

Resource Acquisitions: An Experiment in Library Reorganization at Slippery Rock University

Heather Getsay
Slippery Rock University, heather.getsay@sru.edu

Catherine Rudowsky
Slippery Rock University, catherine.rudowsky@sru.edu

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

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>.

Heather Getsay and Catherine Rudowsky, "Resource Acquisitions: An Experiment in Library Reorganization at Slippery Rock University" (2011). *Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284314914>

Resource Acquisitions: An Experiment in Library Reorganization at Slippery Rock University

Heather Getsay, Resource Acquisitions Librarian, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania
Catherine Rudowsky, Electronic Access/Outreach Librarian, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania

Abstract:

In 2008, the librarians at Slippery Rock University reorganized and created a new position, the Resource Acquisitions Librarian. The goal for this position was to synthesize the responsibilities related to Databases, Serials, and Acquisitions, which previously were managed by three different librarians, into the job of one librarian. This centralized model aimed to consolidate the acquisition, management, and maintenance of all resources, regardless of format, under a single department. Since Databases, Serials, and Acquisitions were managed separately in the past, the job of the Resource Acquisitions Librarian involved merging three unique sets of procedures, workflows, record-keeping materials, and staff. The purpose of this paper is to examine the consolidation model implemented at Slippery Rock University, including the original vision in creating the Resource Acquisitions Librarian position, challenges that arose as a result of consolidation, and the new model that emerged as a result of this experiment.

Reasons for Reorganization

The Resource Acquisitions Librarian position was created at Slippery Rock University's Bailey Library in 2008. Several factors contributed to its genesis, including personnel changes, discussions on management of the physical collection, and concerns for equity of the library budget across disciplines. The biggest driver of the three was personnel changes. A resignation and a retirement prompted the librarians to reevaluate all librarian positions and look for ways to resolve ongoing questions about perceived gray areas between positions. The three areas that surfaced in these discussions were print monographs, serials, and databases and electronic collections, each of which was managed by a different librarian.

The librarians also considered the impact of the growing trend toward electronic resources and the decreasing importance of physical format. This prompted the librarians to examine the collection as a whole, regardless of delivery format. The goal was to think about books as books and journals as journals, rather than e-books versus print monographs, or online journals versus print subscriptions. By considering these resources only in terms of content and not the item's individual format, the librarians were free to think about the collection as a whole. In doing so, the idea emerged to consider centralization of acquisitions, regardless of format. A centralization model had already been implemented in a prior initiative to consolidate cataloging.

The third factor that prompted reorganization of the librarian positions was the concern for equity of the library budget across disciplines. Monograph and audiovisual acquisitions were allocated using a formula. However, there was no formula for serials or e-format resources. As certain disciplines moved toward electronic resources, others stayed anchored in print. With three different librarians overseeing expenses of monographs, serials, and databases and electronic collections, budget inequities inevitably emerged.

The idea for the Resource Acquisitions Librarian position developed in response to these factors. Informal reviews of the library literature on reorganization strategies were conducted, although the job description was drafted entirely on the specific needs of Bailey Library at the time. The goals were to create a culture in which physical format is not paramount in defining an individual item, and to develop an equitable way to distribute the overall library materials budget across all disciplines for all formats. As it was originally created, the Resource Acquisitions Librarian position was responsible for the acquisition of and access to resources in all formats. An immediate concern among the librarians was whether one person would be able to manage the workload involved with synthesizing responsibilities from three different librarians. However, the hope was that there would be enough overlap in these areas that the position would work.

Resource Acquisitions – Version One

Responsibilities were reassigned among Slippery Rock University's librarians, and, in January 2009, a librarian was hired to fill the new Resource Acquisitions position. A job description was drafted by pulling together what had been three unique positions: Acquisitions Librarian, Serials Librarian, and Electronic Resources Librarian. Selected highlights from the original job description include: responsible for the acquisition of materials in all formats and for the bibliographic control of electronic resources and serials; ensure and maintain access to electronic resources and serials; collaborate in the preparation and allocation of the library's print, serials, and electronic resources budget; coordinate licensing agreements; and supervise Resource Acquisitions staff.

The reorganization of librarian responsibilities resulted in the creation of a new unit within Bailey Library, as well as changes in library staff roles. Prior to reorganization, Acquisitions and Serials operated as separate units with dedicated staff members. Databases and electronic collections did not have a dedicated staff member, although a Graduate Assistant provided support in collecting database usage statistics and making database-related changes to the library website. After the consolidation of these units, the Resource Acquisitions Department included a Resource Acquisitions Librarian; a Library Technician and a Library Assistant II, formerly of Acquisitions; a Library Assistant II, formerly of Serials; and a Graduate Assistant. The structure of the Department is shown in Figure 1.

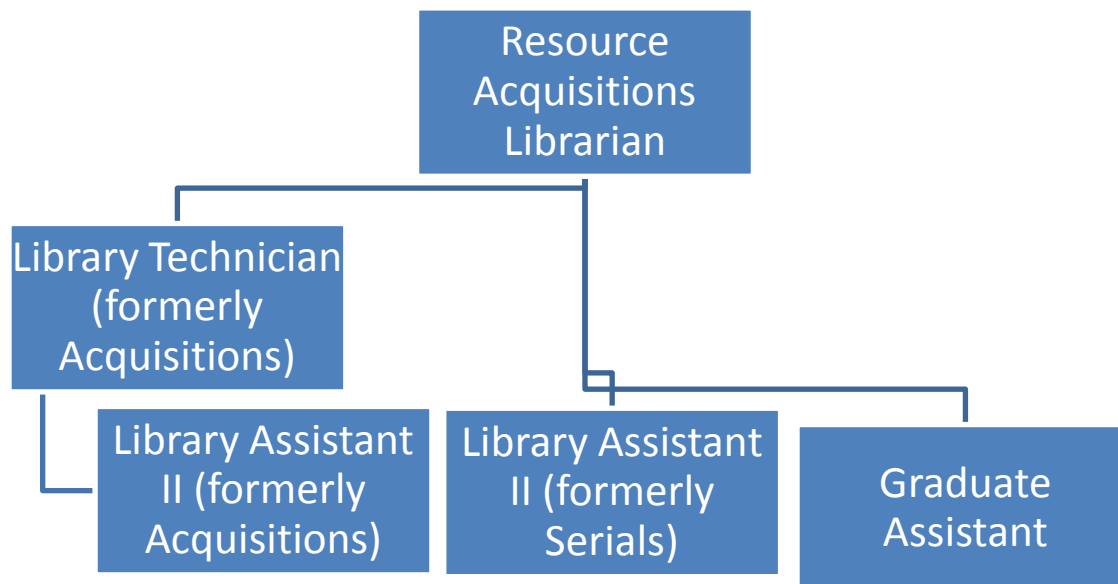


Figure 1. Original staffing model of Resource Acquisitions Department

By absorbing responsibilities previously held by three different librarians in Acquisitions, Serials, and Databases, the Resource Acquisitions Librarian inherited three sets of processes, spreadsheets, staff routines, and workflows. The approach that the Resource Acquisitions Librarian employed immediately after assuming the role was to continue to manage the three areas separately. The goal was to learn each job individually while observing areas of overlap in processes and functions that could later be synthesized.

Some opportunities for consolidation became apparent relatively quickly. For example, the process for payment of invoices previously was managed by three librarians who worked with different staff members. Under the new model, a consistent workflow was implemented within the Resource Acquisitions Department for payment and approval of every invoice, regardless of the format of the item for which it paid. For the Resource Acquisitions Librarian, overseeing the payment of all invoices was a benefit

because it allowed one person to be completely knowledgeable of all library materials expenses.

Other areas of the Resource Acquisitions model did not merge as easily due to the variety of tasks managed by the Librarian. A typical day included a range of disparate activities, including troubleshooting access problems with databases and serials, activating electronic journals and managing the library's e-journal portal, setting up database links and access on the library website, overseeing invoice payments for every item acquired by the library, maintaining budget information, and more. At the same time, Bailey Library initiated several new projects which were distinctly focused in either Acquisitions or Electronic Resources, but not both. For example, setting up OCLC WorldCat Cataloging Partners and

transitioning to the GOBI system for online monograph ordering were specific to Acquisitions, while implementing a new electronic resource management system was related to Databases and Serials. The practical aspect of managing the complete lifecycle of each resource regardless of format was an overwhelming task.

Resource Acquisitions – Version Two

More organizational changes in the library helped to further synthesize the Resource Acquisitions Department. The Library Assistant II who formerly worked in Acquisitions was reassigned to a different department. At that point, the Library Assistant II who formerly worked in Serials began reporting directly to the Library Technician. See Figure 2.

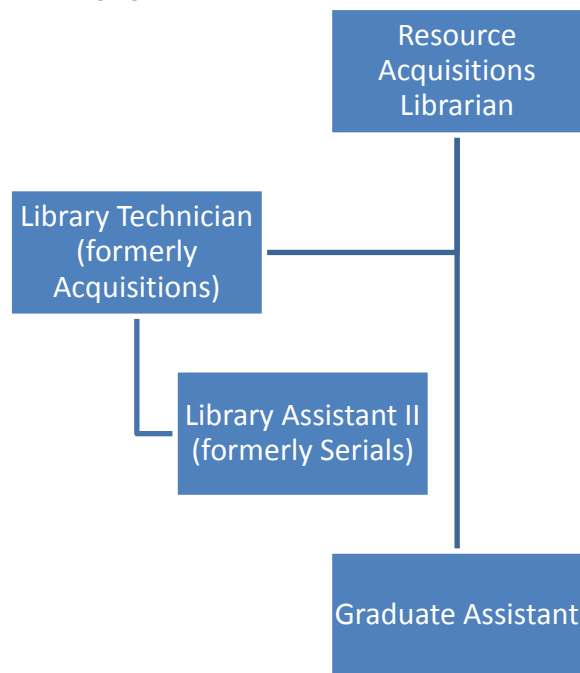


Figure 2. Revised staffing model of the Resource Acquisitions Department

The new model marked an important step toward a consolidated Resource Acquisitions Department, rather than Acquisitions staff and Serials staff carrying out their own tasks under the umbrella of one department. Staff from Acquisitions and Serials implemented a workflow that accommodated all resources regardless of format. For the first time, Bailey Library did not have a dedicated Serials Librarian or staff member, and the traditional Serials Department ceased to exist.

Lessons Learned

It quickly became apparent to the Resource Acquisitions Librarian that certain things were always going to get attention first. Access issues with databases and electronic journals always got first priority because they were the most visible and immediate problems to students and faculty. Troubleshooting technical issues and setting up access can be time-consuming and unpredictable. Budget questions posed another challenge because there was no system for managing all resources in one place. For

example, the ERMS tracked expenses for electronic resources but not print materials. So, while the Resource Acquisitions Librarian was supposed to oversee all resources, the tools to manage budget questions were limited by format.

Despite our efforts to think about resources in terms of content and not format, we realized that existing tools for managing library resources often are based on format. Simply put, one cannot order a database in GOBI, and Serials Solutions offers no features that are relevant to print monographs. Some areas for overlap emerged in managing Serials and Databases because both utilized Serials Solutions and both involved access issues, but Acquisitions always seemed to be a completely separate entity. In the process of trying to consolidate Acquisitions, Serials, and Databases and following two years of experimentation, two distinct areas emerged in the form of Electronic Access and Acquisitions.

Resource Acquisitions – Version Unknown!

In the course of trying to decide how to move forward with the various demands and immense workload of the Resource Acquisitions model, we considered options such as reverting to the previous model or attempting to separate some of the responsibilities. The problem was that we still felt that Resource Acquisitions was a good idea in theory. We did not want to discard the new model, but we also recognized the need for adjustments.

Since Access and Acquisitions emerged as the two primary areas of time consumption, we decided to consider a model in which one librarian manages all issues related to Electronic Access, and one librarian handles all issues related to Acquisitions. Before the Resource Acquisitions experiment, the librarian who acquired serials also maintained serials, and the per-

son who acquired databases also maintained databases. Therefore, it did not occur to us to separate acquiring and maintaining until we were able to view those functions outside of the scope of format.

Our enthusiasm for the newest model was not without questions on where to draw the line between Resource Acquisitions and Electronic Access. As an example, one area that presented a particular challenge is the physical serials collection. Since we no longer have a “Serials Librarian,” and the Electronic Access Librarian deals specifically with e-resources, we struggled with determining who should be ultimately responsible for print serials. This prompted us to think critically about the model we created and how to fit serials into it. Our model now is based on centralization of processes rather than centralization by format. Our idea is to think of our structure in terms of Technical Services, which would include Acquisitions and Cataloging; and Public Services, which would include the Physical Collection and Electronic Access. This suggests that the print serials collection would be included in Public Services, although discussion of alternative models continues in order to identify the best approach.

Conclusion

The reorganization of librarian positions and the creation of the Resource Acquisitions Librarian at Slippery Rock University was an important experiment. By consolidating responsibilities related to Acquisitions, Serials, and Databases under a single librarian, we gained perspective on areas that could overlap where others remained distinctly separate. From this, we created two positions, the Resource Acquisitions Librarian and Electronic Access Librarian. The newest model maintains a forward thinking approach while responding to format-based needs.

The New Model

Resource Acquisitions Librarian

- Invoices & payments
- Licensing
- Acquisitions in any format

Electronic Access Librarian

- Maintains access for all electronic resources
- Troubleshoots functionality issues