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Extending Access to Electronic Resources of a Merged Community College and University Library

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Abstract

Utah State University and the College of Eastern Utah merged in July 2010, necessitating the renegotiation of all electronic resource licenses. The author discusses the process of renegotiating licenses, providing access to electronic collections remotely, troubleshooting and other important areas regarding libraries and mergers in higher education. This paper will provide an Electronic Resource Merger Guide to assist future library mergers.

Author keywords: Electronic resources; Licensing; Library merger; Remote access

Introduction

Utah State University (USU Northern) and the College of Eastern Utah (USU Eastern) were mandated legislatively to merge, effective in July 2010. The libraries of both institutions are managed under one dean but each library manages its own staff and budget. USU Northern's main campus is located in Logan, Utah with small satellite campuses in Brigham City, Tooele, and in the Uintah Basin. USU Northern is a large, research intensive, doctoral granting institution with 16,314 students (FTE) and a library staff of 65 (FTE). USU Eastern has two campuses with libraries, in Price and Blanding. USU Eastern is a comprehensive two-year community college with a stated mission for vocational technology education. The student body numbers 1,605 (FTE) with a library staff of 6 (FTE).

USU Northern was charged with the lofty task to merge the two institutions, and the library was asked to extend access of all its existing electronic collections to USU Eastern – without the aid of a permanent budget increase. The library was further charged with facilitating and promoting at USU Eastern the use of the newly shared electronic collections, its print collections, and other library services. To begin the merger, library staff compiled a list of tasks and resources that would require additional funding – the one-time expenditures for collection expansion, fortunately, were supported through

a fund allocated to USU Northern by the Utah State legislature. This paper discusses the process of renegotiating licenses, expanding access to electronic collections, and attending to other matters related to this type of library merger. In order to help other libraries face similar mandates, an “Electronic Resource Merger Guide” is offered.

Literature Review

Literature covering the effects on libraries during a merger of higher education institutions is limited. The study, “Lessons Learned from Library Mergers at Colleges of Higher Education in Flanders,” revealed that merger teams often do not have standardized checklists or methods for merging libraries.¹ Swanepoel offers “do's” and “don't's” regarding mergers of libraries, but does not focus specifically on issues regarding electronic resources. Nicole J. Muller's article, “Mergers and Mangers: What's Needed for both to Work? Reflections on a Merger of Two Higher Education Libraries in KwaZulu-Natal,” states, “Mergers are not an occasion; they are a process, and it is important to understand how such change processes unfold and the stress factors that are brought about by the change.”² This is particularly true in merging electronic resources, as is borne out in this paper. While a large expansion of electronic resources provides greater access to scholarly materials and is a boon for the smaller institution, such growth and expansion is



diminished if the new electronic resources are not promoted widely and sensitively to the smaller institution. Since faculty and staff may become stressed in a situation where available materials are expanding rapidly, mergers that result in this type of expansion should be approached carefully and with a focus on respect and on building strong partnerships.

While the literature on library mergers is limited, there are other avenues for investigation similar types of developments. Oliver Braet's paper in 2011, "Merging Publishers' and Libraries' Institutional Interest through Business Modelling" describes a collaborative effort to reconcile the needs of libraries and the needs of for-profit publishers in a single ebook system. The Flemish E-Publishing Platform (FEPP) collects all digitally published books from participating publishers and makes titles available for purchase or lease.³ This product was the result of business modeling whose principles can be applied to library tasks in order to identify needs, strengths, and weakness. Such a systematic approach helps greatly in planning a library merger.

Branding Issues

One often overlooked area during initial planning for a library merger is the importance of brand management. The name of the merged institutions was a matter handled by State leaders. However, communication issues complicated the proper application of the new institutional identity for shared electronic resources. Confusion regarding the brand led to the use of incorrect references to "CEU" (College of Eastern Utah) instead of "USU Eastern" on the electronic journals page. It also led to inconsistent placement of logos in some databases that raised the possibility of alienating staff and students of USU Eastern. Institutional identity issues should be addressed well before moving ahead with merger plans.

Libraries are not alone in the failure to recognize the importance of brand and identity in institutional or organizational mergers. Business mergers and acquisitions are thoroughly documented in numerous trade magazines, news media, books, and peer reviewed journals.

A 2011 article by Dung Anh VŨ, Ovidiu Moisescu, and Nguyen HÀ discusses case studies regarding company mergers and provides an appropriate checklist related to mergers and branding.⁴ Brand recognition, often neglected, receives systematic treatment by the authors in discussing brand loyalty, institutional recognition and pride. Each of these issues relates also to certain challenges in an electronic resource merger process but, thankfully, many electronic user interfaces allow for customized brands, logos, and text. The brand of the College of Eastern Utah was well respected in the community, and honoring its identity was important to the success of the merger. The checklist described in VŨ's article, adapted to some extent in the checklist provided in this article, can be applied in the area of brand management in order to prevent such branding challenges.

Literature on mergers of nonprofit organizations will also be useful in planning library mergers. Thomas A. McLaughlin's, *Nonprofit Mergers and Alliances*, addresses several important topics for merging nonprofit organizations. This book is written for an upper management audience, but several chapters will help lower level management librarians navigate mergers. Chapter five, "Preserving Identity," describes a universal fear of mergers, a fear that often results in barriers to buy-in. McLaughlin states,

If there is a common concern voiced by organizations considering a merger, it is lost identity. The fear is nearly universal, especially with smaller organizations. Usually it is expressed in terms like "We'll get swallowed up" or "We'll get lost in the shuffle." The underlying theme is fear of undesired assimilation.⁵

The College of Eastern Utah community deeply felt the loss of their identity and so the librarians who built successful relationships during the merger were careful to honor the history and tradition of the former College. While branding is an issue for all kinds of organizations, library managers can set the tone for a successful merger if they are mindful of identity concerns and their importance to the individuals at each institution.

Electronic Resource Merger

Identify all Parameters

During the initial stages of the USU Northern and Eastern merger there was pressure to provide an estimate of the costs associated with expanding access to all electronic resources for USU Eastern users. Providing estimates for this added service was extremely complicated due to the numerous licenses maintained by USU Northern. The collection development staff were advised to inquire about potential price increases should another campus be added to our licenses – but without fully disclosing the nature of our inquiries before the merger was official (perhaps so as to get a fair price and not a price we had to accept because of the mandate given to us).

The next phase in the merger required the identification of any overlap in database and journal holdings. Several EBSCO databases were provided to both USU Northern and Eastern through a State deal with the Utah Academic Library Consortium (UALC). However, UALC resources were quite difficult to track since some consortium packages were not extended to every institution in UALC. For instance, UALC as a whole participated in the purchase of one section of a package, while only select schools participated in another package. USU Northern had subscribed to both packages, but USU Eastern had not, complicating access issues. Lists of titles were developed for comparison purposes.

License Review

The merger required the renegotiation of all current license agreements in order to extend access to USU Eastern. Initially, the agreements were reviewed to spot language that would indicate the need for additional funds, such as: “contiguous geographic area,” “single site,” and other similar phrases. We focused our efforts on vendors with agreements that did not place limits on the number of sites, but rather that relied on FTE or concurrent user pricing models. Oftentimes, the increase in FTE from the merger did not place us in a higher pricing tier. Likewise, many of the “per user” models

allowed us to extend access to USU Eastern without additional cost, but there were a few notable exceptions. In these cases, vendors required us to buy unlimited access in order to cover USU Eastern. Without *continuing* funding, however, we declined to move from a limited concurrent user model to unlimited access.

Prioritizing Needs and Contacting Vendors

During the initial review of licenses, we prioritized resources according to special requests from USU Eastern, Big Deal packages, and resources that enhanced USU Eastern's collection according to curriculum needs. USU Northern received requests for access to ArtStor and Sage materials. As a result, these two resources were among the first to be extended to USU Eastern. Next, we focused on Big Deal journal packages, emboldened after our successful negotiations with Sage and ArtStor. Providing access to large journal and reference packages was a highly visible step in the merger process and was recognized in USU Northern's student newspaper. In fact, these resource expansions allowed the library to exemplify how the merger will benefit the students of USU Northern and Eastern.

A letter was created for database vendors outlining the merger and set forth a careful explanation of the legislative mandate, along with a detailed description of USU Northern and Eastern, including information about USU Eastern's FTE, its curriculum, its two year degree programs, its faculty, and available IP ranges. The letter also indicated that USU Northern would be the sole point of contact for troubleshooting, for payment, and other administrative tasks. This letter proved to be very effective in establishing expanded access to resources.

Access to Electronic Books

As expected, dealing with ebooks was somewhat different from dealing with databases. The electronic book collections at USU Northern and Eastern did not include the same titles. USU Eastern had leased a large collection of academic electronic books that USU Northern had not leased. After a series of

purchases and license renegotiations, the electronic book collections were largely brought together. Part of this process included creating MARC catalog records for the newly merged ebook collection under a new collection code in the the shared integrated library system (ILS). A batch edit function was used to change the holdings location for the shared materials to the newly created location. Any records for unshared electronic books remained in the original locations with the OPAC permitting searches of both the home library and the shared online library. This solution presented both USU Northern and Eastern patrons searching capabilities in a single operation for electronic books leased only to them as well as to the shared electronic books.

Access to Electronic Journals

Our initial review of licenses revealed that many of our journal agreements included restrictions that prevented us from extending access to USU Eastern. Since our individual journal subscriptions were handled by a subscription agent who would renegotiate access during the upcoming renewal period, the librarians decided in the meantime to focus on communicating access restrictions and alternatives for our USU Eastern patrons. Electronic journal access was supplied via an A-Z journal tile page, but not without some complications in adding the USU Eastern titles. It was not feasible to have a separate A-Z list for the unique USU Eastern titles so in those instances a notation was added, "CEU access is available through Interlibrary Loan," when titles could not be accessed directly from the A-Z list. Since we intended to have most electronic journals licensed for both campuses in the future, the note solution was the most economical and provided adequate access in the interim. We later learned that the note for CEU would need to be changed to reflect the correct "USU Eastern" brand. This misstep did require additional staff time to correct.

Interlibrary loan services played a key stopgap measure as we determined which packages or single titles would provide the best value for USU Eastern. The interlibrary loan librarian worked with our information technology staff to

develop the needed fields for our existing ILLiad form to allow simple ILL access. During this interim period, USU Northern processed a total of 29 requests for articles from USU Eastern. Of those requests, 14 were canceled because USU Eastern already had electronic access via USU Northern and 20 were supplied from our collection. This is a small number compares with the 9,000 articles requested by USU Northern over the same time period.

Access to Databases

USU Northern had earlier undertaken an extensive redesign of the A-Z database portal. The old portal had a limited number of subject access points that were not tied to departments or disciplines of study. The redesigned web page offered subject access by department and individual area of study. Additional access points were added based on type of resource and if items are open access. This system, driven by a PHP (open source web-scripting software) database with MySQL query language, allowed for minor changes on the backend of the portal that permitted quick and simple generation of a separate and locally branded A-Z database page for USU Eastern. The continuity between the USU Northern and Eastern database sites eliminated the need to maintain and to teach two separate portals. After the library homepage, the database portal proved to be the second most visited webpage with just over 10,000 page views between August 20 and September 19, 2011.

Remote Access to Electronic Resources

Prior to the merger, USU Northern Libraries utilized VPN as the primary method for remote electronic resource authentication. OCLC's EZProxy was configured and installed, but initially only as a secondary authentication method. Once the merger occurred, the library was required to discontinue library access through VPN since we were not able to use this authentication method to provide remote access to multiple authorized user groups. Moving to EZproxy allowed us to create groups and various user categories for various types of access. The move away from VPN also required the library to undertake a large project of adding



a “proxy prepend” to electronic books in the library catalog. This project required library systems staff to run a series of scripts to modify catalog records. In addition, all electronic book domain names were collectively added to our EZproxy configuration tables.

Utah State University employs SunGard's Banner system as our campus management software. Campus identifiers were inserted into individual student records to create authorized user groups in Banner. These records were used to populate fields on our Lightweight Directory Access Protocol (LDAP) server. Three EZproxy groups were created: USU Northern only, USU Eastern only, and a combined group for resources that are available to both USU Northern and Eastern. EZproxy checks the LDAP server for credentials in order to authenticate the users for the proper set of resources. The addition of an academic term designator allows the library to restrict access to only our currently enrolled students for each term. This type of granularity in our grouping system allows us to provide remote access that complies with our license agreements.

Troubleshooting Electronic Resources

Troubleshooting electronic resources can be a difficult task in a single-library system. The merger created additional layers of complication because of the constant addition of new resources, the required EZproxy configurations, and various discrepancies in student records in the Banner system. During the initial stages of the merger, staff from USU Northern did not have a direct way to test access at USU Eastern. Troubleshooting often started as a request from a USU Eastern patron to a USU Eastern library staff member, who then passed on the information to a librarian at USU Northern, who then had to attempt database troubleshooting without the ability to test databases in a way that would reflect the problems experienced at USU Eastern. This workflow significantly slowed down troubleshooting. Too many details were lost along the various communication lines. To help solve this problem, a remote desktop was used to centralize and manage access problems. USU Northern provided and configured a basic PC installed on the USU

Eastern campus that could be accessed by USU Northern librarians and IT staff.

Information Explosion

The expansion of electronic and other resources accounted for a significant growth in the collection available to USU Eastern—from 65,000 to 1,700,000 items. In order to increase awareness of the new resources, librarians from USU Northern visited both USU Eastern campuses to provide training for library staff and offer presentations to each community of patrons. During this period of training, a survey was distributed asking how the transition affected user access to library resources. The results indicated that very few people were aware of the new electronic resources and that concerns about how to use the resources were widespread. However, during the following spring, a second survey was posted on the web sites of both USU Eastern libraries. Responses from students, staff and faculty of each site were encouraging:

- Only half of the respondents have accessed resources remotely
- 60% discovered new resources since the start of fall semester
- Very few take advantage of requesting material from USU Northern through ILL
- 66% feel they are “confident” or “very confident” in their ability to effectively utilize library resources
- 40% say their use of e-journals has increased significantly

Concentrating efforts on providing electronic resources to the new campuses has created a positive and visible impact on each campus. The survey indicated that the majority of USU Eastern patrons have discovered new resources and have used more journals since the merger.

Conclusion

Undertaking a merger as described in this paper is a major challenge and requires careful planning. A successful library merger is a time-consuming but rewarding experience in that library patrons, especially those at smaller institutions, will greatly benefit from expanded col-

lections. USU Northern's Libraries were seen as a leader in the merger efforts and this garnered political good will among both the campus administration and the faculty of each institution.

Because of this, as the merger develops and the two institutions grow as one, the library will likely remain in a leadership position.

Electronic Resources Merger Guide

The guide that follows provides useful questions and tips for future library electronic resource mergers.

General Questions

1. What are the goals of the merger?
2. What conditions precipitated the merger?
3. What is the mission of the merged institution?
4. Will each former institution maintain a separate mission?
5. Will each former institution carry a new name to reflect the merger?
6. Will the merged institution have a new official name, color, and logos?
7. Will each former institution carry an individual name, color, and logos?

General Library Questions

1. What is the technological environment?
 - a. ILS
 - b. Discovery layers
 - c. Electronic resource management tools
 - d. Digital repositories
 - e. Link resolvers
 - f. Federated search tools
 - g. Website/library portal
 - h. MARC record services
 - i. Proxy servers/remote access/authentication methods
 - j. Other technologies?
2. Who are the key library contacts?

Electronic Resources Questions

1. Are financial resources available for the merger, and if so how much?
2. Will the entire electronic collection be merged?
3. Which eresources are uniquely held?
4. Which eresources are held by both libraries?
5. Which eresources are provided by state-wide agreements?
6. Which eresources are funded by individual departments?
7. Are electronic books purchased individually?
8. Does the library participate in an electronic purchase-on-demand model?
9. How many licenses has the library executed?
10. Who are the major vendors?
11. What are the Big Deals?
12. Will remote access be provided for resources?
13. What are the collection priorities?
14. Are there any specific resource requests from faculty?
15. What are the curriculum needs?

16. Which faculty members will advocate for collections?
17. What is the combined FTE?
18. What is the FTE of each former institution?

License Review Tips

1. Identify high impact targets
 - a. Big Deal journal packages
 - b. Vendors who provide a large number of databases
 - c. Faculty requests
 - d. Items frequently requested through ILL
2. Identify difficult targets
 - a. Contiguous geographic area
 - b. Single site
 - c. FTE-if combined FTE places the merged library in a higher tier
3. Identify easy targets
 - a. Unlimited sites
 - b. FTE-if combined FTE does not place the merged library in a higher tier
 - c. Pay-per-use models
 - d. Concurrent user models

License Renegotiation Tips

1. Be honest
2. Create a form letter that clearly outlines:
 - a. The circumstances of the merger
 - b. FTE
 - c. The type of institution and degrees offered
 - d. Faculty expertise
 - e. Program strengths
 - f. Future plans for library collections
3. Create a list of every license and associated resources
 - a. Divide the list creation task among staff
 - b. Track the date of initial vendor contact and responses
 - c. Provide prompt feedback to any vendor queries
4. Save documentation if access is extended
 - a. Update the list created in step 3
 - b. Consider drafting an addendum detailing any changes to the original license
 - c. Track changes in the local electronic resource management system and all public interfaces
5. If access is not extended
 - a. Ask the vendor for specifics regarding the denial and attempt to address concerns
 - b. Set aside documentation and consider asking the vendor again at a later date or request a price quote
 - c. Document the response

Access Tips

1. Start a conversation about remote access early
 - a. Identify authentication methods and any limitations to the currently implemented solution
 - b. Advocate the implementation of a campus identifier to be used in student records



2. Clearly identify access rights for each resource
3. Provide alternative access if a resource is unavailable
 - a. Explore the use of ILL
 - b. Implement a “chat with a librarian” feature or provide easy access to librarians who can help identify alternative resources
 - c. Consider purchase on demand options as a stopgap measure
4. Advertise recent resource additions to
 - a. Administrators
 - b. Faculty
 - c. Students
 - d. Librarians
5. Troubleshooting
 - a. Identify changes to troubleshooting workflows
 - b. Implement remote technological solutions that facilitate electronic resource troubleshooting
 - c. Train public services staff

Endnotes

¹Adriann Swanepoel, “Lessons Learned from Library Mergers at Colleges of Higher Education in Flanders,” *South African Journal of Library & Information Science* 71, no. 1 (2005): 86.

²N. J. Muller, “Mergers and Mangers: What's Needed for both to Work? Reflections on a Merger of Two Higher Education Libraries in KwaZulu-Natal,” *South African Journal of Library & Information Science* 72, no. 3 (2006): 198.

³Oliver Braet, “Merging Publishers’ and Libraries’ Institutional Interest through Business Modeling,” *Library Management* 33, no.1 (2001): 115.

⁴Dung Anh VŨ, Ovidiu Moisescu, and Hguyen HĂ, “An Exploratory Research for Establishing a Brand Due Diligence Checklist in Mergers and Acquisitions,” *Romanian Journal of Marketing* 6, no. 2 (2011): 2-16.

⁵Thomas A. McLaughlin, *Nonprofit Mergers and Alliances*, (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2010), p. 33.