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"Bridging the Ravine"; or, the Joint Library Automation Project of Henderson State and Ouachita Baptist University

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Automating a library is at once challenging, frustrating and rewarding. It requires detailed, often tedious planning and enormous amounts of patience. Software glitches, hardware failures, and miscommunication between automation vendors and library staff are common complaints found in the library literature! When two libraries undertake such a project, problems proliferate. The automation project of Ouachita Baptist University (OBU) and Henderson State University (HSU) Libraries illustrates problems inherent in any automation, some unique to joint endeavors, and others representative of cooperation between a public and private institution. Above all, it illustrates how a positive approach to these problems can result in a system which increases the benefits to library users far beyond the walls of their own library.

Background

Cross-town Arkadelphia rivals Henderson State and Ouachita Baptist Universities began the Joint Educational Consortium (JEC) over a decade ago. The two schools, after almost a century of rivalry "across the ravine," approached cooperation with misgivings. From such small beginnings as a joint academic calendar and a joint homecoming, cooperation through the Consortium enlarged to include a concert and a lecture series, plus an annual state-wide art competition and exhibit as enrichment programs which neither school could undertake alone.

Another facet of cooperation involved academic programs. Students were allowed to cross-register for courses, and some departments engaged in joint programs, offering majors between the two schools. The universities found themselves cooperating to avoid duplication of effort, especially where duplication wasted precious resources.

The libraries on the two campuses provided natural foci for cooperative academic efforts. The state school, which had been Methodist until about a generation earlier, and the smaller Baptist institution had librarians whose philosophies involved a high standard of service and cooperative efforts with other libraries. As their first major cooperative library effort, the universities implemented a union catalog and established borrowing privileges for students at both libraries. Once those steps had been taken, students on each campus could discover and avail themselves of resources available in both libraries.

In December 1984, the two library directors met with JEC Director Dr. Dolphus Whitten to discuss how the two schools' academic programs could best be promoted through joint effort. In a discussion predicated on Whitten's belief that a major project focused on the libraries would be best, the discussants considered the relative merits of two proposals. One envisioned a large purchase of periodical backfiles; the other improved access to library collections. From that meeting came the idea of an integrated library system for the combined campuses.

Having agreed on the project's focus, the three faced the automation project's first problem: educating decision-makers to the project's efficacy. To that end, representatives of three automation companies journeyed to Arkadelphia to demonstrate the application of modern technology to library services. Faculty members and administration representatives met with local and visiting librarians for the presentations. By the end of the demonstrations, the educational program had succeeded. All were convinced of the value of automation in a library setting.

A simultaneous problem involved building consensus and rallying faculty and administrative support for access rather than materials. Faculty members at both institutions have consistently decried the lack of materials and complained about the need for more money for materials budgets. The faculties needed to be convinced that money which could go for materials would be better spent on the automation project, and adminstrators needed to be convinced of faculty support for that move. Discussions among faculty members on the respective Library Committees, at lunch, and in the faculty lounges reached consensus that improved access, as offered in the demonstrations, was more important than the additional materials which the funds earmarked to such a project could buy. After meetings with the faculty groups, administrators were convinced that the project would have broad faculty support. Careful "politicking" by supporters over the

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course of six months proved victorious.

Finding the funds and a rationale for the project posed the next hurdle. Accordingly, in 1985, the JEC commissioned a feasibility study by a pair of library consultants, charging them with the task of examining current activities and recommending further cooperative ventures. Their final report included a recommendation for an integrated library system which could involve not only the two universities, but Arkadelphia's public and public school libraries as well. The consultants envisioned a progression which would spread through the city to the county, and then onward to expanding ripples, until the two university libraries were the nucleus for a computerized network of libraries in southwest Arkansas. That rationale appealed to the two universities and to the Ross Foundation, a local philanthropic organization.

Pre-Contract Planning

The JEC tentatively approved the consultants' recommended plan and engaged the services of an automation consultant, Mr. Bob Walton. In 1985, he directed the library staffs in planning for the automated system. First came a series of preliminary, but not especially difficult, questions. For example, what functions should be automated: all or some, and if some, which ones? The librarians agreed that a truly integrated system which automated all library functions should be the goal. Another question was: should the project be cobbled together, buying software from one company and hardware from another, or should it be a package deal? The librarians quickly agreed on the turnkey approach.

Then came the hard part. Designing a system which met the needs of both libraries required numerous accommodations. In the planning phase, the librarians learned new connotations for the words "cooperation" and "compromise." A major test of their spirit of cooperation came with the "Functional Systems Requirement Report," a detailed, prioritized listing of exactly what each subsystem (cataloging, reference, online catalog, interlibrary loans, circulation, serials, and acquisitions) should do. Working through the 365 pages of options was a formidable task.

Two committees were formed, one for technical and another for public services subsystems. Staff from each library represented their respective departments on the appropriate committee, with the Directors as the only common representatives on both. Each library provided one committee chair. Disagreements were solved by acceding to the library wishing to assign the higher priority to a particular function. If, for example, the HSU library assigned a "B" priority to the option of allowing patrons to place a purchase request in the system, and OBU assigned an "A," the "A" priority prevailed.

A second challenge to cooperation came with the "Vendor Proposal Evaluation Scoring Priority Worksheet," which was designed to direct the consultant in evaluating proposals. The consultant provided the librarians with thirteen criteria which were to be ranked using coefficient values to indicate which were most important to the librarians in choosing a system. The criteria were:[2]

1. Vendor adherence with RFP preparation requirements.
2. Confidence in vendor organization fiscal stability and management capabilities.
3. Vendor library automation experience.
4. Functional capabilities.
5. Configurations.
6. Costs.
7. Training.
8. Documentation.
9. Long-term system expansion capability.
10. Contractual issues, documentation, and costs.
11. Implementation plan.
12. Performance examinations.
13. Data conversion plan.

Two criteria tied for first place: confidence in vendor organization fiscal stability and management capabilities, and vendor library automation experience. The consultant advised that neither criterion should be in first place; from his experience, vendor adherence with the Request for Proposal (RFP) preparation requirements was of primary importance. He reasoned that a vendor which could not comply with initial requirements would make a poor automation partner. The librarians followed his advice and placed their choices in positions two and three.

Midway through the planning process, the consultant asked the staffs to rank the requested subsystems and decide which were considered essential and which useful, but optional. There was little difference of opinion on this matter. Although the two libraries ranked the subsystems differently, both gave circulation top priority, and the online catalog and bibliographic catalog maintenance subsystem made the top three of each list. Both libraries also placed the multiple institution resource sharing subsystem near the end of their lists. When the consultant patiently explained that this subsystem was the basis of the joint system, it immediately moved to the top of the lists!

This example underscores an important and continuing problem in the automation process: the lack of knowledge on many librarians' part, and inadequate prior explanation on the consul-

tant's. It is a classic case of "if I had known then what I know now . . . ." Wide-ranging reading on the staffs' part could not prepare them for what lay ahead; installations had not proceeded at a rate which would allow guiding experiences to be published widely enough for staff self-education. Unfortunately, salesmen and company representatives also proved inadequate in their understanding of the company's product, and gave conflicting answers to fundamental questions (a continuing problem).

Perhaps the most important and difficult compromise came at the end of the planning period. Of the seven vendors who had bid on the project, four were invited to Arkadelphia to demonstrate their wares -- OCLC, Data Research Associates (DRA), CLSI, and Carlyle. Each library staff then met separately and rated the four vendors in three categories: hardware, software, and overall. The contest immediately narrowed to two finalists -- DRA and CLSI. Both libraries ranked DRA first on hardware and CLSI first on software. In the overall rating, OBU placed DRA first and CLSI second; HSU placed CLSI first and DRA second. Because the two staffs had independently agreed on their top two choices, there seemed little need to compromise on a third vendor. Lengthy discussion ensued on the issue of hardware versus software. Of the four vendors, CLSI was the only one which could then provide software for all the subsystems required by the libraries. However, the CLSI hardware was not state-of-the-art. DRA, on the other hand, had state-of-the-art hardware, but their acquisitions and serials subsystems software were "in development." Deadlocked on the hardware-software issue, the libraries agreed to throw the question to Walton, with their rankings and evaluations. He recommended CLSI based on several considerations: superiority of software, corporate stability, cost exerience with similar institutions and shared systems, plus installation and ongoing support. Based upon his recommendation, the libraries finally agreed upon CLSI, and the contract was finalized in July, 1987.

Post-Contract Planning

The system was financed by funding from both Universities and the Ross Foundation, which issued a challenge grant for the project. Costs were apportioned between the schools by a three-part formula. First, each institution paid for the pieces of equipment used in its own library. For example, Henderson paid for eighteen system terminals and six printers; Ouachita for twelve terminals and four printers. Second, the schools allocated costs of shared components of the system according to an approximation of use. That approximation was based on each school's proportion of two factors: total records in the database and the total number of terminals. From this proportion came a 60%-40% division of shared costs, which covered such items as processing of OCLC tapes, system software, and central site equipment. Finally, the two universities shared equally in the remaining system costs, including an Uninterruptable Power Supply and upgrading the air conditioning at the central site to cover the increased heat load.

The realities of a system shared by a public and private institution complicated some decisions. The project was to be a joint venture through the JEC, which would allow the two schools to cooperate outside the restrictions of two separate purchasing systems without raising the issue of church-state separation. The institutions would simply purchase services from the JEC.

The mainframe's location posed a political problem. Each institution had a place for the mainframe; neither administration was really willing to allow the other control of that part of the system. A compromise housed the mainframe in the HSU administrative computer center and awarded the position of system coordinator to OBU's Data Processing Coordinator. While politically expedient, this compromise caused some difficulties with the project's development because the system coordinator is not on-site when software and hardware problems occur. Nor does he have the background to understand some of the issues involved in automating a library.

Even before contract signing, Henderson and Ouachita catalog librarians met with a CLSI consultant to make decisions regarding database preparation. Records in MARC format were available on OCLC archival tapes for use in the new system because Ouachita and Henderson had been OCLC members since the mid-1970s and because retrospective conversion was over 95% complete at both libraries. In addition, placing a single order through the JEC for processing records decreased costs somewhat.

Merging records from the two universities into a single database presented the first major obstacle in post-contract cooperation. Two problems surfaced. First, cataloging practices varied between the two libraries. For example, Ouachita does not classify periodicals, Henderson does; Henderson stopped using accession numbers several years ago, Ouachita still does. Second a 25% to 35% overlap existed in the two libraries' holdings, which necessitated a choice of which library's OCLC record to use.

Choosing from duplicate OCLC records was

one of the first compromises in merging the databases. The catalogers at Henderson and Ouachita had only been at their posts since 1985 and 1986 respectively, and luckily were unaware of all the cataloging nuances that had preceded them onto the OCLC tapes. Everyone was aware, however, that Ouachita's previous cataloger had been at her post since 1961, while Henderson had employed a number of different catalogers during that period, and that Henderson had at one time employed a music cataloger. This history, coupled with the current catalogers' collegial working relationship, fostered quick decisions.

In resolving duplicate OCLC records, the catalogers decided to use Ouachita's record for monographs and keep intact their accession numbers in the 590 field. Henderson's serials records would preserve their classification numbers in the MARC record. Henderson's OCLC records for music scores, sound recordings, maps, and other media materials got the nod, because much of that work had been done by the music librarian and because Ouachita had cataloged fewer items in these formats. Finally, Ouachita's archival materials records were chosen since Henderson had few items in this format.

In retrospect, this resolution of duplicate OCLC records into one database could have been a major stumbling block if either cataloger had insisted that his or her institution's cataloging was superior, or if one had worried about minute cataloging details in the OCLC records. Fortunately, neither of these scenarios eventuated. Common sense and cooperation prevailed. However, this area has the potential to cause major problems for multiple libraries sharing an automated system.

Circulation protocol was another major issue requiring compromise. From the beginning, both libraries had insisted on maintaining their individual loan and fine structures, and had sought a system which would allow them to "cooperate separately." The CLSI circulation system allowed each library to establish an "agency" or "agencies" for different collections, and to have a number of unique parameters for each library. Each library could determine its own loan periods, fine rates, and delinquency thresholds.[3]

The libraries did have to agree on several system-wide circulation parameters, including the text of overdue notices, as well as the timing of any grace period before fines would begin to accru and those notices would be sent. Previously, HSU Library effectively loaned for the entire semester, charged no fines, and was quite lenient in its identification of overdue items; OBU Library loaned for two weeks, charged a daily fine, and vigorously pursued overdues. Even a relatively short grace period meant a relaxing of OBU's circulation policy but a sharp restriction of HSU's. Some of the HSU librarians expressed concern at an abrupt change to a more stringent circulation policy, while noting that the current policy might be too lenient. After much discussion, the grace period was set at two days -- longer than the OBU preference but shorter than the four or five days preferred by the Henderson librarians.

The timing of notices was tied to printing. The CLSI system can print three overdues and one billing notice, as well as hold and recall notices. The text of all notices must be system-wide, which requires wording "generic" enough for the libraries to share them. (See below).

Huie Library
Henderson St. Un.
1100 Henderson Street
Arkadelphia, AR 71923

Question? Call/stop by the library

HSU Q 2 1864 00000 1457 1 023966666 AN
YEHL, ROBERT F.
HSU BOX 7541
ARKADELPHIA, AR 71923

5/11/90 RECALL NOTICE PAGE 1
Another patron needs the following item(s). Please return immediately.

3 1864 00476 8091 e 5/30/90
Book
973.927092 N817w
973.927092 N817w
What I saw at the revolution: a political life in

OBU used the first and third, HSU the second and billing notices. The first notice was to print after an item was overdue three days, the second after four, the third after seven, and the billing notice after eleven days. In order for the system to print the second overdue notice it must print the first one, which means that many notices are printed unnecessarily (although HSU uses the first notice to notify faculty of their overdues). In this area, libraries use more paper to ease the actual paperwork. Both libraries have gained greater control over overdues and fine notices, and bills are sent more quickly. Again, HSU

librarians expressed concern that bills would be sent to patrons eleven days after a book became overdue, since the manual checkout system patrons could "slip through" for considerably longer. Yet, HSU patrons have displayed no adverse reactions to these tightened borrowing regulations.

Patron categories and circulation statistics presented additional problems. A list of OBU and HSU patron categories was devised to incorporate different borrowing privileges. HSU and OBU graduate and undergraduate students constituted one category, faculty and staff a second, faculty and staff dependents a third, and community patrons a fourth. OBU requested a separate category for students' dependents. Based on a mix of these categories and the types of materials being borrowed, each library had to extend or limit borrowing privileges to different categories. For example, each library's community cards previously were good at only that library; now they are accepted system-wide, though the number of community loans does not seem to have increased substantially for either library. Community patrons seem to have a "library of preference" as casual users. Also books can be borrowed by inhabitants of either campus, but recordings are only available to respective faculties.

Circulation statistics likewise required consensus because of system limitations. Statistical categories to aggregate circulations (e.g., 200-209, 210-219, 220-229) had to be devised. Fortunately the system offered some 240 of these categories, so while some categories overlap, each library has a few that are distinctly its own. Additionally, each library had to decide on an interval to compile circulation statistics: daily, weekly, or monthly. HSU had compiled statistics weekly, OBU daily. The two libraries eventually agreed that monthly statistics would suffice.

Online!

In June, 1989, after two years of planning, working and waiting, the circulation system was fully functional, and -- after testing -- came on line. The online public access catalog (OPAC) was the next module scheduled for implementation. In part because of the long wait, and in part to drum up enthusiasm for a "grand opening," the JEC sponsored a contest, open to all faculty, staff and students on the two campuses (except librarians), to name what had come to be known as "the electronic link." A committee, composed of a librarian, faculty member, and student from each campus and chaired by the Director of the JEC, selected LINUS (Library Information University System) from almost one-hundred entries.

With the name selected and system tested, the OPAC faced an early November unveiling. At this point, certain administrators raised a "major" issue: which university's name would go first on LINUS's welcome screen? The librarians solved the dilemma by placing the Joint Educational Consortium first on the screen, followed by the school names on a separate line. This decision obviated the necessity for changing the welcome screen weekly to alternate the names. As LINUS becomes more of a fixture at the two libraries, some adjustment in the welcome screen may be made. Happily, the cooperation between the two universities that brought the system to fruition was stronger than the importance of the order of a few words.

Conclusions

The experience of the two universities illustrates that two libraries can implement an automated library system almost as easily as one, even when one is a private and the other a public institution. Most problems seem generic rather than unique to this situation.

Some of the problems of a joint venture obviously are not generic to automation. Cooperation is one such special case. A rubric under which cooperation can be subsumed, like the JEC, is decidedly helpful, especially if the Director is simultaneously committed to the importance of libraries and willing to be helpful rather than attempting to run the project from a basis of ignorance. It allows two entities to act collectively in order to enjoy the economics of scale, and to avoid needless regulations upon one or the other. The decade of previous cooperation helped the project, but much credit goes to the library staffs whose commitment to the project overshadowed institutional loyalties and rivalries. This commitment allowed the project to succeed with a minimum of rancor and dissension.

Finally, automation offers opportunities which reach beyond the project itself. A successful automation project must rest securely upon a base of self-knowledge. In a setting where inadequate funding and staffing make daily operation a real challenge, self-examination takes second place. Without an outside impetus toward a self-study, the constant evaluation which hones service to its finest edge is often ignored. This automation project provided an opportunity for both libraries to examine their policies and identify areas for improvement. It also led to the discovery of new ways to work together in order to better serve their users.

REFERENCES

[1]John Drabenstott, ed. "Truth in Automating: the Multi-Library Experience," *Library Hi Tech* 7(3) 1989, pp. 53-68.

[2]"Vendor Proposal Evaluation Scoring Priority Worksheet," (Austin, Tex.: R. Walton & Associates).

[3]Ouachita charges fines; Henderson does not. Delinquency thresholds are determined by the number of items overdue before the system identifies the patron as delinquent. For the system to make patrons delinquent, HSU Library charges patrons a nominal fine of one cent a day, which is not collected and always forgiven.