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Discussions on Technical Services Management and Data-driven E-resource Management at ALA Midwinter

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The 2015 ALA Midwinter Meeting was in Chicago this year and, as always, gave attendees the opportunity to get a wide-angle view of the profession or to focus in on the day-to-day issues in their areas of work. This report covers two Interest Group (IG) sessions with particular relevance to the Serials Spoken Here readership: the ALCTS Technical Services Managers IG and the joint LITA/ALCTS Electronic Resources Management IG.

Roundtable Discussions on Managing Technical Services

The Technical Services Managers IG met in a roundtable format in which attendees chose a table according to topic, where they spent an hour discussing one of six general areas. The topics and discussion prompts were thoughtfully prepared in advance by IG co-chairs Nastia Guimaraes of the University of Notre Dame and Amy Lana of YBP Library Services. Because I was seated at the ADA-compliance table, I can report on that discussion in more detail than the others.

Managing Disabilities Accommodations for Employees

At the table for technical-services-management issues related to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the discussion covered considerable ground. Surely this was partly due to the diversity of library sizes and locations represented. Seated with me—with apologies if I missed anyone—were librarians from Eastern Kentucky University, Princeton University, Grand Rapids Community College, the University of Nevada–Reno, and the University of Missouri (in addition to myself, from Utah State University). Despite a variety of interests and needs, our concerns fell into two broad categories: making appropriate accommodations for employees and providing accessible resources for library users. Such a venue serves as a kind of impromptu peer review, and the sharing of ideas and experiences was fruitful.

First, regarding library-staff disability accommodations, we generated some key guiding principles:

- Help individuals feel supported; fight the natural deficiency-centric mindset

- Work with the broader institution to interpret, establish, and enforce general policies, such as one institution's "fitness of duty" policy that helped ensure that individuals held positions they could adequately fulfill, provided reasonable accommodations were given

- Do not let those who abuse the system sour you on being generous

- Document all decisions, complaints, and other interactions so you can be accountable to all stakeholders for good-faith efforts

We all recognized that libraries tend to feel (to employees) understaffed, and strategic thinking like the ideas listed above can help managers prioritize work in a way that helps quell burnout for everyone involved.

Making Library Resources Accessible

The second general area—ensuring accessibility of library resources—was predictably expansive. Examples we discussed included in-house captioning of video resources, vendor restrictions on the text-to-speech feature on e-readers, website-accessibility testing, link-checking of static records, and the overall complexity of negotiating access to streaming video. Of course, from one to the next, libraries organize very differently around making electronic resources accessible, but we arrived at some principles in this area as well:

- Demand concrete accessibility information from vendors as early as possible in the negotiation process, and demand accountability for unfulfilled promises

- Become familiar with relevant legislation and guidelines—in particular, Section 508 of the US Rehabilitation Act (http://www.section508.gov/) and version 2.0 of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (http://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG20/glance/)

- Coordinate workflows for efficiency, sharing expertise and project time wisely with HR, centers for teaching and learning or instructional technology, IT, and other institution-level units

- Watch listservs, publications, conferences, and other venues for idea-sharing and to avoid duplication of effort (for example, see the Libraries for Universal Accessibility group's VPAT [Voluntary Product Accessibility Template] Repository at http://uniaccessig.org/lua/vpat-repository/ for information from dozens of major database providers on the self-declared level of accessibility of their products)

This last point represents a common theme that is important in many aspects of librarianship, the need for open sharing of ideas. It is easy to feel lost in the complexity of the e-resource environment, but we share the burden when we share information and best practices.

Other Discussion Topics

Briefly, the subjects discussed by other groups are summarized below:

Library–vendor relations

- Swets's bankruptcy is affecting the whole industry, as are publisher buyouts and mergers

- Prices for short-term loans in patron-driven-acquisitions models are in flux

- The formats and negotiation of rights for streaming-media formats are complex and have no simple solutions

Discovery layer–catalog duplication

- Represented libraries used Summon, Primo, or Encore as their discovery layer, or none at all

- Decision-making bodies for discovery products in libraries are cross-functional or housed in various departments, often involving e-resource units, IT, and public services

- As more metadata is exposed, more cleanup is required

- In the future, data may be harvested and shared via a cloud-based data stream

Linked data—is anyone using it?

- In short, no, but many are experimenting, seeking practical applications, such as the Jane-athon at the Midwinter Meeting (http://www.rdatoolkit.org/janeathon)

- Consortial-level control over data adds complexity

- MarcEdit will allow URIs to be included in a new LC field, but systems do not display the field

- Retirement-ready staff are reluctant to change, and backlog-processing takes precedence over, say, attempts to implement BIBFRAME

- Stakeholders outside the library—e.g., the registrar's office, researchers—may become interested in ORCID, article-level metadata, and other uses of linked data

Marketing technical services

- Perceptions of extreme introversion, etc., need to be overcome—we are exciting!

- Our self-promotion will differ from the "programs" of public services

- Outreach to meet concrete needs will make a difference

- We may need to fight to reclaim ownership of discovery services from IT

In-house collaborations in technical services

- Limited staffing requires more sharing; student workers can be significant

- Placing ILL departments optimally in the organizational chart is still a challenge

- Many activities—weeding, managing an institutional repository, and managing electronic resources were mentioned—require considerable communication and decision-making with subject librarians, systems, e-resources, and other staff

- Succession-planning should be strategic, both distributing tasks rationally and responding to staffing needs on-the-fly

Discussion was productive during the full 90-minute session, and the session ended with an invitation to join the Technical Services Managers IG at ALA Annual. Those interested in the official report of this

session can find it in a forthcoming issue of *Technical Services Quarterly*, and a summary has been

posted to the IG's ALA Connect space: http://connect.ala.org/node/66147.

Using Data in E-Resource-Management Decisions

The other session reported on here is that of the joint LITA/ALCTS Electronic Resources

Management IG, chaired by Kate Silton, of North Carolina A&T University, and myself, Robert Heaton, of

Utah State University. In advance of the session, we requested proposals on how librarians were using

data to inform their tough e-resource decisions. Our panel presented three very different projects that

had clear relevance to conferencegoers, as evidenced by a standing-room-only audience of nearly 70

people.

Scopus, Web of Science, or Both?

The first presenter was Galadriel Chilton of the University of Connecticut (UConn), outlining her

library's process for deciding what to do with their subscriptions to Elsevier's Scopus and Thomson's

Web of Science (WoS): keep both, drop one, or (least likely) drop both. Both databases are very

expensive, and while they do not include full text, the features they offer have become immensely

useful to researchers at academic institutions everywhere. Web of Science is the established contender,

and Scopus is the up-and-coming opponent. UConn Libraries began their subscription to Scopus in 2005,

so they had nearly ten years of side-by-side data on cost and usage. The UConn "Massive Analysis

Project" comprised four major phases leading up to a decision to cancel their subscription to Web of

Science. They compared coverage and functionality, quantitative usage, qualitative usage, and historic

and future costs of the two resources.

The research group carefully tested the coverage and functionality of the two paid databases,

along with the free Google Scholar, using queries that focused on their institution's most heavily used

journals, but they were careful to cover a range of time periods and disciplines as well. In general terms,

WoS outperformed Scopus in the sciences while Scopus outperformed WoS in the social sciences. But in

reality, they found that comprehensive results could not generally be obtained without consulting at least two of the three resources. Other areas of analysis—such as counts of items indexed by format and current subscriptions by peer institutions—left no clear winner either.

For quantitative data on how Scopus and WoS were used, they took advantage of every tool at their disposal: link-resolver statistics, ILL-referral numbers, proxy-server logs, COUNTER search and session counts, and nonstandardized vendor reports on the usage of the value-added "analysis" (rather than "content") features of each resource, such as citation metrics. Usage of analysis features was in the same range for both, but Scopus saw considerably higher content use. Ms. Chilton pointed out that they did not jump to conclusion based on this: it is possible that more searches or sessions denotes a less efficient experience for users, so this was taken as just one data point among many. Similarly, proxy logs showed more unique users of Scopus and more repeat users of WoS.

Qualitative data was gathered by means of a survey of faculty and graduate students. Overall, Google Scholar was most popular, followed by WoS for faculty but with Scopus in second place for graduate students. Many in the humanities used none of the three; scientists preferred WoS; social scientists preferred Scopus; Google Scholar and PubMed rose to the top for those in health disciplines. Some departments—engineering was specifically mentioned—were internally conflicted, some faculty saying that these resources were not used in their field while others proclaimed them indispensable. Most disturbing to the library, some were unaware that one or more of the resources was even available to the campus! As it always is, the qualitative human factor was a messy part of the process, but the survey allowed them to formalize that feedback rather than rely on anecdotes and conjecture.

The final piece in their analysis was cost, including cost per use. Scopus was the clear cost winner, at the known expense of somewhat shallower historic coverage. Cost-per-session numbers for WoS were higher because of the combination of higher cost and fewer sessions, but again, the question of efficiency versus quantity arises. The UConn researchers wisely mitigated the shadowy aspects of

these numbers by complementing them with ILL- and OpenURL-request counts, both of which report a

user's follow-through after identification of a promising citation.

Ultimately, after over 200 hours of data gathering and analysis, the UConn Libraries reached the

decision to maintain, of the two, only Scopus as a current subscription. A considerable effort was made

to educate the campus community and reduce resentment from longtime WoS users; this included a

communication kit with standard materials for all librarians to use. The transition was not entirely

seamless, but of 2,000 faculty and 8,000 graduate students, they logged only 20 strong responses, all

from faculty. One of these even apologized after receiving training on using the comparable features

available in Scopus. A longstanding resource like Web of Science has many ties into the campus

community, whether to individuals' emotions, institutional prestige, or the tenure-and-promotion

process. So the extensive work done in this Massive Analysis Project gave the library concrete reasons

that they could convey to its users so that they would understand and even appreciate the decision

made.

Now, Where Is That Data When I Need It?

The second panelist on data-driven decision-making was Josephine Crawford of Kansas State

University, on bringing e-resource "business-terms data" to the point of need, an endeavor that, so far,

has not been completely successful. Defined as information on the "dollars paid for the content, rights,

and/or services received," business-terms data should, ideally, be available when negotiating license

agreements, considering renewals, troubleshooting access problems, and, at a bigger-picture level,

establishing to the institution the value of library investments. These operations grew in importance as

Kansas State University, like many institutions, saw their budgets stagnate around 2014 following three

consecutive years of growth.

Ms. Crawford needed access to business-terms data in vendor negotiations, where she

demonstrated trends in inflation, content changes, and fee structures in order to get better pricing. She

recommended explicitly comparing two vendor packages against one another and talking to vendors in

terms of real value instead of inflated list prices. In order to do this, she was able to access business-

terms data in the Ex Libris ERMS (Electronic Resources Management System) product, Verde. This data

was noted in a local field, making it much more accessible than in a printed licensed filed away

somewhere.

Unfortunately, local notes in an ILS or other tool do not allow for efficient reporting or scaling,

which represents the main ongoing challenge for tracking e-resource business terms. Often, because

staff duties overlap and cross over department lines, many individuals will need access to different tools

and data, which local notes do not facilitate. Further, faceted reporting of business-terms data is needed

in order to consider the value of current and potential resources—for example, comparing title-by-title

journal purchasing against package deals in a discipline—especially when vendors stipulate multiple

distinct costs, such as for content, hosting, and services.

At this point, the Kansas State University Libraries are anticipating a migration to Ex Libris Alms

this summer and hope that its Alma Analytics will be a step toward bringing data to the point of need.

Other ideas include exploring how the Digital Library Federation's Data Dictionary, along with encoding

business-terms data in a machine-readable format, could help meet this important need, which at

present is still not met satisfactorily. Perhaps library vendors can take note?

Supporting Complex Consortial DDA Decisions

The final presentation of the session was jointly given by Randy Lowe of Frostburg State

University and Lynda Aldana of the University of Maryland–Baltimore County, reporting on a large-scale

demand-driven acquisition (DDA) program underway at the USMAI (University System of Maryland and

Affiliated Institutions) consortium. The 16-member consortium, serving a population of over 160,000,

requires extensive and multifaceted data to inform its DDA program. Most libraries across the country

are either experimenting with DDA now or considering it for the future, and the topic will likely persist

as part of most libraries' collection-development strategies.

To support such a broad enterprise, USMAI librarians routinely gather and analyze a dozen types

of data, including titles available, numbers of short-term loans (STL) and triggered purchases, dollars

spent, users by group, usage by publisher and subject, and various subsets of these by campus. All

purchases in the USMAI program come from a central fund into which member institutions pay, so the

data helps justify high-level decisions about the DDA profile as well as decisions about individual account

management.

As with any apparatus of such a scale, this consortial DDA program entails many potential

pitfalls and negotiations to be made. First, member institutions are very different in size and scope.

Some host professional and health schools; one campus primarily offers distance education; others are

liberals-arts colleges; and historically black and otherwise diverse institutions are represented. The

Shady Grove Campus research park, with researchers who have multiple affiliations, presents a unique

obstacle for both licensing resources and providing access.

By tracking and reporting on the data on a regular basis, the USMAI consortium has made

several adjustments to its DDA program, with other developments forthcoming. Highlights include the

following:

- Pressure to add more publishers

- Per-title cost ceiling lowered

- Trigger point lowered (i.e., fewer STLs before outright purchase)

- Piloting new lease-to-own model

- Plans to compare total costs in different purchase models

- Improved transparency for vendor negotiations, which is leverage to benefit not only libraries

  but to keep the whole publisher–provider–library ecosystem innovative and healthy

Like the Technical Services Managers IG, the LITA/ALCTS Electronic Resources Management IG invited

attendees to join them at ALA Annual in San Francisco. A panel there will share their experiences

implementing an ERMS in different settings, including both public and academic libraries.