Cutting Through COVID-19 Communications Overload:

Which Emails Engaged Personal Librarian Students?

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Miami University Libraries

Introduction and Overview

Program Review

Gathering Data

COVID-19 Impact

Findings

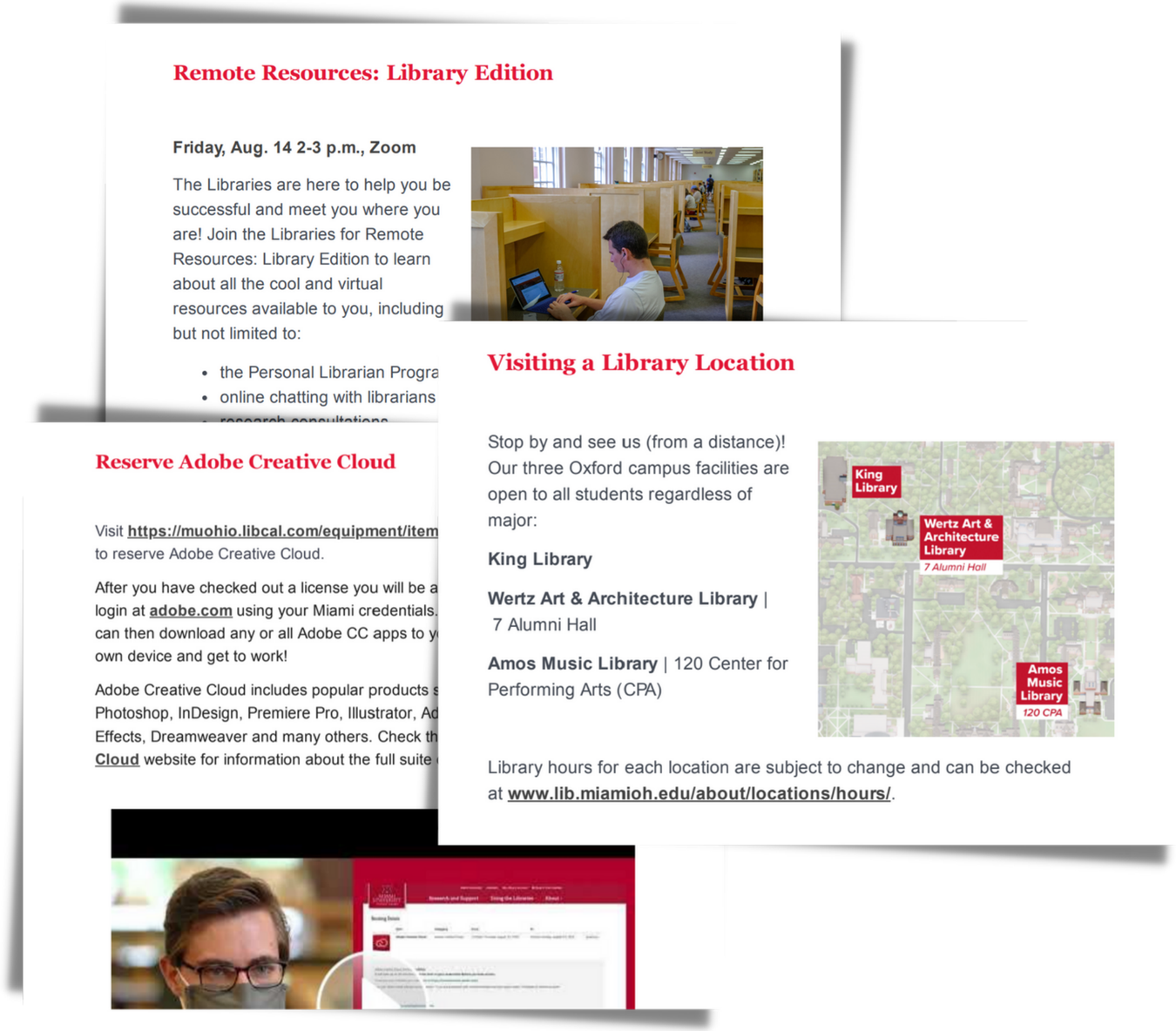
Takeaways

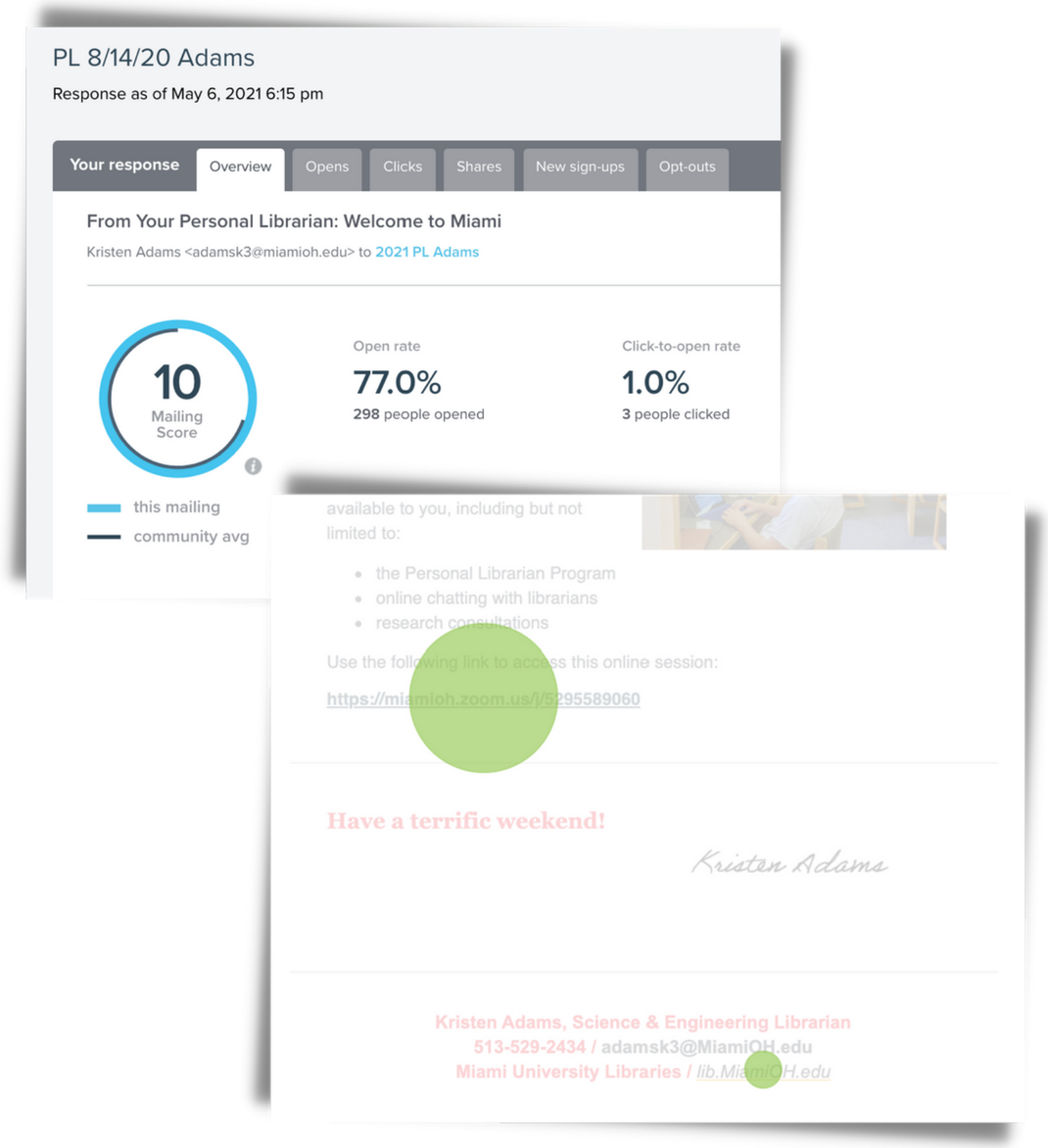
The Personal Librarian Program

- Personally connect students with library services
- Connect via email
- Typical year
  - 15 messages (fall)
  - 5 messages (spring)
- More messages for 2020-2021

The Personal Librarian Program

- Who are we communicating with?
- First-year and transition students
- Enrolling students
- Assigning Personal Librarians
- 2019-2020 - 4,674
- 2020-2021 - 4,844





Emma Email Marketing Software

- Pros
  - Can easily recycle messages
  - Can track open rates and click counts
- Cons
  - Does not track replies
- Gathering data
  - Recorded open rates for all messages sent 2019-2021 and click counts for all messages sent 2020-2021
  - Recorded in Google Sheets
  - 51 messages, sent by 20 librarians = we reviewed and gathered data from 1,000+ messages!

Remote learning/living at Miami in 2020–2021

- March 11, 2020
  - All courses moved to remote instruction. Initially planned to last through April 12
- March 20, 2020
  - Residence halls close
- September 14, 2020
  - Residence halls open
- September 21, 2020
  - F2F classes resume, though many courses continue to be entirely online or a hybrid of in-person and online learning

The Miami Student

Established 1826 — Oldest College Newspaper West of the Alleghenies

NEWS

Miami moves online: How the university will operate amid coronavirus concerns

By Staff Report

March 10, 2020 | 6:27pm EDT

Miami University President Greg Crawford announced Tuesday that Miami classes will be moved online effective Wednesday until at least Sunday, April 12.

Tuesday afternoon, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine asked state universities to transfer to "remote learning" due to the novel coronavirus. This comes after his administration announced there are three confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus in Cuyahoga County yesterday.

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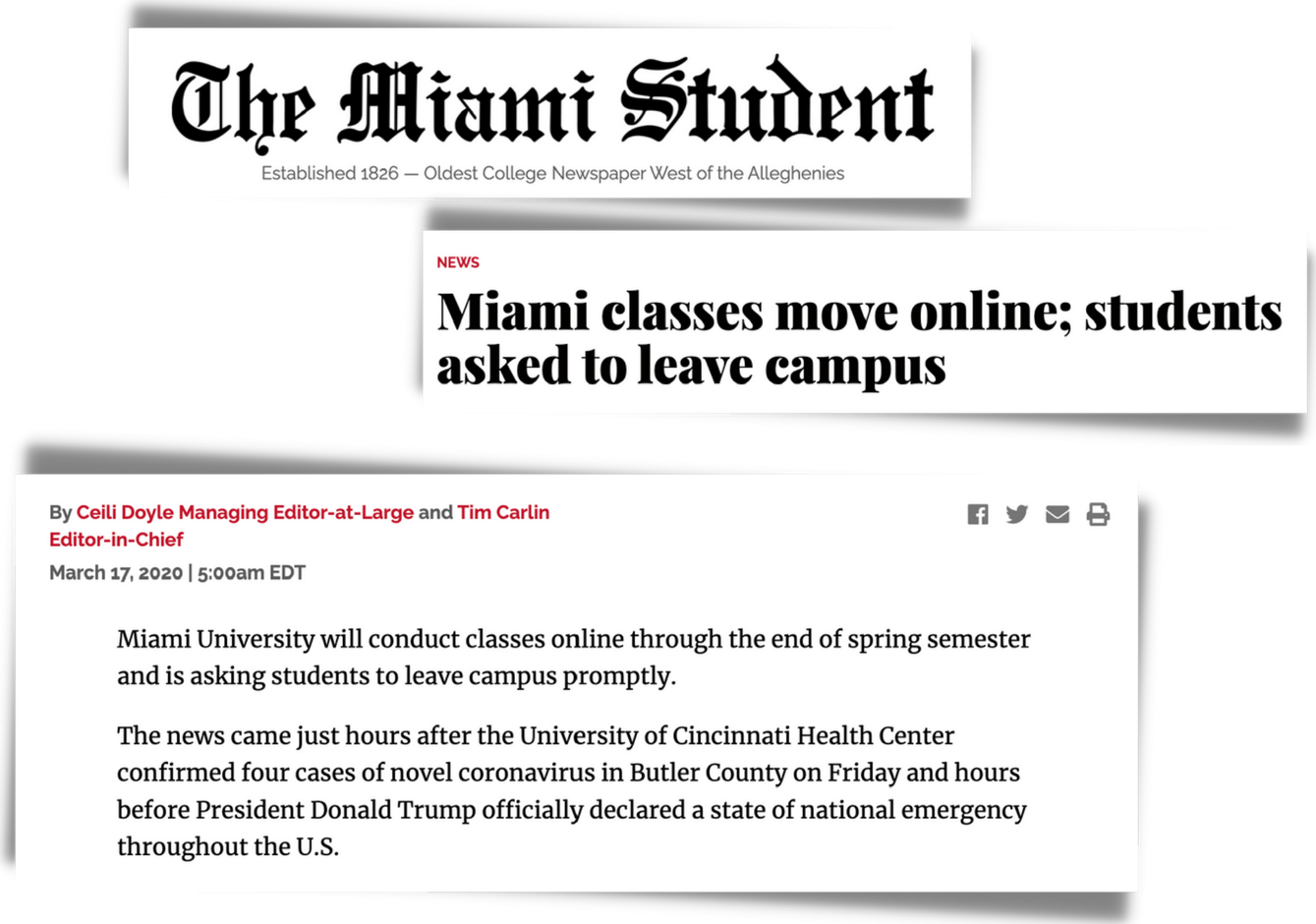

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NEWS

Miami classes move online; students asked to leave campus

By Ceili Doyle Managing Editor-at-Large and Tim Carlin Editor-in-Chief

March 17, 2020 | 5:00am EDT

Miami University will conduct classes online through the end of spring semester and is asking students to leave campus promptly.

The news came just hours after the University of Cincinnati Health Center confirmed four cases of novel coronavirus in Butler County on Friday and hours before President Donald Trump officially declared a state of national emergency throughout the U.S.

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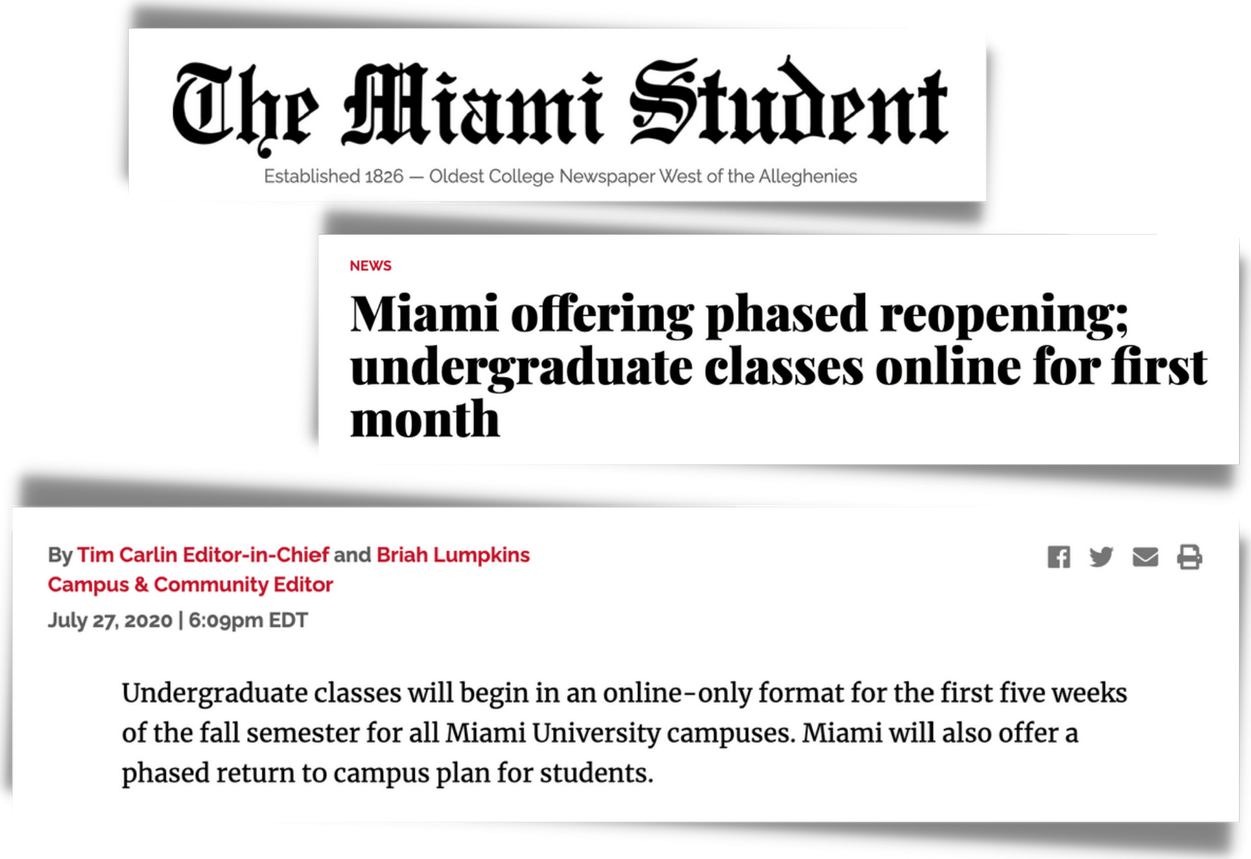

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NEWS

Miami offering phased reopening; undergraduate classes online for first month

By Tim Carlin Editor-in-Chief and Briah Lumpkins
Campus & Community Editor

July 27, 2020 | 6:09pm EDT

Undergraduate classes will begin in an online-only format for the first five weeks of the fall semester for all Miami University campuses. Miami will also offer a phased return to campus plan for students.

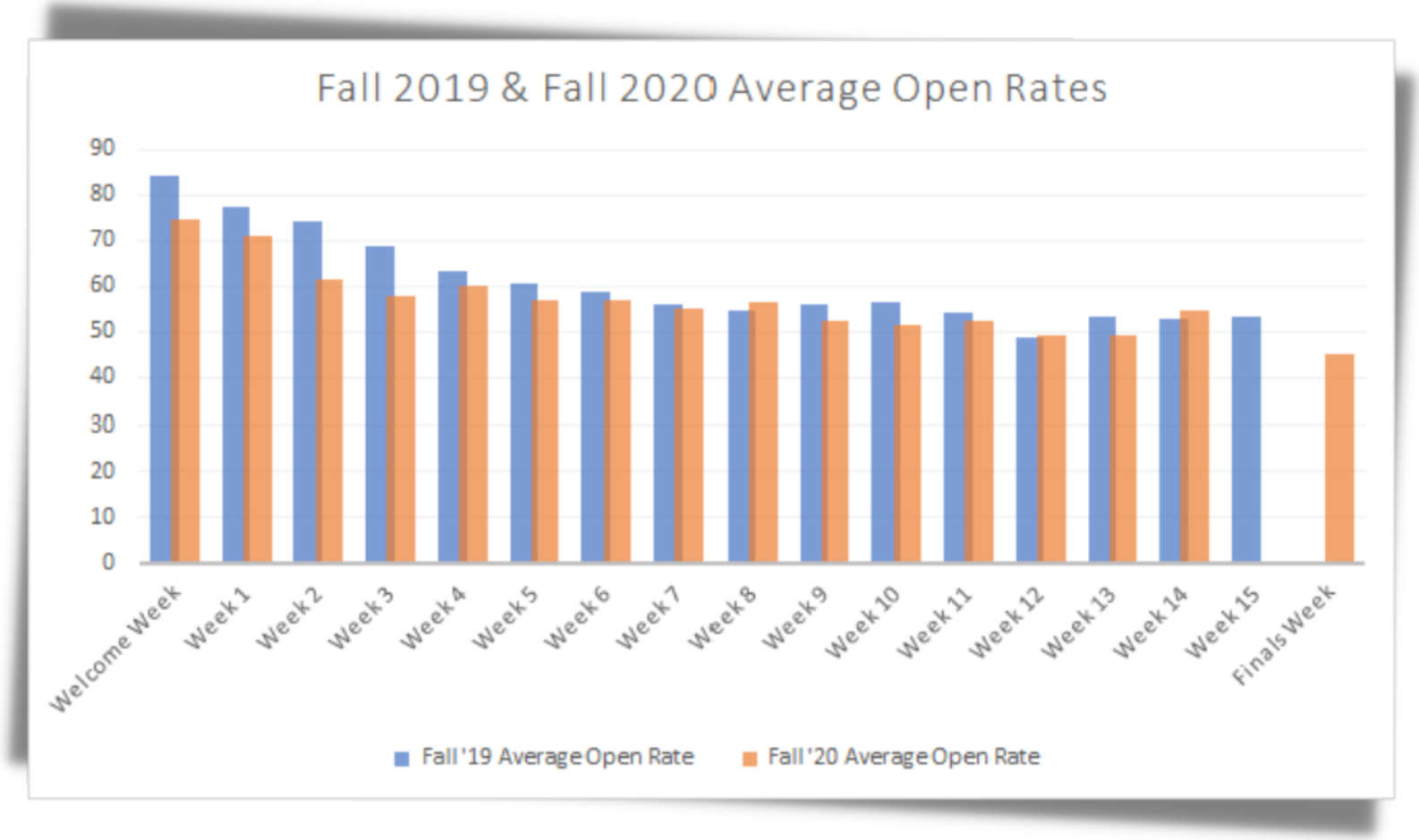
Were students less engaged?

Short Answer: **YES**

Fall 2020 open rates lower compared to Fall 2019, except in few instances by only 1-2%.

10% difference in open rates of first message!

Didn't compare spring semesters because more messages sent Spring 2021.



March 30, 2020 Email

First email after Miami University moved to remote instruction on March 11, 2020.

Average open rate: 46.24%

One of the lowest click counts of all messages reviewed!

Libraries Homepage

www.lib.miamioh.edu/

Proxy Link

Proxy prefix used to ensure access to library resources off-campus.

Resources about COVID-19 misinformation

Links to Snopes "The Coronavirus Collection: Fact-Checking COVID-19" and the World Health Organization (WHO) landing page for misinformation about COVID-19.

April 27, 2020 Email

The only other message sent during the spring semester.

Average open rate: 56.64%

Quite an increase in clicks since last message.

News Resources

Links to freely subscribe as a student to *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*.

COVID-19 Resources LibGuide

Guide to credible resources covering COVID-19.

Ideas for things to do at home

Documenting the COVID-19 Pandemic & Making from Home Resources LibGuide.

Discovering Trends

Reviewed 2020-2021 messages.

Open Rates

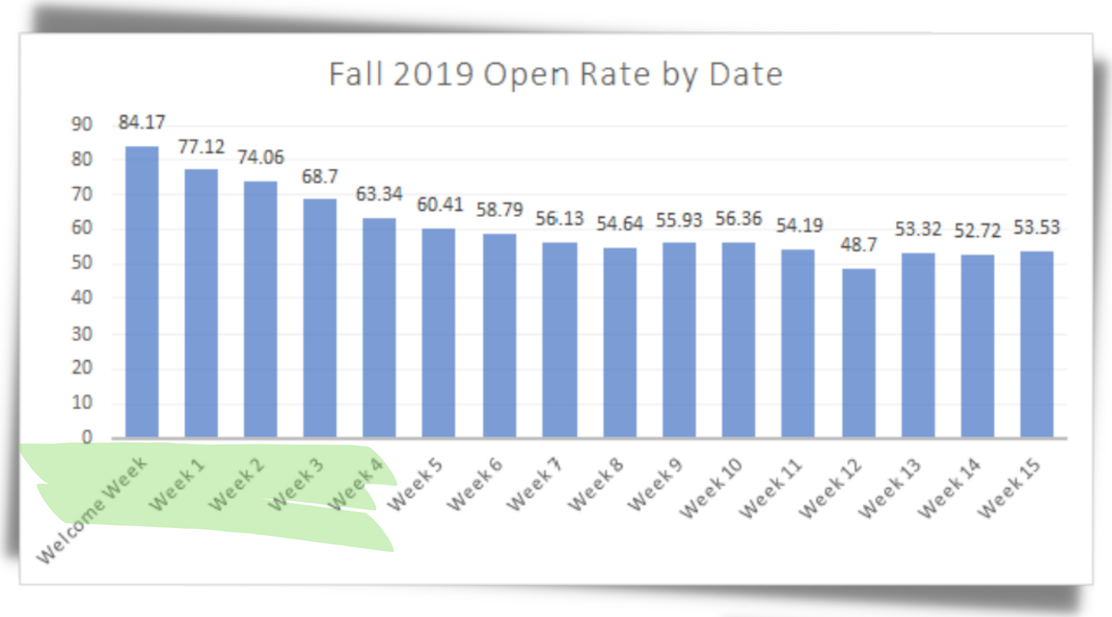
Examined open rates by date/week of the semester sent.
Looked for trends in email subject lines of most opened messages.

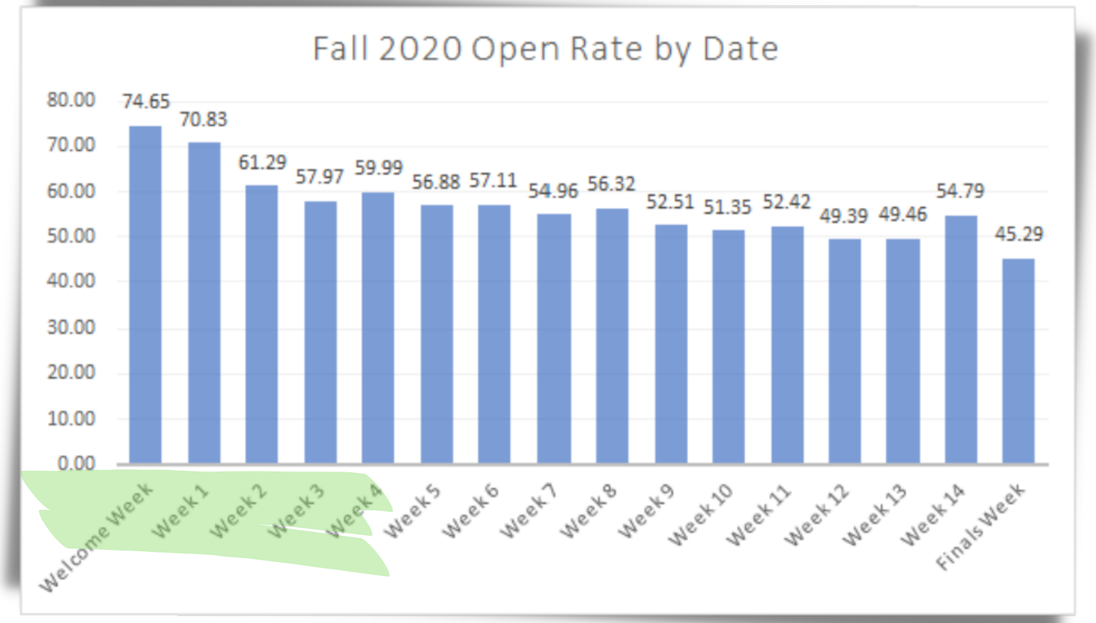
Click Counts

Gathered information about placement of link, type of link, and how link presented. Looked for trends in Top 25 most clicked links.

Replies

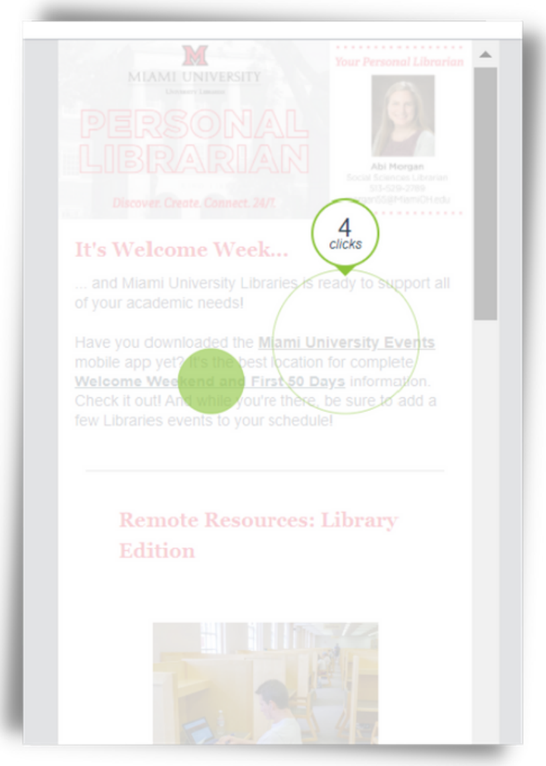
Unfortunately reliant on anecdotal and incomplete data.


Fall 2019 Open Rate by Date
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
84.17
77.12
74.06
68.7
63.34
60.41
58.79
56.13
54.64
55.93
56.36
54.19
48.7
53.32
52.72
53.53
Welcome Week
Week 1
Week 2
Week 3
Week 4
Week 5
Week 6
Week 7
Week 8
Week 9
Week 10
Week 11
Week 12
Week 13
Week 14
Week 15


Fall 2020 Open Rate by Date
80.00
70.00
60.00
50.00
40.00
30.00
20.00
10.00
0.00
74.65
70.83
61.29
57.97
59.99
56.88
57.11
54.96
56.32
52.51
51.35
52.42
49.39
49.46
54.79
45.29
Welcome Week
Week 1
Week 2
Week 3
Week 4
Week 5
Week 6
Week 7
Week 8
Week 9
Week 10
Week 11
Week 12
Week 13
Week 14
Finals Week

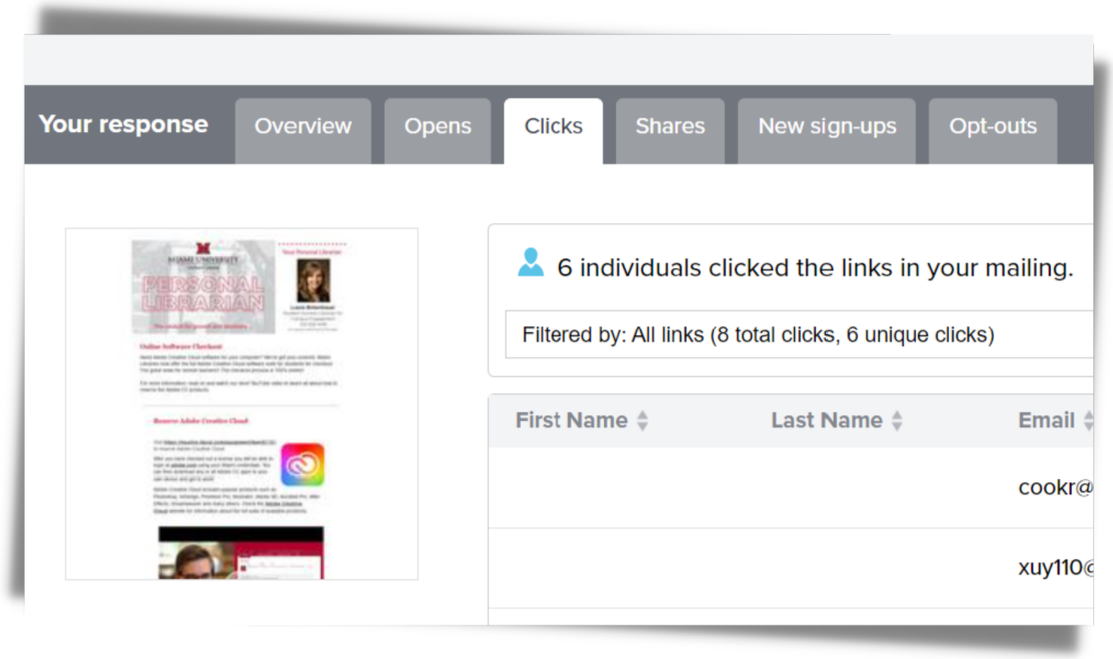
Checkout
Miami
Online
Librarian
New
Welcome
Week
Support
Together
Research
Healthy
Personal
Help
Citing
Fall
King
Writing
University
Semester
Library
Software

What linked resources were students most interested in?



- **Adobe Creative Cloud online checkout (109 clicks)**
- **New York Times subscription (60 clicks)**
- **Virtual library event for first year students (40 clicks)**
- Guidebook to university events for first year students (24 clicks)
- Library hours landing page (20 clicks)

What types of links got the most clicks?

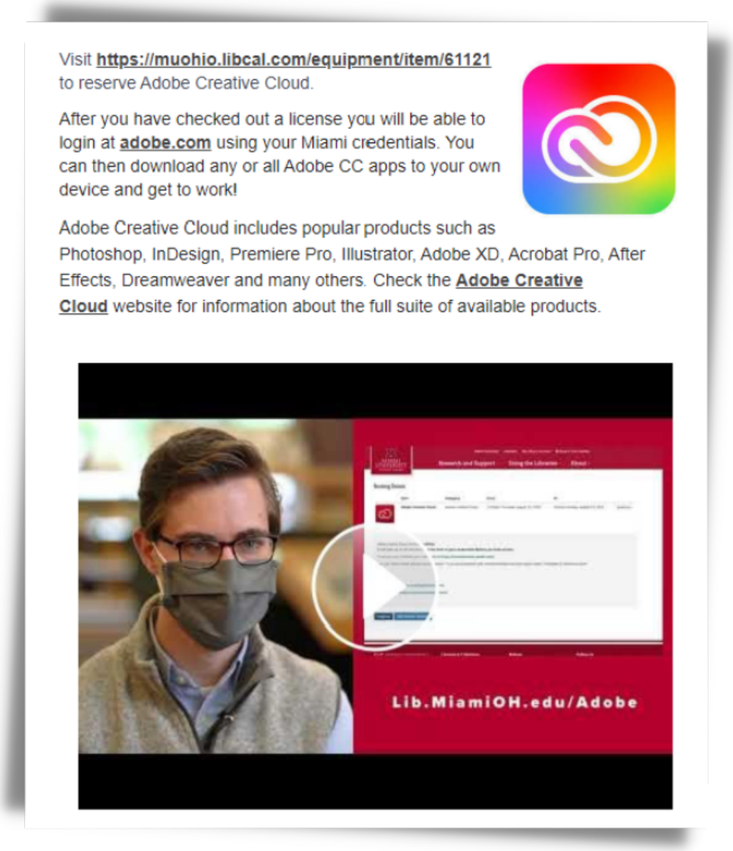


- **Library Events (4 of Top 25 links)**
- **Library Guides (4 of Top 25 links)**
- **University Links (4 of Top 25 links)**
- Library Databases (3 of Top 25 links)
- External Links (2 of Top 25 links)
- Library Software (2 of Top 25 links)
- Library Videos (2 of Top 25 links)

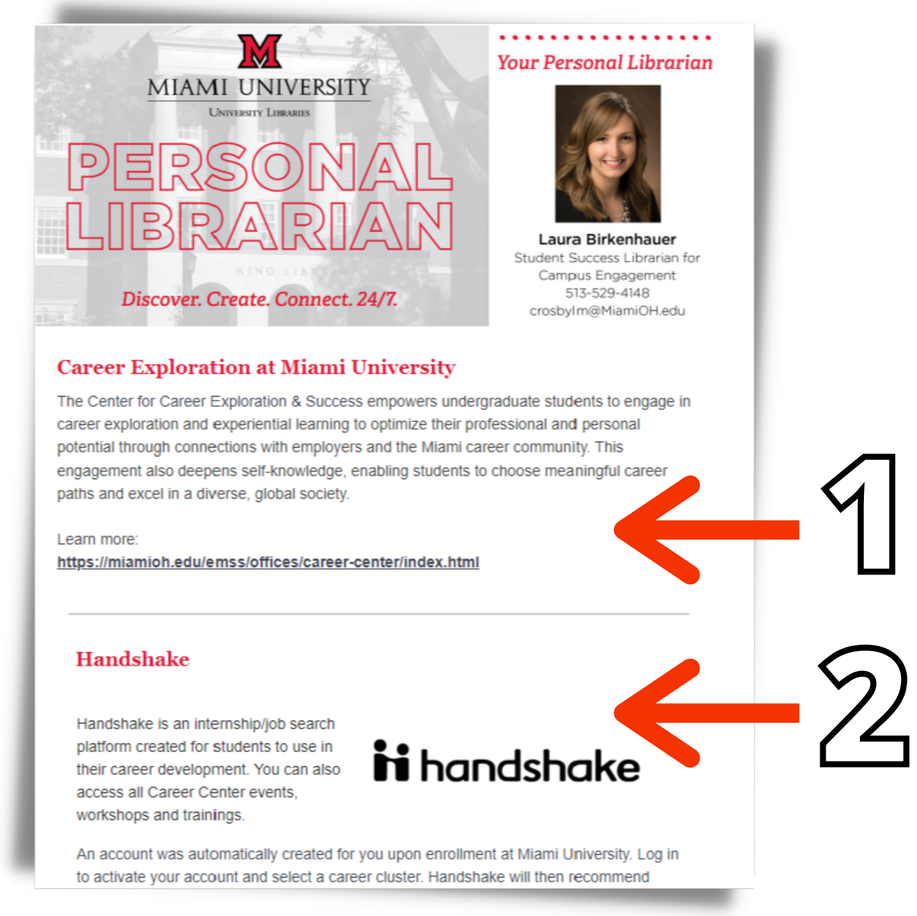
What kind of link presentation grabbed students' attention?

Among Top 25 links, **most were URLs**, plus:

- Linked text (5 of Top 25 links)
- **Linked image (3 of Top 25 links)**
- **Embedded video (2 of Top 25 links)**



Where was it most impactful to place links?



1

2

- **Section 2 (12 of Top 25 links)**
- **Section 1 (6 of Top 25 links)**
- Section 3 (4 of Top 25 links)
- Section 4 (1 of Top 25 links)
- Section 5 (1 of Top 25 links)
- Signature (1 of Top 25 links)

Carry On

Continued delivery of relevant information re-engaged students amid crisis.

Keep consistent with messaging, but allow for flexibility in content to ensure that it's **timely**.

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Recycle

Recycle - and **maximize placement** of - **popular content.**

Make use of list of most clicked links and use similar content.

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Welcome

Front-load important information!

Welcome first-year and transfer students during **period of widest reach in first weeks** of the semester.

Evaluate

Involved process, but gathered valuable information.

Repeat assessments regularly!

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Experiment

Interested in:

- making changes based on findings
- A/B testing
- market segmentation

Investigate options for further improvement.

Thank You!

bit.ly/mialapl

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