

## **Student Voice in Administrative Decision-Making: Inclusive Planning during the Pandemic**

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### **Abstract**

The University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) Library began planning for the Fall 2020 semester knowing that COVID-19 and social unrest stemming from police actions across the country would impact library safety for the university community. The goal for reopening was to implement best practices that incorporated University health and safety guidelines as well as student feedback. A task force conducted 12 focus group sessions between June 18-26, 2020, in which 56 university students participated. Students identified physical distancing, personal protective equipment (PPE), and monitoring compliance in the library as primary concerns. The campus libraries made extensive changes to its facilities, access to materials and services, and conduct policies to address these issues. This paper will benefit library leaders and administrators making tough and unprecedented time-sensitive decisions using evidence-based data from stakeholders.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, pandemic, student focus groups, evidence-based decision making, academic libraries reopening

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### **Introduction**

The University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) library closed its Chicago campus libraries to patrons and staff on March 29, 2020, as mandated by the governor. While the buildings were closed, the library maintained normal service hours for online reference, research consultations, instruction, digital interlibrary loan, and the university community had full access to licensed electronic journals and databases and digital collections owned by the library. In early spring, COVID-19 and social unrest stemming from police actions across the country were two dominant issues for UIC, as library staff grappled with plans to reopen safe workspaces for employees and public spaces for the university community. The UIC's provost expected the Library to open for the Fall 2020 semester when students returned to live on campus and some in-person courses were scheduled.

The planning environment was far from stable. The state was emerging from a total lockdown, with frequent changes in target dates and levels of restrictions. The University disseminated mandatory, campus-wide guidelines for laboratories, classrooms, offices, and meeting spaces. However, there were many questions about the use of library space which is different from other classroom and gathering spaces on the campus. Emerging campus-wide guidelines did not address all aspects of the kind of access and services that the libraries provide (24 hour operations, meeting rooms, social spaces, and instruction). The timeline was short and made more difficult by changing directives from the state government. The library had less than three months to submit a plan that would meet campus mandates, reconfigure physical spaces, order and receive personal protective equipment, develop new guidelines for patron behavior, create a communications plan, and orient staff to new conduct and health safety expectations of patrons.

The goal for reopening was to implement best practices that incorporated University health and safety guidelines. The University Library set new expectations for patrons (e.g., social distancing, wearing masks, and cleaning library tables before and after use). New conduct and facilities use expectations were established that were, in some cases, significant departures from past practices (particularly food policies and group study). Of all the components of planning for reopening, effective communication and fair monitoring of patron behavior were of foremost concern to library staff. It was critical that the health safety expectations be conveyed clearly and applied uniformly and that staff were able to enforce them during all open hours. Because of these sweeping changes within the building and the sensitivity to anti-police sentiment across the country and specifically impacting communities in [City], the library was concerned about the perception of close monitoring and the possibility of bias in enforcement of the new policies. It was important to gather student ideas about adherence to the guidelines that would help them to feel welcome, safe, and comfortable returning to the library. Library administration decided that data collected from a student focus group would help gauge the feelings and concerns about returning to campus.

Since the University Library had very limited time to prepare for reopening, library administration and the library assessment coordinator planned to complete focus group interviews with students and share the findings with stakeholders within a month. Patron-facing service departments such as Access Services were recruited for their assistance in conducting the series of focus groups. The overall project timeline was June 8 to July 8, 2020 (Table 1). The goal of this paper is to demonstrate how leaders and library administration at one public research university used evidence-based data to make short turnaround decisions in unprecedented situations, consulting with those affected who experience the most vulnerability due to the circumstances.

Table 1. Overall Project Timeline (June 8- July 8, 2020):

Tasks	Date	Who
<b>Planning</b>	June 9, 2020	Assessment Coordinator / Associate Dean
Recruiting volunteers	June 9, 2020	Assessment Coordinator / Associate Dean
Recruitment message	June 9, 2020	Assessment Coordinator / Associate Dean
Recruitment graphics/posting via social media	June 11-12, 2020	Director of Marketing/Graduate Assistant
Sign up Form (Appendix 1)	June 11, 2020	Assessment Coordinator
Interview questions (Appendix 2)	June 15, 2020	Assessment Coordinator / Associate Dean
Presentation slides for interviews	June 16, 2020	Assessment Coordinator / Associate Dean
Feedback form	June 18, 2020	Head of Access Services/ Assessment Coordinator
Scheduling	June 12-June 18, 2020	Assessment Coordinator
Notes template	June 18, 2020	Assessment Coordinator
Meetings: discussions on scheduling, interview questions, roles, data analysis, etc.	June 8; June 11; June 12; June 15; June 19; June 26; July 2, 2020	Task Force Team
<b>Focus group interviews</b>		
Before interviews		
Sent out interview questions	June 17-June 25, 2020	Assessment Coordinator
During interviews		
Leading focus groups	June 18-June 26, 2020	Assessment Coordinator /Head of Access Services
Taking notes	June 18-June 26, 2020	Task Force Team
After interviews		
Send out gift cards to participants	June 18-June 26, 2020	Associate Dean

Uploading recorded files	June 18-June 26, 2020	Associate Dean /Head of Access Services/ Assessment Coordinator
Storing notes in Box	June 18-June 26, 2020	Associate Dean /Head of Access Services/ Assessment Coordinator
Updating attendees & rescheduling for students who missed the focus groups	June 18- June 25, 2020	Assessment Coordinator
<b>Data analysis</b>		
Consolidate all of the notes in one Excel file	June 22-26, 2020	Assessment Coordinator
Provide data analysis instructions	June 26, 2020	Assessment Coordinator
Data analysis (Coding)	June 26-30, 2020	Task Force Team
Verify codes	June 30, 2020	Assessment Coordinator
Finalize codes	July 2, 2020	Task Force Team
<b>Writing Report/Presentation</b>		
Develop a full report: Purpose, methods, findings, implementations	June 21-July 5, 2020	Assessment Coordinator
Create presentation slides	June 26- July 6, 2020	Assessment Coordinator
Review a draft report	July 1- July 7, 2020	Task Force Team
<b>Disseminating a final report</b>		
Present the findings to Steering Committee and All Library Staff during University Library Town Hall	July 1; July 8	Assessment Coordinator
Library news and all staff	On the week of July 13, 2020	Assessment Coordinator / Associate Dean

## Literature review

### *National Scope of Reopening Universities during COVID-19*

The unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic put leaders in higher education and academic libraries in a situation where they faced challenging decisions on when and how to safely operate and reopen campus spaces to the community. The fluidity of the situation necessitated swift changes in decisions as well as making decisions that would affect short-range practices and possibly long-term operations. Information from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* shows individual colleges' plans across the United States, and findings from the reports indicate that among 3,000 colleges, about 1,000 colleges are primarily online, followed by primarily in person ( $n=681$ ), hybrid ( $n=622$ ), fully online ( $n=301$ ), fully in person ( $n=114$ ), and undetermined ( $n=86$ ) (Chronicle, 2020 September 25). UIC is among the 34% of colleges that are primarily online. Only 10 undergraduate first-year seminars were scheduled to meet in-person or hybrid for Fall 2020, representing about 33,518 number of on-campus students (UIC Today, 2020 August 15).

Library associations and academic libraries created plans to guide preparations for reopening libraries to operate during the pandemic. For example, the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) published “Pandemic Resources for Academic Libraries: Preparing to Reopen” to assist colleges and universities with strategies, providing information on how other institutions are operating during the pandemic (ACRL, 2020 September 29). Benchmarking how other academic libraries plan to reopen is one way for leaders and library administrators to create a framework for planning, but leaders need to prioritize their own institution’s needs, resources, and community culture for decision-making.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC, 2020 September 21) announced via its website its plan to move all undergraduate instruction to remote learning on August 17, 2020. In the plan report, the university referenced the guiding values of the University Library, including the core mission to “maintain excellence,” and a commitment to “[s]afeguard health and safety in the unique library environment,” and “[b]e innovative.” They appended a list of assumptions that anticipate the need for flexibility and specifically state that “Re-entry will be a dynamic, incremental and non-linear process.” They go on to state “We will modify our approach as conditions change and as new information becomes available. It may be possible to expand services, or it may be necessary to revisit prior decisions in order to protect health and safety” (UNC, 2020, p.9). Another example from University of Akron, demonstrates how they formed a “Reopening Project Team” charged with developing a reopening plan “establishing protocols to maintain safe and clean physical library spaces for library employees and users” (p.3). Their report highlighted that “strict adherence to protocols in this reopening plan is required so we can collectively work toward COVID-19 mitigation efforts.” Similarly, the City University of New York (CUNY) libraries formed a COVID-19 Task Force to identify issues and challenges of reopening library spaces, recommend best practices, and take into consideration procurement and funding of equipment and software to support online courses (New York City College of Technology, 2020 June 30). While various library reopening plans are available on websites, missing is the information on how leaders and library administrators made their decisions and how they have used evidence-based data for their decision-making.

### *Civil Unrest*

Following the May 25, 2020 killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, what started out as peaceful protests gave way to violence throughout the state of Illinois. Governor J. B. Pritzker declared seven counties “disaster” zones. In the first weekend alone, 375 members of the National Guard were activated in the city of Chicago at the request of Pritzker. This civil unrest continued throughout Summer 2020, and represented the culmination of years of frustration at unaddressed complaints to law enforcement about the use of excessive force, racial profiling, and other abuses of power (Chicago Tribune, 2020 June 1).

The health crisis presented by COVID-19 and the social climate crisis presented by civil unrest laid bare the continued disproportionate suffering caused to communities of color (Krieger, 2020) and led student organizations to draft a letter of demands for UIC “to respond to the broader anti-Black violence and racism ravaging our country, which also specifically afflicts UIC’s Black students and students of color.” The letter was submitted to the university president, the board of trustees, chancellors, and the provost in June 2020 (UIC, 2020 June 8). The

University Library acknowledged the broader cultural climate during which the pandemic occurred and as part of the plan, committed to addressing general health concerns and safety concerns of students navigating their return to classes in the Fall 2020.

### ***Campus Context***

From the end of spring semester in early May 2020, campus leadership attempted to predict the public health conditions that would prevail for the fall semester. It was clear that many of the health safety measures instituted during the summer semester would have to remain in force: limited number of people on campus, physical distancing, readily-available PPE (masks and sanitizing supplies), limitations to group sizes, and increased cleaning and sanitizing inside campus buildings and vehicles.

The UIC administration struggled to balance community safety and the most effective method for instruction and learning. Digital and economic inequities that could impact student success were exposed during the abrupt closing of the campus in late March 2020. Eighty seven percent of students commute to campus and 18% are first-generation students. Also, 32% of students are Pell Grant-eligible as of Spring 2020 (UIC Office of Institutional Research, 2020 January). Many students do not have computers at home; they depend on using computers in the library or campus computer labs. Access to reliable internet connections is frequently poor or non-existent. Distraction-free study space is scarce in some living situations. The “normal” university setting helps students overcome many of these challenges, especially in the library with computers, up-to-date software, printers, high-speed internet, and quiet and collaborative study spaces. The University administration ultimately decided that most classes would be online during fall semester. Nonetheless, the provost was committed to making library resources available: she asked that the buildings be open as many hours per day as possible and that all floors of the buildings be accessible.

Top-down decision-making appeared to be what was driving planning across the country. However, the UIC Library was committed to collecting and incorporating feedback from students to develop the plan to implement health and safety guidelines. Library administration decided the fastest way to learn about students’ concerns would be to invite their participation in focus groups. It took a month to plan, conduct focus group interviews, and disseminate the findings to various stakeholders. This inclusive approach can benefit academic library administrations that need to make urgent decisions using evidence-based information.

### **Methods**

The Library’s reopening plans used a qualitative approach with focus group interviews that would help leadership more deeply understand students’ perceptions of safety and health concerns. The goal was to establish and promote a new norm co-created by the library and the community. In order to accomplish this, library administration assembled a task force including the assessment coordinator and staff in leadership positions from patron-facing service departments. Given that these findings are not generalizable--the primary focus is to collect the feedback from students and use that information for improvement and decision-making--the University Institutional Research Board approval was not required.

### ***Recruitment (June 12-June 18, 2020)***

A recruitment call for focus group participants was posted on social media and the library website on June 12, 2020. In addition, the message was sent to an internal library communication forum so that staff could encourage participation by students in instruction sessions or student employees. In the recruitment call, UIC students (undergraduate, graduate, and professional) who used either the Richard J. Daley Library or the Library of the Health Sciences Chicago were eligible to participate in online focus group discussions. Any UIC students who completed the sign-up form and included their availability and contact information were invited to a focus group session (Appendix 1) and offered a \$20 gift card as an incentive if they completed the interview. Due to a high volume of interest, the task force filled all available focus group sessions by June 18. A total of 12 focus group sessions were conducted between June 18 and June 26, 2020.

### ***Interview Questions (June 15, 2020)***

Library administration and the assessment coordinator met to discuss the interviews and asked the task force team to review proposed questions for clarity and to ensure that discussion would yield robust and meaningful feedback aligned with the reopening goals. Additionally, the authors also received feedback from the head of the library's Research Services and Resources Department, who recommended including the last interview question: "How can UIC library users build community support to encourage patrons to comply with the safety guidelines?" The complete list of interview questions is available in Appendix 2.

### ***Interview Procedures (June 18-June 26, 2020)***

#### ***Prior to conducting each focus group***

The assessment coordinator sent an email to each participant with their interview date and time, and requesting their confirmation. A set of interview questions was also provided in order to allow participants to think over the questions in advance (Appendix 2). Given the limited time, the assessment coordinator, experienced in analyzing qualitative data, came up with a collaborative approach for data collection. A template was developed to capture key messages from the notes by using a spreadsheet that included the date, the name of each note taker per session, and interview questions. To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the notes, all members of the task force present at the interview had to take notes. Prior to the first interview, the assessment coordinator explained to the task force how to take notes in the spreadsheet.

#### ***During focus group interview sessions***

At the beginning of each session, the interviewer shared the purpose of the focus group and how the feedback would be used. Also, participants were informed that their personal information would not be saved and would remain confidential. All focus groups were recorded via Zoom. The purpose of recording was to capture all feedback and was used only to clarify confusing or missing information not captured in the notes. The method and rationale for recording information was shared with focus group participants during the session.



*After focus group interviews*

Students who participated in the focus group received a \$20 gift card via their UIC email address. They were provided with a feedback form in case they had additional input they wished to share. All task force members who attended the interview sessions were required to complete their notes in the spreadsheet.

*Data analysis*

After completion of the interviews, the assessment coordinator provided training on how to code the notes using thematic analysis, interpreting the patterns of the meaning in the qualitative data (Table 2). All notes were reviewed by the members listed above. Each member was assigned to analyze the qualitative data from one question. They reviewed and consolidated the notes, then coded the notes by following the instructions. To verify the accuracy and reliability of the codes, the assessment coordinator, who attended all 12 focus group sessions, reviewed all of the codes, and condensed them where necessary. Also, all members met again to discuss and finalize the codes.

Table 2. Examples of Coding for Question 1 “what are your safety concerns about being in the library when it reopens to the UIC community this fall semester?”

Themes	Codes	Frequencies
<b>Physical distancing</b>	stairwells	3
	tables 2nd floor	2
	tables 3 and 4th floor	4
	IDEA commons	3
	between east and west doors	1
	between people	1
	overall	8
	accessing computers and printers	4
<b>Cleaning spaces and equipment</b>	spaces	3
	keyboard	2
	doorknob	1
	elevator	3
	tables and desks	3
	overall	3
	enough sanitizing wipes?	3
	materials (markers and books)	2
	ventilation	2
	frequency of cleaning	2
<b>Users' behavior</b>	coughing around me	1
	taking off masks after entering the library	3
	being complacent and relaxing about sanitizing workspace	2
	students who do not comply with rules	4
	uncertain about students using sanitizers	2
<b>Contagion</b>	contact tracing	3
	being infected	1

## Results

### *Participants*

A total of 123 prospective participants accessed the sign-up form; 82 met the eligibility requirements to participate and were invited to join a focus group based on their availability. Among those eligible, 56 participated in the 12 focus groups that were scheduled between June 18 and June 26, 2020. The participants were from 11 colleges. Specifically, more than half of the respondents (n=39) were from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; 16% (n=9) from the College of Engineering; 7% (n=4) from the School of Public Health. Other colleges included Business Administration, Pharmacy, Dentistry, Education, Applied Health Sciences, Urban Planning and Public Affairs, and the Graduate College (Table 3). Eighty-nine percent of the

participants primarily used Daley Library. Seventy percent of the participants were undergraduate students (n=35); 21% graduate students (n=12); and 9% health professional students (n=6).

Table 3. Focus Group Sessions/date/attendance and College

Focus Group	Date	Attendance	College
1	2-3, Thursday, June 18	6	Liberal Arts and Sciences, Business Administration, Graduate College, Engineering, Dentistry
2	9-10, Friday, June 19	7	Liberal Arts and Sciences, Education, Public Health, Dentistry
3	11-12, Friday, June 19	10	Liberal Arts and Sciences, Urban Planning and Public Affairs, Engineering, Pharmacy
4	11-12, Monday, June 22	4	Liberal Arts and Sciences and Business Administration
5	2-3, Monday, June 22	5	Engineering and Liberal Arts and Sciences
6	3-4, Monday, June 22	6	Liberal Arts and Sciences and Business Administration
7	9-10, Tuesday, June 23	1	Applied Health Science
8	10-11, Tuesday, June 23	4	Liberal Arts and Sciences and Public health
9	11-12, Tuesday, June 23	6	Public Health, Computer Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences, Business Administration and Urban Planning and Public Affair
10	1-2, Wednesday, June 24	4	Liberal Arts and Sciences, Computer Science
11	1-2, Thursday, June 25	2	Dentistry and Public Health
12	9-10, Friday, June 26	1	Dentistry
<b>Total</b>		<b>56</b>	

### *Safety concerns about being in the Library*

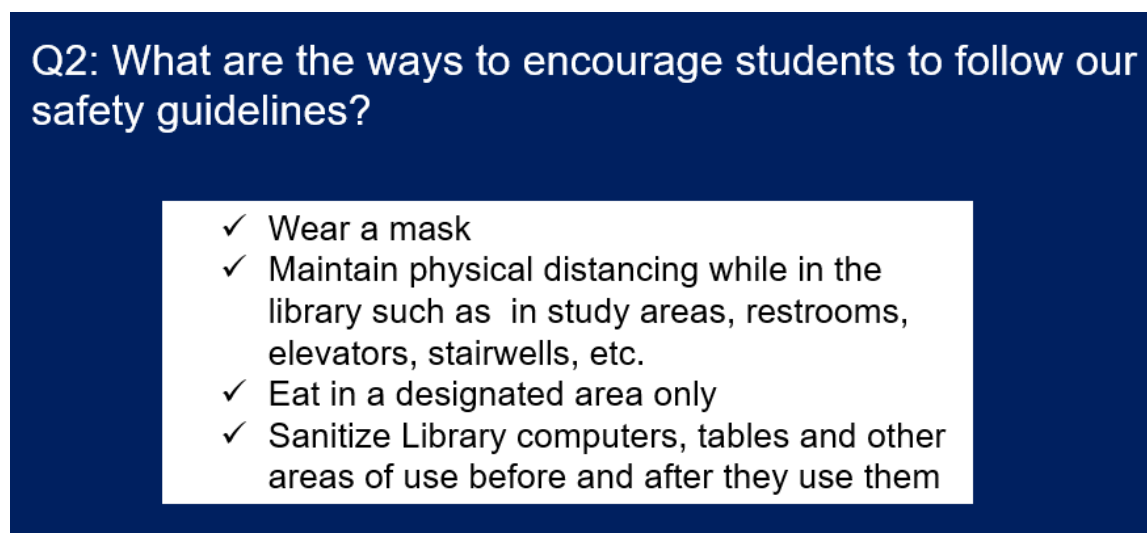
The top safety concern expressed by the participants in all of the focus groups was how physical distancing could be possible in the library. The participants commented that in general the Daley Library is very crowded, and it is sometimes hard to find seats especially during midterms and

finals. Also, tables and desks are close together on the Daley's three main study floors. Regardless of the library location used, participants reported that they were worried about social distancing in elevators and stairwells, and when accessing computers and printers. Another primary safety concern was how spaces and equipment would be cleaned, specifically elevators, tables, desks, materials (white boards, markers, and books), and door handles. Participants reported concern about whether the library would have enough sanitation stations and sufficient supplies of sanitizing wipes and sanitizers, and about the frequency of cleaning. They also questioned the adequacy of ventilation systems in library buildings. Some participants also expressed concern about other users' behaviors: users not complying with rules, not knowing whether other users have taken precautions for health safety, users taking off masks or coughing around others, and users becoming complacent and relaxing safety behaviors. Some participants wondered whether the library would keep track of who is using what equipment or furniture. Participants expressed they would understand if the library required them to swipe university ID cards to gain building access and sign-in when entering (name and contact information), used surveillance through building and computer cameras, tracked IDs of non-compliant users, and required wristbands for exemptions to any of the health safety guidelines.

### *Ways to encourage users to follow our safety guidelines*

Participants were asked to share their ideas about how the University Library would implement health safety guidelines.

*Figure 1. New Expectations for Library Conduct*



For masks, most participants strongly suggested that wearing masks should be mandatory. Also, they expressed that library staff should wear masks at all times to show by example the importance of this prevention measure. Some participants proposed that masks should be provided at the entrance. A few participants suggested that the library should sell masks. Regarding sanitation and cleaning, the majority of the students wanted the library to supply sufficient sanitizers and cleaning materials and place these materials in additional locations for easier access. Some participants suggested providing sanitizing wipes at the building entrance

and in bathrooms. In terms of physical distancing, students suggested setting tables six feet apart and removing extra furniture. Also, they proposed adding directional floor markers for one-way aisles in book stacks and congested areas like the lobby, as well as markers showing proper distancing in queues. Participants suggested that library staff should monitor high-traffic and congregation areas such as stairwells. They also suggested placing highly-visible standing signs outlining the new expectations for conduct at entrances, in bathrooms, elevators, and stairwells. Some suggested that clear and obvious signs should be placed on every table.

### ***Ways to approach users who are not following the guidelines***

Many participants expressed that they wanted users who are not following expectations to be gently reminded of safety requirements with verbal warnings. But they also wanted them to be required to leave the library after two to three warnings. Regarding who should approach those users who are not following the expectations, participants preferred either trained student monitors (hired, not volunteers) or library staff over security guards. The participants did, however, suggest having security guards approach non-compliant users who would be asked to leave the library. Some participants suggested tracking the IDs of non-compliant students.

Most participants preferred to be monitored by library staff or students hired and trained specifically for this purpose. They expressed a strong preference for someone in authority to do the monitoring, with library staff being the top choice and security guards being a “last resort.” They also expressed preference for being monitored by their peers, but also acknowledged that peer monitors do not carry the authority of library staff or security guards. Some expressed that security guards could be intimidating and indicated that this was sometimes advantageous, but also not desirable. When asked about observing someone breaking the rules, half of the participants indicated that they want instructions on how to handle that situation. The rest expressed that they would not approach or would move away from that situation.

### ***Security guards monitoring compliance with safety guidelines in the library***

Participants were specifically asked how they felt about having security guards monitoring compliance with safety guidelines in the library. Contracted security at the library has always been a partnership that has emphasized community and taken a gentle approach to addressing conduct issues in the building in an effort to ensure the comfort and safety of all patrons. However, the opinions were equally split. Half of the participants were strongly against having security guards in the library: they argued that guards are intimidating, aggressive, and make students uncomfortable. They also expressed that there should not be policing in the library at this time. The other half felt that security guards were acceptable with some conditions, saying they were in favor of having security guards as a “last resort,” “not all the time,” or “when there are crowds.” Some participants also agreed to have security guards do the monitoring work if the guards made students feel comfortable and the guards were already working for the library. For those participants who expressed a strong preference for staff to monitor compliance, the desire was for full time library staff, followed by student employees or Student Patrol (students trained by campus police who monitor campus building activity). Although they preferred library staff handle non-compliance, they felt security could be effective if it was necessary to evict patrons. Some participants also suggested having volunteers or creating an incentive program to bring in

outside monitors. They further suggested that 1) security guard uniforms should not be intimidating; 2) those monitoring should be trained on how to approach students, to be calm and part of the solution, and 3) those monitoring should wear badges or other forms of ID so that they can be clearly identified as people in authority to whom students could bring concerns.

### ***Ways to create an ongoing health safety community at UIC***

The participants were asked to provide ways UIC can establish an ongoing health safety community beyond the University Library. Many participants emphasized the importance of communication through signage, posters, emails, text, flyers, video, and social media. Examples included:

1. Clear instruction regarding reopening plans
2. Reminders for complying with the health safety guidelines (social distancing and wearing masks)
3. Data that shows the impact of social distancing and masks on reducing contagion
4. Positive reinforcement surrounding compliance with the new norms

In addition to communication, many participants wanted to have standard expectations and abundant PPE readily available across the UIC campus. Also, some indicated that they wanted options for either replacing masks or having masks provided for students who do not have them. Some proposed ideas on educating the campus community on facts, statistics, data, and preventative measures related to COVID-19.

### ***Student plans to use the library during fall semester***

In most of the focus groups, the facilitators asked an unscripted question about whether the students were planning to return to the libraries. While many students replied they would use the library, their responses were conditional. Students who said yes and set some conditions were in the majority: they expressed that they may spend less time in the library, depending on the safety measures in place and whether other patrons followed safety guidelines. Some said they would wait and see. Most of the respondents who were specifically Library of the Health Sciences Chicago users said they would absolutely use the library without conditions.

### **Discussion and Implementation**

The library aimed to gather students' feedback using focus group interviews in order to understand students' concerns about safety and health, and use those findings for its reopening plans. The assessment coordinator presented the preliminary findings during a Library Steering Committee (a group of policy-making department managers) meeting (July 1, 2020) and during the University Library Town Hall (library leadership meeting with all library employees to provide an update and discuss the current issues) meeting (July 8, 2020). A final report was shared with all library staff as well as with a campus committee focused on Fall 2020 instruction and other academic issues the week of July 13, 2020.

Library administration was already in the process of planning the building reopening according to campus guidelines and was able to gather more information from the focus groups and other

stakeholders to guide the decision-making process. While the campus mandates and student health and safety concerns were in agreement, student feedback brought to light the importance of considering their perspective as the library enforced guidelines. In addition to the pandemic conditions, students were experiencing increased anxiety for personal safety related to recent civil unrest. To address all issues, the library's preparations included the measures described below.

### ***Form reopening libraries working groups***

A call for staff volunteers for reopening libraries working groups was announced via the library staff lists on July 14, 2020. Twelve working groups were formed: Space Reservations, Building Hours, Communication and Messaging, Signage, Closing The Buildings to Staff, Closing The Buildings to Patrons, Equity Impacts of Decisions, Monitoring Compliance with Health Safety Guidelines, Current Awareness, Accessibility, Scope of Access Services, and Preparing Staff Spaces. Most of these would refer to the focus group responses for their planning.

### ***Address space concerns through a reservation system***

The library already knew it needed to address some of the space issues that students raised during the focus groups. The Daley Library has approximately 1,500 seats and during a regular semester is typically filled to capacity with a high-traffic lobby area and a second floor designated for collaborative learning. At times the library has been so full that students sit on the floor when chairs are not available. The campus Environmental Health and Safety Office had already communicated its requirements for re-opening, including reducing occupancy levels to 35% (about 540 seats), removing soft seating, and distancing the remaining furniture. In addition, furniture in high-traffic areas was removed to address student concerns about needless congregating.

The library determined that an online reservation system would be an effective way to ensure appropriate occupancy levels and physical distancing, and such a system could provide information about who occupied which spaces for contact tracing. The library already used a reservation system to book group study rooms, and a product from the same vendor could be implemented for booking individual seats throughout the building. Each of the 540 seats was described (for example, "table with Mac computer", or "carrel with high dividers") and entered into the system as a reservable resource. Students could book their reservation based on their service needs: computers, regular table seating, printers, and circulation services.

Some focus groups suggested time limits for studying in the library, concerned that there would not be enough space to accommodate everybody. As a result, the initial booking limit was for four hours (in post-opening surveys, students requested more time in the library, and booking limits were later increased to eight hours after capacity was demonstrated to not be an issue). The reservation system rendered the book stacks mostly inaccessible to casual browsing, since patrons were limited to using the exact seat they booked. By limiting patron movement around the building, the library addressed the focus group concern about congestion in the aisles. Other changes in library space included reduced capacity for elevators and closing group study rooms, the computer lab, and conference rooms. To further help with contact tracing, the library

changed the entrance access to a single door requiring university ID swipe access. The single door would also then serve as a checkpoint where staff could verify the campus-required health check as well as confirm and assist students with booking reservations.

### ***Order and deploy PPE and cleaning services***

The university centralized procurement of masks, gloves, hand sanitizer and sanitizing wipes for all campus units. Keeping in mind student concerns about the availability and sufficiency of supplies, the library submitted orders to the campus in amounts estimated to provision more than the anticipated number of patrons in the building. In addition to ordering PPE through the campus, the library submitted orders independently for additional sanitizing wipes dispensers and wipes designed for the dispensers. Hand sanitizer and wipe dispensers were placed in all public areas by personnel from central campus, and the library supplemented these by placing additional sanitizing stations throughout the building. As part of the new library expectations, students were instructed to clean the areas where they were seated before and after use.

The university centralized purchase of plexiglass sheets, and several weeks prior to the start of fall semester, installed barriers at all public service desks at the library including circulation, reference and reception counters. Central facilities management instituted a third shift of building services workers to deep clean high traffic areas during closed hours. More important for patrons' sense of well-being were the daytime building services workers who could be seen wiping tables and chairs, restrooms, water bottle filling stations and other high-touch areas such as door handles.

### ***Assign staff and train compliance monitors***

The monitoring compliance working group primarily used the findings from the focus group interviews to develop a plan for who would monitor patron behaviors in the library and how to approach patrons who are not following the new norms. It was decided that a "Wellness Ambassador" should be assigned to each floor to monitor compliance, with an additional monitor placed on the first floor to assist with intake. The duties of the Wellness Ambassador were to walk the floor, observe and address patron non-compliance, and serve as a resource for questions or concerns. A wide variety of ideas was put forth as to who would perform these duties, but one thing the focus groups emphasized was that there needed to be specific bias and de-escalation training for anyone who would be interacting with patrons.

The working group called for volunteers from the staff to fulfill the Wellness Ambassador role, but due to the limited number of employees available, the working group also decided to have the Library's existing nighttime security service extend their hours to work during the days. In addition, all staff in the Access Services department were assigned Wellness Ambassador duties. The combination of library staff and security satisfied the desire to have persons of visible authority doing the monitoring in the Library.

General health safety training was made available across campus, but instruction for staff monitoring compliance was not addressed. The library's monitoring compliance working group developed training materials that focused on introducing expectations for health safety in the



library as well as the role and responsibilities of the Wellness Ambassadors. The training provided reflection on bias, example scripts for various scenarios (i.e., when a patron is wearing a mask improperly), and what to do about non-compliance. For library staff who missed the training or who might be interested in the procedures, all training sessions were recorded. Also, recorded training was shared with contracted library security to ensure a consistent approach to patrons.

### ***Communicate***

Students wanted to know in advance what the expectations for using the library would be during the fall 2020 semester. The library sent an email to the university community (students, faculty, and staff) the week prior to the start of classes, anticipating that this would be the time that most recipients would be focused on reading their university-related emails. The email contained information about new library hours, how to book a seat, and the new health and safety guidelines, including the campus-wide mandate for university community members to complete a *COVID-19 Self-monitoring Survey* wellness screening (health check) prior to coming to campus. This wellness screening consisted of a temperature check and a self-screen as to whether an individual had any symptoms or had come into contact with anyone with symptoms. In addition to the email, this information was posted to the library website and promoted through social media (Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook).

Communication was continual, given the constantly changing situation. It was necessary to reinforce the new protocols as well as clarify using the seat reservation system. All messages were sent through the library homepage, an FAQ page, and social media updates. Signage was an integral part of the communication plan. A banner was prominently displayed in a plaza at the center of the campus. The banner announced that the library was open and provided both a QR code and a simple URL that students could access quickly and easily using their mobile device to reserve their seats. Similar QR codes were used at the entry door of the library so that students could book their reservations and access their “daily pass” which verified they had completed the wellness screening.

Due to the sheer amount of information that needed to be conveyed, the library used simple infographics to make expectations clear about new policies around health and safety, as well as food and drink in the library. Access to the library was reduced to a single entry point, so external signage on the closed doorways and around the perimeter of the building used arrows to point patrons toward the entrance. At the entrance, patrons were now required to swipe their ID cards to gain access to the building, so signage guiding them to the swipe access was also posted. Highly visible signs were also posted throughout the interior of the building reminding patrons to follow the health and safety expectations, including washing hands, social distancing, and wearing masks. Table 4 summarizes the list of actions in response to student concerns in the Libraries.

Table 4. Actions in Response to Student Concerns in the Libraries

Category	Student concerns	Actions taken
Spaces	Physical distancing Reduced occupancy Reservation system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Campus determined maximum occupancy (<math>\frac{1}{3}</math>)</li> <li>● Removed soft seating and reduced furniture density</li> <li>● Implemented reservation system</li> <li>● Closed of group study rooms, labs, and conference spaces</li> <li>● Single-door entrance</li> <li>● Limited access to campus affiliates</li> </ul>
PPE and Cleaning	Sanitizing Sufficiency and availability of PPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Centralized purchase of PPE (masks, sanitizer, etc.)</li> <li>● Added third shift cleaning staff</li> <li>● Added cleaning stations</li> <li>● Signage instructing patrons to sanitize their study areas</li> </ul>
Staffing and training for monitoring compliance	Friendly but firm monitors Non-intimidating security guards Bias and de-escalation training for monitors Repercussions for non-compliant patrons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Assigned “Wellness Ambassadors” to each floor.</li> <li>● Developed and deployed bias and procedural training to all ambassadors, including contracted security.</li> <li>● Implemented a process to handle non-compliance.</li> </ul>
Communication	Concerns for how expectations would be shared	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Multiple channels for information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ mass emails</li> <li>○ social media</li> <li>○ internal and external signage</li> <li>○ website news banner and information pages</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Conclusion

In spite of a pressured timeline leading up to the fall 2020 reopening, library administration recognized the importance of consulting with stakeholders. Significant effort was made to conduct student focus groups during this compressed planning period. Students in the focus groups expressed their appreciation: it was important to them that they had been invited to share their opinions and ideas, and they were eager to provide feedback in conversations with library decision-makers. The library administration learned that students had concerns about health

safety similar to theirs and that physical space and supply preparations already underway in the building corresponded with the students' suggestions. The student focus group responses strengthened the library's commitment to enforcing health safety guidelines and contributed to important decisions on how to monitor and maintain compliance with new protocols in ways that would be acceptable to patrons.

In the focus group sessions, many students said they would use the library during the fall semester provided that certain conditions were fulfilled. The majority said they would spend less time in the library and that their usage would depend on the safety measures in place--and ultimately, whether other library patrons were following safety guidelines. Many said they would wait and see. Overall, they were encouraged to return to the library if their needs were met. We followed up with library patrons throughout the fall semester to assess their experience and continue to solicit feedback through surveys. Preliminary findings from patron surveys indicated overwhelmingly across multiple areas that they were satisfied with the cleanliness of the Library (95%), with the ease of the reservation system (95%), with their experience with library staff (93%), with understanding the expectations (95%), and the feeling of not being at risk (that the space was clean and other patrons were following the guidelines [96%]). These positive results validate the University Library's emphasis on the value of patrons' voices during unprecedented conditions, not only in times of stability. The willingness of leaders in higher education and library administrators to partner with and serve the best interests of their patrons in crisis is more essential than ever to overcome challenges. This is a model that will continue to inform decision-making to ensure the success of students, faculty, and researchers at the university.

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## Appendix 1. Sign Up Form for UIC Students Focus Group about Safety Guidelines

Q1 The UIC Library wants to hear your ideas about protecting students' health in the Library due to COVID-19. Participate in an online focus group discussion for 45 minutes and receive a \$20 gift card. To participate in this project, please complete your availability between June 18 and June 26, 2020 and contact information. A member of the project team will contact you to confirm the date and time and to share the Zoom meeting link for the focus group session. Your conversation will remain confidential, and none of the contact information will be saved. If you have questions about this project, you may contact the Assessment Coordinator.

Q2 Are you a UIC student?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

*Skip To: End of Survey If Are you a UIC student? = No*

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Q3 I mainly use:

☐ Richard J. Daley Library (1)

☐ Library of the Health Science Chicago (2)

☐ None of the above (3)

*Skip To: End of Survey If I mainly use: = None of the above*

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Q4 I am a:

☐ undergraduate student (1)

☐ graduate student (2)

☐ health profession student (3)

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Q5 Please select dates and times you are available to participate in the focus group. Select all that apply.

- ☐ 2:00 - 2:45 pm Thursday June 18 (This time slot is full) (9)
  - ☐ 9:00 - 9:45 am Friday June 19 (This time slot is full) (1)
  - ☐ 11:00 - 11:45 am Friday June 19 (This time slot is full) (2)
  - ☐ 11:00 - 11:45 am Monday June 22 (This time slot is full) (4)
  - ☐ 2:00 - 2:45 pm Monday June 22 (This time slot is full) (6)
  - ☐ 3:00 - 3:45 pm Monday June 22 (7)
  - ☐ 9:00 - 9:45 am Tuesday June 23 (35)
  - ☐ 10:00 - 10:45 am Tuesday June 23 (8)
  - ☐ 11:00 - 11:45 am Tuesday June 23 (10)
  - ☐ 1:00 - 1:45 pm Wednesday June 24 (14)
  - ☐ 1:00 - 1:45 pm Thursday June 25 (21)
  - ☐ 9:00 - 9:45 am Friday June 26 (25)
-

Q6 Please provide your name and contact information. You will be contacted with the final schedule and meeting link for the focus group. After you participate in the focus group, you will receive \$20 on the week of June 29, 2020.

☐ Full Name (1) \_\_\_\_\_

☐ UIC email address (2) \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Phone number (3) \_\_\_\_\_

☐ College (4) \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2. Focus Group Interview Questions

- What are your safety concerns about being in the library when it reopens to the UIC community this fall semester? Can you tell us more about it?
- What are the ways to encourage students follow our safety guidelines?
  - wearing a mask
  - keeping a six-foot distance between anyone else around them - even during group study sessions
  - maintaining physical distancing at the circulation desk, in restrooms, in elevators, in stairwells, etc.
  - not eating except in a designated area
  - sanitizing Library computers and tables before and after they use them
- What do you think is an appropriate way to approach students who are not following the guidelines?
  - Who do you think should be approaching students who are not following the guidelines?
- How would you feel about having security guards monitoring compliance with safety guidelines in the library?
- How can UIC library users build community support to encourage patrons to comply with the safety guidelines?

Thank you everyone for your feedback today. Before we finish the focus group, are there any comments?