

**Art Libraries Society of North America, 33rd Annual Conference
Hilton Americas, Houston, Texas, April 1-6, 2005**

**Session VIII: Outside the Box, Beyond the Cubicle: Developing Versatile
Catalogers**

Monday, April 4, 2005, 9:30 - 11:00 AM

Moderator: Daniel Starr, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Speakers: Amy Lucker, Harvard University; Robin Fradenburgh, University of Texas at Austin; Kay Teel, Stanford University

Recorder: Anne Champagne, Art Institute of Chicago

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Summary:

Daniel Starr introduced the session by describing what he regards as the three most critical requirements for today's catalogers: knowing the rules and when to break them; practicing national cataloging standards; and contributing to the profession through other avenues, whether it be reference, collection development, professional organizations, etc.

Amy Lucker described the tension she believes exists between catalogers and catalog operation managers. Traditionally, catalogers have been prone to add as much information to records as they think the patrons need or want. Managers, especially in times of budget constraints, question the "added value" of crafting catalog records and are focused on providing timely access and preventing (or eliminating) backlogs. She described some of the changes Harvard has made in recent years in order to save money while preserving the integrity of the catalog, including switching to LC classification, accepting cataloging copy with few or no edits, and acknowledging the need for original cataloging or extensive copy editing for certain types of materials in their collection. Through this experience Lucker learned that change is difficult and the most critical element for success in implementing change is time, i.e., the most successful changes were implemented in a phased approach giving staff time to adjust. Finally, she noted that as a manager it is important to be open to feedback and willing to refine or reconsider decisions.

Robin Fradenburgh began her talk by claiming that catalogers are seriously underappreciated. She described the cataloging department at UT Austin and the changes it has gone through in the last fifteen years, especially staff reductions and the automation of nearly all cataloging processes. Despite the loss of twelve catalogers, productivity has not decreased, although the department now places less emphasis on quality and stresses quantity (production) instead. In addition, the library is outsourcing standard monograph cataloging and starting to hire new catalogers who will have more responsibilities than just cataloging. As she reviews the current situation under the guidance of a new library director, she hopes to implement a merit raise system and incentives to encourage conference attendance and participation.

Kay Teel provided the "cataloger response" to the managerial perspectives of Lucker and Fradenburgh. She believes that, fundamentally, cataloging concerns itself with information, access, structure, and organization. She is not wedded to the current tools of cataloging—AACR, etc.—but rather regards them as tools of the moment. Catalogers have the

responsibility to develop new tools as new information and delivery formats appear. She believes catalogers have not been proactive enough in this regard and have sat back while IT departments address these issues, often reinventing the wheel in the process. She urged managers to look beyond the role traditional cataloging has played in the library setting, and encourage catalogers to start addressing the information/access needs of both the library and the institution to which it belongs (e.g., museum, university, etc.).

After the speakers finished, there were a number of questions and comments from the audience.

Question: How does Harvard handle shelving, now that it has switched to LC classification?

Lucker: The library already has several classification schemes, so old systems were compressed to make room for new books.

Comment: None of the speakers mentioned changing traditional cataloging rules so that they are more relevant.

Starr: Catalogers need to get involved in that process.

Lucker: LC is a slow-moving organization and there is only so much individual catalogers can do to affect change. Catalogers have participated in the process of re-writing rules. They should begin to address image standards.

Teel: Catalogers should be involved, yet the rules do not address the changing research environment, which makes the process frustrating.

Comment: Image catalogers have more cache than monograph catalogers.

Lucker: No, they need to be seen as professionals, but not as superior to monograph catalogers.

Starr: LC has made internal changes and they are now willing to accelerate the change process and open up more avenues for participation.

Question: How can patrons at Harvard browse the shelves now that they have switched to LC classification?

Lucker: Browsing was already imperfect due to previous multiple schemes. Off-site storage is really the bigger problem. We need to train patrons to browse the catalog instead.

Starr: The Watson Library switched to LC classification and compressed the books that use older schemes. We have invested more time educating our patron base than in training catalogers how to use LC.

Comment: Users and reference librarians aren't familiar with LC subject headings (LCSH) and that's frustrating for catalogers.

Starr: Catalogers should educate patrons.

Lucker: Undergraduates use the internet -- it's what they know and how they want to search. It's pointless to try to force patrons to learn LCSH. What's the point of making our catalogs difficult to use? We should ask users how they want to search and then catalogers should accommodate them.

Question: Many cataloging positions are being transformed from "cataloger" to "metadata specialist." Have your institutions reassigned catalogers?

Fradenburgh: My director wonders why we have so many staff for the maintenance of "legacy" collections, i.e., print. He wants to have a metadata coordinator and digital project staff.

Teel: Stanford hired a metadata coordinator as part of the cataloging staff, but now there's a separate unit for digital. Catalogers want to adopt metadata cataloging, but they are not lobbying their administrations, so they get left out of this new realm.

Starr: Catalogers need to advocate for themselves.

Comment: Increasingly at smaller institutions, catalogers are be called upon for technical expertise.

Comment: The profession is always talking about the demise of cataloging, but it doesn't happen.

Lucker: It won't happen. The internet needs people who understand how to organize information and use judgment when doing so.

Starr: Outsourcing, because it relieves some of the daily burden of routine cataloging, provides opportunities to participate in new areas such as metadata, but catalogers need the communication skills to advocate for themselves.

Comment: Users don't want to come to the library; they want books delivered.

Question: Metadata projects at the University of Illinois began as grant projects and were divorced from the cataloging department. But now the metadata specialists recognize the value of cataloging and the two units are moving towards integration.

Teel: Cataloging is valued, but not catalogers as a category of professionals. Administrators need to advocate for catalogers.