

The Impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on Three Louisiana Academic Libraries

A Response from Library Administrators and Staff

Tom Diamond

In late August 2005, a growing and widening Tropical Storm Katrina gave birth to Hurricane Katrina. Heeding warnings from the National Hurricane Center and fearing the worst for their states, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco and Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour each declared a state of emergency. President George W. Bush declared a state of emergency for the state of Louisiana. On Sunday, August 28, Hurricane Katrina's wind strength reached, at one point, a maximum sustained drive of 175 miles per hour. New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin issued a voluntary evacuation for the city, declaring "Ladies and gentleman, this is not a test. This is the real deal."¹ New Orleans residents poured out of the city, forming a tortoise-like moving, four-wheel queue that inched its way to Baton Rouge and other destinations in Louisiana and Mississippi. On August 29, Hurricane Katrina made landfall near Buras, Louisiana with wind strength estimated at 125 miles per hour.² Hurricane Katrina made its deadly visit to southeastern Louisiana, southern Mississippi, and southwestern Alabama.

Following in the footsteps of Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Rita paid an unwelcome visit to southwestern Louisiana and southeastern Texas on September 24, 2005. The storm weaved its way through the Straits of Florida and into the Gulf of Mexico, quickly gathering steam and, at one point, reaching a peak intensity of 180 mile per hour winds on September 22. On September 24, Hurricane Rita struck the Texas and Louisiana coastlines with maximum sustained winds of 115 miles per hour.³ While the devastation in New Orleans from the levee breaches made the headlines and national news stories, the devastation in southwestern Louisiana went practically unnoticed. But nonetheless, the people suffered and are still suffering. Rita flattened villages located along the Louisiana coastline and inflicted heavy wind and water damage throughout numerous parishes. Both hurricanes served as major life-altering events.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita had a dramatic impact on the operations of academic institutions in Louisiana as well. Tulane University (New Orleans) plans to restructure its operations, reduce the number of doctoral programs from forty-five to eighteen, and eliminate five

undergraduate majors.⁴ McNeese State University (Lake Charles) suffered \$10 million in damages.⁵ Other universities in New Orleans are still feeling the financial impact. Xavier University terminated or placed staff on leave and sustained more than \$47.6 million in damages.⁶ The LSU board of supervisors granted the University of New Orleans the power to terminate full-time faculty and employees to help alleviate an approximate \$16.5 million shortfall in revenues.⁷ Dillard University, which sustained approximately \$500 million in damages, also dismissed faculty members.⁸ The board of trustees at Loyola University voted to discontinue, consolidate, or suspend numerous programs.⁹ The financial impact of both hurricanes on higher education in Louisiana is deep and far reaching.

The article seeks to document the prehurricane and post-hurricane conditions affecting three Louisiana academic libraries and their parent institutions: Tulane University, McNeese State University, and Southeastern Louisiana University (Hammond). Over a period of several days in February 2006, I met with administrators and staff from each of these universities. All of the participants provided unique insights into how the hurricanes impacted their respective schools and how each school and its employees reacted to the circumstances. We are truly indebted to this group for generously sharing their time. Certainly, no disaster planning document can adequately cover a quagmire the likes of which confronted the state. However, it is hoped their experiences, lessons, and insights will benefit current and future library directors, managers, supervisors, and staff members in formulating or revising disaster plans.

Emergency Planning

The first group of questions tackles emergency planning issues. The questions revolve around the formulation and implementation of disaster plans, the successes or failures in implementing these plans, and whether libraries should consider incorporating steps to contact other libraries for assistance in case of an emergency.

Q: *Did your library have an emergency or evacuation plan in place to deal with external contingencies such as hurricanes? How well was the plan implemented?*

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Lance Query (LQ), Dean of Libraries and Academic Information Resources, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University: In September 2004, we developed a disaster plan for the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library. It looked very fine but proved to be hopelessly inadequate as soon as the levees broke. I looked at other disaster planning documents prior to and after Hurricane Katrina. There are no disaster planning documents that deal with this type of disaster. What we talked about were pipe breaks or fires. We don't deal with a whole city that is underwater. Our disaster planning document was worthless, but I say that in a valuable way because who would have anticipated something like this? The document does note that the library emergency response team will review the effectiveness of the library's hurricane plan and update the plan as needed. The library plan was not implemented because the university's plan was implemented and very well done. Unbeknownst to me, our risk management division of the university had in place plans for a large-scale disaster. For example, the company that works with us on the recovery, Belfor, a German company, worked in big disasters affecting libraries such as the flooding of the University of Hawaii's library. We had scheduled a local firm to help us for emergency generating power both here at the library and the off-site facility in Mid-City [New Orleans]. That was fine as far it went, but the risk management division of the university knew the people to call. At the library, we were able to move with dispatch and did not have to go out and find somebody because that was already in place. Interestingly, one of the topics library directors often discuss at ARL meetings is that risk management personnel persist in wanting to know the value of the collection in dollar terms. We don't have the time or the staff to assess the value of our holdings, so we provide estimates. I have now come up close and personal as to how valuable these risk management people are not only in terms of trying to assess the value of the collection, but in terms of running interference with and serving as a liaison with the insurance companies and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Nancy Khoury (NK), Library Director, Frazar Memorial Library, McNeese State University: Yes, we did have a safety manual. We spent quite a bit of time a couple years ago upgrading and making the safety manual a worthwhile instrument. We did anticipate someday we would deal with a hurricane. Our standing committee, the safety committee, is in place to review and update the manual. The safety manual was implemented as well as possible considering the limited amount of time we had. I imagine the safety manual will be fine-tuned. We had a lot of opportunity to sit around and talk when we were displaced. We discussed some of the things that needed to be addressed. We haven't actually gotten back together with the manual in hand since we've been back in the building. That's something I see us doing soon.

Pati Threatt (PT), Assistant Archivist, Frazar Memorial Library, McNeese State University: The safety manual includes a list of things that needed to be done before Hurricane Rita arrived. We were notified about closure at around 2 P.M. on September 21, 2005 and most of us went home around 4:30 P.M. There was one reference librarian left until 10 P.M. to deal with all these issues. I don't think the list was completed so there was a gap that needed to be addressed. We just didn't prepare for that contingency. That is where one of our major holes occurred. I came back Thursday morning. We have a unique situation with the building. There is a bayou running behind the building, and we have one of our archive storage rooms located right next to this bayou. It is already showing signs of sinking a little bit. I assumed that when Hurricane Rita arrived this would be the first thing that would fall into the bayou. I did come back to move things out of that room and send them to the second floor of the library. Fortunately, the second floor was completely undamaged.

Kenneth Awagain (KA), Library Services Coordinator, Frazar Memorial Library, McNeese State University: We didn't have everyone's cell phone numbers. After the storm, it was hard to get in touch with people to find out the status of all the staff. Since then, all this information has been added to the safety manual. We have also added alternative e-mail addresses in the event the university's system is unavailable.

Eric Johnson (EJ), Library Director, Sims Memorial Library, Southeastern University Library: We have a rudimentary emergency plan that is being reviewed by our ongoing library safety committee. The committee also reviews the building as far as hazards and safety issues. We did not have to implement the plan because we did not have any flooding, breakage, or damage from Hurricane Katrina. The library committee is revising the plan with an eye on what would happen if we did sustain hurricane damage. The university does have an emergency plan. We received copies of it right around the time of Hurricane Georges in 1998. The university safety office is pretty up-to-date on this.

Q: *Should libraries in disaster prone areas include in their preparedness plan previously arranged assistance from libraries outside the area?*

LQ: Yes, this should be done. In our case, the Eastman School of Music has been extremely generous in offering its music scores. The University of Chicago has offered its U.S. Congressional Serial Set and other publications. Harvard University offered assistance, too.

NK: I don't think we actively sought assistance. My feeling was that so many other libraries in the state needed much more assistance that perhaps we should not compete. We were not in a position to get people to come in and help because we could not get into the building.

KA: A lot of people who needed reference and information assistance probably went to the public library if they did not check the library Web page. The Web page played a key role in providing assistance to the students because it was hard to get the word out that we were back on campus but in a different building. We were working out of a smaller library, the curriculum materials center, which is mainly an education and children's literature library. I know that the public library received a lot of questions from McNeese faculty and students. The main public library's assistance from the latter part of October to the end of the semester was invaluable.

PT: Without our even knowing it, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (ULL) helped because a number of our faculty and students visited their library. When they said they were from McNeese, they were given all the privileges of the ULL students and faculty. I only found about this incidentally in a conversation with ULL Director Charles Trische. There is no telling how many students ULL took under its wings. I'm sure there are many instances of that kind of service that are unknown to us. The people at ULL were great.

Library Buildings and Library Collections

After addressing emergency planning issues, the participants discussed how the storms impacted their library collections, buildings, and operations. Archival and preservation efforts and the storms' impact in dollar terms are also reviewed.

Q: Describe the hurricanes' impact on the various library collections and to the library building(s).

LQ: The Law Library sustained a little water damage through leakage from the roof; there was some mold but that was remediated fairly quickly and easily. The big issue is what happened in the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library and Jones Hall. We have an off-site storage facility, located in Mid-City, we acquired about two years ago. It is the old Coca-Cola bottling plant warehouse. The building holds half a million books and the university's art collection. It had its own plans for external power in case of an emergency. The floor is raised about six to seven feet above ground level, and we needed every inch of it. It came within an inch of taking on water. A little bit of water damage was sustained; the water was driven in through some of the windows, but not much. The hurricane wind was almost inconsequential.

NK: We do not have off-campus storage. Government documents, housed on the fourth floor, are the one area of the collection that experienced wind and water damage. We had a lot of water seepage through the windows. We still don't know the full extent of the damage. The clean-

ing people came in and did what they could. They bagged the damaged materials and brought them downstairs. We have just begun to review the bags, which will be very time consuming and labor intensive. These are somewhere from 330 to 350 bagged shelves of documents. We filled our outside storage room. When it was filled to capacity, we started stacking the bags on the first floor in the library. I'm not aware of any significant mold or any other damage on the fourth floor.

Joe McNeill (JM), System Administrator, Frazar Memorial Library, McNeese State University: Circulation counted items that were checked out and what might have been lost. The current count is five hundred unaccounted items, down from one thousand items. Notices have been mailed, asking people to call and account for the materials. Only one item that was brought back had a little bit of damage.

PT: When the people came in to clean the building, they cleaned the books but they did not put them back in the exact spot on the shelf. We were prepared for this, but not for how much we found to be out of place. Circulation is spending a lot of time shelf reading the entire collection.

KA: The collection is one of the big reasons why we did not reopen to the public until February 6, although we were back in the building by January 18. Circulation had to straighten the shelves and get them ready as best they could. The university had reopened on October 27. At the time, we could not occupy the library building because it was damaged, mainly water and mold issues.

EJ: There was no impact in the sense of damage or service. We closed the Sunday of Hurricane Katrina, August 28, and we reopened the day after Labor Day. We don't provide for off-campus storage.

Q: Please describe the library's archival and preservation efforts to save materials.

LQ: We had very valuable, historic scores of music in the music library located in the basement of the library. The music library was virtually under water. Belfor was able to save about 70 percent of the music scores. They can also do wonderful things with microfilm, depending on what kind of microfilm it is. You lose some resolution on the first six to eight feet of film, but it is still certainly readable. Beyond that, you get a very different recovery rate. It costs about twenty dollars a roll to recover microfilm. We have pretty good prospects for saving the microfilm. The fiche was virtually a 100 percent loss. We also had the heating, cooling, computing, fans and mechanics in the basement and that was a complete loss. The rest of Howard-Tilton Memorial Library was virtually unharmed except for some minor damage upstairs. Recovery companies make their profits by trying to recover everything. I did not want

Belfor to perform heroic efforts to save items such as compact discs that can be easily replaced. Government documents can be provided through Government Printing Office (GPO) or are available electronically. [At least 90–95 percent of the documents collection was lost.] Very early on, I had to have people here performing triage who knew what they were talking about. I asked Eric Wedig, head of government documents, who lives in the area, to come in and supervise what would be pitched immediately or what would be put into the dry freezer. That way we maximized our investment. Similarly, I had the heads of special collections and collection development come in and perform triage with Belfor. I did not want to try to recover everything because that would have been cost prohibitive, and I'm delighted we did it that way. I think that was a textbook way of maximizing your resources; that is, the people with the knowledge about the resources perform the triage. The building across from the library, Jones Hall, houses our archives and special collections. The bottom floor houses papers of politically important Louisianans. Four feet of water covered these materials. We are going to save virtually all of these papers.

Government publications and music materials were boxed and placed in chilled tractor-trailer trucks located outside the library and shipped to Fort Worth, Texas, for freeze drying. Belfor actually ran out of space in Fort Worth so some materials were moved to Memphis. Temperature and humidity control is in place throughout the library to reduce the risk of mold. I walked throughout the entire shelf area last October and did not see any mold. We had a few moldy books come back from users that we needed to separate from the rest of the collection. We have had a few gifts/donations from jazz musicians and their families from the Gentilly area for the Jazz Archive. These were sent directly to Fort Worth to be freeze dried. The portable generator located outside of Howard-Tilton will be in place for approximately twelve to fourteen months. It is pretty comfortable in the library.

PT: We did not have any damage to the archives. We did include a provision in the cleaners' contract that when they were cleaning archives materials, one of the archives staff had to be on site to keep an eye on things. We did provide guidance on what did and didn't need to be done. We are also providing professional assistance with the cleanup of government documents. In all of the archives storage rooms, on the actual box labels, we include colored stickers. We have a red and a blue system. The red items mean you have five minutes to save these items. This was very helpful in removing materials.

NK: Labeling the boxes also helped me, too. One of my great concerns was the material in archives. The facilities manager remained on campus throughout this whole mess. When I spoke with him, he asked if there were any items of particular value and interest he should note when he was

in the library. I was able to say yes, they are marked in such a way. That was a handy type of system to have.

Q: *In dollar terms, how would you assess the storms' impact?*

LQ: I think we can be comfortable in saying that, at this time, the losses appear to be in the \$30 million range. (Data provided on June 6, 2006.)

NK: I would say, to get to the point where we are now, it is costing about one million dollars and that would be for remediation. Now, we are working on repairs. There are a number of ceiling tiles damaged. We are still scheduled for a major renovation. If that goes forward, that would take care of some of the things that need to be repaired.

EJ: The impact comes from the budget cuts affecting the university's budget and, hence, the library's budget. As a result, we have tightened our belts greatly. We managed to continue most of the serials and databases. We eliminated roughly \$90,000 from our serials and database budget, this by eliminating duplication of format versus content. We cut our microfilm budget from \$50,000 to \$22,000. We immediately stopped buying books except for emergency requests, reserve materials, and materials needed for accreditation purposes. We already had \$50,000 worth of orders in the pipeline. I did receive more funds, and we will spend another \$10,000 on books. This is compared to a prehurricane book budget of \$250,000. We also stopped binding materials, except for theses. We felt more people depended on the periodicals and databases versus the books. Our administration is extremely supportive of the library. The provost has a good understanding about libraries and what they need. He has truly bent over backwards in trying to keep our services as close to normal as possible.

Ladonna Guillot (LG), Health Sciences Librarian, Southeastern Louisiana University School of Nursing, Baton Rouge Center Nursing School: It also impacted various projects that were put on hold. For example, I had started a study with two of the nursing faculty on cancer pain and management Web sites. We never really completed the project. Although it was accepted at the American Society for Pain and Management Nursing conference in March of this year, the lack of travel funds had us putting this on hold and we will revisit it during the summer.

Staff and Communication Channels

Any catastrophic event, and especially a hurricane, is going to take its toll on staff in terms of morale. Maintaining communication channels during and after a hurricane offers its own set of challenges that planning documents must address. Circumstances may dictate finding alternative methods of

communicating amongst staff members. As discussed by the panel, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita dealt unique and similar challenges to all the schools.

Q: *Please describe the impact on library staff. Was the staff overwhelmed by the scope of events, and what was done to help them cope?*

LQ: Hurricane Katrina impacted our support staff the hardest. They were the least able to cope with it. They lived in modest housing that had been in the family for generations, and it was wiped out. They did not have enough insurance or any at all. How do we cope with that? That is really hard. We accommodated people as best we could and were very flexible in providing the time needed to address these issues. The university chartered a cruise ship for students and staff, purchased an apartment building on St. Charles Avenue, and is working with FEMA to get trailers, but this part has been slow. Sometimes the people coming back cannot afford the housing and also the people who had lived in FEMA housing now have to look elsewhere.

NK: We had so many people on campus offer to help us find places where we could continue working, to feel that we were accomplishing something. The administration and the faculty were very much aware of our problem and did all they could to help us. Good things came out of this, as well. I think we bonded more as a group than we ever dreamed we would. I think we also became aware of how highly regarded the library is on campus.

JM: There was a lot of humor exchanged during that time period. It was the only way to break the monotony of what we were going through. Seeing each other every day was highly unusual since we don't [usually] see each other every day, although we are all in the same building.

EJ: Many staff members experienced damage to their houses. The staff is dispersed throughout four or five parishes. People evacuated to various places such as Hilton Head (South Carolina) and Memphis (Tennessee). The storm impacted staff in two ways: their personal lives and the budget cuts. One of the problems affecting staff living in New Orleans is the uncertainty of what is going to happen. They have the double problem of not knowing what is going to happen to the city of New Orleans and not knowing when they would be able to get help in repairing their houses. This takes a lot of work time. We've been pretty flexible in allowing people to change their schedules in order to address these issues.

Q: *Did you have to lay off any staff?*

LQ: We cut about twelve positions. Also, there were about twelve people from the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library who did not come back to New Orleans. We did hear back

from eleven of these people. We also had a large number of vacancies that will not be filled for now. I said to the university IT department that if you give me a modicum of assurance you can give me support, I'll throw in with you centrally and eliminate all but one IT position. Two criteria were established to determine what positions would be cut: who were in the mission-critical positions and who had the skill set that would enable them to best adjust to a reorganized library. Seniority was not an issue. As a private institution, we had a lot of flexibility. In Houston, all the administrators were told to prepare a list of positions that were not mission critical. For example, who would think that in the post-Katrina situation the library would do away with its preservation department? I did, because I noted that we could work on an item-by-item basis and outsource these materials. I hope to rebuild the department, but for the next couple of years we are not going to be able to do that.

NK: No, but we did have one resignation that was directly tied to the storm. Also, we had one person retire earlier than she planned because she lost her apartment and decided to go ahead and retire.

EJ: No. We have four open positions. Two are being advertised, and two are frozen. It is an interesting phenomenon with a potential impact on recruiting. Because more people moved to this area from New Orleans, we will probably have a better local pool than before. It is a toss-up with a national pool.

Q: *How did the library staff maintain communication channels? What improvements can be made?*

LQ: Post-Katrina, I was at the last ASERL [Association of Southeastern Research Libraries] meeting and was asked to coordinate a discussion on disaster planning. ASERL, through SOLINET, has offered to be a resource for communications. One of the things that broke down at Tulane is that we didn't have a backup system for communication. This was one of the big failures of Tulane University and not just the library. We did not have a backup system. We established a group discussion board on Yahoo! where maybe 20 percent of the library staff participated. SOLINET will now provide such a service for ASERL members, and that's good. Things like this need to be incorporated into disaster planning. The dozen or so disaster plans I've reviewed don't incorporate this but are more concerned about books and materials. We do have a communication tree in our document, but when the cell phones don't work, it doesn't matter.

JM: The national media reports about Lake Charles were minimal. CNN interviewed the police chief and the mayor; all the coverage focused on Katrina and they forgot about Rita and southwest Louisiana. We had no visual clues as

to what was going on with the evacuation. I evacuated to Texarkana, Texas where their excellent public library system allowed Internet usage for patrons not registered with the system. I logged on to the Web and discovered that the McNeese Web pages were operating and was able to contact the person in charge of the Web. This happened because the University IT department already had a plan in place and moved the servers to the campus of Louisiana Tech in Ruston, Louisiana. I think they made this plan prior to Rita because of what happened with Katrina. They were on the ball. We did a very good job communicating with each other. We started cell phoning each other once the lines were reestablished, and I am very glad I had my cell phone with me because I don't know what I would have done without it. It was my lifeline to what was going on at home. Those who did not have cell phones have purchased them. That was a positive just to be able to establish contact with people. Not knowing what was going on was very scary. Just being able to get in touch with each other and exchange information about what was going on was reassuring. It took us about a week to eventually track down and account for everybody. Also, I maintained a daily journal documenting all the events that took place.

KA: Information technology played a very important role. The university Web page and the local television station's Web page served as the only news that you could get if you were away from the area. If you had access to a library with Internet access, that is how you could keep up with the news. Otherwise, other television networks did not provide much information. Once we got back to campus, the ability to update the library Web page was very important. We could give everybody updates on what we were doing, where we were located, what services we could provide. The Web page for us became very important. Also, those resources that were available from the Web page became the only information resources provided for quite a while. These included the Louisiana Online University Information System (LOUIS) databases, databases we subscribed to on our own, and e-books from NetLibrary. Laptops proved to be very important. We brought four or five from the library over to Kaufman Hall. Various departments needed them such as serials and cataloging. Portability was very important.

JM: We also had some volunteer assistance from the LOUIS staff in Baton Rouge. One thing they did was to post a message in bold, big, and bright red letters at the top of our Web catalog that we were closed. The LOUIS people were there with assistance and volunteered their assistance. I don't know what we would have done without them.

PT: Another reference librarian set up a blog for staff to communicate.

EJ: The biggest problems for us in Hammond were electrical and communicative, versus structural or flooding dam-

age. We have emergency communication calling trees in place, but when the phones are not working, this won't do you much good. Text messaging did become a handy tool to use. I learned how to text message using the cell phone in order to contact other staff members. All or most of the librarians have a cell phone number. It is pretty much standard equipment. By Labor Day, all staff members had been contacted and we knew their whereabouts. Beginning Labor Day, we started a telephone bank for students who were calling to find out when classes would start and to ask any other questions. We have a large group of about forty staff members, so the university looked to us for assistance and we responded well. It was an interesting experiment in thinking outside the box, helping people, and trying to shape some kind of normality out of an abnormal situation. We became in a sense a community center for resources for evacuees and the responders.

LG: One of the problems post-Katrina was communicating with one another. I could not contact my colleagues in Hammond and know what to do, how to respond, and what to report back. Landlines and cell phone lines were not working. The university did an excellent job of posting updated emergency information to the Web site, but we had no access to it. Educational institutions responded better than many others did. For example, schools such as Yale and Brown immediately took in a number of Tulane students. They had two days to fly up there and get started with their classes, and those universities were very accommodating. Also, the Catholic school system of New Orleans was able to place students throughout other Jesuit institutions or other girls' schools. The librarians at SLU were one of the first groups to respond to the university's call to operate the phone lines and assist in evaluating the status of students, faculty, and staff. When Internet access was not available anywhere else, people came to the library for the access. I even had some of that traffic here at the nursing school library in Baton Rouge. The library volunteers served a lot of community people, such as the insurers, the National Guard (housed on campus), and Entergy (public utility).

Management

As a catastrophic event unfolds, the impending consequences can become painfully clear to management. Our interviewees discussed the decisions both hurricanes forced them to make and identified the most difficult ones.

Q: Please describe some of the management decisions needing to be made before, during, and after the storm.

LQ: Before the storm, we took care of the electronic equipment and all other normal procedures. It was pretty cut and dry. It was moving-in weekend for the freshman; on August

27, the university president issued a statement to leave town. During the storm, the big question was what to do about the staff. This was due to major cash flow problems. The deans were instructed to address the staff cuts. I called my three assistant deans from Houston to discuss the situation we were facing. I made the initial cuts and ran it by them. I didn't have the dollar quota, but we were probably facing a 20 percent staff cut. We needed to generate the dollars and not necessarily a certain number of positions. The assistant deans agreed with 90 to 95 percent of my proposed cuts. The other management decision was a reorganization of the library staff. This was not a compelling decision, but I had some thoughts on what to do. This was my opportunity to do a better job of reorganization. The old reorganization in regards to FTEs was rather unbalanced, too. In my opinion, research libraries are basically, when all is said and done, services and collections. I wanted an associate dean for services and an associate dean for collections. Instead of three people, I now had two, having eliminated the special collections position. I did not announce the reorganization of the library, and the assistant deans did not know how that would happen, until we came back to the library. We came back on January 2, 2006. The management decision afterwards is how do you fill the positions that are mission critical with people who were dislodged from their jobs? For example, in government documents, two positions were eliminated, and two were kept. How do you fit your good people into these mission-critical positions?

NK: The time constraints posed a problem before the storm. We scrambled around and did what we could do and tried to make sure the more valuable items would be secured. During the storm, we were so scattered and communication did exist, but it was spotty. There was really nothing done during the storm. After the storm, because we did not have a place to go, we had to decide when, where, and how we would do our work.

We were really lucky to find two rooms where we could all gather. We were close to a learning center that provided us with some additional tables, chairs, computers, and printers. We had to decide what we could do. There were some projects we had thought of in the past and this gave us the perfect time to work on them. The first was to work on barcoding in the curriculum materials center, another to do some cleanup work in the performing arts library, and we had people assigned to other areas. Our archivist went over to the office of institutional effectiveness to work on the master plan. We tried to remain productive, active, and creative through some very unusual circumstances.

JM: During our first few hours at the curriculum materials center, we saw what had to be done to check out a book that was not barcoded. I talked with the librarian about this and if we could provide help in barcoding the materials and she jumped on it. We wound up barcoding over six thousand items plus other items needing to be cataloged.

Circulation staff completely shelf read all the shelves. Another project discussed was to complete an inventory of the collection, something that has not been done in years, using the SIRSI system.

PT: Also, the serials department set up their own serials check-in section in the curriculum materials center. They stacked up the periodicals and journals just as if they were in their own offices, in our temporary quarters in Kaufman Hall.

KA: We also arranged an area where the students could study for finals. Nancy Khoury made arrangements for a very nice conference center area to be available for evening study. It is another example of us trying to think of things to serve the students, since we were not in our building. What could we do to demonstrate and show the students that we did not forget them and were trying to help them? It gave a sense of purpose and satisfaction that we were doing something.

JM: To make our presence known, Kenneth did a very good job of posting signage all over campus. We had them virtually on every building notifying the students that our services were available through the curriculum materials center. Kenneth also worked with our campus media staff to get the messages out. This was very effective.

NK: We also continued to provide our bibliographic instruction sessions elsewhere on campus. In as much as possible, we maintained a profile. We did not want students to forget about us.

EJ: The biggest decisions were budget related. We also reviewed our existing policies. Many of them dealt with funds such as the policy for guest printing, for which we are now charging. One benefit to come out of this is that the student technology fee now covers printing charges. This started as of the beginning of January 2006. This helped us enormously this year and will for many years. In the future, when the budget gets back to normal, this will benefit us much more. We were spending a large chunk of money on printing. Because of the timing of the storm and the last-minute knowledge that it was going to hit our area, we did not have a chance during the regular working hours to make many decisions that we would have. This time, the post-storm period was the more important period. Our more pressing post-Katrina problem was how to deal with staff and faculty needs to take time off and attend to personal business. The other big decisions were budget related.

Q: *What was the most difficult decision you had to make?*

LQ: Clearly the job cuts. Before Hurricane Katrina, we were by no means a well-staffed library. From an organiza-

tional point of view, the position cuts were very difficult. The hardest thing is the impact on people. These are positions, but they also have faces behind them. There is nothing to prepare you to make these decisions. Outsourcing your IT on a hope and a prayer is difficult. When I was in Houston, I sent a memo to the administrators saying that the way IT is organized makes no sense. We all have our little islands of IT in libraries. But if we were able to put together a crackerjack central unit, they could provide the needed support. The president and vice president said it was a great idea and to go ahead. The head of IT said he could not assure me of the type service I sought. I had to come back here and tell my staff that we were cutting our IT staff in favor of centralizing IT. In the long run, it will be the way to go. We'll see what happens.

NK: It would be hard to pick out one. I played it day by day. Sometimes I felt like things would never get back to normal. Coping with the unusual situation was the hardest thing.

EJ: The most difficult decision was looking at the entire library picture and deciding what was absolutely essential to keep as is and what could be either eliminated or changed.

Lessons Learned

Preparing for a major storm and subsequently managing the post-storm fallout tests the best of library staff, managers, and directors. A critical component of the post-storm assessment and evaluation process is to look back and determine the lessons learned from the chain of events. What knowledge can be gained and incorporated into the planning process? How can the staff better prepare for the next storm? How can directors and managers improve their responses and decision-making processes? The interviewees share what lessons they learned from dealing with Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Q: *What lessons can be learned from the hurricanes to help you and other library directors, managers, and staff members cope with future storms?*

LQ: One of the lessons is get to know your risk management people because they are your best friends in this kind of situation. The more knowledge they have about the collection, the more helpful they will be in aiding the recovery. The recovery personnel can do wonders to save library materials.

KA: In the library, my mother, father, and I stayed on the second floor in an all-enclosed room. This building is relatively safe in that area. There are no windows in that area. You usually don't hear the rain and wind, but you

could hear the wind blow. The day after the storm passed, the temperature hit over ninety degrees. There was no air conditioning and water, stores were not open, and many other things were not available. The heat was amazing, before and after Rita. We could not stay and decided to leave that Monday. We were getting word that it might take three to four weeks before electricity would come back. If I had to do it all again, I would not stay. Even though the building was perfectly safe, I would not stay. I would forget everything about false alarms from other storms and treat each storm as a very serious matter. One of the lessons I've taken from this experience is that, even if a storm is weakening, it is still a very dangerous storm as it approaches your area. That certainly was the case for both hurricanes. I would definitely recommend to employers that, if this area were threatened again by a major hurricane, they let their employees leave early and make plans to get out. At an impromptu meeting after we came back from the storm, we encouraged everybody to get a memory stick or a flash drive where you can save all your important documents. We can always replace equipment, but your important documents really need to be saved and taken with you.

JM: A lot of us became concerned mainly about our own respective areas rather than trying to see what else we could do with other areas that needed help. We should think about having a little prioritization and have those that are still here come together and see what can be done as a group.

NK: I need to learn to take these storms more seriously. Also, we need to be prepared. McNeese University did well in every aspect. They set up a housing list, and if you could provide housing, you would sign up and maybe find a match with a faculty member or student. I had a little guesthouse, so one of my staff members stayed there. The university, the city, and the parish all did extremely well.

EJ: The library became a community place, a social gathering place. We have seating all over the library. Within a couple weeks of Katrina, just about every seat was being used. The library became a refuge for all people just to come in and get cooled off, read, and use the coffee shop. It provided a little normality in a very abnormal time. It really made all of us who were not affected personally better understand what the students were going through. Until you go there and see the extent of the devastation and just how vast the destruction was in New Orleans, you just don't realize the impact this event had on so many people—how it just uprooted their lives and took everything away from them such as their homes, possessions, and support systems. It makes most people want to reach out and help in any way they can. It is also teaching us to think in different ways, to be more creative, and to use our limited available resources in better ways.

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