Inventory of a Small Academic Library: Cooperation and Communication Through the Units

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Abstract:
The decision to conduct an inventory at the Rosa Parks Library at Troy University in Montgomery was the culmination of several on-going collection cleanup projects with the decisive factors being the need to conduct a collection assessment and a reclamation project to synchronize our ILS holdings with OCLC. In this paper, librarians and staff will discuss the benefits, problems and solutions of completing our first electronic inventory. We will focus on the collaborative effort between access services and technical services. Staff involvement, workflow and procedures will also be discussed.

Background of the University

Troy University was founded in Troy, Alabama as the Troy State Normal School on February 26, 1887 with the mission to train teachers for southeastern Alabama schools. During its 125 year history the university has gone through multiple name changes and its mission has evolved and expanded. Today Troy University serves almost 30,000 students worldwide with three branch campuses in Alabama (Montgomery, Dothan and Phenix City) and 60 teaching sites across the U.S. and around the world. Approximately 34 degree programs are offered. In 2009, Troy University began its first doctoral program, the Doctorate in Nursing Practice.

Background of the Montgomery Campus

The Montgomery Campus of Troy University was born in the mid-1960s out of a request by the U.S. Air Force to provide educational opportunities for those stationed at nearby bases. The original name, Maxwell Gunter Branch, was changed to Troy State University in Montgomery (TSUM) in 1970. In 1983, TSUM became an independent university and received accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Located in downtown Montgomery, the first classes were taught in converted hotel rooms of the old Whitley Hotel a few blocks from the state capital. In 2005, Troy University once again merged all of its independent campuses into "One Great University." Throughout its history, the Montgomery campus has been dedicated to serving the nontraditional student. The majority of the classes are offered at night, on weekends and online to accommodate the needs of the working adult student. Currently 29 degree programs are offered on the Montgomery Campus.

Background of the Rosa Parks Library

The Library at the Montgomery campus began as a one-person operation in a room in Bartlett Hall. Arrangements were made for Troy nursing students to use the Nursing Library in Montgomery's St. Margaret's Hospital. In the early 1980s that collection was donated to the library at the Montgomery campus. The two collections were merged but were administered separately. Over the years as the campus grew so did the library collection, but the growth of the library was severely limited by space, staff and budget. To address the needs of the Montgomery faculty and students, the Rosa Parks Library and Museum was opened on December 1, 2000. The merger of all the campuses in 2005 brought numerous changes to the Rosa Park Library, including placing all full time librarians on the tenure-track. Today the Rosa Parks Library consists of some 40,000 books, over 60,000 full text e-books, and extensive online full text journal databases. The library staff is comprised of six professionals, three full time staff, three part-time employees and various student assistants.

It appears that at least three different scenarios were used at various times to catalog materials for the Montgomery campus library.

Scenario one: A librarian would periodically come from the Troy campus and catalog materials in Montgomery.

Scenario two: Materials were purchased, processed and cataloged in Troy and transported to the Montgomery campus.

Scenario three: Cataloging was performed by non-catalogers at the Montgomery campus.

In 2000, as part of the library expansion, a professional position was created for a part-time cataloger. This part-time position was originally for 20 hours but as the work demands grew the position was increased to 30 hours, and a student assistant was placed in Technical Services to assist with processing. When the part-time cataloger retired in 2009, the position was evaluated and upgraded. Technical Services now consists of two full-time, tenure-track librarians (Cataloging and Collection Development), a part-time staff position and a student assistant. Now with sufficient staff, long needed projects are being pursued.

Inventory Background
Historically, the library typically conducted an annual inventory either during the breaks between the Spring and Summer terms or between the Summer and Fall terms. During this time the library would close to the public for one week, and staff would check individual items and match them to shelf-list cards to determine what titles were missing or lost. Notes would be made on the shelf-list cards but updates were not consistently made to the Integrated Library System (ILS).

In 2005, with a new Director, a fairly new part-time Cataloger, and three of the four librarians suddenly being thrust onto the tenure-track, the Director decided to put the inventories on hold. Over the next few years the academic calendar evolved and the library remained open between terms for patron use. The card catalog and shelf list were discarded and a full time cataloger was added to the staff. In the Fall of 2010, with a more innovative staff, a better understood and utilized ILS, it was now time for a much needed inventory using laptops and hand held barcode scanners.

Motivating Factors for a Barcode Scan Inventory
Now that more staffing is in place, not only with Technical Services, but also throughout the library, we had the ability to do a full collection barcode

scan inventory. Our first objective was to evaluate and clean up our online catalog. Because of the inconsistent history of cataloging at the Montgomery Campus, a successful barcode scan inventory could not be completed until there was consistent staffing in place in the Technical Services department on the Montgomery campus.

Our second objective was to implement a barcode scan inventory, because the previous collection inventories were done by comparing the shelf-list cards to items on the shelf. Doing this would provide a more accurate count of what was actually in the library and what was missing. Our staff had received numerous complaints from patrons about not being able to locate items on the shelves even though they were labeled available in the online catalog. This also became a problem for our Interlibrary Loan (ILL) staff when they would search for items and would not be able to fill ILL requests. This inventory was a major step in eliminating confusion about our library's current holdings.

Project Goals
There were three major goals the library staff were hoping to achieve after the barcode scan inventory was complete.

Goal one: Run a report to check our SIRSI holdings against the holding codes list at OCLC. By doing this, we can check to see which items were correctly cataloged and linked to our catalog, as well as correct any issues that may arise through ILL requests.

Goal two: Update our collection so we could run a collection assessment using either the OCLC WorldCat Analysis Tool or by using Bowker's Book Analysis System comparing our collection with *Resources for College Libraries*.

Goal three: Reevaluate any procedures we had for withdrawing materials and searching for missing materials and create new procedures for any gaps we had found.

Scanning Process & Departmental Interactions
The first barcode scan inventory project was a large undertaking since it was the first of its kind performed at our library and by our staff. The inventory project started October 2010 using small collections

as prototypes to help create a set of procedures for tackling the project. Technical Services and Access Services staff met regularly to devise a system to help the process move smoothly. It was decided that the Access Services staff would do all of the barcode scanning, and that the inventory would begin November 1, 2010. The first collection scanned was the Rosa Parks Library Collection, which contains all of the library's Civil Rights materials and was previously non-circulating. Since this collection was relatively new and small, it was the collection that would be the easiest to evaluate. This section became the model that the library staff would use to go forward with scanning the rest of the library collection.

Since the locations of the barcode on each item were not consistent, usually two people worked as a team. The first person was responsible for physically handling the item, taking if off the shelf, opening it, and returning it to the shelf after scanning. The second person was responsible for the scanning of the items, making sure the information was accepted and dealing with any computer connection issues. After this process was completed, the Circulation Supervisor would run reports based on the sections that were finished. She would review each report and would do one of the following:

1.) Assign Circulation staff or student assistants sections of the collection to search for missing items.

2.) Consult the Collection Development and Cataloging Librarians to determine what should be done with the problem items.

We were able to integrate more staff members into the process once we became more familiar with the system, and identified some of the initial challenges we would be facing.

We continued to inventory our smaller collections first, which included Oversized, Media, Reserves, Juvenile, Historical and Theses Collections. After the smaller sections were completed, the library staff began to scan the Reference and General Collections. It was scanning these collections where many of our Internet issues began to arise. We soon discovered there were areas in the library that did not have as strong of an Internet connection as other

areas. These dead spots caused the system to run much slower than normal. Additionally, when the laptop would lose connectivity, recently scanned items would fail to go through and would later show up on reports as not being inventoried. Items listed that we were able to locate were pulled and inventoried. After several searches had been completed, a new report was run to update our findings. At this point, all scanning had ended and student assistants could return to their shelf reading duties. Once shelf reading resumed, more and more items turned up within the collection and items were changed from "Missing" to "Inventoried."

Evaluating Reports
Once each section was scanned, a report was generated for materials inventoried prior to January 1, 2011, and were then evaluated by the Circulation Supervisor. After the initial reports were run, the Circulation Supervisor met with the Cataloging and Collection Development Librarians to discuss what process should be taken with the report results. After much discussion, a solution for reviewing the reports was reached:

1.) Color-coding each item to distinguish between found or known problems.

2.) Creating a rotation schedule to search for items that turned up missing or not inventoried on each report.

Once the Circulation Supervisor determined the status of each item on the reports, each report was given to the Stacks Supervisor who then assigned circulation student assistants sections to search. Any items that showed up on the report as not being inventoried were then searched for multiple times by staff. This process lasted approximately six months. Found items were given to the Stacks Supervisor, the Circulation Specialist, or the Circulation Supervisor to verify the item was indeed the item on the report list. If the information matched, the item was inventoried and returned to the shelf. If not, the item was marked "Missing," the location was changed in the ILS, and it would be placed back in the search rotation.

Once the reports were run, the Circulation Supervisor and Cataloging Librarian began to notice incon-

sistencies with items found in the report list for the General Collection, our main circulating collection. After discussing this with the Collection Development Librarian, we realized the items showing up on this list were either downloaded during the initial system merge or may have never been brought to our campus.

Several issues arose during the inventory evaluation process.

Issue one: Items that were checked out or items out on interlibrary loan. When items were returned, they needed to be inventoried before they were returned to the stacks.

Issue two: Inconsistencies when multiple copies of one item were believed to be on the shelf.
For example, when items were weeded during previous weeding cycles, copy one was pulled while copy two remained on the shelf. Since our library indicates each copy on the call number label, not replacing the label on the item created confusion for any patron or staff that would conduct shelf browsing searches. This was also a problem because they may have been pulled during a previous weeding project, but were not deleted from the ILS.

Issues three: System-generated barcodes.
We determined that these items were never actually in our catalog and were just errors in the import/export process.

As for database changes, since both departments have small staffing, the Circulation Supervisor would assist with some of the minor database edits. This included updating any item locations to "Missing" or if items were located, they would be changed back to their respective home location. The Technical Services staff dealt with the more complex issues. This included item deletion, recataloging and any physical or label repairs. This process worked really well for our staff, and it helped to strengthen the ties between Circulation and Technical Services.

Lessons Learned
Don't re-invent the wheel.
Reading literature from other libraries can help you determine where to start. The sections that ad-

dressed problems encountered helped our library realize some potential issues before we even started, including shelf reading the entire collection before any scanning is attempted.

Shelf read!
Before any inventory processes are attempted, shelf reading of the entire collection is a must. Shelf reading should be a priority during the entire inventory process. No shelving system is perfect, so conducting routine checks will be beneficial.

Come up with a game plan.
After the staff have been trained and at least one section has been tested, the librarians and staff should sit down together to devise a plan. This should include collection scanning order, a scanning schedule and the time of day scanning should be attempted. Since this process can be noisy, early mornings were typically the easiest times to achieve the least amount of patron disturbance. This mainly depends on library staffing and your campus's environment.

Training, training, and more training.
Much training is involved with the start of any project. Staff involved in any aspect of an inventory project must go through a significant amount of training before they start any of the process. This will allow time to work out any technical issues that may appear when scanning is actually in place. This includes scanning, running and evaluating reports, and determining what should be done with any problem items.

The key is color-coding.
Color-coding reports can be very instrumental in determining the status of each item. It helped our staff identify if the item(s) had labeling problems, was marked missing, withdrawn, or even if the item was checked out.

Don't be afraid to triple check.
Wireless Internet is not always reliable, which means glitches can occur. Not rushing and being attentive during this process helps to ensure that each item is scanned properly. Shelf reading should be a continuous process during an inventory. Rotation assignments are recommended when searching for missing items. This can be advantageous be-

cause the previous person could have missed finding the item on the shelf.

Are these materials really missing?
Our biggest concern was if items found on our missing list even existed on our shelves. One major problem area was what we refer to as our "1996 book list." After multiple searches were conducted for these items, it was determined that they never existed at our library. Our second concern was our most recently cataloged items. It was harder to reach a definitive decision on these items. It was decided that staff would check circulation records to determine whether to shadow the item, continue to search for it or to delete it from the system.

Power supply and Internet connection.
Battery power supply on laptop computers lasts approximately two to three hours, depending on the brand. If a rotation schedule is planned beyond two to three hours, be prepared to use extension cords for scanning beyond that time. Internet connections can also be a nuisance, so be prepared for delays or create a scanning workstation with a hardwired connection. Another positive outcome of our project was the addition of more Internet routers placed in our library.

Be flexible!
Last but not least, it is very important that all parties involved be flexible. Problems can arise in the process to slow things down. For instance, sometimes scanning would have to be put on hold because of patrons' needs or if it was causing disruptions. It also took time to make sense of the reports, and looking for missing items was a long and tedious process that typically requires several months to complete.

Conclusion
Since we are the first of our campuses to do a full-fledged barcode scan inventory, we have helped to create guidelines for this process. This collaboration has strengthened the lines of communication at our campus library, and has opened new avenues of communication with the other campus libraries. Overall, we learned a great deal from this project, and many of our conclusions are reflected in the lessons learned section. Cleaning up the catalog and collections enhanced our library's abilities to

reevaluate our procedures, and improved user access. Our next step will be to start working on our primary goal of Collection Assessment.