

6-1-2006

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Repository Citation

Holmes, Elizabeth Geesey, "Pondering the Future of Classification While Living in the Present" (2006). *Articles, Chapters and Online Publications*. 1.
https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/law_lib_artchop/1

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Pondering the Future of Classification while Living in the Present

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We have certainly been living in exciting times lately as catalogers: LC's announcement that it will no longer create series authority records, rumors that the Library of Congress Subject Headings would be eliminated next; RLG's merger with OCLC; Karen Calhoun's report for LC on the nature of the catalog; and OCLC finally implementing code i for integrating resources. It's been hard to keep up with all the e-mail discussions.

All of the above has led me to thinking about the practice of classification and its future. I assume all of us are assigning classification numbers to most physical materials that cross our desks for cataloging. We want these items to be placed on the shelf in a logical and browseable order so that our patrons can retrieve them easily. However, what about electronic/virtual materials which are not on a shelf and don't need a classification number to be retrieved? Do we assign classification numbers to them? When the majority of materials at LC are online and all their stacks are closed (in other words not browseable by patrons) will LC cease assigning LC classification numbers and maintaining the schedules?

All of which leads to the questions: "Why do we assign classification numbers?" and, "Should we continue to do so when we no longer need them for shelf parking?" I was influenced by Diane Hillman's (a former law cataloger) point of view on this question. I attended an AALL cataloging workshop in 1994 and heard her speak on cataloging CD-ROMs and remote files. She stressed the importance of assigning classification numbers as a subject access point even to virtual resources. The classification number is much more than a parking spot. Most of today's online catalogs allow patrons to browse by classification number to find like materials, in the same way (although admittedly less tactile) as researchers used to — and still do — locate one or two relevant materials in the stacks and then browse around that area to find other materials on the same subject. It is our policy at the University of Georgia to assign classification numbers, though not necessarily cutter numbers, to online resources whenever possible. [We purchased cataloging records for the Making of Modern Law online treatise collection and these did not have classification numbers and were too numerous for us to assign numbers to manually]. We use this information for more than just browsing in the cataloging. We generate special reports of our collection by subject breakdown based on classification number ranges, which our collection development team profiled in an Innovative Interfaces, Inc. feature called a "SCAT table." If materials in our catalog are not assigned a classification number they are not included in these reports that are used for collection analysis.

Classification numbers are also being used on the Internet to facilitate subject arrangement/browsing of online resources. *The Online Books Page* at: <http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/aboutolbp.html> facilitates access to books that are freely readable over the Internet. It is browseable by subject via both subject headings and LC classification numbers. It has quite a few sources listed in the K ranges and is interesting to check out. Another site using LC classification to organize online reference tools for undergraduate students is *E-Ref* at: <http://icrc.bloomu.edu/icrc/lc.php>. Again there are a few legal reference resources there to look at.

How are you using classification in your libraries? What is your opinion on the future of classification and its uses? I'd love to hear from other law librarians on this topic – especially in light of other happenings in the cataloging world.

Meanwhile – back to the present. We are all still assigning classification numbers to at least some of our materials and need tools and tips to do so. Here are a couple of things I've run across lately.

- *Notes on the Design of Subclasses KBM and KBP (CPSO)* by Jolande Goldberg is available on the CPSO website at: <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/KBIntro2.html>. If you are interested in learning more about these sub-classes and their design this is well worth your time.

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- While searching for a classification number for an Australian legal treatise I was reminded of the intricacies of searching Classification Web for law numbers housed in tables. I first tried to limit my search to the KU class, but mysteriously got no hits even when I broadened the search to include both the schedules and the tables. The trick was that the KU numbers are part of the KL-KWX6 table and to limit to this table I had to use the full table name and remember to check the search tables box. I didn't find this at all intuitive and had to get my paper schedules out to find the table number, and in this case, letters as well. So, don't forget to think about tables and where your class number resides when searching in Classification Web.

Lastly, if you have any classification questions that you want answered in a column or have comments please email me.
