SUCCESS STORY: University of Connecticut

What starts as a backlog problem turns into a 12-year cataloging relationship

OCLC Custom Cataloging becomes virtual team for the UConn Library

Situation

Being the largest public research library in the state keeps a staff busy—especially a cataloging team. The problem was that staying on top of new materials was consuming all of the team's time, meaning other materials simply had to wait before getting into the library's catalog. In 1994, that growing workload finally exceeded staff capacity, creating a backlog of new titles.

“We didn't have the staff to keep up with the new materials, gift collections and our retrospective collections,” says Sandy Gallup, Catalog and Metadata Services Team Leader. Other initiatives, such as a new theft prevention system and the transition to a new ILS, also cut into the cataloging staff's precious time. But Gallup was determined not to let these challenges prevent users from accessing the library’s vast collections and moving forward with new projects.

Solution

Two things concerned Gallup: How to cost-effectively process the cataloging backlog and how to ensure the high standards of the library’s bibliographic records. “We tried bringing in additional people, but it never worked out as well as we’d hoped because staff training required so much time.” So she looked more closely at the costs of adding permanent staff versus hiring a cataloging service. The cost analysis concluded that outsourcing would be the best solution, and it offered the most flexibility. That left quality as the only hurdle to clear.

“We had reservations,” she says about trusting someone else to do the cataloging. But after speaking to the OCLC Custom Cataloging team, she felt more comfortable. Still, the initial work was closely monitored. “When we started, we did our own quality control of the records as they came in and continued to sample records for quite some time.”

Results

You won't find a backlog at the UConn libraries any more. In fact, there hasn’t been one for quite awhile—even after the cataloging from the five regional campuses was consolidated at the main library. With the absence of a backlog, there has been time to undertake new strategic work.

“Our administrators wanted to see our other collections online,” Gallup says. OCLC Custom Cataloging has been used for: microfilm, children's literature and foreign language collections, the latter being an ongoing area of focus. “We send about 50 foreign language titles, primarily Italian, Spanish and German, each month to OCLC for cataloging. We just don’t have the staff with this language facility to do them.”
One of the larger retrospective projects was cataloging the 800-title Italian Risorgimento collection. “We’ve had this collection for quite some time, but never had the opportunity to provide full access to national researchers as well as our own users.” Less than one day after it was entered into the catalog, a user requested a title. That’s exactly what Gallup likes to see.

“OCLC helps us enrich our collection by making titles available to users,” says Gallup. “If we had to give up Custom Cataloging, we’d really miss it around here.”

For more information about Custom Cataloging, visit www.oclc.org/customcataloging/, call 1-800-848-5878 or send e-mail to libservices@oclc.org.