Speaker 1:

We're your research therapist, we're here and to help make this research process as manageable and doable for you, as we can possible. When I was talking to the two professors and they were just like, "Oh, it's so hard." I was just like, "Yeah, we're all dealing with it. We can do it. But if I could help you in any way, just tell me." So I hope with the research consultation, it's more personable in this COVID-19 environment.

Christina Barsi:

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

Sun Ezzell:

And I'm Sun Ezzell, and you're listening to The Magic Mountie Podcast.

Christina Barsi:

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak, by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

Sun Ezzell:

We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC, from the classroom to completion.

Speaker 2:

And I know I want to achieve my goals, and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

Speaker 3:

Sociology major, and she's transferring to Cal Poly Pomona. Psychology major.

Sun Ezzell:

From transforming part-time into full-time.

Speaker 4:

Really like the time that you spend the Julie about how to write a CV and a cover letter.

Christina Barsi:

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

Speaker 6:

Think of the natural environment around us as a library.

Christina Barsi:

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC. But most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi, Mt. SAC alumni, and producer of this podcast.

Sun Ezzell:

And I'm Sun Ezzell learning assistance faculty and professional learning Academy coordinator.

Christina Barsi:

And this is The Magic Mountie Podcast.

Sun Ezzell:

For this week's episode, I had the pleasure of talking with Mt. SAC librarians, Esteban Aguilar, Monika Chavez, and Kolap Samel, to find out how the library is supporting the campus during this time of online learning. The library has a wealth of support. In addition to online databases, eBooks, and 24/7 chat with a librarian, they're now offering reference workshops online and an all new option to book a half hour research appointment with the Mt. SAC librarian. Let's get started.

Sun Ezzell:

Welcome to the magic Mountie podcast. I'm here today with Kolap, Monika, and Esteban from the Mt. SAC Library. Thank you all so much for joining me. And I'll just ask you to introduce yourselves and tell us a little bit about your role at the library.

Esteban Aguilar:

Hi Sun. Hi everybody listening at home. My name is Esteban Aguilar. I am the electronic resources librarian at Mt. SAC. So I have been very, very busy along with all of my fellow librarians working to get everything transitioned online, making sure all those databases and eBooks that we're all using now are working as they should. And it's been an experience. So thanks for taking the time to talk with us today.

Kolap Samel:

Hi everyone, my name is Kolap Samel, and I am the general librarian at Mt. SAC library. Just like my colleague Esteban says, it's been pretty interesting getting ourselves online and I've been mainly helping with getting reference online and planning some of the reserves hopefully in the future to be online.

Monika Chavez:

So my name is Monika Chavez. I'm the career education librarian. My major projects include perkins funding for the library and the library's affordability initiative, which has to do with open educational resources.

Sun Ezzell:

Thank you all so much. So I was wondering if you would tell us just a little bit about the work that you've done to help the campus transition online.

Esteban Aguilar:

So I can talk a little bit about that. One of the things that we've been working on is trying to get reserves going. Obviously in the online realm, we are trying to make sure that there are textbooks available for students still. Luckily, there are publishers that have made their material for free for a limited time. Most of that is going to be ending in the next couple of weeks, like mid May to mid June. But myself and Monika and a lot of the other librarians have worked to get that messaging out to the faculty that this stuff is available. Putting it up on our OER lip guide, OER is Open Electronic Resources. We've tried to gather a lot of these free resources right now up on that guide. We've also worked to get instruction online to do online workshops. And I think Kolap would be better situated to talk about that. I know she's had a big hand in getting reference and instruction up.

Kolap Samel:

Like Esteban said, my main focus for the past couple of weeks has been getting the libraries reference presence online. Before COVID-19, we did have an email and a chat with librarian, but since COVID-19, we had to really train ourselves with the platform just because we never had to do it ourselves. We had to think of ways of reaching out to the students. I know that all the librarians are thinking of making a video, going onto social media just to announce that we're here online to help you, to support you.

Kolap Samel:

So we've been promoting and we've been learning and training ourselves with chat, email, the research consultations, reaching out to students that before used to come to library to ask us for assistance or support in reference. We're still here in the online environment for you. Interesting enough, we're going to be changing into a new platform in May. So we're still continuing our learning and hopefully this new platform will better serve our Mt. SAC community. That's been my main focus since COVID-19, just making sure that our reference, we could better support and provide better accessibility for students to reach us out for reference assistance or research assistance.

Monika Chavez:

I guess I'll kind of build on the talk about textbooks. The libraries in general, one of our main focuses is equity, and being able to provide resources to students who can't afford to get them otherwise. And so it's been great that vendors have given us access to materials, but we're really pushing to figure out ways where we can provide those resources to students. Because usually we do it in a physical environment for providing copies of the textbook. So if faculty are interested in using any of our library resources or open educational resources, we're more than happy to collaborate and work with them to be able to make their classes a little bit more affordable if needed during this time.

Kolap Samel:

And actually, I just wanted to add onto what Monika just mentioned. The research consultations that we've now initiated, it is something new where students can book us online. And it's been well received, but it's not just limited to students. When Monika talked about collaborating with faculty, two of my research consultation appointments to faculty members did talk to me about looking for just using materials for their fall courses. So this is also where we can like, "Oh, we can help you find the material you're looking for." And I've also in one instance, even presented alternatives, like Monika said, like an OER or an actual source that's available through the libraries ebook databases too.

Sun Ezzell:

Thank you so much. When I think about the library, so much of what I think about is the physical space of the library. Would you be willing to talk a little bit more about what the library's offering online right now due to the transition online?

Esteban Aguilar:

Sure. So right now the library, when we were physically open, we would offer obviously workshops and reference and instruction for students to be able to just come and do in person. But since we can't do that, we've worked really hard to transition all that online. We are doing live, drop in Zoom workshops still. Students can sign up for it the way that they would normally sign up for workshops through SARS, using links on the library's website. They can sign up for the workshops that work for them. Once they sign up, we take a look at the roster and we send out the connection details to the students.

Esteban Aguilar:

So we're still doing that, but we've also worked to move more of our workshops online in the sense of being self paced before we only had one of them, which I think was our articles workshop was the only one that students could kind of do at their own pace. But we've also now added the choosing and developing a research topic workshop. We've moved that to being able to be asynchronous. So students can do that on their own at their own pace. So not just in terms of the online instruction with Zoom and workshops and stuff like that. We've also been working really hard to make reference more available. Like Kolap has talked about, we've had those 30 minute reference instruction sessions that we offer to the students. And I think Monika can talk a little bit more about how we have been working to try to make ourselves more available with faculty as well.

Monika Chavez:

We also have a librarian liaison program where every department has a librarian liaison who is assigned to them. So you can either reach out to a librarian through the research consultations, or you can directly contact your librarian liaison, who is primarily responsible for purchasing materials for departments. But we're working on expanding our services and kind of figuring that out right now in an online environment.

Kolap Samel:

And I just wanted to add with Esteban, with the research consultation. Since we started a couple of weeks ago, it's been well received. A lot of students have told me that they appreciate seeing someone on the other side. Just because of the remote has basically cut off some type of social. And for me, the research consultation, this is just this week alone, the students saying, "I don't have a mic. Can I chat?" And I remember just telling, "Yeah, it's your convenience, your term, whatever I can do to assist you." And it's just making them feel that you could come in, we could help you any way that we can on your own terms. So pick the time, pick the way you want to contact us. If you want to just chat only if you, if you want to talk to us in person.

Kolap Samel:

We were joking, the student and I, "Yeah, it's like a therapist." And I was like, "Yeah." One of my colleagues is like, "We're your research therapists," when I was telling her the story, you should tell them, "Yeah, we're your research therapists. We're here and to help make this research process as manageable and doable for you as we can possible."

Kolap Samel:

When I was talking to the two professors and they were just like, "Oh, it's so hard." I was just like, "Yeah, we're all dealing with it. We could do it. But if I could help you in any way, just tell me." So I hope with the research consultation, it's more personable in this COVID-19 environment. It's at your convenience, but hopefully it has a more personable and humanizing touch as opposed to just only our synchronous or email offerings or just looking at the website.

Sun Ezzell:

So the college has done, everyone has done such an incredible amount of work to move us online. And I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about some challenges maybe that the library has faced in making resources available to students online.

Esteban Aguilar:

So from my perspective, in terms of my work, as electronic resources librarian, it's always my job to make sure that resources are available for students online, all of our eBooks and databases and such. So that really hasn't been that difficult of a transition for myself personally. But I think one of the biggest challenges, again, for myself, I don't want to speak for all the librarians, Kolap and Monika can obviously share what they feel their biggest challenges have been, but for myself, it's been instruction.

Esteban Aguilar:

When we're in person in the workshops, we really have an opportunity to talk and work with the students on obviously a very personal level, to answer questions directly and kind of walk them through things in terms of like searching through a database. But when you're doing a workshop with 10, 20 plus students, it can be difficult to do that, to make sure that they are understanding everything that they need to, or to even have them walk through the process themselves. Of course you can share a screen during Zoom, but if you're trying to have 20 people share a screen it can be a little chaotic. So I think that's big one of the biggest challenges, but also courses are obviously, that is a challenge that we are still trying to work out and how we want to approach that moving forward.

Kolap Samel:

I think, like everyone else on campus, from staff to faculty to management, I can say that we were giving our hundred percent before COVID-19, doing our job, being comfortable, because we knew our job, because we love what we're doing to serve our students. And then all of a sudden to be told, we have to transition everything online, it still is a learning curve. Would take me only prior 10 to 15 minutes to show a student, sometimes it would take me 30 to 40 minutes and it's that learning curve and I'm pretty sure this is probably the same for my colleagues. We demand a lot more because we want to do such a good job to support the students or faculty, but it is a lot more on us because the learning curve, but we expect it to be done at a certain time. Sometimes I feel a little bit overwhelmed and wondering, am I really reaching out, or am I doing this the correct way? Or is there a better way and I'm not sure because everything's very new. There's not always a clear cut answer.

Kolap Samel:

So for me, before COVID-19 I could have probably done a workshop online. I could have done a reference consultation online and one time cases. But now to fully embrace it and try to learn it and try to hone my craft, it's taking a while just because it's so new. But I think everyone is experiencing... I'm thinking about it now because I was talking to the students. I had the choice to take an online class. I took my history online, but I knew I wasn't going to take biology and calculus online. Now I have to do everything online and it's hard for me. And when I heard the student tell me that when we were in our research consultations, this is what I'm experiencing the same thing as a student and just hoping that we'll get through this.

Kolap Samel:

So I'm sorry, maybe I'm diverging. But it's been an adjustment I think, and it's a bit overwhelming, but hopefully as the weeks go by, things will normalize for us eventually.

Sun Ezzell:

All right. So I want to kind of ask a followup question to what you were just saying, Kolap. Could you tell a little bit more about kind of what feedback you're getting from students, especially since the transition online. How do you think students are doing?

Kolap Samel:

For me at least the first couple of weeks, I'm pretty sure a couple of librarians mentioned it too when we would discuss in our meetings, the students would ask us, when are we going to be open? And we had to tell them that unfortunately COVID-19, we can't go on campus the library isn't open until we get the clearance from the school and the county health. And to me, that was a cry for like, "I need either a place to study, I really need my textbook, I really need to use your research technology, or I just really wish I could go back to my routine. Which I come to campus. I go to the library to study and then I go home and sleep or something." So at least for the first couple of weeks, I felt like I spent a lot of time saying "It's okay. Don't worry, pretty sure your teacher's going to give you your extension. Just make sure you inform your teacher. It's okay, I'm pretty sure we could figure this out."

Kolap Samel:

I felt like our students for the first couple who really needed the extra support or just some clarity or guidance. And that's why I kind of in the previous comment, I said, "Oh, you're a research therapist." And I'm thinking at times, it's okay. Things that are going to be okay. And worst case scenario, we just keep on asking and I'm pretty sure they're going to forgive you, or they're going to excuse you, or they're going to give you your extension. I think I felt that saying that repeatedly for the first, I think three weeks when school went online or remotely. But I think as administrators, instructors started sending out more clear instructions or more information, I feel like the mood or the environment has gotten a little bit better. I think we just didn't have any answers and all I could do was just like, "It's okay. It's okay. Don't worry though. The world's not going to end. You're you're not going to get an F." That's what I felt like I was doing for the first three weeks I want to say.

Kolap Samel:

But I think it's starting. More information is disseminated. We know a little bit more things that are becoming a bit more routine now for our students. I don't feel that anxiety or tension when I do interact with them and on the chat or the research, I don't feel that as much.

Sun Ezzell:

Thank you so much. Anybody else want to chime in on feedback you're getting from students or just anything you've noticed about how students are doing with the transition?

Monika Chavez:

So I think one thing that's come out of it is that it's more clear than ever how many students need access to laptops, to wifi, to resources that can allow them to do online classes. For promise plus, there already was a laptop checkout program, which the library assisted with. And now it's been ramped up because there are so many more students that don't have access to the computers or wifi that they need in order to do classes online.

Monika Chavez:

So at the library, when we're physically open, we often do help students with their technology needs. Usually we help students with a lot of general questions too, like where they can sign up for classes, how to add a class, where they can find a specific building. So I think that we've had a lot of those same students who are asking us questions now, and then now there's the added difficulty of many of them are not well acquainted with using online resources. So previously I believe it was mentioned when we're doing our research consultations, it's not just showing them research. It's also oftentimes we're showing them how to use the online resources and we're having to show them remotely rather than doing it in person.

Monika Chavez:

Now, this isn't for all students, but you know, there's a significant portion of students that need this additional help. I hope that they're not discouraged from continuing their education because of this temporary health emergency.

Kolap Samel:

I am going to also mention what Monika mentioned, was the accessibility. We assume our students because they're there this generation, that they do have access to devices and such. But I do have to say that in the research consultation, there were a lot of students who said that their computer's too old or they didn't have access to a reliable computer or tablet. They were using their phone. Or they'll tell me like, "My phone's microphone doesn't work that well, I'm just going to be chatting with you."

Kolap Samel:

Or like Monika said, even just asking questions like, "Do I need to know anything beforehand? Are you familiar with using Zoom, have you used this before?" And which adds on to the extra time that we would need to use to help the students, just for something that when we did it in person, maybe would have taken only 10, 15 minutes. But because we have to now move it onto the online environment in which we're not sure if the students have the knowledge or the accessibility to the technology or reliable internet, it's more murky than we think. And so I can't always assume.

Kolap Samel:

And sometimes the students say, "Wait, I didn't even see the screen that you shared with me." And I was like, "Wait, are you using a tablet or phone?" Then it's, "Okay, scroll up." Even things like that, they don't tell me until they feel comfortable enough with me in the consultation. She's like, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I didn't tell you this, but I... or I can't type as fast, or I didn't know to access that assignment on canvas." And then I said, "Would you like me to maybe help you walk you through it?" I think for me, and maybe some of the instructors we had this assumption. Or sometimes it isn't until the student feels comfortable enough to tell us that we're like, "Oh my gosh, I thought that we were just going through ABC." But that student might've been stuck on B for awhile and I just went through it. So that's something that I have to be more cautiously aware now, too.

Sun Ezzell:

Thank you so much. My next question kind of is a silver lining question. I was wondering, is there a silver lining in all of this? Are there any tools or collaborations or connections or something that you've discovered at the library because of the transition to online that maybe it turned out to be pretty great. Something that came about as a result of the transition that you think we should keep on doing after we're not impacted by COVID-19 anymore?

Kolap Samel:

I mean, we have to be hopeful. And I do think that there is a silver lining. I want to say, I think it forced me and some of my colleagues to learn or develop skills that we didn't think we needed to learn. I think it got people more onto canvas. It got people to thinking more about putting their research on canvas, even if they're not going to teach online. I liked the fact that the research consultation, we have it online now. We've done research consultation face to face with students, but now we have it where we've made a system where they could book us and they get us for 30 minutes. So I like to say that's a silver lining. I think it's sped up what we were hoping to do anyway. I think we're at least, it's asking us to do something that we didn't think we were able to do so quickly.

Kolap Samel:

So I have to think that there's this overlaying. Those are some of the things I thought about. I'm very happy and proud to work with my colleagues. That first week that we were told that we were going to possibly do remote and all that, I was amazed at both staff and faculty in our library department. Because we put in a lot more hours. We were always thinking about student first. We were brainstorming. It really asks a lot more than I think I would have put it in my regular eight hour day before COVID. So I thought wow, it really pushed me more than I thought that I would have been able to do.

Esteban Aguilar:

So I kind of want to echo what Kolap was talking about just now .I think one of the major silver linings is that this transition to online really forced people to hone their tech skills. Whether it was learning how to do something via Zoom or putting things up in canvas. Developing this online course. And I really think that faculty and students really should utilize tools like canvas more because they just make things more accessible. Because now a reading or an assignment can be accessed at any time, whether it's from a student's phone, tablet, computer, desktop or whatever.

Esteban Aguilar:

So canvas has a lot of great utility and this hopefully can show faculty and students all of its power. Another silver lining I think, is that a lot of students now have been again, forced to use the library online. The library catalog, library databases, looking out for articles and eBooks and such. And we've always had these great tools. We've always had this great system for students to be able to look materials up. But they may not have used it necessarily. But now hopefully they've used it and they've gotten comfortable with it. And it's something that they'll continue to use, especially as they're doing their research. Hopefully they see all of the great resources our library has to offer and that's going to be their first stop for research and not Google or something like that. So I really am trying to look at it from the glass half full perspective of that hopefully this transition and the situation has kind of opened people's eyes to the great tools that canvas and the library have to offer them and that they continue to make use of these tools.

Monika Chavez:

So I'm the career education librarian. So obviously I'm biased, but I wanted to give a shout out to career education. A significant portion of the current essential workforce, we're trained through career education. So thinking about healthcare workers, nurses, histologists, respiratory technicians, and others, I know we have other programs too, but those are the ones I can think of off the top of my head. Those people are more essential than ever in helping us through this crisis. And then there's other programs like welding where construction is still happening. We have to keep on growing.

Monika Chavez:

So the position that I have is somewhat rare in the library world. There's not many librarians who are devoted to career education. So this is my first year doing it. So it's been quite an experience and figuring out how everything works at Mt. SAC and learning about all the great career education programs that we have here. This crunch happened and historically, career education has been on the back burner, except for more recently, there's been more infusion of resources into assisting career education. Not necessarily at Mt. SAC, but as a whole. Devoting those resources to where education has been excellent investment into our community and our society in general.

Kolap Samel:

I think it advanced a lot of the resources support for distanced learning by default because of that. Because now, basically we're a type of distance learning. We're putting our full effort, we're pushing all that we can explore and think about how can we better support our students and distanced learning. So as a default for the silver lining, I thought a distanced learning support and services and ideas have now gone beyond what it might have been, if not for COVID.

Sun Ezzell:

Thank you so much. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about? A message you'd like to put out there to students or to faculty?

Kolap Samel:

The library is here to support our Mt. SAC students, faculty, and community. And we're continuing to explore, investigate and possibly develop things. So just please ask, if you want to suggest something, if you're inquiring why we don't have something, please ask and we'll definitely consider it and see if we can better support the student or faculty needs.

Esteban Aguilar:

There is one thing that I do want to emphasize, and that is that as we continue to do online instruction, I would like to remind faculty that eBooks are scarcely available. Scarcely available as eBooks. Just because publishers know that they can make so much money by not offering them as eBook and forcing people to buy them. It's not so much a cynical outlook as it is the cold hard truth. And there are ways to still get students access to the information that they need and the resources they need. And I would really like to encourage faculty to maybe reassess some of the textbooks that they use while we are in this online realm to ensure that students are able to get access to their course materials.

Esteban Aguilar:

And faculty can do that by maybe looking at some of the wonderful eBooks that the library has to offer. We have a ton of eBooks that have no user limits, meaning more than one student at a time could be looking at the books, so they'll never be denied access in that regard. So there's that option using library eBooks, but also consider using OER material as well. Because OER is open and it can be accessible again, on any device. Students have access to the material from the first day. So they're not automatically falling behind because they're waiting for a print version of their textbook to come. Being able to try consider using library eBooks or OER textbooks, I think that can go a long way in making this transition and just this whole situation easier for students.

Esteban Aguilar:

On a more hopeful note, I also want to just give a plug to Wikipedia Edit-a-thon. One of my colleagues in the library, Eva Rios-Alvarado, she is working on Wikipedia Edit-a-thon with art history, Professor Ellen Caldwell. And what that is, it's art plus feminism. So the way it works is we kind of bulk up the Wikipedia pages for underrepresented women, artists, queer, transgender, the LGBTQ+ community. We are really looking to bolster their presence with more details on their life and their works and things of that nature. So try to keep an eye out for that. We'll be sending out an announcement, it'll be kind of an open participation. It's an assignment for Ellen's class, but we want to make sure that people who want to participate in it are able to. So we want to plug that. I'm working on it as well as another one of our librarians, Michael Emery. And we'll be going over all manner of things like how to edit in Wikipedia and how to add citations, things like that. But it's an important project that we have going on because it's about getting better representation for those that are underrepresented.

Sun Ezzell:

All right. Well, I want to thank all of you so much for your time and I miss being on campus with all of you and with our students and with the whole Mt. SAC community. I'm so grateful that even though I have had a huge learning curve with technology myself, that we are able to connect with each other remotely. So just a huge thank you to all of you and to everyone at the library. It's a huge lift to transition so quickly online in the middle of a pandemic, but thank you for all of your incredible work, your incredible support of students and faculty and the Mt. SAC community. Thank you so much for joining me today.

Kolap Samel:

Thank you for having us.

Esteban Aguilar:

Appreciate it.

Christina Barsi:

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