
CORE CATALOGING FOR SERIALS: AN ADMINISTRATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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At the meeting for Name Authority Cooperative Program (NACO) and Bibliographic Record Cooperative Program—monographic (BIBCO) trainers at the Midwinter Meeting of the American Library Association in January 2001, the chair asked everyone present to state who they were and to describe their experiences as trainers. When it was my turn to speak, I quipped that like all good administrators, I had no practical experience; I was there as the chair of the Program for Cooperative Cataloging Standing Committee on Training. Although I had certainly created both authority records and bibliographic records for monographs and had revised the work of other catalogers participating in BIBCO and NACO, I had never gone to another institution to do either BIBCO or NACO training. Likewise, I come to the topic of core cataloging for serials as an administrator par excellence; not only have I never done CONSER core cataloging, I have never once cataloged a serial. I have, however, been a manager of cataloging departments with CONSER-participating serials units since 1997 and have become an ardent fan of CONSER-at-Large, the CONSER Operations Committee, and NASIG meetings. Prior to that, I received serials sensitivity training from two of the best serialists I know: Cecilia Botero at the University of Florida and Michael Charbonneau at Indiana University. From them, I learned to ask,

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“What about serials?” whenever a new policy or procedure for any type of bibliographic control was being discussed, locally or nationally.

What about serials, indeed? And what about core standards? Is there a place for core standards in the serialist’s arsenal?

BACKGROUND

Cooperative cataloging efforts have a long history in the United States, and the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC)¹ is one of the more successful ventures. The PCC was initiated in February 1995—a result of deliberations of the Cooperative Cataloging Council (CCC),² which began its work in April 1993. The CCC itself had been conceived at a meeting of various participants in cooperative library programs that was held at the Library of Congress in November 1992. The CCC envisioned a program that by the year 2000 would annually produce significant numbers of authority and bibliographic records created by an ever-increasing membership of program participants. In November 1996, the CONSER Policy Committee and the PCC Executive Council met to discuss merging the two cooperative cataloging programs. The consolidation became effective in October 1997. Today, PCC has four components: (1) NACO, (2) SACO (Subject Authority Cooperative Program), (3) BIBCO, and (4) CONSER (Cooperative Online Serials Program).

Having served on one of the original CCC task groups—the infamous “More, Better, Faster, Cheaper” group, in fact—I know that one of the driving forces of the CCC/PCC was frustration with the length of time required to create useful bibliographic records that would be widely accepted by catalogers at other institutions. Many administrators perceived that the National Coordinated Cataloging Program (NCCP, the predecessor of BIBCO) and CONSER represented “Cadillac cataloging” that went far beyond what was needed for local bibliographic access. They also believed that catalogers were striving for the perfect record, one that couldn’t be criticized by other catalogers. Some administrators believed that catalogers were obsessing about unimportant details and that they should be retrained to a new set of values, namely those that focus on end users rather than other catalogers. Catalogers, on the other hand, perceived that administrators cared only about quantity and fast production, and that they did

not appreciate the expertise required to create high-quality bibliographic records to serve the needs not only of local users, but also of the national bibliographic database. As evidence of this, catalogers pointed out that they had promoted the concept of minimal-level records to reduce backlogs. Some catalogers also believed that administrators did not fully comprehend or accept the concept of a cooperative bibliographic database. Rather, the perception was that administrators thought that catalogers should not have to create original records to contribute to the shared database, but merely wait long enough for someone else to create the record for them. There was, and still is, some truth to both points of view.

In my opinion, core standards represent an attempt to build a bridge between these opposing opinions and to introduce the concept of timeliness as an essential component of quality. Discussions about core standards predate the PCC. Colleen Hyslop provided a useful overview of some of the early discussions and research in her article “The Core Record and Consolidation of CONSER and PCC.”³ Before the CCC/PCC ever came into being, CONSER members were discussing the concept of core records. They conceived the core record as a level between a full and a minimal record, and this concept is still clearly apparent in the CONSER model. In 1993, the CCC took up the issue and charged four task groups to analyze a variety of cooperative cataloging issues. One of the groups generated the idea to identify data and standards that would be considered the basis of what was required in a bibliographic record—in other words, the core record. Another group endorsed the concept of the iterative record, adapted from the CONSER model. Another key concept to emerge from the nascent PCC was cataloger’s judgment. All of these concepts are crucial to the acceptance and intelligent application of core cataloging. Whether the core standards have succeeded, or can succeed in all that their proponents hoped they would accomplish, is open to debate. They may, however, be successful in ways that their originators never envisioned.

ACCEPTANCE OF CORE STANDARDS

Core standards for both monographs and serials (and their perceived lack of acceptance or use by catalogers) are a matter of concern to the PCC Steering and Policy Committees. During the November 2000

meeting of the PCC Policy Committee, despite a lengthy discussion on the topic, committee members failed to reach a clear consensus on the extent of the problem and possible solutions. At that meeting, Karen Calhoun, chair of the PCC Standing Committee on Automation, initiated a proposal for a research project to examine the issue from the point of view of catalogers and cataloging managers. David Banush of Cornell University is currently conducting that research project. As a cataloging manager for more than seven years and a cataloger for more than twenty, I will hazard a few guesses in the succeeding paragraphs about why core standards are not being more widely used and whether this is really a matter of great concern.

In looking over the standards for serials cataloging given in the CONSER Record Requirements,⁴ it is clear, as Steven Shadle points out in his contribution to this forum of articles,⁵ that there is greater concordance between full and core standards for serials than there is dissonance. The time savings between core and full cataloging for serials is not great. It may be reduced still further in instances where local public service decisions require the inclusion of certain types of information that the core standard defines as optional, such as classification numbers. In his study of using core standards at MIT, Wayne Jones likewise notes the relatively small time savings gained by using core standards for serials cataloging.⁶ Depending upon local practice, of course, it would be possible to increase the amount of time saved per record. For instance, if local policy is to provide no classification number for electronic serials, some time savings might be gained by following core standards for those resources. One of the perceived failures of the core standard and one of the reasons that some catalogers scoff at it is precisely that in their experience, it does not save a great deal of time. Using that as a yardstick, they ask, "Why bother?" Perhaps the core standard would be more widely accepted if its proponents did not focus exclusively on time savings as a reason for adopting it.

THE VALUE OF CORE STANDARDS

If there is no great savings of time in creating an individual serial record, what, then, is the value of the core record? Kristan Lindlan's contribution to this forum of articles⁷ and Wayne Jones's study both point to what, in my opinion, is one of the greatest

achievements of the core standards: rationalization of the cataloging process. The development and promotion of core standards has led catalogers and their public service colleagues to discuss what elements are essential for the people who use bibliographic records. When I was head of cataloging at UCLA, we were planning to implement the core standards. As did Jones at MIT, we held discussions with our public service colleagues to explain the standards and the options available to us. At UCLA, this led to wide agreement from public service and collection development staff that core cataloging should be the default standard for new original cataloging. Regardless of the amount of time ultimately saved, the attempt to rationalize cataloging based on user needs serves an institution well. It is also worth noting that our public service colleagues can be some of the more entrenched traditionalists in their opinions about cataloging levels. They are often loathe to give up the notes and other data that the core standards define as optional. Such discussions should be ongoing in today's rapidly changing bibliographic environment, whether they focus on core standards, bibliographic control for digital resources, the use of vendor-supplied records for some categories of materials, or other types of bibliographic control beyond MARC records loaded into local online catalogs. If the core standards have been a catalyst for such discussions, they have served a vital function.

Beyond some (albeit minimal) time savings and a rationalization of what catalogers do and for whom we do it, what else has been gained from discussing and implementing core standards? One of the guiding principles of the PCC is that we must learn to rely on "cataloger's judgment." In my opinion, this means that a cataloger is aware of all the options available for bibliographic control, has rationalized the process to focus on the users of the records, understands the policies of the institution in which the cataloging is occurring, and makes appropriate and timely decisions. The concept does not mean that a cataloger will always decide to create a core record. Whenever administrators dictate that all records will be done as core records, they are overturning the principle of cataloger's judgment. For some time at UCLA, we tried to follow an administrative policy of performing all of our serials cataloging at the core level. We stopped when my catalogers confessed to me that they were really doing full cataloging but were merely coding the records as core. In their judgment, and in the judgment of the people using the records,

the information that the core standards considered as optional was actually essential. This is a theme I have heard from catalogers at other institutions, catalogers who have been told that all of their cataloging must be performed as core—they code the records as core to avoid administrative censure but they also *use their judgment* and provide the data that they and their users consider essential.

Unlike some of my counterparts, I do not lose heart when the total number of core records are small compared to the number of records that are created at the full level. I encourage my catalogers to use the core standards when they make sense. If I determine that they have added data to a record that I think could have been omitted, I use it as an opportunity to point out how they could have achieved the same benefit for the user without having added the extra data. Old habits die hard, but the thought process is routinely taking place. I want my catalogers to have the freedom to use their judgment and trust it. That means that sometimes they will use minimal, sometimes core, and sometimes full standards. Cataloger's judgment doesn't mean always doing it my way.

There is one other aspect of the core standard that I think needs wider discussion: the principle of the iterative record. As a cataloger, I have sometimes felt trapped by the idea that I had to create a record that was all things to all people. Given the fact that the bibliographic environment is changing radically and is expanding to include very different user communities from around the world, the concept of a single, perfect record would seem to be unattainable by any single cataloger or institution. Core records are designed to contain a floor, not a ceiling, of data elements that are "essential to the description and access of the serial and all elements contained are fully authoritative."⁸ If that floor meets the needs of the users of the library that created the record, wonderful. If another institution has a different user community that has more specific needs, the core record can be enriched with other (optional) data elements. Those additional elements may be enough to raise the record to the full level, or they may not. The point is that the database is dynamic and can be made to meet the needs of all users through cooperative effort. By stressing the iterative nature of the

records, I have found that some catalogers are more comfortable creating a record according to core standards.

CONCLUSION

In my opinion, it is too soon to panic about the failure of the core record to be accepted. Likewise, I consider it ingenuous to view the core standard as a bibliographic panacea. If we continue to focus on the users of bibliographic records, clarify institutional priorities and limitations, train catalogers adequately thereby helping them to develop cataloger's judgment, and then let them use that judgment, then I believe that the core record will be accepted naturally, as one of the wide array of tools available to provide more effective and efficient bibliographic access to library resources.

NOTES

1. See <http://lcweb.loc.gov/catdir/pcc/> (24 July 2001) for detailed information about the PC and its constituent components.
2. See <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/pcc/archive/reports.html> (24 July 2001) for historical documents and reports from the CCC.
3. Colleen F. Hyslop, "The Core Record and Consolidation of CONSER and PCC," *ALCTS Newsletter*, 8, no. 4 (1997): Supplement, <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/pcc/hyslop2.html> (24 July 2001).
4. CONSER Record Requirements
5. Steven C. Shadle, "The Core Serials Record: Where Can It Save Time?" *Serials Review* 27, no. 2 (2001): 14–21.
6. Wayne Jones, "Gimme a C! MIT's Experience with Core Cataloging of Serials," *The Serials Librarian* 37, no. 3 (2000): 41–49.
7. Kristin Lindlan, "Serials Cataloging Guidelines and Levels of Cataloging at the University of Washington Libraries," *Serials Review*, 27, no. 2 (2001): 9–13.
8. *CONSER Editing Guide* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Serial Record Division, 1994), Section B6.2.