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The Evolution of Technical Services: Learning From the Past and Embracing the Future

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Libraries and librarians have struggled for many years with an identity crisis of sorts, as changes in the publishing industry, technological advances, and subsequent changes in user behaviors have reshaped the landscape of information and access. The goals of the authors in this article are to better understand where we have come from and, therefore, where we need to be heading. In this article the authors will also articulate the significant role of technical services in the evolution of libraries and create a better understanding of the ways in which technical services will continue to play a vital role in the future.

KEYWORDS *library history, centralization, decentralization, future of technical services, organizational change*

Libraries and librarians have struggled for many years with an identity crisis of sorts, because changes in the publishing industry, technological advances, and subsequent changes in user behaviors have reshaped the landscape of information and access. Technical services in some ways have been additionally challenged, too often dismissed as not intellectual or necessary to fulfill scholars' needs as front-line public services. Like all large research libraries, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library (UL) has been evolving since its doors first opened in 1868 with a collection of just over 1,000 titles, and the collection has now reached over 13 million volumes. Technology has also changed the library dramatically, and in order to fully appreciate the library's current situation and to gain a better understanding of the division-wide work that is being completed in the Technical Services

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Division, it is necessary to look back at the decisions that were made and the changes that took place over the past several decades and how those decisions inform our current situation and point to the future. As Elise Wong mentioned in a recent issue of *American Libraries*, “If you think it is hard to explain to nonlibrary users what a librarian does, try explaining the job of a cataloger” (Wong, 2012).

Much of the role of technical services can be tracked through the history of the administrative structure in the UL. In 1947, the UL adopted the technical services/public services structure that was widely accepted at other large research libraries in the years following World War II (Williams, 1987). The Technical Services Division was primarily made up of the acquisitions and cataloging departments, with a serials department added in 1955. By the 1970s, the division also included Area Studies, which originated in acquisitions and included collection development programs that were geographically focused. As the specialized needs grew, a Special Languages Library was created to acquire and catalog Asian, East European, and Slavic materials. These centralized units supported more than 35 departmental libraries across campus. Recently constituted as the International and Area Studies Library (combining what in the interim had become the Asian Library, Slavic Library, Latin American and Caribbean Library, and Global Studies Library), these collections remain a significant portion of the UL’s unique holdings and a major focus of the current strategic plan.

During the 1970s, the UL administration looked very similar to other traditional, American research libraries, and the Technical Services Division had developed backlog problems as others did. But largely because of the UL’s size (its card catalog contained more than 8 million cards), the cataloging and processing backlog was of overwhelming concern and showed no sign of improving. Maintaining the card catalog had become extremely labor intensive, and the resources (staff and funds) did not exist to deal satisfactorily with the magnitude of work required to keep up with the volume of new cards and card changes (Clark & Chan, 1985).

CATALOG CHANGES

The UL began using OCLC in 1975, and each subsequent year saw fewer items that needed original cataloging. Though some of that decline in original cataloging may be due to changing trends in collection development policies, the much broader access to cataloging records played a significant part in the changing nature of cataloging done during this time. This certainly helped to slow the growth of the backlogs that had been developing at the UL, but in 1976 the backlog was still so severe that few items acquired within the previous 2 years were truly available for patrons to use. A filing backlog of hundreds of thousands of catalog cards was piling up, the cards being

arranged into formal and informal supplements that made it difficult for users to find what they were looking for. Maintaining this failing system was not only labor intensive but also cost nearly \$250,000 a year (Gorman, 1985).

To deal with this overwhelming problem, the new University Librarian Hugh Atkinson, led the UL in the direction of automation. At that time, the only major national automation innovation was OCLC's shared cataloging, and it was not used to its full potential at the UL for many years (About the University of Illinois, 2011). The first step in automating, at least to some degree, was to install the Library Computer System (LCS), a short record system that had been developed in the late 1960s and was adapted for local use in 1979 from Ohio State University's Library. LCS was an automated circulation system that allowed patrons to search all cataloged items by author, title, or call number to find holdings and circulation status using one of the terminals located within the library. After being installed at the UL, LCS was used at the University of Chicago and other academic libraries in the state, and by 1985 the LCS network included more than 25 libraries and was the most extensive automated shared resource system of any state (Gorman, 1985).

Following the adoption of LCS, the UL then began looking into options for a true online catalog. Many of the functions of an online catalog were already handled by LCS, such as known item searching, library holdings information, and call number access. LCS provided only brief records and a limited ability to search, so, on its own, it could not serve one of the primary requirements of an online catalog, which was to replace the card catalog (Potter, 1985).

A supplementary system would be needed to solve the bibliographic control problem. This system would not replace LCS but would instead complement and work with LCS. These two systems combined would form the online catalog. In the fall of 1984, subject and keyword searching was made available through the Full Bibliographic Record (FBR), the new system that would provide at least as much bibliographic detail as the card catalog (Woodard & Golden, 1985). The Washington Library Network (WLN) software, and its associated database system (ADABAS), was chosen for the FBR because it would support the library's goal of eventually expanding the online catalog into a union catalog that could be used by other Illinois libraries (Romero & Wajenberg, 1985). Call numbers and circulation information were in LCS, full bibliographic records were in FBR, and the two systems were linked together to form the online catalog. The LCS contained approximately 7 million titles from approximately two dozen libraries in Illinois, and the FBR contained nearly 900,000 records (Cheng, 1985). LCS and FBR were both accessed from a single computer terminal, so to patrons it appeared to be a seamless, single process.

It was clear that the online catalog was superior to the card catalog for subject searching. When the online catalog was introduced in 1985, the UL

was cataloging an average of 11,000 titles per month (Clark & Chan, 1985), which made it impossible for staff to check and file every card that arrived in a timely manner. The online catalog, however, made it possible to maintain a more up-to-date database by eliminating the need to process and file cards for all incoming materials. The catalog was now only 2 weeks out of date for items that had been cataloged since 1975, and it was available wherever there was a computer terminal on campus (Woodard & Golden, 1985).

RESTRUCTURING CHANGES

In addition to moving to an online catalog, the UL began to change significantly in other ways. Between 1977 and 1982, the UL implemented major structure changes in hopes of increasing productivity, efficiency, and reader service (Martell, 1983). As is true for much of the history of libraries, the economic situation forced librarians to ask how they could more efficiently use available resources—in effect, trying to do more with less. The changes implemented left the major divisions (technical services/public services) as is, but the internal structures of each were altered in an attempt to increase productivity and communication.

University Librarian Hugh Atkinson believed that the traditional structure of large research libraries was never ideal but was instead a necessity due to the reliance on paper files. He saw automation as a way to finally decentralize many of the technical services functions (Williams, 1987). With the introduction of the online catalog came, at least in theory, less of a reliance on paper files that were located in one physical place within the Main Library. This meant that cataloging and processing work could be done from multiple locations, with “automation acting as a decentralizing force in allowing the dissolution of the massive centralized processing departments of the past” (Gorman, 1983, p. 63).

In the Technical Services Division the restructuring was based on two points: tasks should be organized by function rather than format, and professional and clerical procedures should be separated. It would entail decentralizing the “professional aspects” of cataloging and subject bibliography and centralizing the non-professional aspects of cataloging, such as copy cataloging that could be completed by staff or automated means (Gorman, 1983).

In late 1978, the restructuring of technical services began, and the serials department was eliminated, acquisitions and cataloging were reorganized, and two new departments (automated systems and collection development and preservation) were added. When this happened, public services had for several years already been organized into four divisions, referred to at that time as councils: arts and humanities, sciences, social sciences, and general services. General services included the units without a specific subject area,

including the reference and circulation departments and the Undergraduate Library. Technical services followed suit, so original cataloging and collection development had catalogers and bibliographers for the different councils. Technical services work was no longer divided by format but was instead split by the subject divisions of the public services councils, requiring many staff to learn and perform overlapping functions (Williams, 1987). For example, as catalogers were assigned to subjects rather than specific formats, each cataloger had to learn how to catalog all of the formats collected in that subject, including monographs, serials, and special formats such as multimedia and maps. The 80% to 85% of items that had a record in OCLC were routed to the Rapid Cataloging unit within technical services.

Although copy cataloging use of existing records played an increasing role, it was clear that original cataloging would still be necessary. The availability of LCS and OCLC made immediate decentralization of cataloging functions a possibility, and this new technology of the online catalog led some to argue there was no longer a reasonable “rationale for the distinction between public and technical services professional librarians” (Martell, 1983, p. 224). Because the catalog was available wherever terminals were located across libraries, some felt it was a logical decision to move the original cataloging responsibilities to those who were most familiar with the collection and who had selected the material and answered reference questions related them. The thought was that by regrouping librarians by subject, now that it was a possibility, the UL would use the professional human resources in a more practical way (Romero & Romero, 1993). However, the announcement that the UL was planning to decentralize original cataloging into public service units caught the attention of, and drew “considerable consternation” from, the library community at large (Williams, 1987, p. 5).

Restructuring continued to take place and became more comprehensive. In 1981 the UL’s two services (technical and public) were completely reorganized in order to be “shifted into a more logical administrative arrangement to fulfill the institutional service goals of the 1980s” (Williams, 1987, p. 10). Technical services was renamed general services and included acquisitions, the automated systems department, area studies programs, reference, and circulation, including the main bookstacks. Public services was renamed departmental library services (DLS) and included nearly 75 subject libraries and the undergraduate library (Williams, 1987). While decisions were being made about decentralizing technical services, there was some support for this move in the literature (Atkinson, 1983; Gorman, 1979; Holley, 1983; Martell, 1983). It was argued that “librarians have taken as an article of faith the dogma that centralized library services are more efficient, more economical, and more serviceable for the large mass of students and faculty than decentralized service. Not that they have much evidence for such dogma” (Holley, 1983, pp. 201–202). Martell asserted, “this bugaboo of the unquestioning has been demonstrated time and again to be a concept without definition

or value. In the online catalog environment, equal access to authority files ensures that dispersal of cataloging need not lead to a diminution of quality” (1983, p. 225). The Atkinson model, though controversial, gained support from other academic librarians as the organizational model of the future. One particularly memorable quote from an article supporting this type of organizational model as the wave of the future stated:

The traditional division by function has been a source of long-standing distrust and tension among librarians. It is axiomatic that paranoid cataloguers have a Cinderella complex, while prima donna reference librarians have the glamour jobs; that cataloguers produce the perfect cataloguing record in total ignorance of the needs of the user, while reference librarians don't really understand their own catalogue, much less the principles of bibliographic control that underlie the standardization and consistency inherent in good cataloguing. It is true that cataloguers are particularly vulnerable to negative feedback (only the mistakes show up; correct work goes through unnoticed) and to control by quantification, while reference librarians are expected by a demanding public, day after day, to be politely psychic polymaths. (Altmann, 1988, p. 147)

Although cataloging and bibliographical work was to be completed within each of the departmental libraries, these “decentralized librarians” were not to simply move their cataloging work with them to a departmental library. The plan was for them to become subject librarians and complete a range of professional duties, such as reference work, item selection, bibliographic instruction, and original cataloging. In the same way, librarians who were already working in the departmental libraries would expand their area of knowledge by taking on some of the bibliographic and cataloging work.

This process took 3 years to complete, moving original catalogers out of a centralized unit and into departmental libraries to take on reference and collection development responsibilities, while at the same time training departmental librarians, some of whom had never cataloged before, to take on original cataloging duties. Original cataloging was decentralized, with 1984–1985 being a transitional year (Williams, 1987).

The restructuring was implemented partly to create “holistic librarians” (Romero & Romero, 1993). “One of the saddest results of the traditional technical/public services dichotomy is the profound, and often self-imposed, ignorance of, and indifference to, each other's expertise” (Martell, 1983, p. 225). The idea of a “holistic librarian” assumes the following:

[the] user is better served when the librarian's focus is upon all aspects of information handling within a single subject or limited number of subjects rather than on a single function. In the holistic model the librarian is responsible for all the primary functions of librarianship, e.g. reference services, faculty liaison activities, collection development, original cataloging, and bibliographic instruction. (Clark & Bingham, 1989, p. 55)

It can certainly be argued that the expertise achieved is possible due to the librarians' ability to focus on and devote their time to a subset of professional tasks that allows them a deeper understanding of that area, rather than a more shallow knowledge of the entire gauntlet of professional areas under the umbrella of librarianship.

CONCERNS ABOUT DECENTRALIZATION

Two of the largest concerns about decentralizing technical services were that public service librarians would not successfully perform cataloging duties and that those who had been doing cataloging or bibliographic searching would not successfully interact with the public (Atkinson, 1983). Atkinson suggests that "in both cases, the staff after decentralization seems to enjoy being able to provide librarianship in all of its facets to a body of clients rather than dealing with a compartmentalized information world" (p. 201). Others do not necessarily agree, however, that professionals do not specifically seek out (and are satisfied by) a specialization in one aspect of the field rather than attempting to understand the whole range of tasks and duties.

There was concern among both former public and technical services staff that cataloging would not get completed in a decentralized environment, and it was felt that in this new model original cataloging—both in quality of records and the retention of cataloging skills—seemed to suffer the most (Bregman & Burger, 2002). The library administration did acknowledge that cataloging was more efficient when centralized, but the "aim underlying its decentralization was to improve library service by placing more personnel in units working directly with the public," and the new organizational structure was seen as a success "in terms of service improvement" because the catalogers were added as additional librarians to the different public service units (Williams, 1987, p. 13).

The decentralization of cataloging was seen by some to be a success, resulting in "an appreciable benefit to public service," and at the same time OCLC statistics showed a higher input of original catalog records (nearly 1,900 more records) from the UL in the 1985 fiscal year than in the previous year (Williams, 1987, p. 18).

It is unclear, however, as to whether or not that higher number reflected changes in overall selection patterns and budgets as much as the change in structure as described below:

There is no doubt that the rigid distinction between technical and public services was not benefiting the user. Catalogers with extensive bibliographic knowledge were kept apart from the user. Lack of detailed knowledge of the catalog and its internal structure did not help public service librarians in their quest to assist the user. With our new organizational structure we confidently expect that the integration of selection,

cataloging, and reference will allow the library user to deal with more informed and effective librarians. (Martell, 1983, p. 225)

Unfortunately, though there seemed to be a prevailing attitude that catalogers would appreciate more time spent working directly with patrons, it doesn't appear that much thought was given to how existing reference and instruction librarians would view spending time and energy on non-public service skill sets, as the following describes:

Many people have difficulty accepting the idea that anyone would voluntarily move from reference to cataloging, and the view that cataloging is a safe place to hide is as persistent as the idea that it is no fun. Historically, cataloging in particular has been seen as a place where an unproductive or marginal person can do the least harm. (Eckwright & Bolin, 2001, p. 453)

During the years it took to decentralize, however, and in the months following, staff continuously discussed whether the restructuring was effective and what impact it would have on original cataloging (Romero & Romero, 1993). Strong opinions developed on both sides of the issue.

EVALUATING THE CHANGES

More professionals working directly with users can certainly be seen as a plus, but not at the expense of effective and accurate technical services, which are equally vital in promoting patron access in differing ways. Therefore, one of the anticipated problems with focusing more heavily on public services was cataloging quality control. In other words, would or could technical services work be adequately performed in the new structure, or would in-person patron demands negatively impact the necessary behind-the-scenes functions that inform those interactions? The library found that the implementation came at the expense of the catalog's accuracy—when cataloging ceased to be the focus of a highly trained few and became one of many tasks completed by many librarians, quality decreased. Additionally, it generally held true that when faced with a patron at a service desk, cataloging and other technical service work dropped in priority, so the short-term benefit to the patron at the desk understandably took precedence over the long-term need for a current, accurate catalog. There was also an underlying assumption that people who excel at technical services work and people who excel at public services work are inherently interchangeable, when such is far from a given.

As noted in a recent article, technical services work is described as work that:

draws and retains people who like structure, take their work very seriously, do not require constant verbal interaction, are keen observers, and who have sharp analytical skills. What is more, over time technical services subcultures within libraries raise the bar of expectation that members notice anomalies, diagnose problems, refine procedures, tighten standards, and tie up loose ends. (Sellberg, 2011, p. 6)

While public services subcultures contain just as many exemplary skills, there is no reason to believe that they are identical to those of technical service professionals. If the infrastructure of the catalog was not as reliable for public service librarians to use, working with patrons would be less effective. In September, 1989, University Librarian David Bishop created a 12-member Cataloging Task Force to evaluate the current decentralized workflow of original cataloging to determine if a more centralized organization “would be in the library’s best interest” (University Library Cataloging Task Force, 1990, p. 1).

A centralized cataloging unit would position original cataloging as a priority for the library. By having designated staff catalog full time, and not as it fit in between public access needs, the cataloging quality and quantity would improve (University Library Cataloging Task Force, 1990). Librarians who had little interest in cataloging would not be forced to catalog (which did not produce the best results), and those who enjoyed cataloging would be able to discuss problems or ideas with others within their shared unit, who also cataloged regularly. The task force conducted a survey, and 84% of the librarians who responded felt that the decentralized original cataloging was not successful (University Library Cataloging Task Force, 1990, p. 3), and a number of concerns were seen across libraries (Table 1). The Task Force believed that “decentralization ha[d] visibly diminished the quantity, quality and uniformity of cataloging at the University of Illinois” (University

TABLE 1 Reasons Decentralized Original Cataloging Did Not Work

Reasons	Percent of respondents
Time. In public services areas, cataloging gets low priority	54%
Not sufficient quantity of cataloging done in unit to develop and maintain expertise; fewer books going out for original cataloging now	53%
Training inadequate; continuing education needed	23%
Decentralization has diminished quantity, quality, and uniformity of cataloging	20%
Inaccessible backlogs accumulate	18%
Inadequate staffing	14%
Lack of trained & experienced reviewers in Office of Principal Cataloger; “not new” problem	12%
Lack of language expertise	8%
Librarians who never wanted to be catalogers are forced to catalog	4%

Library Cataloging Task Force, 1990, pp. 3–4). Patrons in the library present an immediate need and so, not surprisingly, cataloging received a lower priority in most units.

There was not enough cataloging within many units to develop and maintain cataloging expertise without the need for continuing education, for which it was difficult to find the necessary time. Of the librarians who reported that original cataloging was part of their duties, 41% estimated spending less than 5% of their time on cataloging, and an additional 27% reported spending less than 15% of their time cataloging (University Library Cataloging Task Force, 1990) (Figure 1).

If cataloging was to be re-centralized, the problems with training and developing expertise would be severely reduced, if not completely eliminated. The costs incurred by having multiple copies of cataloging manuals across library units, such as Lists of Subject Terms, Dewey Decimal Classification Schedules, and OCLC formats would be reduced also. The removal of original cataloging from the departmental libraries would also result in a stronger emphasis on public service rather than the behind-the-scenes cataloging work, allowing for more time to be devoted to meeting the needs of patrons visiting the libraries.

Not all responses to the survey were negative, however. Some librarians felt that the decentralized organization ensured better subject control, more familiarity with the materials in the library, and more well-rounded professionals (University Library Cataloging Task Force, 1990). The task force did not find this reasoning persuasive, however. Because 80% to 90% of materials already had OCLC records, the 10% to 20% of cataloging that used this subject

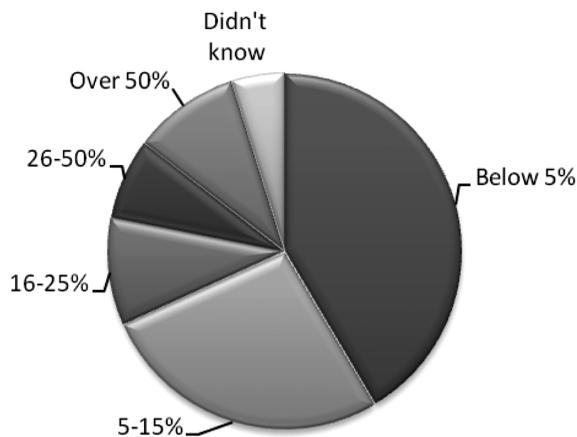


FIGURE 1. Percentage of time spent cataloging. Respondents' answers to the survey: 17(41%) spent below 5% of their time cataloging, 11(27%) spent 5%–15% of their time, 4(10%) spent 16%–25%, 3(7%) spent 26%–50%, 4(10%) spent over 50%, and 2(5%) did not know. *Source:* University Library Cataloging Task Force Assessment Sub-group, 1990.

control was not worth the expense. If it was important for librarians to be familiar with the materials, a less expensive way to achieve that goal would be needed. With the decentralization of original cataloging, this task was part of the job responsibility of at least 43 different librarians¹ (University Library Cataloging Task Force Assessment Sub-group, 1990), which may certainly decrease uniformity in cataloging practices. Although there were some librarians who felt the de-centralization was a success, most felt as though it was a bad decision, as seen in many of the responses to the questionnaire included here:

The idea of decentralized original cataloging has a strong plus factor—it breaks down the barriers between public and technical services by requiring that public service staff be conversant in cataloging, an important set of concepts in light of automation. However, I think it is quite clear that not everyone was cut out for cataloging; regardless of how beneficial that knowledge is to service provision, I believe that it would be far more productive to re-think our current original cataloging structure—the sooner the better.

The Library needs to treat cataloging as a serious, integral part of the system. By dismantling the centralized unit, the Library has relegated cataloging to step-child status and has dismissed its importance within the context of the Library organism.

Fine-tune a wreck? A complete overhaul and rebuild is needed!

The task force recommended abandoning the decentralized system, except in cases where language, format, or type of material warranted it (e.g., the Asian, Music, and Rare Book libraries), and a centralized cataloging unit should be created in order to catalog all materials for which OCLC records were not available. The recommendation was not implemented, however, and in 1993 a 6-month study was conducted to see what effect the decentralization of original cataloging had on records created (Romero & Romero, 1993). The study looked at what types of errors were found in original cataloging copy by UL personnel in the new decentralized environment. All original cataloging records were reviewed by the Principal Cataloger before being added to the OCLC database,² and this provided an opportunity to look at records created across the libraries: 2,376 copy slips were reviewed (Romero & Romero, 1993). The error types were organized into categories: description, headings, classification, subject headings, capitalization and punctuation, encoding the MARC format, and including omission of required data (See Table 2).

The study cited several factors that contributed to the quality of cataloging within the decentralized structure, including lack of time and the absence of “cataloging camaraderie” (Romero & Romero, 1993, p. 65). Cataloging requires an in-depth knowledge of an array of rules and procedures,

TABLE 2 Errors Found in Original Cataloging

Cataloging areas	Number of errors	Percentage of errors
Description	365	20.6%
Headings	130	7.3%
Classification	134	7.6%
Subject headings	140	7.9%
Encoding of MARC format	718	40.6%
Capitalization	10	0.6%
Punctuation	272	15.4%
Total errors	1,769	

and it is difficult to catalog at an efficient pace if much time has passed since the last time one has reviewed these details. The librarians were already overworked, so cataloging was continuously placed on a back burner and dealt with when a small amount of time could be found, requiring librarians to constantly be “reinventing the cataloging wheel” (Romero & Romero, 1993, p. 64). Time had to be found to catalog, but not nearly enough time could be devoted to memorizing or looking up rule interpretations and changes. Cataloging in these conditions produced a “final product that suffers in accuracy and reliability” (Romero & Romero, 1993, p. 65). The power of cataloging in numbers should not be underestimated. Catalogers can learn from each other’s problems and successes, and new staff can benefit from the experience of their colleagues. Being able to simply walk across the room to discuss a problem is superior to having to find similar examples in reference resources or contact a cataloger in another unit who you may or may not know very well. The decentralized environment made librarians new to cataloging feel isolated, especially if they were the only librarian in the departmental location.

RECENTRALIZING TECHNICAL SERVICES

Within 4 years of decentralization, it was so clear that it was not successful that Departmental Library Services wrote a recommendation for recentralizing cataloging (Burger et al., 2000). Additional internal reports echoed the concerns with a decentralized system in 1990, 1992, and 1993, but with none of the recommendations being implemented. During 1996–2000, an updated cataloging system, the Data Research Associates (DRA) system, was implemented (Bregman & Burger, 2002). In January, 2000, University Librarian Paula Kaufman appointed a task force to reevaluate the cataloging workflows and determine if more efficient procedures could be put in place. The task force investigated the cataloging process and the known problems associated with it.

The decision was made to recentralize original cataloging, except for units that dealt primarily with specialized materials. Those areas with unique languages or subject expertise required (Slavic, Asian, law, rare books, government documents) or who dealt with special formats (undergrad media, music, maps) would continue to be responsible for their own original cataloging. The task force recommended recentralizing original cataloging because “from previous reports on the state of cataloging, it has been clear for fifteen years that decentralized cataloging does not work at an optimal level” (Burger et al., 2000, p. 7). The small number of items needing original cataloging in each unit each year combined with a small number of staff performing cataloging functions resulted in problems with training and standardization that were long standing. The task force attempted to not only solve the existing problems but look forward at the quickly changing landscape and make decisions based on what would be best for the library moving forward, as well. First, just a few short years after implementing the DRA catalog system, the UL implemented a fully integrated library system, Voyager by Endeavor, in 2002.

Improving access to the library collections became a priority in the UL's strategic plan, and from 2002 to 2008 the newly recentralized Technical Service units made substantial improvements to technical service functions that achieved just that—enhanced access and more successful support for units across the library (Norman et al., 2008). The Technical Services Coordination and Consolidation Team made several recommendations to improve the centralized functions even more. One major concern was the inaccessibility of many materials in backlogs. At the time of the report, the library owned more than 500,000 items for which there was no bibliographic access, including monographs, microfilm, scores, foreign language materials, and rare books (Norman et al., 2008). The team evaluated the options available and determined that providing a few points of access (including title, author, publishing information, and physical description) for patrons was better than no access at all. A philosophy of “good enough” cataloging had to be adopted. Good enough was not pejorative but instead provided guidance and a mindset for cataloging work that allows patrons to find these backlogged, and completely inaccessible, hidden collections. Catalogers strive for a balance—full, accurate records are important, but formatting details that do not impact patron access are less so.

One of the team's recommendations was to expand retrospective cataloging and backlog cleanup work. As of 2008, the library had hundreds of thousands of items in backlogs that needed to be searched in OCLC for corresponding metadata, with original cataloging being required for any materials for which records could not be found. Thousands of Briefcat materials were stored in the basement of the central stacks, and 225,000 MARCette records acted as the main access point for patrons in the online catalog (Norman et al., 2008). Both categories of records are brief, non-OCLC records that

provide minimal to no access that are essentially place holders for where real records should be.

CURRENT BACKLOG AND CATALOG CLEANUP WORK

Recent years have seen numerous projects (and the funding to support them) with the goal of providing access to backlogs and pockets of materials hidden from patrons throughout the library. The online catalog presence of these materials ranged from zero to minimal access, and many of these backlogs were in non-public spaces and so were also not physically browsable. An additional way that these backlogs are being addressed was through the creation of Collection Management Services (CMS), a new unit within the Technical Services Division. Building on the cyclical nature of processing course reserves, one of the ongoing key responsibilities of the unit, professional and staff expertise has focused on performing efficient and effective project-based, large-scale collection management and cataloging work. Since these backlogged materials were made a priority, this new unit alone has cataloged, physically stabilized, and/or marked and barcoded as needed, and made accessible to patrons over 84,000 items from the identified backlogs (Table 3). Additional projects were organized, prioritized, and completed, or are being completed, by the faculty and staff of other units in the centralized Technical Services Division as well. Some of the larger projects include backlogs of Slavic language materials; Asian language materials; Asian MARCettes, which are Asian language items for which the only catalog entry are local, very brief mini-MARC records; Rare Book Library/pre-1830 materials that were not extremely rare (which were affectionately referred to as “medium-rare”); and Briefcats, which were items that had been acquired from 1950 to 1954 that had never been fully added to the online catalog. Projects are still underway to continue working on these and other inaccessible materials, but improved workflows combined with this project-based work has resulted in patron access to materials that have long been hidden.

TABLE 3 Backlog Projects

Project	Items processed to date
Asian language backlog	29,000
Rare book library backlog	28,000
Asian MARCettes	15,000
Briefcats backlog	6,500
Slavic backlog	6,000
Total	84,500

CONCLUSIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Though not the hoped-for panacea for the tensions between Technical Services and Public Services, nor, as it turned out, the ideal environment for furthering excellent cataloging work, the move toward decentralization and back to a centralized technical services model was a clear indication of the need for excellent communication, assessment, and innovation in the technical services arena. There are a number of directions that technical services may need to move in the future in order to continue to meet current and future patrons informational needs, and the debate about what direction we should take may not be as important as making sure that innovations continue to be pursued. One important goal moving forward is “encourage TS librarians to embrace new opportunities for sharing their expertise in the development and management of knowledge in order to meet the challenges facing libraries today” (Gregory, Weber, & Dippie, 2008, p. 38).

Changes to the catalog, both technological and procedural, have only increased in rapidity and impact, making clear communication between Technical Services and Public Services of even greater importance. Though particular modes of communication do not always prove successful, as one case study notes, “time spent on such efforts have improved relationships between technical services staff and other departmental staff, which in turn leads to a higher level of service the library can provide its users” (Bazeley & Yoose, 2013, p. 127).

Clearly, treating technical services as a subset of, or interchangeable with, public services is not a viable option for long-term organizational growth. However, a key to the success of any library in coming years is likely to depend on the permeability of the walls between historical divisions and the ability to be flexible in meeting new challenges, as explained here:

Our continued success will be dependent on our capacity to manage multiple programs, projects, and priorities. It is important not only to acquire cataloging skills, but also to develop the ability to recognize trends and opportunities for better resource management and to proactively enhance the skills that will be necessary when the next innovation develops and our work assignments move down the continuum of change. (Ouder Kirk, 2000, p. 354)

There are a number of alternate possibilities to explore in changing the technical services workforce to meet upcoming challenges. One is to assign individual responsibilities across public and technical services to best match the skills sets of individuals hired. Or, as Eckwright and Bolin put it, “organizational productivity can also be improved when an individual can have an individualized assignment” (2001, p. 455). Another would be adopting a more tiered approach to staffing, as the UL has investigated over the last

few years due to budget constraints and significant changes in the available workforce.

Tiered staffing can allow the library to continue to investigate and test various options before making commitments to permanent staffing that are arduous to change. Hiring and training to address particular needs allow permanent skilled staff to spend their time as efficiently as possible, taking advantage of their experience and skills while temporary staff absorb as much of the mainstream work as possible. Careful assessment of project needs, such as particular language skills, coupled with appropriate hiring and training practices maintains excellent quality control while allowing for fast, large-scale results. (Laskowski & Gao, 2011, p. 239)

Regardless of the direction that the UL in general, and the Technical Services Division in particular, eventually takes, clearly a key component in the success of the library's ability to meet current and future patron needs will continue to lie in the strength of our ability to provide access to content we acquire. Recognition of both public and technical service needs and strengths, and clear communication between library professionals in both areas, will help ensure that whatever steps we take advance our shared goals and mission. A willingness to learn from our past, as well as invest in innovative ventures knowing they may fail, will also help contribute to the success of technical services, and the library as a whole, in the future.

NOTES

1. The number of librarians who completed the survey and answered "yes" to whether original cataloging was a part of their job responsibility (69% of respondents). Eighteen librarians answered "no" (29% of respondents).
2. This review was completed without the items in hand. The catalog records were checked for any errors that could be easily identified by an experienced cataloger (Romero, 1993).

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