PCC Virtual Meeting
February 19, 2021, 1-3pm (Eastern)

This session will be recorded and made publicly available after the meeting.

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A. Welcome and housekeeping (Melanie Wacker, Columbia University Libraries, PCC chair)

B. PCC-At-Large (30 minutes)

    a. Brief RDA Update (Judith Cannan, Chief of the Policy, Training, and Cooperative Programs Division, Library of Congress)
    b. Emerging thoughts on LCSH (Judith Cannan)

C. PCC Participants program (90 minutes)

    Announcements

    a. New PCC Strategic Direction 7: Incorporate Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) principles to every aspect of PCC operations (Melanie Wacker)
    b. New PCC Advisory Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (Melanie Wacker)
    c. Update from Big Heads (Jennifer Baxmeyer, PCC Past Chair, Princeton University Library)
    d. Other

Panel: **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and the PCC -- a Conversation**

Panelists:

○ Amber Billey is the Systems and Metadata Librarian at Bard College. She is part of the transitional Leadership Team for the Core Metadata & Collection Section, is Co-Chair of the Core Diversity and Inclusion Committee, serves on the Advisory Board for the Digital Transgender Archive, and the editorial board for the Homosaurus – a linked data thesaurus for the LGBTQ+ community. Billey is also a member of the PCC Task Group on Identity Management in NACO. When she isn't thinking about metadata and the future of libraries, Billey enjoys hiking in mountains, swimming in oceans, and sitting on meditation cushions.

○ Violet Fox is a cataloging and metadata expert. Her research interests include the ethical implications of classification, though her work addressing bias in the Dewey Decimal Classification was cut short after she was laid off by OCLC in October 2020. In 2019 she chaired the CaMMS Subject Analysis Committee Working Group on Alternatives to LCSH "Illegal aliens" (find its report at https://alair.ala.org/handle/11213/14582). Find her tweets about libraries and roadside attractions at @violetbfox.

○ Tina Gross is the Metadata and Cataloging Librarian at North Dakota State University. In 2016, she served as chair of the CaMMS Subject Analysis Committee Working Group on the LCSH "Illegal aliens" (see its report at https://alair.ala.org/handle/11213/9261). She was one of eight tenured faculty (four librarians) laid off by St. Cloud State University in 2020, which now has no librarians in technical services. Follow her on Twitter at @aboutness or read her found poem about getting laid off at https://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/my-layoff-letter-ground-up-with-text-from-meat-processing-trade-magazines.

Moderator: Melanie Wacker

The panelists will discuss the questions:

1) What are the most pressing issues in your PCC work?

2) Beyond the PCC -- everyday challenges and dilemmas

3) Where would you like to see the PCC go from here?

Opening Statements:

Amber Billey:

As catalogers, we're just trying to do our jobs the best that we can. But even in my relatively short 12 years in this profession, I have seen constant disruption and development to our essentially quite simple and stable work of describing and providing access to library resources. When I entered this profession in 2009, I was trained using the 2008 revision of the 2002 edition of the AACR2. My professors warned me of RDA looming ahead, and how it would radically change our work. Based on FRBR, FRAD, FRSAD -- RDA was released around 2012 with full adoption by the PCC in 2013. At first I was a champion for the standard, until I started using it. Then I became a critic. Effectively arguing to change rules on how we describe gender in Name Authority Records. The cataloging flux continues. Also in 2012, LC began development of BIBFRAME and released the second version of the ontology in 2016. I used to also be a champion for BIBFRAME, but I've since become disenchanted with linked-data. Meanwhile just a few years later, RDA begins an overhaul (not a new Work!) with it's RDA 3R project that I think is finally done? I outline this timeline to illustrate that catalogers have lived in a near constant state of flux throughout the 21st century, and we are tired of it. On one hand we're being asked to apply constantly evolving content standards with the promise of a linked data revolution around the corner, while on the other hand we're still being forced to use MARC based systems and subscribe to incredibly expensive antiquated utilities to simply do our jobs.

I argue that we have wasted a generation of librarianship on repeated rehashing and hand-wringing of basically the same work we've done for nearly 150 years. We describe resources and we provide access to them. It doesn't have to be so complex or so expensive especially if we work together. As a profession we have been distracted by FRBR and it's family of standards, RDA, and BIBFRAME -- instead of concentrating our efforts to addressing the real problems that our profession must reckon with: first, acknowledge and correct systemic and structural bias and racism in our library standards; and second develop open tools and standards that actually reduce library costs, facilitate resource sharing, and encourage more diverse participation from all libraries.

All knowledge organization systems reflect the ideologies from which they emerge. LC standards were developed during eras of oppression. We've seen generations since the 1970s address many of the issues hidden within these standards, but there is still more work to be done. PCC has an opportunity to be a leader within the profession for catalogers to make and enact actual change. To encourage practical and freely available content standards that facilitates diversity in cataloging, to develop standards for the open exchange of library metadata and the tools to support that work, and finally to have the courage to fork from Library of Congress when necessary to rectify bias and oppression in subject access and classification schemes. This work is far more important than any conceptual bibliographic framework or new metadata standard. This vision is a framework for eradicating oppression within our knowledge organization systems, providing equitable access to the resources within all of our collections, and enabling diversity within our cataloging community.

Violet Fox:

To tell you more about myself, in January I started a temporary, part-time position as the Wikimedian in Residence at the University of Nevada Las Vegas. In that role I'm editing and creating Wikidata items to highlight some of the digital resources in the UNLV Special Collections, as well as evaluating tools for bulk editing. Previously, I worked for OCLC as one of the two editors of the Dewey Decimal Classification, which involved in-depth research to create new class numbers. I was laid off from that role in October. I point this out because I've heard many calls to make our classification systems more equitable, and I was doing that work, and that work was apparently not valued enough to continue paying me.

Let me start my comments by telling you about a project of mine. The [Cataloging Lab](#) is a website I created, it's a simple wiki where people can collaborate on proposing additions or revisions to LCSH. It's a way to open up the LCSH submission process to people who aren't part of a SACO library. People can see the kind of research that is required to submit a proposal. They can see a successful proposal, and they can see the process behind a proposal that has been submitted, rejected, and reworked, and resubmitted. At the same time, it's a way for catalogers to get advice from the larger library community as well as people with subject matter expertise.

I have never been paid for this kind of work; my previous employers did not find value in this work; this is created on my own time. At this point I've done over a dozen presentations on how the LCSH proposal process works, explaining how vital it is for people to get involved, or at least to understand who makes these decisions and how decisions are made. Again, I'm usually paying my own way to conferences or taking personal time off from work to talk about this. Essentially, I think that I've been doing PCC's work, only for a broader audience than just catalogers.

Why am I doing this work? Honestly, it originated with being frustrated, because I am an outsider. I have never been part of a SACO library, I have never had access to Minaret. From my perspective, and from the perspective of 99% of librarians, the work of PCC is a black box. When I copresented at ACRL 2017 with other catalogers, we titled our presentation "Behind the Curtain: Demystifying the Subject Approval Process" and made a lot of jokes about the Wizard of Oz, because that's what this feels like to people who aren't in a large academic library.

Sure we have the participants' manual and FAQs online, but everything is geared towards catalogers who have been through training. Tina and I cowrote a [chapter](#) in the 2019 book [Ethical Questions in Name Authority Control](#), and we asked PCC to create a landing page for the public which provides information about the goals of authority work and examples of how the information collected by librarians would be used in disambiguating identities. And I'm going to repeat that suggestion here, because that's a solid idea that would not take that much work. If PCC doesn't do this, I'm thinking of just doing it myself on my own website, but it would be so much more authoritative and discoverable on the PCC site.

We need to stop thinking it's ok that no one knows what PCC is doing, or that we're just catalogers, and that no one's interested in what we're doing. People are interested! People keep inviting me to talk about subject headings, even though I don't know nearly as much as people in this audience. The only thing I'm doing differently is inviting everyone into the conversation.

And the reason I'm doing that is that we desperately need to broaden the group of people who give input into these systems. Fewer and fewer libraries have the staffing and administrative support to do this work, and the group of people doing this work become smaller, and less diverse, with every year that passes. We're trying to equitably represent the diversity of human thought in LCSH, and we're trying to responsibly represent people from diverse cultural backgrounds in authority records, and that's a really hard ask to do that work justice, and we're not doing ourselves any favors when it's just the same 200 people who are having these conversations with ourselves.

I think some of the recent discussions around privacy in authority records have been an example of what's gone wrong because PCC has a monoculture. In an October 2020 presentation Paul Frank talked about how catalogers "have gone off the rails" when it comes to adding personal, potentially privacy-invading information about individuals, using the RDA fields. But we should all know, as information professionals, that when you provide new tools, you need to be clear and upfront about the potential for misuse. Just as we need to do with any new software, we need to think through and communicate the potential dangers at the time those new fields are available.

In the zine librarian community, we are very aware of the potential harms involved in describing people, especially people of color, queer people, disabled people, and other vulnerable populations. In our 2015 Zine Librarians Code of Ethics, we clearly discuss the dangers involved with including information that's found via detective work. We've been talking about this for a decade. I think that if there were more members of those underrepresented groups in PCC work, or if more folks were even marginally aware of the work done by PCC, privacy would've been a part of the conversation a decade ago, when these fields were introduced.

I look forward to your ideas about how we can make the work of PCC more transparent, and the rest of our conversation today.

Tina Gross:

[Note: On the day of the event, I spoke from an outline. This represents my attempt to translate my comments (from memory, the recording isn't available yet as I write this) into written form—it's not a transcript.]

In the past several years, I've participated in and listened to many discussions about the LCSH "Illegal aliens." Initially it was through my involvement in the ALA resolution and chairing the first Subject Analysis Committee working group on that subject heading, and more recently because of appearing in the documentary Change the Subject and participating in many Q&A sessions after showings of the film.

I'm going to focus today on a couple of observations about what I've heard in those discussions. We perceive two main approaches to addressing things like a problematic subject heading—to approach the Library of Congress, to focus energy on asking, encouraging, or pressuring them to change the heading, OR to encourage libraries to make changes to address the heading locally. It's to SAC's credit that it has embraced and participated in both. In discussions I've been part of, the question of what actions to take is sometimes framed in a way that suggests that these two approaches are actually opposed to each other. I've tried to argue consistently that any counterposing of these efforts is a mistake, to the point that "don't counterpose" has almost become my catchphrase. I maintain that to say either "We changed the heading locally, now we can wash our hands of it, who cares what LC does?" or to say "All we can do is wait for LC, all other options are too difficult or expensive" both constitute an abnegation of cataloging ethics. It's incredibly important that libraries exercise judgement and have the autonomy to act on it—that so many libraries have made a local change in order to discontinue subjecting their users to the term "Illegal aliens" is tremendously important. But that doesn't make it less critical that the LC heading be changed, or change the fact that library workers have a collective responsibility to address library practices that harm users. Embracing independence and being able to diverge from national standards when necessary, and taking responsibility for the effect of standards and working to improve them, should be viewed as constituting a whole project, not two opposed or separate things.

I'd like to make one other brief point. The university library where I was employed when I did most of my work around the LCSH "Illegal aliens" no longer has a single librarian working in technical services after laying off four tenured faculty librarians last year. (All of the library's BIPOC librarians were also among those laid off.) To me, this is a dire illustration of how cuts and austerity undermine the pursuit of the cataloging DEI principles that the PCC is undertaking. That work simply won't be happening at my former workplace because there's no one there to do it. It might appear that this issue is outside of the PCC's purview, but if lack of cataloging positions and lack of institutional support for catalogers mean that the PCC's DEI goals cannot be achieved, which seems a very real possibility to me, then we need to grapple with it. So a question that I wanted to raise, in general, is what the PCC can say about this and what it might do. In particular, does the creation of CORE (with catalogers and technical services together in the same division as library management) present any opportunities to help us address this problem?