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Tracking and Offering Electronic Resources During a Pandemic



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When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States in March 2020, Buswell Library, like many college libraries, had to reimagine how they offered resources to their students and faculty. Buswell Library is the main library for Wheaton College, a small, private, Christian, liberal arts college located just west of Chicago, IL. Wheaton College offers a few graduate programs, but the majority of degrees offered are at the undergraduate level. The vast majority of Wheaton's students live on campus. The pandemic forced our faculty and students to pivot quickly to remote teaching and remote learning. It was during this pivot that classroom teaching had to be reimaged and, in some cases, new library resources had to be found in order to finish out the semester.

Shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic hit, many publishers made some of their content freely available. Some publishers required libraries to run an institutional trial and others opened their content up completely to the public by releasing IP restrictions. In order to track the resources that would be most beneficial to our campus users, Buswell Library's E-Resources Management (ERM) Librarian created a COVID-19 E-Resources tracking tool (<https://guides.library.wheaton.edu/COVID19Offers>) using Springshare's LibGuides. The tool allowed librarians and teaching faculty the ability to find resources pertinent to their teaching and classroom needs. So much content was made available that it was clear these offers would need to be organized in a way that was easy for librarians and faculty to look for these resources. The ERM Librarian organized the free content into the following categories: Educational Resources, Open Access Collections, Technology Offers, Links to Other Sites with Free Resources, and COVID-19 Research Pages. The tracking tool was primarily intended to benefit the Wheaton College community; however, it has gone on to be used as a template for other librarians in the field who wished to track these resources for their own campus. Building this tool as a LibGuide provided a way to track the offers that were being received while also displaying these offers to our campus and to other librarians in the field.

For e-resources that our library felt were the best fit for our campus community, the ERM department found a few ways to incorporate these additional collections into our library catalog. Some of the larger e-collections and databases were added to Buswell Library's Databases A-Z list with a subject tag and description to let users know that these were temporary resources made available due to COVID-19. Buswell Library is

currently running its Databases A-Z list using CORAL, an open-source software, due to the functionality of this software. These resources were tagged with a COVID-19 subject tag to denote these resources from our regular subscription databases. In addition, each resource was given a description that included a brief summary of the resource and how long the publisher intended to make the resource freely available. Other resources that were not candidates for Buswell Library's Databases A-Z list, but were still felt to be helpful to our campus, were added directly to our ILS for users to find in Buswell Library's catalog. This created a bit of a challenge for the ERM department since Buswell Library was in the middle of a system migration when our campus shifted to remote learning. Electronic items and/or collections were activated separately in our discovery layer and link resolver systems pre-migration so items were available for the remainder of the semester to our users. Post-system migration, these electronic collections were activated again in the new ILS. To keep track of the electronic collections that were activated in Buswell Library's Library Search instance a combination of spreadsheets, notes, tables, and calendar reminders were used to track how long these resources were being made available by the publisher, in which system they were activated in, and when the resource needed to be removed from the ILS. Documenting each of this information was imperative to ensure our users were able to access the content that was made freely available.

The last year has been a challenge, but there are some things the author has learned during the pandemic. In times of crisis, the librarian and publishing communities have really come together in the interest of education and learning. In addition to providing access to content that was made freely available to our campus at a crucial point in the semester, many publishers have decided to keep pricing flat during this fiscal year. In a time where library budgets are facing further reductions, this reprieve is especially helpful. Additionally, librarians came together in ways they hadn't before to create shareable materials in areas of outreach, instruction, and finding e-resources.

Almost one year later the scene is a bit different on our campus. Many students have now returned to in-person learning and some essential work staff have returned to Wheaton's campus. The inclusion of more online resources, streaming video, and the purchase of ebooks has come to the forefront in Buswell Library's collections planning. While the need for immediate access to resources has diminished, this pandemic has changed the way in which Buswell Library thinks about our resources and how we provide those resources to our students. †

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Megan M. Ruenz is the E-Resources Management Librarian and Science Librarian at Buswell Library. She oversees all of the electronic resources for Wheaton College. Before becoming a librarian, Megan worked as a medicinal chemist in the area of drug discovery. She received an MSLIS from the iSchool at the University of Illinois and earned an MS Organic Chemistry from Miami University. You can connect with Megan on her LinkedIn page at www.linkedin.com/in/meganmruenz.