

Against the Grain

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Collection Management Matters — Migrations and Migraines

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When you have stable staffing, in a place where people plan to remain for the rest of their career, years can go by without any changes in personnel or the way business is conducted. Time can pass without much notice when there is no need to make any substantial changes in the library's delivery of services or space configurations. Sooner or later changes do come and when they occur concurrently, the upheavals can cause difficulties on many levels.

During the past two years, along with the Coordinator of Media Services, we have had four librarians retire, including the entire public services faculty, except one. This basically happened because many people in the library are around the same age and have worked together for decades. We also had two librarian resignations and a staff member retire. Nowadays there is always a Search Committee going on to fill one position or another.

While dealing with staff changes, our library environment and delivery of services had been shifting at what seems like a breath taking pace. In the fall of 2017, our OCLC representative informed us that *Illiad* was going away and *Tipasa* would take its place. We had not selected our new Interlibrary Loan Librarian, who would have that responsibility, so we postponed dealing with that issue until the position was filled. During the spring of 2018, we were confronted with two more migrations decisions. First we needed to migrate from a turnkey site for **Innovative Interfaces, Inc** to a software only site. This required a trip to **Innovative** Users Group Meeting for negotiations and face-to-face conversation, with subsequent frequent follow up for requesting the necessary paperwork. Along that same time line, we decided to migrate to **EBSCO EDS** for our discovery service and *OpenAthens* for our authentication service. Both required monthly meetings and testing to iron out functionality issues.

In the midst of all of these pending transformations, the University's Project Director arrived in April to inform us that he was going to build a structure to house the university's writing program inside the library, and he could not find a better place for it, than the entire reference collection area — and it had to be done by June. Then the Facilities Man-

agement Manager arrived to say that she was preparing to erect the Makerspace the Library Dean has requested in the area that housed the Government Documents Collection. As we were reeling from these announcements, which were previously unheard of by the librarians and staff, the Interior Designer arrived with diagrams in hand to tell us that he had ordered new furniture, for areas of the library that currently housed books and microform. Not wanting to be left out of the party, the IT Department announced that this summer they are going to replace all of the student computers, enlarge the server closet, and Oh by the way, turn-off our computer service while they worked.

At an emergency meeting, I presented the department heads with the options for migrating the reference collection and government documents. The consensus was that we would weed the reference collection and move it to the bound periodicals area and do the same with the government documents, since this would keep both collections on the same floor as the reference staff. The bound periodicals would have to be weeded and moved up to the third floor, where we had previously only kept the Journal Archives. To make room for the additional journals, the Oversize Collection which was housed behind the journal archives, had to be weeded and sent to the general circulation collection.

Weeding is not generally labor intensive, but when it is done with oversize and reference books, plus bound periodical volumes, it requires a lot of heavy lifting. Attempts to get temporary help with packing the discards from an outside agency or assistance from the university's Facilities Management department proved futile. The librarians and staff had to do it all, sometimes on days when the air conditioning was not functioning.

When we thought we were seeing a light at the end of the tunnel, it turned out to be a train named "Microforms." All of the microform cabinets, which housed periodicals, ERIC, newspapers, and "The Papers of..." had to be removed to make room for seating areas for the students. We came to work on a Monday and found out this had to take place that day. After feverishly packing what we could, we got the Facilities Management Manager to move the cabinets with the microform inside.

We did the weeding afterwards, to save refiling microform that was no longer needed because we had digital access.

With weeding, there can be differing opinions. Last year, the Head of Cataloging made it a personal project to go through the ERIC microfiche and weed what was available online. This year the Head of Reference maintained that what is there is never used, and he decided to discard it.

Upheavals in personnel, major changes in workflow, realignment of job assignments, and modes of delivery of services can be more than stressful to staff. Transitions that do not have minimal, if any prior planning carry with them an urgency that can be irritating and breed resentment. Getting all of the physical labor done without student help and bodies that are past middle age, can make one weary and irritable at the end of the day — especially when that day is long because of a four day work week. Having all of these occur concurrently can heighten frustration and definitely affect morale.

Fortunately, the librarians and staff maintained a "can do" attitude throughout the process and we were able to accomplish the first leg of the transitions before the students arrived. Where there was a job vacancy that handled a specific task, someone else stepped up to do the job. For instance, one of the catalogers was responsible for withdrawing the books, creating a list and packing them. After he resigned to take another position, a library assistant took over that job. The entire Collection Management staff moved and shifted bound volumes and read the shelves. All of us filed microform. Sharing the workload helped diffuse some of the aggravation and made the work less onerous.

Sudden changes in work flow and assignments are always done better with thoughtful planning and verification. Of course, it would have been best to weed the affected areas first and to measure spaces before moving. However, when that is not possible, I think it's important to focus on how all of the changes are affecting the staff and try to diffuse anger and resentment. I apologized to them for the haphazardness, asked for their patience, worked alongside them and thanked them for their understanding. Putting people before processes and procedures fosters strong team spirit, promotes unity of purpose, and helps get the job done, with little, if any residual negative attitudes. Fortunately, our staff has always had strong team spirit and that took us a long way towards getting the migrations accomplished and setting the library on new paths for delivery of improved and updated services. 🌱

