
Organization and Administration of Cataloging Processes

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THE CATALOG department's primary function is to incorporate books and other materials into a library's cataloged collections in such a fashion that the reader may readily ascertain what the library's holdings are and get hold efficiently of the particular item he wants to use. Classifying, shelf-listing, descriptive cataloging, and subject cataloging are the principal processes involved in accomplishing this function. Traditionally, in libraries large enough for departmentation, these are the minimum duties assigned to a catalog department, although it is frequently made responsible also for certain others more or less closely related to these major functions. Examples are accessioning, physical preparation of books for the shelves, and maintaining location records for books shelved more or less permanently in branches, departmental libraries, or other special readers' service units.

Study of the organizational structure of large catalog departments reveals a surprising lack of uniformity even in libraries of a single type which are comparable in size. Moreover, because of the number and diversity of the elements on which organization of cataloging work may be based, the pattern of individual departments is usually complex. A casual examination of organization charts shows that among these elements the following are considered to be especially important: function, subject, language, form or type of material, degree of difficulty of material, and level of treatment to be accorded various categories of material.

Theoretically, the organization of work in catalog departments along strictly functional lines seems both natural and logical. Yet few departments have set up separate divisions for classifying, descriptive cataloging, and subject cataloging. A stronger preference has been

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shown for a scheme whereby one group does the descriptive cataloging and a second the classifying and subject cataloging, the logic for combining the latter two processes being that both require subject analysis. But in most libraries each cataloger performs all three of the basic operations, and the organization patterns in their catalog departments therefore follow other lines.

Particularly in libraries where organization of readers' services by subject fields is emphasized, for example, in public and university libraries set up on the subject-divisional plan, and in university libraries with college and departmental libraries serving special subject areas, the division of work in catalog departments is likely to be primarily according to subject. The important advantage this kind of organization holds over one developed along functional lines is that, since it involves most, if not all, of the cataloging staff, a higher degree of subject specialization can be achieved than in a special subject cataloging unit made up of a relatively small number of workers. Although there appears to be no common agreement as to the level in the departmental structure where subject specialization should occur, the importance of making definite provision for it is increasingly recognized. Not only have library survey reports generally urged the management of cataloging with reference to subject, but reorganization plans of catalog departments indicate that more libraries are accepting the idea.

The outstanding example illustrating this trend is the reorganized Preparation Division in the Reference Department of the New York Public Library, which, prior to a survey by a firm of management engineers, had been set up primarily around form of material. The Preparation Division now is divided into a Cataloging Branch and a Preparation Branch. On the recommendation of the surveyors, the Cataloging Branch was organized around subjects rather than forms of material. According to R. E. Kingery,¹ Chief of the Preparation Division, the recommendation was based on the view "that the cataloging job is a whole job of planning approaches between a piece of material and its potential users, that the job should not be broken up as it had been on the basis of subject analysis vs. description, and that the significant differences among materials, in terms of use, lie in differences in subject and not differences of form." In line with this theory, Kingery reports, catalogers now handle materials within a subject area "regardless of form of material, and . . . do the whole

job of catalog planning for that material, including subject analysis and description."

Libraries acquiring much material in foreign languages must have on their staffs catalogers with a knowledge of these languages. Some catalog departments set up special units to handle all foreign publications. Both the Chicago Public Library and the Los Angeles Public Library have such units in their catalog departments, and the Descriptive Cataloging Division of the Library of Congress contains a Foreign Language Section and a Slavic Language Section.

Although in the cataloging of foreign materials language facility is more useful than subject specialization, in the catalog departments of university libraries the formal unit for cataloging all foreign language publications is the exception rather than the rule. The explanation may be that in these libraries, where increasing emphasis is given to subject specialization, catalogers generally have a working knowledge of two or more of the principal foreign languages and so can handle the bulk of such material without particular difficulty. Moreover, they may go to a language specialist of the department for assistance whenever necessary. The cataloging of most materials in the minor or dead languages, however, is usually assigned to catalogers with the special language facilities required.

With respect to form or type of library materials, the organizational structure of catalog departments most commonly includes a special unit for the cataloging of serials. The fact that in the larger departments the serial cataloging section is commonly one of the principal units is due both to the phenomenal growth in importance and mass of serial publications, and to realization that the physical and bibliographical peculiarities of serials make specialization with them sound administrative practice.

The use of the degree of difficulty of material as an element in determining basic organization of cataloging work is excellently demonstrated by the reorganization some years ago of the catalog department of the Harvard College Library. In this department, Susan M. Haskins² reports, the staff was organized into two major groups. One handles material which can move along rapidly, such as titles for which Library of Congress cards are available, nonfiction which presents no special difficulties, other editions, second copies, and books which are to be sent directly to the New England Depository Library. The other group catalogs the more difficult material involving research

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problems, unusual languages, and so forth. The second group only is organized along the traditional lines of subject and language.

Manifestly the many and varied publications which flow into libraries are not all equal in value or importance, and therefore need not all receive equal treatment. Hence the level of treatment to be accorded certain categories of library materials is an additional element influencing the organizational patterns of catalog departments. For example, a special unit may be made responsible for the processing of pamphlets and similar ephemera, and another for the cataloging of rare books and manuscripts. The developing trend for applying brief or limited cataloging techniques to older and less important publications has resulted in the creation in some catalog departments of special units to handle such materials.

Traditionally, much importance has been attached in libraries to the value of accuracy and consistency in cataloging records. To attain these twin objectives, it has been the policy in many catalog departments to revise in detail the work of even experienced catalogers. Approaching their work conscientiously, the catalog revisers spent much time covering the same ground as the cataloger and correcting minor errors which might have been rectified more cheaply by proofreaders. Forced by the economic exigencies of the times to scrutinize the effects of these practices on cataloging costs and the flow of material through the department, library administrators came to the conclusion that, all things considered, the premium they were paying for accuracy and consistency was too high and that, in the interests of economy and efficiency, a major shift in emphasis was necessary. This has been accomplished in many catalog departments, (1) by depending on proofreaders to discover and correct minor errors, (2) by revising closely only the work of the less experienced personnel, (3) by letting catalogers take the initiative in consulting revisers when their help was needed and in this way placing more responsibility for good work on those doing the original cataloging, and (4) by limiting such over-all revision as remains necessary to a quick examination of entries, classification, and subject headings. This policy has been followed for some years in the Catalog Department of the University of Illinois Library, and is very similar to the scheme advanced by the surveyors of the Los Angeles Public Library in conjunction with their proposal for the reorganization of the catalogers into subject units under the supervision of senior catalogers.³

Administrators of catalog departments have long recognized the

importance of differentiating clearly between professional and clerical duties for the purposes of efficient management. However, despite the increasing attention given in libraries to job analysis and position classification, the evidence shows that in many catalog departments the lines between professional and clerical processes have not yet been sharply drawn. Obviously, where this has not been done, all attempts to arrive at defensible ratios of professional to clerical personnel must rest on guesswork.

Some notion of the size and nature of this problem may be gained from the data presented in the 1951 survey of personnel in catalog departments in public libraries which was conducted by a committee of the American Library Association Division of Cataloging and Classification.⁴ According to the answers supplied by 108 libraries, only two of the duties defined as professional were not also performed by non-professional workers, and 5 per cent of all duties listed as professional were also performed by nonprofessional personnel. An analysis of the staff involved in the performance of nonprofessional duties in the catalog departments of 110 public libraries revealed that all nonprofessional operations were carried on by both groups; further, 26 per cent of the answers from these libraries indicated that nonprofessional duties were performed by professional catalogers. The conclusion that professional personnel is often wastefully employed in catalog departments is rather obvious. Evidence produced by the survey showing that large libraries experience least difficulty in separating clerical from professional duties is scarcely surprising. Despite the somewhat discouraging picture drawn by these facts, there is considerable evidence in library survey reports, as well as in the published accounts describing reorganization of work in individual catalog departments, to indicate that much real progress has been achieved in the past decade in differentiating professional and clerical duties and in making use of clerical personnel for cataloging operations not requiring professional training.

The accessioning of books is not regarded by all librarians as a logical function of the catalog department. Actually, in many libraries it is performed in the order department or in a special unit. The formal register of accessions, for so many years looked upon as a basic and essential record for any properly managed library, appears to be on the way out. In fact, quite a few libraries have abandoned both the accession book and the use of accession numbers in the individual books. Others have decided on one of several possible compromises,

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such as (1) adapting other library records, e.g., bills, lists, order cards, or shelf-list cards, to serve the purposes of a standard accession record, or (2) continuing the stamping of accession numbers in the books themselves, thereby preserving their value as a means for positive identification of particular volumes or copies, but without listing books in an accession register nor noting their accession numbers on shelf-list cards. That simplification of accession records and procedures, if not their complete elimination, is a growing trend in libraries, is suggested by the fact that nearly all library surveys have recommended it wherever the surveyors encountered the traditional accession records.

The taking of inventory of the library's book stock by the circulation department and other readers' service units can readily be defended on the ground that they have a custodial responsibility for the books shelved in their departments. However, in many libraries this duty is delegated to the catalog department, presumably because it makes and maintains the shelf list and catalog and often keeps the accession record, and therefore should withdraw the notations of items established as lost in the inventory process. Moreover, it may be reasoned, the catalog department is the logical department to correct any errors or discrepancies that may be discovered in the course of inventory.

Particularly in very large libraries, the trend is away from complete periodic inventories, for the simple reason that they no longer can be afforded. In some such libraries formal checking is attempted only in reference and reading rooms and for departmental collections. Larger libraries which have not abandoned the taking of inventories of their central collections, tend to carry them out at longer intervals, rather than annually, or to assign relatively small staffs to carry them on continuously.

One of the most significant recent developments in American librarianship has been the grouping in numerous individual libraries of all services in two divisions, viz., technical services and readers' services. The underlying administrative philosophy aims primarily at reducing the span of control of the top administrator and promoting effective oversight, coordination, and integration of the various services carried on in the organizational units brought together by the change. The services commonly regarded as technical include acquisitions, cataloging, binding, and photographic reproduction, and the act whereby they are placed in a single large division recognizes the close relationship of their individual functions and the operations involved in performing them.

Although the merging of organizational units carrying on technical operations into a technical services division may make the coordination of these operations easier, it is admittedly not a prerequisite to effective cooperation. The close relationship between cataloging and acquisitions, for example, is axiomatic, and instances of successful coordination and mutual cooperation are not hard to find. In many libraries the acquisitions department forwards material to the catalog department only after it has been established that the material is to be added to the library's collections. It indicates what books must be given priority treatment, designates what items are to go to departmental libraries or other special locations, and calls attention to added copies, varying editions, and rare or costly works. It passes on bibliographical information useful to catalogers which is discovered in searching and checking. It brings to the attention of serial catalogers changes in current serials which affect the cataloging of these publications and, in some libraries, adds notations about serial and continuation volumes to the catalog records.

In like fashion, the catalog department facilitates acquisitions work by (1) transmitting to serial and continuation sections call numbers assigned to new serial and continuation titles, and catalog entries established for them, (2) bringing to the attention of these sections gaps in the library's files of such publications, and (3) notifying the acquisitions department regarding titles for which cataloging has been completed so that the "orders-received" file may be cleared.

Although in many libraries it is the practice to route unbound books to the binding department directly from the acquisitions department, in others such material is forwarded to binding only after the cataloging processes have been completed. This order in the procedure is particularly useful in the case of works issued in fascicles and for certain unbound serials, such as monographs issued in series which, by catalog department decision, are to be kept together as a set and may therefore be bound several to a volume. Serial catalogers can contribute to the efficient operation of the binding department by giving advice regarding the binding of complicated serials, e.g., those comprising subseries or issued with supplements. In some libraries it is routine practice for serial catalogers to assemble serial volumes for binding as a last step following cataloging or recataloging, and to forward with the volumes a form supplying such information as call number, entry, binder's title, and other items to be marked on the spine, and showing whether any volumes have been bound previously. The

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binding department, on the other hand, can assist the work of the catalog department by routing to it all newly bound serial volumes which need to be recorded on catalog records, and by identifying bound and rebound volumes which must be routed to special locations in the library system.

All readers' services units, both centralized and decentralized, are aided immeasurably in their services to readers by the records prepared and maintained by the catalog department. Hence it is axiomatic that cataloging policies and methods must be related effectively to the needs of readers' services.

Public service departments stress a number of special ways in which catalog departments can be of help in achieving high standards of service to readers. They urge that cataloging be done expeditiously, that "rush" items be given special priority, and that temporary cards for new books be filed in the public catalog to serve until the permanent sets are filed. They ask that catalog records for items withdrawn or lost, and not to be replaced, be canceled soon, and that errors or discrepancies in catalog records when reported to catalogers receive early attention. If a book is reclassified they want to know, when it is returned, under what number it was charged out. They ask sympathetic consideration for their suggestions for improving the catalogs. Catalogers, among other things, want prompt cooperation when they must recall items for recataloging; and, when books are transferred from one part of the system to another, they want to be notified so that they can make the necessary changes in catalog and shelf-list records.

Effective coordination between the catalog department and other departments can be especially fruitful in simplifying some records and eliminating the duplication of others. A central serials record may make unnecessary the recording of serials in the public catalog; or the checking records of current serials may supplement the information provided for these publications in the catalog. The "orders-received" file, or a combined "orders outstanding-current receipts" file, maintained by the acquisitions department, if conveniently located with respect to both departments, will obviate the need for an "in-process" file in the catalog department.

The branch libraries of public library systems almost universally have been set up by their central libraries, whereas the departmental libraries of college and university libraries have been started in many instances by academic departments independently of the general library. Centralization of cataloging in public library systems has, for

this reason, been the general rule; while centralization of cataloging in colleges and universities has been achieved generally only as the departmental libraries were drawn into a centrally administered library system.

In the large public library system, where multiple copies of many new books are distributed simultaneously to the branches, the policy of centralizing cataloging has apparently met little opposition. In university libraries, on the other hand, there has often been strong resistance to it. The chief argument by the proponents of decentralized cataloging has been that work done in the departmental libraries would meet better the needs of the clientele. Since the cataloging would be performed by those most familiar with the subject fields involved, they have maintained, the classifying and subject cataloging especially would prove more satisfactory than if it were carried out in a general catalog department. Furthermore, they have supposed that their books would reach the shelves sooner if processed in the departmental library.

The principal arguments on the other side were: (1) a union catalog recording the library's total resources could be maintained most satisfactorily through a system of centralized cataloging, (2) standardization of the various catalogs in the library system, best attained through centralization of cataloging processes, would facilitate both their use by readers and the interchange of library materials between departmental libraries and the central bookstacks, (3) uniform and competent classifying and subject analysis of books could be achieved by promoting subject specialization in the general catalog department, and (4) centralization would promote over-all efficiency and economy.

G. A. Works⁵ put the case for centralized cataloging succinctly when he wrote more than a quarter of a century ago that cataloging illustrates well a type of library work in which there is a distinct advantage in centralization. "It makes for economy and a good quality of work to have all persons doing cataloging organized in one group so as to give the largest opportunity for differentiation and specialization." Almost without exception library surveys of the past decade or so have recommended centralization of cataloging wherever they found that it was not already the established policy. This, or at least the creation of a union catalog in the general library, they have urged even where for special local reasons it was not feasible to bring all departmental and college libraries under the administrative control of the general library.

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The problems of centralization of cataloging is not confined, it must be pointed out, to the relations between a central library and its branches or departmental libraries. Occasionally the cataloging operations carried on in the central or main library are scattered among several independent units. Carleton Joeckel and Leon Carnovsky, for example, in their study of cataloging operations in the Chicago Public Library in 1940, discovered that cataloging was being done in five essentially autonomous units.⁶ They strongly urged unification of this work in a single department, and supported their recommendation with the argument that the change would "insure standardization and uniformity of procedures, would permit the efficient organization of professional and clerical personnel, would make possible the economical duplication of cards for the catalogs and shelf-lists, and would probably result in a more even distribution of work throughout the year."⁷

The appearance of the storage library, a very recent development, has raised a variety of new problems for both the storage centers and their parent institutions. H. H. Fussler has defined three types of storage libraries: "(1) a storage depot for the deposit of books from a single library, or library system; (2) a cooperatively owned and operated building in which the cooperating institutions may rent space for the separate deposit of their own materials; and (3) a cooperatively owned and operated library in which the deposited materials are available to and shared by all member institutions."⁸ Certain administrative problems of storage libraries are common to all three varieties; but each type has some questions peculiar to itself, among which is that of cataloging policy.

When a library like the Iowa State College Library builds a special structure to provide economical space for little-used materials for which there is no room in the main library, the storage building may be regarded as a simple extension of the central bookstacks. A record in it of what is shelved there may be useful, but not essential; and in the main library it is necessary only to indicate which of its books are shelved in the annex. This may be done by appropriate notation on catalog and shelf-list cards, or by whatever method the main library indicates location of particular books in its departmental libraries.

At first glance it would appear that a similar scheme would serve satisfactorily the needs, in this respect, of a storage library of the second variety, the prototype of which is the New England Deposit Library. Actually, the cataloging plans for the materials stored in the New England Deposit Library are a little more elaborate.⁹ The original

proposal, requiring each participating library to supply, for each title deposited, a main entry card for the Deposit's union catalog was soon abandoned, and only half of the parent libraries continue to furnish cards for this file.

A newspaper catalog, comprising four different indexes, is maintained at the storage library, and there is also a complete shelf list of the newspapers of the Boston Public Library and the Harvard College Library. Largely to avoid the additional expense, but also because Harvard did not make shelf cards even for its own use in the case of new acquisitions placed in storage, the Deposit Library dropped plans for a general shelf list representing the materials housed there.

Harvard, the only cooperating library which sends new acquisitions to the Deposit Library in quantity, has adopted a special cataloging policy for these books. Presupposing that there would be few calls for them, and that therefore the expense of standard cataloging was not justified, Harvard decided to apply simplified cataloging. Also, keeping in mind that grouping of books by size and shelving by fixed location was the basis for storing these materials in the Deposit Library, Harvard decided to save the expense of the usual subject classification in the case of these new acquisitions by simply classifying them according to size and then numbering them serially.

The institution which comes closest to fitting Fussler's definition of the third type is the Midwest Inter-Library Center. The scope of its function is broader than mere storage, however, since it is charged also with acquiring additional research materials directly, by purchase or gift. Furthermore, excepting only the small deposits stored on a rental basis, all materials housed in the Center are available for use by the member institutions. For these and other reasons, the Center has had to face entirely new problems in organizing and recording its holdings and supplying essential information regarding its resources to member libraries.

The general cataloging and classification plans developed by the Center were described in 1951 by its director, Ralph T. Esterquest,¹⁰ who was quick to point out that they are "subject to revision . . . in the light of experience." According to Esterquest, fixed location and size-shelving will be the general rule and, for this purpose, six size classifications have been established. Examples of exceptions are: (1) state documents, arranged by state and issuing agency, (2) foreign dissertations, alphabeted by author, (3) old textbooks, disposed

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under large subjects, and (4) telephone directories, arranged by state and locality.

With respect to cataloging plans the Center has made a number of major decisions. First, the catalog of its holdings is to be limited almost entirely to author entries. For a title cataloged prior to its transfer to the Center, a member library is expected to supply a catalog card. This card, or a copy of it, is marked to show shelf location and then filed in the Center's catalog. For uncataloged items received, the Center prepares its own catalog entries, always with an emphasis on what is essential. Certain categories of materials, e.g., those listed in the paragraph above, are not given individual cataloging treatment.

To keep its member libraries informed regarding its resources the Center furnishes each library, as well as the National Union Catalog, a multilithed copy of its catalog cards. In the case of currently received serials, a copy of its serial checking card is supplied. To supplement this information, particularly for the uncataloged categories, the Center has prepared and distributed to its member libraries its loose-leaf *Inventory of Holdings of Certain Classes of Materials*.¹¹

The disposition of M.I.L.C. catalog cards in the individual member libraries varies somewhat, but in most the cards are kept in a separate file, usually near the public catalog. In a few cases they are interfiled either in the public catalog or in the "union" catalog, i.e., the Library of Congress depository catalog with which have been interfiled cards from other libraries.

There is also variation in these libraries in their treatment of catalog records representing titles transferred to the Center. If the cards are left in the catalog or shelf list, or if they are filed in the "union" catalog until the corresponding M.I.L.C. cards are received, the fact of the location of the material in M.I.L.C. is noted.

The growing concern of library administrators over mounting cataloging costs is matched by a similar concern over the problem of cataloging arrears. The most inclusive definition of cataloging arrears includes all acquired materials which are to be incorporated in a library's organized collections but are not being processed currently.

It is a truism that a library's acquisitions are limited only by the size of its book fund and its ability to secure materials by gift and exchange. But the flow of accessions often is increased substantially by administrative action and policies. For example, the librarian may succeed in getting a sizeable increase in the regular allowance for books, or he may manage to have the book fund supplemented by

special appropriations or monetary donations, or he may promote an active gift and exchange program leading to large gift collections. If, when any of these things happen, he does not provide the additional personnel needed to take care of the increased accumulations, he either creates an arrears problem for the library or makes an existing one worse.

The general tendency to put the blame for uncataloged arrears on the catalog department is quite understandable, since getting the library's acquisitions cataloged is its chief responsibility. Moreover, it cannot hope to escape criticism for being behind in its work unless it has taken all steps necessary to maintain high efficiency. But if, despite good organization, sound procedures, efficient techniques, and satisfactory morale, a catalog department is unable to bring its accumulated arrears under control, the solution to the problem must be found in providing more cataloging personnel or in adopting a more realistic acquisitions program.

The catalog departments of a number of libraries have experimented with various methods for reducing cataloging arrears or preventing them. The Division of Cataloging and Classification devoted a session to consideration of the problem at the 1951 A.L.A. conference. Papers presented at that meeting reported on efforts to deal with arrears at the University of California at Los Angeles, Yale University, the University of Pennsylvania, the Brooklyn Public Library, and the Library of Congress. These papers, as well as a statement on arrears at Columbia University were published in the Fall 1951 issue of the *Journal of Cataloging and Classification*.¹² In the same year A. D. Osborn¹³ reported on the way Harvard had attacked the matter, and a few months later Alice T. Paloney¹⁴ came out with an article telling how the Los Angeles Public Library avoids arrears entirely.

Although tackling a common difficulty, the methods developed by these libraries have varied considerably. A comparison shows differences in the organization of the material in arrears, in the use of personnel, in the kind of cataloging treatment given, and in the application of special techniques. The significant thing about these experiments is that they all have proved worth while, some beyond all expectation. In view of the results there can be little doubt that more and more libraries, seeing they cannot hope for sufficient personnel to process arrears by normal cataloging methods and routines, will use the lessons reported above to deal with their own arrears.

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