

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT



Wake Forest University

Library Covers Curtailed Campus Services with Simple, Elegant Solution

University campuses today face new challenges. Aiming to offer the same high-quality service, they must also ensure the wellbeing of the campus community during a global pandemic. At Wake Forest University (WFU), librarians looked to Patterson Pope for help finding new ways to continue to offer services within safety protocols.

THE PROBLEM

At the Z. Smith Reynolds Library (ZSR) on Wake Forest's North Carolina campus, service hours were curtailed for the 2020-21 academic year. The library also had fewer student assistants on campus to handle the on-campus delivery of circulated items to faculty members.

Quite simply, the changes required of the library during COVID-19 diminished services to students and faculty, said James Harper, Interim Director of Access Services at WFU. The library needed to find flexible ways to continue to safely meet campus needs.

The ZSR staff came up with a short-term solution in the Spring of 2020 when only faculty were able to

come to campus. Borrowers could make online requests from the collection, and the library would pull those items, check them out and leave them in paper bags with the individual's name on it in a reading room that is 24/7 accessible by swiping a WFU ID card.

"It met the need to be able to continue to make the collection available, but it was very inelegant and not at all secure," said library associate dean Mary Beth Lock. *"We were basically relying on people to be honest and only take the bag that was checked out to them."*

THE SOLUTION

Lock's team had already been eyeing smart storage solutions as a *"pie in the sky"* possibility, even before the pandemic. The new environment on campus gave ZSR an opportunity to lobby for the funding. There was *"zero push back,"* Lock said. Those holding WFU's purse strings also recognized the logic of offering convenient access to the collection while minimizing risk.

Before classes began in the Fall of 2020, the university invested in smart lockers for the library. In fact, WFU added a second bank soon after the first to meet the growing need.

Now the lockers are typically at 90-95% capacity. In fact, the library had to change its policies reducing the ten-day locker retrieval period to five days to ensure efficient use of the lockers.

After analyzing the locker trends available in the digital dashboard provided by the locker's software, Harper also reconfigured the lockers originally set for day-use. With actual on-premises library use

curtailed, those weren't being used as much. When things change again, he'll be able to switch them back if needed.

Additionally, Harper set aside five specific lockers for the IT department's use to allow faculty and students to drop-off and collect technology from the repair team. Unique sized lockers are used to dispense audio visual equipment, again without the individuals needing to interact face-to-face at the circulation desk.

With smart lockers in place in the secure campus reading room, the library saw several advantages:

- » User-friendly solution for staff and faculty
- » Ability to meet demand after hours while still securing collection resources
- » Greater flexibility regarding how services are provided and when
- » Improved transparency into circulation trends with digital software
- » Minimized personal contact in the circulation of collection items

"We desire contact-less as much as possible. The lockers still give faculty and students the access they need but without them or us having to take on additional risks."

Mary Beth Lock
Associate Dean, Z. Smith Reynolds Library

THE OUTCOME

Two banks of smart lockers installed in the 24/7 reading room let students and faculty members unlock a touch-less locker using their campus IDs. Items are reserved and checked out by librarians and the borrower gets an email with information about how to collect their items from the lockers.

While Harper at first had several signs up around the lockers to explain how the process worked, he was able to work with Patterson Pope to customize

the solution. Adding visuals to the touchscreens and specific details for their configuration has streamlined the process so that all the signs are now gone. It's an elegant, and user-friendly solution, the librarians agree.

"We have certainly had a lot of feedback that the lockers are a lifesaver," said Lock. "They fit so effortlessly, it feels like they were always there."



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ABOUT THE CLIENT

The Z. Smith Reynolds Library (ZSR) at Wake Forest University supports the research and instruction needs of over 4,800 undergraduates and nearly 3,000 graduate and professional students in the School of Business, the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and the School of Divinity.

