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The Illinois Fire Service Institute (IFSI) Library provides fire and emergency library and information assistance and services to the Institute's instructional staff, students, Illinois fire departments and firefighters, and other fire/emergency-related users in the successful and effective performance of their jobs. In response to the COVID pandemic, IFSI Librarians have developed new services and resources to continue serving patrons. At the same time, new procedures and services were adopted. With the staff's return to the library's physical location, IFSI's Learning Resource and Research Center building, new COVID-19-related safety measures have been instituted. IFSI Librarians worked with IFSI staff to create the COVID-19 Archives Collection to preserve important documents about the pandemic as it occurs. The Library received grant awards respectively from IMLS and ALA. During the pandemic, the IFSI International Programs continued to provide information resources and access to international users. The Library organized online academic activities via Zoom on a variety of workshops, lectures, and discussions to ensure that users were able to receive enough resources to continue their study and research.

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Illinois Fire Service Institute Library Initiatives During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The Illinois Fire Service Institute (IFSI) Library provides fire and emergency library and information assistance and services to the Institute's instructional staff, students, Illinois fire departments and firefighters, and other fire/emergency-related users in the successful and effective performance of their jobs. In response to the COVID pandemic, IFSI Librarians have developed new services and resources to continue serving patrons. At the same time, new procedures and services were adopted. With the staff's return to the library's physical location, IFSI's Learning Resource and Research Center building, new COVID-19-related safety measures have been instituted. IFSI Librarians worked with IFSI staff to create the COVID-19 Archives Collection to preserve important documents about the pandemic as it occurs. The Library received grant awards respectively from IMLS and ALA. During the pandemic, the IFSI International Programs continued to provide information resources and access to international users. The Library organized online academic activities via Zoom on a variety of workshops, lectures, and discussions to ensure that users were able to receive enough resources to continue their study and research.

Keywords: Library Services, Archives, IFLODD, IMLS Grant, ALA Grant, International Programs, Outreach Services, COVID-19, Illinois Fire Service Institute Library

INTRODUCTION

The Illinois Fire Service Institute (IFSI) is Illinois's statutory fire academy and the oldest continuous fire training institution in the United States. Since 1925, first responders from across the state, the nation, and the world have relied on IFSI to deliver hands-on, innovative, and top-quality training, education, and research. IFSI's mission is "Helping Firefighters do their Work through Training, Education, Information and Research." The IFSI Library is one of only three fire academy libraries in the United States dedicated to serving fire and emergency service users. Since opening in 1990, the IFSI Library has worked to support all four areas of IFSI's mission by providing information and resources to firefighters across the state. The library's mission is to provide fire and emergency library and information assistance and services to the Institute's instructional staff, students, Illinois fire departments and firefighters, and other fire/emergency-related users in the successful and effective performance of their jobs.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, IFSI librarians have developed new services and resources to continue serving patrons, including assisting patrons with information and research

requests, creating new e-resources (e.g. online subject guides, useful links), and updating the library's social media account and webpage with the library's services and resources. At the same time, new procedures and services were adopted, including curbside pickup for patrons borrowing physical materials and major email outreach to Illinois fire departments. With the staff's return to the library's physical location, IFSI's Learning Resource and Research Center building, new COVID-19-related safety measures have been instituted, such as mandatory face coverings, social distancing, and the quarantine of returned library materials. IFSI Librarians work with IFSI staff to create the COVID-19 Archives Collection to preserve important documents about the pandemic as it occurs, including collections for IFSI in general, the Illinois fire service, and the IFSI Library/International Programs. The library received grant awards respectively from IMLS and ALA. During the pandemic, the IFSI International Programs continued to provide information resources and access to international users. The library organized online academic activities via the web conferencing software Zoom through a variety of workshops, lectures, and discussions to ensure that users were able to receive enough resources to continue their study and research.

IFSI LIBRARY SERVICES

Library's New Services and Resources

During the time the IFSI Library was closed physically, librarians worked to continue to provide informational assistance to IFSI staff, instructors, and Illinois first responder patrons. The library website (<https://fsi.illinois.edu/content/library/>) was available and the online collection catalog could be searched from there. Patrons could email the library at fsi-library@illinois.edu with questions, research projects, and requests. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the library developed new services and resources, including the following:

- Created *IFSI Library 2020* PowerPoint file and sent it as attachment to 382 Illinois fire departments
- Created *How to Use the IFSI Library: Information Literacy for Firefighters and Fire Safety Education in Libraries* online subject guides for firefighters/fire departments to use; emailed information/links to 400+ fire departments
- Created All Staff emails and IFSI COVID-19 Library Information Update page concerning the library's service and resources during remote service; updated as needed
- Instituted Curbside Delivery for physical materials
- Created a linked list of Homeschooling Resources for First Responder Parents, including resources such as Story Time in Space YouTube Channel, Digital Library of Illinois, Biodiversity Heritage Library "Color Our Collections", Storyline Online, Spanish Children's Stories from The Spanish Experiment, Sea-Span: The Florida Aquarium, UIUC College of Veterinary Medicine, American Chemical Society, and from the University of Illinois News Bureau: *How to foster children's learning while sheltering at home*.
- Created a linked list of Champaign County Public Library websites
- Continually updated the library's Facebook account with new digital resources, including two Open Access fire service books
- Created an EXCEL spreadsheet to track patron requests and contact information to assist them with additional services and materials when we returned to onsite service

Curbside Pickup and Interlibrary Loan

The IFSI Library offered curbside pickup for members of the fire service who were able to drive to IFSI. The procedure was that patrons would request an item via our catalog, email, or phone. Librarians would contact patrons when the requested item was ready or if they needed further information and would schedule a pickup time with the patron. Patrons were instructed to drive up to the front door of the library building and stay in their vehicle. A staff member would come out to deliver items to the patron, who was instructed to wear a mask to ensure safe pickup.

Due to COVID-19, the library limited the loaning of hard copies of materials to a case-by-case review. Electronic materials were still available, but librarians informed patrons that access to those materials might be slightly delayed due to staffing limitations. Interlibrary loan was halted for a time since the interlibrary loan services provided by the Illinois State Library System had been discontinued because most Illinois libraries were closed. The due dates of items already on loan were extended indefinitely. Librarians asked patrons to keep loaned items until provided with updated due dates.

Eventually the library was reopened with limited hours and in-person services offered by appointment only. Curbside pickup was also continued. As other Illinois libraries opened, interlibrary loan services were resumed by the Illinois State Library System. The IFSI Library closely monitored CDC, ALA, and OCLC isolation and disinfecting guidelines for returned items, putting a sticky note marked with the returned date on each returned item and leaving the items on a return cart until they were deemed safe to handle and re-shelve.

Library Operations during COVID-19

When the library reopened, social distancing was strictly observed in staff workspaces and public-use facilities. Staff alternated between working onsite and remotely to make it possible for only one reference librarian to cover the reference desk at a time and for staff working in the library office space to maintain social distancing. Some public-use computers and public-use tables and chairs were taped off to encourage social distancing, and used surfaces in both the public spaces and the reference desk area have continued to be sanitized after use.

Masking in public facilities was mandated by the State of Illinois and the University of Illinois, as well as by the Illinois Fire Service Institute. Signs about mask requirements in the library were posted on the library entrance door and inside the library. Masks for patrons arriving without masks were made available by IFSI and are still required in the library. Patrons wearing masks inappropriately are reminded to adjust their masks according to requirements.

While the library was closed, librarians met with student staff via Zoom each week, and this continued when the library opened, but with strict social distancing requirements that prevented more than one person from working behind the reference desk at a time. Currently librarians and student employees work onsite together while continuing masking and social distancing protocols. Permanent library staff met via Zoom from the beginning of the pandemic and continue to meet online to accommodate staggered onsite work hours.

IFSI LIBRARY ARCHIVES

IFLODD

In April 2020, three Illinois firefighters died of complications from COVID-19 after contracting the virus in the line of duty. In keeping the Illinois Firefighter Line of Duty Deaths Digital Image Collection Database (IFLODD) an adaptable and relevant database, the library modified the structure of IFLODD to accommodate deaths from COVID-19 and allow users to search specifically for firefighters who have lost their lives to the virus. IFLODD records were created for these three firefighters including incident summaries, extensive metadata, images of the firefighters, and information and images from their funerals. Keeping IFLODD current and reflective of the issues faced in the fire service helps to maintain the strong relationships between fire departments and the IFSI Library that is necessary for this user-driven database.

COVID-19 Archives Collection

The IFSI Archives also worked with IFSI staff to create the COVID-19 Archives Collection to preserve important documents about the pandemic as it occurred, including collections for IFSI in general, the Illinois fire service, and the IFSI Library/International Programs. The IFSI Archives also worked with the University of Illinois Archives to coordinate IFSI responses to their “What’s Your Story” project that preserves the experiences of University of Illinois staff during the pandemic.

IFSI’s Community in IDEALS

The COVID-19 pandemic has also led to an increase in digital collections in the archives. While increasing digital collections has been a focus of the archives since its inception, the pandemic has shown the ever-increasing interest in digitized archives collections. In order to allow IFSI staff, Illinois fire service professionals, and the general public to access the collection of every Illinois Fire College brochure from 1925 to present, the archives digitized the entire collection and added it to the Illinois Digital Environment for Access to Learning and Scholarship (IDEALS), which is the institutional repository for the University of Illinois. The Illinois Fire College is the most important single training event at IFSI and has been held every year since 1925, making it the oldest continuous fire college in the United States. The archive’s collection of every brochure allows a look into all of the courses and events held at this event over its almost 100-year history. Making this collection freely available on the internet is an important way of showing not only the value of IFSI’s training to firefighters over the years, but also the richness of the archive’s collections. The archives also worked to digitize all historical IFSI newsletters and made them available on IDEALS as well. IFSI’s community in IDEALS has had over 200,000 downloads.

LIBRARY GRANT PROJECTS

IMLS American Rescue Plan Grant

In Fall of 2021, the IFSI Library received a \$50,000 grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) titled “Experienced-Based Knowledge Management Initiatives to Support Illinois Firefighters’ Dynamic Needs in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.” The grant

activities will take place between November 1, 2021 and October 31, 2022 and include: documenting and enhancing firefighter records in the Illinois Firefighter Line of Duty Deaths Digital Image Collection Database (IFLODD) for those who died in the line of duty from COVID-19; collecting Reflections oral history interviews from Illinois firefighters about the COVID-19 Pandemic and making them publicly available in IDEALS and the Illinois Digital Archives; documenting the IFSI response to the COVID-19 pandemic through the collection and addition of images, documents, videos, and other relevant file formats that will be assigned metadata and uploaded into IDEALS; and, documenting Illinois fire departments' responses to COVID-19 with images and documents collected from fire departments that will be assigned metadata and uploaded into the Illinois Digital Archives.

ALA American Rescue Plan: Humanities Grants for Libraries

In Spring of 2022, the IFSI Library received a grant of \$10,000 from the American Library Association (ALA) - American Rescue Plan: Humanities Grantmaking to develop a new Children's Fire Safety Literacy Reading and Discussion Program. The grant project will take place between March 1 to August 31, 2022. The project team will hire graduate students from the School of Information Sciences, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (iSchool), to work with firefighter presenters from different types of fire departments. The grant team will purchase and catalog 68 children's books including multi-lingual items on fire safety suggested by the firefighter speakers to support the new program. The books purchased for this program will include fiction, historical fiction, nonfiction, and memoirs for the preschool through high school level written in English, Spanish, Polish, and Chinese for racially and ethnically diverse populations. The books will be included in the IFSI Library's circulating collections that will be available to the general public.

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS AND OUTREACH SERVICES

IFSI Visiting Scholar Program

Since 2008, in partnership with other campus departments and units, the IFSI Visiting Scholar Program has been open to scholars, students, and researchers in Library and Information Science, Fire and Emergency Response Management, and other related fields from academic institutions, colleges, and universities all over the world. The program has received 152 visiting scholars in Library and Information Science, Fire Service, and Emergency Management fields from 83 institutes in China, Brazil, South Korea, and the Netherlands. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many visiting scholars had to postpone their program studies. In Fall of 2021, visiting scholars began to resume their programs. Since that time, eight scholars have arrived safely, including one fire sergeant from South Korea who joined the IFSI Winter Fire School and took the IFSI training courses in Spring 2022.

International Programs Online Scholarly Activities

Since April 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, IFSI International Programs have offered virtual scholarly communications and exchange activities. We have coordinated and hosted 29 virtual scholarly activities via Zoom with a total of 826 participants. The topics include

Community Informatics, Emergency Management, HathiTrust, Library Assessment, Library Management, Library Strategic Plans, LIS Education, Rare Book and Manuscripts, Research Data Management, Scholarly Publishing, Scholarly Writing, Subject Librarianship, etc. Speakers were invited from University of Illinois departments including the iSchool, Writers Workshop, Main Library, and Policy Department. We also invited scholars from China and colleagues from the Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA) to join the Zoom activities. The Associate Director for Access and Research Services, Lindsay King, from Haas Arts Library at Yale University, was invited to share their library services, policies, and practices during the COVID-19 pandemic through our Zoom activities. The Research Librarian, Dr. Jiuming Ji from the East China University of Science and Technology Library, joined the Zoom activities and gave a presentation on “Chinese Libraries’ Responses during COVID-19.” More speakers will be invited from universities in and beyond Illinois.

Although the pandemic continues, the IFSI International Programs continues to deliver international outreach services and has built a strong and continually growing global community of 803 individuals, consisting of 423 librarians, 152 scholars, and 228 first responders from 186 organizations including libraries, universities, research institutes, and fire organizations.

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About the authors

Dr. Lian Ruan, Head Librarian at the University of Illinois Fire Service Institute (IFSI), Director of the IFSI International Programs, and Affiliate Research Faculty at the School of Information Sciences, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, has research interests in information behavior, special library administration, and international librarianship with numerous publications.

David Ehrenhart serves as Assistant Director for Library Operations with the Illinois Fire Service Institute Library. His responsibilities include supervisory tasks related to library operations, as well as preserving and providing access to the history of the Illinois Fire Service Institute and the history of the fire service in Illinois.

Diane Richardson serves as Reference and User Training Librarian with the IFSI Library. Her responsibilities include leadership of a reference team of graduate students, creation of digital information resources, and the provision of circulation, outreach, and library usage training to Illinois firefighters via interlibrary loan services, social media, and in-person and online workshops.

Shuyi Liu serves as International Outreach Services Librarian with the Illinois Fire Service Institute Library. She performs duties involved with supporting and assisting international outreach programs and activities, providing reference and information research resources for international users, as well as liaison with organizations on and beyond campus.