

## You Cannot Have Too Much Electronic Resources Staffing

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# You Cannot Have Too Much Electronic Resources Staffing

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## Abstract

Two years ago, Auburn University Libraries created a new Electronic Resources and Serials Services (ERSS) unit to create a cohesive, highly responsive, and forward-moving team. This newly created unit wanted to do things right, well, and strategically. When the team reflected upon the current staffing situation, the following issues emerged: (1) doing “more with less” was not a recipe for success; (2) projects were a far-away dream; and (3) having too little documentation was dangerous for succession. In addition the Unit Head was assuming more administrative assignments, making delegation of tasks not possible for this small and full-to-capacity work group. Thus was born the decision to create and hire a new tenure-track librarian, the Serials Acquisitions Librarian. It has now been 2 years since hiring this new librarian.

Three members of Auburn’s ERSS unit: the department head, the new librarian, and the serials associate, will talk about their experiences with adding a new electronic resources expert. Topics covered will include: (1) progress to date on addressing weak areas of service; (2) challenges with hiring a person proficient with electronic resources trouble shooting and cataloging, but less so with acquisitions; and (3) areas needing more attention. Engagement with the audience will be fostered through dialog on aspects of training staff, writing documentation, building teamwork, planning for succession, and handling sudden departures of key personnel.

## Doing More with Less

From the late 1990s the Serials Unit at Auburn University operated with only one librarian (Sullenger) dedicated to serials and, increasingly, electronic resources. Currently, the Auburn University Libraries spend approximately \$6,000,000 on materials, with at least 85% of that dedicated to electronic resources. All of these new responsibilities fell on Sullenger, her serials associate (Aladebumoye), and another serials assistant who worked mainly on claims and current periodicals maintenance.

Both Sullenger and Aladebumoye began their acquisitions work in 1997 and 1998 after working in the serials cataloging unit. At this time, online journals were emerging and adding multiple new dimensions to an already full serials workflow. Aladebumoye specialized in serials orders and invoices, and as she gained experience with problem resolution of print serials, she gradually took on the orders and invoicing of electronic journals which, at that time, were largely print-plus-online orders. Like most other serialists at that time, Sullenger learned on the job, monitoring discussion

lists and attending professional conferences. Along the way, she devised local procedures and workflow.

Aladebumoye gained expertise with electronic journals primarily on the job, as did Sullenger. She and Sullenger worked closely together for many years and became familiar and comfortable with each other’s work styles and methods of recording decisions and making notes. Due to not having an Electronic Resources Management (ERM) product, Aladebumoye recorded most acquisition notes in the Voyager acquisitions module.

## A New Start

In 2011, a reorganization led to the Electronic Resources and Serials Services Department, consisting of Sullenger, Aladebumoye, the serials assistant, and Jack Fitzpatrick, as the manager of catalog maintenance and the Serials Solutions knowledge base along with electronic resource troubleshooting. However, with both the volume and complexity of this work and Sullenger taking on other responsibilities, a reorganization of staff was not sufficient. Sullenger requested and received

permission to hire another librarian for the Department. The major issues that Sullenger needed to address included:

- Undocumented procedures
- Specialized tasks performed by only one person with no backup plan or person(s)
- Serials cataloging given to this new department that had previously been in the Catalog Department
- Lack of a formalized ERM product, such that institutional/business process information is dispersed among paper files, purchase order notes, and online spreadsheets

We hired Ellero, who had substantial experience with serials cataloging and electronic resources problem maintenance but no direct acquisitions experience. She spent the fall learning basic serials tasks such as reviewing fall renewal invoices and title reconciliation lists for the Big Deal packages. While building upon her existing skills, she completed the backlog of serials and analytics cataloging and began formal documentation of our policies and procedures. Aladebumoye conducted much of Ellero's serials acquisitions training. In addition to training Ellero, she learned to adjust to a new person's work style and language (e.g., Sirsi terminology versus Voyager), which was a new experience for her.

Ellero on the other hand faced the huge challenge of learning the hands-on work of acquisitions, Auburn's odd October 1 fiscal year cycle, and a new ILS system and its modules. Liaison work with the subject bibliographers was also new to her, and as she gained experience, she took on more of this role. Several new public service librarians were hired during Ellero's first 2 years, and they also were learning how to perform their duties which increased the workload on Ellero and Aladebumoye. Perhaps the most eye-opening experience for Sullenger and Aladebumoye was the difficulty Ellero had in interpreting their acquisitions module notes. The abbreviations and conventions they developed over the years were clear to them, and they were surprised that it looked like a secret code to an outsider with very little acquisition experience.

Former acquisitions librarians at Auburn had told Sullenger that it takes at least 2 years to become proficient and comfortable with acquisitions work. She found that to be true in her case, and Ellero also felt the 2-year mark was where she started feeling that she was an acquisitions librarian. Early in Ellero's first year of employment, she was invited to lead a special committee to consider a subscription to a discovery tool service which kept her from concentrating solely on acquisitions and mastering the Voyager system. Auburn librarians have tenure, and the presentation and publication requirements take significant amounts of time away from daily work. The time that we had planned for her to work on special projects to enhance her knowledge of electronic resources life cycle management was diverted to the work of the discovery tool committee.

### Where Do We Go from Here?

The question is, "After 2 years, where to do we stand?" Ellero continues to document policies and procedures and is creating a manual so that the next new person will have a better starting point. We have made significant progress on spreading specialized knowledge among the staff. With an extra person in the Department, Aladebumoye has been able to expand her role to take on tasks that always have interested her, but with the lack of sufficient time, she never had the opportunity. She is now assigned one day a week to resolve electronic resource linking issues and will continue to take on more maintenance tasks, functioning as another backup person for Fitzpatrick. Ellero has gained a good working knowledge of the duties of Sullenger, Fitzpatrick, and Aladebumoye.

We wanted to find a way to systematically approach our goal of having two skilled and knowledgeable persons for every responsibility and task in the Department. We decided to use the NASIG Core Competencies for Electronic Resources Librarians.<sup>1</sup> Each member of the Department conducted a self-assessment of each competency by rating their

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<sup>1</sup>NASIG Core Competencies Task Force. (2013, July 22). *Core competencies for electronic resources librarians*. Retrieved from [http://www.nasig.org/site\\_page.cfm?pk\\_association\\_webpage\\_menu=310&pk\\_association\\_webpage=1225](http://www.nasig.org/site_page.cfm?pk_association_webpage_menu=310&pk_association_webpage=1225)

knowledge, skills, and abilities as unable to perform the competency, somewhat knowledgeable of the competency, knowledgeable enough to carry out the competency, or thoroughly confident of their

ability to carry out the competency. We continue to use this assessment to target areas performed by one person and to prioritize training for both Aladebumoye and Ellero.