So Many Projects, So Few Resources: Getting More Bang for Your Buck in Technical Services

Project Management

Project management is an often overlooked and undervalued component of library technical services work. Project management requires development of specific skill sets and expertise, but when used successfully it can help maximize the ability of technical services units to meet multiple goals simultaneously by finding similarities in workflows and creating efficiencies.

The overarching goal of technical services in academic research libraries is to improve access to our collections for our users, but the resources are not always available to add project work on top of pre-existing workflows and needs. However, by combining goals and smaller projects into a well-established framework of project management we are able to get more "bang for our buck," completing several tasks in a single pass rather than having to touch the same materials again and again unnecessarily.

Too often dismissed as simple common sense, project management can be a key element in providing effective, efficient technical services that meet current and future needs of academic research libraries. Rather than prioritizing often competing objectives, such as working on cataloging backlogs versus preservation of content or shifting collections to redefine public spaces, project management allows technical services departments to focus on those projects that maximize resources. Basic prioritization focuses on doing the work that has the highest value for the cheapest investment, but using project management well can also help reduce the cost and increase the value of projects that might otherwise remain at the bottom of the list.

Rethinking workflows as projects rather than "business as usual" can encourage higher productivity, minimize the number of times items need to be touched, and generally create an environment that rewards accomplishment. There are opportunities to find overlapping projects that can be combined to accomplish multiple goals such as reclassification, enhancing catalog access, reducing cataloging backlogs, preservation, inventory control, and digitization. Not only does meeting multiple goals simultaneously improve efficiency but it can also help publicly demonstrate good stewardship of collections and highlight the importance of technical services work in supporting campus missions.

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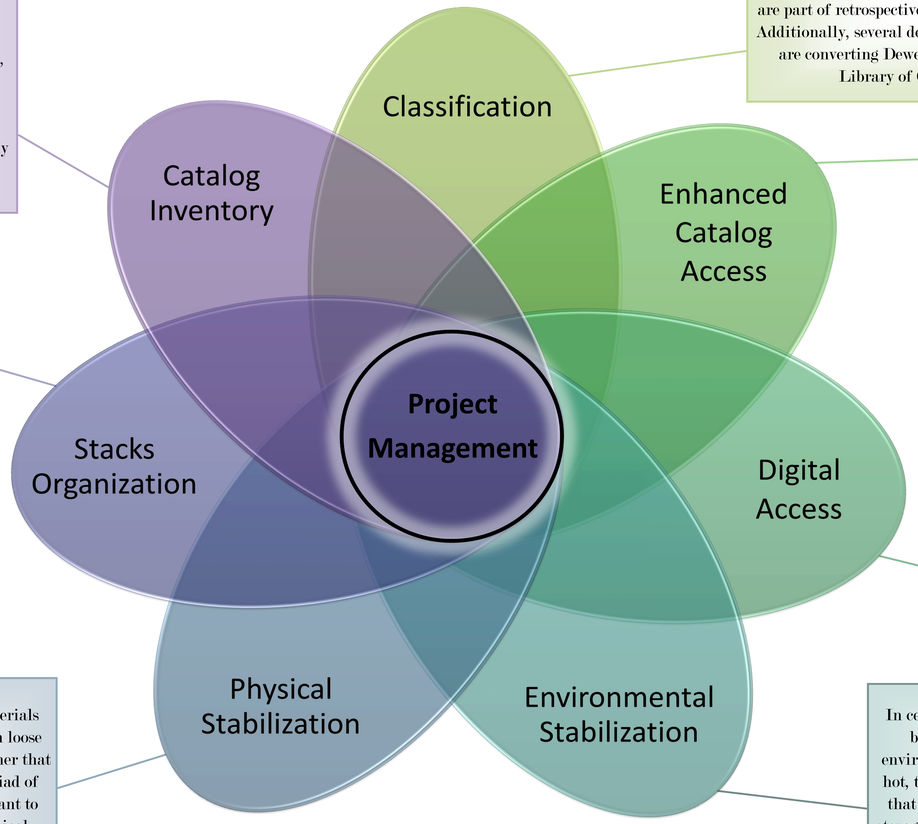
The online catalog contains over 13 million volumes, making a catalog inventory nearly impossible on its own, both daunting in size and infeasible financially. Through other projects, though, the library has been able to improve the catalog and more accurately represent the Library's holdings.

There are several reasons we have engaged in classification projects. Most commonly, items are in various cataloging backlogs and are part of retrospective cataloging projects. Additionally, several departmental libraries are converting Dewey call numbers to Library of Congress.



We have a few different types of records in the online catalog that need enhancement. Some are brief records that were loaded when the catalog first went online and others are subpar records from vendors, records with typos or other errors, or records for which we now have better or additional information to add.

The main bookstacks were overfilled and in need of more space as additional materials are added to the collection. Transferring lower-use items to the Library's High Density Storage Facility allows the remaining volumes to be less cramped, meaning that all of the items, in both locations, are more findable and accessible.

We have participated in various projects in-house and with partners in order to provide digital access to Library materials that are unique, rare, in the public domain, or are otherwise determined to benefit from a digital surrogate. Digital access helps with searchability, findability, indexing, and with preserving the physical items.

We work to physically stabilize materials that are damaged, such as items with loose pages or boards, damaged spines, leather that is suffering from red rot, and a myriad of other issues. Stabilization is important to preventing or slowing further physical deterioration of the materials in the Library's collection.

In certain areas of the University Library, books are shelved in less-than-ideal environmental conditions, whether it be too hot, too humid, too tightly shelved, or areas that were not originally designed for book storage. Relocating these materials to a safer, temperature- and humidity-controlled environment is an ongoing priority.

Project Example:
Merging Two Libraries

As part of a larger New Service Model initiative, two departmental libraries were being merged into one. The collections were being moved and interfiled into a new space as part of this initiative (**stacks organization**), which was a perfect time to utilize project management. Because the materials were already being handled, steps were added to better utilize staff and financial resources. This created an additional opportunity to perform a **catalog inventory** and **reclassify** the materials from Dewey call numbers to Library of Congress call numbers.

Project Example:
Processing a Cataloging Backlog

A cataloging backlog of Asian-language materials had been growing for many years. Resources were made available to create or **enhance catalog access**, but in order to successfully finish this project in a way that would be most beneficial to patrons, efficient use of resources was essential. Through careful planning, the Library was able to do all of the following using the resources provided for cataloging: **classify the materials**, move the materials into a more controlled space (**environmental stabilization**), perform **physical stabilization** on items as necessary, and **organize the stacks** to enhance access for patrons.

Project Example:
Digitizing a Special Collection

Funding was secured to provide digital access to the Library's C-Collection— approximately 45,000 college and university catalogs and related publications that had been collected for many years. These items were tucked into a corner of the main stacks, uncataloged. Project management techniques were utilized in order to not only provide **digital access** when possible but also create or **enhance catalog access**, **physically stabilize** materials as needed, move the items to a more **stable environment**, clear out these materials in order to better use the space (**stacks organization**), and perform a **catalog inventory** of the items in the online catalog as part of this collection.