



University of North Carolina School of the Arts: A Digital Transformation

A small library introduces new capabilities and wide-ranging efficiencies, saving time and streamlining their services.



About University of North Carolina School of the Arts

The University of North Carolina School of the Arts (UNCSA) is a top-ranked creative and performing arts conservatory, located in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. It was founded in 1963 as the first public arts conservatory in the United States. Part of the UNC system, UNCSA is a unique professional institute, training students at the high school, undergraduate and master's levels for professional careers in the arts. The university is divided into the Schools of Dance, Design and Production, Drama, Filmmaking, and Music. It has an academic staff of 186 and 1,144 students.

The UNCSA Library and Learning Commons is a member of NC LIVE, a statewide library consortium that purchases electronic resources and services on behalf of 205 academic and public libraries around the state, the Triad Academic Library Association (TALA), and the UNC System. The library has a full-time staff of twelve.

“

The Alma-based workflow is quick and efficient, from licensing all the way to getting the right content into the hands of our students.

”

Sarah Falls, University Librarian

The Need for a New Solution

The UNCSCA Library is dedicated to providing the materials or information needed, in whatever formats are deemed appropriate and useful, to support the educational and artistic programs of UNCSCA. In practice, this meant an increasing shift in focus toward digital acquisitions, rather than print, as well as toward audiovisual resources.

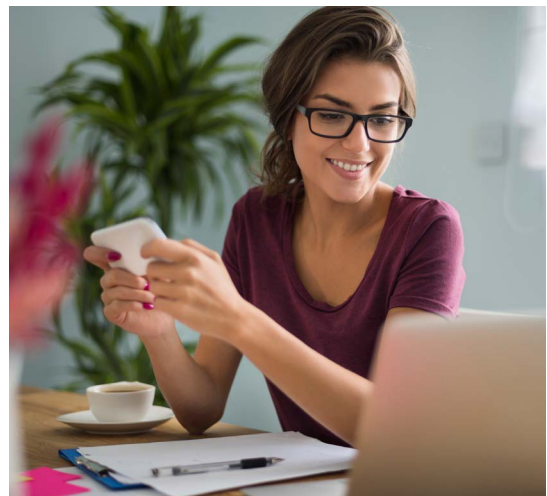
However, the discovery solution did not meet the needs of the university's concentration on the visual and performing arts, which required significant access to filmed performances. It was very hard for students to quickly find what they needed, so a more robust discovery platform was necessary.

In addition to its discovery challenges, the library decided that its library services platform (LSP), Sierra, also needed to be upgraded.

Efficiency in a Small, Specialized Library

As their challenges encompassed intertwined areas of discovery, acquisitions, ERM, cataloging and analytics, the UNCSCA Library leadership decided to undertake a comprehensive transformation. The goal was to introduce both new capabilities and efficiencies, with the recognition that a small, multitasking staff would benefit enormously from streamlining.

Having worked with Ex Libris services in the past, UNCSCA Library Director Sarah Falls suggested that Primo and Alma would be most suitable for the encompassing changes the library needed. She highlighted the flexibility of Alma as being a critical for her smaller library.



“We can pick and choose what we need to use in Alma,” Sarah said, “and the efficiencies it gives us are well worth the effort to get there.”

- Print, digital and electronic resources are centrally and consistently managed for the first time in Alma.
- As items and collections are migrated, expanded, updated and added, any necessary fixes (such as changing access rights, eliminating outdated information, adapting settings, etc.) can be easily made directly in Alma and Primo.
- DRM information on licensing and payments are automatically added to Alma and tracked.
- Analytics is an automatic, ongoing process that library leadership can “check in on” regularly or on demand. The reporting is detailed and allows the librarian to drill down for valuable insights. As Sarah put it, “Alma lets you be a bit lazy, because you can set up reports and have them automatically pushed straight out to your dashboard.”
- Integration with the Banner administrative system has allowed for the automated updating of student information in Alma and Primo.
- The intertwined workflows of discovery, acquisitions, cataloging and other library services are streamlined and seamless with Alma and Primo.

Giving 150% during implementation

“We had a very smooth, thorough and good implementation experience,” Sarah said, “albeit fully digital.”

A curve ball was thrown into the Alma implementation plans with the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic. The UNCSA Library staff was very nervous, but their contacts in the Ex Libris implementation team provided calm encouragement, confident that they would be able to go live in the same timeframe as before.

“The Ex Libris team really stepped up,” Sarah commented. “They’ve always been good, but I think they really came at it 150% in terms of responsiveness.”

The UNCSA implementation team held regular meetings with their Ex Libris colleagues and then met for in-house follow-ups, which Sarah said she “cannot recommend enough. It helps you close the loop on Ex Libris guidance and plan next steps.” Another key element was Basecamp, which they took full advantage of throughout the process for working through questions and accessing documentation.

The UNCSA Library has very focused needs, which the Ex Libris team was able to meet with flexibility and round-the-clock support. They were also “really friendly,” according to Sarah. “We had a great time and enjoyed each other’s company, even if stuck at home on Zoom.”

The UNCSA Library continues to receive close support post-implementation, as well. The Ex Libris person of contact responds quickly, with great flexibility and a granular focus on UNCSA’s specific needs.

In addition, members of the UNCSA Library staff took advantage of optional Ex Libris certification for Alma, Primo or both. The skills and knowledge they gained has been very helpful for the library in independently responding to issues that arise and designing effective workflows.

Free to Focus on Effectiveness

Alma and Primo have saved the UNCSA Library staff a lot of time and effort, reducing frustration and streamlining services to their patrons.

- The workflow from identifying an e-resource vendor to obtaining a license to providing patron access is rapid and efficient, often taking just a few hours.
- The lion’s share of UNCSA collections development and management is now in digital format, representing a major part of the library’s annual budget.
- Thanks to Alma integrations, student information is automatically updated daily, eliminating the need for a staff member to devote an entire day to the process. In a two-way process, Alma also updates the university systems with relevant data.
- The integration also streamlines late fee charges and notifications, as well as making it easier to track activity by patrons.
- Detailed, accessible, accurate Alma analytics reporting provides a centralized view into library activity, indicating how allocated funds are being spent. This insight makes the library director far more effective in her budgeting and planning.

With the Alma-driven automation of routine tasks and other efficiencies, the UNCSA Library staff has more time to devote to value-added activities. This includes being more involved in patron-facing support, assisting with intense pre-semester preparations, student outreach, and more.

Next Steps

Having seen the benefits of having staff members skilled in using Alma and Primo, the UNCSA Library Director intends to ask other members of her staff to get Ex Libris certification in those solutions. Sarah expects that this will facilitate both more effective and expanded use of Alma and Primo in the future.

Among the likely additional applications of Alma is full integration with the university's financial management system, for which Alma has the built-in capability. The library has found that Alma allows for not only tracking financial information, but also helps staff plan and budget for the next fiscal year.

“We have also started building out collections in Alma that are discoverable in Primo. This functionality is an incredible outreach tool for us and allows us to curate collections for users with very specific research needs. And finally, because of the move to Alma, we are better able to define what is missing from certain record sets. We are currently working on a project to enhance subject terms, locations, and formats for our play script collection, which is much needed to support our highly rated School of Drama.”

About Ex Libris

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