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Ontario University Libraries Respond to Uncertain Times

TORONTO, ON, May 25, 2020 - In these extraordinary times Ontario's university libraries are working together to support our teaching, learning and research communities. Through the [Ontario Council of University Libraries \(OCUL\)](#) Ontario's 21 universities have collaborated since 2002 to provide access to a rich set of digital collections through a robust and innovative digital infrastructure. This shared technological infrastructure, [Scholars Portal](#) and [Omni](#), and our history of collaboration have made us flexible, resourceful and responsive in the face of uncertainty.

Flexible

University libraries continued to provide their vital services with minimal disruption as our buildings closed and university operations across the province moved into the virtual space. Thanks to our collective digital infrastructure, and our experience providing service in the digital realm, the transition to purely online support has been quick. Scholars Portal services provide the backbone for interlibrary loan and virtual reference through chat at many of our member libraries. The Omni search tool and Scholars Portal collections of ebooks, online journals and statistical and geospatial datasets also provide students, faculty and researchers with fast and easy access to a vast collection of diverse, high quality academic material. Research data discovery and sharing also continue through shared tools such as Dataverse and library support for research data management. This infrastructure was at the ready when our users needed it most and has been leveraged to fill the gap left by the absence of in-person services and access to physical collections. As we approach the fall we will continue to adapt to the needs of our students and faculty.

Resourceful

Province-wide partnerships enable our libraries to provide digital access to a breadth of resources and technology that would be difficult to achieve alone. From online social science and geospatial data portals, odesi and Scholars GeoPortal, to collective licensing of digital resources, OCUL member libraries make the most of their resources by pooling expertise, leveraging negotiating power and eliminating redundancy. We are also working with our publishing partners to secure extended off-campus access to digital content. Library staff have risen to the challenge of remote service delivery and are working virtually with colleagues across institutions to share knowledge and provide services. Some are helping to document the pandemic in their local communities [using shared preservation services](#) while stewarding local digital collections in the absence of access to physical archives. Our people continue developing new skills that will help us navigate the future academic landscape.

Responsive

OCUL member libraries are working closely with campus partners to support the necessary changes to teaching and learning during this time. Libraries are looking for ways to simplify the lives of teaching staff as they deliver summer and spring courses and prepare for the fall semester. They are working on alternatives to on-campus access to physical collections for

researchers, graduate students and students with print disabilities, including digital document delivery through the RACER interlibrary loan system and the Accessible Content ePortal (ACE). Some have also repurposed their 3D printing facilities, contributing to institutional efforts to provide PPE to local frontline workers. Together Ontario's university libraries have found ways to continue to support student success, enable the important research that continues at our institutions and contribute to the community.

Helping shape our future

Ontario's university library services have provided much needed continuity for students, faculty and researchers in a time of uncertainty. With 21 institutions working as one OCUL helps to make the future of Ontario post secondary education a success. Our member libraries have an important and active role to play in supporting and shaping the future of higher education in Ontario, and Canada.

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About OCUL

OCUL is a consortium of Ontario's 21 university libraries and an affiliate of the Council of Ontario Universities (COU). Its strength lies in its commitment to work together to maximize collective expertise and resources. OCUL has been collaborating since 1967 to enhance information services in Ontario and beyond through collective purchasing, collaborative planning and shared digital information infrastructure. [Omni](#) is Ontario's academic search tool powered by a collaborative system of team members and resources from 14 of Ontario's university libraries. [Scholars Portal](#) is a service of OCUL provided to libraries in Ontario under a service agreement with the University of Toronto Libraries. Its services include:

Accessible Content ePortal (ACE) - Providing access to library books in accessible formats.

Ask a Librarian - Connecting users with bilingual research assistance through chat.

Books - E-book platform with 600,000+ scholarly and public domain texts.

Dataverse - Research data management and sharing platform.

GeoPortal - Award-winning geospatial data discovery tool.

Journals - Repository of 50 million+ scholarly articles from over 20,000 full-text journals.

odesi - Web-based data exploration, extraction and analysis tool.

Ontario Library Research Cloud (OLRC) - High capacity, secure and affordable storage for digital content.

OCUL Usage Rights (OUR) - Database of usage rights for licensed digital resources.

Permafrost - Tools, training and resources enabling long-term preservation of digital objects.

Publishing Services - Hosting for open access publishing platforms.

RACER - Automated interlibrary loan service.

<https://ocul.on.ca>

For more on individual libraries' responses to COVID-19 visit

<https://learn.scholarsportal.info/featured/covid-19-response/>

For further information contact John Barnett, OCUL Executive Director,

john.barnett@ocul.on.ca, 416-770-6507.