

## Other Duties as Assigned: Reaching New Heights Through Changes

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### **Abstract**

One of the primary aspects of librarianship is how our roles can and will change. Melissa Brooks, Michelle Colquitt, and Kayla Whitehead discuss change management in their new positions, including changes from smaller institutions to larger ones and into positions with increasing responsibilities at the same institution. In addition, we discuss strategies we have found helpful while undergoing great periods of change. Our perspectives include managerial (Brooks), career-change (Colquitt) and moving from a sole practitioner to team member (Whitehead). This session focuses on theory-versus-practice regarding what we learned in library school versus the realities of working in academic libraries. We examine change management and the growth mindset—particularly in planning projects versus their actual execution and implementation—as well as staffing levels and their impact on workflows.

**Keywords:** professional development, electronic resources management, personnel management, growth mindset

## **Introduction**

Learning curves abound when you attain your dream position in the library world, be it going to a much larger library in a more specialized technical services role, becoming a manager tasked with reorganizing a department, or transitioning from a solo electronic resources librarian position to a team-based approach to electronic resources management. In this session, Melissa Brooks, head of technical services at the University of Southern Mississippi Library, Michelle Colquitt, the continuing resources & government information management librarian at Clemson University Library, and Kayla Whitehead, the electronic resources acquisitions librarian at the University of North Florida, recounted stories about growing into their professional roles.

### **Briefly describe your journey into your present role.**

Colquitt reported she had faced a long and winding journey into librarianship. While not new to librarianship, Colquitt reported it took her an inordinate amount of time to reach the place and library position of her dreams. During library school, Colquitt worked as a juvenile probation parole specialist II with the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice at the Athens-Clarke County Juvenile Court for ten and a half years. As you can imagine, this work was very emotionally taxing, and while rewarding, Colquitt wanted a change and sought library education and training. Colquitt did not arrive at the decision to become a librarian without a great deal of thought and careful consideration. Colquitt said her favorite job was working as a student library assistant at the Athens (Georgia) Technical College Library. This position allowed Colquitt to blossom and grow out of her extremely introverted shell

while helping her learn that she loved helping the public in a bustling technical college library setting.

Colquitt graduated from Valdosta State University's online master of library and information science program in 2011, at the height of the Great Recession. To become more marketable, Colquitt enrolled in Georgia Southern University's master of education in instructional technology, graduating in 2017. Colquitt quit her full-time probation officer position and embarked on a practicum in the Jefferson (GA) High School Media Center while working part-time as a librarian at Georgia Piedmont Technical College. While working at the practicum, Colquitt quickly learned she was not suited to working as a school library media specialist. Because of her experience working part-time at the technical college library, Colquitt was hired as a paraprofessional with Gwinnett Technical College.

Colquitt graduated from Valdosta State in 2011 and did not work full-time in the library world again until late 2017. Furthermore, Colquitt reported that because of the dearth of library jobs in her hometown, she had to drive over 100 miles roundtrip daily to the metro Atlanta area for employment in this position. Even though Colquitt faced adversity to attain her goal of becoming a librarian, she stated she would do it all over again.

Whitehead reported that she came to e-resources librarianship later than her peers. Similar to her presenting colleagues, she had decided she did not want to teach. After finishing a master's program at Webster University in 2008, she decided not to pursue a PhD in the field of political science. She had been working in academic libraries since 2004 and accepted a library staff position at Loyola University New Orleans in 2008.

At Loyola, Whitehead began her work managing print serial subscriptions and stated this work naturally led to electronic resources work as the university library was moving many print journal subscriptions to an online format. This allowed her to "get in on the ground floor" during a time of significant change in libraries. By the time Whitehead left Loyola, she was mostly managing electronic resources

and continued to gain experience in the areas of troubleshooting, usage analysis, and budget management.

Whitehead accepted a position at Brandeis University and moved to the Boston area in 2016. She worked full-time and attended library school during her three years in Boston. Working and going to school full-time was a challenge, however, this was a period of significant growth. She continued to learn about electronic resources management at Brandeis and gained expertise using Alma, a library management system. With Alma, e-resources management and acquisitions are often intertwined and learning the connections between those workflows proved to be advantageous for her career later.

In 2019, Whitehead accepted her first official professional role and began negotiating pricing and licensing terms. In 2021, she joined Bard College as the Electronic Resources and Reference Librarian. Part of a small but dedicated staff of librarians, she was often the only person managing the broad spectrum of tasks related to electronic resources management. In 2022, Whitehead joined the e-resources team at the University of North Florida and began work focused solely on the licensing and renewals of electronic resources.

Brooks reported that her journey in librarianship started about fifteen years ago as a cataloging librarian at Morehead State University, a regional academic library in Eastern Kentucky. From there, she moved to West Virginia University (WVU) in Morgantown, WV, where her goal was to move into leadership roles. During her six-year tenure at WVU, Brooks moved from a cataloging librarian position to head of metadata, and eventually to head of metadata and data services. Here she took advantage of leadership opportunities in regional library organizations and built leadership skills.

In 2019, Brooks accepted the position of metadata and discovery librarian at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Unfortunately, her tenure in this role was short-lived due to the pandemic and retrenchments in the university system.

Brooks moved to the University of Southern Mississippi in March 2021. In this role, Brooks realized her goal of leading the technical

services department at an R1 university. In her tenure, Brooks reorganized the department, carving out units for collection management & acquisitions, electronic resources, and cataloging. During this reorganization, Brooks also completed her work on a master of business administration.

### **You transitioned from a different type of role. What tactics did you use to gain knowledge of serial cataloging?**

AuQ2

AuQ3

Originally an electronic resources librarian, Colquitt reported she had a steep learning curve when transitioning to the world of serials and government documents cataloging. First and foremost, Colquitt said she trusted her team members as every team member had twenty-five years of experience, and it would be ludicrous to think she had more knowledge and experience than they do. Colquitt reported that while she had access to her predecessor for a limited period, she mainly joined library-related organizations, sought mentoring opportunities, and attended courses to gain skills in serials cataloging. During Colquitt's daylong interview with Clemson University Libraries, she had to craft a presentation for the entire Libraries community with the prompt "Discuss your approach toward both print and electronic serials management, including the impact that an ILS of your choice has on your workflows. Who are the key players, and what are your goals as the manager of this process?" Coming from an electronic resource management background and only supervising one copy cataloger, Colquitt indicated her reliance on the "NASIG Core Competencies for Print Serials Management" and the "NASIG Core Competencies for Electronic Resources Librarians," as she relied on these documents during the preparation for her faculty interview. Colquitt believes mentioning these documents helped her receive a job offer.

Upon hire, Colquitt joined several organizations such as NASIG, the South Carolina Library Association (SCLA), the American Library

Association, and Online Audiovisual Catalogers, Inc. (OLAC), just to name a few. Colquitt wanted to join these organizations to learn more about the profession and forge connections with like-minded catalogers and technical services professionals.

Colquitt also sought as much professional development about cataloging as possible, including enrolling in several courses related to learning the finer points of cataloging. Colquitt related that during the coursework for her second master's degree, she learned about the growth mindset.

### **You mentioned "growth mindset." Please tell us more, and how you've applied it to your practice of librarianship.**

During her second master's degree, Colquitt learned about Dr. Carol Dweck's growth mindset theory.<sup>1</sup> The growth mindset theory posits that an individual can grow their skills through hard work by embracing a "not yet" mentality.<sup>2</sup> Colquitt shared that her second master's degree taught her about the growth mindset and to choose to rely upon it, how to evaluate information organization tools, and that she did not want to be a teacher.

Colquitt related an anecdote about her favorite "lullaby" when she was growing up, "I'm Just an Old Chunk of Coal," a country song from 1981 written by Billy Joe Shaver. The protagonist of this song is an exemplar of the growth mindset. In the lyrics, Shaver wrote:

I'm gonna learn the best way to walk  
Gonna search and find a better way to talk  
I'm gonna spit and polish my old rough edged self  
Till I get rid of every single flaw<sup>3</sup>

Colquitt related that she is continuously on the path to becoming a better librarian by polishing her rough edges to become a diamond one day.

Colquitt thinks of librarianship through the lens of seeking opportunities to learn and grow. She wants to take advantage of every opportunity she has both for personal gratification and, more importantly, to meet the requirements of the tenure track. Colquitt stated that using the growth mindset in her current work—transitioning from electronic resources management to serials and government documents cataloging—looks like attending as many professional development courses and webinars as possible while also thinking about how to learn and grow in the areas of research, service, and librarianship.

### **Colquitt's Pearltrees Tool**

Colquitt related that she had a course during her second master's degree coursework that tremendously helped her learn more about assessing information-sharing tools. During this coursework, she learned about the Pearltrees tool for information organization. Colquitt believes Pearltrees is a superior tool for information organization because it can create and manage hierarchical relationships of information. For example, Colquitt organized tools she has bookmarked around each element of the "NASIG Core Competencies for Print Serials Management."

**You went from a solo e-resources librarian to part of an e-resources team at a larger university. What are some of the challenges you faced? What helped you navigate those challenges?**

Whitehead moved from a small private college to a larger state university. She was prepared for needing to manage more complex resources and a larger budget. However, she was not prepared for the communication challenges that come with joining a team. She explained, "When you are the only person doing the work, you do not have to

update people about what you are working on. In a team environment, you have to learn how to work together, and you have figure out who is doing what.” Clarifying job roles helped with communication challenges during that time. If jobs overlap a little, it’s helpful to check-in with each other. The team utilized project management software and Microsoft Teams to ease communication.

### **How was managing the change from a team to the one left covering for a team similar and different for you?**

In January 2023, both the department head and the acquisitions coordinator left for other opportunities. The team at the University of North Florida (UNF) was cut in half and Whitehead was left with the responsibility for most acquisitions tasks, which she needed to quickly remember how to do. Luckily, she had done these tasks in Alma before at Brandeis University. However, she had to spend time re-teaching herself how to do these tasks. Also, best practices vary by institution and Whitehead wanted to learn the best practices for acquisitions at UNF.

The department was able to hire two new staff positions to handle acquisitions tasks. Whitehead trained the new staff, and she was grateful for the documentation created by former colleagues. Her remaining colleague on the e-resources team was also helpful with streamlining e-books workflows and training new staff. Whitehead and the rest of the e-resources team were able to finish the fiscal year in strong shape, and a new department head was also hired and started in mid-June.

### **When looking at the work that is encompassed in technical services, how do you envision each part working together?**

Brooks envisioned each unit of technical services to function as an integral part of the whole. Each unit’s work is to thoughtfully provide



patron access to resources. Brooks envisioned the work to move from ordering materials in acquisitions and collection management to either the creation and remediation of metadata or the activation and management of electronic resources.

Brooks also commented that as more people and responsibilities are added to the process, there is a tendency to build silos instead of collaborative workflows. Brooks envisioned the department growing through the work, trying out new ideas, and even revisiting older processes to identify the best workflows possible. Brooks also wanted the environment to be a comfortable space for idea-sharing and exploration.

Brooks indicated that she expects people in the department to work together to find solutions. Occasionally she had to facilitate those conversations, but now staff seek opportunities to talk and collaboratively solve problems.

### **How did you reorganize the department to better fit the needs of all library stakeholders?**

When Brooks started at the University of Southern Mississippi, the department structure consisted of cataloging and acquisitions. Five people were dedicated to cataloging workflows, three to acquisitions, and one person to preservation. Brooks found that each area's work was siloed and did not move resources to patrons effectively.

After more review, Brooks determined that electronic resources in the original structure were an afterthought. The role moved through several people as extra duties. Electronic resources needed to become a stronger focus in the department. Brooks also determined that collection management needed to be part of technical services. Collection management drives all purchasing and selection in the library and dictates the work of cataloging and electronic resources.

Brooks reorganized the department to consist of four areas: collection management and acquisitions, electronic resources, cataloging,

and preservation. She focused on providing each unit with a librarian lead with support staff. Brooks reallocated staffing from cataloging and acquisitions to create the electronic resources unit and successfully moved collection management to technical services.

### **Can you describe the importance of communication in change management?**

Clemson University Libraries has been in the throes of change since at least 2019, well before Colquitt was hired. The changes included several key retirements, the COVID-19 pandemic, going live with Alma during the early days of the pandemic, a mini-department reorganization, and a full Libraries-wide reorganization. Colquitt mentioned that Libraries administrators regularly provide updates, hold regular all-employee meetings, and conduct office hours. Colquitt said she firmly believes in Brene Brown's philosophy that "clear is kind."<sup>4</sup> Through this example, Colquitt said she is very intentional about communicating changes with her team members. Colquitt conducts monthly meetings with her entire team and creates joy and celebration with her team, including work anniversaries and retreats during university breaks (a winter party and kayaking during the summer).

Whitehead said that workflows need to be adapted when team membership changes. For example, maybe the acquisitions staff was only doing a certain task because of understaffing. When there are major staffing changes, it is a good idea to re-examine roles and tasks to ensure equitable workload and workflow efficiency. This can be a challenge because people get used to doing their jobs a certain way. Whitehead believes it is important not to force workflow changes in a "top-down" way. Workflow and workload changes need to come from conversations with staff.

Brooks indicated that communication should be a priority. Communication involves being prepared for questions and knowing there may be an immediate answer. Her goal was to find the answers or address

them in time. When working through change, admitting mistakes, and finding an alternative solution is important. Brooks also said that processes in one organization may not work in another.

Some library staff will not be happy with or willing to accept change. Brooks suggested accepting that people are inflexible and allowing the individual to choose their course and next steps. Recognize that change is not easy and expect to hear that we have always done it this way, or we tried that before and it did not work.

### **How does training and documentation fit into your ideas about communication?**

Colquitt believes training and documentation fit into effective communication. Clemson University Libraries is creating an onboarding course for all new employees. Otherwise, divisions and departments have created homebrewed orientation sessions. Documentation of job duties is another area where clear communication is kind.

Whitehead stressed the importance of having documentation, saying that things need to be written down so they do not continue to live in only one person's brain. However, she addressed some challenges she faced at her institution regarding too much documentation. The shared drive was full of documentation that was no longer relevant. At times, it was a challenge to find the correct version of the documentation she was looking for or to remember where a certain document was located, as there were sometimes multiple versions in different locations. Additionally, Whitehead found some of the training videos that had been created for the department to be lengthy and difficult to watch. There is still a need for more clear and updated documentation.

Brooks focused on the documentation previously used by the technical services department. She stated that the old documentation was out of date and focused on how to complete work in a previous library system. Brooks also encountered missing documentation that, if provided, would have allowed for better transitioning into new roles.

Under Brook's tenure technical services has moved departmental documentation to LibGuides. Brooks stated that the department presents new training documents in Kanban boards, like Trello or Microsoft Planner. Brooks emphasized the positive of moving training from an in-person, labor-intensive process to a relaxed self-paced experience. Brooks believes these transitions have helped communication within the department and moved training responsibilities away from one person.

### **When facing a change, what resources do you utilize in the process of planning or implementation?**

Colquitt stated that data is one of the greatest assessment drivers at Clemson University Libraries, and that this is a great driver of change. Colquitt further mentioned that while we normally like to have project plans while making intentional change, we have recently dealt with factors outside our control., including a flood of our main library and the government documents collection move.

Whitehead discussed wanting to make training videos that are shorter and easier to watch. Some people learn from having written instructions and some people would rather just watch a video and do the task along with the video. "It's good to consider individual differences," Whitehead said. She also discussed an interest in using project planning software such as KanbanFlow or Trello to organize projects and daily tasks. She said it was helpful to have a visual representation of her tasks.

Brooks again focused on technology as a driver in planning. She reiterated her use of Kanban boards and their ease in breaking down tasks.

#### **Audience Questions and Comments:**

The panelists created a Padlet to encourage audience participation and questions. Figure 1 is a screenshot of the Padlet including the following audience questions and comments. The Padlet is available at: <https://tinyurl.com/nasigheights>

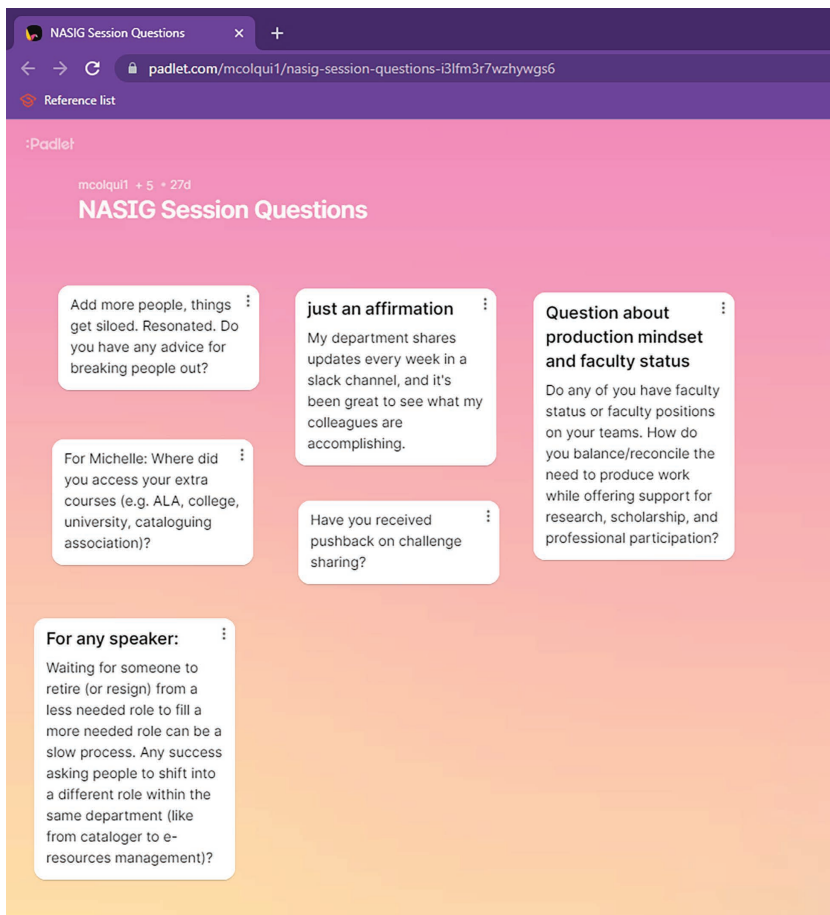


Figure 1. Padlet Image

### Padlet Comments:

Session attendees left anonymous questions and comments on the Padlet during the session. These included:

Add more people, things get siloed. Resonated. Do you have any advice for breaking people out?

For Michelle: Where did you access your extra courses (e.g., ALA, college, university, cataloging association)?

For any speaker: Waiting for someone to retire (or resign) from a less needed role to fill a more needed role can be a slow process. Any success asking people to shift into a different role within the same department (like from cataloger to e-resources management)?

Just an Affirmation: My department shares updates every week in a slack channel, and it's been great to see what my colleagues are accomplishing.

Have you received pushback on challenge sharing?

Question about production mindset and faculty status: Do any of you have faculty status or faculty positions on your teams? How do you balance/reconcile the need to produce work while offering support for research, scholarship, and professional participation?

## CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

**Melissa Brooks** is Head of Technical Services at the University of Southern Mississippi Libraries in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

**Michelle Colquitt** is Continuing Resources & Government Information Management Librarian at Clemson University Libraries in South Carolina.

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## Notes

- 1 Stanford Profiles, "Carol Dweck," Stanford University, accessed July 3, 2023, <https://profiles.stanford.edu/carol-dweck>.
- 2 Carol Dweck, "Developing a Growth Mindset with Carol Dweck," Stanford+Connects micro lecture, Stanford Alumni, filmed in New York, NY, YouTube video, posted October 9, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiiEeMN7vbQ>.

- 3 "Old Chunk of Coal Lyrics," STANDS4 LLC, accessed July 3, 2023, <https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/27720295/Billy+Joe+Shaver/Old+Chunk+of+Coal>.
- 4 Brené Brown, "Clear Is Kind. Unclear Is Unkind.," Brené Brown website, written October 15, 2018, accessed October 10, 2023, <https://brenebrown.com/articles/2018/10/15/clear-is-kind-unclear-is-unkind/>.