Purdue University

Purdue e-Pubs

Charleston Library Conference

Rompiendo Barreras: Reorganizing Technical and Digital Services in a Small Academic Library

Jonathan H. Harwell
Rollins College, jharwell@rollins.edu

Sharon P. Williams
Rollins College

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

Part of the Library and Information Science 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.

Rompiendo Barreras: Reorganizing Technical and Digital Services in a Small Academic Library

Jonathan H. Harwell, Head of Collections and Systems, Rollins College
Sharon P. Williams, Acquisitions/Office Coordinator, Rollins College

Abstract

The Olin Library at Rollins College is a 2013 winner of the ACRL Excellence in Academic Libraries Award. In May 2012, the Library's new Collections and Systems (C&S) Department began reorganizing from being two separate units—rethinking roles, workflows, and procedures. A small department with a wide range of responsibilities, C&S has four staff and three librarian positions, doing everything from acquisitions to systems to interlibrary loan. We will talk about how the department has focused on mutual respect as the basis for full collaboration in merging two departments, flattening the reporting structure, completely redefining some positions, streamlining workflows, literally breaking down walls, and establishing a highly flexible department that will adapt as resources change. We invite anyone interested in reorganizing technical and digital services—especially but not only in small libraries—to come and share your own ideas and experiences about making sure all the employees are leading change together. We will share what works for us, and, in an open and informal discussion, we want to hear what works for you and/or ideas you would love to try.

Introduction

Rollins College is a small liberal arts college with a handful of graduate programs, including a highly ranked business school. It is located in Winter Park, Florida, just outside of Orlando. The Olin Library at Rollins is a 2013 winner of the ACRL Excellence in Academic Libraries Award. Our library building had a renovation of the main floor in the summer of 2012, and it is now a popular 24/7 hangout that brings together our public services offices and service points, computer labs, the new books, the reference collection, a full-service café, the campus IT help desk, and the tutoring and writing consulting center. This has been a major transformation. Meanwhile, behind the scenes, two departments have completely reorganized into a highly flexible and collaborative team. We are here to tell that story, and to hear your own ideas.

Before

Historically, there was a Technical Services Department in Olin Library. There were several staff members and a couple of librarians doing acquisitions and cataloging. The Sirsi ILS was managed by the campus IT Department. There was one librarian who was the resident techie.

Most "computer questions" from colleagues or patrons were directed to him.

In 2008, R2 Consulting performed a workflow analysis, focusing primarily on the Library's technical operations. They provided a list of helpful recommendations, including the development of systems expertise within the library organization instead of relying on IT. Soon afterward, the library created a Digital Services and Systems Department. It was led by that techie librarian, along with two staff members for interlibrary loan and systems and technical support, as well as two other librarians for electronic resources and serials and for systems and technical support. The new department joined the Technical Services Department's workspace. Around the same time, Sharon joined the team as the Technical Services Supervisor. Two staff members in cataloging reported to her.

As you might expect, this was a major transition for all involved. There were challenges with space arrangement, working styles, and change in a long-standing work life in that office area. The workspace was split down the middle between the two departments. Modular walls were installed to minimize distractions for one of the systems workers. This would be the mode of

working for a few years. Following some turnover in Technical Services, the people at Olin Library did some rethinking and decided to officially merge the two departments and to simultaneously relocate a staff member and a librarian from systems to reference, giving them a new emphasis on "emerging services." That would bring more technological expertise into public services, while keeping one librarian responsible for the ILS. They would hire a new person to lead the merged department, Collections and Systems.

Caution: Merging Ahead

This is where Jonathan came in. He was hired as the Head of Collections and Systems in 2012. When he began in May of that year, we immediately reorganized—at least on the organizational chart. As it happened, the main construction would be happening in the summer, so all of public services were temporarily displaced to other floors. So we still had a similar office arrangement until the construction was done by the fall.

One of our priorities as a new department was making sure we had a collaborative and enjoyable work environment. There was already a plan in place to select and migrate to a new ILS within a few years. So we knew that major changes still lay ahead in terms of daily processes and general workflow. We recognized how unsettled people can feel when there is uncertainty about the future of their daily work life. There was still some real tension from the previous changes, and we knew we had to find a positive way past this.

The new department began having regular biweekly meetings. We established at the outset that our first priority was to make sure we all have a mutually respectful work environment with zero tolerance for disrespectful communication. That is, we would all make an honest effort to treat each other as respected human beings, and if any problems with disrespect arose, the person(s) involved would be asked to leave for the day. As Jonathan often says," no one should ever dread coming to work in the morning; if that is the case, he needs to know why and what we can do to help."

We also began monthly one-on-one meetings between each employee and the new department head. In each meeting, Jonathan asks, "How can I support you in your work?" Initially it was mostly about getting to know each other. We have since maintained these meetings and added a monthly, rotating one-on-one lunch with Jonathan. These lunches are nonworking downtime, just keeping in touch with one another. We also have daily coffee breaks in the adjoining workroom. Each morning, people from around the library are encouraged by the library director to meet up over coffee and connect as people. This has been ongoing for several years, and we strive to maintain it as our schedules allow. We are a small library, and it is essential that we share a sense of community.

Time Out Together

A few months after our merge, we planned retreats for the entire library and for our new department. On a Thursday in July, everyone in the library met in a conference room across campus. We had already taken a personality inventory, and we had an external facilitator who led us through understanding everyone's communication styles. We were there the entire day, including lunch together. It helped to get us toward a better knowledge of each other as individuals and why some personalities can clash.

A week later, our department took a Friday and gathered in the living room of a beautiful historic home, the Osceola Lodge (ca. 1880s). We had refreshments and lunch brought in (thanks to Jonathan's amazing wife), and we settled in for the day to talk openly and respectfully about where we were heading as a new team.

We had done some great preparation. Along with the personality inventory, we also had teams of department members appointed to prepare presentations on various aspects of our work together, including ideas for the future. Jonathan intentionally asked people who had been in separate departments to collaborate on these. He also invited Dr. Jonathan Miller, the Library Director, to welcome and encourage us just at the beginning, and Dr. Rick Bommelje from our Department of Communication to lead the first session.

Dr. Bommelje is known for leading Quaker-style listening workshops, and a time of guided silence was exactly the right tone to begin our day. He also helped us to make a list of "brutal facts to confront to be a great team." Here is our list:

1. Inequalities (in positions)

    a. Uneven workloads

    b. Responsibilities

    c. Titles, faculty-staff divide library-wide

    d. Recognition

    e. Monetary rewards

    f. Opportunities for development

2. Protocol gets in the way

3. Recognizing/embracing work styles

4. Trust and reliability

5. Communication

    a. Understanding each other's jobs and strengths

    b. Speaking directly

    c. Valuing one another

    d. Awareness and transparency with each other

6. Workflows (hard to convince ourselves to delegate projects)

7. The past (time to move on!)

And with that, we began talking with others through our prepared presentations. We talked about disruptive technologies, the new norm of constantly changing tools and resources, and the need for adaptability. We discussed our ideas for union listing, cataloging, modifying job descriptions, coordinating student assistants, and streamlining workflows.

Sharon led a collaborative exercise in re-envisioning the office space arrangement. We focused on opening up the environment. Rethinking our space is what brought to mind the title of this presentation, "Rompiendo Barreras." This is a Spanish phrase meaning "breaking down barriers." In rearranging our office environment, walls literally came down. As we mentioned before, we had a set of tall, modular walls in one area. A colleague who previously worked in this space had requested this arrangement to help with concentration. The walls helped for that purpose. However, in the context of a tense working environment, they also had a demoralizing effect as a signifier of territory.

So taking the ideas that we worked out together in our retreat, we put our facilities department into motion. We removed those modular walls. We removed shelving from our main space and replaced it with...space! We rearranged desks, bookcases, and the orientation of our desks. We went through our files and removed two tall file cabinets full of files and dwindled it down to one two-drawer file. We moved the printer to a more convenient space for those using it the most. In the end, we created a shared space, with space for us in the middle. Where the filing cabinets had been, we placed a new bulletin board that we use as an information spot for notes for student assistants and shout-outs for each other.

So planning that was one major part of our retreat. We also took a look back at our accomplishments since the R2 Consulting visit and a few ideas with which we still wanted to follow up. We all recognized we were beginning a new chapter in which everyone would be valued and safe with one another.

We kept talking after that day. We talked about ideals, challenges, and most of all about ideas "bubbling up" instead of being handed down from above. Change was certain, and we intended to make it collaborative and enjoyable. We recognized, for example, that there was no longer a need to have a complex reporting structure within our department. We decided together to make it flatter and have all employees report

directly to the department head. This meant revising Sharon's position from supervising staff members to supervising student assistants, in a highly collaborative model; and also taking responsibility for all invoice processing, not only for monographs, but also for serials and databases. She is responsible for departmental supplies, office arrangement, and general strategic thinking.

We looked at the big picture and realized that instead of filling an open position for a catalog librarian, the ideal solution would be to transfer it into a different department and completely rewrite it as a digital archivist. That person, Angelina Altobellis, is now developing a records management program for the campus, has taken responsibility for our institutional repository (formerly managed by our systems librarian) and is digitizing archival materials.

We also completely rewrote one of two copy cataloging staff positions, and it became a collections data specialist position. This person, Natalie McMichen, now does a lot of the data wrangling that had been done solely by the e-resources and serials librarian. She manages usage reports, license and cost data, and other administrative metadata, along with inventorying and updating serials holdings. She is also looking at additional ways to collaborate with the entire department on managing data.

Where Are We Now?

Our new department is even newer than it was then. We have had almost complete turnover in the past year and a half, as people have retired or grown into more responsible positions elsewhere. It should be emphasized that, overall, these were fond goodbyes. We had already worked together to transform our work life, and the office area had already become a more positive and supportive place. Sharon is now our department's longest-serving member, at just over 3 years. Imagine what a difference it makes to have such a fresh

team in technical services. None of us have been there long enough to be entrenched in a routine, a workflow, or a space. It enables us to constantly rethink and streamline everything, from our job descriptions to workflows to offices.

Our new Technical Services Specialist, Amanda Vocks, does mostly copy cataloging and has been doing a lot of miscellaneous collection inventories and data cleanup in the catalog. This will be a great help as we prepare to select and migrate to a new system. She is also preparing to catalog the small library of books within our college's fine arts museum, which have never been organized before. We are working with Circulation to check them out remotely from our own terminals. We feel comfortable with this major collaborative project because of Amanda's great idea to have joint meetings of Collections and Systems and Circulation. Both have mostly new staffs, and we are in frequent one-on-one contact about new ideas. It helps immensely for us all to sit down and talk about ideas that affect everyone and to have librarians present but not owning the process.

It also helps that three of our department's staff members have backgrounds in circulation. Natalie even supports Circulation and Reference by staffing both desks, as needed. She and Kristen Arnett (Interlibrary Loan Specialist in our department and also a budding fiction author) are both library school students, so we know that we cannot keep them forever. We make sure they understand that we support their career plans and that we are eager to keep them as long as we can.

We have been searching for an Electronic Resources and Serials Librarian and a Discovery and Systems Librarian. Soon we will have these new people joining us, and we plan to have another retreat in the spring after they arrive. We two are the only ones remaining who were at last year's retreat. We are excited about revisiting a similar process. This time, we are starting from a positive footing, and we can focus on getting to know one another and on everyone's new ideas.