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### Collection Management Matters – ...And Then Came the Flood!

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# Collection Management Matters — ...And Then Came the Flood!

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**D**uring my forty years as a librarian, I thought I had seen it all. At least that is how I felt when the Library Dean asked me to substitute for him at a two-day **Lyrasis** workshop on “Disaster Preparedness” that was being held at **Fisk University** for Nashville area historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). In addition to **Tennessee State University**, librarians and staff from **Meharry Medical College** and **American Baptist College** attended.

During the workshop, which was led by **Annie Peterson**, we discussed various destructive scenarios and how to manage them. We also did a hands on exercise, where we divided into teams to make decisions about materials (books, videotapes, CDs, etc..) that were sitting in a trash can with water. Since our library has a relatively new roof, I was all but certain that catastrophic flooding would be the least of my worries.

Then one late September 2016, near closing time around 10:45 PM, a student went into the men’s room on the third floor of the library and flushed a urinal, that overflowed and would not stop. Water rushed out of the restroom on to the carpet in the stacks. He reported the problem to the Reference staff on the second floor. They could see that water was beginning to drip down from the third floor onto the books and the carpeted area in front of the Government Document area, so they moved those to tables. When Emergency or Facilities Management arrived around midnight, they gathered the waste baskets from around the floor, many already filled with trash, and placed them under the dripping ceiling. Everybody went home.

At 6:40 AM the next morning, the Acquisitions Senior Library Assistant called me at home for the first time in our nineteen years of working together, to say that water was streaming down from the ceiling on the second floor onto the books on the first floor and that it was all coming from the third. She had gotten a cart and was moving as many as she could. When I arrived, I found the third floor carpeted area in the L through R section, completely soaked and squishy. This included a Special Collections room dedicated to a State Senator. Boxes that held his donations showed serious water seepage. The second floor had small ponds, because the waste baskets left the night before had quickly overflowed to point where the carpet had shallow pools that caused water to flow, not drip, down to the first floor where there was real collection damage. Some of the books in the E through H section were soaking wet, while others were visibly moist. One of the custodians helped me empty the flooded waste baskets on the second floor, so that they could take on more water. When that

was under control, I went down to the first floor and got the Circulation and Collection Management staff, along with the Cataloging and Systems librarians to form a triage system. We put tables together to put the books on, so they could dry out and then we gathered up every fan we could find and placed them where they could blow on the tables.

The two Catalogers went to the shelves to pull the books that showed evidence of dampness. The Systems/Metadata Librarian supervised the team that sorted the books that could be salvaged, from those that needed to go on the tables. The Circulation staff pulled the books off the shelves that were in the flooded area, which might have gotten damp from spillage, if it continued to spread. They also arranged the books on the tables to dry out. We ended up with a large cart of books which were soaked to the point that some were already beginning to show discoloration.

We were in the process of searching for replacements for the damaged books, when it was brought to my attention that as a public university, we were subject to state property procedures for floods. Two claims adjusters from the company contracted by the state of Tennessee to handle flood damage surveyed the areas the next day and explained the procedure for books. A restoration company would check each book in the flood area with instruments designed to detect dampness and pull those that tested for a certain percentage. Damp books would be pulled from the shelves, boxed up and sent to be freeze dried at a facility in Fort Worth, Texas for several weeks. When the books were returned, we would make an assessment of what could be retained and what needed to be replaced. The claims adjusters said they had dealt with a flood situation at another university, so they were familiar with issues that might arise in an academic library.

All of this took place very quickly, so some procedures were afterthoughts. For instance, the restoration company checked the books for moisture and packed them over the weekend. Nobody counted the books being taken off the shelf, so the restoration company had to do it after the books had left the library and they counted 3,641. We also did not have list of the books removed, so the Systems/Metadata Librarian created a spreadsheet in our online system (Sierra) that listed all of the books in the ranges within the flood zone. She globally changed the location for each book on the spreadsheet to “Flood Area.” The Circulation Staff then did an inventory with our Circa equipment to determine which titles remained on the shelves and their status was changed back to available. Those that were missing were designated as “Flood Damaged,” if they

were not checked out or already designated as “Lost.” All three areas were cordoned off from public access. Humidifiers ran for 24 hours for several days.

After the books were returned from the restoration facility, the Circulation Staff unboxed them and used Circa inventory to scan them in, because we thought the job would get done quicker. When that project was finished, the staff then sorted out the books which did not show any sign of water damage. They were re-shelved after the status was changed from “Flood Damaged” to “Available.” The damaged books were put on a cart for me to evaluate and the government documents were put on a separate cart for that librarian to assess. The Systems/Metadata Librarian created a revised list of flood damaged books and we matched her spreadsheet to the books on the cart.

Our next task was to document the replacement cost of each title. We deleted books from the list that were duplicates of print titles or we already had in eBook format. We identified books that were no longer available in paper, but were available electronically. We evaluated titles that were minimally affected and could go back to the shelves, as well as those that only had cover damage and needed to be sent to the bindery.

For books that remained on the spreadsheet, we went to *Amazon.com* and listed the new or used price. If a title had a new edition, we cited that edition and its price. If a book had dated content, we substituted a contemporary title, color coded it purple and listed its price. For those books that we could not locate in **Amazon** or identify a suitable replacement, we listed the current average price of an academic library book (\$72.31) in *Library and Book Trade Annual 2016* (Bowker). We submitted the completed spreadsheet with explanations to the claims adjuster, who requested that we take a 15%-20% depreciation for the \$72.31 quote, which brought our replacement cost for books no longer available to \$57.85 or \$61.46. Our total replacement cost for 294 books was quoted at \$22,147.81.

There were two important takeaways for me. First, the library staff should create a list of the books in all of the flood areas immediately. Secondly, if an outside company is removing books, the library should request that the company provide a count of the books before they remove them from the campus. When the books were returned, I noticed that the outside of the box had the count for the number contained within. I would like to have matched up numbers before they left the campus. Some boxes had four books and were mostly full of

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paper, while others boxes the same size could have 20 books or more. They could not provide an explanation as why they did it that way, but we retained the boxes, so that we could recycle them for our summer weeding projects.

We are currently awaiting the final approval of the insurance adjuster. When the approval is provided, the university will transfer the money into our book object code. I believe I was “prepared for a purpose” when I attended the Disaster Preparedness workshop. I even contacted **Dr. Jessie Carney Smith**, the Library Dean at **Fisk** and **Annie Peterson**, our **Lyrisis** trainer, to share that I had been able to convert my just in time knowledge into actual experience. The event absolutely reinforced for me the thought that librarianship is a forever growing and evolving profession where you may need any skill set you can acquire. 🌱