Embracing Evolution: A Collaborative Approach to Library Organizational Change

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History and Background

Librarians have, for years, been having important conversations about the radical changes academic libraries are facing. Which services and resources do our students and faculty need in this rapidly changing information environment? How can we implement and provide support for emerging technologies? How can we stay relevant? These difficult questions are compounded by a limited library staff size, making it difficult to expand existing services, let alone to develop new areas, when administrations are not often willing to increase library funding or approve new positions.

Beginning in 2011, our small liberal arts college library found itself in a unique situation to respond to these challenges when four of nine full-time employees—including the library director—announced their intentions to retire in the next two years. We decided it was time for a reboot, and embarked on a project to radically restructure the library staff model. Our vision was to create more space in a librarian's day for the things that only librarians can do, and we were attempting to do this without hiring an additional position. We were tired of putting off projects, ideas, and goals until we had the time, the money, and the expertise to accomplish them, so we needed to consider how to use the people currently employed in our library in the most effective possible manner.

The overarching vision that drove our restructuring and decision-making process was an emphasis on information literacy instruction, which we wanted all librarians to participate in. In addition, we wanted to shift our focus from being a keeper of things to a provider of access through both our resources and our services. These goals were driven by what our faculty were saying and what our students were using. We embarked on an inclusive, affirmative process that resulted in a complete reorganization of our library, based on our assessment of the current and future needs of our liberal arts campus.

Literature Review

Academic libraries are in an environment of increasingly rapid and large-scale changes, as are their host colleges and universities. The process of planning how to implement organizational change that adapts to challenges and takes advantage of opportunities is crucial. Oregon State University Libraries took on such a process in 2010 to match a wider realignment at the institution.[1] OSUL librarians used "visioning exercises" to determine both current and anticipated needs. It found that development of a clear vision, as well as proper communication, was essential to the success of the planning. Many different factors can necessitate realignment in academic libraries, but a major one in the last decade has been the shift from print to digital collections. The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas Library found in planning that this was the impetus for an organi-

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zation-wide change to address issues from staffing to vision.[2]

In addition to addressing changes to their own services and user needs, libraries have found benefit in working closely with their host institutions. Debra Lucas at D'Youville College in New York found that collaboration with faculty, using evaluative data to show the library's effect on departmental objectives, was a highly effective means to advance the goals of both the library and the college overall.[3] As OSUL and others have found, an even broader organizational realignment with the institutional mission is often required. University of Connecticut Libraries were confronted with similar changes to its host institution's academic plan and, in planning reorganization to shift the library's focus back to its users, directly aligned its final organizational structures with the new University plan.[4]

Once a library has identified the need for organizational change, based on its own or its host institution's needs, the conditions must be right for a successful reorganization. In beginning a major reorganization in the mid-1990s, the University of Minnesota Libraries first gathered data on its current condition through the statement of values and assessment of staff attitudes.[5] From there the Libraries were able to succeed thanks to effective teamwork and communication. However, the external pressures to innovate or change to the point of reorganization are typically met by some level of internal opposition to change, especially in institutions like libraries. Jantz notes that this means effective leadership is all the more essential at this stage.[6] Here, organizational culture can impact just how much resistance there is to reorganization. Using Cameron and Quinn's Competing Values Framework, the University of Saskatchewan Library found that most librarians saw themselves as being part of a "market culture"—one that is externally focused but that needs stability and control.[7]

Properly dealing with staffing changes is a challenging but essential aspect of the reorganization process. Crumpton advocates identifying trends and priorities, then examining current practices based on how they match where the library needs to be following reorganization.[8] Frequently, budget limitations will require significant shifts away from traditional yet outdated practices. In today's library, Barnhart and Gremmels note that this means trimming down the "small armies" in technical service departments.[9] There are and will be difficult staffing transitions to be made as the library requires more high-level work, much of which may be beyond basic retraining efforts. Librarians are also being asked to take on a wider range of roles; in particular, the separation of technical and public services is breaking down. Fitting existing staff to significantly changed or new roles is a challenging element of the reorganization process, especially as the library moves away from its traditional silos of responsibilities.

To manage all of this significant change in the library, many leaders are using Organizational Development (OD), either formally or informally. Libraries that used OD in one form or another, according to a survey from Holloway, consider that they likely "would not have been responsive or flexible" if they had not undertaken the challenging process.[10] In trying to escape the common library culture that favors stability and control, as previously noted, those leaders who engaged in OD did so primarily to "creat[e] a flexible and agile organization." Although less than half of Deans of Libraries in a survey from Parsch and Baughman indicated that they used the term OD specifically, nearly all of them are in fact engaged in that kind of role.[11] While OD may be a new concept to many librarians, its leaders will increasingly need to implement it effectively.

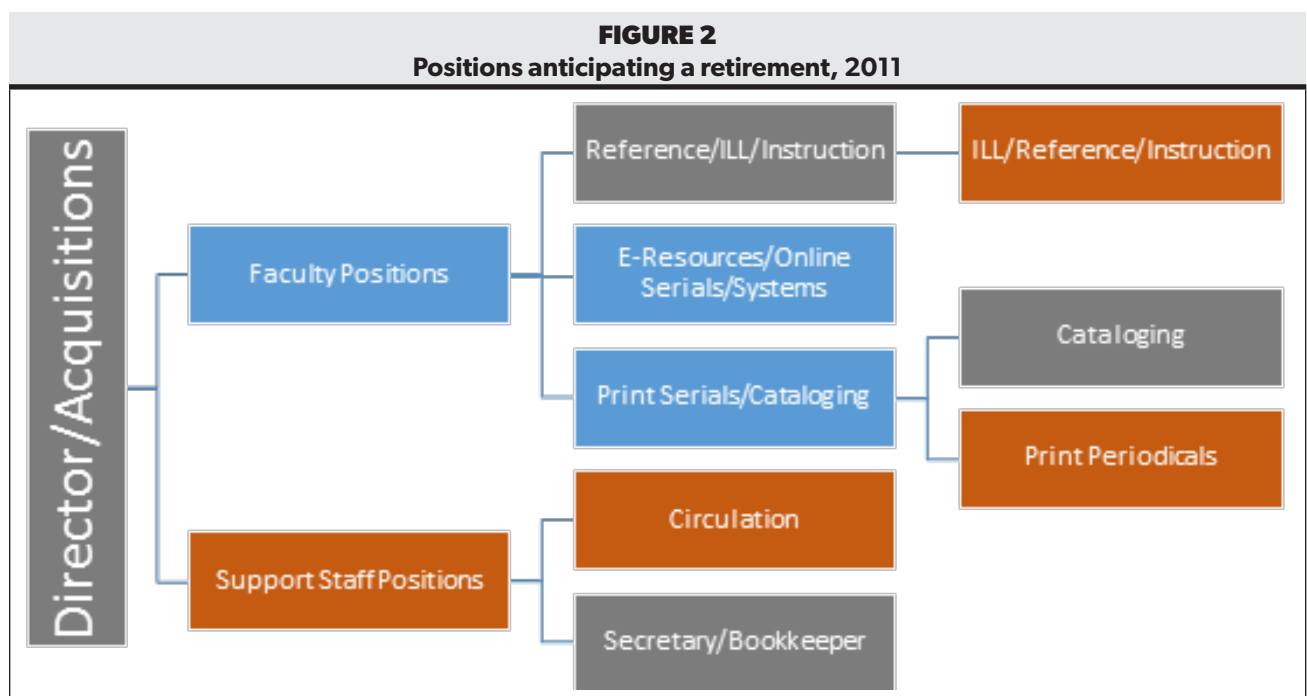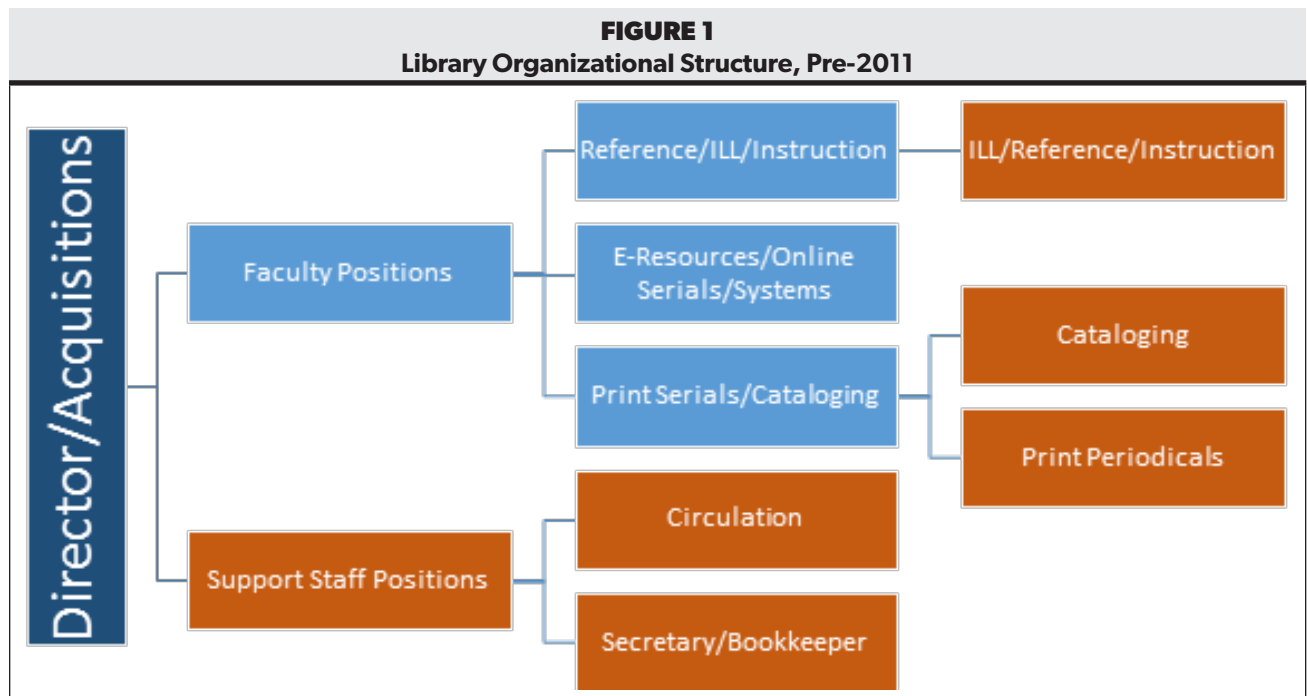## Step-by-step Process Narrative

Westminster College is a small, primarily undergraduate liberal arts institution located in western Pennsylvania, with an enrollment of nearly 1,600. Our staffing, in terms of both numbers and job descriptions, had been static for decades: four faculty librarian positions o and five full-time paraprofessional positions structured as seen in figure 1. Each paraprofessional reported to one of the faculty librarians. We had made
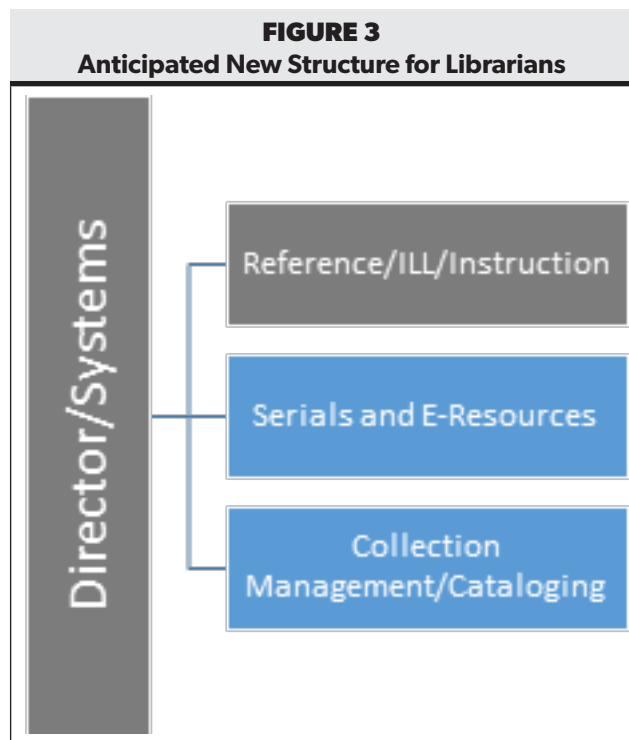
formal requests of the College administration for the addition of a fifth librarian on two separate occasions during the 2000s, but both times the request was denied.

Then, in the spring of 2011, four of the nine total employees at the library announced their intentions to retire within the next two years (See figure 2.)

This dramatic change allowed for the opportunity to completely reimagine the library's structure. Over the period of the next year, our staff went through the dual processes of deconstructing all current librarian and staff job descriptions and identifying new library services and tasks. The first iteration of the restructuring dealt only with faculty librarian positions, with a

FIGURE 1
Library Organizational Structure, Pre-2011

FIGURE 2
Positions anticipating a retirement, 2011

FIGURE 3
Anticipated New Structure for Librarians

Acquisitions and cataloging were tied together under the responsibility of a single position with the intention of streamlining processes, and systems fell under the purview of the director by default.

That was the plan. But as so often happens, the plans ended up changing. Over the next year, two more positions unexpectedly experienced a turnover. In addition, a new director began her tenure. This dramatic turnover allowed for an even more dramatic shift in the structure of the library.

The second iteration of restructuring involved two parallel but distinct processes: figuring out what we were currently doing and deciding what we should be doing. Figuring out what we were doing began with a "time inventory" of all Library employees. Every librarian and paraprofessional created a document that listed all of the duties and activities that they were responsible for on a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly basis. Everyone was asked to estimate approximately how much time each of these duties required (in terms of actual hours). We were very careful to communicate that everyone was going through this exercise and that while we were interested in exploring ways we could change job descriptions, no one was in danger of losing his/her job in the library. We also
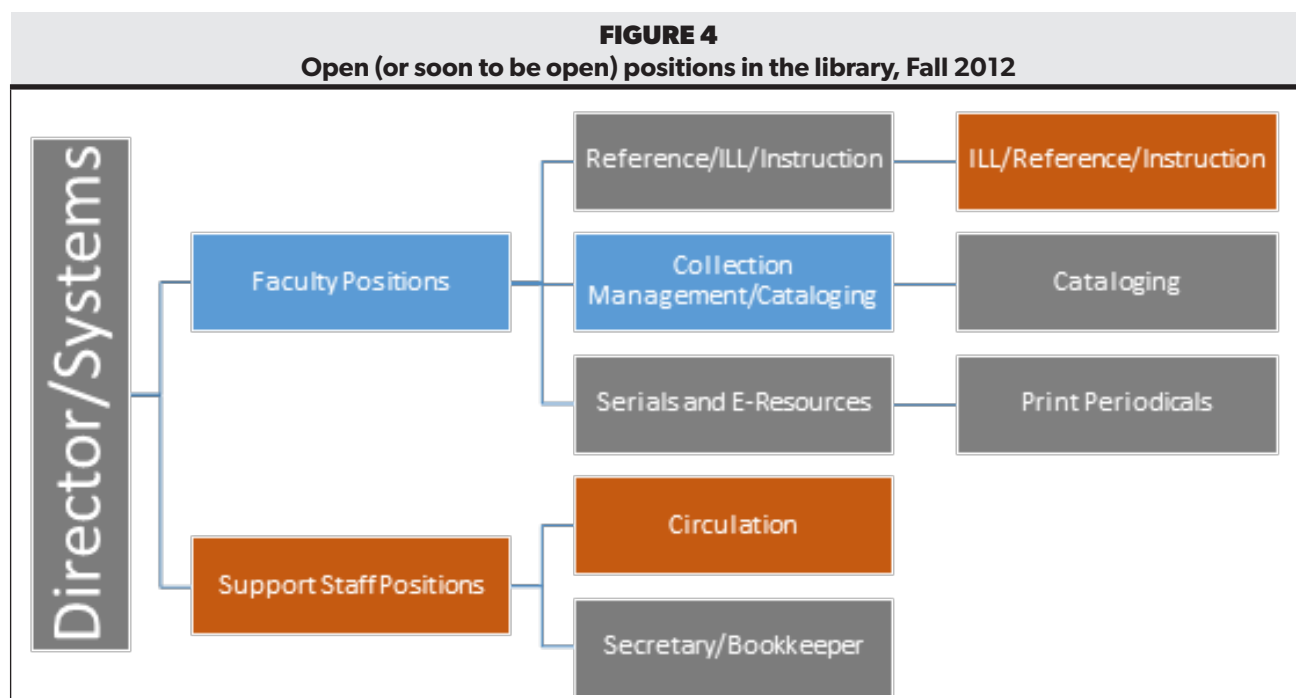
focus on grouping areas of responsibility together in a way that reflected the changes in the way the library now worked. For example, serials and e-resources became the responsibility of one position, since those areas had become closely tied together with the advent of electronic journals, indexes, and databases.

FIGURE 4
Open (or soon to be open) positions in the library, Fall 2012

stressed the importance of being as honest and accurate in time estimations.

Figuring out what we should be doing We also discussed and investigated the value of those individual tasks to the larger campus community. The new director had just completed a sabbatical research project investigating the status of faculty interaction with the library, especially in terms of services. This work drove much of our understanding of the student and faculty needs that the library needed to fill.

Our discussions led to the decision that, for us, the focus of the library needed to shift towards information literacy instruction. Based on input from the faculty and from our understanding of student needs (largely gathered from the sabbatical project, as well as meetings and discussions with various academic departments), we decided that the most important thing our library does is providing information literacy services to our main users, undergraduate students , in support of and in conjunction with the curriculum of the college and the teaching needs and preferences of the faulty. Parallel to this, we decided that we needed to shift our thinking from being an acquirer and keeper of things to a provider of access to information. We needed to spend less time on "things" and more time with people to help them with their research and information needs.

This brainstorming session led to discussions about the things we were not currently doing, but needed to initiate in order to stay relevant and connected to our patrons. Several key issues rose to the top of that list. We needed to have an increased focus on technology, provide better online access to our resources, and do better at reaching out to and communicating with both students and faculty about the library. However, because it was clear we were not getting any new positions in the library any time soon, we also had to think about the things we could stop doing in order to make time for the new tasks and initiatives that would provide the best experience for our patrons. This was perhaps the most difficult piece, and we had heated debates about what was essential for our library, and what was not. We also discussed the role of faculty librarians versus library staff. We

decided that we needed a new category of employees in our library, the non-librarian professional, in order to make room for new initiatives.

Once we had developed the vision for our future and a list of related possibilities, it was time for the librarians to tackle the most difficult part of the process: figuring out the things we could stop doing in order to make time for the new tasks and initiatives that would provide the best experience for our patrons. Not surprisingly, this led to some heated debates about what was essential for our library, and what was not. We looked carefully at the library employee time inventories. How did each of these tasks and responsibilities fit into our new vision? Which tasks were essential, and which were superfluous? We discussed at length how responsibilities could be shifted or redistributed to better fit together and to better fit individual staff members. We also discussed the role of faculty librarians versus library staff: were there things that librarians are doing that could be performed by non-librarians?

Once we had developed drafts of the new roles for paraprofessionals (to go along with the previously discussed new roles for librarians), the entire library staff met again as a group. The librarians asked for discussion and input from staff on the new roles, and made edits where needed and requested. Paraprofessionals, who performed many of the day-to-day activities of the library, had excellent ideas for improving processes and procedures in many areas. In addition, our director met with each staff member individually to discuss the changes and to listen to any of their concerns in a more private setting.

Another series of meetings amongst the librarians finalized the new job descriptions that included new roles and responsibilities.

Administrator (non-MLS professionals)	Technical Services: Acquisitions and Cataloging	Technical Services: Interlibrary Loan
Parpaprofessional Staff	Periodicals and E-Resources assistant	Public Services Coordinator/ Secretary
Eliminate	Secretary/ Bookkeeper	

We added e-resource support to the formerly print-only periodicals assistant position. We eliminated (due to a retirement) one support staff position, because we found that we did not need the services of a secretary/bookkeeper with the modern tools that were available to us, such as the acquisitions module in our ILS. Our most controversial decision was to re-assign the oversight of our Cataloging and Interlibrary Loan programs from faculty librarians to non-librarians. There were many heated debates about this issue—was it appropriate for non-librarians to take on tasks traditionally done by only librarians (such as copy cataloging and ILL)? In the end, our decision came down to two factors. One, it became clear that the only way we could free up time for librarians to focus on information literacy instruction was to stop doing something. Two, we are convinced that, at least at our institution, technology in these areas has progressed to the point that they can be administered by technically-savvy professionals with an eye for detail. Also, the individuals holding these positions were, we felt, more than capable of taking on these new roles and responsibilities and we wanted to empower our truly excellent staff members to do the things they could do well. This was the only way that we could reprioritize and shift librarian time into what we felt were more important areas.

This was also somewhat controversial on our campus because it required the creation of a third position category in our library. Prior to this point, the library had two positions: faculty librarians and hourly support staff. The new non-MLS professionals in Technical Services and Interlibrary Loan were what our campus calls "administrator" positions, which require a bachelor's degree, receive a salary instead of hourly pay, and have more responsibility and more autonomy. The elevation of two of our number, especially on such a small staff, was not necessarily a popular decision, especially to those who remained as support staff. However, in order to realign responsibilities in this way, it was necessary. In addition, we were able to move one of the remaining support staff members from the circulation desk/public services position to the serials/e-resources position, which proved a more appropriate fit based on skills and interests. This helped to control tensions in the library resulting from the reclassification of the two new administrators. For the remaining support staff position, we hired a new person who was made aware of the new structure and expectations before beginning in the role.

Once we had made our decisions within the library, it was time to approach the college administration for support of these changes, which would result in a change of staff for two of our staff members. We marshalled our arguments. The director met with the academic dean of the college, the president's cabinet, and others to discuss and explain our plan. The human resources office was also involved as we worked out the details. Perhaps because we explained our reasoning clearly, and articulated such a clear vision for the way forward—one that also supported the mission of the college as a whole—this was not a large stumbling block. A good relationship with the administration and our ability to clearly articulate how the restructuring effort supported the educational mission of the College played a key role in getting approval for the plan. However, it is also likely that this request succeeded where others failed is because it was budget neutral: the elimination of one support staff line offset the increase in pay for the two new administrative positions.

This process occurred over the course of an academic year, and we were ready to implement these changes starting in the fall of 2013. This was the plan, but external events intervened. After finalizing our plans, the college as a whole experienced some significant budgetary issues. The library's budget was frozen, and we were unable to replace our retiring reference and instruction librarian. For another academic year, while we fought to hire an Instruction Librarian, we were able to maintain reference and instruction services because of the changes that we had made and the responsibilities that had shifted to our support staff. Other areas of responsibility did suffer (collection development, for example), but when we were finally

able to hire a new Instruction and Outreach Librarian for fall 2014, we already had experience with an increased instruction load amongst all librarians.

Implementation				
Faculty	Director	Collection Management	Periodicals and E-resources	Instruction and Outreach
Admin	ILL	Cataloging/Acquisitions		
Support Staff	Public Services		Periodicals and E-resources	

As might be expected, some staff members at our library resisted these changes. Change is hard, especially radical changes in thinking and the shifting of the entire mission of the library. We developed several effective strategies to deal with this resistance to change. First, we always kept in mind the need for flexibility and patience. It was important to spend the time meeting with staff members, both in groups and individually, to talk about their ideas and their concerns. This inclusiveness helped everyone feel that they were a part of the decision making process. We did not come up with the best plan on the first try, and it took a few iterations to get to where we are now. It was important to realize this, and to be willing to make changes when needed. It doesn't matter who comes up with an idea, as long as it is the best one to make for our library. It was also important to carefully consider all ideas presented and, where possible, provide responses and reasons when we felt that an idea just wouldn't work. Transparency in the process and especially the reasoning behind decisions was an important element in the success of the implementation of our plan. The decision making process was not democratic but neither was it secret, and everyone had input. It was important that everyone knew what was going on and that everyone had a voice.

It is undeniable that our extremely high turnover rate reduced the amount of resistance to the restructuring significantly. But we did have long-term staff members that resisted some of the changes we were planning to make. One innovative strategy that worked in this situation was to completely shift the duties and responsibilities of staff members into different areas of the library. For example, we were able to move our former Circulation assistant into the Periodicals and E-resources role. Her skill set was compatible with the new role, and she expressed a preference for it. Then, when we made fairly radical changes to her former position, there was not as much resistance. This strategy required, again, a lot of communication and a dedication to being flexible, open, and responsive to the needs, abilities, and concerns of the library staff.

Ultimately, our having a clear vision for the future was most important for the successful transformation of the library. We started this process knowing what our campus wanted, what it needed, and what worked at our library in our particular situation. We then translated this knowledge into a set of goals and priorities that guided the entire restructuring process. Without this over-arching vision, it would have been easy to get lost in the details and the emotions of the process. Having a vision was perhaps the most important piece of our successful implementation of this plan.

Change is ongoing. We do not expect this model to last as long as the previous one, and we plan to continually reevaluate the library structure in order to be responsive to the needs of our faculty and students and to grow the library where we see potential as new technologies, practices, and ideas come to the forefront.

Conclusion

The end result of the process described in this paper was a radical restructuring of the library's organizational structure and a reimagined set of priorities to correspond with a refreshed purpose for our library. In one year, we evolved from an organizational struc-

ture devoted primarily to resource acquisition to one that gives information literacy initiatives top priority. Needs and priorities will vary from campus to campus, but cross-organizational participation and an "everything is on the table" approach to organizational restructuring are critical components to managing change at any institution. The process we used could be employed in any library to result in a better and more strategic use of human and financial resources, happier staff members, and a better and more strategic alignment with our college's mission and vision for the future.

Postscript

After the conclusion of the library's restructuring process, yet another wrench has been thrown into the plan. Starting with the 2014-15 academic year, the library and the IT department merged to form the new "Department of Library and Information Services." The Library Director was chosen to lead this effort due in large part to the proactive and inclusive approach described in this paper. We are still exploring this new situation and what it means on our campus. But we believe that the library can be a center of learning and support for information literacy as well as for technology resources. We were able to add another member to the library staff, an administrator formerly in the IT department who is focusing on instructional technology. It is an exciting time, and our flexibility and options are much more open than they would be if we had not already gone through a restructuring process.

Notes

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