

Gwen M. Gregory

# For the duration

## Creating a collection maintenance unit in technical services

**T**he University of Illinois-Chicago is an ARL member library with a collection of 2.3 million volumes. While we have access to many electronic resources, we still have a substantial collection of physical items to manage in several buildings. Many of those volumes are held at the Richard J. Daley Library on our east campus, where nonhealth-related academic programs are located. Late in 2015, the head of the Daley Circulation Department announced his retirement after more than 30 years in that position. The department was a typical academic library circulation unit, including circulation desk, shelving, reserves, and interlibrary loan. Most of the two dozen staff members had been with the department for many years.

I am head of the Resource Management and Acquisition (RAM) Department, which could be described as our technical services department (cataloging, acquisitions, serials, electronic resources management). I was asked to step in and supervise parts of the circulation department while we recruited a new department head. I worked with the interlibrary loan and stacks maintenance units, while a colleague took on the reserves and circulation desk units. We served as co-managers of the department for eight months, during which time we restructured the department in several ways. One major change was creating a new Collection Maintenance Unit, which was added to the RAM Department.

I had considered new ways to manage our physical collections for some time. I was originally inspired by a discussion with Richard

Kong about the reorganization of the Skokie Public Library, where he is now the director. He described how a single department was responsible for physical items through their whole life cycle, from purchasing through cataloging, processing, shelving, and finally withdrawal. It made sense to have the people doing these tasks work together closely. In our earlier organization, shelving, shifting, and repair were managed in one department while cataloging, processing, and bindery were managed in another. Combining these tasks in one department would surely encourage cooperation. When I got the opportunity to work with the circulation department units, I was determined to investigate how such a setup could work in our academic library setting.

I found little mention of this type of organization in the professional literature, although a 2011 article about a reorganization joining circulation and reference<sup>1</sup> presented some interesting ideas. I began by learning more about the tasks of the current units through talking with staff and studying their workflow. I also looked at jobs done by other parts of the circulation department. Repair of items from the circulating collection had ended up in the circulation department after staff changes some years earlier, and was

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done by a few staff members with little professional oversight. On the other hand, some tasks of the current units were clearly able to be combined with those of other units of the circulation department, such as staffing the desks at the entry doors and monitoring the building during the hours of operation. Working closely with my comanager and with current staff members, I developed a new model for a smaller Collection Maintenance Unit to be added to the RAM Department, incorporating four staff members from circulation and one from RAM as well as 15 to 20 student workers.

The new Collection Maintenance Unit is responsible for shelving, shifting, withdrawals, management of collections in warehouse and storage spaces, repairs, bindery, and processing new materials for the Daley Library. Some of these

tasks were previously done in circulation, some were done in RAM, and some were done jointly.

For example, items for withdrawal were often pulled by circulation staff and delivered to RAM, where RAM staff removed items from online systems. The Collection Maintenance Unit incorporates the smaller Database Maintenance Unit from RAM, which focused on processing items and withdrawals and had one full-time staff member and five

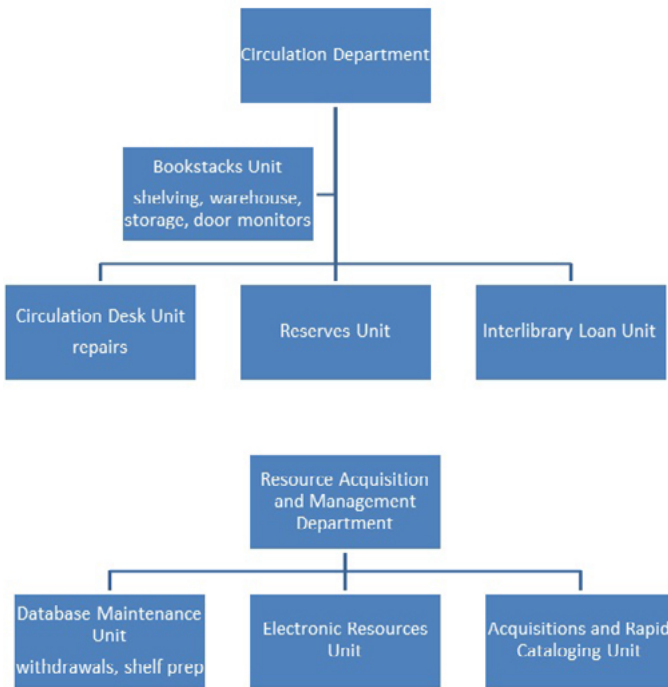
student workers. We now have more staff to work on these tasks, as needed, as well as a larger pool of students who can be trained for a variety of tasks. We are training more students for shelving so that they can do this at crunch times like the end of the semester.

As the RAM department head, I supervise the Collection Maintenance Unit directly. Other units in the RAM department handle the purchase and cataloging of new materials, so we cover the full life cycle of many items. Tasks that remain with the Daley Circulation Department include staffing the desks, assignment and management of library

carrels, and monitoring the floors.

The transition took place in August 2016, just before the beginning of the fall semester. Four staff members moved to the RAM work area on the second floor, which provided physical distance between them and

their old work location and colleagues. This enabled them to focus on their new duties. The reshelving area, where materials accumulate for shelving as they are returned, remained on the first floor behind the circulation desk. We had four empty workstations in RAM due to previous elimination of positions, so we had ample desk space. We created a dedicated repair area, with two tables, a number of shelves, and special repair equipment and supplies.



Previous Circulation Department organization.

We initiated a new workflow for repairs, which are now either delivered to the second floor by circulation staff or picked up by RAM in the first floor circulation area. We created a paper slip to enhance communication between departments, enable monitoring of treatment options, and minimize time out of circulation. One library clerk has taken over most of the repair work, and other staff members have been trained to perform repairs when needed. None of them previously did these tasks. I have previous experience with book repair and preservation, so I led this effort and trained the staff. For a few months, we got together each morning to review items needing repair and to discuss the best options. There was a backlog of items, which gave us plenty to review.

After this initial training period, the staff members are now able to diagnose and repair most items immediately, and they bring questions to me. We have started sending a limited number of items for rebinding at a commercial bindery which we had not done at all for the past several years. Items needing repair now move through the workflow quickly, either being fixed, sent to the bindery, or routed to subject liaisons for review if they are unfixable or may no longer be needed. We repair rush items immediately and are careful not to develop new backlogs.

Shelving is now done almost totally by stu-

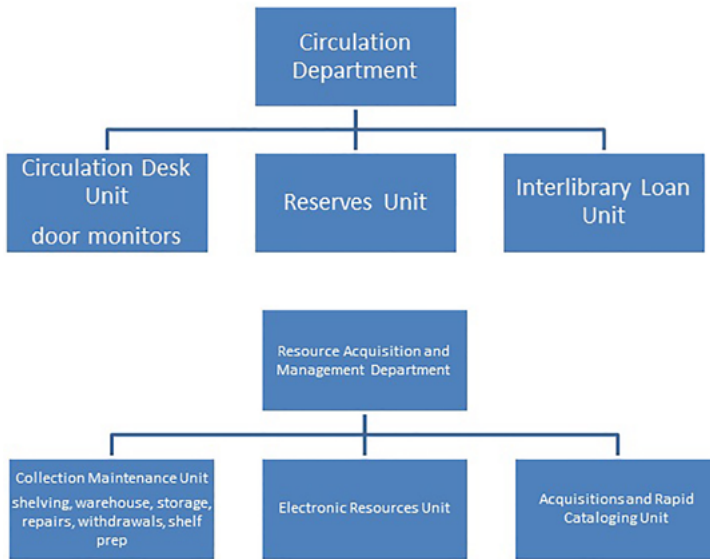
dents; full time staff did much of it previously. This saves on staffing costs and frees staff members to do more complex work, such as repairs. As part of the reorganization, we were able to eliminate two lower level staff positions by shifting their desk and shelving duties to students. Staff members direct students in their shelving and shifting work.

As in many academic libraries, circulation of physical items has been gradually declining for some years. Not as many staff and students are needed for shelving as in the past, and the volume of returns is not so great that we need to have people shelving at night and

through the weekend. The unit staff work during business hours Monday through Friday. We are currently considering whether we need to do any weekend shelving.

These staff members

involved have reacted positively to these changes, for the most part. All are long-term civil service employees at the library who have worked in their jobs for some years. Several of them expressed specific interest in taking on new duties as part of the reorganization. Staff are still adjusting to their new roles, including letting go of some responsibilities that have stayed with the circulation department. As their manager, I have helped them share their thoughts and ideas with the new head of the circulation department. I continue to share their comments myself, as



New Circulation Department organization.

well. However, some things have changed, and staff in the Collection Maintenance Unit will need to let go of their old ideas and responsibilities. This is challenging for some. I have engaged the staff members in new projects to encourage their exploration, as well as to distract them from focusing on their previous duties. Because the reshelving area remains on the first floor, staff members must visit it several times each day to monitor how much shelving needs to be done and then assign it to students. We are exploring other ways to monitor reshelving needs, such as placing a webcam in the area.

In the next few months, staff members in the Collection Maintenance Unit will need to take several steps to become more effective, now that everyone is accustomed to being part of the RAM Department. First of all, we need to expand cross-training, both for students and full-time staff. When student workers are trained to do multiple tasks, we can more effectively assign them.

For example, much more shelving is done at the end of the semester. At that time we can use everyone who is trained to get it done quickly. However, that is only five or six weeks out of the year. The two groups of students should merge into one bigger pool that can be used for many things. We also need to continue cross-training staff. I will work with the two senior staff members in the unit to plan cross-training activities for the next year. I anticipate that we will have many important future projects for the unit,

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*(“Librarians as campus partners,” continues from page 417)*

CRIC opens the door to potentially uncomfortable, but meaningful, conversations about power structures in the classroom and in the university more broadly. Be willing to listen and to learn from others on campus, including those who are in other unique roles, such as disability services and student groups. Expect any outcomes generated during such a collaboration, such as a guide, to be organic and iterative. Be ready to keep learning.

such as the withdrawal of duplicate copies from our collection.

In addition, staff members who recently joined RAM from circulation need to be integrated into the social life of their new department. I am looking for ways to get them to participate more in departmental parties and other activities. Our departmental retreat in January 2017 was an occasion for everyone to get better acquainted and understand each other’s work.

The creation of the Collection Maintenance Unit brought together a team to care for and monitor our physical library collections throughout their life cycle. We now work more closely on projects like shifting, withdrawals, and bindery. There is a better process for determining and completing repairs for the circulating collection, with increased accountability at the different steps in the process. We also have more staff and student workers who can be deployed for various collection projects, as needed. This will improve our ability to handle the library collections in the future, making the best materials available for our users and managing physical library collections effectively throughout their life cycle.

## Note

1. Ken Johnson, Susan Jennings, and Sue Hisle, “Ending the Turf War: Circulation, Reference, and Instruction on One Team,” *Journal of Access Services* 8, no. 3 (2011): 107–24. *ZZ*

## Notes

1. Portland State University, “Let Knowledge Serve the City: Strategic Plan 2016–20,” Portland State University, accessed June 26th, 2017, <https://www.pdx.edu/president/sites/www.pdx.edu/president/files/StrategicPlan2016-4.pdf>.
2. Geneva Gay, “Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching,” *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53 no. 2 (2002): 106
3. <http://guides.library.pdx.edu/culturallyresponsivecurriculum>. *ZZ*