

# Nobody Knows and Nobody Is Responsible: Issues in E-Books Workflow and Access

Tina M. Adams

*Western Carolina University, tmadams@wcu.edu*

Paromita Biswas

*Western Carolina University, pbiswas@email.wcu.edu*

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Tina M. Adams and Paromita Biswas, "Nobody Knows and Nobody Is Responsible: Issues in E-Books Workflow and Access" (2016).  
*Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference.*

<http://dx.doi.org/>

# Nobody Knows and Nobody Is Responsible: Issues in E-Books Workflow and Access

Tina M. Adams, *Electronic Resources Librarian, Hunter Library, Western Carolina University*

Paromita Biswas, *Metadata Librarian, Hunter Library, Western Carolina University*

## Abstract

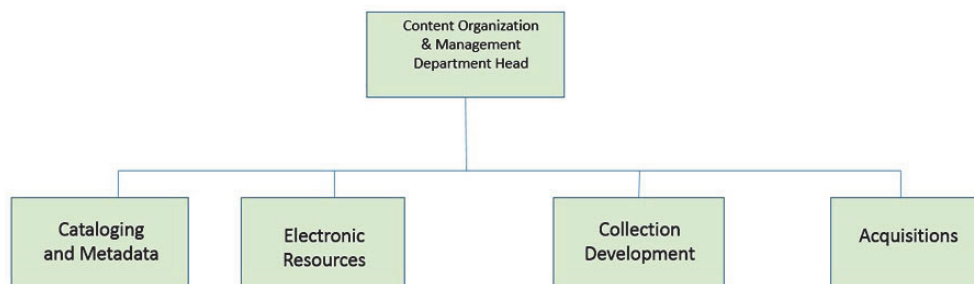
Hunter Library at Western Carolina University is a midsized academic institution managing 10 large e-book packages and about 80,000 individual e-book titles. Managing e-books involves working with multiple vendors and staff from different areas of technical services. This paper examines issues in e-book workflows; in particular, we will share the results of a project to document our e-book workflows and utilize an existing technology, Microsoft SharePoint, to better manage this workflow and share information and communication among staff involved in this process. The idea for this project came with the almost simultaneous hiring of the electronic resources librarian and the metadata librarian's assumption of the responsibility for loading e-book machine-readable cataloging (MARC) records into the catalog. We found the existing workflow related to downloading MARC records from vendors' sites confusing because of the involvement of multiple units within our technical services department, Content Organization and Management (COM). We also noticed there were questions from both users and library faculty about e-book user limits and download rights that were not easily answered by looking at the catalog record, nor was the information readily available. How might we share unique access information with users and public services staff? How might technical services staff better communicate with each other regarding their individual roles and responsibilities in this process? How do we document and maintain relevant information for technical services staff? This project dealt not only with our e-book workflow but also helped to eliminate knowledge silos we discovered in our technical services department.

## Background

Hunter Library at Western Carolina University is a medium-sized academic institution with just under 10,000 full-time equivalent (FTE). The library employs a shared common catalog as part of the Western North Carolina Library Network (WNCLN) consortium, which is comprised of Western Carolina University, University of North Carolina Asheville, and Appalachian State University. As of this writing, Hunter Library subscribes to 10 large e-book packages and maintains a total of about 80,000 e-book titles. In fiscal year 2014-2015, the library spent

\$162,962 on firm-order e-book titles, spending an average of \$299 per book, thanks to, for example, some expensive reference materials costing as much as \$14,850 per title.

Our technical services department is called Content Organization and Management (COM) and is comprised of four units: Acquisitions, Electronic Resources, Cataloging and Metadata, and Collection Development. These four units include four librarians and eight support staff who report to the COM department head (see Figure 1).



Organizational chart—Technical Services (COM)

**Figure 1. Organizational chart of content Organization and Management Department, Hunter Library, Western Carolina University.**

In late 2015, a new electronic resources librarian was hired, and at the same time, the existing metadata librarian took over e-book responsibilities when the cataloger who had previously been responsible for this process left. Shortly thereafter, in early 2016, COM hired a new collection development librarian, and our acquisitions librarian left, so our collection development librarian became our acting acquisitions librarian.

The result of all this turnover was that all librarians involved in e-books acquisitions, activation, and cataloging were new to the process. As we soon discovered, we had no documentation for the e-books acquisitions and activation process at Hunter Library, and while we had some documentation of the MARC record-loading process, it was inadequate. The drawbacks of having no documentation for the e-book workflow process quickly became apparent to both the electronic resources librarian and the metadata librarian.

### **The Workflow Problem**

The first thing the electronic resources librarian noticed was there was no clear responsibility for setting up access to e-book packages, as the acquisitions workflow was not organized. Instead, it was haphazard with regard to activation and follow through consisting of sporadic e-mails from various COM staff members. The electronic resources librarian further discovered troubleshooting was complicated by the fact that when there were turnaways for an e-book it was difficult to know why because there was no documentation of user limits for e-book packages and titles. This also made it difficult for her to respond to user limit questions from public services staff. Thus, when there were problems accessing content from our catalog, she wasn't sure if it was a user limit issue or if the content had been dropped from our packages.

When the electronic resources librarian consulted the metadata librarian about these issues, other problems were discovered. The metadata librarian pointed out problems she herself was having due to a lack of any documentation regarding e-books workflow. For example, she did not know how frequently MARC records needed to be updated for e-book packages, nor did she know who to contact when faced with problems such as extremely slow downloading of MARC records from vendor sites or incorrectly delivered sets of MARC records. She

wasn't sure who she should rely on—the electronic resources librarian or the acquisitions librarians—to contact the vendor, or whether she should contact the vendor herself.

There were other issues that need to be resolved as well. It soon became apparent that for a couple of our packages MARC records had not been added recently. For example, our business reference librarian and the acting acquisitions librarian identified a couple of hundred titles from our business expert press (BEP) package that were missing from the catalog. There were also missing titles from our credo academic core collection. The titles from BEP hadn't been loaded because the metadata librarian, and the cataloger who previously loaded e-books records, were under the impression that they would be notified by the former acquisitions librarian if new titles were available. In reality, Cataloging was expected to periodically check the vendor site for additional titles and download any available new titles. This problem was sometimes further complicated by the fact that our library shares a common catalog as a member of the WNCLN consortium, and a few of our e-book packages are loaded on our behalf by our consortium's network librarian, who oversees this process. For example, our Credo Academic Core titles were at one point loaded by the network librarian, but this process was no longer in place. Each of the schools are now expected to load their Credo Academic Core titles. There was no documentation of this change, and we had neglected to load the new MARC records.

The electronic resources librarian and the metadata librarian realized the three units of COM—Acquisitions, Cataloging, and Electronic Resources—which were heavily involved in the e-book workflow functioned in silos with their own practices and expertise, which weren't shared or documented anywhere. Acquisitions handled purchase and licensing of e-book packages with the vendors, Electronic Resources was responsible for turning on access and creating proxied links, and Cataloging customized and batchloaded MARC records into the instrument landing system (ILS). However, the units did not communicate well with each other about these processes, and other than the documentation involving MarcEdit procedures to customize MARC records for loading, there was no documentation of the e-books workflow itself. Panchyshyn, in his 2012 article, had stressed the importance of cooperation

and communication among the various areas within Technical Services in the context of establishing an e-books workflow, and our problems clearly indicated we needed to do the same (Panchyshyn, p. 12). A literature review of how other libraries have dealt with issues relating to e-book workflows showed that any improvement to our current workflow should begin with an assessment of, as Beisler and Kurt (2012, p. 103) write, “all the different paths e-books could take from ordering to providing access . . . with an examination of which departments and individuals needed to be involved.”

## Problem Solving

With this in mind, the electronic resources librarian and the metadata librarian met to discuss a potential workflow for e-books. Key outcomes of a workflow would include better sharing of unique e-book access information with users and public services staff; better communication among technical services staff regarding individual roles and responsibilities in the e-book acquisition, activation, and cataloging processes; and maintaining necessary information with regard to e-book packages and individual titles for technical services staff for future reference.

We started examining what staff were currently doing with regard to e-book processes. Although there was no set workflow with regard to e-book packages, there was a process in place for firm order of e-book titles. We documented the firm order e-books process by interviewing the staff who performed these duties and asking them to tell us about any bottlenecks that they encountered in their workflow so that we could make any necessary changes to the firm order e-books workflow based on feedback from staff interviews.

Some examples of bottlenecks discovered include the acquisitions specialist’s concerns that liaison librarians were submitting owned titles for e-book ordering. To remedy this, the acquisitions librarian reminded liaison librarians to pre-search the catalog before submitting titles. Another issue was that the metadata librarian was not getting information about user limits for firm order e-book titles from the acquisitions specialist so information was lost once we received the firm order e-book. In the new process, the acquisition specialist now includes simultaneous user limit information on the e-book

invoice sent to the metadata librarian so this information can be incorporated in the catalog record in the MARC 856 field in user friendly language for public view. Lastly, the technical specifications for the simultaneous user limit information as it appears in our GOBI ordering module is added as a note field to the order record in both firm order and package e-book records so that technical services staff know the exact entitlements for each package or title.

These changes to the firm order e-books process were helpful, but now it was time to devise a workflow for e-book packages. We took our cue with regards to developing a workflow from our proposed outcomes to share unique e-book access information, improve communication, and to maintain necessary information for future reference. We also needed a tool that would allow us to clarify staff responsibilities. We decided to utilize SharePoint, which we already had access to and had employed for document sharing and storage, as it could be used to develop a workflow that would help us achieve these simple outcomes.

## The E-Books Checklist and Sharepoint

SharePoint has a workflow product called Nintex workflow that integrates seamlessly into SharePoint and provides an intuitive interface for creating a workflow with notifications and tasks, which is helpful for clarifying responsibilities in the workflow.

To design a workflow, the first step is to create what SharePoint calls a “List.” You must have the “Custom List” app downloaded in SharePoint. You must then create a “Custom List.” We developed a form we called the e-books checklist with fields that the acquisitions librarian would populate when she is adding an e-book package at licensing (see Figure 2).

Once you have created a “Custom List” you can then design a workflow (see Figure 3). Go to Nintex workflow and choose “Create a Workflow” and drop and drag “Send Notifications” and “Assign Flexi Tasks” to develop a workflow made up of tasks and notifications appropriate for your workflow. In the “Configure Action Screen” you can “Insert References” to pull over the fields you want from your checklist. Then go to the list you created and apply the workflow you developed to your checklist.

Figure 2. E-books checklist form in SharePoint with markup of who is responsible for filling out which parts of the form.

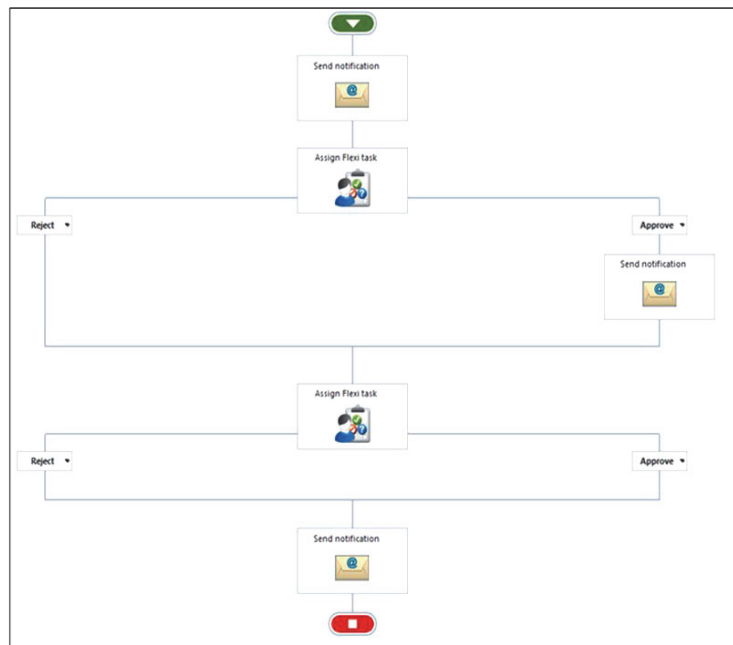


Figure 3. Example of e-books workflow overview in SharePoint with tasks and notifications along start and stop route.

The information that comes in the notification email (see Figure 4) and the task assignment e-mail (See Figure 5) is generated from the appropriate fields in the e-books checklist form so that the pertinent information for the package is sent to each librarian

in the process at the point-of-need in an email. The e-books checklist form requires manual input from the acquisitions librarian inputting information at the time of licensing to initiate the workflow.

# Metadata Librarian Notification

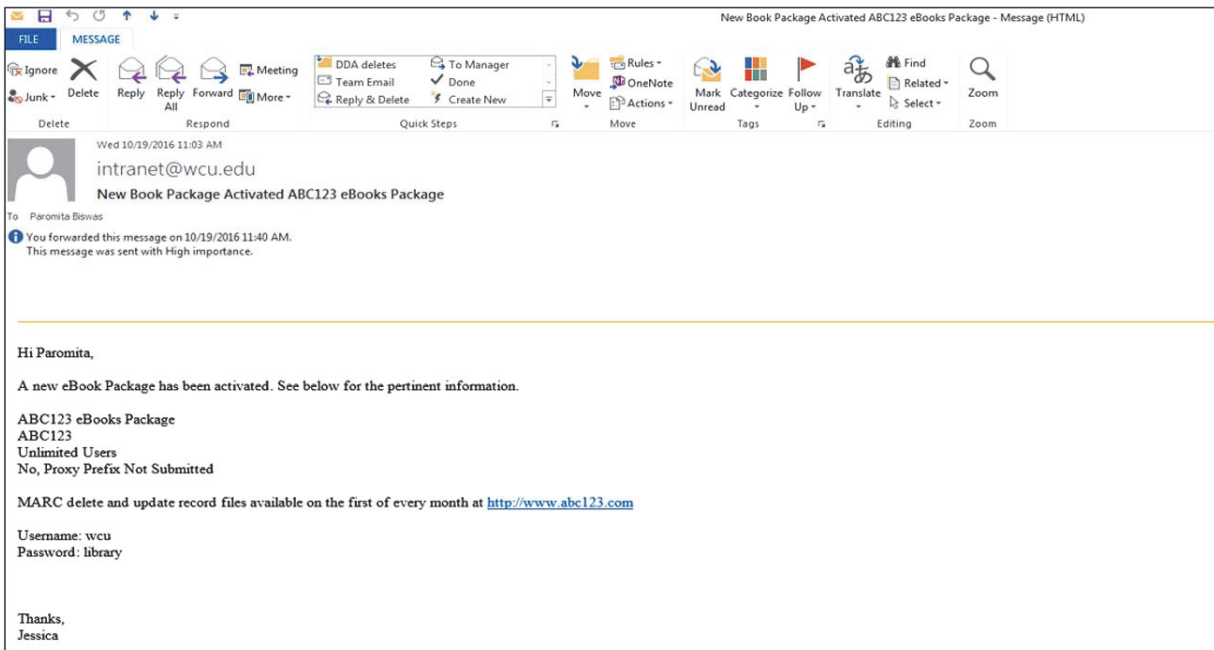


Figure 4. Example of a notification e-mail sent automatically from SharePoint to notify a participant (in this case the metadata librarian) of pertinent e-book package information.

# Metadata Librarian Task Assignment

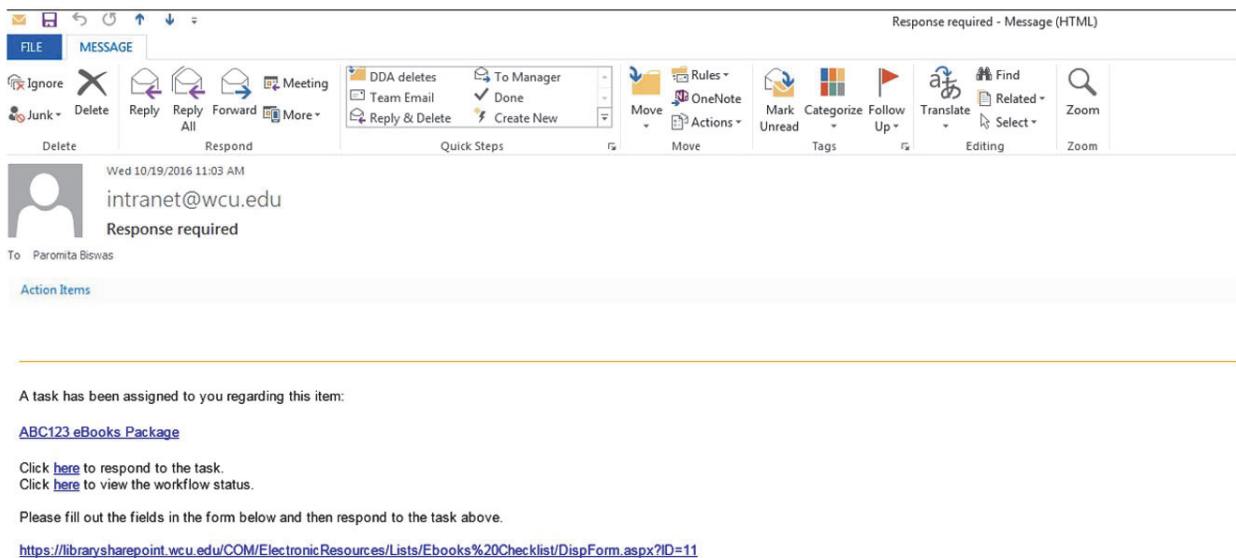


Figure 5. Example of a task assignment e-mail sent automatically from SharePoint to notify a participant (in this case the metadata librarian) of an e-book package task assigned to her with a link to the e-books checklist prompting her to complete her portions of the checklist.

The electronic resources librarian is first in the workflow to receive an automated task and notification and uses the information in the e-mail notice to activate the package and complete the additional fields of the e-books checklist. Next, the pertinent information from the e-books checklist is sent to the metadata librarian in a task e-mail and a notification e-mail once the electronic resources librarian has activated the package. The metadata librarian then downloads the MARC records, uploads the records to the catalog, and submits her information into the e-books checklist form and completes her task. The loop is closed once the electronic resources librarian and the metadata librarian have completed their tasks. Completion of the final task prompts a notice to the acquisitions librarian that the package has been activated, cataloged, added to the database list if necessary, and announced to public services library staff.

The e-books checklist thus ensures the digital rights management information, simultaneous user information, MARC record method of download, frequency, credential information, and last MARC record update are easily located by anyone who needs it for future reference. We realize that while the checklist includes all the information that we consider necessary now, it is not meant to be static and should be flexible to accommodate information on new procedures that need to be performed for any e-book package so the processes can be added to or altered in the future as needed (Cope, Bunting, & Vause, n.d., p. 9).

## Future Steps

We have retroactively created e-books checklists for all our existing packages. As noted by Chen et al. (2016, p. 257), while some vendors send out notifications when records are ready to be downloaded, updated, or deleted, some do not have a good notification system, and the cataloging staff need to check vendor websites regularly for record availability. Hence, it is important to record vendor specific information on updating/deleting of MARC records to maintain uninterrupted access to e-books, which is what the e-books checklist will allow us to do.

We have also started recording access restrictions, such as user limit information for e-book collections and individual titles in the catalog, alert users and public services staff who may experience an access

issue so they can understand why they may not be able to access a particular title at that moment. Standardized language for links that users click to access titles will also be implemented. Currently, we have a variety of phrases for these access links, including some really lengthy ones like “an electronic book accessible through the World Wide Web-WCU ONLY” or “available via Gale Virtual Reference library-WCU ONLY.” We have decided to use “Click to view—WCU ONLY” along with the specific user limit of (one user, three users, or unlimited) with the “WCU ONLY” part added to distinguish our records from the other two schools in the consortium (see Figure 6).

Other changes to e-books MARC records we might consider include using a 9xx field instead of a 730, which is currently used, for recording locally created titles of e-book packages. This might alleviate some of the issues that can arise from having a locally created title that is the same as a series title found in the 490/830 field. These titles can also come up in user searches since the 730 fields are indexed and publicly searchable, and large collection searches based on these terms can deluge the user with an unmanageably large result set (Panchyshyn, 2013, p. 21). On the other hand, there is also the concern whether public services staff can search for these packages via a nonindexed field, since a nonindexed field requires using the backend of an ILS as opposed to the public catalog interface with which public services staff are more familiar.

Duplication of titles is also a concern. While complete elimination of duplication is impossible, having a sense of how much and where the duplication exists might be useful in collection development decisions (Chen, Kim, & Montgomery, 2016, p. 261). Having a method to tackle and reduce duplication in e-book titles is something we will need to work on in the future.

## Conclusion

The newly devised e-books workflow is benefiting both technical services and public services staff. We now have a place to check for unique e-book information as well as a process with clear responsibilities among staff. Standard language in catalog records and more efficient processes have benefited users, and we have begun a retroactive project to ensure that all of our e-book packages

have an entry in the e-book checklist and that all of our packages have simultaneous user information in the public catalog view. The workflow is working! In fact, we have found it so useful we are considering using a similar workflow for database activations and resource trials. We will definitely be using this workflow to train new staff who will be involved in e-books package process in the future.

One thing that surprised us was the learning curve for everyone involved. Coming up with a workflow helped us all to learn more about the different aspects of acquiring, activating, and cataloging e-books, where before we worked in silos and didn't understand what the other units did in this process. Just working on the e-books checklist was a helpful process as we learned that the acquisitions librarian did not understand jargon that the electronic resources librarian and the metadata librarian had taken for granted, and we had to alter the form to be understandable to everyone.

Conversely, the acquisition librarian pointed out a missed step in our e-books process of which neither the electronic resources librarian nor the metadata

librarian were aware, specifically needing to record a step regarding contacting our book vendor to suppress new e-book package titles from our DDA profile so we didn't risk purchasing a title twice. This had never occurred to either of us, but it was the first thought of the acquisitions librarian. Another benefit of the e-books checklist was that the form helps the acquisitions librarian know the technical questions to ask of the vendor at licensing and acquisition.

Overall, the new e-books workflow has led to better sharing of unique e-book access information with users and public services staff; better communication among technical services staff regarding our individual roles and responsibilities in the e-book acquisition, activation, and cataloging process; and a way to maintain necessary information with regard to e-book packages and individual titles for technical services staff for future reference. We hope this tool will allow us to remain flexible in how we approach this work and will work well enough to be useful in other resource workflows, so we can now say that we all know, and we are all responsible.

The screenshot shows the library's public catalog interface. At the top left is the Western Carolina University Hunter Library logo. On the right are navigation icons for New Search, Adv Search, My Account, and Hours. Below these is a horizontal menu with links: Research Guides, Ask-A-Librarian, Loan Shark/ILL, Course Reserves, ABC Express, and Browse E-Journals. The main search area includes a search bar with 'gangland chicago' entered, a dropdown for 'Western Carolina University', and a 'Search' button. Below the search bar are options for 'Add to My Lists', 'Add to Bag', and 'MARC Display'. The search results show a record for 'Gangland Chicago' by Richard C. Lindberg, published in 2016. The record includes a book cover image, author and title information, publication info, and a star rating. A note indicates 'Available online: Click to view--WCU ONLY (1 user limit)'. Below the record is an 'EBook' icon and a detailed description: '1 online resource (405 pages)', 'text' content, 'computer' media, 'online resource' carrier, and 'Bibliography' which includes bibliographical references and an index. The subject is listed as 'Crime -- Illinois -- Chicago -- History'.

Figure 6. Standardized language showing user limit information in the public view of the catalog record.



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