

Purdue University
Purdue e-Pubs

Charleston Library Conference

If We Had a Prologue: Lessons From a System Migration

Jodi Shepherd
California State University, Chico, jrshepherd@csuchico.edu

Laura Krier
Sonoma State University, laura.krier@sonoma.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/charleston>



Part of the [Cataloging and Metadata Commons](#), and the [Collection Development and Management Commons](#)

An indexed, print copy of the Proceedings is also available for purchase at:

<http://www.thepress.purdue.edu/series/charleston>.

You may also be interested in the new series, Charleston Insights in Library, Archival, and Information Sciences. Find out more at: <http://www.thepress.purdue.edu/series/charleston-insights-library-archival-and-information-sciences>.

Jodi Shepherd and Laura Krier, "If We Had a Prologue: Lessons From a System Migration" (2017).
Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284316688>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

If We Had a Prologue: Lessons From a System Migration

Jodi Shepherd, California State University, Chico

Laura Krier, Sonoma State University

Abstract

This paper is a reflection on a library system migration project from two project managers at two different campuses. The authors discuss challenges encountered, approaches taken, priorities established, and perhaps most importantly, what each would do differently with the benefit of hindsight. For those who are preparing to undertake a system migration, this paper will offer guidance and advice.

In 2015, the 23 campuses of the California State University system collectively decided to migrate to a single, unified library management system. The CSU libraries had been purchasing electronic resources as a consortium since 1989, and the management of these resources involved duplication of work across campuses. The libraries were looking for a solution that would streamline electronic resource management as well as open new opportunities for resource sharing and collaborative collection management. After exploring the options available in the library system marketplace, the decision was made to migrate to Ex Libris's Alma and Primo.

The CSU system is one of the largest and most diverse public university systems in the United States, with campuses that range in size from 900-student Maritime to 40,000-student Fullerton. Migrating all of these campuses, each with unique needs, systems, and staffing levels, required both central coordination and local management. Staff in the CSU Chancellor's Office were dedicated to managing the project across the system, and working groups comprised of librarians and staff from all libraries were convened for every functional areas of the library. A migration team from Ex Libris supported all of the work. And each campus selected its own project manager and implementation team to coordinate work on the ground.

All 23 campuses went live with Ex Libris in summer 2017. After working with Alma and Primo for several months, every project manager can look back and identify things they would have changed. The aspects listed below are areas that the project managers would ensure were addressed if they had it to do again.

- Set realistic goals and timelines and share them
- Divide tasks/project areas and assign someone as the lead in each area
- Celebrate the milestones
- Be flexible; change course if you need to
- Get buy-in at all levels of the organization
- Communicate frequently
- Make sure there is at least one expert in each functional area
- Understand how people do their work and what they need to do it

In this paper, two of these project managers, from Chico and Sonoma State, will share some of the lessons they learned in the migration process, providing a prologue for those who are approaching a similar project.

Chico State, Meriam Library

Chico State enrolls approximately 15,000 full-time equivalent students and is a residential campus in rural northern California. The library employs eight tenure/tenure-track librarians and one assistant (adjunct) librarian with about 25 staff. During the migration Chico State experienced administrative turnover in the office of the president, provost, and library dean. The library also had several staff retirements during the migration.

The library migrated to Innovative's Millennium in 2007 and had upgraded to Sierra so migration and system changes were not totally new to the Meriam Library faculty and staff. We also utilized SFX and

EBSCO's Discovery Service as our discovery layer prior to migration. I became project manager and along with five staff members representing each functional area of the library, formed the implementation team for our library.

Knowing where to start at the beginning of the migration was a challenge. There were training videos to watch and some suggested cleanup, but it was hard to find a starting point. It would have been good to start looking at each field in each type of record to determine if it contained useful information that would be necessary in Alma. For example, if we had notes, would they serve a purpose in Alma? Were our orders coded correctly? Were our call numbers clean? Most importantly, were there OCLC numbers in the 001? Before migration a staff member at Chico added missing 001 numbers. Some libraries in the CSU did a reclamation project with OCLC prior to migration in order to clean up their records.

Throughout the project the library was extremely short staffed and it was difficult for staff to complete their regularly assigned duties and help with the migration. In addition to cleanup for migration, time was spent in meetings and webinars as part of the CSU consortium migration. Dividing up duties and setting priorities for both migration cleanup and regular library responsibilities was important in order not to feel overwhelmed. Assigning a team member to focus on training and communication was also important.

Our test data was fairly clean but due to an e-book mishap, the majority of our e-books showed up as print and electronic. We had a year to review our data and we spent that time examining migrated fields in our records. We determined where each data point ended up and if that data was needed. We also evaluated how well our bibliographic records matched those in the consortium, analyzed order record content, reviewed item record fields, checked call number formats, and inspected holdings record content. Notes in patron records, bibliographic records, holdings, and item records were particularly scrutinized for relevance. As we were migrating to a shared environment, internal notes on bibliographic records were no longer acceptable.

On the final load we determined that we wanted to pull all of our call numbers from the item record, so a staff member spent a significant amount of time entering call numbers in the item records. This was a useful task as our call numbers came across cleanly. In the final load there were 400 open orders that

were missed because we didn't take across anything without a holdings or item record. In retrospect I would have made a point to check for open orders or created a brief item for them. Overall our data came over fairly clean, we had some technical migration records to deal with, we had to rebuild our prediction statements, and our boundwiths had to be linked. We have some cleanup projects that will continue, but overall our catalog is functioning to our satisfaction.

Being able to communicate the value statement of the migration was very important. Be sure to look at the project holistically and be able to communicate the value, goals, and outcomes to the stakeholders. By examining the project holistically, you can determine what your benchmarks are for a successful project, determine what needs to be accomplished, and set goals to achieve those. Set realistic goals and allow enough time for unexpected problems. Lastly, as one task finished, another one started and we did not take the time to celebrate our accomplishments. We should have celebrated the milestones in order to see the progress that we were making.

Sonoma State, University Library at the Jean and Charles Schulz Information Center

Sonoma State University is a mid-sized public liberal arts university located in a suburban area about 50 miles north of San Francisco. SSU enrolled approximately 9,000 students in fall 2017. The library is relatively small, with six tenure-track librarians and four assistant (adjunct) librarians, and about 20 staff and administrators. At the time of our migration, we were in the middle of significant personnel changes. We had just welcomed a new dean, and five of our six tenured/tenure-track librarians, as well as some key administrators and staff members, retired or resigned between 2014 and 2016.

We had been using III systems, both Millennium and Sierra, since 2000, with III's Web Access Management proxy server, Ex Libris's SFX link resolver, and a locally developed discovery layer using ProQuest's Summon index. To make our migration a little more complicated, we also have an automated retrieval system in our library that uses software integrated with the library system, and we shared our library system with another CSU library, which also stores materials in our automated retrieval system.

When the migration project kicked off, the project manager role was assigned to our Technical Services

librarian. While she was very involved in acquisitions work and knew a lot about workflows in the library, she didn't have project management experience and did not want the role of project manager. The assignment was meant to be temporary until we hired a director of library technology, who would then take on the role. But when he was hired, several unexpected departures in the library increased his workload, and he had neither the time nor inclination to manage the migration project. I became the project manager in fall 2016, one year after project kickoff.

This proved to be one of the biggest challenges of our migration. In the first year, despite everyone's best intentions, the project wasn't managed well. Some key aspects of project management were neglected, including giving the implementation team clear direction, setting priorities, getting buy-in across the library, and sharing information with key stakeholders. There was a sense of urgency with no direction, which contributed to the feeling of chaos that was already present across the library.

That feeling of chaos was another big challenge. With the departure of so many librarians and staff, members of the implementation team were picking up slack in other areas and didn't have the time they needed to devote to the migration project. People weren't able to complete key training, plans to clean up our metadata were discarded, and deadlines were continually missed. Morale in the library was very low. People were overworked, and the constant change made people feel unsteady and insecure. Libraries can be slow-moving institutions, and many people hadn't experienced significant change in over a decade. To experience so much of it at once was destabilizing and made it hard to make progress on the migration.

Finally, the structure of our library caused some challenges. The supervisory structure of Sonoma State is such that librarians cannot supervise staff members; that can only be done by management personnel. Faculty can operate as work leads for staff, providing day-to-day direction and monitoring projects and tasks, but cannot be responsible for actions like hiring, disciplining, promoting, and assigning employees to positions. As a faculty member, I had no managerial position with the staff on the team, and the only person for whom I was a work lead wasn't part of the team. The extent of my ability to direct the work of people for whom I wasn't a work lead was unclear, which made it hard to assign work and to ensure that tasks were completed.

When I became project manager, the first thing I wanted to do was to examine existing workflows. I thought that if people could step back from their day-to-day work and be reflective about practices and processes, it would become mentally easier to change those processes. When we work with the same system for many years, that system, and the ways its affordances shape our workflows and practices, become invisible. By making workflows explicit, it can be easier to make changes.

Learning the workflows also enabled me to see which configuration options in Alma would work best for us. This was the second priority: I spent a large amount of time testing different configuration options to see which would work best for our needs, balancing our existing practices with Alma's expectations. It became clear during migration that Alma is designed for a much larger library than ours, and many of the out-of-the-box options were too weighty and complex for us. I hoped to find the right configuration before go-live so that only small tweaks would be needed once we were really working day in and day out in the system.

My third priority was staff training. I created an online course using our campus's course management system, incorporating Ex Libris's training videos and documentation, diagrams that reflect our library's organization and workflows, and step-by-step guides that reflect our configuration. I created a "simulation lab" with some fake patrons and fake materials, held demonstrations and hands-on workshops, and created tons of documents, screen captures, and diagrams. I even used the badging options in the course management system to encourage participation and brought in treats and prizes for people with the highest rates of participation.

Unfortunately, the previously mentioned staffing challenges we were facing meant that people did not have time to participate in training. Most staff members attended one demonstration and logged into the course once or twice. Few people had the time to learn how Alma works. I didn't have the ability to prioritize training at the institutional level, to put other projects on hold, or to restructure work to free up time. We were instead trying to accomplish all of the things we'd always done, with fewer staff and librarians, in addition to preparing for the migration.

Looking back, I wish that I'd recognized this early on and shifted gears. If I could go back and tell myself, when I first took on the project management role,

what to prioritize, I would have put a lot more emphasis on data cleanup. More flexibility would have served me well; if you see that your original plan isn't working as intended, be willing to reassess and reprioritize.

The migration process involves first submitting test data, which you then can work with in your Alma environment during the implementation period. This gives you a chance to see how your data migrated and identify any changes you may want to make before submitting the final data near the end of the implementation period. We knew that we had messy data. We spent some time identifying some of the issues before the migration officially began, but we didn't have a comprehensive sense of what the problems were. Additionally, the person who had the most knowledge about our metadata problems retired shortly after the project kickoff.

Post-migration, our messy metadata is our biggest challenge. Call number migration was especially tricky, and our call numbers migrated very badly: Many records were without call numbers after go-live, some of our local call number decisions were not reflected in our records, and we are still in the process of cleaning them up. Because we are working with a shared network zone catalog, based on OCLC records, there are instances when our items didn't link to the correct network zone record, so the record doesn't match the item. We used holdings records in Sierra, but not in a way that mimics the MARC holding standard that Alma uses, so we have a good deal of holdings record cleanup to do that sometimes makes it hard for people to request items out of our automated retrieval system. We still haven't identified all of the cataloging cleanup

work that we're going to have to do over the coming years. While the data was messy in Sierra, it was messy in a way that worked with Sierra's quirks and structure. These particular messes don't work as well with Alma and Primo.

If I were to give advice to a team about to embark on their own migration project, I would encourage them to be thorough in their analysis of how test data migrated. I'd suggest they make sure that they have a very clear understanding of how the migration process works, and how their data will be manipulated to make it work with the new system. I would suggest spending more time making changes to the data before migrating so that it will work as well as it can with the new system.

My decision to prioritize workflow analysis was a good one. We went live with Alma with a configuration that, for the most part, works well for our library. We will continue tweaking and changing things as we need to and as Ex Libris develops new configuration options for Alma, but on day one, our key tasks worked as we expected them to.

You will never be able to predict the disruptions that might occur during a migration. Staff and librarians will leave and new people will be hired, project leadership may change, and new work may arise that can't be put off until after migration. If you establish clear priorities from the beginning, pull together a team of functional experts from across the library to participate in the migration, and communicate frequently with people both in and out of the library throughout the process, your migration will stand a greater chance of success, whatever obstacles appear in your path.