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Biz of Digital — Double, Double: Methods for Shared Management of a Digitization Lab

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Our vision of leadership tends to be a singular person acting alone, independently making decisions that affect a group. But some groups require more than one leader to get the job done. How then do two managers, two leaders, work together to co-manage a single group? This question faced us in the Digital Projects Lab at the **University of North Texas** some years ago. We may not have all the answers, but we have created a few techniques to keep operations running smoothly with two heads instead of one.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Digital Projects Lab at the **University of North Texas** is a digitization lab that uses largely student labor to digitize primarily cultural heritage materials for inclusion in The Portal to Texas History and the UNT Digital Library. Two librarian positions, the Digital Projects Lab Manager and the Digital Production Librarian, together provide oversight of the imaging element of the digitization workflow, including jointly supervising 15 to 20 students.

Before we setup a shared supervision system, we noticed several issues in the lab: ambiguous decision-making authority, unclear rules between the supervisors, lack of communication of essential information, and choke-points in project workflow development. Recognizing that we and our student workers were unsure of expectations, we decided to clarify the matter by first tackling our own individual roles.

There are a number of tasks that need to be completed in order to see a digitization project through to completion, but when we began working together in 2015, it was unclear to us which tasks belonged to whom. To clear up the confusion, we started by listing out all the tasks necessary to run and manage the lab and then divvied them up between us. We established a chart of duties and the person responsible for each category (see below). In this way, we knew the lead person in any area.

Designation of Responsibilities between the Digital Production Librarian and the Digital Projects Lab Manager

Responsibility		Responsible Person
Inventory		Production Librarian
External Relations		Production Librarian
Born Digital Evaluations		Lab Manager
Quartz Communication		Production Librarian
Archives Communication	On-going projects	Lab Manager
	Short-term projects	Production Librarian
Music Communication		Lab Manager
Quality Control		Lab Manager
Imaging Directives		Lab Manager
Computer and Equipment Troubleshooting		Lab Manager
Wiki Page Development		Lab Manager
Weekly Report		Production Librarian
Student Hiring		Production Librarian
Student Training		Production Librarian
Student Outreach		Production Librarian
Student Schedule Accountability		Both
Assigning Student Tasks		Both

This list has changed as we have grown in our positions and learned our strengths, but this step alone alleviated much of the tension caused by an unclear division of labor. We also agreed that for the purposes of

sustainability and smoothness in management, no knowledge, skill, or information should be siloed by a single librarian. Instead, an understanding was made (and has been kept) that in order for the two of us to effectively manage the lab together, we must be fully cross-trained and retain the ability to perform the other person's duties if and when required. We agreed to keep each other informed about happenings in our individual areas and to teach each other our tasks and duties as a backup in the case of our inevitable absence. Right from the start, we established a cooperative management style based on clear and continued communication and shared knowledge.

Tools and Practices

Over the course of the last three years, we have developed several systems that keep us up-to-date on lab developments and on the same page so that we work together and not at cross-purposes. We believe in cross-training each other, maintaining formal and informal communication strategies, and managing the student workforce as a team.

Cross-Training

While it was very important to understand who is responsible for what within the larger lab, it was also vitally important to train one another in the different roles in case one of us, as is daily the case, is unavailable. In order to cover the times in which one of us is not in the Lab — due to daily lab hours, meetings, vacation, or illness — we both know, by and large, how to do the other person's job. Although the Digital Production Librarian is responsible for hiring, the Digital Projects Lab Manager is trained and knows the steps required to complete a hiring cycle. While the Digital Projects Lab Manager is responsible for troubleshooting equipment, the Digital Production Librarian is kept current on all common and known issues with equipment and is trained on how to operate the machines. This does not mean that we each do not have our own areas of expertise, or that there are not tasks better performed by one of us rather than the other, but ensuring that both of us have a reasonable level of competency in all tasks required to manage the lab effectively leads to fewer bumps in the road.

Communication Methods

We have several methods of communication that keep us both aware of lab work. The most formal method we use is weekly meetings. In each meeting we make goals of what we want to accomplish over the course of the week and assess what we have been able to accomplish in the previous week. Items such as moving projects forward, detailing administrative to-dos, and planning research projects that we work on together are all documented in meeting minutes kept in a shared document. Having a set meeting every week carves out time from our schedules to decide together what the priorities are and what can be improved so that there is agreement on the work that needs to be done from week to week. The meetings also keep us accountable to each other for completing priority tasks in a set time period. These formal meetings, and the documentation that

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goes with them, have helped significantly improve our ability to co-manage the Lab smoothly.

Our second, more frequent communication method is a process we call scrumming.¹ Most days there is a two to three hour period in which one of us is not in the lab. During this time, many things can happen: equipment can break, projects can be assigned, other staff might have shared information or asked questions. To ensure that the other person knows what happened while they were out, we take a few minutes to fill each other in. This helps ensure that neither of us is caught in a situation uninformed or unaware about a decision that had been made. Thus scrumming gives each of us the confidence to manage the Lab in the other's absence knowing we have all the information we need to make informed decisions.

Other than weekly meetings and morning scrumming, we also just talk. Throughout the day as necessary, we allow each other to bounce ideas off of us. The ability to get quick feedback is invaluable and keeps one from spinning their wheels over an individual issue. Keeping the lines of communication open, while still respecting each other's work time, helps information to flow freely and maintains consistency between supervisors.

Student Supervision

In order to supervise the same students jointly, we have checklists for different procedures and continue our routine of sharing information. To avoid discrepancies in training between the two of us, we created checklists for training students on each type of scanning equipment in the Lab. This facilitates consistency as each librarian knows what information needs to be communicated. Thus students are given the same instructions — and are expected to produce the same quality of work — regardless of who trained them.

We also continue to follow our same pattern of communication, information sharing, and joint decision-making. Students are instructed to email both supervisors, not just one, when emailing about absences or project updates. As well, we CC each other when we email important information to students. And we decide together what policies to put in place and act on them jointly.

Including the other in student communications, using the same checklists, and enforcing policies together demonstrates to the student workforce that we are working together to manage the lab, not against each other. They can see us clearly working as a team. It gives students confidence that either supervisor can be approached to consult about a given issue, and that both supervisors are knowledgeable about the goals of the Lab. Even though the work of the Lab is effectively being managed by two people, a united front is presented which enables smooth and consistent management.

Why We Work

It has been noted by many of our colleagues that we work particularly well together. Why is that? We believe the key to our working

relationship stems from the first step we took: defining our roles. Once our responsibilities were clearly established, it was a lot easier working together on our joint duties. It allowed each member to let go of things they previously felt responsible for in order to focus on the items in their own spheres. Coupled with effective and frequent communication, it allows us to work together and successfully share the responsibility of managing the Lab. We also happen to have complementary skill sets. While one of us has a more human resource and production focus, the other has a deeper understanding of the technical elements of imaging as well as a mind for management. Both are necessary to keep the lab running without kinks. But that aside, while others might have a different dynamic with their colleague(s), the practices of clearly defining responsibilities and establishing procedures together that work to facilitate good communication and effective teamwork has the potential to work for anyone. 🐿

Endnotes

1. Inspired by the true Scrum framework: *Scrum.org*, last modified 2018. <https://www.scrum.org/>

Rumors from page 59

Talis will continue to be run by its existing management as a **SAGE** company. As a result of the acquisition, **SAGE** will provide **Talis** with an enhanced global footprint to support further international growth.
<https://talis.com/>

Helen Szigeti is leaving **SSP**. She will be consulting in scholpub and scholcomm, so hopefully attending the **Charleston Conference** will be in her future. Cheers and good luck, **Helen**!

We are pleased to welcome **Courtney McAllister**, the electronic resources librarian from the **Citadel's Daniel Library**, who will join the **ATG** and **Charleston Conference** teams. Welcome, **Courtney**!

We are also happy to have **Antje Mays**, Director of Collections, **University of Kentucky Libraries**, in Lexington, back writing for **ATG**!

Have you noticed that **Corey Seeman** takes a lot of pictures of squirrels? See **Corey's Squirrel Page**! <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~cseeman/squirrels.html> And he has even more on Facebook.

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