University Libraries Publications and Scholarship

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No holds: How the MSU Libraries website team made telework work

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Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

In this presentation...

- How we transitioned to remote work

- What we were able to accomplish working remotely

- Why we were able to accomplish it

- The differences we noticed from on-premise work

- Recommendations

This is not…

- A rehash of what you already know about remote work

- Advocacy for remote work for everyone

- A political screed

- Necessarily tied to COVID-19

It's intended to be…

- An overview of our own experiences

- A discussion of our processes and outcomes

- Recommendations based on the above

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Transitioning to remote work

How it happened

- We finished work one Friday in March 2020...

- Went home...

- The library closed...

- The next Monday, we turned on computers at home and got back to work.

That's basically it.

Transitioning back to the office

How it happened

- *MSU* terminated all COVID-related telework agreements effective *May* 17.

- We came back to work on *May* 17, turned on our work computers, and got back to work.

That's basically it.

Accomplishments

Launch of MSU Libraries website

- Completed user research virtually

- Communicated with each department to make sure their needs were met

- Launch the new site!

- Monitor the usage and quickly address issues

Launch of Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library website

- Migrated website from WordPress to Drupal

- Learned lessons about working with others remotely

Migration to new IR platform

- In Fall 2020, we acquired Digital Commons to replace our DSpace instance

- Created a migration plan and began migrating content

Migration to LibAnswers for helpdesks

- *Moved from mixture of Jira Service Desk and an old homegrown helpdesk

- *Migrated ourselves first, then 8 other departments/working groups

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Migration of ArchivesSpace to hosted

- *Moved from self-hosted ArchivesSpace to version hosted by LibraryHost

- Worked with Special Collections departments to migrate over 60,000 records

Hire of new Web Developer

- We had had an open position for a while pre-COVID

- Hired student assistant Josh Tucker in December 2020

Other accomplishments

- Gained a lot of perspective on accessibility, technology, and work

  - Time to not just work, but plan

  - Became more *proactive* (as opposed to *reactive*)

- Implemented documentation standards (Vue.js)

- Began work on web content standards for creators

- Developed "standard" technology stack for new projects

- Compiled list/schedule of regularly recurring tasks

- Began research and work on component/pattern library

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How we did it

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Infrastructure

- Mix of hardware

  - Ability to remotely access work computers

- Mix of Internet connectivity

- Virtual private network

- Personnel on-site

Infrastructure

- Atlassian suite (Jira, Bitbucket, Confluence)

- LibAnswers & LibGuides

- Microsoft Office 365 (Outlook, Teams, OneDrive)

Physical space

- Each customized their space as they were able

- First order of business: Better chairs!

Communication and reporting

- We already documented our work – we just intensified and clarified this documentation into a weekly log

- Changed and documented how we evaluated student assistants

- Frequent text chats, Monday/Friday video/audio meetings

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Other factors

- Who we are as people

  - (it's not for everyone)

Who we are

Julie:

- Almost 15 years at MSU Libraries

- Married to a colleague

- 2 kids (9 and 3 at the time)

- Former (terrible) freelancer

- Extreme introvert

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Who we are

Troy:

- New Hampshire transplant

- Married to an English professor

- Musician who has a hard time sitting in a room with instruments and not playing!

Who we are

Brock:

- 3 years at MSU Libraries
- 2 Dogs (Meeko – left, Jetta – right)
- Previous experience with remote dev work

Brock Balducci via Facebook

Who we are

Josh:

- Student worker to Developer

- Easily Distracted

- Introvert

Consequences

Communication

- Limited frequency and type...but more meaningful

- "Water cooler conversations" and collaboration still happened (via Teams)

- Scheduled, structured time to receive feedback and work together on projects

Health

- Mental

- Physical

- Financial

Mental health

- Overall: Great!

- *More physically comfortable*

- Fewer interruptions, better concentration

- Feeling of being in control of routine

- Work became a more comfortable, enjoyable, accessible experience

Mental health

- Negatives:

  - COVID, obviously

  - Stir-craziness

  - Competing demands (kids etc.)

  - Perceptions (or perceived perceptions) from others

Physical health

- *More exercise

- Better diet

- Better sleep

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Financial health

- Saved money on commute, takeout, other expenses

Recommendations

Should libraries offer remote work?

…Why?

- It helps combat "brain drain"

- It might make work more accessible

- It provides opportunities to re-engineer library space

- It might make management easier

- It might make hiring easier

How do we do it?

- Begin by assuming good faith

- Focus on "gateways," not barriers

- Don't assume it's "crisis only"

- Don't wait until the next crisis – plan for remote work *now*

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How do we do it?

- Set *clear* expectations (and boundaries)

- Don't force people either way

- Self-discipline and time management absolutely required

  - Don't micromanage

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Can we do it?

No Holds

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Julie D. Shedd, Troy DeRego, Brock Balducci, & Josh Tucker

Thank you!

- **Find us:** https://www.library.msstate.edu/departments/digital-initiatives-and-web-services

- **Slides and related files:** https://scholarsjunction.msstate.edu/ul-publications/37

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