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2003

Syracuse University Library 1973-2003

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Introduction

Syracuse University Library (SUL) and Nylink have enjoyed a 30-year connection. This connection began in mid-1973 when an existing regional consortium, the Five Associated University Libraries (Cornell, University of Rochester, SUNY at Binghamton, SUNY at Buffalo, and Syracuse), joined the Ohio College Library Center system, formed in 1967. In an effort to speed processing of library materials and reduce labor costs, the five libraries joined this fledgling organization to share cataloging put online by several Ohio libraries. Many, many changes have taken place since that beginning.

The Ohio College Library Center system has become OCLC, Inc., a non-profit membership organization offering to libraries around the world many services beyond the sharing of catalog records. The Five Associated University Libraries consortium no longer exists. SUL now accesses a wealth of services from OCLC, Inc. through its membership organization, Nylink (formerly the SUNY/OCLC Network). These services include access to reference databases, services for online searching, preservation, resource sharing, and training opportunities as well as access to catalog records in the WorldCat database. From its modest start as a small pool of bibliographic records donated by Ohio university libraries, the WorldCat database now holds over 52 million catalog records. A member library somewhere in the world adds a record to this database every 15 seconds.

SUL's last thirty years illustrate many of the trends experienced by all libraries: incorporating automation; questioning centralized/de-centralized processing; balancing ownership/access issues; shifting 'just in case' to 'just in time'; reacting to the impact of the PC and Internet; and adjusting to computer literate users' changing expectations for library services. These changes have impact on all fronts: the expectations and needs of the users, the Library's financial resources, organization, staffing, and the requisite skills for staff. To successfully respond to this environment of rapid change, in 2000, SUL developed a five-year strategic plan, Targets for Transformation. This short paper highlights some of the milestones and the significant events of the years 1973-2003 for SUL.

From automation to online

In mid-1973, when the Ohio College Library Center system became available outside of Ohio, SUL held the initial training and demonstration session for the Five Associated University Libraries. Through the years, SUL has continued to be a site for regional training and seminars, assisting Central New York librarians to meet the demands of rapidly changing technologies and new user needs. In May 1999, Syracuse, at the request of University Librarian Peter Graham, co-sponsored with Cornell and the University of Rochester, a three-day OCLC Institute seminar titled "Knowledge Access Management" on the tools and concepts for the cataloging of Internet resources.

The first step toward an online catalog for Syracuse was the creation of key punched book cards used to automate circulation in the late 1960s. In the Annual Report for 1972-73, Director of Libraries, Warren Boes notes that only 8% of circulation came from titles with book cards and declared, "[we] must work much harder to produce more book cards for the retrospective collection…" These book cards formed the basis for a pioneering automation effort by SUL that moved on from circulation to encompass acquisitions, cataloging, and finally an online catalog. Recognizing the importance of this local development, Boes states: "It is our belief that the system now running in the libraries at Syracuse will have momentous impact upon the organization and processing activities in major libraries across the country as it becomes more understood."

After numerous upgrades, this system became known as SULIRS (Syracuse University Libraries Information Retrieval System) and was one of the first OPACs in the country. Though it was studied in national research for online library systems, SULIRS was used only at Syracuse, but Boes' prediction did forecast today's integrated online library systems. Even so, SUL maintained a card catalog concurrent with the online catalog for several reasons. The card catalog still contained the only access to many of the Library's titles (the same staff did both new title cataloging and retrospective conversion). In addition, SULIRS offered virtually no help with authority control; filing cards was the main way to identify errors in subject, name, or series entries. Finally, many users were comfortable with the card catalog and not accustomed to computers and computerized access. The online catalog brought with it both the need for technical services to do retrospective conversion and the need for public services to develop a different approach to user education.

In 1973, a chief laborsaving benefit of OCLC was the automated manufacture of catalog cards, eliminating the need for manual production of cards. Ironically, data was initially keyed manually into SULIRS, an online equivalent of "typing cards." In 1976, programming was written to load tapes from OCLC directly into SULIRS; this resulted in a great improvement in the quality of the bibliographic data. Under Director of Libraries, Donald Anthony, the Syracuse University Libraries began closing its nearly 100-year-old card catalogs in 1981. SULIRS terminals were located throughout the Libraries significantly increasing access to the catalog. The only SUL department that currently maintains a shelflist is the Special Collections Research Center. As one of the first major libraries to close its card catalog, SUL was again in the forefront of library automation. Today catalog records are downloaded from the WorldCat database and instantly available to the public in the online catalog. Nylink has been a source of information, advice, and assistance with various telecommunications set-ups supporting SUL in this evolution.

In time, the University determined that the resources needed to continue local development of SULIRS could be more effectively used in other projects. Thus, in 1989, the Library's Automation Planning Committee chose NOTIS Systems, Inc. as our vendor for a commercially developed integrated online system. Planning the migration of data from SULIRS was an enormous task, taking many months, and the migration itself was accomplished in several stages beginning in November 1990 and continuing through July 1991. The catalog was named SUMMIT and represented SUL's second-generation system.

With SUMMIT, the Library began to use barcodes, not book cards, for circulation. Barcodes were generated for each bibliographic record that migrated and these were applied in a massive library-wide bar-coding project. Associate University Librarian for Technical and Automated Services Randall Ericson, who guided the entire process of NOTIS implementation (vendor choice, migration, clean-up from migration, and bar-coding) could often be seen with a T-shirt emblazoned "So many books, so little time." NOTIS was based on MARC (Machine Readable Cataloging), a distinct improvement over SULIRS, which had locally restructured the MARC record. In addition, SULIRS offered no reliable holdings information for multi-volume titles; NOTIS provided holdings information that was enhanced through local input and revision from shelflist cards as well as through the processing of SUL's local data records from OCLC. Having comprehensive holdings information in the OPAC was a tremendous improvement. Authority control for subjects, names, and series entries was done with much greater efficiency, since NOTIS offered a global updating feature, which SULIRS did not.

SUL's third-generation system came just seven years later in 1997. The University was eager to move from mainframe-based technology to client-server technology. The Library therefore reviewed proposals from vendors with available systems in the client-server environment capable of handling a database of our size. We selected the Voyager product from Endeavor Information Systems. Planning this data migration, from the NOTIS-based SUMMIT to the new Voyager-based SUMMIT, was easier to do but the system change posed difficulties for the staff. NOTIS was a more mature system, character-based and built on records. The new system is graphical-based and built on relational tables. Acquisitions staff needed to re-enter the Library's vendor file and all open orders; the serials staff needed to create publication patterns and learn how to handle predictive check/in and all staff had to learn how to effectively use a very different system.

From "in the Library" to "on the desktop"
Even with our groundbreaking forays into automation, SUL public services, like those in the rest of the library world, were largely manual in 1973. A public "Guide to Syracuse University Libraries" (undated, thought to be ca. 1975) states:

> The Reference Department and its non-circulating collection of approximately 22,000 volumes is located on the first floor of Bird Library. To assure effective use of its numerous resources, a staff of librarians assists patrons in locating specific information and using the library for study and research. They interpret the card catalog, provide telephone reference service for quick questions, and speak to groups of students about the library and its resources. Reference librarians are familiar with the card catalog, periodical indexes, abstracting services, bibliographies and other references tools necessary to research and will help students use them efficiently. (Pg.10)

The beginnings of online reference can be seen in this description of mediated search services, from the same Guide:

> For specialized reference assistance many computer-based indexes can be searched for information on your research topic. … Many of these computer-based indexes include the same information contained in printed indexes. … Retrieval capability is however greater through the computerized index. … There is a modest charge for computer searches. (Pg. 14)

Today, SUL maintains subscriptions to over 400 web accessible research databases and these can be reached electronically through links in the SUMMIT catalog. Through its membership in Nylink, SUL offers its community end-user electronic access to OCLC FirstSearch, which forms a part of those resources. In May 2002, the Library reported access to over 5,000 electronic journals, which could be reached electronically through links in the catalog. Additionally, SUL has developed a MyLibrary capability, a customizable collection of electronic resources and services designed to reflect a user's individual research and personal interests. Through the catalog and MyLibrary, users can do their own searching for relevant information which is available on their desktop, 24/7, both on and off-campus and there is no "modest charge." Reference staff now offer assistance not only at service points and via phone, but also through email and LibChat, a digital chat reference service. The traditional course reserve service has evolved to include online access to as many reserve materials as possible, under the copyright fair use guidelines.

Such electronic resources are now an essential part of the collections and crucial to our users. The cost for the purchasing, licensing, and maintenance is enormous. Our challenge today is to find the right balance for financial allocations between print and electronic resources and to build an affordable, enduring, and accessible collection that will support the teaching and research in the University.

An additional challenge faces what was then known as "user education" which in 1973 focused on finding relevant information through the card catalog, printed indexes and bibliographies. In only one example of the many dramatic changes here, subject specialists now create web pages to highlight important resources and provide direct online access. Today's SUL staff provide instructional services to assist students, faculty, and staff not only in finding information, but also in assessing, using, and presenting this information. Our goal is broader than the immediate classroom assignment; we prepare students to be successful in lifelong learning.

Interlibrary Loan was a manual operation as well in 1973. Then, users were asked to come to the Interlibrary Loan office to fill out a request form between 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Now, SUL uses the ILLiad system, available electronically 24/7 from the user's desktop, to receive requests from users and process the vast majority of borrowing and lending transactions. SUL contributes to resource sharing among libraries by union listing its serial holdings on OCLC. In 2000-2001, SUL implemented the electronic delivery feature in ILLiad, allowing users to receive digital copies of requested articles from their account. This service has been enormously helpful to distance students; quite likely it will become the preferred method of delivery for all our users.

From the library building to building a library
Syracuse was very fortunate to acquire, in 1973, a new building for its humanities, social sciences, media, and special collections. The Carnegie Library, the former main library for the campus, was overflowing with twice the collections and six times the number of staff as it was designed to accommodate. The new E. S. Bird Library was based on a quasi-branch system with even certain acquisitions and cataloging functions de-centralized. There were inherent problems with this concept, with the four subject floors (fine arts, humanities, social sciences, and area studies) housing broad subject collections and operating independently. This required extensive staffing and the costly maintenance of duplicate subscriptions to selected reference titles and resulted in both a lack of consistency in policies and service and the fragmentation of the call number arrangement.

Gradually, all acquisitions and most cataloging activities were centralized in technical services. In 1991, under University Librarian, David Stam, the Library reconfiguration sought to rationalize both public services and collection arrangement. Except for Maps and Government Information and Fine Arts, humanities and social science reference was consolidated and most collections re-ordered in one LC call number sequence. New study areas were also provided. Recently, under current University Librarian, Peter Graham, the Library has focused on building its virtual space in addition to making the best use of its physical space. Of note, the Library is one of the early implementers of the University's wireless network

In April 2001, the Library unveiled a new GIS Lab and service on the 3rd floor of E.S. Bird. With GIS (geographic information systems), users can create custom maps based on data of their choice and in doing so may observe relationships among data that could not be seen otherwise. GIS services were a natural outgrowth of SUL's depository library services which have included a sizeable map collection, one of the largest in the northeast, and a great deal of numeric and geo-spatial data. The Library secured a campus-wide ESRI site license for GIS software, which we administer for the campus.

Conclusion

Noting some of the particularly important changes and events in our 30 years of shared history has been a way to commemorate and to celebrate the Syracuse-Nylink connection. And as much as this article chronicles changes, it also documents the constancy of SUL and Nylink. It is easy to see what has changed from 1973 to 2003. It is equally easy to see what has remained the same; in both organizations there is a constant commitment and dedication to service to the Syracuse University community and to the library community in New York State.