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Jumping Into and Then Climbing Partially Back Out of the Pond

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Radford University's Experience with Outsourcing Bibliographic Records and Processing

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Introduction

Within approximately a decade, **McConnell Library**, **Radford University** went from in-house cataloging and processing, to outsourcing bibliographic records and processing for books from our primary vendor, to going back to in-house processing while continuing outsourcing of bibliographic records. While outsourcing is no longer seen as the enemy as it once was, it is also no longer seen as an unquestionably accepted practice. A strong emphasis on immediate access has gained traction over record quality.

Radford University is a public university in Southwest Virginia with the **Carnegie Classification of Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs**. Founded in 1910 as a teacher's college, Radford is now a comprehensive university with more than 9,000 students. The university has over 30% first-generation college students and is well known for its strong faculty/student bonds and service ethic. **McConnell Library** currently has 29 librarians and staff providing collections and services to the university.

In May 2006, **Kay Johnson** was hired as Coordinator of Technical Services, which oversees library acquisitions, cataloging, and shelving. The Technical Services Department was comprised of three librarians, who hold faculty rank but are not tenure-track, and six classified staff members. There was a cataloging vs. acquisitions workflow in which cataloging of monographs and serials was handled by one group (Catalog Librarian plus two staff) and acquisitions of monographs and serials was handled by another group (Acquisitions Librarian plus two staff). The Coordinator of Technical Services supervised the librarians and the two staff responsible for shelving and binding of monographs and serials.

Johnson came from a larger university that had outsourced bibliographic records and shelf-ready processing of books ordered from the library's major book vendor. **Johnson** asked the Catalog Librarian, **Elizabeth McCormick**, to work with her to plan and implement outsourced cataloging.

Research and Planning

Johnson and **McCormick** worked together to write a justification for outsourcing and a draft workflow plan, which would be presented to the University Librarian. The original idea was to look at outsourcing the cataloging, invoicing, and shelf-ready processing of firm-ordered books. **McCormick** asked for pricing from the library's contracted book vendor, **YBP**, and information about **OCLC** PromptCat processing. The final reasons for outsourcing were:

- Improved turnaround time from receipt of books to shelving;
- Possible redeployment of staff to other areas of the library needing more staff, mainly to Circulation.

Cost-savings was not a factor in outsourcing. Because student assistants are paid through the Financial Aid office, **McConnell Library** does not pay for student labor, which cancelled any argument in favor of saving money, and the vendor's cost for monograph copy cataloging and physical processing was significantly higher than in-house costs.

McCormick and **Johnson** began discussions in late January 2007, and in February they traveled to nearby **Virginia Tech** to learn how they handled **OCLC's** PromptCat processing. Because the cost to outsource the cataloging of bibliographic records was relatively affordable, unlike the cost to outsource the physical processing of the books, the decision was made to outsource to **YBP's** service only the bibliographic records of available copy as a pilot project. If successful, further outsourcing would be considered, including paying for **YBP** to process books as shelf-ready. Also, because it was known in advance what books would come on the library's approval plan from **YBP**, and because it was likely that full bibliographic records would be available for the majority of titles, the decision was made to receive records for only the approval books instead of the firm-ordered books.

Outsourcing Phase 1: Bibliographic Records

McConnell Library's approval plan began in 2006. Newly received book shipments were placed on shelves in Technical Services for two weeks. This allowed librarians and departmental liaisons the opportunity to visit Technical Services in person in order to reject books or suggest edits to the approval profile, which would result in books better suited to teaching and research needs. Outsourcing of bibliographic records for approval books was accomplished between January and May 2007. **McCormick** and **Johnson** consulted frequently to discuss progress and challenges. Acquisitions and cataloging staff were included in discussions and testing. **McCormick** worked with **YBP** staff to set up the PromptCat profiling and managed the implementation.

OCLC lost the initial profile application sent in March 2007, thus delaying implementation until May. **McCormick**, **Johnson**, and cataloging staff processed and reviewed the first books outsourced and **Johnson** contacted the vendor to fix a payment problem. **McCormick** edited the load profile to provide better quality records. The financial cost at the time was minimal at fifteen cents per record.

McCormick wrote procedures for loading the PromptCat MARC records into the Millennium system. The approval books would arrive and the data file would be available two days later. The file was brought into Millennium via FTP, whereupon bibliographic and invoice records were created. The books were unpacked and left on the review shelves for two weeks. After that time, the books were sorted so that rejected books could be returned and approved books could be processed. Reports in Millennium, known as review files, were used for processing and invoice payment, as well as for catching any coding errors. After successful testing of approval book record loading, PromptCat bibliographic records became routine for the Technical Services staff. Bibliographic record content was accepted "as is," and only brief records and records lacking call numbers were forwarded to the Monographics Librarian for upgrading.

Outsourcing Phase 2: Physical Processing of Books

In May 2008, **McCormick** submitted a cost estimate for physical processing to **Johnson** and the University Librarian, **David Hayes**. An updated estimate was submitted in July after using the more recent price sheet from **YBP** and final cataloging and acquisitions data from the 2007-2008 fiscal year. Three options were supplied: one based on keeping spine label printing in-house and two based on different types of spine labels that **YBP** could use. **McCormick** recommended keeping the label printing in-house at first: it was the cheaper option, would allow Technical Services staff to handle call number prefixes, and would allow staff to determine what did and did not work and to make changes as needed.

After receiving spending approval from the library's Administrative Council, it was decided to go forward with receiving PromptCat bibliographic records for the library's firm-ordered books. **McCormick** contacted **YBP** in July 2009 to begin the process. She

informed them of which subaccounts should be outsourced and the time frame for the library's holdings to be set in **OCLC**. A second profile had to be set up with **OCLC**. Outsourcing commenced with the new fiscal year when orders started to be placed in September 2009.

By 2013, very few departmental liaisons came to the library to review the books, rejected books were minimal, and the approval plan profile had been modified to the extent possible. **Johnson** approached **McCormick** about outsourcing the physical processing of all books purchased from **YBP**. This meant the approval books could no longer be returned to **YBP** but it also meant a quicker turnaround from receipt to shelving for all **YBP** books. As part of the new process, the approval books would go straight to the stacks instead of undergoing a two-week review process in Technical Services. This would save time and effort for Technical Services staff and serve the library users better by providing the books promptly.

YBP's processing of books began in August 2013 with the finished materials arriving in October. Some materials were not completely shelf-ready for a variety of reasons. Oversized materials needed a call number prefix but since the classification of a book into the oversize collection depended on the book's being measured, this could not be done by **YBP**. Books for which there was no copy available were to be originally-cataloged in-house. Finally, sometimes the bibliographic record used by **YBP** did not have a call number at the time processing needed to be done. In those cases, a bibliographic record would be supplied but no spine label would be sent.

In 2015, **McConnell Library** migrated from Innovative Interface's Sierra system to **OCLC's** WorldShare Management Services (WMS). **McCormick** worked with **OCLC** and YBP to migrate outsourcing over to the new library management system. There were a few glitches and delays, but eventually outsourcing worked smoothly again. The **OCLC** master bibliographic record *is* the local bibliographic record for WMS libraries. For libraries like **McConnell Library** that are not part of the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC), the ability to change the bibliographic record is limited. Migrating to WMS took away detailed local cataloging control and the need for authority work, thus adding another justification to accept outsourced bibliographic records as "good enough."

In 2016, as part of a state-wide budget shortfall, public universities were asked to come up with 2%, 5%, and 7% proposed cuts. **Radford University** was no exception and each college on campus, including **McConnell Library**, had to find ways to cut costs at each of the three levels. Savings in processing time were weighed against the budget shortfall and the decrease of importance of the print book collection in comparison with the increased eBook collection. We proposed ceasing physical processing to save money for the library. While the cuts ultimately were not needed in 2016, they were in 2017 and cataloging and physical processing returned to CaTS. Electronic invoices continued to be generated by **YBP** so that holdings would be attached to the bibliographic records during the acquisitions process.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Cataloging and acquisitions staff had concerns initially about outsourcing because it affected their work, but those concerns are long over. They appreciate the efficiencies of loading order and invoice records and the time it gives them to tackle other work, including increased time required for electronic resources ordering, cataloging, and maintenance. They have also gained the opportunity to cross-train in other departments in order to help when staffing needs arise.

Outsourcing has been positive for **McConnell Library**, but it comes with costs. One can look at staff cost savings in comparison to outsourcing costs but the reality is that the personnel budget is different, and more stable, than the library materials budget. **Johnson** and **McCormick** would recommend outsourcing cataloging and physical processing to libraries that have the money to do so. Technical Services staff should be included from the beginning. Consult with other libraries and start with a pilot project that can be changed, expanded, or shut down as needed. 🦃

Knowledge Quest STEM and STEAM Blog — *https://knowledgequest.aasl.org/category/blogs/stem/* — includes school librarians' experiences and recommendations for incorporating STEM and STEAM in school libraries, which can also be adapted for public library children's and young adult makerspace and similar programming: 3-D printing, augmented reality, makerspace kits, monthly STEAM challenges and more can liven up children's programming and offer suggestions for future educators and librarians.

Makerspaces.com — *https://www.makerspaces.com/makerspace-guide-school-and-library/* — "Ultimate Makerspace Resource Guide" is a powerhouse of "101+ Makerspace Resources for Schools and Libraries." From describing, defining, showing and telling to benefits of makerspaces, beginner guides, information for special education environments, materials and supplies, tools, and equipment, projects, furniture, storage, and more—librarians will revel in the hands-on world of makerspaces and will find just about anything they need to start, modify, or expand their program offerings.

PBS Kids: Design Squad Global — *https://pbskids.org/designsquad/* — The hands-on activities and videos from this site can be used in any educational setting to engage children and teens in STEM and STEAM projects. Lesson plans, activity guides, training, and more are available to encourage exploring, designing, and making, vetted by one of the foremost educational networks in the world.

SWNFLN: Southwest Florida Library Network — *https://swfln.org/steam/* — Get ready for hour-long continuing education library tutorials (geared, obviously, for Florida libraries, but worth the time to explore) on STEAM topics ranging from low-budget maker programs to music on the cheap to video games to virtual reality, and more! Professionals present excellent ideas that can be adapted to any library setting. Webinar tutorials including American Sign Language translators.

Hour of Code — *https://hourofcode.com/us* — Hour of Code takes place annually during Computer Science Education Week, but Hour of Code can be hosted any time of the year. Begun as a one-hour introduction to computer science, it has since grown to explore computer science in a variety of ways in communities around the world. See the tutorials, how-to guides, and activities available. This is a grassroots effort that is supported by hundreds of partners and more than 200,000 educators around the world.

S&S Worldwide — *https://www.ssww.com/stem/?src=side2* — is an online family business, selling educational materials. However, they have an extensive list of blog posts related to STEM activities, including holiday crafts, invention convention ideas, DIY projects, as well as promoting their classroom supplies. Creative youth librarians can adapt the ideas and activities to school or public library programming.

Girlstart — *https://girlstart.org/* — STEM curriculum and resources for all educators, as well as resources to promote girls' advancement in STEM learning. Programs of interest to librarians for partnerships include Girlstart After School, Community STEM Education, and STEM Extravaganza. Geared primarily for schools, the programs and ideas can be inspiring to enterprising school and public librarians looking for opportunities to collaborate.

STEM Activities for Kids — *https://stemactivitiesforkids.com/* — Articles, descriptions and instructions, blog, STEM challenges. 🦃