Starting and then starting again: Challenges and victories in hiring, retaining, and training new acquisitions staff

Amy Castillo, Director of Access and Discovery

University of Texas at Arlington Libraries

Acquisitions Institute | May 19, 2025

A bit about University of Texas at Arlington

University of Texas at Arlington campus*

- R1 university – Very High Research Activity Carnegie classification
- 41,000+ student headcount, 1,500+ faculty, and 2,500+ staff
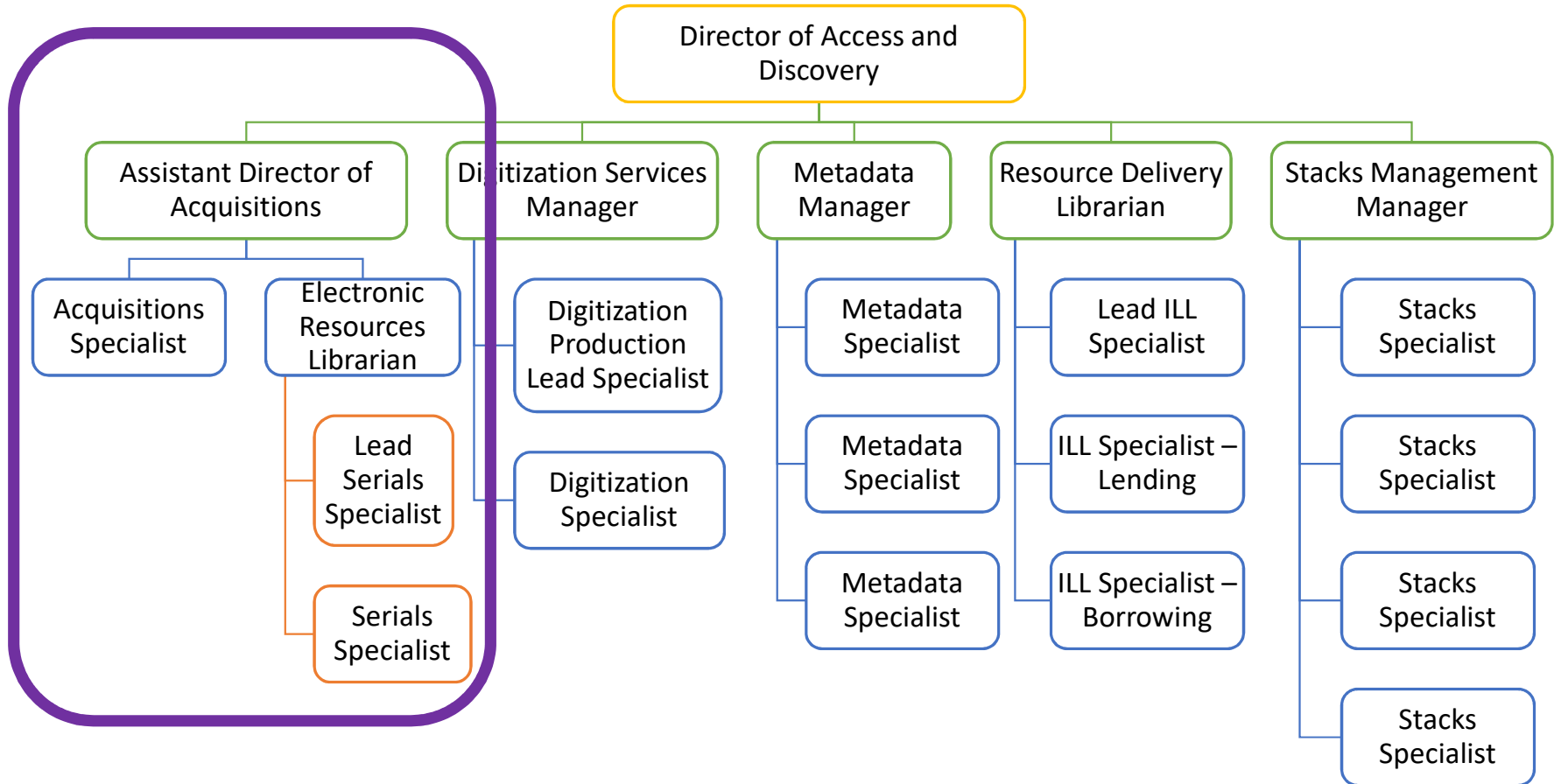
Libraries specifically^

- Approximately 123 staff (including graduate research assistants)

Access & Discovery Department Org Chart *circa 2025*

- **Director of Access and Discovery**
  - **Assistant Director of Acquisitions**
    - Acquisitions Specialist
    - Electronic Resources Librarian
      - Lead Serials Specialist
      - Serials Specialist
  - **Digitization Services Manager**
    - Digitization Production Lead Specialist
    - Digitization Specialist
  - **Metadata Manager**
    - Metadata Specialist
    - Metadata Specialist
    - Metadata Specialist
  - **Resource Delivery Librarian**
    - Lead ILL Specialist
    - ILL Specialist – Lending
    - ILL Specialist – Borrowing
  - **Stacks Management Manager**
    - Stacks Specialist
    - Stacks Specialist
    - Stacks Specialist
    - Stacks Specialist

But let's go back a few years...

December 2016

E-Resources Librarian (ERL) left, did not fill position and lost line over time. Department head filled in.

June 2019

Acquisitions Librarian retired (almost 34 years!), did not fill position and line lost over time with intent to fill at some point. Department head filled in.

April 2020

Department Head promoted to Associate University Librarian, and continued to fill in as dept head, ERL, and Acq Librarian
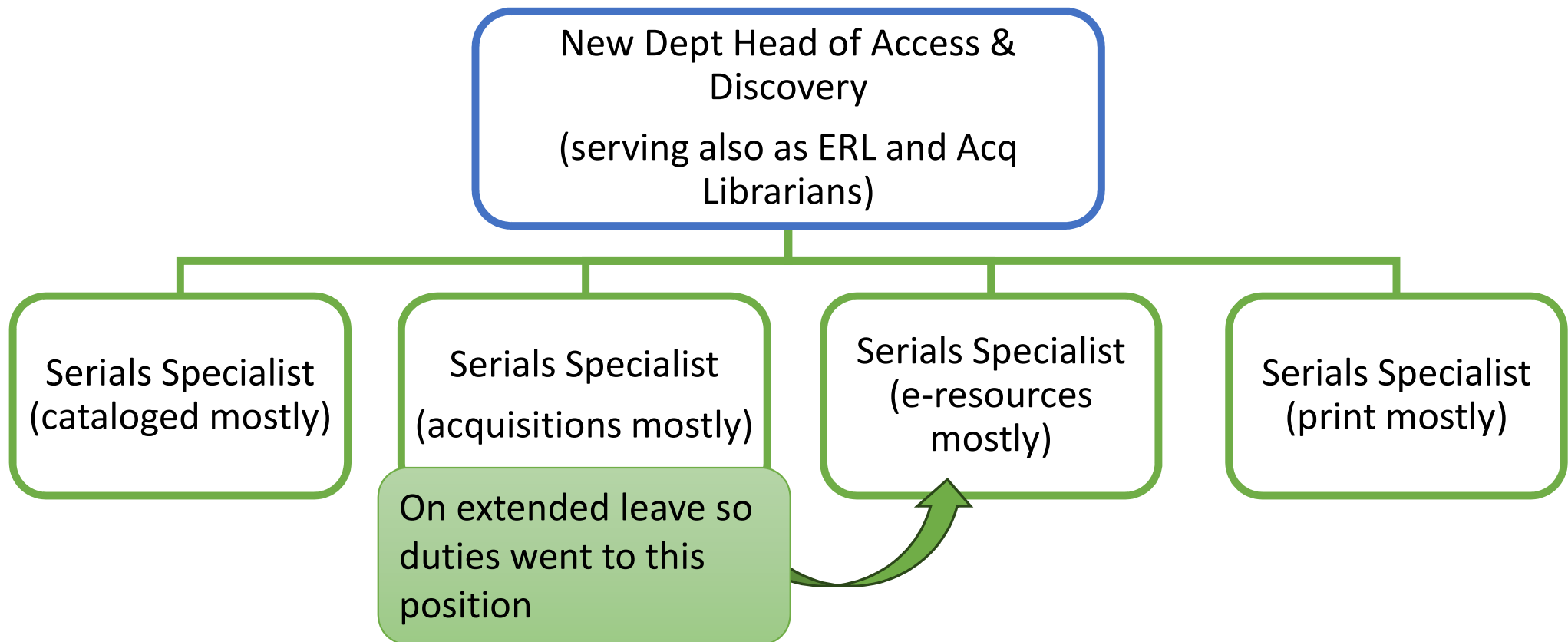
November 2021

New Department Head hired, alleviating AUL of filling 4 roles simultaneously.
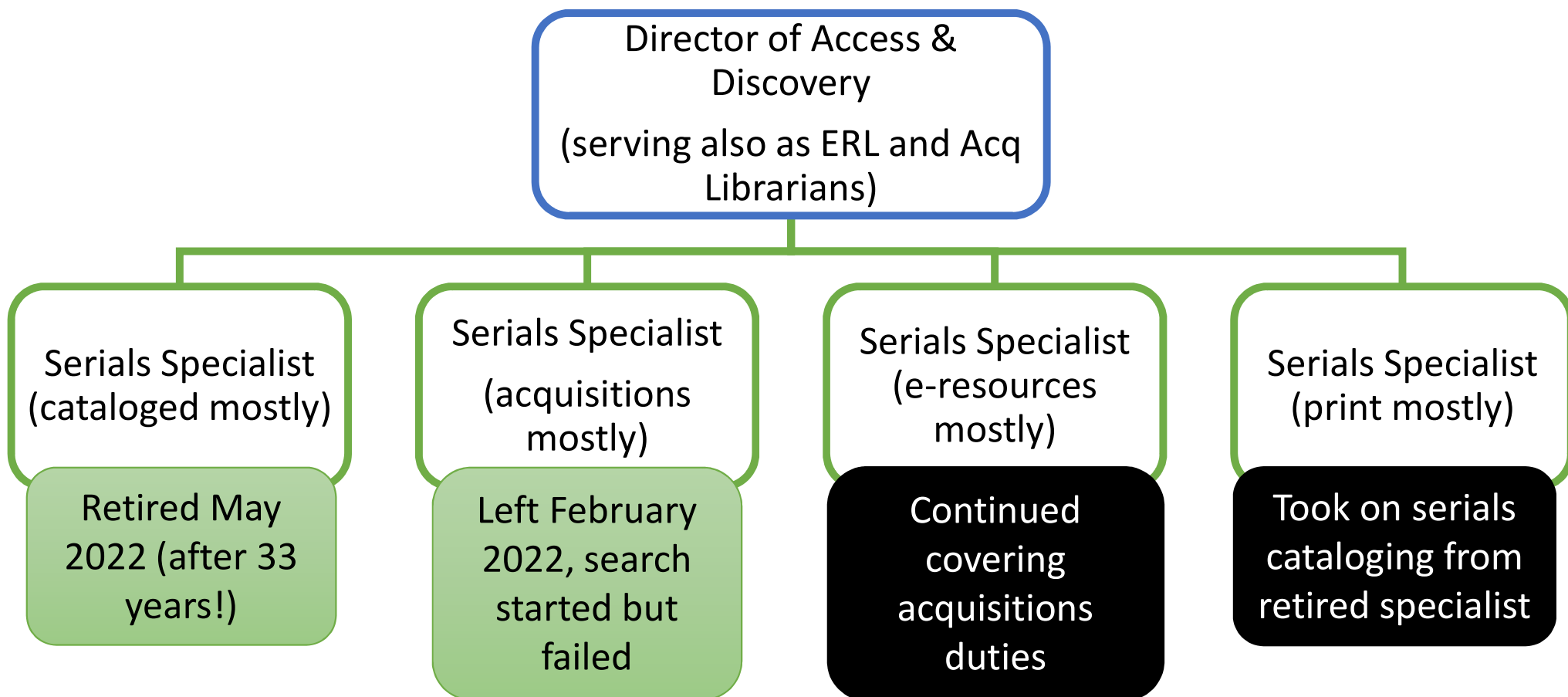
What wasn't happening

- License agreements and contracts were no longer systematically saved in a single place, either in print or electronically
- Annual databases reviews did not occur – just renewed and occasionally poor-performing resources were put on a "watchlist"
- Usage was being collected through SUSHI connection into Alma Analytics but not regularly analyzed for insight into how resources were being used, particularly the large individual serials renewal review.
- Endowment funds were not spent.

Acquisitions Unit by end of 2021

New Dept Head of Access & Discovery

(serving also as ERL and Acq Librarians)

Serials Specialist (cataloged mostly)

Serials Specialist (acquisitions mostly)

Serials Specialist (e-resources mostly)

Serials Specialist (print mostly)

On extended leave so duties went to this position

Acquisitions Unit by mid-2022

Director of Access & Discovery

(serving also as ERL and Acq Librarians)

Serials Specialist (cataloged mostly)

Retired May 2022 (after 33 years!)

Serials Specialist (acquisitions mostly)

Left February 2022, search started but failed

Serials Specialist (e-resources mostly)

Continued covering acquisitions duties

Serials Specialist (print mostly)

Took on serials cataloging from retired specialist

Acquisitions Unit by end of 2022

Director of Access & Discovery (serving also as ERL and Acq Librarians)

Acquisitions Librarian – search started but failed

Acquisitions Specialist – hired October 2022

Serials Specialist (e-resources mostly)

This person was handling all of serials + training new Acq Specialist
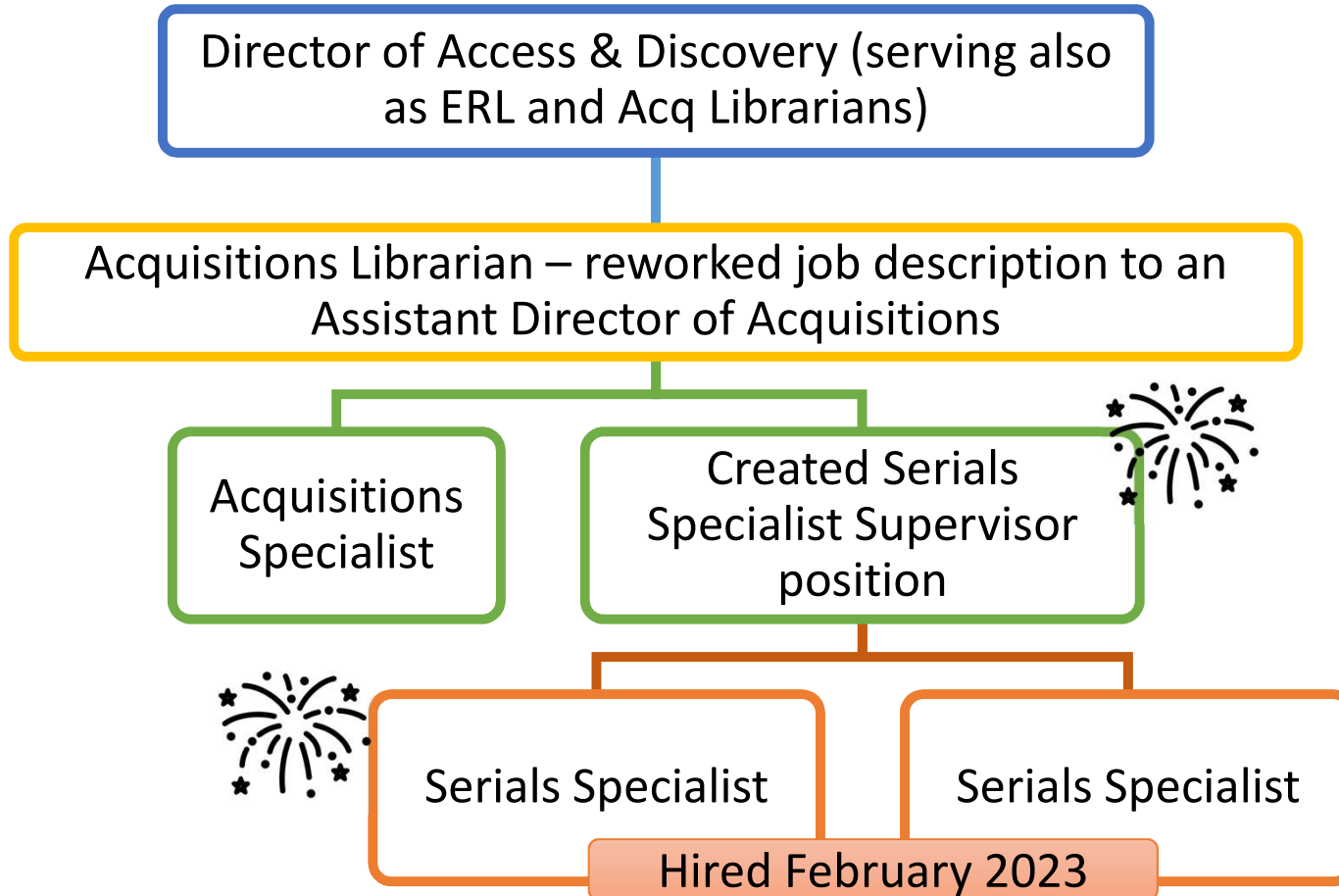
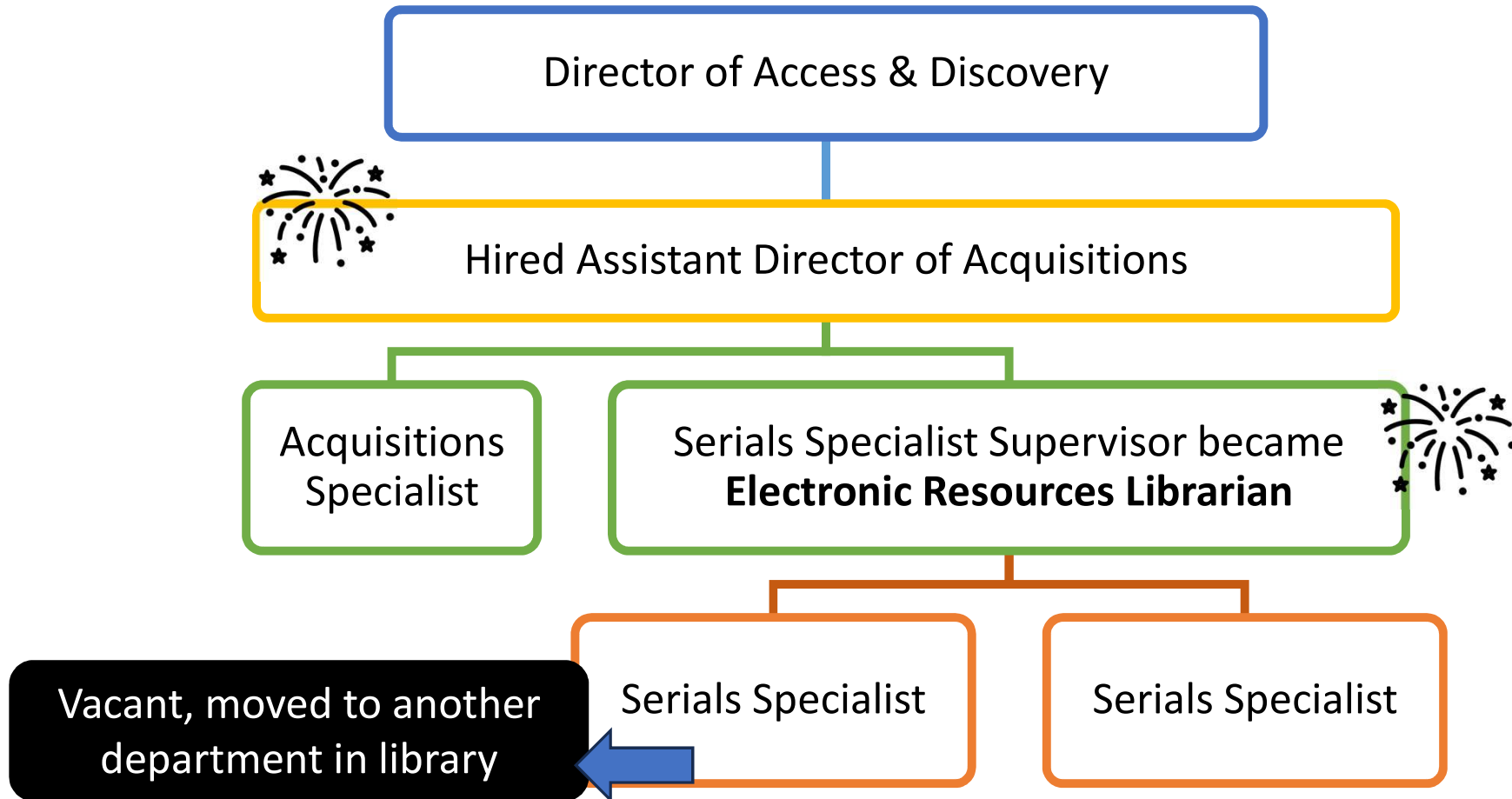**Serials Specialist (cataloging mostly)**
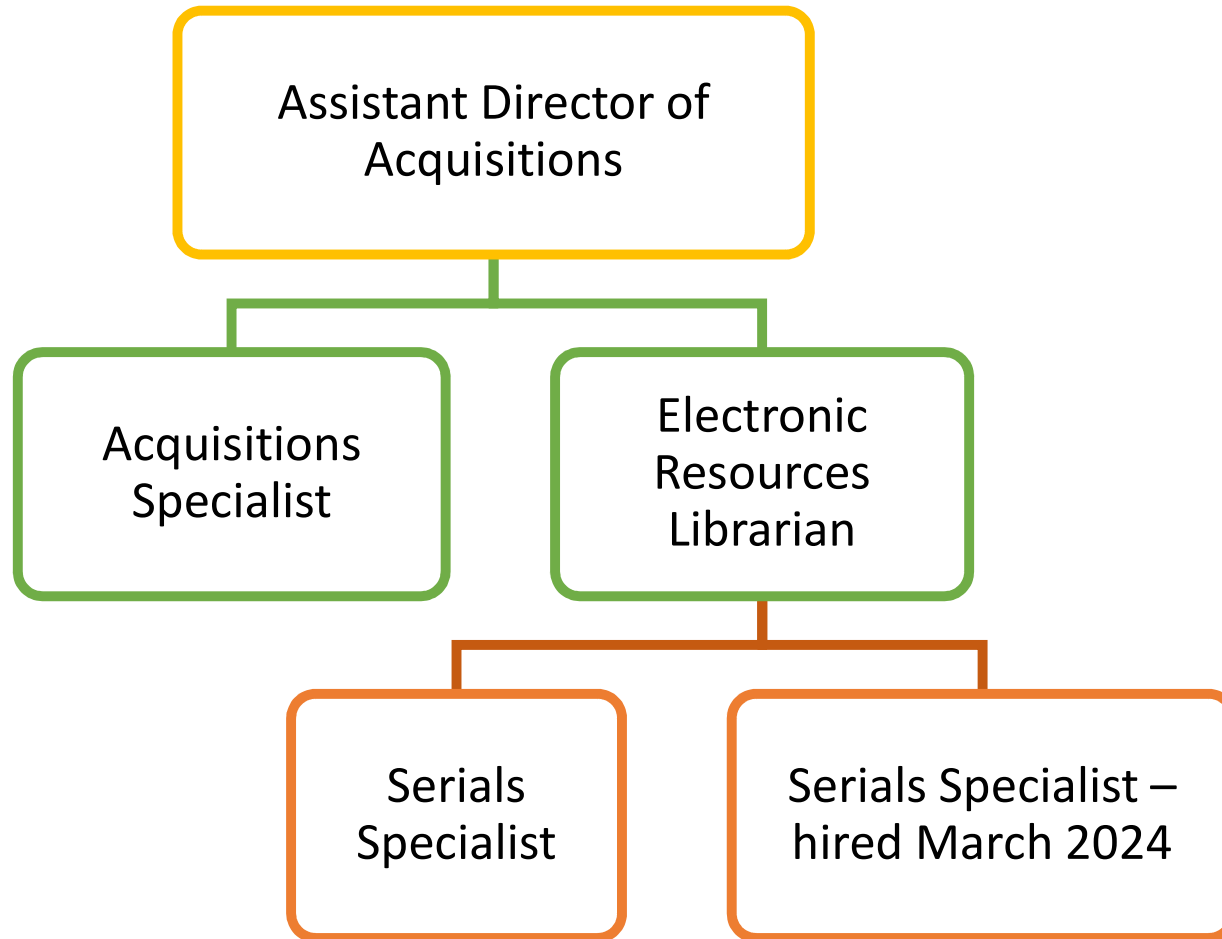
Vacant

Serials Specialist (print mostly)

Vacant

Search started November 2022

Acquisitions Unit by mid-2023

Director of Access & Discovery (serving also as ERL and Acq Librarians)

Acquisitions Librarian – reworked job description to an Assistant Director of Acquisitions

Acquisitions Specialist

Created Serials Specialist Supervisor position

Serials Specialist

Serials Specialist

Hired February 2023

Acquisitions Unit by end of 2023

Director of Access & Discovery

Hired Assistant Director of Acquisitions

Acquisitions Specialist

Serials Specialist Supervisor became **Electronic Resources Librarian**

Serials Specialist

Serials Specialist

Vacant, moved to another department in library

Acquisitions Unit by mid-2024

Acquisitions Unit by end 2024

Assistant Director of Acquisitions

Acquisitions Specialist

Electronic Resources Librarian

Serials Specialist

Serials Specialist

Vacant, moved out of state

Acquisitions Unit by mid-2025....

Assistant Director of Acquisitions

Acquisitions Specialist

Vacant, moved to another department in library. Search in progress.

Electronic Resources Librarian

Promoted to Lead Serials Specialist

Serials Specialist – hired March 2025

- . The rollercoaster continues
- but it seems to have slowed down…

Library-wide Turnover by Fiscal Year

TURNOVER BY FISCAL YEAR

Turnover Rate = Termination Count ÷ Average Headcount

2024-2025: 5.13% to date
2023-2024: 6.90%
2022-2023: 18.18%
2021-2022: 19.75%
2020-2021: 22.09%
2019-2020: 12.36%
2018-2019: 28.09%

Legend: ● Voluntary ● Retirement ● Involuntary

X-axis: FY19, FY20, FY21, FY22, FY23, FY24, FY25
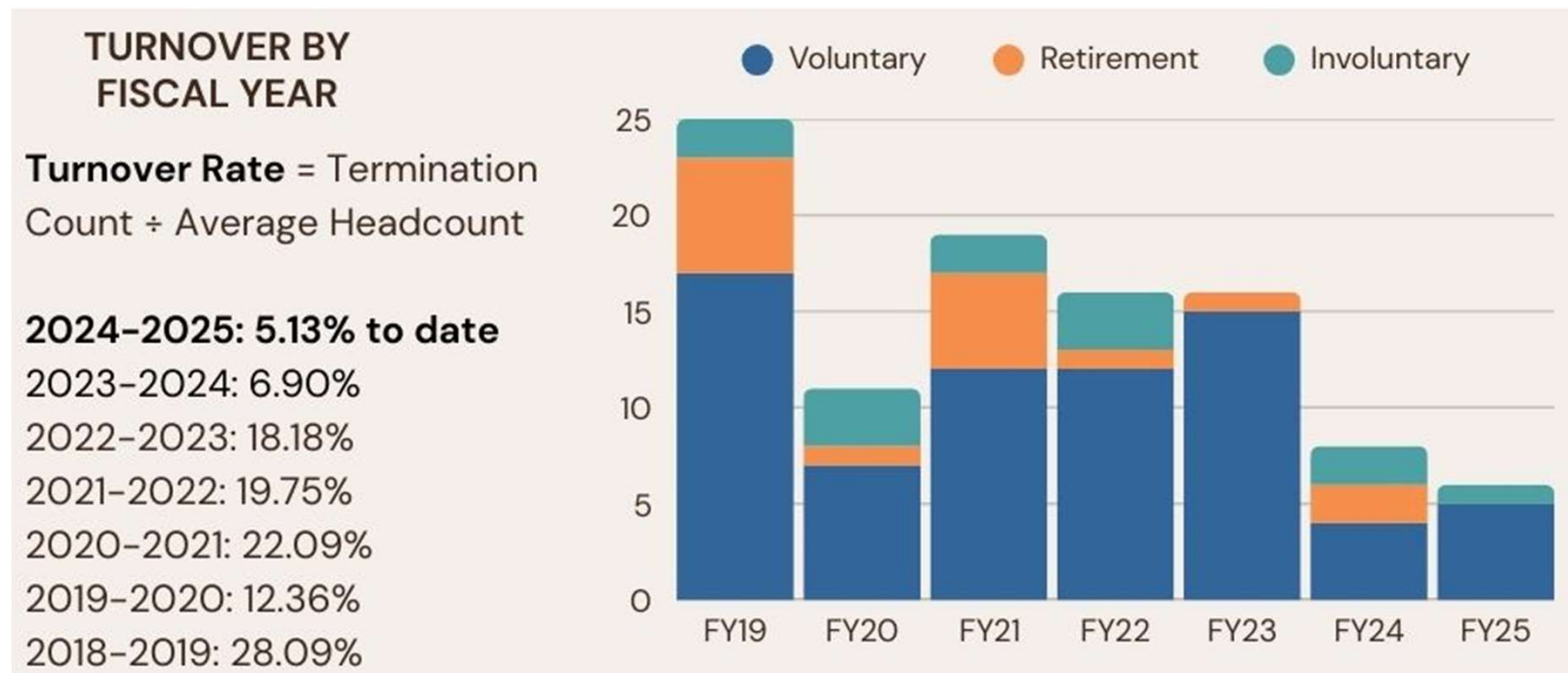
Data for FY25 is for only a portion of the fiscal year. Fiscal year runs September-August.

Data presented at UTA Libraries March Updates Libraries Staff Meeting (2025, March 19). Permission to share permitted by Associate University Librarian of Organizational Excellence and Creative Programming, Katie Musick Peery.

Library-wide Hiring for Open Positions
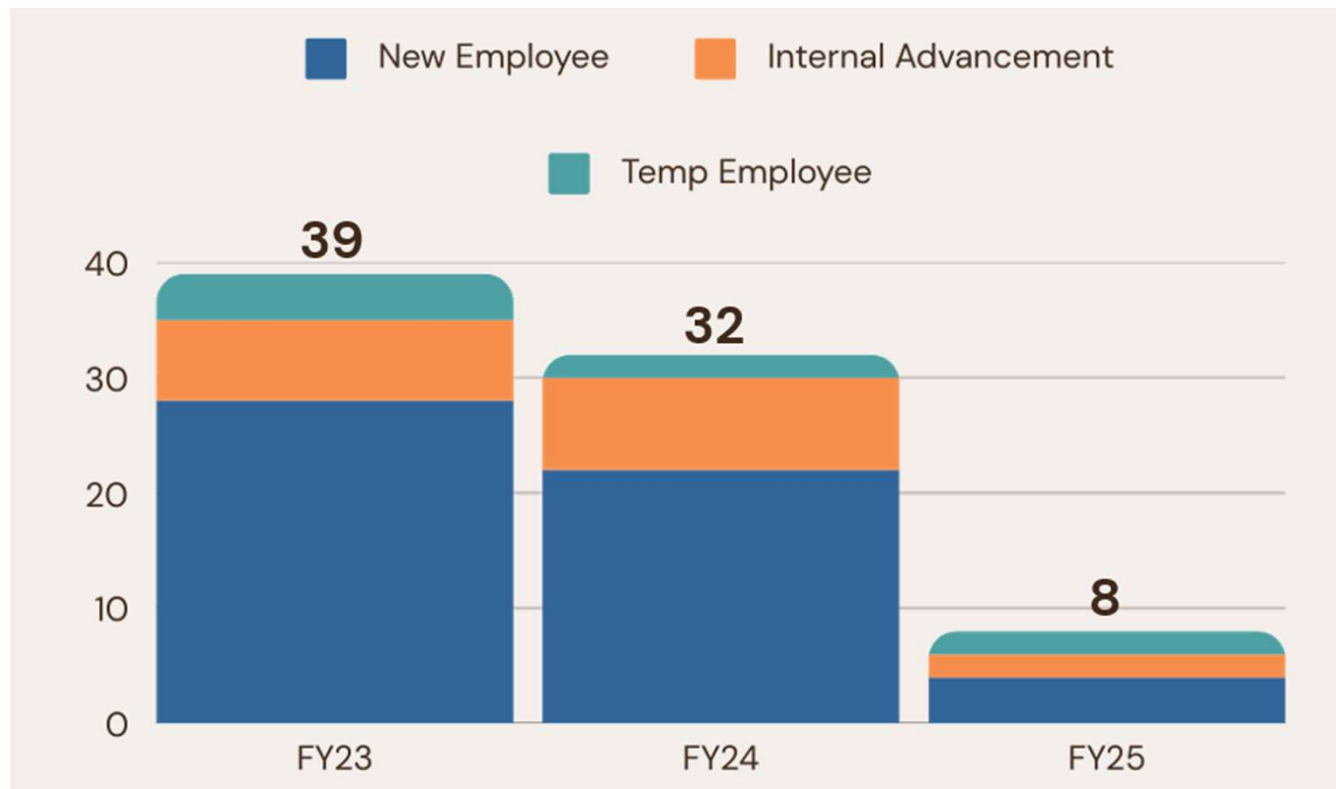
Data presented at UTA Libraries March Updates Libraries Staff Meeting (2025, March 19).
Permission to share permitted by Associate University Librarian of Organizational Excellence and
Creative Programming, Katie Musick Peery.

Changes we made to make starting again less painful

Tasks Brain Dump
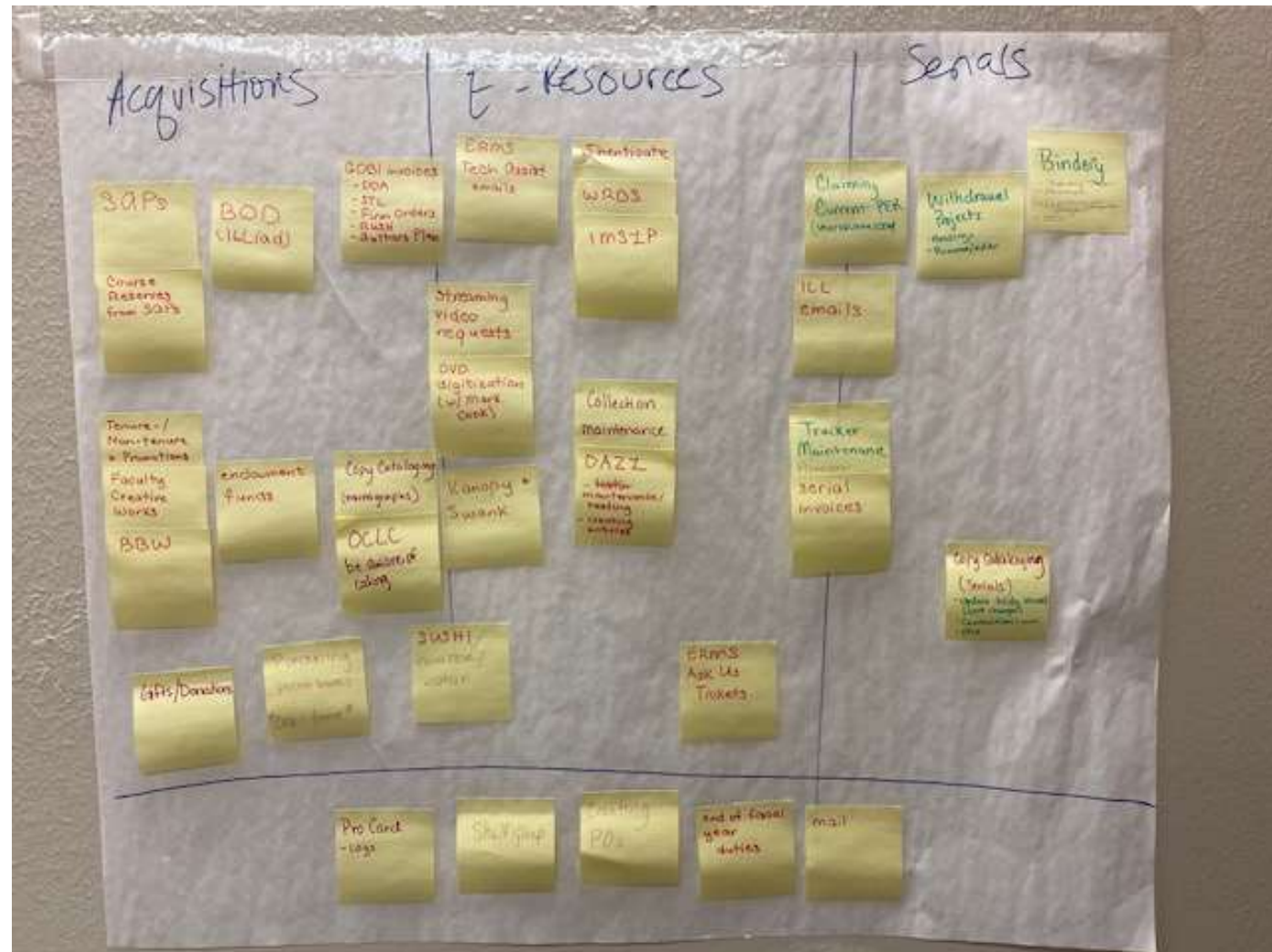
Updated Acquisitions Team Processes & Workflows

- Set up different "trackers" to manage annual databases & serials renewal and assigned renewals to staff so it's not all on one person

- Cross-train, cross-train, cross-train!
  - Each person ends up becoming responsible for certain tasks, but we try to make sure no one is siloing work

- Set up Coral ERM to manage credentials and vendor contacts (was in spreadsheet before)

- Set up e-resources queue within LibAnswers for troubleshooting tickets

Updated Acquisitions Team Processes & Workflows

- Created a "back burner" projects list, being more thoughtful on capacity levels and not doing all the things at once
- Documentation has been created and updated by each new hire
- Re-set file management system for organizing invoices, contracts, and historical usage in our Library's SharePoint site
- Initiated accessibility reviews for electronic resources with our campus Office of Information Technology

Recruitment Improvements

- Rewrote position descriptions several times, gave ourselves the opportunity to reflect on current needs and revise accordingly

- Internal succession planning and growth opportunities

- Utilized Talent Acquisition consultant for the Acquisitions Librarian role which had failed 3-4 times before we were successful

Updates to onboarding process

- Checklists, created through team approach
  - Access levels needed, pages to bookmark, training schedule documented
- Meetings with colleagues around Library & tours around facilities to familiarize new staff with environment
- Improved onboarding from our Libraries' Organizational Excellence team
  - Streamlined list of documents and actions needed for starting at UTA Libraries – day 1, week 1, month 1

More mindful offboarding process

- Leaned more on cross-training through duration of time at Library
- Reviewed documentation with supervisor and peers to ensure smoother transition
- Collected feedback on areas to improve to help us with the next new hire (voluntary)

Increased training & development support

- ALA Fundamentals workshops
  - Cataloging, Acquisitions
- Webinars
  - Variety of free and paid for through Amigos, NISO, ALA, NOTSL, etc.
- Cataloging Workshops
  - Serials cataloging through Midwest Collaborative for Library Services
- Conferences (for librarians)
  - ER&L, Charleston, ALA, Acquisitions Institute ;)
- Supervisor training & succession planning
- Summer book club reading of *Radical Candor* for staff & student managers

Group discussions

Hiring

What worked? What didn't?

Have there been challenges with hiring for vacated positions?

Retention

What worked? What didn't?

Have you seen similar trends
at your organization?

Training

What worked? What didn't?

What is your go-to training tool or resource?

Thank you for your time & engagement!

Happy to respond to any questions!

amy.castillo@uta.edu