

Bibliographic Standards Committee Comments on the *Report on the Future of Bibliographic Control*

The Bibliographic Standards Committee (BSC) of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) of ACRL welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *Report on the Future of Bibliographic Control* drafted by the Library of Congress (LC) Working Group (WG) on the Future of Bibliographic Control. The Bibliographic Standards Committee is especially encouraged by the fact that access to rare and unique materials is recognized as one of the five central themes within this report.

The Bibliographic Standards Committee strongly agrees that, indeed, there are many institutions and organizations that have the expertise and capacity to step forward and play significant roles in the bibliographic future. Only if we are allowed and encouraged to do so will this be successful.

Although the Bibliographic Standards Committee is most interested in the second theme of the report relating to the exposure of rare and unique materials, we realize the recommendations of the entire report will impact rare book and special collection repositories just as significantly.

What follows are specific comments on many aspects of the report.

In general, the report ignores the impact of the vast quantity of materials on the Web and the issues of selection and providing access to them, except by talking indirectly about making use of metadata.

Page 6: It is gratifying to see that the Library of Congress has learned that announcing major changes to the library community without advance preparation, as happened with their series decision, is not the way to introduce change. The ability of the cataloging community, together with OCLC, to discover ways to cope with that decision is an indication that the Library of Congress can indeed rest easy in the knowledge that there are organizations and institutions who are willing to step forward and volunteer their expertise in cataloging standards.

Page 7, Paragraph 2: The Bibliographic Standards Committee agrees that users would be better served if access to a variety of materials were provided in the context of a unified philosophy of bibliographic control. Unfortunately, this desire is most likely impossible to realize given the commoditization of information and proprietary considerations.

Page 7, Paragraph 3: The Bibliographic Standards Committee strongly disagrees with the statement that "Consistency of description within any single environment, such as the library catalog, is becoming less significant than the ability to make connections between environments." Both are important; minor inconsistencies are tolerable both

within and between databases. Major inconsistencies need to be remedied lest they result in chaos. Introducing a database with no authority control into one with authority control eliminates any authority control and adequate precision or recall in both databases.

Page 7, Paragraph 4: What is meant by “cataloging?” Perhaps this needs redefinition as much as “bibliographic control.” The Working Group seems to use “cataloging” to denote all that is old and outdated and “bibliographic control” to denote all that is new and good. It is “necessary to embrace a view of bibliographic control as a distributed activity, not a centralized one.” Fortunately, this has been happening for a few years thanks to the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC) and OCLC’s master record concept.

Page 8, Paragraph 1: The Bibliographic Standards Committee is very worried that the Working Group accepts the commoditization of information without a nod to the notion of information as a public good. Does this mean that the Library of Congress will begin charging for its services? Should we expect to see pop-up ads on Classification Web in the near future?

Page 9-10: Redefining the Role of the Library of Congress. As mentioned earlier, the Bibliographic Standards Committee agrees that LC might want to reconsider its responsibilities to the nation’s libraries. There are many experts in public, academic, and special libraries who would be willing to work with LC to create partnerships and opportunities to improve the universe of bibliographic control. This will be a new world for LC and a learning experience for all involved, but a public recognition that the locus of expertise has given way to many loci is necessary. As LC is aware, the Bibliographic Standards Committee is very involved in the creation and maintenance of standards for the rare materials community.

Page 10: The shift of bibliographic control of primary resources within LC does not mean that traditional cataloging practices must be abandoned. The traditional practices need revision and need to be coupled with other means, but they will continue to be necessary for materials of all formats. As we will see in Recommendation 2, traditional cataloging practices will be necessary to make some of these resources available. These resources do not leap into malleable electronic metadata without costly human intervention and intellectual activity.

Page 11, Section 1.1: Eliminating Redundancies. Descriptive metadata does not account for most of the cost of bibliographic control, so although improved sharing is a good idea, it will do little to reduce costs. Even classification could be more automated than it currently is. The real, barely reducible, cost comes with controlling names, titles, and subjects.

Page 13-14, Section 1.2: Copy cataloging and loading of LC authority files are not the only reasons that libraries have reduced staff. Budget cutbacks and lack of qualified professionals, as well as the soaring costs of the materials and licensing should also be considered.

Page 15: Overall, the Bibliographic Standards Committee agrees with Recommendations 1.2.1.1-1.2.1.3. LC could make better use of PCC-produced data. If the recommendations in 1.2.2 to examine original cataloging programs and sub-programs at the Library of Congress are to work, LC will need to do a better job than it has in the past of identifying and working with other entities. As mentioned above, LC will need to explicitly abdicate from the library community's expectation that it is THE source of knowledge in these areas and direct some inquiries to other institutions or groups.

Page 16: Recommendations 1.2.3 and 1.2.4. The problem is not simply the number of PCC participants; the problem is with institutional barriers to expansion of PCC participation. For example, when NACO and BIBCO catalogers move from libraries where they have been trained in NACO and BIBCO procedures and made contributions to libraries that are not members, their expertise is lost. The Bibliographic Standards Committee also recognizes that libraries need to expand the number of certified librarians within their institutions. NACO certification, and perhaps BIBCO certification, should be attached to catalogers and transferable with the cataloger. There should be investigation of ways OCLC can encourage small, specialized libraries, to achieve Enhance status, which is necessary for BIBCO membership. OCLC in particular should consider amending its loading algorithms and rewards for upgrades and corrections to avoid M-level records with 20 libraries attached whose catalogers have done work in their local catalogs but found it too time-consuming to make the changes in the "master record."

Page 16-19, Section 1.3: The section on collaboration in authority record creation is excellent, particularly in its recognition of the inescapable amount of human intellectual effort that is devoted to authority work. A great deal could be done here by making participation in cooperative authority processes easier, as mentioned above. The Bibliographic Standards Committee also notes that rare materials libraries and special collections are often excellently positioned to be able to contribute to the creation and maintenance of national authority files. NACO participation among special libraries should not only be encouraged, but should be facilitated by broader training and mentoring programs.

Page 18: Again, the Bibliographic Standards Committee is willing to work with LC to increase collaboration on authority data and controlled vocabularies.

Page 19-21: Enhance Access to Rare and Unique Materials. On the whole, this is an excellent section. However, some things might be added. First is that increasing

cooperative collection development by research libraries will mean that more current material, particularly from foreign countries, will become “rare” and require original cataloging because no one else holds these materials. Research libraries need to commit to the fact that creating unique collections will require more resources for bibliographic control of those materials.

Page 19, Paragraph 3: “Few models exist, however, for how such trade-offs might be made.” See Mark A. Green and Dennis Meisner. “More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing,” *American Archivist*, 68 (2005): 208-263. Although principally about archival processing, this article also touches on access and description and discusses the implications of the various trade-offs that must be made.

Page 20, Recommendation 2.1: Rare book and special collection repositories have recognized the need to make the discovery of their materials possible. The Bibliographic Standards Committee has gone a long way towards this goal in codifying rules for various formats of materials and in emphasizing access to a greater number of items and empathizes with LC in prioritizing these materials.

Page 20, Recommendation 2.2: “Streamlin(ing) cataloging for rare and unique materials, emphasizing greater coverage and access” is an oxymoron. One can streamline some of the processes, but poor access will hinder users from finding the materials they need almost as much as providing no access at all. When thinking about the different levels of 2.2.4 and the “some level of access” of 2.2.1, institutions need to remember the way in which broadsides were ignored not so long ago and the way pamphlets were bound together and given an assigned title with little or no access to the individual pamphlets. Individual items of these types often have great research (and monetary) value and are used in serious scholarship. By not providing full access, libraries hinder discovery by both scholars and collection development staff who must decide how best to spend limited resources on new acquisitions. The Bibliographic Standards Committee notes that there is tension between recommendations 2.1 and 2.2. There is danger in merely shifting unprocessed materials to under-processed materials by adopting an uncritical approach to “some access.” The Working Group cites the ARL White Paper on “Hidden Collections” (on p. 19) and would be well-advised to consider the approaches examined there more carefully.

Page 20, Recommendation 2.3: Integrating finding aids and databases and metadata records into the discovery tools for rare and unique materials is a wonderful idea. However, these systems need to have the ability to limit to or exclude such materials.

Page 21, Recommendation 2.5.1: Is it necessary to share metadata for unique materials?

Page 21, Recommendation 2.5.2: Success will depend on OCLC's ability to offer federated searching on institutional records and to make it easier for finding aids or images, for example, to be loaded into OCLC.

Page 21-22: Position Our Technology for the Future. It would be foolish to adopt a replacement for MARC that does not retain the advantages of MARC (e.g. subfields for searching) or that does not address the major defect of MARC, namely its inability to handle hierarchical relationships. Would it not be better to work with Web developers to increase the relevance and ranking of library catalogs and standards and to index MARC records in such a way as to increase visibility in search engines? Catalogers and programmers will need to work together to make this possible.

Page 23-24, Section 3.2: Standards. The report states that "it is through consistent application of standards that the full value of bibliographic data can be released across many potential use environments" and that standards are in reality, a business issue. Standards not only remove barriers, they also impose barriers, particularly those relating to cost. Standards require conceptualizing data in a certain way. A better argument for standards is the utility for the users of bibliographic data, which goes along with recognition of their limitation. We need to recognize the limitations and shortcomings of standards along with their undeniable value and not blindly endorse anything simply calling itself a "standard."

Page 25, Recommendation 3.2.1-3.2.2: Suspend work on RDA. This makes sense, even if not for the reasons given. Some in cataloging community think that it goes too far, others think it doesn't go far enough. Until ALA and LC agree on a format for the recording and display of data, and detailed statements on encoding, existing catalogers will find it very hard to implement RDA. The Bibliographic Standards Committee also wonders how the recommendations in 3.2.2 will, if at all, affect *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials*.

Page 26, Paragraph 2: It is unlikely that machine applications will ever be the primary users of bibliographic data. They may be one of the major manipulators of such data, but the users remain human, with human objectives. It is enough to say that we need to structure encoding schemes that support such manipulation.

Page 26, Section 4.1, Paragraph 3: "...most users now conduct their research in multiple discovery environments: search engines, online booksellers, course management systems, specialized databases, library catalogs, and more." This is similar to the what users have always had to do, consulting catalogs, periodical indexes, newspaper indexes, bibliographies, printed catalogs, microfilm, etc. The difference is that at one time, researchers had to travel to different institutions or use different machines. Most of this can now be done from one computer, which gives the illusion that these resources should all work the same way. Unified searching may be an unattainable goal.

Page 27, Paragraph 2: The report's assertion that library users value features and data that help them make sense of results by ranking, organizing, and clustering, may or may not be true. Recall and precision of results is just as important, if not more so.

Page 27, Paragraph 3: It is very disturbing to learn that the Working Group considers that a library catalog should be designed to ingest or interact with records from sources outside of the library cataloging workflow. Unless there are stringent guidelines and intense oversight, any idea of authority control or standards will be negated. If LC is concerned with the overwhelming responsibility and staffing issues of updating and maintaining its records, mixing controlled and uncontrolled bibliographic data would be foolhardy decision. Rather than abandon its controlled catalog, LC should consider the alternative of using its catalog as a base.

Page 27, Paragraph 4: "Many libraries have chosen to produce metadata to satisfy the needs of their most sophisticated users, despite the fact that such users are but a small percentage of their total user base. They do so under the increasingly dubious assumption that all users will benefit from the greatest detail in cataloging." This statement contradicts the whole tenor of Recommendation 2 and promulgates an atmosphere of anti-intellectualism. Ideally, we, as information professionals and librarians, should encourage discovery and deeper understanding in everyone who makes use of a library. Nevertheless, the fact is that discoveries and research are made by the small number of users who make intensive use of primary sources and secondary literature. This is as true of scientists as of humanists. Such intensive use of information requires complex tools to study the very complex reality we live in. What is required in the library catalog is detail sufficient to distinguish resources so that the user may discover and select them. The larger the database, the more sophisticated the user, the more detail may be required.

Page 28, Recommendation 4.1.2.1: It is reassuring to see that LC recognizes the importance of maintaining the "integrity of library-created data."

Page 28, Recommendation 4.1.3.1: Algorithms need to go a long way before they are useful in suggesting works that might be useful to patrons. For example, commercial search engine algorithms fail to distinguish between popular and scholarly material.

Page 28, Recommendation 4.1.3.2: If implemented, this will take longer than creating original controlled vocabularies and their variations.

Page 28, Section 4.2: Realization of FRBR. What does the statement "FRBR suggests alternatives for analyzing intellectual content for bibliographic control" mean? FRBR proceeds from what users, do or are supposed to do, and posits ways of constructing relationships and displaying those relationships.

Page 29, Paragraph 2: Developing a means to exchange work-level data will take thought but is hardly less feasible than many of the other suggestions the report adopts, such as recasting LCSH in a hierarchical structure. The cataloging rules are part of RDA. In the report, the Working Group calls for the suspension of work on rules that will support the creation of authority records using FRBR, but then attacks the FRBR model for not having such cataloging rules. The real problem will be finding the resources to apply FRBR retrospectively and to materials whose metadata is inadequate for any but the most basic purposes.

Page 29, Recommendation 4.2.1.3: There are at least as many problems with the concept of Manifestation as Expression. Nonetheless, the fact that these determinations are flexible and subject to development as scholarship intensifies on a particular group of Works, with the related Expressions and Manifestations, allows for the model to stay alive.

Page 30, Recommendation 4.3: Although the Bibliographic Standards Committee is particularly interested in description, subject access is an important aspect of discovery. This section, and the diagnosis of problems, ignores the basic fact that LCSH is complex because reality is complex. Navigating the thesaurus and the Subject Cataloging Manual is difficult, but so too is describing the world of knowledge. Any attempt to do justice to a resource's subject is bound to be difficult. The length of LCSH strings is more a problem of catalog displays. Oddly, LCSH strings are quite useful for keyword searching which can then allow retrieval of other items with the same or similar subject strings. LCSH is not, and should not be, designed for novices. Such individuals are best served by starting with a keyword search and then building on the subject headings or bibliographies to find other materials.

Page 31, Recommendation 4.3.2: De-coupling of strings is possible, but hardly necessary when keyword searching of subject strings is so effective.

Page 32, Recommendation 4.3.3.2: "Apply terms from any and all appropriate sources of controlled subject headings in bibliographic records to augment subject access." How does this fit in with the streamlining mentioned in Recommendation 1? How does this reduce the cost of cataloging? How will it help the user?

Page 32: The Desired Outcomes for section 4.3 do not flow from the recommendations. The result of the recommendations on LCSH will be more complex subject analysis, not less, and certainly not more intuitive. It will not be easier to update and to apply. Terminology may be more current but certainly not more consistent. The application of the recommendations will require substantial resources that may or may not be justified. Rather than test FRBR, the recommendations concerning LCSH should be tested for feasibility and user benefits before they are put into practice.

Page 35, Recommendation 5.2.1.2: This recommendation is excellent, but until libraries make clear that there is a demand for graduates with these skills and that cataloging and bibliographic control are the backbone of a library, the recommendation will languish.

Above all, there needs to be a commitment on the part of the institutions involved to invest in the expertise required for control of these items: technical knowledge of papers, bindings, printing and photographic processes, reproduction technologies, languages, scripts, subject expertise in areas ranging from chemistry to denominational schisms, as well as electronic systems, encoding schemes, and programming ability. Only if institutions are willing to value this expertise will there be the necessary personnel to realize these outcomes. In this report, the Working Group never really commits itself to the notion that no matter how many shortcuts can be found, how much electronic manipulation of metadata is done, libraries will still have substantial investments in the human aspects of bibliographic control. Until this fact is recognized, libraries will not be able to make the changes that will lead to effective implementation of the recommendations, let alone implement some of the others that are needed.

Respectfully submitted (on behalf of the ACRL/RBMS Bibliographic Standards Committee),

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