UALC Statement on COVID-19 and Academic Libraries

The Utah Academic Library Consortium (UALC) has been working to gather information and support our member institutions responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Each of our campuses has responded in different ways, based on different needs and circumstances. Here, we summarize these responses, as well as the current consensus by our national professional organizations on the issue of closing library buildings during the pandemic.

Utah Academic Libraries: Current Status

The following describes the current status of UALC member institutions. All UALC member institutions are providing online research and other support, as well as access to electronic collections.

Closed buildings
- University of Utah J. Willard Marriott Library
- University of Utah Spencer S. Eccles Health Sciences Library
- University of Utah James E. Faust Law Library
- Weber State University Stewart Library
- Westminster College Giovale Library

Partial closures, including limited access to restricted areas, access limited to cardholders, and/or reduced hours
- Brigham Young University Harold B. Lee Library
- Brigham Young University Howard W. Hunter Law Library
- Dixie State University Val A. Browning Library
- Salt Lake Community College Libraries
- Snow College Karen H. Huntsman Library
- Southern Utah University Gerald R. Sherratt Library
- Utah State University Libraries
- Utah Valley University Ira A. and Mary Lou Fulton Library

An ongoing survey of academic libraries demonstrates a trend toward complete library building closure in response to public health social distancing recommendations. As of today, 376 survey

respondents had closed. Among a smaller subset of academic libraries, those that belong to the Association of Research Libraries, closure has been the predominant response. As of today, 116 ARL libraries reported complete building closures, with eight reporting reduced hours or access, and one reporting regular hours and access (Live ARL status document). Public libraries are also responding in similar ways. In Utah, 61 of 70 libraries are currently closed (Live Utah public library status document).

Technology and Internet Connectivity

Most traditional library services and resources can and are delivered electronically. All UALC members have shifted staff to provide research and other assistance via online chat, email, and phone. The vast majority of our collections, especially scholarly journal articles, are already available electronically. Member libraries are scanning some print materials for electronic delivery and offering alternatives to print materials that are currently inaccessible.

Many of our patrons rely on the library for computers and internet connections. This has been the greatest challenge to our students as their classes move online. Internet and cellular providers are providing free service and removing data caps, which helps address some of the connectivity issues. Nearly all UALC member institutions have increased their laptop lending programs to meet the needs of students who do not have computers. In many cases, we have been able to distribute laptops through an appointment and no-contact model that does not require our buildings to be open to the public.

National Recommendations

Both the American Library Association and the Association of College and Research Libraries have recommended that all library buildings close in response to the social distancing required to slow the transmission of COVID-19.

In times of natural disasters, libraries play a role in providing services to our most marginalized community members. This is not a natural disaster. This is a public health crisis that requires social distancing. Keeping libraries open brings people together, potentially endangering our staff and the very patrons we are trying to serve.

The Utah Academic Library Consortium is communicating regularly, providing support to our member institutions, and cooperating across institutional lines to ensure that the Utah academic community has access to the resources and services that it needs to teach and learn online. We encourage campus leaders and partners to consider the recommendations and examples of our peer institutions and professional organizations on the issue of library building closures.