trauma paired with student data provided a lens through which to see that some learners faced immense challenges. Trauma-informed teaching enabled us to support and teach all students.

Conclusion

The rapid transition of courses to online formats at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities in spring 2020 and the resulting year of online instruction changed the way that we design and deliver content for classes, workshops, and engagement. Overall, learning about the trauma-informed approach inspired us to explore new online technologies and new ways of teaching. It has helped us to grow in ways that were often imperfect, but nonetheless have changed the way we will teach going forward. At least that is our hope. In fall 2021, the University of Minnesota welcomed new students to campus in person for the first time in a year. The SAMHSA principles of safety; transparency; peer



support; collaboration; empowerment, voice, and choice; and cultural, historical, and gender issues will continue to guide our teaching and learning into the future.

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