Current Practices, Resources, and Trends

in Authority Control

by

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Conference Program Abstract: This program will discuss the value of authority control in library cataloging, results of state and national surveys conducted on authority control and practices, and resources to assist in learning more about authority control work.

Authority control plays an important part in the cataloging process, particularly in the identifying and collocating functions of the library catalog. One definition of authority control is "the process of maintaining consistency in the verbal form used to represent an access point in a catalog and the further process of showing the relationships among names, works, and subjects" (Taylor 2004, 491). Another definition that I believe is applicable to authority control comes from the world of Star Trek and the dreaded enemy the Borg, whose mantra was "We bring order out of chaos." In a world of information overload, bringing order out of the mass of raw data available to us is a highly valuable service that authority control can provide. At the Mississippi State University (MSU) Libraries and other institutions, authority control is a core part of the cataloging process which helps both catalogers and library patrons identify and locate desired information.

In the Cataloging Department of the Mississippi State University Libraries, authority control is an integral part of our activities. In November 2002, we received training in creating authority records for names through the Name Authority Cooperative program (NACO), which is a component of the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC). The week long training was conducted by a representative

from the Library of Congress and covered the creation of authority records for personal names, corporate names, geographic names, and uniform titles. Following a period of review, we were granted independent status from NACO in 2003. In October of 2003, we received training in the creation of series authority records (SARs), and in 2004 we were granted independence in creating SARs. We currently create authority records for names and series using OCLC's Connexion and use MarcImport to bring in authority records that have already been established. While we use a vendor to provide us with new and updated authority records for our catalog, we also create new authority records for student authors of theses and dissertations at MSU, names of academic departments, and names of Mississippi authors with holdings in our Special Collections Department. Once added to the OCLC Authority File, these records can be accessed by libraries worldwide.

To better understand how authority control is practiced at academic libraries in the United States, I conducted a survey in 2004 that was sent to the 258 institutions designated by the 2000 Carnegie Classification as Doctoral/Research Extensive or Intensive, with 193 responses received. The complete findings were later published ([Wolverton 2005](#)) and I believe that the highlights from the study tell us quite a bit about the state of authority control today. The survey found that 95 percent of the libraries responding performed some level of authority control, with 94 percent of respondents indicating that such work was done by an MLS librarian. Three vendors (OCLC/MARS, LTI, and Marcive) accounted for 90 percent of authority control services for survey respondents. Forty-three percent of respondents had received NACO training and 21 percent had received training in creating authority records for subjects through the Subject Authority Cooperative program (SACO). While authority control was highly valued by the vast majority of survey respondents, lack of funding and personnel often hindered the implementation of local authority control practices.

Several trends in authority control have emerged in recent years, and it seems likely that these trends will continue into the future. Interest in authority control appears to be continually growing, with journal articles, books, web sites, electronic discussion groups, and even special conferences devoted to authority control emerging. This interest can also be seen in the plan to include a chapter on authority control in the Resource Description and Access (RDA) rules that will replace AACR. Efforts to internationalize authority control also appear to be growing, with organizations like the International Federation of

Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and projects such as the Virtual International Authority File exploring ways to make global authority control possible.

Another trend related to authority control is the ongoing evolution of technology, which has enabled many libraries to provide authority control for their catalogs by electronically importing authority records from the Library of Congress and OCLC authority files, as well as creating new authority records and submitting them through the NACO and SACO programs. The development of new web sites has also proved beneficial to authority control practices by providing additional sources of information to catalogers, such as Wikipedia and the Internet Movie Database (IMDB). While some web sites may not be viewed as authoritatively as print resources, they still demonstrate how advances in technology have made access to information easier than ever before.

While the value of authority control may be obvious to librarians and other information professionals, it can also be reflected in OPAC displays viewed by library users. Using different forms of an author's name can result in their being scattered throughout the OPAC, but by using the authorized form of the author's name, all works associated with that person are brought together in the OPAC, making them easier to find. One example of this in the MSU OPAC was recently seen by doing an author search for "Crozier, William." Four listings for that name appeared in our OPAC, including "Crozier, William," "Crozier, William Armstrong," "Crozier, William Armstrong, 1864-1913," "Crozier, William Armstrong, Ed.," and "Crozier, William M." figure 1 shows how they were originally displayed in our OPAC.

Figure. 1. Original OPAC display for author search for "Crozier, William."

After reviewing authority records for those names, it was determined that "Crozier, William" was the correct form of the author's name in the first bib record and that "Crozier, William M." was the correct form of the author's name in the last bib record. The authorized form of the author's name for the additional twelve bib records was determined to be "Crozier, William Armstrong, 1864-1913," so four of the records were edited to use that form of his name. This resulted in the OPAC display shown in figure 2.

Figure. 2. The display now gives the patron the correct form of name for each of the William Croziers and brings together all of the works attributed to "Crozier, William Armstrong, 1864-1913."

A similar problem can occur when incorrect numbering of items in a series is used in bib records, resulting in the numbers appearing out of sequence in the OPAC. An example of this was found in the "Evangelical Family Library" series in the MSU OPAC. Enumeration of bib records in the series was given as "v. II," "v. 8," "vol. 1," and "vol. 6", so the series appeared in our OPAC this way as in figure 3.

Figure 3. Showing incorrect formatting of volume numbers, resulting in records appearing out of order.

After reviewing the authority record for the series, it was found that the correct enumeration to use was "v." followed by the number. The series statements in the bib records were edited to use that enumeration, resulting with the numbers indexing in sequence in our OPAC, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Correctly formatted volume numbers.

While the names of some well-known people may seem unique to an OPAC user, they may actually be shared by people with very different backgrounds. A search for "Springsteen, Bruce" in the MSU OPAC brought up three records, but after reviewing them it was determined that two were by the music artist Bruce Springsteen and the other was by different Bruce Springsteen who worked in energy and environmental research. A name authority record was found for the latter Springsteen, which used his year of birth as a qualifier, distinguishing him from the musician. The names now appear as shown in figure 5.

Figure 5. Two authors with the name "Bruce Springsteen" were made unique by using a date of birth for one.

Mississippi blues great Howlin' Wolf (real name: Chester Burnett) shared his name with other performers known as Howlin' Wolf – one from England, another from Texas. By reviewing each performer's name authority record, we could determine which Howlin' Wolf to use for our bib records. There were also scope notes in the authority records letting the cataloger know not to confuse the different Wolfs and how to distinguish between them. Even fictitious characters are vulnerable to name confusion. Two different versions of "Dennis the Menace" exist, one in the U.S. and another completely different character in British comics. Authority records now reflect that one Dennis the Menace was created by Hank Ketcham in the U.S. and that the other was created by David Law in Great Britain.

Then there are situations of frequent name changes presented by artists like Prince. While the authority record for Prince includes his real name (Prince Rogers Nelson) as a "see from" reference, it also includes more unusual forms of names he has used over the years, including "Artist Formerly Known as Prince" and "TAFKAP". There's even a scope note in the record stating that he changed his name to a symbol for a time, so a cataloger can easily view all the differing forms of his name. With an authority control system in place, a patron using any of those forms would automatically be referred to "Prince."

As these examples show, authority records provide specific information that can help both catalogers and patrons. It should be noted, however, that authority records are often subject to change. One example of this has recently been reflected in the decision by the Library of Congress to add death dates to some existing personal name authority records. In addition, changes frequently occur in the names of corporate bodies, countries, and subjects, which can result in changes being made to existing authority records and new ones being created. However, these changes can be positive, reflecting contemporary terminology and name usage and providing "see" and "see also" references to guide people from the earlier form of the name to the newer form.

A number of helpful resources related to authority control exist on the Web and can provide you with additional information:

- Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC): http://www.loc.gov/catdir/pcc/
- Name Authority Cooperative program (NACO): http://www.loc.gov/catdir/pcc/naco/naco.html
- Subject Authority Cooperative program (SACO): http://www.loc.gov/catdir/pcc/saco/saco.html
- Library of Congress Authorities: http://authorities.loc.gov/
- MARC 21 Concise Format for Authority Data: http://www.loc.gov/marc/authority/ecadhome.html

While implementing authority control practices in a library involves an investment of time and money, it can be of great value in the long run, helping catalogers in their formulation of access points in the bibliographic record and helping patrons more easily identify and find desired information. In addition, if more libraries receive NACO and SACO training it will likely lead to an increase in the number of authority records available for all of us to use, illustrating the value of cooperation in the authority control process.

References

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Wolverton, Robert E. 2005. "Authority control in academic libraries in the United States: A survey." *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 41 (1): 111-131.