

Envisioning our Future: The Pandemic Changed Everything

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Executive Summary

The *Envisioning Our Future* project is a case study of how space supports the ways staff work at Temple University Libraries and University Press. Our intent is to explore how spaces (physical and digital) impact our work, particularly as the organization shifts to a more hybrid work environment. In the fall of 2021, the pandemic and flexible work arrangements led to a high increase of library and press staff working remotely. To explore the changing environment from the perspective of staff, we conducted 28 interviews with staff from 12 departments. The project builds on previous research exploring the questions of how library spaces, primarily physical, support their work as individuals, connecting with colleagues, and working with users.

Many staff working regularly onsite enjoy a special comradery, particularly that which is developed out of a department's shared experience. Working in the same physical space offers opportunities for serendipitous meet ups and informal socializing. Being onsite allows for a direct connection with students and the community using the libraries' physical spaces and resources; it allows for a kind of immediate assistance and communication with patrons that may be harder to accomplish through digital channels.

And yet when onsite, it can be harder to fully participate in online meetings with colleagues. Particularly at the beginning of the pandemic when vaccinations were not available, health and safety concerns contributed to anxiety and frustration for those workers. As was true pre-pandemic, privacy in the open workspaces continues to be problematic, particularly for those doing sensitive work or working with users on the telephone.

Staff working remotely experience many benefits in work productivity. The ability to focus on individual work and control over how the day is structured contribute to this, as well as the flexibility they enjoy. Staff working remotely appreciate their supervisors' trust and respect in providing this opportunity. If the technology is working, staff communications via Zoom and other means are seamless, and in some ways afford improved interactions with colleagues and with users.

As much as staff enjoy the privilege of working remotely, they describe feeling lonely and isolated at times. They describe less interaction with colleagues outside of their immediate department or project team, and less serendipitous connections. Some sense a lack of cohesion across the organization and a growing gap between onsite workers and those working from home, exacerbating what some perceive as an already siloed organization.

Our interviews with staff surfaced strong feelings. For those we interviewed, the last two years have been full of anxiety, anger, and uncertainty. Our new work environment provides opportunities as well as challenges for staff and the organization. We conclude with additional questions and recommendations towards addressing these changing work environments in positive ways to meet the needs of our staff and user communities.

Background

The *Envisioning Our Future* project is a case study of how space supports the ways staff work at Temple University Libraries and University Press. The project had three phases. The first and second phases of the project, conducted in the spring of 2019 and winter of 2020, responded to the Association of Research Libraries' call for assessment projects exploring how library spaces facilitate innovative research, creative thinking and problem solving. We used the opening of the Charles Library in August 2019 as an opportunity to relate these questions to the perspective of staff.

Through semi-structured interviews, we sought to understand these issues:

- How is the physical space, its organization, its technology, impacting how staff work?
 - Consider work as individuals, with colleagues (both in formal and informal ways) and with users
- What are the opportunities in the new spaces?
- What are the challenges?
- What are the ways in which staff are challenged in managing changes in the use of space?
- What are the ways staff feel supported in managing these changes?

Interviews in Phase I were conducted in the spring of 2019, prior to the move. Staff were anticipating a change to quite different kinds of spaces supporting their work and that of users. While the new space supports a high level of technology in meeting spaces, there are no private offices. Most of the print collection is accessible through a robotic storage system, not through browsable shelves. The primary service desk at Charles is designed to support multiple needs including access, reference and technology services. This, too, was a new service model.

We conducted Phase II interviews about six months after the move. Our interest was in exploring how expectations for the changes played out, as both opportunities and challenges. Again, we focused on the use of space and technology in the building. We learned that while staff were adjusting to many of the physical changes related to use of space and technologies, a theme that emerged from those interviews was the need for continual communication about change; staff endured many new building hiccups in the spaces they were using for their work—noise, technology was not all in place in meeting and instruction rooms. It was frustrating; but things were coming together and we were settling in to the space.

By the summer of 2020 we thought our project was complete. We wrote up our report, presented research results to staff, to ARL, and to the assessment community more broadly at the 2020 Library Assessment Conference.

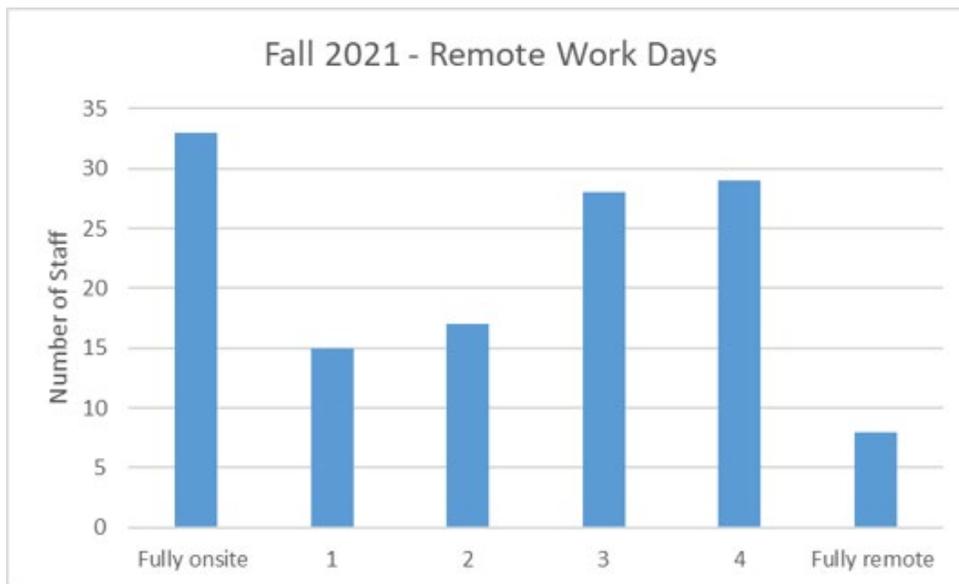
Just as we were wrapping up the analysis and reporting for Phase II in early spring 2020, the pandemic hit. The physical libraries closed, and classes went online only. When facilities re-opened in the fall of 2020, only staff whose jobs required them to be onsite were called back to campus. These staff members included those working in facilities, service desks, access and circulation, and other roles requiring access to

physical collections: access services, public service desks, facilities, and those handling physical materials. Meanwhile, most staff continued to work from home.

In August of 2021 students returned to campus provided with a mix of in-person and online classes. Most staff who could work remotely continued to do so. Hybrid, as well as fully remote, flexible work arrangements went into effect.¹ The current proportion of staff working onsite and those working remotely is quite different to what it was in previous phases of the research project.

The Hybrid Work Environment

Temple Libraries and press staff² have always had the option to work remotely—pre-COVID this was typically 1 day per week. Remote work is at a much higher percentage now, from those who work remotely 100% to the more usual three-to-four days per week. Even those in public services, like research and instruction librarians, are on site one day per week. This situation represents a change for both those working on site and those working off site.



Graph representing the number of staff working remotely per typical week

This dramatic change provided us with a new opportunity to explore questions of space and technologies supporting that work. Our workspaces are no longer primarily tied to physical spaces in library buildings. Our space for library work can no longer be considered the physical space of the Charles building. It is as likely to be the dining room table, a couch in the living room, or a closet retrofitted to serve as a home office. Our spaces for connecting with colleagues may be a meeting room, a Zoom meeting, or

¹ It should be noted that the libraries/press has always provided Flexible Work Arrangements, most frequently one day per week.

² Although limited to some levels of organization and dependent on role.

a mix of the two. We meet with students and faculty via Zoom, chat, and most less frequently, in person.

As in previous phases, findings relate not just to these physical aspects of work, but to changes and feelings about how we communicate and connect with one another. These patterns of communication, the technologies we use, how we manage our work, and how we balance offsite and onsite work—these have changed rapidly and continue to evolve.

Method and Participation

As in Phases I and II of the Envisioning our Future project, our method consisted of semi-structured interviews. The participation numbers in each phase of the project have been similar, with a mix of new and returning participants. Phases I and II focused on how staff envisioned their work changing as they transitioned from very traditional library spaces at Paley to more open spaces at Charles. Charles Library introduced to staff, and to users, a hugely different environment for access to services, collections, and technology. Our interest was in exploring how expectations for the change played out, as both opportunities and as challenges. Our focus was primarily on the physical spaces and technologies used.

In Phase III, our research question expanded to include digital spaces and no longer needed to be tied to Charles Library. This allowed us to recruit from all areas of the library system. We were pleased with the response, and the representation includes most departments and all branch locations:

- Access Services
- Acquisitions and Collection Development
- Administration
- Ambler Branch Library
- Charles A. Blockson Afro-American Collection
- Communications & Outreach
- Health Sciences Libraries (including Podiatry)
- Learning and Research Services
- Library Technology Development
- Library Technology Services
- Metadata & Digitization Services
- University Press
- Special Collections Research Center

Participants also represented the range of library and press roles. In addition to many departments represented, staff at multiple levels participated in the research.

Role	Count	Departments
Librarian	10	6
Staff	9	8
Supervisor	10	7
Grand Total	29	-

A final measure of “representativeness” is variety of remote work arrangements. While most of our interviews were conducted with staff working 3 or 4 days off site, we interviewed several who are on site 100%, and as many working fully remotely.

Days of Week Onsite / Remote (5-day work week)	Number of Interviewees	Total Number of Staff (includes branch locations) ³
Fully onsite	3	33
1-day remote work	2	15
2 days remote work	3	15
3 days remote work	10	28
4 days remote work	8	29
Fully remote	3	8

The Interview

We conducted semi-structured interviews and as in previous phases of the project, asked about workspaces for individual work, work with colleagues, and work with users. Our interviews began with broad questions about work—the typical job functions and activities that the participant performs on a regular basis. We asked about the spaces where work is conducted and the technologies used for that work. For clarity, questions were organized around three distinct time periods: pre-pandemic period, pandemic period, and the current “hybrid” work environment.

³ Based on Flexible Work Arrangements in fall 2021

Period	Time Frame	Description
Pre-Covid	Pre-March 2020	The university and its buildings were open as usual. Phases 1 and Phases 2 of the project were based on this period. For those whose primary work took place at Charles Library, the period was six months only, from August 2019 to March 2020.
Pandemic	March 2020 through August 2021	Buildings were closed and all students were online. This period includes a time when many staff were called back to the building (particularly in the areas of Access Services, Facilities, Special Collections, Technology, and other public service desk positions).
Current Period	August 23, 2021 to present	The “hybrid” work environment. Flexible work arrangements are fully implemented.

We asked participants how they felt about the changes they have experienced over the last two years and the support they received during these transitions. This provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on the less tangible aspects of their work and how they experience the changes.⁴

In most respects, our process for recruitment, interviewing and analysis remained consistent across the three phases of the project. In addition to opening up participation to library locations, we conducted all interviews via Zoom rather than in person. Interviewees were located at home or onsite in a private meeting room. Zoom was used to create audio-recordings of the interviews. We used the transcripts for these recordings as the basis for our analysis. The call for research team members was not open in this phase but drew from staff members with previous experience in Phase I or II.

Findings: Individual Work

Library and press staff spend a good bit of time on individual work in activities such as email or Slack, materials processing, research, cataloging and metadata creation, data analysis, design, project planning, instruction preparation and report writing.

⁴ The full interview guide is included as Appendix A.

Onsite Spaces

Staff who work onsite are continuing to use the physical spaces they used pre-pandemic. We spoke with staff from multiple library buildings working in different types of workspaces—from private offices⁵ to open cubicle-like staff areas. Most staff work in open office spaces, with the largest at the Charles Library, accommodating approximately 50 cubicles. At the time of these interviews, masking was required in all open areas of the library.

Prior to the pandemic, concerns about distractions and lack of privacy in the open office spaces came up frequently for staff working onsite. It was difficult to handle telephone calls from patrons, as this was disruptive to others, and receiving personal phone calls was uncomfortable. There were concerns about confidential information viewable on computer screens. Those issues are less relevant when working onsite now, as the open office spaces are quiet and occupied by far fewer staff. Physically unchanged, the spaces' ambiance feels different.

“It doesn't feel cozy because it's very cavernous. It's just cavernous and quiet, instead of cavernous and loud.” [Interview #21]

“Most of the time when I come in, it feels like a ghost town, so it feels sort of performative.” [Interview #10]



⁵ Other library spaces, not at Charles, do provide some staff with private offices

Remote Spaces

For many staff during the start of the pandemic, the transition to remote work meant finding space in their homes to work. Remote work environments vary greatly: some use kitchen and dining room tables as workspaces while others have dedicated home offices. Some work alone and some share spaces with partners, roommates, or family members. All phases of the pandemic were difficult, particularly for staff with young or school-aged children. We heard of staff adjusting meeting schedules around naps and babysitters. In spite of this stress, some appreciated the increased time available to be with their families and pets. Once day care services and in-person school opportunities re-opened, staff generally found working from home less disrupted by family needs.

Focused/Private Work

A sense of control and privacy were frequently mentioned as a positive aspect of remote work. If there are distractions, they are different than the onsite distractions of nearby colleagues' voices or foot traffic. Distractions typically are home-related—a child needing attention or the noise of construction activity outside a window. While a majority agreed that remote workspaces are more conducive to getting focused work done, several spoke to the opposite—onsite spaces now provide a quiet refuge for concentrated work.

Productivity

For those working at home, productivity came up most frequently as a positive aspect of working remotely. This perceived increase in productivity is due to many factors, from time saved commuting to the need to prepare a packed lunch.

Working from home saves time traveling to meetings, either within the building or from one campus to another. Staff at branch campuses find it easier to participate in meetings via Zoom. While Zoom attendance at meetings was always an option, its use increased dramatically with COVID. In fact, staff prefer participation in meetings with colleagues when working from home to being on site.

“It’s quiet here [at home] when I need to be quiet, I can put music on if I need to put music on. If I need a break, I’m not limited to just walking around the library, I can take the dogs for a walk.” [Interview #26]

“It’s like a private space [at home] that I reliably have access to, with no major tech issues and the only thing that ever comes up is background noise from my neighborhood or construction or things like that. But other than that, I think it works great for me.” [Interview #19]

With these advantages came downsides. It can be more difficult to separate work from life (both physically and mentally). The separation between work and home that a commute necessitates was described as providing both physical exercise and a mental rest from work.

Flexibility

A benefit of working remotely is the flexibility to arrange work schedules to accommodate different working styles and personal needs. Many spoke of how they

“chunk” their time, deliberately pausing Slack and email during times requiring focused concentration. When working remotely, it is easier to step away briefly for a medical appointment or to work outside of traditional business hours. This flexibility requires a certain discipline. There is an increased need for self-organization. Particularly for those working with physical collections, working remotely requires onsite planning and preparation to facilitate offsite productivity.

Findings: Connecting with Colleagues

Staff meet with colleagues in a variety of ways – the most usual interaction is through scheduled meetings that are organized at the department and team level or are project-related. These may be group meetings or one-on-one, with colleagues or of a supervisory nature. Zoom is the current preferred platform, although Slack has become more widely used as well. Serendipitous meetings with colleagues, particularly staff outside one’s immediate work group, are much less frequent with fewer staff working onsite.

Onsite Spaces for Meeting with Colleagues

Staff whose work required preparation of the building, technology, and access to print collections returned to campus in the summer of 2020 to prepare for the start of the semester. This was a period of tremendous anxiety as staff faced uncertainties around the COVID-19 outbreak and the University plan for re-opening campus. Onsite staff describe a collegial “bonding” during this period, fostered by seeing one another so frequently. There was a shared sense of pride in the responsibility of continuing essential services for Temple students and faculty.

Staff working onsite continue to use small breakout or meeting rooms as the primary place for participation in group meetings. In the absence of private offices at Charles, these rooms are used by individuals participating in any hybrid meeting.⁶ Although social distancing rules are no longer in force, there continues to be anxiety about in-person gatherings, and typically staff reserve a room for individual use rather than gather in a meeting room. The level of anticipated participation in a meeting may inform where a staff member logs into that meeting—if it is a large meeting with listening only, some appreciate the convenience of staying at their regular workstation.

Being onsite may have the effect of discouraging staff from using a camera or participating in meetings in other ways. Working at a service desk in a public location prohibits participation, of course. Others describe not wanting to disturb nearby colleagues. Using a camera while working in an office space exposes others who may prefer to stay off camera.

At the time of our interviews, the onsite mask requirement contributed to a potential communication barrier, less so for in-person interaction but more significant in Zoom meetings. It certainly constrains indoor socializing over a coffee or meal.

⁶ A meeting that includes onsite and remote participants

“[Working onsite,] your relationships with your colleagues became, at least in my department, I feel became much more casual and authentic.” [Interview #23]

“It kind of felt like people who were working remotely kind of pitied the people onsite and were like ‘oh my god, they have to go in,’ which sometimes worked in our advantage, I think.” [Interview #11]

“It’s almost like the people who started in August are like invading our space we got used to having this space for a year, and now it’s like everybody else is back. It was nice when it was just us.” [Interview #3]

Hybrid Meetings

As noted above, Zoom has become the standard platform for meetings, either fully online or hybrid. Hybrid meetings create challenges for participation, both for those onsite and those who are working remotely.

Zoom facilitates meetings that are not feasible in the physical spaces we have available to us—an important example is the All Staff meeting. With Zoom, all staff can log in to hear updates from the Dean and colleagues, with no required travel to main campus. Barring connectivity challenges, it may be easier for remote staff to fully participate in these meetings. The chat function is used widely in this context.

But hybrid meetings may be problematic for those onsite. For instance, staff members who work more regularly offsite note the irony of commuting to the library only to isolate themselves in a room in order to fully participate in a meeting with colleagues.

An important issue relevant to both onsite and remote workers is the degree to which video is used. It’s acknowledged that bandwidth issues and privacy concerns result in the choice for opting to not use video. A staff member notes “differences of sensibility” related to video usage for those working from home.

“Because of the hybrid environment all of the meetings were remote only anyway, so I would end up in one of the [onsite] breakout rooms, with my little Chromebook, kind of miserable instead of on my big two screens.” [Interview #26]

“[It’s] hard to have meetings when you’re on site, both because of space and because of technology.” [Interview #7]

Making External Connections

Interviews in Phase III corroborate what was reported in Phase II of this project, that the open office spaces at Charles Library did not promote the level of connection across departmental lines that might lead to deeper collaboration. While these unplanned meet-ups pre-pandemic were not seen as valuable to everyone, many staff now say that the increase in remote work has led to fewer connections to those outside one’s home department or current project team.

“Usually, the work and the ideas come from meeting with people you know in proper actual meetings, and so I don’t know how much of that spontaneous interaction has really blossomed into something tangible.” [Interview #14]

“Those kind of spontaneous meetings are obviously not possible when everyone’s remote, you really have to be intentional.” [Interview #17]

“I definitely used to spend a lot more time talking to people in other departments. Kind of casually. That’s not a downside, in terms of like productivity and work, but it’s a downside, in terms of knowing and being close with your colleagues.” [Interview #13]

Findings: Working with Users

Over 60% of the staff we interviewed work directly with users. That work includes reference and research consultations, instruction, access and guest computing services, and public program and event activities.

Open service desks and instruction rooms are the primary physical spaces in which staff work with users in person. In many cases, in-person instruction is provided in academic buildings rather than the library itself, at the request of the instructor. The library’s event space for was not used for public events during the period reviewed here.

Reference and Research Consultations

Our in-person work with users is now more limited, although the telephone is used frequently in special collections reference. In addition, the library offers an array of reference assistance through digital channels, via email, chat, and online research guides. Zoom is the primary way in which reference and instruction is delivered. In most cases, participants described the many advantages of Zoom in conducting reference transactions, particularly with students. Screen sharing works well and Zoom lends itself to easily sharing links. It is notable that even prior to the pandemic, many of the physical spaces at Charles Library were not ideal for working one-on-one with students—early on there was noise, limited consultation spaces and distance between the reference staff area and service desk. Students and faculty may also have different expectations and needs for reaching out to library staff.

Instruction

Instruction is an activity that continues to be conducted in both in-person and online spaces. The online space is preferred by some for the degree of “control” it provides to the instructor. It was interesting to learn that faculty requesting in-person instruction also preferred that class take place outside the library instruction area. Staff who conduct instruction onsite described teaching with a mask as something to which they have become accustomed.

Virtual instruction typically takes place via Zoom, as well as research consultations. The perception of effectiveness varied. The “reach” was mentioned—a Zoom session could reach over 100 students. The connection, some felt, was lost.

Programming and events are also now primarily online. Again, the potential for increased reach is a benefit. The Zoom space is accessible and convenient for many community members. But it has limitations, particularly for those who do not have ready access to the technology, or who favor the interaction and networking that our programming affords.

“I don’t think we’ve gotten any negative feedback about how we’ve handled things over the pandemic, in terms of instruction.” [Interview #14]

“I do have that sort of philosophical bent even before Covid, that if you’re in public services, you should be interacting with people on a regular basis, and not just your users, but also our colleagues. I do think that the collaboration comes naturally when you are physically in the same spaces.” [Interview #18]

“[In faculty exchanges] you were used to seeing these people face to face as real people, as socially, you know, engaged, you know, organisms, as opposed to just transferring information back and forth.” [Interview #1]

Providing In-person Service to Users

At the start of the pandemic, as some public services staff returned to campus, there was fear and anger. There was anxiety about non-compliance with protocols for mask-wearing and social distancing. Despite the Libraries’ following all University policies for safety. Monitoring of full compliance by students throughout the building spaces was challenging and of course, vaccinations were not yet available.

And yet many recognized that the libraries/press is part of a larger organization, and our decisions could not be made outside the context of policies and expectations put into place at the University-level.

“I’m so angry at the lack of concern for staffs’ well-being and for students’ well-beings and the community’s well-being, I think that’s an anger I’m never actually going to get over.” [Interview #13]

“When we were really in the throes of the pandemic, I kept wondering whether the University was listening to the same news I was.” [Interview #10]

“Sometimes there’ll be people who get mad at administration, but they don’t understand they have bosses too.” [Interview #24]

“I think people are not always as positive as I would like them to be, and I really appreciate a lot about TULUP.... [Temple is] more supportive and more innovative and more open to experimentation than other places, and so I think we don’t give enough credit for leadership.” [Interview #21]

Findings: Technology Needs and Improvements

Technology needs, particularly in instruction and meeting spaces, came up many times in Phase II of the project. In this phase, several participants noted that the pandemic resulted in staff leaving the Charles building just as the technology needs were being addressed. The hybrid work environment has put the technology in meeting spaces to the test.

Onsite Work

While onsite meeting rooms work well for individuals attending virtual meetings alone, they are not all well designed to support an optimal hybrid meeting experience. Staff

reported issues with echoes, microphones, and web cameras that distanced onsite participants from those attending remotely. This is particularly problematic when the room is large and onsite participants are wearing masks. Several suggest establishing norms and sharing best practices for the use of webcams and individual Zoom sessions to support full engagement in group meetings. Staff did not report wide use of instruction rooms in the library, but were called to conduct in-person instruction in academic buildings.

Remote Work

The libraries provide an array of technology equipment for staff for their onsite work, from desktops to laptops as primary and additional devices, like Chromebooks, as supplementary. For those working remotely, there is a range of technology in use—for those who have increased their work from home, many upgraded equipment, furniture, workspaces, or technical infrastructure.

But technology needs have also been a source of frustration for some. At the beginning of the pandemic, many staff were provided with Chromebooks and laptops to support their work from home. It quickly became evident that the Chromebook was not sufficient for many types of remote work. Others were disappointed that borrowed laptops needed to be returned when students returned to campus.

The increase in remote work has led to many types of skills development, from more intimate knowledge of Zoom to more frequent use of Slack for informal communication and checking in with colleagues. Those in technical services report wide use of VPN is used more widely now, allowing access to specialized software on onsite desktop machines and opportunities for new workflows allowing previously onsite work to take place remotely.

“We’ve certainly developed the sort of facility with working online that we hadn’t before and that’s very good.” [Interview #1]

“It definitely shifted the way we think about our work and, to this day, has completely like recalibrated how we do our projects.” [Interview #28]

“Our meeting rooms are just not really conducive to the hybrid meeting environment, so that’s a challenge.” [Interview #9]

“Things like going to meetings or teaching classes online are a little bit more stressful when I’m onsite and have to find a space to do those things, especially because there have been some tech issues with lighting and things like that in our breakout rooms.” [Interview #19]

Findings: Feelings about Space and Work

The pandemic and its many impacts on our work and home lives precipitated feelings of anxiety and stress. While strongest during the early pandemic period, those feelings persist for many. Positive feelings were expressed by participants, both working onsite and remotely, included: pride, trust, respect and care for colleagues. On the flip side,

feelings of anger, resentment, and even guilt surfaced, particularly from those at home while colleagues were required on campus.

Our research questions for this project originated with workspaces—the physical spaces and objects that we use when working, including cubicles, technology equipment, meeting rooms and service desks. During and after the pandemic, those physical spaces continue to be essential to our work, but the digital spaces, the communication, and connections we foster via digital channels, have increasingly become our workspace as well. We wanted to learn how staff felt supported in their hybrid work spaces, and how they were helped in managing the changes. To explore that, we asked:

- What are your feelings and the changes you’ve experienced?
- What made you feel supported during this time?
- What would you like to see more of?

Support

Many kinds of support were provided during the pandemic period and beyond. Staff relied on colleagues for support, particularly those working onsite. Some staff believed they had established good wellness habits on their own; others perceived the focus of University-provided wellness programs addressed the needs of staff working remotely, not onsite staff. Staff were grateful that their supervisors provided the privilege to work remotely. Staff were aware that decisions about remote work were made by supervisors and department heads, although it was unclear to them if supervisors coordinated their approach among themselves. There were concerns that it was “luck” and good fortune that allowed staff their work from home arrangement—that across the organization, decisions were made in an “arbitrary”⁷ manner. Library administration was faulted for failing to establish standards for remote work arrangements and for being “secretive” in sharing schedules. There was a continuing bitterness and anger surrounding these issues.

Some expressed a lack of clarity about practical information, such as what happens if you get sick or need to quarantine. The policy for support of technology needs was another area where many expressed confusion.

“My direct line of supervision, you know both my staff, my direct colleagues and my supervisor have all been super supportive through all this.” [Interview #14]

“Maintaining personal relationships and maintaining as much as possible a sense of routine I think has helped me to kind of handle the transitions and all the different changes throughout the year.” [Interview #3]

⁷ The word “arbitrary” was used multiple times to describe how remote work arrangements were implemented.

“There’re also people who have supervisors or are in departments that have stricter kind of requirements. It’s just like some people got lucky, some people didn’t. And it feels pretty arbitrary. I feel fortunate to be on the lucky side.” [Interview #6]

Work-Life Balance

The pandemic has made us all more aware of the importance of work-life balance. The flexibility to incorporate small household chores into the workday is important, as well as the freedom from commuting. Commuting takes time, costs money, and particularly during the height of the pandemic, raised health concerns for those using public transportation. Others value the commute to work as an opportunity to exercise, or to mentally organize for the day ahead.

“When I go in my whole day revolves around commuting and working and there’s not time for anything else, so I also feel very tired and drained usually the day after going.” [Interview #2]

“[The commute] is a nice way to kind of signal the beginning and the end of the workday...with built-in exercise and the benefits of that just in terms of clarity of mind.” [Interview #12]

Equity and Privilege

Many staff spoke about issues of equity and privilege in areas of remote work opportunities, access to technology and exposure to health risks. In the early days of the pandemic, many staff were overwhelmed with work while others had less work that could be accomplished remotely.

Onsite staff are gratified by the in-person work they do at the library; being onsite for that work is essential and the immediacy of helping patrons is what they love about their library work. That said, the opportunity to consider what work might, if desired, be conducted remotely was a privilege that many, many staff commented on. They describe the practical benefits of productivity and efficiencies in getting work done. They also describe the morale-boosting aspects of remote work—the respect and trust that is demonstrated by their supervisor when these opportunities are made available to them.

The unevenness of work from home opportunities that were perceived to depend solely on the decision of a direct supervisor resulted in harsh criticism of library administration. Administration was faulted for failing to establish standards or providing transparency across the organization about how flexible work arrangements rules were implemented. In the fall of 2021, there continued to be bitterness and anger surrounding these issues. The feeling that those who were able to work from home have a privilege not shared by others in the organization tempered some staff members’ enjoyment of their own privilege.

“I’m a firm believer in fairness and equity across the board, and I think that’s the only real way an institution can work well.” [Interview #24]

“I think there’s a lot of anger and jealousy and I really believe, and I say this publicly, I really believe it exists because some are work-from-home, and some are not.”
[Interview #25]

“It’s so uneven who’s working from home and who’s not and I’m really lucky that I only have to come in two days.” [Interview #4]

“We could still feel a little more connected to each other in a way, if there were more conversations about this, like conversations about why. How do you decide which are the departments, where people do need to go in? Is it possible for people’s job responsibilities to have been changed somewhat so that maybe there was more opportunity for hybrid work?” [Interview #6]

Organizational Implications

Hybrid work environments also impact relationships between supervisors and their staff. One interviewee favors the more direct interaction that Zoom affords with a supervisor and perceives a better quality of interactions with people. Another notes that we can no longer rely on casual in-person reminders of action items that arise from meetings and these need to be more carefully articulated. Some staff may be less likely to reach out to a supervisor who is working remotely, while others may enjoy working without a direct supervisor onsite. A supervisor believes that their staff is high-performing, and the quality work has remained consistent in spite of the increase in remote work.

Several staff members perceive a weakening of organizational cohesion. They are interacting less with colleagues outside their immediate working groups, groups external to their department or project team. Others spoke of challenges for new staff in learning “the ropes”—new staff may experience more challenges in learning professional skills and feeling connected to the organization, particularly beyond their immediate department.

“A lot of the people who do work on site all the time are often hesitant to reach out to the people who are working remotely.” [Interview #15]

“I worry what Covid has done to our cohesion as a staff and as an organization. I worry that it has taken an organization that was already pretty siloed and made it even more siloed because...you’re not having those chance encounters. You’re not randomly seeing people. You’re really only having those zoom meetings with the people that you work closely with.” [Interview #17]

“Because of the strictures about having masks and being in your office and things like that, at least for me. I don’t feel that sense of community as much as I did before.”
[Interview #8]

The organization has been described as siloed. The pandemic and resulting increase in remote work has the potential to create a new dividing line—that of remote and onsite workers. The types of work that we perform haven’t changed, and we may be more efficient than ever in getting that work done. But we no longer assume our presence on

campus and our in-person interactions with colleagues and users are required to support that work.

Many staff now consider it a privilege to be a knowledge worker, able to conduct work as well, perhaps better, while working remotely. Those staff who work with physical materials, manage physical spaces, and provide in-person service to the community—these staff have less work flexibility but find their work rewarding in different ways. They feel a special bond with their co-workers, enjoy in-person fun and joking together, and experience a more immediate and direct connection with the libraries' physical spaces, resources, and users.

Looking Forward

“So that’s a lot of flexibility in our schedule and it’s very nice for life, right? But it’s weird for any kind of collegiality.” [Interview #6]

“I honestly think my dream would be to work remotely for the rest of my life.” [Interview #4]

Next Questions

The pandemic has changed everything. Our future work environments will not look like they used to. The pandemic has opened up for us new ways of using and organizing space in our work. For many, it has led to opportunities for skills development, positive work-life balance, and productivity towards getting more work done efficiently and without distraction. It has provided benefits for those onsite as well, where colleagues' relationships with one another are closer and a greater variety of rooms are available for individual quiet work or collaboration with offsite colleagues.

It has introduced new challenges as well. We need to better understand what types of work, what services and what resources are best provided in person and what we can do as well or better outside the confines of our physical building spaces. How do we best balance the opportunities for these different types of work in ways that make practical sense and are equitable as work standards and policies? At the end of the fall 2022 semester, we continue to evaluate our remote work policies and practices to best meet the needs of our staff, our users and the organization.

The hybrid work environment **IS** impacting our organization—from basics of technology and communication practices to how we connect and support one another in the work we all do. How do we move forward together, in unison and in service to the University? How do we get to know and have fun together?

Recommendations

- In the spring of 2022, considered as a transitional period, our research suggested these recommendations to library administration:
- To enhance communication across departments and services, provide skills training for interested staff in the use of tools like Slack and Zoom.
- Facilitate staff discussions of norms for hybrid meetings to develop and share best practices that work in a variety of scenarios, with an aim towards seamless participation by remote and onsite staff.

- Identify and provide training and support for leaders facilitating meetings that are inclusive for participants in in-person, hybrid, and fully online meetings.
- Review onsite meeting space and technology needs to support best practices for hybrid meetings.
- Ensure barrier-free participation by onsite staff in work-related meetings, with private rooms that are readily accessible and equipped with appropriate technology.
- Clarify policies and options around technology support for staff working from home in terms of hardware, software, and help.
- Provide various modes for communicating policies and processes related to remote work and the pandemic, in relation to childcare and use of sick leave (as examples).
- With the understanding that policies are set at the contract and/or University level and with approval by the direct supervisor, consider how work roles and job descriptions might be reviewed with an eye towards more opportunities for remote work.
- Continue to explore how our spaces (both onsite and digital) can be used in creative ways to enhance organizational cohesion and sense of community.
- Continue to explore how users are impacted by changes in service and resource delivery and how service, resource and space needs are changing.

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Appendix I: Interview Guide

ENVISIONING OUR FUTURE — INTERVIEW GUIDE

Last Update: December 10, 2021

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this project. First, let me give you a bit of context for what we're doing.

We've conducted two research projects now to understand how library spaces support the work of staff at Temple University Libraries/Press. In this next phase of the project, we want to learn about how our current work environment, with many staff working remotely, impacts our work as individuals, with colleagues and with users.

DATA COLLECTION AND HANDLING

Our method for handling the data we collect through these interviews is described in the Letter of Consent. You will have access to your interview transcript and you'll get a preview of the final draft of the report before it is shared externally. I'd like to make an audio recording of this interview to check against the transcript. The audio recording will be destroyed after the transcript is verified. Is this okay with you?

LIBRARY EXPERIENCE

- Can you tell me how long you have worked at the Library/Press?
- Do you currently have a work space onsite? If so, what building is that?

CURRENT WORK ACTIVITIES

Let's talk a bit about your current work activities.

Tell me about what a regular day looks like for you.

- What are your primary activities?
- How much activity do you do on your own, how much is interacting with colleagues, and how much is working with users—that could be students, community or faculty.

I'm going to ask you a set of questions related to the differences between your current work spaces, both onsite and remote, and your work spaces pre-pandemic. I'll be referring to three separate time periods:

- The first will be Pre-Covid, or spring 2020 *before* the library buildings closed.
- The second period was when students were primarily in online classes.
- And I'll be asking you to describe your work spaces now, as of fall 2021—or our current hybrid work environment.

PRE-COVID WORK SPACES

So before COVID hit you were working at [insert name of library here]. Tell me about various spaces you used for your work.

Potential Probes:

- For individual work, likes and dislikes
- For working with colleagues, likes and dislikes
- For working with users, likes and dislikes

Additional Probes:

- Technologies
- Meetings spaces (for formal and informal meetups)
- Ambiance

PANDEMIC PERIOD

From spring 2020 to fall 2021 classes were pretty much all online.

Can you tell me about where you did your primary work during that time?

In terms of the spaces that you used for your work, what were the benefits? What were the challenges?

Potential Probes:

- For individual work, likes and dislikes
- For working with colleagues, likes and dislikes
- For working with users, likes and dislikes

Additional Probes:

- Technologies
- Meetings spaces (for formal and informal meetups)
- Ambiance

HYBRID WORK ENVIRONMENT

Okay. Thanks for this. I wanted to get of sense of what work spaces have been like for you previously. My next set of questions relates to our current work spaces.

I want to talk now about our current work environment, since the start of the fall 2021 semester. Tell me about where you currently are working: fully onsite, fully remote, or a mix.

Possible probe:

- Degree of mix (1 day onsite, 4 days off site, etc.)

INDIVIDUAL WORK NOW

Let's start with the space where you do most of your work now, for your individual work or when you are working alone. Describe for me your physical environment, like your desk and technology as well as the ambiance, aspects like noise and light.

- Comparing the space to Pre-Covid days, how does your current space, or spaces, work for your individual work?
- What are the benefits it presents?
- Are there challenges?

- If you are working both onsite and remotely, are their differences in how the space works for you? What's an example?
- Are there differences in the types of work activity you do in the different spaces?
- Are there benefits that you are now experiencing, in terms of working with colleagues now? Aspects of this work environment that you like? Are there things you dislike?

Potential Probes:

- Physical similarities and differences
 - Furniture
 - Desk space
 - How space is organized
 - Technology tools and access
- Ambience similarities and differences
 - Noise
 - Light

COLLEGIAL WORK NOW

- What are the spaces that you are currently using for work with colleagues?

Let's first talk about scheduled meetings. Again, these could be virtual spaces or physical spaces. In using these spaces for work with colleagues, what are the differences between pre-COVID and now.

Potential Probes:

- Furniture
- Room Availability
- Technologies Used

Are there benefits that you are now experiencing, in terms of working with colleagues now? Aspects of this work environment that you like? Are there things you dislike?

Potential Probes:

- Working with colleagues in the same department
- Working with colleagues outside the home department but in project team
- Working/connecting with colleagues in the organization
- In terms of behaviors, do you feel that those have changed in your work with colleagues?
- Could you give me an example?

WORKING WITH USERS NOW [USE FOR STAFF THAT WORK WITH USERS]

What are the spaces, and these could be physical or virtual, in which you interact now with users (in real time)? These could be individuals or groups, and could be students, faculty or community members.

Potential Probes:

- Instruction spaces—virtual and live

- Consultation spaces—virtual and live
- Service desk
- Other physical spaces where you meet up with users?
- Other virtual spaces where you meet up with users?

Comparing your current spaces for work with users with what you used Pre-Covid, what are the similarities? What's different. What are the similarities and differences between the physical and virtual spaces you use now and the spaces that you used when working before COVID?

Potential Probes:

- Frequency
- Convenience (for you as a staff person, for user)
- Technologies and Furniture in Space
- Ambiance
 - Noise
 - Light
- In what ways does it work better in your work with users?
- In what ways does it present challenges?

FEELINGS ABOUT CHANGES

From what you've told me, you've experienced some changes in how you do your work and the spaces you use to do your work. We've talked about what you like and what you dislike.

Do you have any other feelings about the changes you are experiencing between spring 2020 and now?

SUPPORT FOR TRANSITIONS

- What are the things that have helped you, or supported you in managing the transition from before COVID to now? This support could derive from:
 - Own self
 - Your colleagues
 - Your direct supervisors
 - Library administration/leadership
- What kind of support would make you feel more supported in your work within this changing work environment? Can you provide an example?

WRAP UP

That is all my questions. Did you have anything that you wanted to add?

Just to let you know again about next steps. After it is de-identified, this transcript will be shared with you and with the research team. After we draft our final report, that will also be shared with you as a participant. We're hoping to have the analysis and report completed in early spring.

I really want to thank you for your time. This is an important project and we appreciate your willingness to share your experiences.

Appendix II: Research Teams

Phase I: Spring 2019	Phase II: Winter 2020	Phase III: Winter 2021
Olivia Given Castello Rachel Cox Jessica Martin Urooj Nizami Jenny Pierce Caitlin Shanley Jackie Sipes Stephanie Roth Nancy Turner (PI)	Karen Kohn Rebecca Lloyd Caitlin Shanley Nancy Turner (PI)	Karen Kohn Jess Martin Stephanie Roth Jackie Sipes Nancy Turner (PI)