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Shelf Ready Doesn't Always Mean Ready for the Shelf

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Abstract

The Acquisitions and Cataloging Departments at American University have embarked on a partnership whereby an acquisitions specialist uses a cataloging checklist to check various aspects of shelf ready records for correctness and accuracy. Any books that don't meet the requirements of the checklist are automatically routed to the Cataloging Department for additional copy cataloging. Over the course of several years of refining the checklist, the number of approvals bypassing Cataloging has gone from 24% to 60%, which has freed up the Cataloging Department to work on more original and complex cataloging work. This has also led to other collaborations between the two units.

About American University Library

American University is a private, coeducational institution in Washington D.C. with an FTE of approximately 11,000 students. It is known for its programs in international service, public policy and public affairs, and international law and human rights. The library is a member of ACRL but not ARL.

In 2009, the library decided to broaden our services with the book vendor Blackwell to provide us with shelf-ready processing for our approval plan books. Blackwell would attach the spine label, apply the bookplate and property stamp, add the security strip and attach the barcode. At the same time, the library contracted with OCLC Worldcat Cataloging partners to provide us with MARC records for these shelf-ready approval books. Once the books arrived into the library, the Acquisitions Receiving Specialist would receive the books and review that all the pre-processing was done, and then divert all of the titles to the Cataloging Services Department for the record to be reviewed.

Once the shelf-ready program was up and running, we discovered that shelf-ready and computer selected MARC records did not mean books were consistently ready to be put on the shelf. All the books were being routed to Cataloging. However, Cataloging did observe that many books coming in through this workflow had no problems with their records and could have been sent directly to Circulation to be shelved

after the item record was created. At this point, in 2009, the Acquisitions and Cataloging Departments entered into their first collaborative effort to streamline this workflow.

In 2010, with Blackwell's bankruptcy, the library decided to use Coutts (now Coutts Ingrams) as our primary book vendor. We wanted to continue shelf-ready processing approval books with them as well as the collaboration we had established between the two units

The Idea

If the Receiving Specialist was already receiving the approval book and checking that the shelf-ready processing was complete, why couldn't she also check that the book's bibliographic record was complete enough to by-pass cataloging? This was the idea that the heads of both Acquisitions and Cataloging decided to explore. We needed to make sure that the Receiving Specialist had the time, knowledge and attention to detail to ensure the MARC records would be thoroughly checked and that it was done in such a way to make Cataloging staff feel comfortable with not examining every bibliographic record for newly acquired approvals books. It was decided that Cataloging would develop a checklist that the Receiving Specialist would follow. If the book and record matched everything on the checklist, the barcode would be scanned to add the item to the record and the book would be routed to Circulation. If the book and record did not match

even one item on the checklist, the book would be routed to Cataloging for review.

The Specifics

Cataloging developed a checklist that is used by the Receiving Specialist to check for bibliographic errors in records for shelf-ready approval books. Elements of the checklist include a physical check for processing, instructions for routing non-standard books including folios, multivolume sets, literature that needs reclassification according to local practices, or books that should be sent to our music library. The Receiving Specialist initially checks the encoding level (Elvl) of the record, so that books with full-level ("1" or "_" [blank]) records are eligible to go through this checklist. The checklist includes basic matching checks of elements on the book and in the record. This includes:

- ISBN.
- Existence of 035 in record with OCLC prefix.
- Call number on the vendor-provided spine label matching the 050 and/or 090 in the bibliographic and holdings records.
- Matching publisher information in the record and on the piece.
- Matching dates in the 050 and/or 090, 260 or 264, and DtSt field in the 008.
- Pagination.

The checklist also includes more complex elements to examine, such as a check for variant titles (246) in records and more extensive instructions on how additional contributors such as illustrators and editors to a book can be reflected in a record. It should be noted that because of the sometimes complex aspects of these elements can't be fully covered in the checklist, it means that sometimes titles are routed to Cataloging for work when they have otherwise good quality records.

Any books with errors or missing information in their records are routed to Cataloging for correction and enhancement. In 2014, the Receiving Specialist who performs this work was

trained to check and compare encoding levels in OCLC and in our ILS. She was trained to import and overlay full level OCLC records onto our existing Voyager record in order to update them from prepublication or minimal level to full level. She then applies the checklist to the newly imported record.

The Results

When we began this workflow in 2009, it initially resulted in 24% of approvals bypassing Cataloging, but with additional refinements and additional training of the Receiving Specialist who performs this check, we have increased this number by approximately 10% per year over the course of the past four years, raising the total number of approvals books bypassing Cataloging to an average of 60%. The Receiving Specialist's accuracy in checking these books was typically 96% to 97%.

More Collaboration

Since collaborating on the shelf-ready approval project (the library also has firm order books pre-processed but these titles always go directly to Cataloging. This may be a future project to analyze, to see if we can apply the checklist to these titles), the Cataloging and Acquisitions Departments have worked together to improve workflows by Acquisitions' contribution to a long-term move to storage project in which we are moving approximately 100,000 volumes from our library's main stacks to a shared storage facility that is part of our consortia, WRLC. The purpose of this move to storage project, which will move approximately 15% of our main stacks to storage, is to make space for increased student study and programming space, as well as being part of a renovation of the library. The renovation of the library is somewhat dependent upon creating space in the library based on this move, so moving items has needed to happen at a rapid rate, at times being the Cataloging unit's number one priority since the project began approximately two years ago. As part of the move to storage process, we confirm that the cataloging record and barcode match the item in hand, make corrections to bibliographic records that are

incorrect, correct holdings statements as needed, and examine materials for damage or mold.

One Acquisitions Specialist in particular has contributed significantly to this project, accounting for nearly 35% of the total volumes relocated to storage over the past year. In addition to performing the database maintenance and cleanup aspects of this position, she has also reviewed the work of acquisitions student workers who have been trained to work on this project during their down time and also serves as a point person for answering student questions. Although she initially only worked on single volume monographs and titles that were considered the easier part of this project's workflow, she has, over time, learned additional skills and works to correct problem titles routed to us that have errors in bibliographic, holdings, or item records. This has allowed us to move significantly more titles to storage and has given Cataloging more leeway to focus on projects requiring higher-level cataloging knowledge and skills.

Bender Library's Processing Department is located in the Acquisitions Department, and the Processing Specialist has provided Cataloging Services staff and student assistants training to identify which materials that are moving to storage as part of this project need to be routed to her department for repair, and has trained staff on how to identify mold so that these materials can be isolated and appropriately handled.

Another way the two departments have collaborated has been with e-book cataloging. Over the past five years, we have shifted to purchasing more e-books than print books. The Acquisitions Department is responsible for ordering all e-books that are one-time purchases (The Electronic Resource Management unit orders

subscription e-book packages). Acquisitions has one dedicated staff member who handles the bulk of e-book ordering and importing of records. Initially, he would send a list of titles to Cataloging in order for them to review the records. That staff member suggested that since he was already in the MARC record changing the URL field, why couldn't he just check the record to make sure it was correct? Thus was born another collaborative effort. Cataloging developed an appropriate checklist and several staff members in Acquisitions were trained on using it. This collaboration has resulted in the elimination of the backlog of e-books to be checked.

Onward

Often times in libraries, various units in Technical Services do not necessarily work together. These units may create their own silos and may not be involved with work other units are doing. At American University Library, the heads of the units in Technical Services have worked hard to foster the idea that we are one unit, working for the same cause—to provide the best access to the material for our users. It has been very useful for the acquisitions unit to learn what the cataloging unit looks for in a good record. This has provided us with a shared vocabulary and understanding. Cataloging staff have also been trained to work in the acquisitions module of Voyager. This has helped in the demystification process for everyone. We can do this by collaborating on projects that get the materials out to the user in a timely manner. Our staff members have also been eager to learn new skills and to get a better understanding of what work is done in each unit, and how something Acquisitions does may impact the work in Cataloging and vice versa. One positive outcome has been an increased respect for work done in our units.