Report of the ALCTS Technical Services Managers in Academic Libraries Interest Group, American Library Association Midwinter Meeting, Denver CO, February 2018

The ALCTS Technical Services Managers in Academic Libraries Interest Group (TSMALIG) Meeting at the ALA 2018 Midwinter Meeting had 39 participants. Attendees had six roundtable discussion topics to choose from. Discussion topics were developed and facilitated by TSMALIG Planning Committee members. 50 minutes was allotted for the roundtable discussions, 25 minutes for representatives from the six roundtables to report summaries of discussions to the full group, and 15 minutes was reserved for questions and answers.

During the business portion of the meeting, volunteers were sought to serve on the TSMALIG Planning Committee. In addition, a volunteer was sought to serve as TSMALIG Vice-chair, whose term would begin after ALA Annual 2018 in New Orleans. A big thank you and congratulations to Lauren DeVoe of Columbia University for volunteering to serve as the TSMALIG Vice-Chair! Thank you to the facilitators and planning committee members who provided topic ideas and led the discussions, as well as to the note takers, and to those who reported on the table discussions to the full group. The summaries of discussions on the following pages provide a snapshot of the current issues in academic library technical services management.

**Table 1: Cooperative technical services: sharing work with other institutions (facilitators:**

**Scott Phinney, University of South Carolina; Mark Wilson, Columbia University)**

Scott Phinney created the topic and developed a detailed outline with questions in order to facilitate the table discussion, but he became ill and was unable to do so. Mark Wilson was brave enough to stand in and facilitate this topic. Thank you both for all of your efforts.

Table 1 opened with a discussion of how institutions share work with other institutions. Librarians from Columbia University discussed their experience with 2CUL and the Manhattan Research Library Initiative (MaRLI). 2CUL is a partnership between Columbia University Libraries and Cornell University Library. The goal of 2CUL is to collaborate in areas such as cataloging, e-resource management, collaborative collection development and digital preservation. MaRLI is a joint venture between New York Public Library, Columbia University and New York University to coordinate collecting and sharing of materials. Columbia has been working at this for a while with 2CUL and MaRLI. These projects are often cited as examples of sharing collections.

SUNY discussed their Shared Catalog/Single Bib Project. Each university library previously operated separately and had to develop a group mindset in order to successfully work in the new shared bibliographic record environment. SUNY shares bibliographic records in the ILS. Shared acquisitions among institution has been challenging as every institution does not use the same vendor. GOBI is a useful tool for collaborative collection building, so long as every institution uses it.

In Florida, the Florida Academic Library Services Cooperative (FALSC) operates the integrated library system (ILS) used by public college and university libraries statewide. State of Florida universities share an ILS, which is a single bibliographic database of bibliographic records. Having a single instance of bibliographic records in the shared Florida ILS offers some benefits, but presents many challenges. In addition to operating the ILS, FALSC negotiates, purchases and manages some e-resources. Each Florida institution does its own cataloging and acquisitions. FALSC also provides training and support services to member libraries.

Triangle Research Libraries Network (TRLN) is a consortium that includes Duke University, North Carolina Central University, North Carolina State University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC). TRLN can negotiate contracts and licenses on behalf of member libraries. There is currently a pilot underway where UNC catalogs Arabic language materials and Duke catalogs Japanese language materials. TRLN is interested in having formalized technical services collaborations. Nascent opportunities for collaboration are being explored by heads of technical departments with the backing of their administrations and IT departments that have a grassroots feel. Organizational Alignment is key to success as it is hard to collaborate when organizations have different goals. North Carolina is at the beginning stages of collaborations and is excited by all of the possibilities. Sharing print collections can pose logistical hurdles especially when institutions are geographically dispersed. Sharing e-resources, where each institution pays a fee and then has access through negotiated agreements, holds a lot of potential.

**Table 2: Working with a sense of urgency….. and with a sense of Business!?! (Facilitator: Nadine Ellero, Auburn University)**

The facilitator introduced the discussion topic by stating that her university (Auburn University) has a new President as of July 2017 and a new Provost internally hired from the College of Business as of January 2018. At the top of the new president’s agenda is to become a Research 1 institution and to work with a sense of urgency. The facilitator is taking this charge seriously in her library department. The facilitator added the “...with a sense of business” to the discussion topic and quoted Auburn’s new president’s words from an interview published in the Plainsman:
“[Y]ou’re going to see a lot of pressure from my office about a sense of urgency as we grow research and scholarship, especially in our business practices,” he said. “I’m not going to run [the University] as a business. But it’s going to be run in a more businesslike fashion than it’s ever been run before. … [I]n the end we’re going to accomplish a lot more.”1

The facilitator further referenced Kotter’s book on change management and a session that she attended at ALA Annual 2015.2 Expressing the desire to lead technical services with a sense of urgency, she wondered about the difference between urgency and haste, thinking of the expression, “Haste makes waste.” She questioned, “What is special about urgency?” It occurred to her that the essence of urgency sounded like Covey’s quadrant II initiatives where there are important but not immediate emergency initiatives.3  Covey’s Quadrant II tasks are those things that we should do but often don’t do. The facilitator shared her recent experience of hosting a Technical Services Department (TSD) Open House this past Halloween 2017. The whole library was invited to come and learn about the work of technical services. Each unit in technical services created and displayed posters. A word search game and “cataloging of self” activity were featured along with prizes and snacks. The TSD Open House was judged to be a great success as a technical services outreach activity as it was well attended and an overall win-win (in Covey language). Another attendee described that their technical services department conducts “book tours” where one follows footprints to experience the entire process of a book being selected, ordered, received, cataloged, and labelled.

Other attendees also have new presidents and provosts, new budget models, sudden initiatives such as relocating books to remote storage and weeding in order to create space for building projects. Several attendees described feeling urgency as the order of the day. Management challenges with respect to handling staff perceptions that the administration is acting in a sneaky manner were also discussed. Seeking answers in the business literature was suggested as was communicating often, avoiding backroom conversations, being transparent, and managing with the “end” in mind, even when the “end” is not completely clear. One institution moved all collections off site and implemented manufacturing type processes for running the library. This new manufacturing process created stress for some staff who expressed not knowing job expectations. Trust can be compromised. When it does, building understanding becomes essential. Questions regarding motivation and incentives were posed and conducting an interest survey was one suggestion for gathering feedback. Implementing more business style financial reporting/forecasting for re-prioritizing work was also shared as a new work initiative in technical services.

**Table 3: New job postings in technical services: skill requirements and job functions beyond traditional TS job duties (Facilitator: Lizz Bridges, Texas Wesleyan University)**

Technical services is no longer just in the back room. Many technical services librarians have assignments in public services departments. Historically, acquisitions and cataloging department staff dealt with print; however, now most work involves e-resources. Some staff are hesitant to work with electronic resources. There will likely be numerous retirements in the near future as baby boomers continue to retire. Job descriptions for new hires need to include required qualifications such as strong analytical skills and willing to work with both print and electronic resources. Paraprofessionals need to have skills that they didn’t in the past. Many paraprofessional positions need to be reclassified to meet new demands of the job; however, it can be difficult to reclassify vacant positions in union settings.

What skills will be needed in technical services in the next 5-10 years? Workers in technical services will need to be: technology savvy, analytical, problem solvers, bookkeeping skills, ability to prioritize, initiative, flexibility, cross-trainers. Hard skills such as cataloging, metadata, and technology can be tested during interviews by giving candidates short tests. The discussion next turned to on the job training. If on the job training is offered most employees are happy to be trained. Hard skills are relatively easy to acquire; however, soft skills are not. Organizations should not hire for “fit” as it generally is biased and leads to hires who look and think a particular way and results in homogeneous organizations. It is essential for the person doing the hiring to recognize their biases.

**Table 4: Prepping traditional catalogers for metadata librarian roles (Facilitator: Marcia Barret, University of California Santa Cruz)**

The discussion opened with each attendee describing why he/she is interested in the discussion topic. Many participants responded that there is a shifting of roles underway in cataloging services as more and more work relates to metadata and BIBFRAME. Traditional catalogers will need to learn the requisite skills to be metadata librarians. With numerous retirements likely in the near term, new hires will need to have metadata skills. One roundtable attendee was primarily interested in the topic because he/she will be teaching a metadata course in a library school.

The group next considered how metadata work differs from traditional cataloging. Metadata work is more about moving data around, refining it, and ensuring quality control rather than creating primary metadata records. The focus of metadata librarians is usually on bulk metadata management rather than record-by-record creation as is done by traditional catalogers. Being a metadata librarian requires big picture thinking. Metadata work is fuzzier than traditional cataloging.

Participants were asked to discuss the skills and knowledge that catalogers have that helps them to perform metadata work. Knowledge of doing authority control work as well as abilities such as attention to detail and a commitment to data quality are important. Participants were asked to talk about the skills and knowledge that catalogers may lack to do metadata work. Traditional catalogers focus on the trees while metadata work is more about a forest view. Traditional catalogers will have to learn how everything works together as well as develop more of a customer service focus to their work. Catalogers tend to be perfectionists. When doing metadata work, one has to learn to let things go. Everything can’t be perfect. Many catalogers lack coding skills. Coding is a valuable skill for metadata librarians to have.

The group next discussed the characteristics and attitudes that lend themselves to metadata work. Metadata librarians need to be flexible and have a tolerance for ambiguity. It is important to have an ability to teach oneself as well as a willingness to be a self-learner/starter. Metadata librarians need to be willing to take on more technical work and to learn skills such as coding and to use data editing tools such as MarcEdit and OpenRefine.

The facilitator asked attendees to discuss how catalogers can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to do metadata work. Suggestions offered include: taking courses such as ALCTS Fundamentals of Metadata, online webinars, and taking advantage of local and regional training opportunities. Other suggestions included Terry Reese’s YouTube videos about MarcEdit, Library Juice Academy courses, and Steve Miller’s book *Metadata for Digital Collections*.4

Attendees were next asked to discuss how technical services functions extend beyond traditional technical service jobs. Technical services librarians are no longer solely working in a back room somewhere. Technical services librarians often have assignments that include public facing services, such as providing library instruction, reference, and collection development. The comment was made that some catalogers hired when print was predominant are not interested in moving forward in an electronic resources environment. The soft skills needed in the next 5-10 years include an ability to analyze, problem solve, prioritize, initiative, flexibility, as well as a willingness to cross-train. The hard skills needed include an ability to use new technologies.

**Table 5: Metadata cleanup ahead of migration to a next generation library resource management system (Facilitator: Caryl Ward, Binghamton University)**

The discussion began with attendees talking about their biggest concerns moving forward with a metadata cleanup prior to a migration or major system upgrade. Data integrity and staff training were cited as major issues. The goal of any data migration is that the data comes over both accurately and completely. Staff will need adequate time for training. How workflows are setup will to some degree be determined by the ILS. Newer ILS focus more on electronic resources and this is a sea change for some libraries. Participants were resigned to the fact that metadata cleanup takes a long time.

The second topic of discussion was how to determine institutional database maintenance priorities. It was suggested to have the mindset of buying a new house; the basic essentials, such as plumbing and electrical, need to work before worrying about tweaking details. It was recommended to start with the essentials and not let the project’s scope grow too much even though these are always tempting opportunities to do more. One library reported having done a lot of documenting in acquisitions and still having a lot of questions and problems bubble up. They found it helpful to map out processes visually.

The third topic of discussion related to metadata not coming over as it should. Features that are specific to a particular ILS will probably be the hardest to migrate. To address these challenges, generate a list of data and then try to figure out how to convey it to the new system. Nonstandard/custom cataloging which includes leaders and fixed fields will need to be addressed before migrating. Most libraries are changing a lot of format types as hybrid records for print and electronic are no longer acceptable to many ILS. One library reported multiple holdings for the same e-books with different user levels and subscription models, sometimes in the same record and sometimes in separate records. Another library used MarcEdit and OpenRefine to do cleanup after pulling out the data. Order records may be problematic. If they are attached to items, they have to be migrated separately.

The fourth topic of discussion was evaluating staff training needs. Challenges include unionized environments where job descriptions can be difficult to change. One library had to temporarily assign a librarian as “owner” of their ILS after a search failed. Project ownership has proven very important. One participant shared that they hired an entry level person in technical services who is good at data cleanup and needed very little instruction. Another library has had great success after hiring a project manager with non-library experience at associate level pay.

The fifth topic of discussion was how to communicate about the data cleanup to other departments. It is good practice to have cross-training and sharing of information across the organization. More than one person should have knowledge of key information to avoid the problems and pitfalls that come from having all of your eggs in one basket. Concern was expressed about the extent to which a single individual’s knowledge was being disseminated to other staff. Communication is key to successful projects. Everyone needs to know what is going on throughout the process. The project manager should have a robust communication plan that is shared with university-level marketing and communication offices. One participant described how different groups are fighting over what to name Primo. Good communication is important within the library system and externally when necessary. One lesson learned is that you can’t make everyone happy. Documentation of the whole process should be made publicly available. One person needs to be responsible for the project; one person needs to own it. The University of Georgia system was cited as an example of having had a successful migration. The University of Georgia brought in retired University of Georgia programmers as contractors, formed committees for all the stakeholder areas, and brought MARCIVE into the conversation. The University of Georgia’s migration documentation is all online. It is important that everybody read everything. One participant said that the reference department brought perspectives that the metadata team hadn’t considered. Bear in mind that the new system will be different from the old one. System migrations require continual training. Universities are all different; the process cannot be one-size-fits-all.

**Table 6: The changing digital repository practices: identity management, authority control, linked data and more (Facilitator: Sai Deng, University of Central Florida)**

The discussion began with each participant introducing themselves and describing their role in working with digital repositories. The group was a mixture of librarians and vendors. Participants then described the digital repository systems and institutional repositories platforms their libraries use. The digital repositories used include: Islandora, CONTENTdm, and Digital Commons. Some attendees have several digital repositories as well as an institutional repository. One attendee has a digital repository that houses student theses and dissertations, but does not have an institutional repository. The vendors work with authority control of MARC data. One vendor’s work focuses on customer needs, such as writing user stories and providing suggestions for improving the company’s software.

The discussion moved on to new developments in identity management and authority control in digital repositories. The group is aware of the shift underway from authority control to identity management. One library is a participant in the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC) International Standard Name Identifier (ISNI) Pilot project This library has been exploring creating identifiers for musical groups and musicians. The facilitator provided a handout that listed some of the largest digital repositories and the means by which they handle identity management, authority control, common vocabularies, authority files and identities. For example, CONTENTdm embeds multiple controlled vocabularies and thesauri inside, including Getty Art & Architecture Thesaurus (AAT), Getty Thesaurus of Geographic Names (TGN), Getty Union List of Artist Names (ULAN), and Library of Congress Thesaurus For Graphic Materials (TGM), but not Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) and OCLC Faceted Application of Subject Terminology (OCLC FAST). Islandora allows subject authority to be defined in its Metadata Object Description Schema (MODS) form. Authority Control can be enabled in DSpace via drop-down lists in forms or as individual XML files. Digital Commons uses its own Three-Tiered Taxonomy of Academic Disciplines as broad subjects. One library has been adding Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORCID) to faculty profiles and publications in its digital repository. They also have been exploring other authority control and identity management possibilities for their digital repositories. One vendor noted that they create authorities for Name Authority Cooperative Program (NACO) libraries.

The discussion next switched to how participants are planning to include linked data in their digital repositories. Most participants were aware that BIBframe is the leading linked data model for bibliographic information, but no one was sure what digital repositories are actually doing with it. The handout prepared by the discussion facilitator listed several key digital repositories and their efforts to use linked data. There have been efforts to map MODS to Resource Description Framework (RDF) for earlier versions of Islandora. Fedora 4 is a linked data platform and Islandora CLAW is an initiative to make Islandora work with Fedora 4 and Drupal 8. DSpace’s linked data support spans three layers: the storage layer, business logic layer, and the application layer to store, convert, and publish linked data. Digital Commons allows users to add extra fields for linked data values and links, but it is not structured in RDF. It was noted by one participant that structured data in their digital repository item display page utilizes JavaScript Object Notation (JSON) and Schema.org vocabularies to enhance discoverability by search engines. Another participant reported that they add data to their institutional repository from the Library of Congress Linked Data Service Authorities and Vocabularies for names of authors and contributors such as advisors, college and departmental names, and Virtual International Authority File (VIAF) links for names. One vendor said that they have a Authority Control Department that adds linked data to MARC records in the catalog and that also controls data exported from CONTENTdm. All attendees felt the need to do something about linked data, but no one was certain of the production outcome or immediate benefits.

Participants concluded by discussing the changing role for catalogers and metadata librarians in evolving cataloging departments. The vendors emphasized the need for them to meet customer expectations and to be flexible and adaptive. Librarians and vendors need to be aware of new developments, participate in discussions, and be proactive and flexible.

The Technical Services Managers in Academic Libraries Interest Group can be followed on its ALA Connect site http://connect.ala.org/node/66147.

**Notes:**

1. Willoughby, S.President Leath aims to reorganize University structure, culture. (2017, September 26). <http://www.theplainsman.com/article/2017/09/president-leath-aims-to-reorganize-university>
2. Kotter, J. and H. Rathgeber. (2016) *Our Iceberg is Melting*. Privately Published.
3. Covey, Stephen R. (1989) *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
4. Steve Miller, J. (2011) *Metadata for Digital Collections: A How-To-Do It Manual*
ALA Neal-Schuman.

**Further Reading:**

1. Systems of Knowledge Organization for Digital Libraries: Beyond Traditional Authority Files, by Gail Hodge.<https://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub91/contents/>
2. CONTENTdm. Resources.<https://www.oclc.org/en/contentdm/resources.html>
3. Digital Commons: Three-Tiered Taxonomy of Academic Disciplines.<https://www.bepress.com/reference_guide_dc/disciplines/>
4. DSpace: Authority Control of Metadata Values. [https://wiki.duraspace.org/display/DSDOC6x/Authority+Control+of+Metadata+Values](https://wiki.duraspace.org/display/DSDOC6x/Authority%2BControl%2Bof%2BMetadata%2BValues)
5. DSpace: Linked (Open) Data. [https://wiki.duraspace.org/display/DSDOC6x/Linked+%28Open%29+Data](https://wiki.duraspace.org/display/DSDOC6x/Linked%2B%28Open%29%2BData)
6. Islandora CLAW.<https://islandora.ca/CLAW>
7. Islandora: Entities solution pack. [https://wiki.duraspace.org/display/ISLANDORA/Entities+Solution+Pack](https://wiki.duraspace.org/display/ISLANDORA/Entities%2BSolution%2BPack)
8. Omeka Plugins (include LC Suggest).<https://omeka.org/classic/plugins/>
9. Schema.org.<http://schema.org/>
10. International Standard Name Identifier (ISNI).<http://www.isni.org/>
11. LC Linked Data Service: Authorities and Vocabularies.<https://id.loc.gov/>
12. Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORCID).<https://orcid.org/>
13. ResearcherID. [www.researcherid.com/](http://www.researcherid.com/)
14. Schema.org Vocabulary.<http://schema.org/docs/gs.html#schemaorg>
15. Scopus Author Identifier and Profile.<https://www.scopus.com/freelookup/form/author.uri>
16. Virtual International Authority File (VIAF).<https://viaf.org/>
17. WorldCat Identities. [www.worldcat.org/identities](http://www.worldcat.org/identities)