Transforming Acquisitions and Collection Services
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In 2010, the Collection Management Department of the Health Sciences and Human Services Library (HS/HSL) of the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB), was facing a dilemma. Over the previous decade the library had gradually shifted from a print collection to one that was almost entirely online. This had led to a sharp decrease in the amount of time spent on physical processing, yet the department was still fully staffed with experienced workers who had been hired to do just that. Several efforts were made to find meaningful work for the staff, including an electronic journals holdings verification project and part-time assignment of some staff to other departments. One idea that held a great deal of promise for repurposing the department and providing more work for the staff was teaming with the new UMB Digital Archive to perform digitization services. A digitization pilot project was conducted in the winter of 2010 to test this concept.

At the time of the pilot project, the Collection Management Department consisted of two faculty librarians and four paraprofessional staff. The head of Collection Management oversaw library-wide collection development, was responsible for the resources budget, and supervised serials and acquisitions. A digital resources librarian was responsible for establishing and maintaining access to the library’s licensed electronic resources. The four paraprofessional staff members performed more traditional serials and acquisitions tasks. The serials technician was responsible for journal check-in and claiming. The bindery technician processed journals for submission to a commercial
bindery, performed basic book and journal repairs, and assisted the serials technician in shelving journals. The accounting technician handled standing orders and dealt with the campus procurement office. And the acquisition technician was responsible for managing a book approval plan and the firm order of books. Her duties also included copy cataloging.

At least, these were the responsibilities of the paraprofessionals in theory. The library had switched to an almost exclusively online journal collection, only maintaining a small browsing collection of around 40 titles. This left the serials technician and the bindery technician with little work to do. The change by the campus procurement office from paper forms to an online requisition system, and particularly the adoption of electronic data interchange (EDI) invoicing by the library, eliminated much of the work the accounting technician had traditionally done. And budget constraints combined with the loss of stacks space caused the library to reevaluate its book buying strategy. When it was discovered that most books purchased on the traditional approval plan were never used, the library switched from “just in case” to “just in time” book purchasing. This, in turn, left the acquisitions technician with too much free time.

It was difficult to find new enjoyable and meaningful tasks for the paraprofessionals to perform. The acquisitions technician helped some with electronic resources, collecting journal statistics and maintaining the journal and e-book A–Z list. And the bindery technician occasionally helped with interlibrary loan when one of the ILL staff was absent. But even with these new tasks, the acquisitions technician and bindery technician still lacked enough meaningful tasks to keep them occupied and the other two paraprofessionals had even less to do. One attempt to fill the staff’s time was to conduct an electronic journals holdings verification project. Each technician was assigned a portion of the library’s electronic journal subscriptions and asked to check for access and to confirm that the holdings information was correct. This involved checking holdings in the library’s OPAC, link resolver, and journals A–Z list for consistency and then manually checking availability on the publisher’s website. Very few problems were found, and they were passed on to the digital resources librarian for resolution. The project took several months, but when it ended, the problem of filling the technicians’ time with consistent work remained.
Fortunately, a confluence of events presented an opportunity for the department to create a new role for itself. First, the HS/HSL began to explore the idea of providing a digital archive as a service to the campus. Second, the library’s historical collection obtained the papers of Florence P. Kendall. Dr. Kendall was an important player in the creation of physical therapy as a profession, a leader in the American Physiotherapy Association, and one of the driving forces in getting the State of Maryland to grant professional status to the new occupation. The library realized that this collection could very well serve as an important component of the new digital archive. And third, the National Network of Libraries of Medicine, Southeast Atlantic Region (NN/LM SEA) began to offer monetary awards to support the digitization of significant collections. The head of Collection Management was serving on the committee that was exploring the establishment of a digital archive and saw this as a way to get his department involved in the new service.

The head of Collection Management applied for and was awarded a $5,000 Express Digitization Award by the NN/LM SEA to support the digitization of the Kendall Collection. The project was funded in whole or in part with federal funds from the National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, Department of Health and Human Services, under Contract No. NO1-LM-6-3502 with the University of Maryland Baltimore. The application process was simple. The head of Collection Management wrote a short description of the significance of the Kendall Collection, explained that the collection would be made available to the public through the new digital archive, and devised an equipment budget. Working with the library’s IT staff, a high-quality scanner, storage, and peripherals were purchased. The library’s IT Department also assisted in training the Collection Management paraprofessionals in using the equipment. Collaborating with the Cataloging Department, the head of Collection Management also organized training for the paraprofessionals in the basics of the Dublin Core metadata schema. While some of the paraprofessionals proved adept at this, the cataloging librarians felt it was best if the paraprofessionals only identified the title of the document and the collection while submitting, leaving the more thorough description of the materials to the cataloging staff.

The pilot was a great success. Each paraprofessional was asked to devote a minimum of four hours a week to the project; most of them
chose to do much more and the pilot was completed in four weeks rather than the eight that had been initially projected. The technicians enjoyed the change of pace and the novelty of the work, and above all recognized that it was meaningful. As the serials technician put it, while it was sometimes difficult to get a decent digital reproduction of an aging typewritten document, it made the material much more accessible to our patrons and other scholars than if it had been stored behind locked doors in the library’s historical collection. And as the UMB Digital Archive moved closer to reality, the paraprofessionals began to electronically submit the works they had digitized. The submission process was fairly straightforward. The library had chosen DSpace as its repository application, and each technician uploaded the pdf documents he or she had created into the Kendall Collection, placing them in the queue for the cataloging librarians, who provided a more thorough description. It was felt that this division of labor was the most efficient. The technicians would have the satisfaction of seeing their work actually placed in the Archive without the steep learning curve that would have been involved in developing metadata skills. And above all, it was stressed that the technician’s work had provided the Archive with a significant collection to highlight during its rollout.

With the successful completion of the pilot, the Collection Management Department began to offer digitization as a service to the UMB Digital Archive. Over the next few years, the department handled a handful of digitization requests on an ad hoc basis. Unfortunately, the Archive was slow to recruit materials and the resultant low demand for the service meant that digitization never became a part of the department’s regular workflow. Over time, two of Collection Management’s paraprofessionals retired and their lines were either moved to other departments or eliminated for cost savings, leaving only the bindery and acquisitions technicians in the department. The electronic resources librarian moved to another library department, and the acquisitions technician was repurposed as an electronic resources technician. The bindery technician was given the responsibility of document delivery, providing him with more work, and this right-sizing of the department combined with an increasingly cantankerous scanner meant that the Collection Management Department was no longer in the digitization business. The digitization service moved to the Resource Sharing Department. Not only did Resource
Sharing have better scanners and more staff to provide the service, but the head of Resource Sharing also served as the Digital Archive program manager.

Overall, the digitization service was a successful collaboration between the Collection Management Department and the nascent UMB Digital Archive. The Archive started as an idea presented in a white paper and continued as a committee-run project that conducted a soft rollout. At this stage, Collection Management’s digitization service was useful. It provided the Archive’s first significant collection and continued support as the Archive began to develop. While demand for the service was initially low, the pilot showed that acquisitions staff can take on new and innovative roles as libraries continue to evolve. Just as the Archive began to grow as the program manager successfully recruited more material from campus, Collection Development’s staff was halved, necessitating a move of the service to Resource Sharing.

**NOTE**
