Pondering the Future of Classification While Living in the Present

Elizabeth Geesey Holmes

University of Georgia School of Law Library
in license terms, mergers and acquisitions of vendors, etc. Communication builds trust. Once you have gained the trust of your procurement office, the more likely they will be to work with you rather than insist on blind conformance.

As our procurement officer told us, we want you to get what you want to buy, we just need to find a way to accomplish that within the rules we’ve been given. Education, documentation, and communication are three steps toward finding that common ground.

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/le.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/KBlntro2.html. If you are interested in learning more about these sub-classes and their design this is well worth your time.
A. Implementation of Bibliographic Level “i” by OCLC and LC
AACR2 2002 revision formally altered the bibliographic division of the world from monograph/serials. Monographs remained one of the categories, but serials were subsumed as part of the new category, “continuing resources,” which also included the new subcategory “integrating resources.” Integrating resources include updating loose-leaves (long familiar to law catalogers), updating websites, and updating databases. To accommodate this new taxonomy, the Machine-Readable Bibliographic Information Committee (MARBI), defined a new bibliographic level (MARC leader/07) value in the MARC format: “i” (Proposal No. 2001-05). RLIN implemented the new value several years ago, but the Library of Congress (LC) and OCLC were waiting until OCLC finished converting to its new platform. OCLC’s implementation should be announced sometime in June 2006 or thereabouts. Guidelines on how to apply value “i” are in OCLC Technical Bulletin 252, May 2006.

Both BIBCO and CONSER libraries are expected to share in the maintenance of records for integrating resources. Somewhat later this year (possibly by fall 2006), both BIBCO and CONSER libraries will be able to authenticate records for integrating resources by adding the LCCN [Library of Congress Control Number] and a new authentication code (MARC field 042), to be determined. BIBCO libraries will also be able to update and enhance these records on OCLC without authenticating them, but both the LCCN and the new authentication code will be necessary for the record to be selected for distribution through the Library of Congress’ Cataloging Distribution Service. [Les Hawkins message posted to the BIBCO listserv, June 2, 2006 11:30:59 AM, “Bib level i CONSER and BIBCO records”]

B. New Place of Publication Codes (008/15-17) and New Geographic Codes (043)
More precise Australian country codes and geographic codes (043) for specific states and territories have been added to the MARC bibliographic format. They may be used immediately. The country of publication code “at” and the geographic country code: “u-at” remain valid for Australia as a whole.

C. Character Set Changes (Basic Latin & Extended Latin)
Spacing characters may now be entered as characters on OCLC. Two of the most commonly used, the spacing underscore and spacing tilde, were approved as additions to the MARC bibliographic format in 1994, but since then, we have been directed to use the characters’ hex values instead (%5F and %7E). Since uniform resource identifiers (URIs) frequently employ one or both of these characters, this has been a bit of a nuisance for most catalogers. OCLC cataloging interfaces are now accepting these characters, but they should not be used until revisions of the Library of Congress Rule Interpretations [LCRIs] 1.0E and 1.4F5 are posted on LC’s Cataloging Policy and Support Office’s [CPSO’s] website, which is expected to occur in early summer 2006. For more information, see: Library of Congress Usage of New MARC 21 Characters Plus Processing Implications on the web at: http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsd/newchar2.pdf (last revised 2006-04-04; last viewed, June 6, 2006) and: Library of Congress Implementation of New MARC 21 Data Elements at: http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsd/m21data.html (click on May 2006; rev. May 16, 2005; viewed June 7, 2006).

D. MARBI ALA Meeting in San Antonio, Jan. 2006
I attended my first MARBI meeting this past January 21-22, 2006. Attending the meeting were ten voting MARBI members representing different ALA constituencies, seventeen MARC Advisory Committee representatives and liaisons (including myself), three ex-officio members lending their vast experience, and about forty other attendees.