Amanda Clay Powers, Martin Garnar, and Dustin Fife

New academic library leader discussion series

Part two

Amanda Clay Powers (ACP), Martin Garnar (MG), and Dustin Fife (DF) are all relatively new library leaders. This series is their attempt to discuss the process of moving to a new library and becoming more than just a new manager, but truly a leader. In part two, Powers, Garnar, and Fife will focus on the first 100 days. They will discuss getting started and working with a new team. In part one, the authors discussed finding their new jobs and in part three, they will discuss obstacles, mistakes, failures, and successes. They believe this open and honest conversation is essential to help prepare future library leaders.

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MG: For this next installment of our lives as new academic library deans and directors, let's focus on those first 100 days. When I started at the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs (UCCS), I was overwhelmed by the number of trainings I had to complete as a new officer of the university, as well as the sheer number of meetings. Twenty-five of those meetings were my own fault, as I required all library employees to meet with me within the first month, so that I could get to know them. I also had a packed "social" schedule ("social" because it was all work-related) from being invited to all sorts of receptions and events. I did not know which ones I could refuse at that point, so I found myself out of the house several evenings each week. Meanwhile, removed from my previous life of constant teaching and desk shifts, I had no idea what I would be doing in my office all day, though I quickly found things to do. What was it like for you to step into your new roles?

DF: Excitement, new faces, and imposter syndrome, dominated my move to Western State Colorado University (Western). I know I am not the first person to realize this, but big professional changes create many other big life changes. So at the same time that I was trying to focus on a new professional opportunity, I was also looking for a place to live, working on a mortgage, trying to get all of my stuff to Colorado, and a million other things. It was a

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period of disruption and opportunity. There was disruption in my life, but also in the lives of new team members. Getting a new director is scary for many, and exciting for others. It is important to remember that you bring disruption with you.

ACP: Eventful is the way I would describe my start at Mississippi University for Women (MUW). I could never have managed all the challenges without the support of MUW administration, faculty, and library staff. Across campus, individuals reached out to assist me. The senior vice-president of administration, in particular, was an invaluable ally as she oversees all construction projects on campus. Additionally, my provost is a literary scholar whose favorite place in the world is the National Library of Scotland. The president of MUW made a point of reading articles about the importance of libraries in academia and discussing them with me. I do not know how I could have been luckier in terms of support and encouragement.

On my fifth day on the job, we found out that we had to store the circulating collection, bound journals, and all the microform into the not-yet-built Automated Storage and Retrieval System (ASRS) in order for Phase III of construction to begin. Once the ASRS was constructed, this would leave us two months to ingest the entire collection. Investigating further, I discovered that the bound journals and microform had yet to be cataloged at an item level, and we were in the middle of RFID-tagging the entire collection. The RFID system was not integrated with the ASRS, so item-level classification and barcoding was needed to make both systems work.

To learn more about the library, I met with each team member and asked three questions— what was in their job description, what were they actually doing, and what did they want to do. This way I could see any gaps and where we needed to go. This was complicated by the fact that there was an internal candidate for my position. That was important for me to address immediately. In fact, my first act on my first day was to talk to her. I also learned that the new university archivist worked outside the library. I immediately began incorporating him into the library faculty and staff, working with him to identify and reassemble Special Collections, which had been dispersed during the seven previous years of construction.

As for everyone else, I was joining a library that had not had new personnel in many years, and I had been hired in part to integrate relevant technologies. This kind of work inevitably involves culture change, which is always a challenge and should be a slow process, if possible. To that end, we began weekly staff meetings to establish transparency and an ongoing exchange of information and ideas.

I discovered through this initial exploration that we did not have a systems administrator or anyone with the necessary expertise to run a robot or administer other systems we needed. We began an expedited search for a systems administrator with a robotics background, and I traveled to North Carolina to visit the only other library that had implemented this particular ASRS. I hoped to learn more about the skills needed to run it, as well as the process they went through to ingest the materials from their library. Happily, I found a new systems administrator straight out of nearby Mississippi State University's MIS program, who had co-op experience in robotics, just as the ASRS was completed.

Concurrent with all of these initiatives, an internal audit began. I highly recommend this for any new dean/director. This gave us a chance to learn from the auditor how to handle university policies that had not yet been adopted within the library. These ranged from how cash was handled, to the need to have a "desk manual" for each employee. As part of this, we discovered several budget lines that had not been used, including a substantial professional development fund. We used this money to build expertise within the library on serials cataloging, reference, and administration of electronic resources, to name a few.

Then school started about 30 days into my first 100 days. I began meeting with various constituencies across campus to hear about the many things they wanted from our library. Those meetings were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the future of the library and

helped shape many of our goals. I have learned repeatedly that it is critical to remain nimble, but especially as you begin your role as a new library dean or director. Though I wouldn't say my vision for the library has changed dramatically—we are focused on continual professional development, building our team, serving our patrons (online and in person), and identifying ways to integrate relevant new technologies into our practices—but the method of implementation and methods of measuring our progress certainly have evolved.

Luckily, I did not have to move, so I was not going through the changes that Dustin describes. My commute is about 30 minutes, and I use that time to prepare and think through the day or process what the day brought. Most of the transition I made in taking on this role was professional, and it was a profound one. Though I was supervising approximately the same number of people, managing a quickly evolving small library as opposed to a structured department within a very large library was night and day. I have always thrived in an environment where I'm learning new things, particularly if I've got good support. My first 100 days at MUW definitely fit the bill.

DF: I do not know how to insert a long dramatic pause to let everything Amanda just wrote sink in, but before you take a new job I suggest you reread that last section about Amanda's first 100 days. **[MG:** *Dear reader, please insert long,* dramatic *pause, then resume reading.]* My transition was nowhere near as hectic professionally as Amanda's, and I am grateful. I was lucky enough to follow a talented library director. There were no glaring difficulties, but it was time for new leadership for the sake of new ideas, and not just from me, but from the entire team. Periodic changes in leadership, or leadership teams, allow team members to reset—kind of like the professional New Year's Eve, but hopefully with more impactful resolutions.

Like Martin and Amanda, I met with every member of the team as quickly as I could. My team is much smaller, so that was day two. I tried to focus those conversations on them: who

they were, what they had been working on, and what they would like to work on in the future. These meetings gave me a good sense of who everyone was, though it was more comfortable for some than others, so I kept an open mind and tried to keep open lines of communication.

For the next few months, since the library was in good shape, I tried to mostly survey. I tried not to insert myself too much. Not inserting myself is difficult for me. Like many people, when I feel insecure, I slip into a "fake it till you make it" mindset. I had to constantly cut myself off, remind myself to breathe, and I occupied my hands and mind with copious notes of what everyone else was saying. This helped me to understand my team, library, and university.

The best thing came from hearing about all of the different projects each team member was working on. Like many libraries, we had slipped into a culture of treating projects more like never-ending job duties. In a profession with endless work, I knew the process of identifying projects, separating them out from job duties, and finishing them one by one, would bring a strong sense of teamwork, accomplishment, and catharsis. Helping the team to enumerate the many projects they were already working on and allowing them to set some aside, is by far the best thing I did in my first 100 days, other than trying to shut up and listen, that is.

MG: Looking back over my first 100 days, I see that I had a lot of time devoted to professional commitments. I had served as production editor for an online journal at my previous institution, and though I had tried to hand off the responsibilities to someone else, I wasn't able to find a replacement before having to coordinate the copy editing and do the layout of my final issue as part of the editorial team. I was also co-chair of an ALA task force on equity, diversity, and inclusion, and we were in the process of compiling feedback from surveys and conference presentations in preparation for what ultimately became a list of 58 recommendations for the association. Though part of me was mildly concerned that I was continuing to spend time on these "outside" projects, I reminded myself that one of the reasons I was

hired was because of my professional accomplishments, so it was important to continue to invest time in those activities.

What my calendar does not show in those first 100 days is the number of times I went next door to ask my associate dean a question about policies, or how many times I disturbed my human resources and budget professional to get one more clarification about a procedure. Between the two of them, they had more than 50 years of combined experience in the library, and I was so grateful to have all that institutional knowledge readily available. They assured me that I would eventually learn the complex systems of the university, but also reminded me that just because the library had "always" done something a certain way did not mean that I could not change it if it did not continue to make sense.

Conclusion

Powers, Garnar, and Fife each used their first 100 days to learn about their new team members and institutions. Each of their experiences were different, with Powers being confronted by something new each day and Fife and Garnar entering stable situations, but uprooting their personal lives. Transitions for other new leaders will be unique, but leadership is about persisting humbling, asking questions, and adapting to new environments.

This is part two in a three-part series. In part three, the authors will look back at their first year. They will explore what worked and what did not, and what lessons they learned as new deans and directors. ✂

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5. Sarah Stanley and Micah Vandegrift, "Cross-disciplinarity at the Crossroads," in *Digital Humanities in the Library/Of the Library: A dh+lib Special Issue,* edited by Caitlin Christian-Lamb, et al., http://acrl.ala.org/dh/2016/07/29/cross-disciplinarity-at-the-crossroads/ (accessed October 27, 2017).

6. Susan Powell and Ningning Nicole Kong, "Beyond the One-shot: Intensive Workshops as a Platform for Engaging the Library in Digital Humanities," *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 24 (2017): 1–16, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10691316.2017.1336955 (accessed October 27, 2017).

7. Jan H. F. Meyer and Ray Land, eds., *Overcoming Barriers to Student Understanding: Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

8. Glynis Cousin, "Threshold Concepts, Troublesome Knowledge and Emotional Capital: An Exploration into Learning about Others," in Meyer and Land, eds., *Overcoming Barriers,* 139.

9. See the Slack Community on digital humanities: https://digitalhumanities.slack.com, HASTAC (Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory): https://www.hastac.org/about-hastac, or Digital Humanities Now: http://digitalhumanitiesnow.org.

10. Jennifer A. Livingston, "Metacognition: An Overview," State University of New York at Buffalo, Graduate School of Education, 1997, http://gse.buffalo.edu/fas/shuell/cep564/metacog.htm (accessed October 27, 2017).

11. Dale J. Vidmar, "Affective Change: Integrating Pre-Sessions in the Students' Classroom Prior to Library Instruction," *Reference Services Review* 26, no. 3/4 (1998): 80.

12. For strategies on how to design instruction for technical tools, see Data Carpentry at www.datacarpentry.org and Data Carpentry Instructor Training at http://carpentries.github.io/instructor-training/. ✂