Checked Out! Episode 2 Transcript

Dean Kathy Ray: Hello everybody, this Kathy Ray with the University of Nevada Reno Libraries and Teaching and Learning Technologies. How's everybody doing? Who knew that staying home for Nevada could be so stressful sometimes? Take some deep breaths. Slow things down, take a walk, enjoy those beautiful Reno blue skies and soak in some sunshine. This is our second episode of Checked Out. I'm really enjoying sharing the stories, emerging from the Libraries and TLT, and these are the anecdotes we want to bring to you to tell you about the many accomplishments moving us forward in this time of unprecedented uncertainty. We're really looking forward to having everyone back on campus, but until then we're gonna continue broadcasting from here. And I hope you'll keep listening. So with that, I bring you episode two of Checked Out. Enjoy.

Sasha Soleta: Thank you Kathy for that great introduction. I'm Sasha.

Sean Busey: And I am Sean, and welcome to uh episode two of the Checked Out, the new University Libraries podcast. Uh How's it going Sasha?

Sasha: It is going ok. Working remotely is....something. I'm just going to leave it at that. Something.

Sean: But we're getting through it.

Sasha: We are getting through it, and you know what? My animals I guess like it.

Sean: Dude, the dogs.

Sasha: They're gonna be shocked

Sean: The dogs are really happy right now.

Sasha: Uh-huh

Sean: They are fine with this arrangement.

Sasha: But I don't think they're going to like it when we go back to work.

Sean: I think they're gonna think it's totally unfair. They're gonna be like "oh c'mon!"

Sasha: I think UNR should let us bring them in to work with us the first couple weeks so we can like slowly...

Sean: Like a transition period?

Sasha: Yeah we got to transition them into this, I think that's fair. Or we can, I've always wanted one, we could get a library cat.

Sean: I mean, you know what why not, why not, why not, and I...I, we know we have the technology now. Let's just have the dogs at work by Zoom every day.

Sasha: Oh that'd be sweet.

Sean: we can do it.

Sasha: And they're always on mute so when they wanna talk they have to press the spacebar down.

Sean: Yeah, woof woof. I didn't like that. Woof.

Sasha: I am kind of interested to see how the students are coping. You guys give us a shout out, tell us how you guys are handling this. I can only imagine how it would be to do online Zoom classes.

Sean: In my, my collegiate career I think I took uh one online class, where we had to attend like a live video lecture sort of the thing. And it was an unmitigated disaster.

Sasha: Well I'm not saying we're old Sean, but the internet was just a series of tubes when we started college, so I think....

Sean: Wait, It's still just tubes now.

Sasha: Oh I forgot about that, the great tube underground. But...
Sean: A bunch of carrier pigeons, that's how text messages work.
Sasha: Yeah I only took like two online, solely online courses for my undergrad, and they were Core Humanities, so I don't think that counts. Sorry Core Humanities.
Sean: And then, and then I had one other, the only thing that was online about that was the proctored tests. Never had to do anything like uh... like one of those live Zoom tests that I hear are a thing, but that sounds awful.
Sasha: Yeah good luck guys we believe in you. But you know, what's not a test but also happens at the end of the school year Sean?
Sean: I'm gonna go with stress eating and research papers.
Sasha: Yes, more on the stress eating.
Sean: That comes later.
Sasha: That comes later. Actually it comes during, if you don't turn in your physical paper covered in Cheeto dust did you even write a final paper?
Sean: Couple of stray drops of mountain dew.
Sasha: Uh-huh, no for me it was red bull back in the day. But....
Sean: that's right, that's right.
Sasha: With those research papers what do you need Sean?
Sean: Help.
Sasha: Yeah, you need a lot of help.
Sean: You need, yeah, specifically you need research help.
Sasha: Uh-huh, so back in the day before the dark times of sheltering at home. is that what we call it?
Sean: Uh, quarantining.
Sasha: Quarantining, we had this place called the Knowledge Center. Do you remember it? Big brick building, windows and stuff.
Sean: For anyone that watches Firefly it's like the earth that was.
Sasha: Yeah, and in that building at the base of the grand staircase there was this wonderful desk where they would help you find articles and these things called. Bo- Bo- Books.
Sean: Bo-ocks
Sasha: Bo-ocks, bo-ocks
Sean: Yes
Sasha: about the things you were trying to research. And I believe they were called the Research Services desk.
Sean: This is, this is truly a fantastic setting, and people you are discussing.
Sasha: Yes they were truly fantastic, and then the dark times came. And the library closed, Sean.
Sean: And now it's all shuttered and boarded up now.
Sasha: But you know what? we carry on at the Knowledge Center, and those great research helpers have moved on to the internets. And that's what we're interviewing them about this week.
Sean: Yeah, we, we interviewed Tati Mesfin one of the Instruction Librarians, and her student worker, Alyssa Campbell, a peer research consultant who helps provide that research assistance. We talked to them basically about the trials and tribulations of doing this all remotely, and uh yeah we were interested in what they had to say, and we found it pretty informative we hope you do as well.
Sean: Alright, so we're here today uh with Tati Mesfin, uh Instruction Librarian, at the Knowledge Center and Alyssa Campbell, the peer research

consultant we are interviewing today, also at the Knowledge Center. So, thank you two for joining us.

Tati Mesfin: Yeah sure of course.

Sean: So I think we wanted to start off, uh Tati, since you supervise the PRC's

Tati Mesfin: Mmhmm

Sean: Maybe for those that don't know, maybe you could talk a little bit about the PRC position and its responsibilities and maybe, maybe like how it's evolved since it first came to be. Something like that.

Tati: Yeah, Sure of course. So PRC stands for Peer Research Consultants, um they are student workers for Research and Instruction services in the knowledge center. Um And they uh provide research and instructional support to students, staff, and faculty. They staff the Research Help Desk, which is on the second floor of the Knowledge Center. And they also provide uh chat help so they provide research help from the Libraries uh home page. They provide chat and phone and in person help. So they are in, in contact with library patrons in lots of different ways and they are usually on the desk in the afternoons and evenings which is when a lot of students are kind of working on their papers and studying and doing homework. It's a really great time for them to be available to provide support to students. They uh come from a variety of different majors, different backgrounds, different places. Some are local, some are from Vegas, and they really are there to be peer to peer help to students. So students speak the language of other students. They understand what they're going through they have taken a lot of the same classes, same tests, written the same papers, and so they are basically there to be a mirror for the students. They can talk about complex research strategies and concepts in a way that relates to students uh that's in their own language. And they connect with them on a much deeper level. So we get students from different kinds of backgrounds and they all really have like the same core belief which is to provide research assistance to patrons.

Sean: Nice, very cool.

Sasha: So now that we know what a PRC is, let's talk to one. So we have Alyssa Campbell, you're one of the, how many are PRC's do you guys have now?

Tati: Four, we have four Peer Research Consultants right now.

Sasha: So Alyssa is one of the four, um unfortunately we couldn't schedule everybody at the same time. It's like herding cats sometimes, so..but we have Alyssa here to talk to. So first question I have for you. Yeah. First question I have for you is um, what have the PRC's been doing to offer research help during quarantine?

Alyssa Campbell: Um yeah, so as Tati Mentioned um we usually do um in person and then virtual chat help. And so the nice thing is we have been able to continue using the chat function, which is on the Library website. And we can still provide quite a few services um through that chat function. Um And I believe it's Monday through Friday and then also Sunday that we help, and I think it's the afternoons generally. Um which is really nice because we've been able to really continue um what we've built on and what we've been working on even in person.

Sean: that's great even in the, even in quarantine students sleep away most of the morning after late nighters.

Alyssa: Yes exactly. We're always there.

Sean: So um, what uh, what is changed as far as the normal process, you know vs. not in quarantine vs. now. What is, what is different?
Alyssa: Yeah, so the nice thing like I said is that it's very similar. We are continuing the chat function, um but we don't get to do the in person help anymore. We don't get to have those one-on-one interactions with um patrons who want to drop in during the school day, or school year. And I believe our hours are a little bit shorter um than they used to be we used to offer evening help as well, but we're starting off with this, and I think its, its been a pretty good help so far.
Sean: Right.
Sasha: Have you seen like an increase in chat numbers from when you guys were working the desk? Or...
Alyssa: Somewhat, I think it stayed kind of similar, um I work on Fridays and Sundays, so those are definitely a little bit slower shifts than I think some of the weekdays are. I feel like they're just a little bit different questions. It's more policy related um, what's been changing, how can we help with these difficult times, and what services does the library have, so.
Sean: And have you guys, like, have you even had to, but have you entertained the thought of doing like, like this, like a video chat or something like that? I imagine there might be a lot of complications with something like that.
Tati: We've thought about it, um the librarians the staff and faculty and Research and Instruction services, we just started adopting that, as we're working remotely we just started offering Zoom research consultations, so we're, we're transitioning into that. And so, it's possible we could have the PRC's do that in the future, if not remotely then at the research desk.
Sean: Ok.
Tati: There still might be some benefit to seeing the patron on a screen. Um We do help people on, on chat, that's actually our most popular uh way to get research assistance, it's just that when you are missing those non-verbal cues, it's kind of...you're missing a big chunk of communication there. And so, I think even if we were able to set up something that the students could provide video chat, I think that would still be beneficial. So we are considering that.
Sasha: What are the challenges to helping with research remotely?
Alyssa: For me, I really miss the in-person connection. Um I think it's easier to explain concepts when you can be right there and walk them through it on a computer. We do have some services that allow us to like screen share. But like Tati says um, I kind of miss the verbal cues to knowing like oh they actually get this, and they're doing well with this concept. So I really do miss that and then, at no fault of the libraries of course, um just like the limitation of resources is hard, just because when you can't check out books that you used to, or the services aren't quite the same, people miss that, so you can definitely get some frustrations, but everybody's usually really understanding, so.
Tati: We got a lot of interactions at the research desk just from people like walking into the library. Just walking down the stairs. Just going to pick up a book, or write a paper, see your friend. And so, we're missing that. People might walk by the desk and catch our eye, or see that it says research help, and so we're not getting all of those uh passer-by's, so because of that we are seeing a drop in numbers, and I do

miss the kind of in person face-to-face interactions with patrons. Like I miss people in general.
Sean: Yeah, I think we all do right now.
Sasha: Yeah, Just a little bit.
Tati: Um, but...there were parts of the um research interview, the reference interview, that are now missing like, you might try explaining something to a patron and they might say um, or they might type in chat, "yes I understand," but they might have a different expression on their face, their brow might be furrowed, they might be shaking their head.
Sean: Yeah
Tati: And so, you can kind of pick up on those things and, you know um, ask more questions and really kind of dig deeper, but when you don't really get those non-verbal cues, it's difficult to get into a more in-depth reference interview I feel.
Sean: Right. If you're like me you just have your face buried in your hands, "yeah I get it, I get it." Yeah, that's where chat comes in handy.
Sasha: So have you seen more research questions based now on scholarly articles because we can't get as many, like, books to people as we could before? or...
Alyssa: Um, I don't know if it's an increase, I feel like it's um kind of the time of the semester where a lot of people have research papers due anyway. So I, I think I've seen an increase in a little bit of, "how do I find this article?" "why isn't it showing up at home?" "how do I get access to these scholarly materials at home?" Because I think a lot of students are used to sitting in the library environment and being to able to hop on the Wi-Fi and things just show up. I think once they move from the fact that maybe books aren't available then also like where else can they get help, and so I think the resources that the library has provided um, I'm trying to think of a few... there was like the national...what is it called Tati? it's like the national emergency library.
Sasha: Yeah, there's HathiTrust as well that released a lot of their books to be available online, which was really good.
Alyssa: Yeah, yeah those are both really good services that I think people were a little bit more excited to have access to now, like I'm not completely cutoff from all the books that I've been wanting to read or have in my research paper so.
Sean: Yeah, that's great. We talked a little bit a moment ago about the potential for Zoom meetings, like in the future, but in the process of, you know, doing this with an, you know, in quarantine. Have you learned any, anything else that could change, you know, how this is performed, how the service is offered in the future?
Alyssa: Um, for me I think I'm definitely gonna be more aware um for people on chat, and then also in person for knowing how to use these resources at home, because I think people just relied on having it at the library, or so on and so just really making sure like hey this is accessible at home, you can use um your net ID and password to be able to log onto these resources, and kind of walking them through step-by-step how to get these articles um might be a part of the reference interview for me just to make sure that when they're going home they're not going to have more issues in the future.
Sean: Right, Right. That little extra bit of thoroughness.
Alyssa: Yeah most definitely. Um and then just making sure that they do know um who their librarians are I think is always really important, and we try to stress that, but I think in times like this, um they can be a

really great resource, when they are available that is a service that we still have, and you can still meet with these individuals um, and so knowing that they have that resource in a quarantine, or not in a quarantine um that is an available resource.

Tati: I really encourage students to, to utilize the resource, to talk to peer research consultants. It's someone in your class um who um has a strong academic record and writing skills, and they're there, and they uh probably don't have a lot of other things to do at the desk. So go up to them and talk to them. But ask them questions. I was very afraid of the library when I was a freshman, um so, I really think that it's a way to make students feel welcome into an environment that can be scary. So I hope that they feel welcome and talk to the PRC's.

Sean: Very well said. Very well said. Anything uh, you want to add on?

Alyssa: Yeah, yeah um I was just gonna say don't be afraid to um ask questions as a student um we will literally help with anything you can possibly imagine about the library or elsewhere. Um I've had questions from how to get apartments, to how to use the library resources, um to how to find um articles for your research paper. So we really are a really great resource, and um even if we can't help you, the library has tons of resources that can get you the help you need. So just don't be afraid to ask questions as we really are to help you.

Sean: Alright, so that was a PRC interview.

Sasha: And a big thank you to our guests, Alyssa Campbell, who is a Peer Research Consultant at the Knowledge Center. And Tati Mesfin, who is an Instructional Librarian with Research and Instructional Services at the Knowledge Center.

Sean: We are of course your hosts Sasha and Sean. Also thanks to the Library's uh podcast team, Maggie Ressel, uh Michelle Rebaleati, Luka Starmer, Jill Stockton, and Landon Renwick.

Sasha: Oh and our episode music was "Better Days" by Lewin Wikstrom, courtesy of Universal production music, and the barking in the background was provided by Duncan, my stupid dog.

Sean: Until next time, this is Checked Out checking out.