Navigating the Post-Go-Live Phase:
Alma Implementation at the University of the Free State Library

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Outline

- Overview of the University of the Free State
- Transition from Sierra to Alma
- Why patron data matters
- Challenges in Patron Data Integration
- Is Migrating Legacy Data the Best Approach?
- Strategies Adopted by UFS
- Conclusion and lessons learned

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Who are we?

University of the Free State, South Africa

121 years old
3 campuses
7 faculties
39 639 total students
3% distance-learning students
5 018 staff members
3 707 international collaborating institutions

UFS IN **NUMBERS**

Established in 1904   3 campuses   7 faculties

ECONOMIC AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES   EDUCATION   HEALTH SCIENCES   THE HUMANITIES   LAW   NATURAL AND AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES   THEOLOGY AND RELIGION   BUSINESS SCHOOL

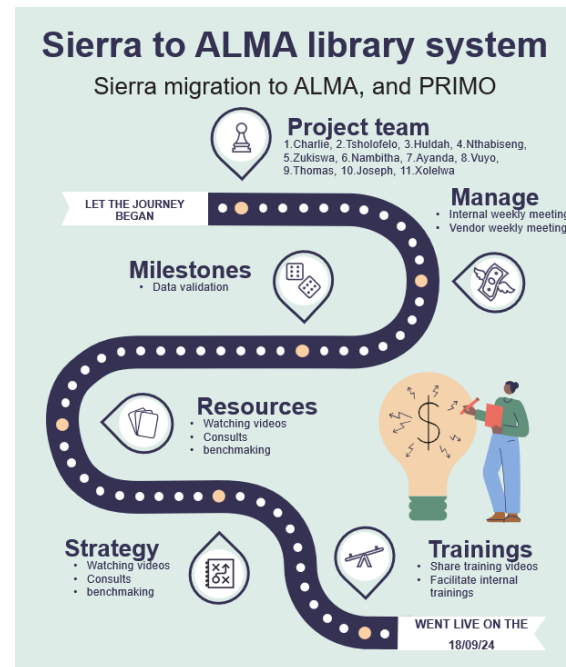Students (2025 registrations) 39 639   Students (2024 graduates) 9 250   Registered 97% contact | 3% distance

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Introduction

Project Timelines

- Project start date: March 2024
- Go live: September 2024
- **Focus**: Post-go live implementation

Sierra to ALMA library system

Sierra migration to ALMA, and PRIMO

Project team
1.Charlie, 2.Tsholofelo, 3.Huldah, 4.Nthabiseng, 5.Zukiswa, 6.Nambitha, 7.Ayanda, 8.Vuyo, 9.Thomas, 10.Joseph, 11.Xolelwa

LET THE JOURNEY BEGAN

Manage
- Internal weekly meeting
- Vendor weekly meeting

Milestones
- Data validation

Resources
- Watching videos
- Consults
- benchmaking

Strategy
- Watching videos
- Consults
- benchmaking

Trainings
- Share training videos
- Facilitate internal trainings

WENT LIVE ON THE 18/09/24

From Sierra to Alma

- Transition to Alma in 2024
- Sierra- Legacy system
- Alma – A modern, cloud-based, integrated solution.
- Implementation
- Post-go-live challenge
- Disruption in day-to-day operations
- **Challenge** – Patron data

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Why Patron Data Matters

1. **Core functions** dependent on patron data:
   - Circulation & loans
   - Access control
   - Fines
   - Authentication for digital resources
   - Analytics & reporting
   - Notifications
2. **Integration**: PeopleSoft Human Resource System and Student information System
3. **Compliance**: POPIA (Protection of Personal Information Act) & UFS Policy

Challenges in Patron Data migration

- **Data Migration Issues** - Duplicate user records, Incomplete fields and mapping
- **Operational Disruptions** – Access issues, Blocked accounts due to incorrect data records.
- **User Frustration** – High Fines, Blocked accounts, Delayed services, No access
- **Staff Adaptation & Technophobia** – Learning new workflows & manual data inputs

Challenges 1: Manual user creation

Newly registered students and newly appointed staff not in Alma
- ICT assisted only during registration in early 2025
- Post-registration: **manual creation of new users**
- Legacy users (ie. pensioners, deceased users) on PeopleSoft PeopleSoft Human Resource System

Challenges 2: Incorrect user groups

- Staff imported as "==Default==" were not able to loan/renew books
- **Incorrect expiry dates** assigned to active users
- **Manual corrections**: Update user groups to active roles

Examples:

Staff	User group (PeopleSoft)	New user group (PeopleSoft)
Mary Jane	Default	Support Staff
John Smith	Default	Academic Staff

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Challenges 3: Dual profiles

- Student assistants (working in the Library) have **two profiles** (Staff + student)
- Student profile sometimes loads as "**Pensioner**" → cannot log in
- Manual solution: Updated to **Postgraduate**

Examples:

Student	Student number	Staff number	User group	New user group
Apple Green	2025001001	0850011	Pensioner	Postgraduate
Grey Smith	2025002002	0850022	Pensioner	Postgraduate

Challenges 4: Incorrect data on profiles

Data mismatches between staff and student profiles created login failures

1. **Example1 :** Mr Alex Dlamini
   1. Staff profile: Staff email ✅
   2. Student profile: Staff email ❌ → login failed

2. **Example2 :** Miss Sophie Dlamini
   1. Student profile: Mr Alex Dlamini's staff email ❌ → login failed

Challenge: Mr Dlamini → login failed → Staff email assigned to two users

Strategies adopted by the UFS Library

- Cross-Unit Collaboration (Librarians, ICT, Technical Services)
- Data Clean-Up & Testing
- Change Management
- Training & Support

Impact and Outcomes

- Reduced patron complaints
- Seamless synchronization of patron records
- Increased staff confidence & adoption
- Improved analytics

Lesson Learned

- Data migration is useful but not flawless
- Involve ICT Services during the planning phase
- Field mapping between Alma and PeopleSoft must be validated during initial phase
- Data cleanup before migration is essential
- Manual fixes work short-term but are not sustainable.
- Integration is key for continuity

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Way forward

- Integration with PeopleSoft Finance
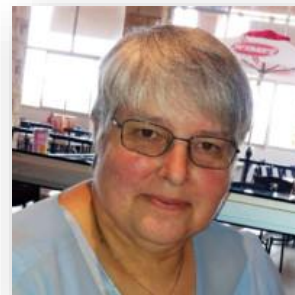- Student fines synchronisation between Alma and PeopleSoft

Thank you

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