MYTHBUSTING:
THE TECHNICAL SERVICES GENERALIST

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Hi. I’m Jenica.

I’m 41, and I’ve been working in academic libraries since I was 18 years old. My post-MLS path:

★ 1st job, Technical Services Librarian on a staff of 3 professionals

★ 1st part-time job, Training Consultant for a multi-type consortium

★ Next, Collection Development and Cataloging Team Leader on a staff of 10 professionals

★ Now, Director of Libraries and Archives, with a staff of 25 (plus a dozen more in the Center for Applied Learning, which includes faculty-student research.)
WHAT I’M TALKING ABOUT TODAY

- SUNY Potsdam as a case study – a failed one.
- Responding to that failure 1: Expectations.
- Responding to that failure 2: Job ads.
- Responding to that failure 3: Profession-wide issues
- Notes from the field: concerns and perspectives from SUNY librarians
- What do we do with those perspectives: Strategies and questions
I think starting as a generalist was the best thing I ever did.

**SOME DEFINITIONS:**

- **Generalists:**
  - Technical Services Librarian.
  - Cataloging and Serials Librarian.
  - Collection Development and Acquisitions Librarian.

- **Specialists:**
  - Electronic Resources Librarian.
  - Cataloging Librarian.
  - Catalog Librarian, Music Library
  - Digitization Librarian.
  - Scholarly Communication Librarian.
  - Research Data Librarian.
SUNY POTSDAM'S STORY
I NOW WORK AT A SMALL 4 YEAR COLLEGE.

HERE’S WHAT’S AHEAD.

➡ developing our 1st credit bearing information literacy course in response to new GenEds
➡ finishing targeted renovations to enhance the usability of our public spaces
➡ refining our Serials Solutions and EBSCO Discovery Service implementations
➡ accelerating our Patron Driven Acquisitions and Purchase On Demand projects
➡ prepping for the shared SUNY-wide LSP upgrade and migration in 2018
➡ responding to the FDLP’s growing discontent with uncatalogued gov docs collections
➡ shifting print journals to Empire Shared Collection
➡ digitizing in-demand archival collections
BUT THINGS AREN’T WORKING.

I’VE FAILED TWO SEARCHES SO FAR.

First problem:

Institutional politics interfering with good sense.
BUT THINGS AREN'T WORKING.

I'VE FAILED TWO SEARCHES SO FAR.

Second problem:

What do we actually need, and are we being realistic about what we can expect?
“PEOPLE NATURALLY WANT TO BECOME EXPERTS, SO THAT MEANS EITHER METADATA OR E-RESOURCES, BUT NOT BOTH. IF YOU WANT QUALITY APPLICANTS, YOU HAVE TO ACCEPT THAT THEY WANT TO SPECIALIZE.”

Audience feedback, Midwinter 2015
What were we really expecting of our tech services positions?

It’s a double-edged sword.

We need a cataloger to manage our operations, and we need a serials librarian to manage our discovery tools.

But we want OERS developed, and research data management is on our faculty radar, and we know they need copyright and scholarly communication expertise.

The first two needs don’t slot neatly with the last three desires in our cultural conversation as librarians.

(You can only be a jack-of-so-many-trades!)
First solution:

Two jobs from one.

What doesn’t bend breaks.
But when we bent to institutional will, it broke our staffing.

We demanded two positions be filled.
IN AN ATTEMPT TO REPLACE THE SKILLED LIBRARIANS WE’VE LABELED DINOSAURS, WE’RE HUNTING FOR A NEW AND ELUSIVE BREED OF LIBRARIANS: UNICORNS.
Second solution:

Advertise differently, and require different things.

The old model of stiff academic job descriptions wasn't working for SUNY POTSDAM.

We completely rewrote our ads.
SO WE STOPPED ASKING FOR A UNICORN, AND ADVERTISED FOR A LIBRARIAN.

★ An MLS

★ Sufficient experience in libraries to be a successful part of the team
AND THEN WE EXPLAINED WHAT WE HOPED THEY'D JOIN US IN DOING

As a part of this team and community, the Coordinator will provide leadership and vision for the Libraries’ management of content in all formats, and will be responsible for access to library materials, including metadata creation in support of print, digital, and Open Access collections. Technical Services currently encompasses acquisitions, cataloging, serials, and discovery, and will expand to include digitization of local collections. The Coordinator will supervise one librarian and two Library Clerks, and will be a key member of the Management Team of the Libraries.
AND THEN WE EXPLAINED WHAT WE HOPED THEY'D JOIN US IN DOING

We expect that the Coordinator will provide leadership for the following projects or types of projects:

- **Migrating to a consortial LSP in 2018 from a local implementation of ALEPH 500**
- **Engaging our campus with Open Educational Resources and developing a sustainability plan for OERs**
- **Supporting technical services staff in purchase, cataloging, and maintenance of materials for the F.W. Crumb main library, and the Julia E. Crane music library**
- **Mentoring the professional development of a new Electronic Resources and Serials librarian**
- **Integrating patron-driven or purchase-on-demand processes into current processes**
AND I WAS AS HONEST AS POSSIBLE ABOUT WHO WE ARE.

Because we are aware that we are a historically white and historically regional college that has an increasingly diverse population, we are working to understand our differences as we integrate students from beautiful rural upstate New York with students from the vibrant urban environments of downstate New York, preparing all of our community members to live global lives.

The Coordinator will join 9 library faculty and 6 support staff who include a mix of “lifers” who have settled in Potsdam for the foreseeable future, and new folks who will learn from us, do good work here, and move on in their careers better for the experience – and we welcome the diversity of perspectives that both kinds of professionals bring to our campus.

Library faculty are also expected and encouraged to engage with the academic and student life of the campus through committee, teaching, or other service opportunities, and current library faculty have built a strong reputation as valued members of our community through these kinds of service engagements.
HOW DO WE PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE?

Third solution:

Find the generalists.

WE AREN’T SURE THEY’RE OUT THERE ANYMORE, HONESTLY. BUT IF NO ONE LOOKS FOR THEM WE’LL NEVER KNOW. SO WE TOOK A LEAP OF FAITH.

AND WE’RE TRYING TO BE PART OF THE SOLUTION.
FINDING THE GENERALISTS

WE NEED THEM.
SUNY’S TECH SERVICES LIBRARIANS ARE ADAMANT ON THIS.

- “We need people/librarians who can see the Tech Services Forest’s ecosystem AND its trees.”
  ~ Head, Technical Services

- “Technical Services generalists serve a unique purpose as they can participate anywhere in the workflow and thus see “the bigger picture”.”
  ~ Technical Services Librarian
FINDING THE GENERALISTS

WE NEED THEM.

▸ “Tech Services work is far too interconnected within today’s LSPs to function effectively when specialists are only focusing on a tiny subset of user needs.”
   ~ Head, Technical Services

▸ “Technical services is going to turn into “All Things Back End” and for smaller campuses like ours, this will be tasked to one person.”
   ~ Systems and E-Resources Librarian, self described jack-of-all-trades
FINDING THE GENERALISTS

WE’RE WORRIED.

“A big issue is development of leaders who can make planning and policy decisions. ... Keeping up with rapid and continual changes in standards and technology is difficult and time consuming, creating the problem of production vs. professional development.”
~ Metadata and Authority Control Librarian

“We don’t have any. Our director doesn’t see the value in having such a position. They would prefer to outsource things like cataloging.”
~ Resource Sharing Librarian

“Can’t wait to retire!”
~ Head of Cataloging and Metadata

“Not optimistic. I’m retiring soon.”
~ Head of Bibliographic Services
FINDING THE GENERALISTS

HIRING TRENDS VALIDATE OUR CONCERN.
ZERO RESPONDENTS TO MY DIRECTORS’ SURVEY WERE HAPPY WITH THE QUALITY OF THE POOL IN THEIR RECENT SEARCHES.

▸ “The pools [for recent searches] were very small... We don’t particularly live in a library-poor area, with one library school just 45 minutes away.”
   ~ Library Director

▸ “We are experiencing the same situation with our vacant systems position. We’ve searched it multiple times.”
   ~ Library Director

▸ “We need more of them. Recently filled a position, all the top candidates, for that matter all the candidates that met the requirements, were from out of state. I have never experienced that before for any other library position, to include Director.”
   ~ Library Director, former TS librarian
WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?
"HOW CAN GENERALISTS ACCESS AFFORDABLE TRAINING TO BECOME MORE SPECIALIZED, ESPECIALLY GIVEN THE STRONG DEMAND FOR REFERENCE AND INSTRUCTION WORK AND A MILLION OTHER HATS ONE MUST WEAR AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE?"

Technical Services/Systems Librarian

WE NEED TO NURTURE OUR CURRENT PEOPLE
“ADMINISTRATORS PULL CATALOGERS AWAY TO DO OTHER TASKS WHEN THERE IS NOT EVEN SUFFICIENT TIME TO KEEP UP WITH TECHNICAL SERVICES ISSUES, WORK, AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT. IT MAKES TECHNICAL SERVICES STAFF FEEL THAT THEIR WORK IS NOT CONSIDERED IMPORTANT IN ITS OWN RIGHT.”

Metadata Librarian
SO: BE THE CHANGE
PAY ATTENTION TO OUR CURRENT STAFF RESOURCES

- What do our org charts communicate about the value of technical services work?
- How is leadership developed in our TS staff?
- How is TS scholarship supported and promoted?
- How is professional development handled?
“I’m worried that we’re building systems and services that we will no longer be able to maintain if we do not nurture those who can maintain them.”

A SUNY comprehensive college library director
“I DON’T WANT TO WORK THE REFERENCE DESK, AND IT’S NOT FAIR FOR YOU TO SAY THAT’S UNREASONABLE. I’M A CATALOGER BY CHOICE, AND I’M GOOD AT IT.”

DEFINE “TECHNICAL SERVICES.”

Audience feedback, Midwinter 2015
PUBLICIZE THE CHANGE!

PROVIDE BETTER EXAMPLES TO OUR FIELD

- better articulate the core value of technical services work to the easier, out front parts of librarianship
- push our TS folks out of their comfort zones, even when they don’t want to go.
- Make sure the uncomfortable zone has a variety of seats available.
- Don’t neglect broad professional development for mid-career librarians.
WE HAVE TO LOOK AHEAD

“WE SHOULDN’T THINK OF TECH SERVICES AS JUST FOR BOOKS AND MEDIA. FRANKLY, IN OUR SHOP METADATA DESCRIPTION FOR IMAGES AND IR CONTENT COULD BE A FULL-TIME JOB.”

A SUNY comprehensive college library director
“MLS students don’t understand the value of a broad technical services position anymore. They see the pieces — cataloging, ScholComm, research data, serials — but not the big picture. We need the big picture.”

SUNY technical services librarian
How do our ads read? Are we engaging and encouraging new professionals to look at us?

Are your TS areas bringing in interns, volunteers, and mentoring student professionals to build the pipeline?

How is TS work included in your publicity strategies? Are you showcasing the cool stuff? In doing so, are you linking it to the base principles of cataloging?

Are we articulating the value of TS work to the rest of the services libraries offer?
WE’RE REALLY NERVOUS. BUT WE’RE COMPLICIT IN OUR CURRENT DILEMMA. AND WE DON’T HAVE TO BE. WE CAN CHANGE THINGS. FARMERS WANTED
WE HAVE EVERYTHING WE NEED TO GROW OUR OWN PROFESSIONALS, IF WE CONFRONT THE CHALLENGE HEAD ON.
THIS IS GWYNETH. SHE'S 3.
I INCLUDED HER FOR A REASON.

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING.

CAN I ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS?