

Rolling (Over) in the Deep: Cleaning Up All Continuing Resources with the NASIG Core Competencies in Mind

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Abstract

Adele Laurie Blue Adkins, the diva behind some of our age's greatest songs, wrote the song "Rolling in the Deep" in 2010. Although this song can be viewed through the lens of either a romantic relationship or a friendship, it is also applicable to the fiscal year rollover process in the library world. In this proceeding, Michelle Colquitt, continuing resources & government information management librarian at Clemson University Libraries, discusses their decision not to roll over continuing resources orders after the prior fiscal year rollover because they required an intense level of cleanup. During this time of intentional order evaluation, workflows and documentation were both created and updated. This paper offers a view of the cleanup of these orders and acquisition data through the lens of the *NASIG Core Competencies for Electronic Resources Librarians* and *NASIG Core Competencies for Print Serials Management*.

Keywords: acquisitions, Alma, Purchase Order Lines (POL), NASIG Core Competencies for Electronic Resources Librarians, NASIG Core Competencies for Print Serials Management

The Fever-Pitched Fire

Background and Institutional Information

Background

The decision not to roll over all continuing resources was truly a group process. The Clemson University Libraries Acquisitions Team, specifically the ordering group, is composed of six members under the auspices of the associate dean collections and discovery. Team members include Teresa McCoy, our databases and subscriptions manager; Jessica Scott, our newly hired e-resources and discovery librarian; Allison Shultz, our usage and analytics manager; Wade Culler, our electronic resources library manager; Chris Vidas, the head of collections and acquisitions, and Michelle Colquitt, the continuing resources and government information management librarian (who is additionally serving as the interim e-resources coordinator). This is a subset of the Acquisitions Team, minus the team members solely devoted to one-time purchases. We recognize that each member of our team has a wonderful skill set and immense strengths.

Clemson University Libraries reorganized in 2022, and as part of the reorganization we partnered with Clemson University Human Resources. In consultation with Human Resources, every employee completed a Clifton StrengthsFinder Assessment. I completed the assessment on my first day of employment. I found that this assessment was very enlightening about both my strengths and the strengths of my team. My top strength is Achiever, which is aptly explained:

Your Achiever theme helps explain your drive. Achiever describes a constant need for achievement. You feel as if every day starts at zero. By the end of the day you must achieve something tangible in order to feel

good about yourself. And by “every day” you mean every single day—workdays, weekends, vacations. No matter how much you may feel you deserve a day of rest, if the day passes without some form of achievement, no matter how small, you will feel dissatisfied. You have an internal fire burning inside of you. It pushes you to do more and achieve more.¹

As evidenced by this quote, I like to get things finished and scratched off my to-do list with the utmost haste.

Our team members knew that the project to critically evaluate and replicate or close orders would be an immense challenge. Because of our own individual strengths, however, we were confident we would be up for the challenge of creating new orders during Fiscal Year 2024. The rationale for not rolling continuing resource orders over would fall into either of two reasons: incorrect order or record data (e.g., incorrect order type, bibliographic records, or holdings) and workflow evaluations (primarily for the prodigious number of membership orders that we have, especially for print continuing resources).

When asked about her inspiration for the song “Rolling in the Deep,” Adele related that “the phrase ‘rolling in the deep’ is sort of my adaptation of a kind of slang, slur phrase in the UK called ‘roll deep,’ which means to have someone, always have someone that has your back, and you’re never on your own, if you’re ever in trouble you’ve always got someone who’s going to come and help you fight it or whatever like that.”² Much like Adele, the ordering team knew that we would never be on our own in this project and we further knew that each other had our backs.

Demographic Information

Clemson University is an emerging R1 institution in Upstate South Carolina, in the southeastern United States. In terms of enrollment, there are almost twenty-nine thousand students enrolled in both undergraduate and graduate programs.³ Clemson University Libraries has seven branch libraries across the State of South Carolina, including our main campus

library, the R. M. Cooper Library. We have used the Ex Libris Alma and Primo library services platforms since 2020, and are still working some of the kinks out of our data. It is important to know that in our Acquisitions structure, R. M. Cooper Library acquires materials for all branch libraries. We have a relatively healthy collections budget of almost ten million dollars. Roughly four and a half million dollars is devoted to continuing resources, specifically print and electronic journals, certain database subscriptions and other electronic resources, as well as institutional memberships. This large figure also includes payments to our subscription agent. We felt an imperative to clean up our data because we are going through a budget model shift to Revenue-Based Budgeting (RBB), which is driven by the University's new strategic plan, ClemsonElevate. RBB is being touted as a simple-to-articulate model that is more transparent than our current financial model(s) while also being a proven business model that will ensure quality services to all areas of the University.⁴ This model has been hyped up to us for a while, and we are all excited, albeit a bit nervous, about this forthcoming change.

Organizational Instability

Another part of the fever-pitched fire Clemson University Libraries faced, and still faces to a lesser degree, is a lack of organizational stability. Through 2018 to 2021 there were a number of key departures or retirements, such as the former unit head, and several members of what was then known as Technical Services and Collections Management. There was also the COVID-19 Pandemic, which of course, impacted every aspect of life across the globe. As a pandemic hire, I was not here during the early days of the pandemic, which was also a time when Clemson Libraries was in the throes of migrating to the Ex Libris Alma and Primo platforms as part of the PASCAL (Partnership Among South Carolina Academic Libraries) migration and implementation. Having migrated and gone live with Alma/Primo in 2018 as an employee of the Technical College System of Georgia, I am not sad to have missed Clemson's migration to Alma/Primo. I would, however,

have liked to provide input about the migration of old order data from the Millennium ILS to Alma.

After the migration to Alma, data cleanup began in earnest. One of the first cleanup opportunities we encountered was the cleanup of \$1.00 orders for continuing resources, that were primarily either gift titles or membership titles. We had (and still have) grand plans to continue to clean up our order data. During our early cleanup efforts, we also were in the throes of our aforementioned Libraries-wide reorganization efforts. As a part of the reorganization efforts, we were reorganized into the Collections & Discovery Division under the leadership of a new associate dean for collections & discovery.

The Fever-Pitched Fire and the NASIG Core Competencies

As a newer serials librarian, I like to frame the great majority of my practice through the lens of the *NASIG Core Competencies* documents. This project fit nicely into the *Core Competencies for Electronic Resources Librarians* and the *Core Competencies for Print Serials Management*. Addressing the *Core Competencies for Electronic Resources Librarians*, the most applicable Core Competency is 1.1., which states that the electronic resources librarian has “thorough knowledge of electronic resources acquisitions, particularly managing electronic resources budgets, encumbrances, integrated library system (ILS) acquisition module functions, split funds and other accounting situations particular to acquisition of journal packages that may not have a single discipline in common, service and lock in charges, and adjusting for discrepancy between fiscal year and calendar year accounting.”⁵ Our cleanup project certainly enabled everyone to gain a much deeper understanding of acquisitions modules, proper Purchase Order Line (POL) creation workflows, as well as activating our prior knowledge of journal and other electronic resource packages.

Comparing the *Core Competencies for Print Serials Management*, the most applicable competencies are 1.1 and 3.1. As indicated in

1.1, serials librarians have “thorough knowledge of serials acquisitions, including trends in publishing and subscription services, publication patterns for receipt and claiming, and shipping practices.”⁶ As someone who had not primarily worked in Acquisitions before this position, I had a rather rudimentary understanding of how the receipt of print serials happened without being tied to a POL. After the cleanup and replication of continuing resources orders that we undertook during this tremendous project, I am much more knowledgeable about the ties between active POLs and the receipt of print serials. Another competency serials librarians should keep in mind is “among other areas, serials librarians can provide useful input on: (3.1) Acquisitions and collection management.”⁷ Prior to this project, there were moments when I truly felt overwhelmed or out of my depth in regard to my understanding of librarianship specifically related to money management and acquisitions.

Bringing Us Out of the Dark: Acquisitions Cleanup Efforts

Dollar Orders

During my first months of employment at Clemson University Libraries, a group of us, under the direction of our interim associate dean, spent a large amount of time working to clean up what we collectively called Dollar Orders. These Dollar Orders were orders that were for items that were primarily acquired either through a gift subscription or through a membership order (more on this order type is forthcoming). During the FY23 cleanup process, we thought we had addressed every Dollar Order. However, we quickly realized during our FY24 ordering and cleanup spree that a few of these orders had slipped through the cracks. When we encountered these orders, we critically evaluated them to determine whether they could be closed or needed to be closed and replicated.

Acquisitions Receive

Purchase Order Lines (POLs) are associated with a holding in order to closely account for the cost of a physical item received. One of the overarching projects undertaken as part of the cleanup of continuing resources orders was ensuring that Acquisitions>Receive reflected the appropriate current physical item orders. At the onset of this project, there were approximately twelve hundred items with an active physical POL. Many of the items were journals that had transformed from physical to electronic as early as 2008 or 2009. At that time, new orders were not created to ensure the type and scope of the order. After the cleanup and closing of old orders, we currently have 465 active POLs for print resources, which can be received through the Alma Acquisitions>Receive process. Of course, monographic series are outliers, and the great majority of those orders are received/cataloged outside of the Acquisitions>Receive process (more on monographic series items is forthcoming).

Another oddity present in the Acquisitions>Receive process was the presence of a physical holding location for electronic resources. From Clemson Libraries folklore I have gleaned from previous workers that the former integrated library system, Millennium, required a holdings location for every resource, even electronic resources. Obviously, there is no need for a physical holding (or really any holding) for an electronic resource. There were roughly 950 items in the ijsr physical location, but not every item had an order, so it was preferable to close the orders from Acquisitions>Receive, rather than finding each one individually through a physical holdings location search.

Electronic Resources

There were a multitude of problems with electronic resource orders in Alma. The great majority of order-related cleanup involved correcting incorrect order types. Examples include an electronic journal with the order type Physical Standing Order Non Monograph, Physical Standing

Order Monograph, and Physical Subscription. As a group, we had to determine specific workflows such as ordering at either the electronic portfolio or collection level. We also had to pay particular attention to the type of order that we created for each electronic resource.

As we had to create several thousand orders during the 2023–2024 fiscal year, I found that templates were incredibly useful and helpful to quickly create several of the same type of order. Templates were a time saver because I could predefine several pieces of the same information (fund, renewal date, vendor, etc.). As mentioned during the presentation, templates were an absolute lifesaver during the ordering process.

The ordering group set a specific policy that if there was a line item for a resource with a cost associated with the item there will be an order in Alma. In the past, an order would often be lumped together, an example being a resource had parts I-IV and all parts would have one combined POL. The ordering group decided that we should break everything apart, provided that there were collections for the individual parts in the Alma Community Zone. We also decided that we should create brief records for items (mainly monographic series) that we could not locate in the Community Zone. We rely heavily upon the Alma Acquisitions module and want every resource we purchase to have an active order.

As previously mentioned, there were a great number of resources, specifically those listed in Acquisitions>Receive, that had undergone a print-to-electronic transformation within the last ten to fifteen years. There were copious notes (with some exceptions) about the transformation, but there were no new orders created after the initial old order. Publisher changes and even the material type changes were included in the copious notes. When asked, the more seasoned members of the ordering group indicated that the former unit head was primarily in charge of ordering, and that any decision to create a new order would reside with them. We have created a departmental policy to create new orders immediately after the notification of a material type change.

Membership Orders

We have a plethora of membership orders totaling over three hundred thousand dollars. In the past, these orders had either had a \$1.00 for the order price (see the earlier discussion) or the price of the membership was associated with the title. The ordering group created an entirely new workflow for ordering memberships and the titles that come with said membership. We decided that we would order the membership as an Order Without Inventory in the Acquisitions Module. In order to properly receive items through the Acquisitions>Receive process, we created Technical Orders (for the item type, e.g., Physical Journal Subscription) and associated it with the appropriate holding.

Transformative Agreements

Over the last few years, Clemson University Libraries has entered into a number of transformative agreements with a variety of vendors. As a result of the increased number of transformative agreements we have entered into, we faced an imperative to quantify the amount of money that we are spending on these agreements. Within the orders workflow, we rely upon reporting codes (which are a piece of data that can be entered in the template). We designated the third reporting code as pertaining to transformative agreements. Since we have created this workflow and reporting code, we can very quickly gather the amount of our collections budget we have spent on transformative agreements.

Lessons Learned

Cleaning Up

The ordering group learned several lessons from undertaking this project. During the early stages of this project, we were unaware of

the size and scope of this project to include the depth and breadth of orders that needed to be replicated. As a tenure-track faculty member, I am responsible for gathering my yearly statistics for the rating period (May 16, 2023 to May 15, 2024). As a result of this project, I found out that I closed approximately 2,100 orders while creating approximately 2,400 orders. These are my numbers only, and I know that I ordered several hundred more orders after the conclusion of the rating period. It would be beneficial to gather order numbers for the entire Collections & Discovery Division in order to properly tell our story.

Another area in which we encountered issues and learned lessons was vendor creation. As the primary orderer, I was not involved in any aspect of the vendor creation or updating process. This separation of duties helps avoid the appearance of opportunities for financial mismanagement. Database Subscriptions Manager cleaned up Alma Vendors to provide updated contact information and associate COUNTER reports and POLs with the correct vendor. There were also some migration issues we had to remedy, including vendors with the code PRV (what we have gleaned was a provider). We had to uniformly decide which vendor to use, the ones without the PRV code.

One key lesson I learned from this process is that I need to have grace with myself. There were so many random situations I and the ordering group encountered during the order replication. When the work on this project began in summer 2023, I encountered an Alma customization issue that was rectified for other Acquisitions folks, but somehow slipped through the cracks for me. We centralize our owning library as the R. M. Cooper Library, rather than the branch location where the material will reside. I learned about this through trial and error. This situation typically occurred when ordering for the Gunnin Architecture Library. Another, wilder aspect of this process was that one vendor no longer wanted their subscriptions to be managed by another vendor. This led to a comedy of errors ending with an \$805,000 check landing in my mailbox.

We Can (and WILL) Have It All

After all the cleanup work we undertook this year, the ordering group is confident that we can move forward and will have it all, meaning that we believe we have a confident and easier path moving forward with refreshed orders. We received the imperative to clean up our old orders as a result of Clemson University's impending migration to both Revenue Based Budgeting (RBB) and a new Enterprise Management System in the coming years. Due to the depth and complexity of this project, I will note that it was not an easy project. Also, after the majority of this project is over, I have to grapple with questions about whether or not my Achiever strength led me to ponder if I was simply a "button pusher" or if I was actually an Acquisitions Librarian. I am not sure; this is an area that requires more study and rumination.

In terms of our plans, we are focusing on gathering all the numbers for both closing and opening orders so that we can tell the Acquisitions Team story within the Collections & Discovery Division. We are looking to implement electronic data interchange (EDI) for some of our larger vendors and packages, so that our team members do not have to invoice a thirty-plus page invoice in Alma. We are also cleaning up our standing orders. These types of orders have bedeviled the team during the fiscal year because of the different Purchase Order Line types. It was important for me to keep the *NASIG Core Competencies* in mind when policies were being created and implemented. I have reminded the ordering group of my devotion to the *Core Competencies* numerous times.

Contributor Notes

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Notes

- 1 Tom Rath, *Strengths Finder 2.0* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007).
- 2 "Adele on '21': 'The Songs on Here Are the Most Articulate I've Ever Written,'" *Rolling Stone*, February 17, 2011, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/adele-on-21-the-songs-on-here-are-the-most-articulate-ive-ever-written-2-98352/>.
- 3 "About," Clemson University, accessed January 16, 2025, <https://www.clemson.edu/about/index.html>.
- 4 "What is RBB?" Division of Finance and Operations, Clemson University, accessed January 16, 2025, <https://www.clemson.edu/finops/budgets/rbb/what-is-rbb/index.html>.
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- 6 "NASIG Core Competencies for Print Serials Management," last revised April 25, 2016, <https://www.nasig.org/Competencies-Print>.
- 7 Ibid.