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Transformation of Acquisitions at Wayne State University

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Technology has always been moving libraries forward, and acquisitions staff needs to keep moving with it. While the basic steps of acquisitions haven't changed much — order, receive, pay — the technology behind what we do has changed a great deal. This has been especially the case over the last five years with the increased acquisition of electronic resources. The integrated library system made the work easier in many ways, but the reality is that the increase in electronic resources has complicated acquisitions by adding extra steps to the workflow. Along with the difficulty of keeping up with the increase and rapid acquisition of electronic resources comes the need for staff members to keep their skills current to handle these changes.

Approximately a year ago at **Wayne State University**, we had to deal with drastic budget cuts across the entire campus. The library system was included in these cuts. We lost a number of staff positions due to those cuts, as well as through attrition. During that same time period we also had a reorganization of the library system. The reorganization flattened our organizational structure and resulted in several promotions. By experiencing these two major changes — the budget cut and the reorganization — we had the opportunity to review the overall direction of the library. This was also a chance to reposition staff to support this new direction.

In the Acquisitions Department, this new direction initially meant adapting to the pronounced shift from print to electronic publications, while managing with a reduced number of staff. Our challenge was having individual people with certain job responsibilities that were severely fragmented, as staff members were dealing with the increased electronic resources workload and shrinking amount of work involving print resources. This created a gap in job duties, along with a lack of an established vision for the department had become a concern. The previous organizational structure did not reflect the increased workload associated with the increase in electronic materials.

This presented the opportunity to change the acquisitions culture in technical services. Previously we had six staff and two administrative positions in the department. We lost the two administrative positions plus two staff positions, leaving us with four people working in the department. At that point, we needed to examine where the future of the acquisitions department was going and how we were going to get there. As the supervisor, I identified strategic and practical improvements that could be made. A comprehensive review of our internal procedures and workflows was required. This review included both current job responsibilities the staff had and the opportunity for realigning staff with new tasks that addressed the increase in electronic resources, as these e-resources were now a collection development priority. This internal review fit in well with the administration's priority of emphasizing user experience. By undertaking this review, the acquisitions department aligned itself with the vision for the library system, with the understanding that any new plans or changes needed to be flexible.

Looking for ways to create processes that are more streamlined and improve efficiencies, we began the task of transforming our acquisitions unit from format-based to functional-based operations. This was a major change that addressed the fragmented staff job duties well. Using a more functional approach gave staff a clearer idea of what their duties were. For example, with one staff member handling all orders and another handling all invoices, everyone knows who does what. We needed to change not only procedures and workflows, but also the organization of the unit. Along with the realignment of job duties, a review of skills and tools needed to do our daily work was also necessary.

Organization of tasks for both supervisors and staff is necessary in library work, and the acquisitions unit is no exception. Besides the everyday applications like calendars and email, we began to explore additional online tools. We borrowed some of these tools and applications from the business world. We are investing in project management to keep us more organized and on track. Previously, we would start a project and frequently get sidetracked. Interested staff members learn project management skills such as planning and running project teams. We are also using a spreadsheet in **Google Drive** to organize, plan, and create timelines for departmental projects. We will be utilizing this template for our project planning in the acquisitions unit as well. Since it is a **Google** application, access is conveniently on the Web and can be limited to staff use.

With the reorganization there were some internal promotions of staff members to positions with supervisory responsibilities. One of the promoted staff members did not have previous experience with supervision, so it was necessary to provide some additional training. With support from the library, we are able to utilize many resources for this training. One in-house

resource is our Professional Development Librarian. This person's role is to assist the librarians with their professional development, whether the need is developing leadership, public speaking, or project management skills. We also have online resources available to us with the understanding that a portion of our work time can be devoted to further developing these skills. Through the university we can access an online resource called **Accelerate**. This tool consists of different instruction modules that we can complete at our own pace. Modules cover topics like **MS Office**, leadership training, and time management skills. **Accelerate** is a particularly effective tool because training can be customized to individuals and completed in small time segments.

There are other online resources available on the Web, both free and for purchase. **Alison.com** (<http://alison.com>) is "a free online learning resource for basic and essential workplace skills" that covers many different subject areas. Another resource is **Library Juice Academy** (<http://www.libraryjuiceacademy.com>), which "offers a range of online professional development workshops for librarians and other library staff, focusing on practical topics to build new skills." These courses focus more on practical topics and are available for a fee.

Just as supervisors need to continue to develop their skills, so does staff. As previously mentioned, all employees have access to our professional development program **Accelerate**. Job trends indicate that advanced computer skills, including the proficient use of Web-based resources, will support the transformation brought about by the increase in electronic formats. Personnel in the Acquisitions Department, in particular, have been encouraged to utilize the resources available to them. The areas of focus are time management, organization of daily tasks, and **MS Office Excel**.

Other areas of concern affecting the department include staff turnover, reallocation of position responsibilities, and staff morale. These are all things that supervisors encounter on a regular basis. Here at **Wayne State**, due to our major library system changes, these concerns have been somewhat amplified. We have taken the initial steps to stabilize the department, review our needs, and assess where we are going. In the near future, we will be addressing the fragmentation of job duties by increasing our skill set, cross-training staff in the new functional-based operation, and reassessing the traditional acquisition activities.

Taking a systematic approach to applying a new departmental structure, which addresses not only the local changes but also the transformation of acquisitions in general, is not unique to **Wayne State**. We are just one of many academic libraries making this transformation and moving ahead with technology. 🐾