



Boston University and Ex Libris

Boston University (BU) is a private, urban research university with two campuses and an internationally diverse student body. BU has 16 schools and colleges, including a Medical School, and a total enrollment of 33,400 students. The Libraries are members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), and consist of the Mugar Memorial Library and its branches, as well as separate libraries for Archives, Law, Medicine, and Theology. Staffed by 122 librarians and administrators, the Libraries house over 2 million physical items and 1 million electronic volumes. Previous ILS and other related systems: Innovative Interfaces Innopac and Millennium, Ex Libris SFX, and Proquest Serials Solutions.

Moving to Alma

Summary of Institutional Benefits:

- Alma enables collaboration and coordination of practice across libraries
- Integrated workflows promote efficiencies and reallocation of staff resources
- Electronic resources can be easily managed, controlled, and discovered
- Alma Analytics supports quantitative analysis and use of metrics

BU Libraries' transition started with a website redesign, supported by the University. The Libraries wanted to include a Discovery service to improve user access to electronic resources, since they had never fully implemented electronic resource management functionality in Millennium. After investigating various options, they selected Primo. The Libraries knew they had to address the library management system in addition to improving discovery. They recognized the unsustainability of their existing e-resource management: inadequate cataloging, multiple systems, and external tools. The various BU libraries were out of sync, with separate A-Z lists, which were confusing to both staff and the public.

BU had been a longstanding Innovative's Millennium customer. Staffing structures and workflows were rooted in the system, and it was difficult to meet new demands or to transition staff to new work. To move

forward from old routines meant replacing the system itself. Alma's workflow-driven design was attractive to BU. The exception-based workflows could help them move away from a procedural model and rethink staffing structures. They also wanted to get away from non-cloud services, software updates, and server issues. Alma was more flexible, with frequent updates, responsive to customer needs. BU appreciated the Unified Resource Management (URM) concept, with everything under one umbrella, paired with Primo. They liked the integration of the management and discovery components with a single vendor.

The transition to Alma and Primo gave the libraries the clout to work together, to collaborate and coordinate their differing standards and procedures. Alma enabled them to become one BU library system.

Impact and Value of Alma

Organizational Change and Staffing



“Instead of just providing access to electronic resources, now we are gaining control”

Tim Lewontin, Electronic Resources Librarian, Mugar Library

At BU, changing library management systems was seen as a way to re-envision workflow and staffing structures. BU libraries were using different journal A-Z lists, different cataloging standards, and traditional, print-based workflows. There was limited coordination among the libraries, and staffing was out of balance, with inadequate support for electronic resources given the size of the budgetary commitment. A strong culture of print reinforced by their former system meant that cataloging workflows and standards did not match the requirements of an increasingly electronic collection. The Metadata Services department did not deal with e-resources at all, and there was a lack of familiarity with the complex nature of electronic resources.

Alma has allowed BU to bring everyone into the process. According to Russell Sweet, Associate Director, School of Law Libraries, “Alma enabled collaboration and gave us the opportunity to work together as one BU.” Alma’s exception-based workflow design makes more rigorous demands to standardize practice and impose consistency across the libraries. The data drives the functionality. “Consistency is a requirement for living peacefully together,” according to Jack Ammerman, Associate University Librarian for Digital Initiatives and Open Access. The integrated environment of Alma breaks down traditional departmental and functional silos. As a result, staff members understand more about other department roles and see the interrelated nature of their work.

The implementation of Alma has created an opportunity to rethink the structure of the Metadata Services unit at BU. The Libraries’ goal is to use the flexibility and efficiencies created by Alma workflows to re-deploy staff toward new and expanding services in the libraries. The new structure will include three units. One will continue the traditional approach to creating metadata with a typical book-in-hand workflow, and will also take on special projects and maintenance of the bibliographic records. The second unit will focus on batch processes typical of electronic resources, and will manage packages, the CKB, importing batches of vendor records, and harvesting and manipulating records from other sources. The third group will support BU’s institutional repository and digital collections, including the workflow for the new ‘opt-out’ open access policy adopted by the Faculty Council at BU.

E-Resource Access and Management

BU had identified the unsustainability of their e-resource management tools as a major consideration in changing systems: inadequate cataloging, multiple systems, scripting, separate databases, difficult patron service. Inconsistencies affected reporting and were felt across the board. With Alma, BU can manage both electronic and print materials in one system, with improved data standards supporting discovery via Primo.





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According to Tim Lewontin, Electronic Resources Librarian at the Mugar Library, the biggest change from their separate SFX environment to their Alma/Primo system, is that beyond providing just access to e-resources, now they can control and manage them. Alma has integrated SFX, MARC record services, and locally maintained information into one environment, connecting financial data and metadata.

One feature of Alma that BU finds especially beneficial, is the ability to create electronic collections. Grouping local portfolios into collections improves control of their inventory. This has been especially important for the Law Library, according to Russell Sweet, Associate Director, School of Law Library. For e-books, they combine their local records into collections, with links to the vendor, invoices, and payments. BU describes these new processes as inventing inventory control in the electronic era, borrowing practices from the print serials world. They can ensure that they get what they pay for and have access to what they've purchased. Their focus is on the materials they pay for directly, controlling them at the order level, linking to bibliographic data regardless of the source of the metadata. Their print serials subscriptions are decreasing now that they can properly manage their electronic collections and expose them to their users via Primo.

Analytics/Metrics

Alma Analytics has proved very valuable to BU. Metrics are extremely important across the university and administrators expect departments to have quantitative

data readily available. Dashboards allow BU Libraries to monitor spending and many other usage statistics—answering financial questions without needing to use external spreadsheets for reporting. Once a query is developed, it is available to run again as needed. Alma reports have supported BU's transition from print to digital collections. Analysis of spending has made it possible to reallocate budgets to support changes in collecting priorities. An additional benefit is that the annual ARL statistics are much easier to collect using Analytics.

Access to Analytics can now be spread to multiple staff. Before Alma, there were shadow systems at each library and it was difficult to interpret data across the libraries. With their previous ILS, very few library staff had the ability to generate meaningful statistical data. Data was exported for further manipulation and stored on a local drive, not easily shared and sometimes misfiled. Invariably, the report had to be updated later, requiring the process to be run all over again. With Alma Analytics, the reports are dynamically updated (daily) and stored in a central location accessible to all authorized staff. Even better, Alma Analytics is user-friendly and can be mastered by a wide array of staff, expanding expertise in report creation to be distributed across library departments and staff.

The value of Analytics is widespread. BU uses a number of reports to monitor workflow and outcomes in Alma. Perhaps most important are those that they have constructed to monitor inconsistencies, or missing data, in various Alma record types, from purchase order lines to electronic portfolios and physical item records. These records are visible to patrons in

Primo, and the reports can be used to correct or provide added data necessary for the discovery and access of needed library resources, both print and electronic.

Some commonly-used reports of value include: granular reports of library acquisitions and orders during the fiscal year – updated daily; collection analysis reports containing data to identify titles for

review and possible cancellation; and, reports containing data for use in reporting to various accreditation bodies. BU conducted a recent review of serials during an RFP for a single vendor. They used this opportunity to discontinue some print serials. Alma was helpful with gathering information on what they had and facilitating batch changes to records.

Looking Ahead



BU is using the capabilities of Alma and Primo to look ahead at new initiatives and decisions concerning their collections and improving the user experience. The Libraries have undertaken projects to improve access to titles in repositories such as HathiTrust, Google Books, and the Internet Archive. They are discussing the role of ILL in collection development now that improved discovery via Primo has led to greater success in meeting patron needs and a significant drop in borrowing. Batch loading of vendor records and batch processes have allowed them to reduce a backlog of 500,000 uncataloged e-books, and have permitted the adjustment of staff responsibilities to new work. For BU, Alma is living up to its potential to meet the changing needs and high expectations of their user community.