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Kyle McCarrell and LouAnn Blocker, "Technical Services Talk: Fostering Faculty Collaboration through Reorganization and Communication" (2011). *Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference.*
http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284314963

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Technical Services Talk: Fostering Faculty Collaboration through Reorganization and Communication

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Abstract:
Do you wish you could get out from behind your desk and find out what patrons really want? Are you stuck staring at your computer screen wishing your department's workflow could be more efficient and effective? If this sounds like you, come to this session to hear how one mid-size technical services department (acquisitions, cataloging, serials, and e-resources) at a regional public university of 6,000 students created a leaner, meaner, more focused unit by doing just that. By reorganizing our department and overhauling our workflow to take a more active role in the collection development process, we revitalized relationships with faculty and students to communicate and collaborate with faculty year-round. Focused on small and mid-size libraries, this session will teach attendees practical strategies to create more efficient workflows to better interact with users and hopefully save time and money in the process. Time will be built into the session for attendees to share about similar issues they have faced and their ideas on improving workflows and communication.

Kyle McCarrell and LouAnn Blocker are librarians in their first professional positions in the Technical Services Department at Reese Library, Augusta State University in Augusta, Ga. Both had limited technical services experience before coming to Augusta State. Offering over 50 programs of study, Augusta State is part of the University System of Georgia and has an FTE of about 6,000 students.

Reese Library is staffed by ten librarians, 20 support staff, and 11 student assistants. All librarians assist with instruction and reference, while select teaching faculty contribute to collection development efforts as their department's collection development representatives. There are no subject liaisons among the librarians, but there are informal relationships between the librarians and faculty based on interests and personal contacts. The Reference Coordinator serves as the head of collection development and is responsible for all weeding and the selection of reference materials and general books. The Acquisitions and Cataloging Librarian (Kyle) receives orders from the academic department's collection development representatives. The Electronic Resources and Serials Librarian (LouAnn) is responsible for working with librarians and teaching faculty to make journal and database selections.
Prior to 2010, the Technical Services department had a department head who supervised all staff in cataloging, serials, and acquisitions. The library's Associate Director served as the head of collection development while a part-time Electronic Resources Librarian reported to the library director. Due to retirements or resignations, all these positions were open around the same time and the library took this opportunity to reorganize Technical Services. Now, as mentioned above, the Reference Coordinator serves as head of collection development. The Electronic Resources position went to full-time and added the serials duties. Finally, there is no head of Technical Services as the Electronic Resources Librarian and Acquisitions and Cataloging Librarian share leadership. Over time, as with most libraries, the number of staff in this department went down and tasks were consolidated.

This new structure is much more effective for electronic resources, since these duties overlap with serials duties. Collection development has also improved, since the Reference Coordinator has more information about student research projects and the resources required to support them. The Acquisitions and Cataloging librarian can focus on those specific duties without the added responsibility of overseeing the serials. The three people in these positions have found they communicate well on issues that affect them all, such as e-book purchases.

One of the first changes the Acquisitions and Cataloging Librarian made was to change the process for selecting materials coming from the faculty. Using YBP's GOBI system, each collection development representative is given a user name and password with the ability to select materials desired by their

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DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284314963

department's faculty. Once materials are selected in the system, the Acquisitions assistant can order the material. By not utilizing librarian subject specialists, our department can communicate directly with our users regarding their needs and wants, creating more efficiency in the workflow. In addition, when the collection development representatives select materials, they include the name of the faculty member who selected the item. This allows the Acquisitions assistant to quickly notify faculty when books are available for them to use. Changing this entire process provided a networking opportunity to meet teaching faculty through group and individual training sessions that are repeated as needed. For the faculty, being a collection development representative counts towards the teaching faculty's service component for tenure and promotion.

The merger of e-resources and serials allowed the Electronic Resources Librarian to compare database content with journal orders and led to the cancellation of some print titles that were replaced with consortial deals for electronic titles. The librarian was also able to work with faculty on some cancellations of print and electronic single title subscriptions. Each department was sent a list of their journals that included suggestions for cancellations, the rationale for doing so, and a list of the sources where journals were duplicated. Departments were offered the opportunity to order new titles or, in some cases, new databases, in exchange. Other departments cancelled titles that no longer fit their focus. For 2010-2011, all of these changes added up to considerable savings. These changes continued in 2011-2012 as more departments made changes in their individual journal subscriptions, or switched out less popular databases for other databases or more single titles. One example of our improved communication came from three departments who agreed to share the costs for an expensive journal that all three needed, but could not purchase on their own.

As previously mentioned, some of the changes in Technical Services came about because of job openings that allowed library administration to restructure positions. Other changes have come about because both new librarians saw an opportunity to initiate new communication channels and build relationships with faculty as trusted partners in improving the collection. Building this trust has taken some time and effort through visibility on campus committees, meetings and social activities, and talking to as many faculty members as possible about their students and their research. One great opportunity has been attending the help sessions on using our Course Management System offered by Instructional Technology staff. The instructor invited librarians to come and, if faculty members wanted the help, pass out handouts and give hands-on help linking articles from databases into the campus course management system. Casual conversations with history and business faculty led to requests for some products which were already available in a database. Educating faculty about sources already available to them has provided more opportunities for conversation and has increased requests for instruction for students and faculty. Hosting visits from vendor representatives and opening them to teaching faculty has also opened more doors for communication.

One of the most successful joint efforts in the Technical Services Department has been visits to departmental meetings. There are eighteen academic departments, and over the last year, the two librarians have visited thirteen. To get on the schedule, emails were sent to department chairs asking for visits of no more than 15 minutes, unless the department wanted something longer. The Electronic Resources Librarian provided handouts that included a 'what's new' section, an 'old friends to revisit' section, a brief explanation of the E-journals by Title list, and a list of services the library could provide to faculty. The Acquisitions and Cataloging Librarian provided demos of the new book ordering system and solicited faculty opinions on e-books. Three departments wanted longer training sessions: one for discussion of budgets and resources, and two for more in-depth demonstrations of the library catalog and databases.

Coordinating, planning, and executing these visits took very little time, and the results have been generally positive. One department has requested more follow-up visits to provide targeted instruction for their faculty. Requests for bibliographic instruction from individuals in the visited departments who have never requested instruction in the past have been made. Other faculty members have requested greater assistance in asking for

help with their own projects, or for help in selecting resources for student assignments. Though these requests are not directly related to purchases, they help faculty use what the library does purchases or subscribes to and improves communication and trust. More requests for new journals or databases have come from faculty members, not just from their department heads or collection development representatives.

In addition to these efforts, the Technical Services librarians created vouchers that were given to new faculty to order books directly instead of going through the normal department allocation. The librarians are also working to create a LibGuide to help in updating and advertising trials. In the future, the librarians hope to begin discussion with faculty as to the needs in our collection, and to ask for their help in weeding the book collection. Targeted help sessions on the catalog and databases are also planned to maintain contact with the faculty.