

**Best Practice Poster:**  
**Building the Bridge: Collaboration between  
Technical Services and Special Collections**

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## 1. Introduction

At Wichita State University Ablah Library, members of Technical Services and Special Collections began collaborating on a mass digitization project to increase visibility and accessibility of Special Collections holdings, and to digitally preserve brittle rare materials. Both departments scan collections, create metadata, and upload materials into CONTENTdm. The departments overcame challenges regarding the project, such as limited collaboration between the departments, poor communication, minimal metadata, and differences in quality control expectations.

## 2. Challenges

Differences in philosophy between Technical Services and Special Collections presented the first challenge. Special Collections was concerned with securing their collections and felt librarians did not share this concern. They also emphasized the collections over users' needs. Since their practice was boutique style treatment for items, less attention was paid to productivity, and keeping current with changing cataloging standards. Special Collections were concerned Technical Services were unfamiliar with archival practices. Technical Services goal was to operate with the end user in mind. To that end, the adoption of RDA as well as OCLC's *Best Practices for CONTENTdm and other OAI-PMH Compliant Repositories* (2013) in metadata creation reflected this focus. They also had a provider/client relationship at first. Technical Services also felt Special Collections were not familiar with the standards and practices the cataloguers used, nor with Technical Services' production environment.

Poor communication presented another challenge. When Technical Services completed a collection, it was returned to Special Collections with expectation of rapid feedback. With no information forthcoming, Technical Service operated as though there were no problems. As a result, they completed six collections by the time Special Collections sent feedback. Some corrections came from incorrect information from old finding aids. Additionally, Technical Services and Special Collections each had internal control processes, but no shared criteria existed for gauging quality.

Common metadata standards did not exist between the departments. Technical Services operated in a production environment based on collaboration and cooperation. Special Collections operated in an isolated environment with emphasis on unique description, locally created metadata, and traditional archival standards. They also did not have a dedicated cataloger on staff. The uniqueness of uncontrolled vocabulary metadata versus controlled vocabulary for interoperability allowed for much constructive debate. The goal in regard to metadata was to get Special Collections and Technical Services using the same standards.

The departments had different approaches to metadata. Special Collections focused mainly on the descriptive metadata in a human-readable format. Technical Services was interested in the

addition of administrative and technical metadata, and kept in mind the current Web environment and machine-readable representation of information.

### 3. Method and Results

Building trust between the departments involved many facets. Staff from both departments created a metadata group responsible for creating metadata templates for manuscripts and printed materials. Investigation of standards and best practices, creation of data dictionaries, and mapping templates were only a few of the topics focused on by this subcommittee. The group developed minimal and core level metadata templates for published and unpublished materials based on common standards for rare books and manuscripts using OCLC's *Best Practices*. The templates focused on access to collections, future migration, and preservation. Technical Services accommodated unique needs of Special Collections while working on the creation of shared workflows and metadata templates. Special Collections responded positively to the processes and also recommended changes based on their needs. Multiple revisions to the templates were required to accommodate both departments.

Quality control quickly became a priority. With administration support, the departments implemented pre-planning meetings where the departments discuss specific collections. This includes the level of metadata Special Collections and Technical Services selects for a collection. Levels of quality control are also present throughout the process. Multiple people handle the scans and metadata in terms of viewing and uploading, as well as the final review. There are also pre-planning meeting forms, scan inventory worksheets, a metadata cheat sheet for the catalogers, and workflow checklists.

Technical Services introduced DC mapping in CONTENTdm, as well as an enhanced production environment to Special Collections that previously performed boutique treatment of materials. Likewise, Special Collections communicated their specific needs so that we gained an understanding of expectations from Special Collections, which the metadata group kept in mind when creating the templates. Special Collections' willingness to work with the OCLC Best Practices, as well as RDA was a real leap for the department in terms of opening up their collections to a worldwide audience.

### 3. Next Steps

Next steps include appointing a project manager who will lead each project from beginning to end. A metadata checklist is being created to aid the catalogers in reviewing their peers' work. Creation of local controlled vocabularies will also be a future project.

### 4. Conclusion

This has been a positive collaborative experience for both departments. Bringing expertise of catalogers and uniqueness of Special Collections together has helped them to be less isolated. The implementation of metadata and cataloging standards creates a layer of interoperability, and increases the potential of users finding unique materials. Additionally, the departments have a new working relationship that will hopefully continue in the future.

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### References

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