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Assessing Print Acquisitions at UMN Libraries

by **Julie Rashid** (Manager, Acquisitions and Rapid Cataloging, University of Minnesota Libraries) <jarashid@umn.edu>

The library acquisitions landscape has been evolving over the past few decades. An upsurge of and demand for electronic resources, advances in vendor technology and service offerings, constraints in library physical spaces, and dwindling staff and collections budgets have forced acquisitions departments to take a closer look at how they operate. Libraries recognize that assessment of current procedures and services, as well as vendor offerings, is needed to guide acquisitions staff during these times of rapid technological advances and shifting library priorities.

In her article on technical services assessment, **Mugridge** defines assessment “as the process of evaluating a procedure, service, product, or person to determine its value or effectiveness.”¹ **Mugridge** lists various methods of technical services assessment including collecting statistics and usage data, soliciting input from nontechnical services librarians and staff, collecting stories or feedback from customers, conducting customer service surveys, benchmarking with other institutions, having an anonymous suggestion box, and conducting focus groups. **Mugridge** observes in the analysis of library literature on assessment activities in technical service units that the most common forms of assessment activities are “workflow analysis; statistics collection; assessment of training, documentation and websites.” In a followup article **Mugridge** and **Poehlmann** comment that outcomes based on assessment activities are often “used to identify ways to streamline or improve processes, make better decisions, lower costs, reallocate staff or other resources, identify activities and services that can be eliminated, inform strategic planning activities and communicate with customers or administration.”²

Over the years the **University of Minnesota Libraries** has explored a variety of quantitative and qualitative measures to assess its procedures and services. Knowledge of these past initiatives is extremely valuable to new managers in understanding the various paths that the library has taken over time; what has worked (and what has not); and where the library has invested dollars (plus blood, sweat, and tears). This wealth of valuable information stashed away in the library’s working archives is an invaluable source of institutional knowledge that can guide and inform managerial decisions moving forward.

This article attempts to pull out the highlights of recent acquisitions assessment initiatives (2005-2014), outline current assessment activities (2015-present) and reflect on what the future may hold for print acquisitions. For the purposes of this article, I would like to break down **UMN Library** acquisitions-related assessment initiatives into two categories: externally-driven and internally-driven. Externally-driven assessment initiatives refer to those which materialize from external causes, i.e., turnover in key leadership positions,

substantial budget fluctuations, library-wide initiatives, etc. They are essentially top-down mandates. Internally-driven assessment initiatives refer to those which the acquisitions department itself undertakes to gauge department productivity, efficiencies and value to the organization, i.e., collection of acquisitions-related statistics, vendor services exploration and assessment, personnel performance, etc. A look at both categories allows for an in-depth understanding of where we have been, where we are and, hopefully, will help guide us to where we want to be in the future.

Externally-driven Assessment Initiatives

University of Minnesota Libraries is an award-winning institution which prides itself on innovation and problem-solving.³ As a leader in the field, the organization is constantly looking at ways to improve and enhance library services, both internally and for its users. In spring 2005 the Libraries Administration approved funding to hire a consultant to find ways to increase efficiencies in selection, acquisition, cataloging, processing, and providing resources more rapidly to users. The project, called Selection to Access (S2A), began in October 2005 and “sought to bring as many new monographs as possible through a streamlined process — one that would not require local cataloging or local physical processing” and to expand the use of approval plans to “free time for selectors to identify and select less mainstream titles, and to consolidate English-language ordering with a single vendor.”⁴ Prior to the arrival of the consultant, five working groups were established to provide documentation for the consultant to review, including organizational charts, procedures, workload statistics, job descriptions, detailed flow charts, high-level operating budgets, vendor statistics, etc. The consultant then came to the university for three days of on-site interviews, met with over 100 people in small groups, analyzed the data collected and provided, and made recommendations that focused on enhancing unit efficiency and productivity. A committee was formed to assess the recommendations made by the consultant and to set up an implementation schedule, a process that took about a year. The committee looked at the impact of the proposed changes, in terms of economic feasibility, staffing, and desired service outcomes. Among the changes implemented, some of the most significant included:

- dividing the existing approval plan into 18 highly-focused plans
- reducing liaison selection activities
- loading of electronic order confirmation records (EOCRs) and Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) invoices
- expediting the arrival of books to the user through the elimination of review shelves and adoption of

shelf-ready processing and vendor-supplied cataloging records

- consolidating English language acquisitions (U.S. and UK) with one vendor (YBP)
- determining which monographic series would be treated on the approval plans and blocking series that would not to avoid duplication
- training selectors on the **Gobi** platform to streamline firm ordering

At the outset of the S2A project, the goal was to move 65 percent of new orders through the streamlined process. As of fiscal year 2007, 60 percent of all new items were received shelf-ready and 46 percent of all monographic materials were received on approval plans. Those percentages remain roughly the same today. The project also identified **Casalini** and **Harrassowitz** as potential vendors for future streamlining projects.

In Spring 2007, immediately following the implementation of S2A, the same consultant was hired “to analyze current operations dealing with serials [and] e-resources.”⁵ This project was dubbed Selection to Access: the Sequel (S2A2). The assessment process for S2A2 was similar to that as described above for S2A. The consultant recommendations were completed in April 2007 and aimed at improving unit efficiency and eliminating processing exceptions made for materials going to individual departmental libraries. An implementation subcommittee was formed to assess the proposed changes in relation to unit service goals. Implementation began in June 2007 and was largely completed by October 2008. Some outcomes pertaining to print resources included:

- simplifying print serials workflows and reducing processing exceptions for different campus libraries
- identifying strategies to reduce staff turnover in serials acquisitions
- establishing system-wide collections management policies

In the years following the implementation of recommendations made under S2A and S2A2, assessment and improvement work continued in the Libraries. In 2011 the Libraries hired a consultant to engage Library staff in broad strategic themes and to help shape the future of the University Libraries. After collecting data and meeting with library leaders and staff, the consultant presented recommendations proposing a new organizational framework for **UMN Libraries** in support of strategic directions. The Libraries convened several different groups to look at the restructuring recommendations; one of those groups was the Technical Services/Enterprise Technology (TS/ET) Design Group, which was charged with transitioning “existing Technical Services and Enterprise Technology

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departments into critical roles in support of the Libraries' work and strategic themes."⁶ (Note: Technical Services was comprised of acquisitions and cataloging staff and Enterprise Technology was IT staff.) The TS/ET Design Group surveyed current tasks done by staff in Enterprise Technology and Technical Services, polled staff via a Google survey and solicited feedback at town hall meetings. As a result of Libraries restructuring, IT was renamed Data & Technology (D&T) and Content & Collections (C&C) was established as a new division. Acquisitions became part of the C&C division, along with Collection Development, Collection Management & Preservation, and eventually Interlibrary Loan and Publishing Services. Cataloging was renamed to Data Management and Access (DMA) and became part of D&T, along with Web Development, Digital Library Services and Computer & Networking Support. This basic structure exists today.

These three externally-driven assessment initiatives: S2A, S2A2 and the TS/ET Design Group were strategically launched by the Libraries and had far-reaching impacts on departments and units throughout the libraries. Not all initiatives are quite as grand in scale.

Internally-driven Assessment Initiatives

Running parallel to the large external initiatives are smaller, need-based internal assessments. These are done to evaluate a unit's performance, efficiencies and impact on overall library services and, as mentioned in the introductory statements, can include such things as statistics, informal observations, goals tracking, vendor assessments, customer service quality, adherence to established timeliness standards, etc. It should be noted that internally-driven assessment initiatives typically feed into the larger externally-driven assessment initiatives, providing rich sources of data and a picture of 'on the ground' activities. They are generally collected at the departmental level with the purpose of monitoring unit effectiveness and, unlike the externally-driven assessment initiatives, do not normally have additional funding sources.

Over the years the acquisitions department has undertaken various forms of assessment to track its effectiveness. Some forms of assessment are one-time or project-based and some are recurring.

One-time or Project-based Assessments

Two examples of internally-driven project-based assessments undertaken at **UMN Libraries** were the Technical Services/Information Access & Delivery Services Benchmarking Throughput Study (2006-2010) and the Acquisitions & Rapid Cataloging unit (ARC) Serials Time Study (2015-2016). The Benchmarking Throughput Study was repeated several times from December 2006 to November 2010 and "measured throughput times for newly acquired monographs, music scores,

	Avg. Processing Time	Timeliness Standard
Shelf-ready	21.95 hrs (.91 days)	30 hours (1.25 days)
Non-Shelf-ready	196.26 hrs (8.18 days)	336 hours (14 days)*

**Reflects timeliness standard for items cataloged in which there were Library of Congress & Member bibliographic records available. The standard for original cataloging was one month.*

sound recordings, ASC (Archives and Special Collections) gifts, and Smart Learning Commons videos."⁷ The study used flyers to track items from receipt in the shipping department, through acquisitions, cataloging, processing and their arrival on the destination library shelves. The study compared the average processing times for shelf-ready and non-shelf-ready materials with department timeliness standards⁸ and found that they fell well within the established parameters (see table 1).

The ARC Serials Time Study took place from October 2015 to October 2017.⁹ The goal of this study was to obtain benchmark measures to improve efficiencies, to compare student receiving costs with a prominent vendor's subscription services, to determine if an open Library Assistant 2 position should be filled, to gain a clearer picture of the duties being performed by full-time staff and to assess time availability for cross-training purposes. Print serials staff and students were asked to track their activities by category on a spreadsheet for one-month intervals in October 2015, April 2016 and October 2016. Two interesting findings came out of this study:

Overall staff time spent on receiving dropped from 61.8% in October 2015 to 41.5% in October 2016, while project-related work increased from 17.3% in October 2015 to 30.1% in October 2016. The decrease in receiving was attributed to the large print serials cancellation project that occurred in August 2015.

Of the 3,000 print serial subscriptions open with the selected vendor, 93.9% of those titles were cheaper to process with existing staff and students. The remainder of the titles were journals with higher frequencies, i.e., daily, weekly, etc. Potential cost savings were weighed against the receiving delay that would occur through having the vendor process these materials and it was determined that the frequent publications were more valued for their timely delivery than for any economies that might be realized by outsourcing their processing.

Recurring Assessments

Aside from one-time and project-based assessments, the collecting of departmental statistics has always been used to evaluate departmental efficiency and productivity and to make decisions. Common collection data points are number of orders created, approval orders, shelf-ready orders, gifts, periodicals received (by students and full-time staff), orders by vendor, books fast cataloged (rapid

cataloging), print serials cancellations, and issues claimed, plus cost of shelf-ready processing and vendor records, total expenditures (often broken down on a granular level by fund code, vendor, material type, selector, fiscal year, etc.), vendor performance reports, and many more.

Soliciting input from colleagues whose work is affected by acquisitions unit workflows, procedures and policies is a vital part of departmental assessment. This takes many forms at the Libraries. Members of the Acquisitions & E-Resources Management department participate in cross-functional, cross-divisional groups where policies and decisions regarding print acquisitions, trends, budgets, etc. are made and provide input on collection development and management guidelines, as well as policies and procedures regarding selection, acquisitions, preservation, withdrawal, reformatting, etc. Being actively involved in various library committees allows acquisitions leaders to be aware of upcoming purchases and purchasing trends, better understand the changing priorities of library users, learn about initiatives in other departments, and get feedback on acquisitions policies, procedures, and services to ensure open communication. It also gives acquisitions staff the opportunity to communicate procedural changes, remind selectors of fiscal year deadlines and have a forum to bring up new ideas for input.

Additional input is sought by participating in other departmental or divisional meetings. Both the print and electronic acquisitions units have requested time in non-acquisitions departmental meetings to talk about what we do, how our services intersect with other departments and to inquire about pain points. These conversations have been very fruitful and have led to acquisition unit projects such as:

- implementing ServiceNow, a ticketing system for queries, and improving our customer service model with regard to how the unit responds to and follows up with queries from liaisons, binding staff and vendors
- fine-tuning claiming strategies by creating a student claiming spreadsheet in which students identify missing issues as they are checking in new issues and claim them with the subscriptions vendor on the spot
- pursuing the Purchase Order Claiming Task List project in Alma to identify and perform acquisitions

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maintenance on ceased and defunct serial titles

- participating in cross-training projects in interlibrary loan, copyright permissions, and (in the near future) e-resources management

As a relatively new manager at **UMN Libraries** (I joined in July 2015), learning about the assessment efforts that have taken place over the years has been crucial in my growth and understanding of how current procedures and organizational structures have been formed and how they affect everyday activities in the acquisitions department. Assessing the outcomes of changes implemented over time provides current managers with rich institutional knowledge and arms them with assessment techniques and tools that can be used to further improve processes and services offered. 🌱

Endnotes

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7. **UMN Libraries**, *Technical Services/IADS Benchmarking Throughput Study* (2010). Internal UMN Libraries document.
8. **UMN Libraries**, *ARM Timeliness Standards for Basic Functions* (April 22, 2011). Internal UMN Libraries document.
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of many in his understanding of the enormous opportunities, challenges, and risks attendant on the digital transformation of the cultural record, its preservation, and its dissemination. The humanities field is forever in his debt." With the rise and promise of the digital age, the **Mellon Foundation** established a standing program in support of the burgeoning field of scholarly communications in 1999. With **Waters** at the helm, the **Scholarly Communications program** supported research libraries, cultural and academic archives, museums, universities, presses, and arts organizations as they embraced the potential of digital technologies in furthering the collective understanding of societies and cultures around the world. Scholarly Communications grants have given rise to scores of nonprofit enterprises, including **Ithaka**, **Artstor**, **Portico**, **LOCKSS**, **Hypothes.is**, and the **Digital Public Library of America**; dozens of new types of professions, such as scholarly communications librarians, digital repository managers, digitization specialists, data curators; and a large variety of standards and digital tools for knowledge-making.

<https://mellon.org/about/staff/donald-j-waters/>
For **Waters** full biography: <https://mellon.org/resources/news/articles/senior-program-officer-donald-j-waters-retire/>

The resourceful **Kent Anderson** announces: **Caldera Is Active Again**. After guiding a startup to acquisition, it's time to return to consulting. "With the announcement of **RedLink's** acquisition by **Wiley/Atypon**, I'm pleased to also announce that **Caldera Publishing Solutions** is active again, after 3+ years of dormancy. Of course, the launch of this newsletter — "The Geyser" — in October 2018 was the first rumbling that something

was coming. **Caldera Publishing Solutions** was launched in 2016 with the mission of providing scholarly and scientific publishers — as well as other information purveyors — with future-focused consulting services. We emphasize editorial development, product development, market assessment, customer insights, and strategic synthesis. We have some unique approaches that help develop strategies that recognize complexity and size-up viability from the start."

<https://www.caldera-publishing.com>

PS — I will put in a plug for *The Geyser* which is always an enlightening read!

thegeyser@substack.com

Plus **Kent** is offering a discounted subscription to **ATG** subscribers and **Charleston Conference** attendees! Watch for it!

Moving right along — **Kent** and **Rick Anderson** have another entry in the world of newsletter publishing — *Mad About Music*. I had no idea that both **Kent** and **Rick** had bands back when they were younger or maybe even now! I just learned about a Maine folk musician, **Gordon Bok** who is quite good! "Without music, life would be a mistake."

Friedrich Nietzsche.

madaboutmusic@substack.com

The **National Information Standards Organization (NISO)** announces the appointment of **Jason Griffey** as the Director of Strategic Initiatives on the NISO staff. **Griffey** brings to NISO over 15 years of experience in libraries and community leadership, as well as a broad understanding of emerging technologies. This new position was created to support the merger between NISO and the **National Federation of Advanced Information Services (NFAIS)** that was announced earlier this spring. **Griffey** will be responsible for organizing an annual conference and thought leadership meetings,

and for building initiatives based on those convenings. For the last five years, **Griffey** has run **Evenly Distributed**, a consulting firm that works with libraries — both nationally and internationally — on education and strategic planning related to cutting-edge technologies. He is widely recognized as an expert in the areas of artificial intelligence, blockchain, privacy, and other library-related technology issues. **Griffey** has written and presented extensively on technology and libraries, including multiple books and a series of full-periodical issues on technology topics, most recently *AI & Machine Learning in Libraries and Library Spaces and Smart Buildings: Technology, Metrics, and Iterative Design* both published in 2018. **Griffey** spent three years as a Fellow and Affiliate at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society at **Harvard University** before spending one year working with the metaLAB at **Harvard**. He has served both as Director-at-Large and as Parliamentarian on the Board of the **Library Information Technology Association**, a division of the **American Library Association**. **Griffey** is a graduate of **Morehead State University** and holds an MLS from the **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**. NISO fosters the development and maintenance of standards that facilitate the creation, persistent management, and effective interchange of information so that it can be trusted for use in research and learning. NISO is a not-for-profit association accredited by the **American National Standards Institute (ANSI)**.

<http://www.niso.org>

Awesome! Award of the **Laurea magistrale ad honorem in Library and Information Science** has been given to **Michele Casalini** by the **University of Florence**. It is with both enormous pride and great pleasure that we announce that the **CEO of Casalini**

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