

2022

No Such Thing as a Free Lunch: Labor in Open Source Systems Implementations

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Taylor, Jaime, "No Such Thing as a Free Lunch: Labor in Open Source Systems Implementations" (2022).
University Libraries Presentations Series. 27.
<https://doi.org/10.7275/wjvg-a273>

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No Such Thing as a Free Lunch

Labor in Open Source Systems Implementations

Jaime Taylor, UMass Amherst
Library Technology Roadmap, Amigos, Dec. 1, 2022

Checking in

Who has done a systems migration recently?

Which systems did you migrate to?

Were any of them open sources systems?

Checking in

Did your library hire any additional staff for the migration project?

If so, what were those people's roles?

Were they permanent or temporary staff?

What does “open source” mean?

The **source code is freely licensed & available**,
resulting in:

- Free as in pizza
- Ability to modify
- Ability to redistribute
- Decentralization & collaboration
- Security

**FOLIO, CORAL, Evergreen, Koha,
Aspen, VuFind, Blacklight, Islandora,
DSpace, Omeka**

Why do libraries choose open source systems?

- **Free (as in pizza) software!**
- **Hosting & support options**
- **Customizable**
- **Meet local needs**
- **Transparency, privacy, free (as in speech)**
- **Alignment with mission/vision**

Let's talk about
the other side of
the equation

Theses:

1. Open source softwares are often chosen because of – perceived or real – cost savings. Cost savings calculations need to account for the different & increased labor necessary to open source software projects. This doesn't always happen.
2. If your library undertakes a large project, staff cannot work on that project while also performing their regular duties. Without reduced duties or additional staff, either regular or project work will be undone or done poorly; staff will be overworked & burnt out; the project will exceed projected timelines & resources.

In combination, these produce a perfect storm of overwork.

Open source projects have different labor needs

Skillsets??

PHP

JavaScript

Ruby on Rails

APIs

OAI-PMH

CSS

XML

UX

GitHub

Okapi

Python

RegEx

JSON

Java

Linux

server administration

SQL

Drupal

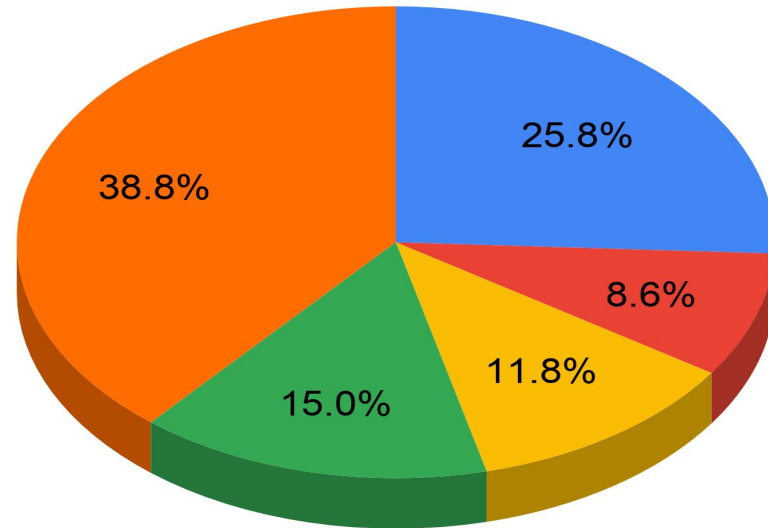
...and more!

(Even when hosting &
support is farmed out!)

Basic math : UMass tech services time spent on FOLIO in late 2019

Total average hours per week: 12.57

- Special Interest Group meetings
- Special Interest Group homework
- Five College Working Group meetings
- Five College Working Group homework
- Other FOLIO related activities



No, really.

A lot of us already have franken-jobs that used to be done by multiple people.

A lot of us are already overworked and burnt out by doing those jobs, especially in pandemic year 3.

Can you do 12 more hours of work every week?

Solutions:

- Hire new or project staff to who have the required skillsets
- Hire new or project staff to cover regular duties if existing staff have the required skillsets
- (Be sure that either existing or new/project staff have appropriate skill sets for the project!)
- Accept that the project cannot happen at this time, at current staffing levels

That's it! There is no solution that doesn't involve more staff & appropriate skillset; gets both regular & project work done; and avoids overwork & burnout.

How?

Intervention #1 : Evaluation of Systems/RFP process

Labor questions *need* to be included in RFP processes & project proposals.

- Include questions to vendors about staffing & skillsets needed.
- Talk to other institutions to find out the real story, not just the vendor!
 - Look for institutions that have staffing & funding similar to yours.
- Ask about how long projects take – at different levels of staffing.

Intervention #2 : Labor

We can't reasonably be expected to take on project work.

A lot of our bosses will try to make us do it anyway.

- Do you have a union & collective bargaining agreement? Use it.
- Don't? Consider unionizing – this is a great moment for it.
- “Which of these tasks are we hiring new/project staff for?”
- “Since I already have a full plate, which of my current responsibilities are we going to pause for the duration of the project?”
 - Don't ask a yes/no question.
 - Ask as if you assume it will happen.
 - “We” language.

Thank you!
Questions? Ideas?

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