Global Strategy for Technical Services

Justin Parrott, Wenchao P Jia, and Heng (Helen) Ge

New York University Libraries supports technical services for two portal campuses based in Abu Dhabi and Shanghai. Staff in each location have worked together to develop a successful technical services operation that strengthens the Global Network University's access to knowledge and management of resources. Based upon this experience, strategies are recommended for global libraries supporting a similar project. Issues considered are the coordination and communication between global and local processing units, staffing, training, and professional development in a global context, sharing the ILS system and selecting suitable vendors, providing secure global shipping services, cataloging items by surrogate, and creating a separate workflow for special collections.

Introduction

New York University has opened two portal campuses in Abu Dhabi and Shanghai whose library collections are linked within a common integrated library system (ILS). Our team consists of the Global Processing Unit (GPU) stationed in our main processing center called KARMS (Knowledge Access and Resource Management) located in New York City, and the local processing units located on the campuses of NYU Abu Dhabi and Shanghai. We call the overseas units "local" because they take charge of processing only for their portal campuses. A successful technical services operation in the Global Network University requires carefully coordinated effort and teamwork. Responsibilities and priorities need to be delegated between the GPU in the United States and the local processing units abroad. The right shipping services need to be selected for items to be shipped from the GPU to the local units in a timely and secure manner. Materials acquired by the local unit abroad will often require original bibliographic records, necessitating a

surrogate cataloging workflow in order to reduce processing time and shipping costs. Special collections, rare books, and other unique and expensive acquisitions require their own processing workflow in coordination with the main processing center's preservation department. In this chapter, we will share some strategies we have developed from our experience pioneering a unique global library system that we hope will assist technical services employees at other institutions embarking on a similar endeavor.

Coordination between Global and Local Units

Each technical services unit within the Global Network University has a specific set of duties that complement each other and facilitate a seamless operation from the time of acquisition until the items arrive at the shelves abroad.

The main processing center KARMS is the primary location where the majority of ordinary processing takes place, consisting of the Knowledge Access (cataloging) and Resource Management (acquisitions) departments. We created the Global Processing Unit within the main processing center to focus specifically on processing items to be shipped to the sites abroad (what we call the "local" sites or units). The GPU may also assist the local unit in a variety of ways due to the advantage of their location, such as having greater access to and communication with U.S.-based services and vendors, consulting with U.S.-based faculty and subject specialist librarians for collection development, and utilizing specialized processing departments for foreign language cataloging, serials management, e-resources, book binding, and preservation.

The local units supplement the role of the GPU by increasing the efficiency and coordination of the library's acquisitions capabilities and processing operations. A well-trained and competent local unit greatly reduces overall processing time and subsequently provides better service to users. Local staff and librarians are in the best position to communicate with the local university's faculty, to assess their academic needs, fulfill their service requests, direct collection development accordingly, and provide feedback to the GPU for modifying library approval plans. Furthermore, the local unit is capable of enriching the global network's library collections due to its access to unique materials acquired abroad.

In acquisitions, the GPU's primary responsibility is to handle package ordering from vendors and automatic approval plans. Batch loading order and bibliographic records is an important component of the local library's collection development plan and the GPU is in the best position to direct this process. In case anything goes amiss, their proximity to the U.S.-based vendors make it easier and timelier for solving problems. The local unit may have a significant disadvantage in communicating with vendors resulting from a delay due to a difference in time zone.

The GPU can consult U.S. based faculty and library selectors to assist their responsibilities in regular collection development. In contrast, the local unit can consult faculty abroad for purchasing specifically requested titles, initiating time-sensitive rush orders needed for course reserves or research, and modifying approval plans to match the ongoing development of academic programs.

In cataloging, the GPU takes responsibility for most cataloging needs, specifically batch loaded records, copy cataloging, serials and foreign language cataloging, and creating original bibliographic records. Their access to specialized library departments, particularly serials and foreign language expertise, makes them most capable of performing these services. The local unit has an important complementary role performing some copy cataloging, particularly to reduce the processing time of rush items, and assisting in the creation of original records through a process known as cataloging by surrogate.

In shipping services, the GPU takes responsibility for routine receiving, invoicing, and shipment of materials to the local site. The local units take responsibility for receiving these items, screening and evaluating which materials arrive (in case the approval plan needs to be refined), coordinating the direct shipment of rush orders, and communicating with the global unit if items need expedited processing and shipping. The local processing unit will also play an important role in transitioning the items to the access services team in a timely manner.

Effective communication between the global and local units, faculty, and specialized departments is essential for the success of this complicated interplay of duties. A strong and consolidated channel of communication will reduce the time needed to address problems and prevent emails from being bounced around to the wrong people or lost altogether. In the beginning, it is recommended that one person be assigned as a point of contact to consolidate communication between global and local units.[1] The contact person in the global unit should have a strong working relationship with their local counterpart and be able to connect them with the right person in specialized departments for issues that arise whether involving acquisitions, cataloging, serials, e-resources, or preservation. After routine communications are firmly established, the contact person in the local unit can delegate communications duties among local staff. Development of cordial working relationships is essential for maintaining team spirit and a smooth operation during the inevitable challenges that arise from long-distance communication.

The long distance and time difference between locations means that nearly all communication and information sharing will need to be computer-mediated. A number of tools are available to support effective communication: Skype, Google Hangouts, email, instant messaging, and file-sharing applications. Policy and procedure documents can be uploaded to a wiki database for sharing between units. Long-distance training, collaborative meetings, and webinars can be offered online. Moreover, the human element ought not to be neglected and it is advisable

for the global and local staff to communicate face-to-face at some point, preferably in person, to help build a friendly working relationship.

Staffing and Training

Staffing the local units can be a considerable challenge depending upon the location, as hiring for library positions abroad will typically have a reduced pool of qualified applicants, especially during the start-up phase. Local staff members should have the meticulous skills needed to successfully accomplish technical services work, as well as the desire to live in the host country. Living abroad can be difficult as it usually involves moving away from family and friends. It helps for candidates to be motivated by the unique opportunity and a desire to experience a new culture or to learn a new language.

Technical services positions in the local unit might be filled only after other essential positions in the local library, such as access and reference services, have been consolidated. The global unit can provide most technical services for the local library in the beginning phases, so staffing local technical services positions only becomes necessary after the local library foundation has been built and the operation is ready to optimize and expand. Once new staff are hired, they have to be trained in the details of their work, library policies and procedures, the nuances of the university's integrated library system, and be placed upon a realistic path of professional development and career advancement.

The best method of training new staff is a hands-on approach, shadowing and working with staff members in the main processing center. The technical services librarian for NYU Abu Dhabi Library spent three months training at the main processing center in New York before heading to the local site. This approach proved fruitful not only because face-to-face interaction is almost always the best way to absorb new information and skills, but also because personal interaction strengthens the working relationship; it is especially important for those who will communicate frequently over long distances. Our NYU-trained librarian arrived at the local site ready to teach staff new skills and train new employees. If possible, staff should periodically visit the main processing center for training, workshops, professional development, and other activities.

If travel to the main processing center is not a realistic option, then training will need to be conducted online. There are a variety of methods available and staff will need to choose which method works best to meet their objectives. Small groups can meet via Skype or Google Hangouts; larger groups can meet via stable conference calling software such as GoToMeeting. Supervisors and experienced employees can record videos of themselves performing computer tasks using screencast software, such as Jing, and share these abroad using a private video hosting service. A wiki database can be used to host and share official policy and procedure documents with all units. Local staff might want to draft their own additional training

documents tailored to their situation. It is also helpful to simplify long, detailed procedure documents into bullet points or info graphics for quick reference.

For professional development, local staff can attend online workshops offered by the American Library Association and its Association of College and Research Libraries division, although the difference in time zone may make it difficult to attend live sessions. Additionally, staff should be encouraged to attend local conferences and involve themselves in professional library activities within the host country. For example, the Special Libraries Association (SLA) has a chapter for the Arabian Gulf that has provided collection development and cataloging workshops for our employees in Abu Dhabi.

NYU Shanghai Library, one of the two portal campus libraries, currently has no technical services librarian specifically for cataloging and acquisitions, so the library relies heavily on support from the GPU. The absence of dedicated staff at a local level has its advantages but also suffers from disadvantages at the same time.

Without a technical services librarian at the portal campus, the NYU Shanghai Library is able to save costs by taking full advantage of the expertise and efficiency provided by the GPU. We previously mentioned the difficulties of hiring a qualified technical services librarian for the portal campuses. With technical services handled almost exclusively in New York, the library avoids the trouble of finding a qualified candidate. As NYU Shanghai Library is still small, everyone does a little bit of everything, especially as the library is in its early phases of development. Much of the technical services work can be performed from our centralized location in New York, requiring library staff to communicate effectively and build a close working relationship with the New York team.

Despite these advantages, the lack of a technical services librarian and other support staff at the NYU Shanghai Library also has its disadvantages. Whenever a problem arises that needs an immediate solution, there is no one to consult with locally who is able to provide a professional answer. The timezone difference makes the earliest available time to address the problem in the late evening, when New York-based colleagues arrive for work. This means staff in Shanghai must work from home in the evening in order to communicate in a timely manner with the New York team. Problems of this nature also tend to be complicated and difficult to describe over email. Relying on email communication alone can produce a significant delay as email is traded back and forth when further clarification is needed. In order to quickly find the right solution, library staff in New York and Shanghai have to communicate directly via phone or Internet call.

In addition, library assistants occasionally need to deal with technical services-related issues and are often unaware of who they should contact in New York for guidance, particularly newly hired staff who do not personally know their colleagues across the ocean. A dedicated technical services librarian should be able to handle such problems locally and can streamline and direct communication to the right people in New York.

Relying solely upon the New York-based GPU has its obvious pros and cons. In the early development of the library, it makes sense to have the vast majority of the work handled from a centralized location in the United States. As the collection grows in size to fulfill the needs of increasing numbers of students and faculty, the NYU Shanghai Library will need to decide when and if a technical services librarian or additional support staff should be hired to take care of anticipated challenges in processing.

Processing General and Special Collections

The general collection workflows were naturally the first priority when we began establishing the local libraries' foundations. Much of this processing is done in a manner similar to U.S. libraries: creating an approval plan from an academic library supplier, assigning selectors for collection development, etc. What made our process unique was the creation of the GPU to focus solely on technical services and global shipping for the local libraries abroad. Once the general collection was established, we began a number of special collections projects that involved their own specific procedures.

Payment for special collections items often involves unusual processes such as foreign wire transfers, pro forma invoicing, payment of individuals as opposed to institutions, and other irregular methods of payment. These types of purchases enrich the library collection but might also conflict with university policy. A committee or working group can be formed to investigate existing university policy and ensure such purchases conform to policy guidelines, as well as develop criteria for when an exception to the general rule can be justified.

Shipping expensive and rare special collections items should be kept separate from normal shipments. Normal shipping sometimes results in damage from mishandling or even the destruction and loss of items. Securing insurance, careful packing, and tracking of special collections are judicious precautions needed to protect these rare and expensive materials.

One of our major projects at NYU Abu Dhabi is the acquisition of films screened at the annual Abu Dhabi Film Festival (ADFF). Some of the films are commercially available from major vendors, but many of them were produced by independent filmmakers, which makes them more difficult to process in terms of payment and cataloging. We begin by sending a courtesy letter offering the filmmakers payment for their films to be included in our collection. We provide a statement of intent for filmmakers who are cautious about how their work will be used, plus a blank invoice for those who are not accustomed to selling their work. Since we will likely purchase from these individuals only one time, we created a generic ADFF vendor record in our ILS system. We include the name and address for each payee within each individual order record. The vendors, orders, arrival, and payment status for each film is shared between the global and local units via Google Drive.

Sometimes consisting merely of a disc (without cover, artwork, date, place of production, or studio name), each ADFF film we buy from an independent filmmaker usually has minimal bibliographic information. We have to create the best bibliographic records we can from the little we know. To this end, we created a cataloging template in our ILS system specifically for these films. Embedded in the template is metadata linking the film to the ADFF collection and making it easier for users to find these items together in our online catalog.

Our collection of rare books and maps is another component of our special collections that requires a separate workflow. These items are processed by the main processing center's specialized departments in coordination with the GPU. The GPU will take care of acquisition and payment, while these items are shipped to preservation specialists who are able to handle and catalog such fragile and expensive materials. We make sure that these items are not mixed with normal processing workflows in order to avoid mishandling and damage. When shipping these items globally, we provide an extra measure of packing protection and shipping insurance.

Our technical services units are sometimes called upon to serve the university in other ways. NYU Abu Dhabi librarians helped create a small children's lending library at the request of our Campus Life department. The department had no other easy way to keep efficient track of loans and we were happy to assist them. In consultation with their department, we selected a number of children's titles for ages 3–10. We chose to use Follett as our vendor since they were able to provide us with MARC records for each title to be batchloaded into our ILS system. Each title was given a simple shelving number to make it easier for children and their families to browse the shelves. However, since NYU Abu Dhabi Library's mission is primarily academic, we suppressed these records in our ILS from appearing in the general online catalog in order not to burden our student and faculty population with unwanted search results.

Cataloging by Surrogate

Unlike the GPU, the local unit might not be able to hire the dedicated staff needed for full-time original cataloging, either due to lack of resources or a decreased pool of qualified candidates. The local staff can be trained in copy cataloging and many times a new acquisition only needs to be attached to the correct existing record in the ILS system. However, part of the mission of the library abroad is to acquire publications and resources not easily obtainable in North America, such as local publications and government documents, foreign language works, special collections art work and films, and other unique items. These items will often require the creation of original bibliographic records for which local staff do not have time or expertise. In this case, technical services staff at the local site can implement a workflow of surrogate cataloging in partnership with the GPU via sharing of digital scans.

Staff first need to create brief bibliographic records for the items in hand containing its most basic information (title, author, publisher, date, and ISBN if available) and then complete inventory control measures such as adding a barcode, holdings record, etc. Next, using a photocopier, staff create digital image scans of the item including the front cover, the title page, the verso page which contains the item's basic bibliographic information, and the back cover. For oversized items, images may be taken using a digital camera or smartphone. These images may be shared with the full-time cataloging staff in the GPU, who will then be able to create the full records they require. Cloud drive applications such as the Google Drive are very helpful for storing and sharing the surrogate files among staff members.

Sometimes the catalogers will need information not easily obtained from the surrogate image. Typically this involves the 300 field which describes the size, illustrations, and pagination of the item. Staff in the local unit can be trained to complete this field and any other subsidiary information needed by the GPU cataloging staff. If necessary, items can be shipped back to the GPU, although this should be avoided in order to save costs and to prevent loss or damage. Surrogate cataloging is especially important for special collections items that are rare or expensive and can only be shipped at great risk.

Global Shipping Services

Once our materials have arrived at the GPU and undergone processing, we need to distribute them to the local branch libraries in a safe and timely manner. Orders placed with a local vendor abroad do not need international shipping and would save time and cost, but the majority of orders will be processed through the GPU in the U.S. The right international delivery service should be able to provide online services for easy tracking, direct contact with an account representative, established access to the host foreign country, insurance for expensive shipments (such as rare books and special collections items), and preferably, a generous discount.

The established shipping companies in this regard are UPS, FedEx, and DHL. To ensure a smooth and continuous operation, an account should be opened with the selected carrier and one person from the global and local units should be assigned as the point of contact with the account representative. When rare, but inevitable, problems occur during shipping, it is best to establish an efficient communication routine between the contacts and the representative.

The account can be set up by either the global or local units, but the advantages of either approach may depend upon the host country. Different countries have various regulations on the importing and exporting of goods. For example, sending materials to Abu Dhabi for customs clearance is often faster and easier than sending materials to Shanghai. The required documents for shipping to China can be complicated. In this case, it may be more advantageous for the local unit to take over shipping responsibilities. It is possible to hire a local book trader for customs

clearance and apply tax exemption for the university, or an import account can be opened with an American shipping company in China, such as DHL China, so that the global unit can easily schedule a delivery. Each of these options should be considered and explored before committing to a particular service.

The first shipments to the local unit will not always go smoothly, but steps can be taken to establish a process. A packing list should be created by generating a report in the ILS for each item that is ready to be shipped. All items in the box must match the packing list. The value of each item should be presented on the packing list and the declared value on the waybill must be the same as the total value on the invoice. A shipment with values over a certain amount may require additional documentation and the carrier service should be able to provide support for this. High-value packages should be insured through the carrier. The delivery services team in the global unit should use high-quality packaging and may use a scale to weigh shipments. Depending upon customs regulations, a process can be established using the right weight and value for maximum efficiency and minimum cost.

Communication between the global and locals units and the account representative is essential for a successful operation. Shipping library materials abroad always has its risks. Valuable time and money can be lost if preparations are below acceptable standards. For this reason, the contact persons should be able to easily track a package online and communicate directly with the representative in a timely manner because shipments can run into a number of complicated problems. For example, multiple boxes may be sent in one shipment but separated in different locations, or the items arrive damaged, or the online tracking service tells you the shipment is being returned without explanation, or the tracking number is not working properly. In these situations, it is important to contact the representative as soon as possible so they can open a case and investigate. Many of these problems arise due to the mishandling of the shipment by the carrier service, but most of the time they can be easily resolved by communicating promptly with customer service.

In addition, a procedure should be set up between the global and local units to account for all shipments. The local unit needs to be informed of what they should expect to receive and to be given notice of any delayed or missing packages. The longer a delayed or missing package remains unattended, the more difficult it will become to resolve the issue. Regular communication between the two units will also help the local unit plan ahead for storing and processing the items. A number of tools, such as a shared Google spreadsheet, may be used to let the local unit know the date a package was sent, how many items and boxes were in the shipment, and their tracking numbers. This is even more important for rare and expensive special collections items. The local unit should be able to confirm the receipt of delivery and its intact contents, ensuring a secure shipping process from beginning to end.

Conclusion

Coordinating technical services in a global context is a challenging task, but will ultimately enrich the scholarly community by supporting the exchange of knowledge and information across national boundaries. The creation of a global processing unit in the mainland and integrating it with the local libraries abroad is the first step towards this end. Staffing, training, and effective communication and collaboration over long distances is essential for the success of the project. After the local libraries' primary services are established, such as reference and access, a dedicated library professional can be hired to optimize and expand the technical services operation. The result of this work will be a tightly connected global library service capable of getting users the unique items they need when they need them and offering students and scholars access to a wealth of learning and research that ordinary libraries in the mainland cannot readily provide.

---

1.   Parrott, Justin. "Communication and Collaboration in Library Technical Services: A Case Study of New York University in Abu Dhabi." *New Review of Academic Librarianship.* Published electronically April 25, 2016. doi: 10.1080/13614533.2016.1181663.

Biographies

Justin Parrott has been Technical Services and Research Librarian at New York University Abu Dhabi since December 2012. He received his MLIS from Kent State University. He currently manages the local technical services unit for NYU Abu Dhabi Library and is liaison to the university's Mathematics, Arabic, and Chinese language departments.

Wenchao P Jia was Supervisor for the Global Processing Unit, managing processing for NYU Abu Dhabi Library and Shanghai Library materials and acting as a liaison between Bobst library and Abu Dhabi and Shanghai Libraries from August 2012 to June 2015. Currently she works in the Metadata Production & Management Dept. She has worked in the Technical Services Division for the Bobst library at NYU since 1994 and she received the First Annual Dean's Award in 2011. She has a bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering.

Heng (Helen) Ge has worked at NYU Shanghai Library as a Reference and Research Services Librarian since September 2013. Her work includes reference services, faculty liaison, library instruction, collection development, and a variety of other duties. Prior to her appointment at NYU, Helen was the Technical Services Coordinator at Knox College, University of Toronto, where she was responsible for cataloging, acquisitions, reference services, and supervision of library projects. Helen holds a Master of Information Studies and an MA in Chinese History from the University of Toronto.