

**“Managing a Shortage of Catalogers: A Research Library Perspective”**

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It is my delight to be here today to present my thoughts on this topic. It is a topic that I, along with my colleagues who manage the cataloging operations at the Library of Congress, have been concerned with for some time now, so I was happy to be asked to join this important program, with these distinguished presenters and participants. As the manager of arguably the world's largest cataloging operation, it is safe to say that my management team and I face just about every challenge, obstacle—and yes, opportunity—that any other cataloging manager and group face. In fact, some might wonder why, with a cataloging staff of slightly over 400 (including catalogers, technicians, managers and supervisors), I would characterize the Library as having a shortage of catalogers. Numbers are relative, of course. Considering that in the early 1990s, the LC's then Cataloging Directorate was staffed at a level of over 700, the impact of the reduction of staff by some 300 becomes more evident.

As the de facto U.S. national library, the Library of Congress has long, if not always, been in the limelight, and rightfully so. A lot is expected of the Library and its staff. Since we have shared our cataloging data with the world for over a century now, there is a dependency on what we do, how we do it, and, perhaps, who does it. The past few years have been marked by a number of events that has brought into stark relief the impact of what we do, what we do not do, how we do it, and what we change about what we do. I trust that there is sufficient distance since these events occurred that I am safe in reciting a few! There was protest several years ago when we

announced that we were introducing full scale copy cataloging of serial records, using technician staff, coding the records, and adding them to the CONSER database. The Library's initial arrangement with our Italian book vendor, Casalini Libri, where we agreed for the first year of the contract, not to redistribute the bibliographic records created by Casalini caused considerable concern. More recently, as in a year ago, there was the uproar following our decision to cease providing controlled series access. Perhaps, the less said about that the safer I am! Some of these events—if not primarily driven by—were at least contributory to my topic. They can be described as instances of our seeking ways, with the least negative consequences, of managing a shortage of catalogers.

Today's sessions will address the varied components that underpin developing and maintaining the Nation's supply of catalogers. Because they are all integral to the outcome of a sufficient, sustained, and competent pool of catalogers, I suspect that several of us will have similar threads running through what we say. I'm taking the liberty of asking you to bear with us when this happens—hopefully, these common references will be reinforcing of the topic, rather than unnecessarily redundant.

I decided that my take on this topic and contribution to today's session might have the greatest impact if I used LC as a case study of what one research library, although unique in some respects, is planning for the next year. Our planning constitutes one approach to tackling a shortage of catalogers.

At the risk of becoming too personal, it may be instructive to understand my background and growth in technical services, in particular in cataloging. This knowledge will help to set the stage for my current views and, equally important, underscore that I have an abiding love and respect for the craft of cataloging and the good that it yields. When I started at the Library some thirty-seven years ago, the Library's cataloging operation was set up in the most structured assembly line approach imaginable. Hired as a descriptive cataloger, that was all that I did, along with performing the required authority record creation associated with the descriptive cataloging. My colleagues in cataloging were in similar positions, either as descriptive catalogers or as subject catalogers. The latter position limited subject catalogers' work to subject analysis—for the assignment of subject headings and classification numbers. In assigning the classification numbers, the subject catalogers did not even go the extra step of adding the cutter number—that was reserved for their technician co-workers, whose jobs were similarly very focused, on shelflisting, that is, completing the classification number started by the subject catalogers, to produce the call number. *Dewey Decimal Classification* numbers were assigned by a separate group of librarian staff, who were likewise dedicated to this singular task. Acquisitions librarians and technicians were in a totally separate operation, with similarly focused tasks.

In 1992, a major reorganization of the LC cataloging operation occurred, in which we implemented whole item cataloging. With that restructuring, for the first time, descriptive cataloging and subject cataloging were brought together in a single position description. While this was not new in most academic libraries, it was a huge step for LC. Shelflisting and

assignment of Dewey numbers remained distinct, however, as did acquisitions functions.

As a descriptive cataloger, I took immense pride in what I did, in how well I did it, in training others to do it well, and in reviewing the work of others who were learning descriptive cataloging. Not that there was anything unique in this, however—most of my fellow staff members were of a similar sentiment. It was, nevertheless, a very limiting slice of not only technical services, but also of cataloging. Certainly, while I was occupying the descriptive cataloger position, I was fully satisfied and felt totally fulfilled. A number of factors have converged in the intervening years to cause a gradual shift in my thinking.

Among those factors has been my assumption of more responsible positions. It is amazing how the expansion of the sphere of responsibility expands one's view of what is possible and viable. Another factor, of course, has been the extraordinary advances in technology since I started as a descriptive cataloger. These include the solidification of MARC, the systems built as a result of MARC, the advent of the World Wide Web, the proliferation of digitized content, and the availability of metadata from varied sources. These factors also stimulate ideas of how functions, operations, and responsibilities might be altered for improved services and output.

For over a decade now, I have been planting seeds among LC cataloging staff and managers that we should shift the responsibilities among our cataloging staff for who does what. The embryonic stages have resulted in moving to the purview of technician staff tasks that, heretofore, had been rigidly reserved for catalogers—copy cataloging and completion cataloging

in publication records, for instance. The need to gain greater efficiencies and a shortage of catalogers call for doing more. A complete rethinking of the content of the position descriptions that define what our catalogers do is warranted. Refashioning the position descriptions of technical services librarians and technicians at LC is where we find ourselves in 2007.

### ***Restructuring Acquisitions and Cataloging–***

Before we explore how redescribing catalogers' duties help us address a shortage of catalogers, I want to spend some time talking about the current organizational structure for acquisitions and cataloging at LC. Since 2004, acquisitions and cataloging have been realigned into one administrative directorate. On paper, we are the Acquisitions and Bibliographic Access Directorate. This realignment is primarily administrative only, with meager meshing of workflows and duties. What remains to be done to achieve an optimal outcome, with an optimal output is totally to restructure our technical services operations so that duties between acquisitions and cataloging staff are incorporated into a single set of duties. We are poised to take this next step.

Plans are solidified to reorganize LC's acquisitions and cataloging activities. Our aim is for improved timeliness of access, improved access to digital content, increased productivity, and increased flexibility of the organization. We see that the reorganization will streamline operations and redeploy increasingly scarce resources—for today's discussion, a shortage of catalogers. The resulting organization must be more efficient, flexible, and innovative.

Operations will be streamlined through

- reducing the number of handling/decision-making redundancies through revised workflow design and assignment of work to staff that combines acquisitions and cataloging tasks; and
- reducing the number of workflows that exist that focus on exceptional situations, rather than the routine.

Scarce resources will be redeployed by

- merging the acquisitions and cataloging functions in order to apply increasingly scarce foreign language expertise most effectively and to reduce the number of hand-offs of materials among staff;
- using new blended position descriptions to allow greater flexibility in the assignment of work;
- re-apportioning staff to achieve improved ratios of staff to work and staff to supervisors; and
- assigning tasks more appropriately, that is, having tasks assigned and performed at the optimal pay/grade level.

The benefits that we see accruing as a result will include

- improved timeliness of access to content;
- better integration of digital content processing;

- increased per capita production; and
- increased flexibility of the organization.

In making such a move, we have developed diagrams to document new workflows that we view as ideal for the various formats of materials we must acquire and process, including digital.

These new workflows will be introduced in the reorganized environment, enabling us to reduce redundant steps and multiple hand-offs of materials being processed.

### ***Cataloging and Acquisitions as One?--***

Now to return to who does what. The other linchpin in our reorganization efforts is the reconceptualization of what should constitute the job descriptions of our catalogers, as technical services librarians. As I have described our plan to restructure our Acquisitions & Bibliographic Access Directorate, I have suggested that the job descriptions become more encompassing and not limited to cataloging. We interchangeably call these “blended” and “hybrid” position descriptions.

### ***New Librarian (Blended) Position Descriptions--***

For the librarian position description, four components are delineated. Our expectation is that anyone filling these positions can be called on to carry out all four sets of duties. It may be, however, that not every staff member will perform all four at all times. In fact, some staff may never perform all four, for a variety of reasons. They will, however, be part of the same unit, so that all acquisitions and cataloging activities are done in the same unit. With these new position

descriptions, we will have the flexibility to assign the full range of tasks, as circumstances warrant. This is imperative. The four components are

- Acquisitions and metadata services;
- Analyses and organization of information and materials;
- Consultation and provision of liaison services; and
- Provision of training and mentoring.

Acquisitions and metadata services.

Acquisitions. Our librarians will independently acquire a variety of materials in all formats from various countries and languages, using appropriate sources and methods of acquisitions. These will include contacting dealers, subscription agents, vendors, domestic and foreign government agencies, exchange partners, and/or donors, to obtain information and to negotiate price or other terms of acquisitions. Assisting in planning and implementation of special acquisitions projects takes on special importance. Librarians will be called on to participate in budget preparation, determining availability of funds and recommending reallocation when necessary.

Cataloging. We will expect that incumbents will independently catalog a full range of material, including assigning headings, assigning classification numbers, establishing personal and corporate names and uniform titles, and establishing subject headings. Of particular importance will be the ability to offer solutions on how to describe bibliographic elements that are not covered by cataloging rules, or that require interpretation. We will need these librarians to



participate in studies of proposed changes in cataloging policies and practices and the introduction of new technology into the Library.

Selection/collection development. Selection and collection development duties will be introduced to our librarians, in relation to their acquisitions and cataloging responsibilities for their assigned countries, languages, and/or subjects. They will be expected to review a variety of sources for new items and sources for possible acquisitions. Further, they will participate in formulating plans for changes and improvements to collection development policies.

Analyses and organization of information and materials. The librarians will be asked to take on or organize and coordinate assignments involving complex or novel problems, or those with special requirements. Their skills in analysis will be brought to bear on areas that show need for improvement, resulting in reports and recommendations on workflow and procedures, for instance.

Consultation and provision of liaison services. Consultation with internal and external constituents and users of the materials acquired and metadata imported or created will play an increasingly important part of the new librarians' duties.

Provision of training and mentoring. Training responsibilities represent critical expectations for the new librarians. They will be instrumental in assuring that apprentice librarians and technician staff receive the appropriate instruction and guidance.

*New (Blended) Technician Position Descriptions–*

To effect the desired outcome and vision for addressing a shortage of catalogers, certain tasks and duties will need to be assumed by technician staff. There also needs to be a corresponding reworking of the job descriptions that define the technicians' work. Just as the librarian positions were redescribed to include acquisitions, cataloging, and selection, concomitantly, the technician positions are being redescribing to embrace the needed support functions.

In the blended position description that will direct the work of technicians, tasks are grouped into four components, similar to the four for the librarians.

- Acquisitions and metadata services;
- Service to library patrons;
- Online searching/use of automated tools; and
- Collections materials processing.

These four components cover the support functions for the areas of acquisitions and cataloging. Instead of the third area of selection that catalog librarians will assume, the third area for technicians is serials control. The duties will include acquisitions related support functions: searching, placing orders, receiving items, paying invoices, and serials check-in. The duties will also include those to support cataloging: record creation, copy cataloging, database maintenance activities, and searching. The long established technician defining duty of shelflisting will eventually disappear for technicians–this will be done by librarian as part of their providing the

classification number. *A long-term goal is to have technicians be the primary crafts persons for providing descriptive cataloging.* By removing this long held task of librarians and shifting it to technicians, catalog librarians will be freed up to assume more professional determining duties, including managing more digital resources. Because technicians will be assigned more responsible tasks for the full array of materials acquired and cataloged, foreign language competencies will become more critical for new technician hires.

***Assessment of Acquisitions/Cataloging Reorganization Planning Process–***

The planning for our proposed massive reorganization (involving some 600 acquisitions and cataloging staff), was all done in house by managers and staff in the Acquisitions & Bibliographic Access Directorate. While we felt that we were on solid footing because of the almost two years that have gone into the thinking, planning, and activities associated with pulling this off, we thought it prudent to have an external review of our process. We contracted with Outsell (who used staff with library degrees) to take a look at our planning documents, implementation reports, new position descriptions, and proposed workflow diagrams to give an assessment of the feasibility of what we are proposing and if the reorganization will achieve the desired outcomes. In addition, managers and staff within the Directorate were interviewed to get their perceptions on the reorganization. The Outsell report was submitted to us on June 1. It contained a number of recommendations and some cautions on how we might mitigate the impact on this major undertaking. We will take those under consideration. The overall assessment was positive, however:

“... the ABA reorganization will meet its objectives of improved throughput of content, increased productivity and flexibility of the ABA directorate.”

“It will provide an environment which will attract young librarians (future new hires) who are used to a more fast-paced, multi-tasking world. The reorganization will allow staff at all levels the ability to learn new tasks and explore new opportunities. It will solve the problem of lack of language specialists and the imbalance between the numbers of acquisition staff and cataloging staff.”

I will close with a focus on the statement in the Outsell report that highlighted a reality that is worthy of our noting as we ponder steps to take to address a shortage of catalogers—the next generation of librarians, whether catalog librarians or other types, will expect to be engaged in a variety of tasks and not be as pigeon-holed as my generation of librarians were. This point has been underscored by the last group of new cataloger hires the Library brought on board—they have stressed to management their desire for a greater array of tasks and responsibilities.

I trust that my presentation has offered some stimulation and thoughts for consideration as attendees of this preconference focus on offering ideas and input to the ALCTS CETRC Task Force, as it plans for taking next steps emanating from today’s sessions.

Thank you!