**CUNY Libraries COVID-19 Task Force Memo**

# Introduction

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on CUNY and the communities that we serve. As faculty and staff at the CUNY Libraries, we are best positioned to understand the challenges and issues related to re-opening the CUNY Libraries.

While many members of our campus communities are anxious for the library to reopen, we must take a measured and evidence-based approach toward reopening that leans heavily on best practices that prioritize the health, safety, and well-being of our staff and our patrons.

We strongly urge a CUNY-wide approach to a phased reopening of the libraries, although we recognize that individual colleges may have the autonomy to make some local decisions regarding the reopening plan for their libraries.

## Issues and challenges of reopening library spaces:

* High occupancy, crowding in narrow aisles and study spaces; close face-to-face contact at service points; shared offices
* Patrons spend prolonged periods of time in closed spaces (cumulative viral load)
* Numerous high-touch surfaces, including furniture, shared equipment, and circulating materials
* Returned books and materials need to be quarantined before recirculating
* Risk of exposure on public transportation for nearly all students, staff, and faculty
* Unknown role of HVAC systems in transmission of the COVID-19 virus
* Library staff and faculty who need to continue to work remotely because of health concerns and/or caretaking responsibilities
* Coordinating our efforts with other campus departments and offices such as Facilities and Public Safety, which are understaffed and under-resourced
* Procuring the necessary supplies and equipment to maintain sanitary and safe library spaces
* The particular needs of the part-time workforce, many who work at multiple job sites, may hold inadequate health insurance (if any at all), are afforded less generous sick leave, and work with very little job security

# Best Practice Recommendations for Reopening Library Spaces

1. Coordinate re-opening among CUNY colleges to avoid overwhelming campuses that open before others.
2. Avoid opening too fast and then having to re-close, which would be disruptive to students, faculty, and staff.
3. Open libraries in phases, conditional upon environmental safety conditions (both on campus and citywide), sufficient staffing levels, and adequate provision of equipment (PPE).
4. Gather and use information, including data on COVID transmission, infection rates, the availability and accuracy of testing, the availability and effectiveness of contact tracing, and the existing impact of the crisis on CUNY faculty, students, and staff, before making decisions about each successive phase of re-opening.
5. Keep NYC context in mind when making new policy decisions, e.g., allowing students to access computers and to print at the nearest CUNY campus, not where they’re registered, in order to limit their exposure on public transportation.
6. Institute precautionary measures for staff/faculty even if library spaces remain closed to patrons.
7. Collaborate with other departments (IT, public safety, etc.) to develop innovative space solutions (e.g., moving computers out of the library to more open spaces on campus, controlling and monitoring occupancy limits and social distancing within the library).
8. Incentivize faculty outside of the library to use electronic resources, whether from the library collection or Open Education Resources (OERs), to reduce reliance on physical textbooks in reserves collections.
9. Work closely with representatives from the unions that represent faculty, clerical, and building staff

# Continuity of Library Services: A Phased Approach

Keeping our students, staff, and faculty healthy as we take well-considered steps toward a gradual re-opening of the libraries will ensure a continuity of services that support instruction, learning, and research. A phased reopening allows for a modular and flexible provision of remote services at varying levels as conditions evolve.

* **Online-only services, with no staff onsite**

Throughout the "NY on Pause" period, CUNY libraries have been directly supporting students through chat, text, email, telephone, videoconferencing, and online library instruction. We have enabled students to access electronic resources, worked with vendors to expand our online resources, and collaborated with faculty outside the library to support student research through synchronous and asynchronous instruction and digital learning objects. The libraries have also continued moving forward with its migration to a new Library Services Platform, which will be completed August 3. There will be no circulation, acquisitions, or cataloging in July.

* **Online-only services, with minimal staff onsite**

Having minimal staff on-site (possibly in staggered, shorter shifts) would allow for some scanning and sending of physical reserves materials. Because this service will be limited, library faculty will work with disciplinary faculty to find suitable online alternative materials to support their courses, including OERs. To better support students and faculty, CUNY Libraries should actively pursue new online resources, which would require additional funding.

* **Online services and limited patron access to physical library**

Students would gain greater access to physical reserves material. Library faculty would continue to work with disciplinary faculty to find online alternatives, and libraries should continue to pursue new online resources to support instruction and research, which as noted above would require additional funding. Students would also have access (possibly indirect, in a closed stacks system) to circulating materials: books for research or personal enrichment, DVDs, etc.

* **Online services and expanded patron access to physical library**

Students would have access to study spaces, and (if they have not been moved outside of the library in an earlier phase) computer workstations and printers. Access would still be regulated for occupancy and time limits.

## Library-specific services that can be provided remotely:

### With remote staffing

* Reference and research help
* Library instruction (synchronous and asynchronous)
* Online guides, videos, and tutorials
* Online access to databases, journals, and electronic collections
* *Possible:* scanning reserves texts from remote locations
* *Possible:* provision of electronic resources from other libraries via interlibrary loan services

### With staff onsite

* Contactless pickup and mail delivery
* Document delivery services (scanning print materials within copyright constraints)
* E-reserves scanning from print collections
* Receiving, processing and cataloging of new print materials

## Library-specific services that require a physical reopening:

* Study spaces
* Access to print and physical collections
  + Stacks\*
  + DVDs and VHS tapes\*
  + Print reserves (textbooks) and other physical reserve items (calculators, musical instruments, etc.)
  + Archives
* Access to departments within libraries (based on campus)
  + Writing Center
  + Tutoring Center

\* *could be mitigated through contactless pickup and mail delivery*

# Open Issues for Academic Continuity in Fall 2020

## E-reserves and copyright restrictions:

OLS and CUNY Legal must develop a CUNY policy on e-reserves and copyright, in advance of the Fall 2020 semester, to guide campus libraries in acceptable quantities of digitization of course materials. Guidance on streaming media for courses that require access to copyrighted A/V materials should be included.

### Key decisions

* Administrative recommendations, respecting the bounds of academic freedom, will be issued to faculty regarding the use of electronic versions of textbooks.
* CUNY legal teams must advise libraries on how to proceed when a suitable electronic version is not available, and the extent to which legal restrictions prohibit digitization of print texts for e-reserves.
* Campus leaders must establish the extent to which open educational resources (OERs) fulfill the needs of high-enrollment courses.
* Licenced e-resources are costly and may include access restrictions. In some instances, reallocating textbook funds to provide students with vouchers for textbook purchases may be the more fiscally prudent option. If this is not possible, CUNY Libraries must receive more funding to expand its collection of electronic resources, particularly e-books.
* CUNY should provide funding to libraries to hire college assistants in order to provide a more robust e-reserves system.

## Student access to computers,printing, and quiet study spaces:

Campus facilities, in coordination with campus IT, must develop a plan to move computing equipment from the libraries to unused classrooms or other spaces that present less risk and require less staffing. Given the cramped realities of most New York City-based households, campuses should also consider how to leverage campus space for quiet studying.

### Key decisions

* If CUNY moves to a fully online fall semester, campuses should explore new ways to provide access to study space and computing facilities for students and faculty without opening the libraries to patrons.
* Campuses should consider possibilities for separating computing equipment from library collections spaces.
* CIS and campus IT must facilitate cross-CUNY-campus access to computers, wifi, and printing
* CUNY should provide tools, such as mobile wifi spots, to provide computer access from off-campus.

## Supplies for contactless pickup:

In order to provide access to our collections without opening the libraries to patrons, it may be possible to provide contactless delivery of books. Libraries would provide pick-up and drop-off points for books so that there is no interaction between staff and patrons. In order to create a reliable system, additional funding would be needed.

### Key decisions

* Campuses will decide which method(s) of contactless delivery would be most effective. Options include mailing books via UPS or FedEx, book lockers located outside of the library, or book dispensers.
* CUNY should provide funding to libraries for the hiring of college assistants In order to provide these services.

## Minimum/maximum staffing levels if spaces are open/closed to patrons:

In order to ensure social distancing, only two to three staff can be onsite when we are closed to provide minimal services such as scanning for e-reserves and contactless book delivery. Shifts must be staggered and staff can only work for a few hours each day. When the library begins to open to the public, staffing levels will be guided by federal regulations around social distancing and density levels. On site shifts will be staggered. Faculty and staff will continue to work online with some hours a week on site. Library faculty and staff are the best judges of staffing requirements and should be able to determine the schedules that work best for them and their library.

### Key decisions

* Library departments should make decisions about staffing
* Each library should develop the schedule that works best for them and their constituency.

## Cleaning:

The nature of library spaces require constant in-depth cleaning. The administration must commit to providing sufficient cleaning supplies and PPE to all CUNY Libraries, with a clear plan for proper training in disinfection methods and a schedule for cleaning that meets the needs of the current crisis.

### Key decisions

* Cleaning supplies and PPE such as gloves and masks will be funded at either the central or campus level, but not from library budgets
* Campus facilities will provide dedicated cleaners solely responsible for and working within libraries.

## Enforcement of occupancy limits and social distancing measures:

Before opening shared library spaces to staff or patrons, campuses must identify departments that will be responsible for enforcing occupancy limits and social distancing measures. Library staff is not equipped to engage uncooperative patrons.

**Prepared by CUNY Libraries COVID-19 Task Force**   
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