BCC98/Auth/3

LITA/ALCTS Authority Control in the Online Environment Interest Group
Sunday, June 28, 1998, 2:00-5:30 p.m.
Sheraton City Centre, New Hampshire Ballroom

True to a trend in librarianship, the ACIG program's theme was "Metadata and Authority Control." The task of stage-setting fell to MLA stalwart Sherry Vellucci (St. John's University), who sought to describe what she called the "Metadata Express," while asking if it is out of control. She gave a brief accounting of the history of "metadata" as a term and its movement into librarians' vocabulary with the advent of descriptive cataloging for remote electronic resources. Rather than the boilerplate "data about data," Vellucci's definition of "metadata" is data that 1) describes attributes of an electronic resource; 2) characterizes its relationships to other resources; 3) supports its discovery, management, and efficient use; and 4) exists in the electronic environment.

Where does authority control enter in? Vellucci reminded the audience of authority control's traditional function--providing consistency of content and form to access points. Authority control has worked to best effect when operating in a well-defined and -bounded universe (e.g. a local catalog), with access points constructed according to principles and a set of standards, reference to authoritative lists (e.g. LCSH), and when it is performed by well-trained, knowledgeable individuals. The nature of electronic resources on the Internet negates the first three of these points. Internationalization of information exchange has presented a further challenge. Moreover, there is a plethora of metadata schemes in use, from broad-based ones (e.g. the MARC format, the Dublin Core) to domain-specific (i.e. subject-specific) ones. While one buzzword in metadata is "interoperatability," which postulates a core set of data elements, with "crosswalks" that map data between systems, it is counterbalanced by a desire for flexibility in the amount of data and its adherence to standards, and for extensibility (the ability to add elements and guidelines to serve specific audiences).

Vellucci posed a set of concluding questions whose answers bear on the prospects for authority control of metadata:

1) How will metadata be used? Where will it reside?
2) Who will create it?
3) What standards will govern its contents?
4) What data registries exist?

She identified three models for creation of metadata: "embedded," in which the metadata is formulated by the document's creator; "third party," where an agency creates, collects, and manages separate metadata records; and "view-filter," in which an agency manages metadata from many different sources. She offered data registries as one possible avenue for exercising authority-control principles, as a mechanism for verifying metadata types, content standards, and object identifiers.

David Austin (University of Illinois-Chicago) demonstrated and explained tools that members of the art community use on the Web for information, and how authority control is being attempted. In this realm, thesauri such as the Art and Architecture Index, the Union List of Artists' Names, and the Thesaurus of Geographic Names are mainstays; in this era of remote access, authority control is needed to serve the finding function that personal mediation did before. Austin gave particular attention to a Web site developed by the Getty Information Institute to demonstrate current projects (http://www.gii.gett.edu/), and mentioned AMICO (Art Museum Image Consortium), a cooperative project among 33 museums to develop a database of images, accompanied by metadata, to be licensed to universities for teaching.

Readers of the electronic discussion list AUTOCAT would not expect a conventional presentation for Gerry McKiernan (Iowa State University). ACIG attendees heard and saw a kaleidoscopic presentation that used a mix of earnestness, irony, humor, and unusual visuals to put forth his points. McKiernan defined authority control as "the management of access and navigation to relationships and meanings." He chose to focus on how different schemes for organizing information help to answer this need. These schemes range from the "neo-conventional," his term for current standards in cataloging and classification, through automated categorization (such as artificial intelligence programs), to visual, auditory, and even tactile ("feeling" information). For more, see his Web site (http://bcc.musiclibraryassoc.org/BCC-Historical/BCC98/BCC98Auth3.html)
Sherry Kelley (Smithsonian Institution) brought the session back to a more traditional plane by reporting on activities of the ALCTS/CCS/CC:DA Task Force on Metadata and the Cataloging Rules. Beginning with the assumptions that electronic resources would be added to library collections, that they would be diverse in nature, but that they would be treated in a manner consistent with that of traditional resources, the Task Force tried to answer the question "What do catalogers do with metadata?" It looked at standards such as TEI headers and the Dublin Core to evaluate their content standards vs. AACR2; they were apparently found wanting, because the Task Force concluded that metadata is not a substitute for cataloging and should not be expected to function that way in a library catalog. Of particular concern is the interpretative approach of metadata creators vs. the descriptive practices of catalogers. Diane Dates Casey then spoke about the two subcommittees formed in the wake of the Task Force -- Metadata and Subject Analysis, and Metadata and Classification, both just getting started.

The business meeting followed, with discussion about the group's next two programs.

Rebecca Dean, incoming Chair, presented her vision for the Midwinter reporting session and Annual Convention program. For Midwinter, she hopes to review the position of ACIG in the current state of online authority control and have the ad-hoc chairpersons present reviews of the current wants and needs of the authority control community. For Annual, she envisions a program titled, "Who 'Owns' Authority Control?" This program (which has been approved) will explore the impact of authority control issues on non-cataloging staff as well as vendors and patrons and examine the ways in which authority control impacts this diverse group of users. Her proposals generated much discussion concerning the practical aspects of bringing these sessions to successful conclusions.

Elections followed. Rebecca Dean was elected to a unique two-year position as Chair, and Stephen Hearn to a parallel two-year position as Vice Chair/Chair Elect. Charlene Casey was elected as the new Ad-Hoc Chair for Series Authority Control. Hiroka Akawa was elected as the new Ad-Hoc Chair for Local Systems.

Submitted by Mark Scharff

Last updated February 4, 2000