



V O L U M E 2 N U M B E R 3

::: JUNE 2002 :::

FEATURE – Matt Wilcox

A Bunch of Naked Librarians

Cataloging, library management systems, standards, and Tired Library Discussions – Matt Wilcox presents us with a rant on what we are (or rather are not) doing for ourselves and our profession.

INTERVIEW – Naomi Caldwell

Naomi first caught our attention when she wrote a thoughtful and openhearted [letter](#) to *Library Juice* regarding the Brian Smith “Rediscover America” [cartoon debacle](#). Following the links to her web pages, we found an intelligent and passionate librarian who has spent much of her career focusing on Native American issues. Naomi is Past President, American Indian Library Association and ALA Councilor-at-Large, 1992-2000. Here, she shares with us her inspiration for becoming a librarian and talks about her work as a “coach facilitator” and mentor.

PEOPLE

An associate professor at UCLA's Department of Information Studies, Clara M. Chu's research interests include the social construction of information systems, and information access in multicultural communities. An enthusiastic library activist, she is the recipient of this year's ALA Equality Award.

ASK SUSU

Susu, our sometimes irreverent advice columnist, answers your questions about work, school, the job hunt, and librarianship in general. In this issue, Susu hunts down information about the profession.

TECH TALK

Tanya Rabourn works on a variety of digital publishing projects from concept to code, and wears her skirts too short and her love for information architecture on her sleeve. In this issue of TechTalk, Tanya presents us with a painless introduction to metadata and includes many exciting examples.

LETTERS

Say What? If you have something to say, we want to hear it. [Send us](#) your letters and we'll post them here. If you're responding to an article or interview, place the headline in the subject of your email.

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F E A T U R E A R T I C L E

::: JUNE 2002 :::

A Bunch of Naked Librarians

MATT WILCOX



Matt Wilcox nurses his bitterness while directing the library and academic technology at the Yale School of Epidemiology and Public Health. His 15 minutes of library fame includes getting **Library Juiced** and a **marriage proposal** from Jessamyn West. (Don't laugh, it is all he has got). He lives in New Haven, CT, with his lovely wife and two, soon to be three, perfect children. Asked to sum up his philosophy of life, Matt smiles, looks askance, and reminds us all to “have fun. We don't get paid enough not to.”

So Juanita emails me and asks me to rant a little for a feature. Let me tell you, ranting on demand is not easy. It is best done after reading some asinine email from a library listserv with someone whining about something only whiners would whine about (you know what I mean and who I am talking about — unless, of course, you are one of the whiners whining and then, well, they never know). But picking on libraries is a bit too easy. Especially because we seem to think we are doing better somehow, that we are on the road to success. But are we?

I should first say that I am, of course, not talking about you or your library. I am sure your library does not fall into these traps. And it goes without saying, valuing employment as I do, that I am not talking about my library. I am not talking about you, or me. I am talking about all of those *other* libraries and *other* librarians. So remember this before you email me to complain. And if I am interviewing at your library ten years from now and you dig this thing up off the web, I am not talking about your library then either. I am sure that you will still be getting it right — otherwise why would I want to work there?

In the end, the basic thing I am oh-so-tired of is that we know what we should do, we know what our users need, and we continue in the same half-assed modes as before. Makes sense? Let's take Sanford Berman as an example. I have nothing against him personally. I have never met him, although I heard him speak once in library school — a good talk about how libraries don't do all they should do, or rather, that libraries think they are doing the right things when they are fooling no one but themselves. About how minimarts a block away from a library have a better selection of locally produced alternative publications than what you will ever find on the library shelves. How LC Subject Headings are often demeaning or out of touch with the way people think and talk to the point of inhibiting people from finding what they need.

I am sure you have heard the shtick as he has been saying it for years. But does it matter? No. Are we out there saving the library world, practicing his brand of populist cataloging, giving our users what they need? No. Now Hennepin County PL has phased him out and his model catalog. Does it matter? No. We whined and complained on listservs. We fired off emails, articles, and letters full of indignation. Did it

matter? No. We have taken him on as our token radical librarian, we have given him some awards, applauded his successes, and then we go home to practice our lemming-like copy-cataloging, using inadequate records for the books that came in on our approval plan.

Don't get me wrong. I think he is **dead right**. But the pisser is that it truly doesn't matter. Not when you read stories like **Bruce Jensen's experience at Santa Ana Public**. Maybe we should stop writing emails about Sanford Berman and actually do the things that we say we love him for. Then maybe being called a Sandynista would mean something. (Damn that is unfair, but that is what looks like to many of us newer librarians. The sheer numbers of people saying they love the preacher and not doing what he preaches makes him a symbol of how far we have not come).

Library systems are another example of our problem areas. Take our catalogs, please. I've just returned from a conference where I spoke with a guy whose library is bringing up new library management system. This is, of course, a monumental task carried out by dedicated people and led by the best systems librarian he knows, someone who really does get it right. But after hearing about the new system "features," I couldn't help thinking that this is a giant example of where we are shortchanging ourselves by not getting enough from our vendors. When it is all done, when the virtual ribbon cutting happens, when the old model T system gets its plug pulled, they will have a system that *still* doesn't connect well with their other systems and has a *less* sophisticated user interface than most of the databases they lease access to.

What does your catalog do, really do, that it didn't do five years ago? Now, compare it to what **PubMed** can do. Close to natural language searching, related article algorithms. "But wait, Matt," you say, "we have all of these patron empowerment features now." Compare your OPAC to **Amazon** — they have "patron empowerment" features coming out the ass. Go ahead, check these sites out and then go ask your LMS vendor what the problem is. Just because we abdicate almost all of our systems development responsibilities to our vendors doesn't mean we shouldn't demand that they sell us what we need.

As an aside: He was bummed because they just got the word that there will be no open URLs from the new OPAC without buying their system for linking. The vendor told them that they will not implement a standard unless they duplicate a product that they have already purchased from another company, a product they specifically didn't buy from the LMS vendor because theirs was so far behind in development. But hey, what are we as librarians going to do about? Screw us because it isn't like we are going to write about it and tell the world. Or if we do, will it matter? News flash, folks: we need systems that can talk to each other. Systems that follow standards — and I don't just mean library standards, pretty as they are. If we build them and buy them, we will be able to put them to use next year or the year after in ways we can't even imagine. The software world seems to get it, why don't we? And don't talk to me about z39.50. Z39.50 is for losers! There is a reason why "lowest common denominator" has the word "lowest" in the front.

Do we do something about this? No. We spend out time in Tired Library Discussions. Librarian? Information Professional? Informationst? Cybrarian? Folks, people outside of libraries care so little about this. They care more about results. Or as Dan would say, show me the code. (Dan, or "Dan the Man" as we say around my house, is a librarian/programmer). Produce results and no one will care what you are called. No results? Then save us the trouble of your watering down our titles with your bad impression. (Not that I am talking about you, it was more of a rhetorical you. You, of course are getting it right. Perfect even. Remember?) Library Science? Information Science? Whatever. It is sad that so many missed opportunities and poor service make us want to change the names rather than the profession.

Quick, a pop quiz. What are the overriding goals of your library? Remember them? You must have had a meeting about them where you hashed it all out, filling whiteboards during the meeting that went on and on. Or, what are your personal goals? Because in the end, that is the greatest problem of all. As a profession, we have no overriding goal. This is what keeps other noble professions going and why ours seems as if it's slowly easing to a halt. What is *my* goal? That no health problem that can be assisted by timely information will go unsolved for lack of it. Anywhere in the world, at anytime, in any venue, in any language. Too big? Then yours isn't big enough.

So here we are walking down the road, thinking we are cool, the Emperors of Information, outfitted in the clothes of our knowledge and good intentions. Although in this story we sold ourselves the clothes — the librarians' new clothes. There is no one else to blame. So where does that leave us? Come on, you remember the story. It leaves us naked. A bunch of naked librarians. And, no offense, I don't want to see you naked.

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Naomi first caught our attention when she wrote a thoughtful and openhearted [letter](#) to *Library Juice* regarding the Brian Smith "Rediscover America" [cartoon debacle](#). Following the links to her web pages, we found an intelligent and passionate librarian who has spent much of her career focusing on Native American issues. In our Interview for June, we bring you Naomi Caldwell, Past President American Indian Library Association and ALA Councilor-at-Large 1992-2000. Here, she shares with us her inspiration for becoming a librarian and talks about her work as a "coach facilitator" and mentor.

NewBreed Librarian: Why libraries? How did you get started in libraries?

Naomi Caldwell: At a very early age, I went on a walk with my mother to our local public library on the Southside of Providence (a.k.a. the Ghetto). We strolled by several blocks with triple decker houses complete with window boxes. Just weeks before, our neighborhood had participated in a community project to beautify our homes. Everyone worked together to make the window boxes and plant the geraniums, pansies, and marigolds. My mother and I walked what seemed to be a long time and finally arrived at a small brick building. Little did I know at the time that this experience would imprint a strong memory in me, helping to shape my destiny. Once inside I was greeted by Mrs. Harris, a beautiful brown skinned, Wampanoag/Narragansett woman. I remember Mrs. Harris shared poetry with me and a group other preschoolers. I was four at the time.

Later I remember receiving Dr. Seuss books in the mail. The first box contained Green Eggs and Ham and a picture dictionary. I fell in love with books and read every thing I could get my fingers on.

At age 9, I remember using a toy typewriter to make cards for each of books. Little did I realize that I was preparing for what would be my professional career.

When my teenage-years arrived, I had aspirations to become either a poet or a lawyer. I wanted to speak out against injustice. Since I knew I would need to save money for college, I took a job as a page.

It was there that I met Louise Blalock, now Director of Hartford Public Libraries and [2000 Library Journal Librarian of the Year](#). She was and is an outstanding role model. Louise involved me in every aspect of the children's room, from making bulletin boards to simple weeding projects. I watched her as she went into the neighborhood on warm summer days. Dressed in flowing, flowered dresses complete with a large straw hat and a baby carriage filled with books, Louise would stop at various corners. Naturally, children would gather around her. She would reach into her carriage and take out a book and read to them. Many children would follow her and many later came to the library.

I also saw Louise turn around the very next day dressed in a business suit and attending City Council meetings. She was dynamic and progressive and had a genuine concern for the people. I admired her style and way of being. It occurred to me that I could do this (her job) and that acquiring information skills would help me with whatever career I finally choose. Poetry wasn't financially rewarding and it would take at least eight years to become a lawyer. Thus, in the fall of 1976, I enrolled The School of Library and Information Studies at Clarion State College in Pennsylvania.

My interest in librarianship coupled with my family's teaching that "To whom much is given much is required," and "one must always give something back to the community." I became inspired to use my abilities and talents to help out the Indian Community. It was not until my second professional position as a microtext/reference librarian at Texas A&M University that I was able to participate in the American Indian Library Association. It took me eight years to realize this dream.

NBL: What is your role in libraries today? How have you been able to participate in the Native American Community?

I'm somewhat of a "coach facilitator" for library student interns and school library media specialist student teachers at the University of Rhode Island, [Graduate School of Library and Information Studies](#). I teach future librarians and school library media specialists the pleasures and responsibilities of collection development, multicultural resources & services, young adult literature, media literacy, and use of information technology. Some of the courses I've taught include

- Collection Development
- Multiculturalism in Libraries
- Media in the Library
- Theory and Production of Library Media
- Reading Interest of Young Adults
- School Library Media Practicum

Each spring I visit interns in school libraries throughout New England — mostly in urban areas. It is such a joy to be able to see young people learning about information literacy, using [BIG6 Skills](#), and manipulating the latest technology. During my visits I assess how well student teachers engage the classroom and the appropriateness of the lesson and materials used. The best lessons are those that enable children and young adults to be critical thinkers when it comes to accessing and using information.

It has been especially rewarding to stop by schools in my old neighborhood and to encourage the children and to plant seeds of hope. You see there are so few people of color who are teachers. The children faces express amazement when they see that a woman of color a "professor" at a University. I demonstrate to them that reading, hard work, and encouragement helped me to become what I am. I know that they can do it too. I tell them so.

In terms of participating in American Indian community, I love to share times of refreshing — powwows and socials with other Indian folks here in Rhode Island and New England. Each year I look forward to going back to Mahwah, New Jersey, to participate in our (Ramapough) [annual gathering](#). In terms of my work, I occasionally lecture at schools about American Indian culture in general and about my tribe specifically. I find a bonding takes place as a result of these talks. Among folks who are not Indian, the lectures promote further understanding of Indian cultures and ways of being. I trust these talks help to open the door that leads to healing.

From time to time, I am called upon to share my views about the stereotypes of Indians in materials for youth. Just last month I gave a presentation for National Library Week at the University of Massachusetts - Amherst at invitation by the Native American Studies Department and the W. E. B. Du Bois library. It was wonderful meeting the students and faculty there and to talk with other Indians in academia. It is always immensely rewarding to share what I have learned and experienced as an Indian woman and librarian.

NBL: Diversity and recruitment are both significant issues in librarianship today. With the lack of new people becoming librarians, how do you suppose we can encourage folks, especially those from multicultural backgrounds to choose librarianship?

There are many ways to recruit people of color into the library profession. Chief among them would be to acknowledge that they are needed and welcomed. Programs like [Spectrum](#) do this. Spectrum has been very successful because it recruits from among the various multicultural communities and provides networking opportunities.

At the University of Rhode Island, we have a similar program — Prism. Prism is the brain child of our library school Director, Dr. Michael Havener. Funded by the [Institute of Libraries and Museum Services](#) (ILMS), it has enabled several women of African American, Asian, American Indian, Azorian decent to receive scholarships, information literacy training, and teaching opportunities. Prism students have mentors, network with professionals in our region, and are reminded that the profession needed their talents and expertise to address the information needs of our diverse population.

The success of Prism is due to many key factors: vision held by Dr. Havener to “walk the talk,” funding, outstanding recruits, and a dedicated and diverse faculty. The richness of our diverse faculty has significantly contributed to the success of our program. Prism scholars each have someone from their “community” as a resource/coach/facilitator.

For me, the beauty of this program was the opportunity to work with and learn from individuals from different cultures. Together we share our aspirations, our family challenges, and accomplishments. I found that we all have a genuine hope and desire to make a positive difference in the lives of those we come in contact with each day. This generosity of spirit in these programs like this one can and do recruit talented individuals.

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P E O P L E

::: JUNE 2002 :::



An associate professor at UCLA's Department of Information Studies, Clara M. Chu's research interests include the social construction of information systems, and information access in multicultural communities. An enthusiastic library activist, she is the recipient of this year's ALA Equality Award.

Perhaps it was when my son Evan turned three that I first began to tell him, "People are more important than things." Now, at age seven, he understands that this is the one phrase he can count on my repeating, whether it is in response to taking turns or sharing toys with others. Soon enough he'll want me to deconstruct it, though, and will ask the challenging question, "What does it mean?" I think I am trying to impress upon him one of my core values, a value central to the way I view the world and how I want to treat others. In my professional life, this has meant adopting a user-centered approach to services, and identifying and breaking down barriers that prevent the oppressed in our society from gaining access to information. I am interested in shaping professional practice and research through the study of the social construction of information and the provision of multicultural information services. To this end, I teach classes in research methods, information services in culturally diverse communities, design of library and information services, multilingual information resources, and international issues and comparative research in library and information science. I am active on ALA's **Ethnic and Multicultural Exchange Round Table**, and chair the **Office for Literacy and Outreach Services** Advisory Committee. I also work with ethnic library associations (such as the **Chinese American Librarians Association** and **REFORMA**) at the national and local levels. Internationally, I serve on the International Federation of Library Associations' **Section on Library Services to Multicultural Populations**. My personal and professional outlook has been influenced by the work of a number of multiculturalists and critical theorists, including:

- Critical pedagogist Paulo Freire, who first noted that literacy is central to enabling individuals to understand the culture that has shaped them, and to move toward reflection and positive action in their lives. Freire asserted that it is through literacy that individuals find their own voice and can eradicate cultures of silence that keep them oppressed or aim to assimilate them.
- Cuban historian Juan Pérez de la Riva, who dedicated his life to studying and documenting what he termed the *historia de la gente sin historia* (literally, the history of people without a history, or better said, the history of people without a voice.) He studied the history of Africans and Chinese in Cuba. Many of us who write about ethnic and disenfranchised groups recognize that our work is about giving voice to those who have been silenced or subjugated.
- Scholar Peggy McIntosh, best known for her groundbreaking studies of the ways in which privilege, particularly White privilege, organize all aspects of life, enabling Whites and those with higher socioeconomic status to have better access to services, goods, jobs, housing and other opportunities.

- Dr. E.J. Josey, former ALA president and founder of its Black Caucus, has dedicated himself to eradicating racial bias from library systems and professional organizations. Josey has published extensively on these issues and his research documents the denial of library services to African Americans and the barriers faced by African American librarians. As ALA president, he established the Pay Equity Commission, which ensured equal compensation for male and female librarians. He continues to publish, mentor, and break down barriers experienced by librarians of color.

I have come to the conclusion that library and information practice, research, and education need to be examined within a discourse of power. That is, we need to recognize that our field is socially constructed and privileges certain types of information that reflect dominant cultures and values. To this end, I hold discussions in my classroom in which I examine bias in research, inaccuracies in information organization, misinformation in library materials, historical exclusion of minorities from libraries, user-centered information design, individual learning styles, multilingual issues, the digital divide, globalization, and other related topics (for more information, see my [digital divide resource list](#), [multilingual internet resource list](#), and the page for my course [International Issues and Comparative Research in Library and Information Science](#), in which students recently worked on a [project](#) with archivists and students in Chiapas, Mexico.) The opportunity to engage students in activism and work with them on community outreach projects is especially rewarding. Outside the classroom, I have also had the opportunity to do this by supporting the activities of UCLA's [Activist Librarians and Educators](#).

What can I, as a multilingual, Peruvian-born, Chinese-Canadian and U.S. resident, offer to library and information research? First, I can challenge those who look at people through a single ethnic or racial lens or any other single identifier. For people of ethnically or racially mixed background like myself living in the United States, the 2000 Census became a battleground for our identities to be recognized. Although countries like the United States and Canada do recognize their multicultural make-up, it is imperative to recognize the diversity within particular groups (my [Diversity and Libraries site](#) and [multiracial/multiethnic resource guide](#) speak directly to this point.) Eventually, for example, for example, people might see that a Chinese Latina is a Latina, not just a Chinese or an Asian-American.

Grounded on my experience and research on the information needs of multicultural groups in the U.S. and Canada, I am examining the ways in which Chinese communities in Latin America preserve their culture and meet their ethnic information needs. This area of comparative ethnic studies, what others might call transnational or diasporas studies, is a growing research field, and I have developed a [Chinese in/from Latin America website](#) to provide multidisciplinary researchers with a single rich source of information. In order to further support research in this area, I co-coordinate the UCLA Asians in the Americas Working Group's efforts in the challenging task of obtaining demographic data on Asians in the Americas. My work on the Chinese in Latin America is an area where the boundaries of traditional library science and my work in critical theory/cultural studies blur, synergy occurs, and a space is created where I can study the social construction of information and cultural institutions.

People come first is not always easy to put into practice when we are "drive-by" librarians. We need to live in and engage with the communities we serve to understand how complex they are. We need to ask ourselves how we can bring people together in our libraries, and facilitate discussions and learning about difficult issues such as racism, socioeconomic inequities, sexual orientation, disabilities, and political divisions. Librarians need to work harder in order for libraries to be a true public commons and a safe space for communities. I hope that I do my part in community development through coalition building

with libraries and communities, **recruitment** of activist librarians and conducting research that will promote equity of access. May the following inspire a Newbreed librarian:

Connectivity, Community, Coalition Building

Collective voices creating community;
Breaking new ground for collaboration;
Identifying the threads that bind us;
Weaving strands of differences into a pattern of consensus;
Incorporating whispers into the dialogue;
Constructing a language of respect;
Cultivating an identity of collective agents of change,
Collective voices, a conduit for social justice,
Fashioning a legacy of equality.

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A S K S U S U

::: JUNE 2002 :::

Susu, our sometimes irreverent advice columnist, answers your questions about work, school, the job hunt, and librarianship in general. In this issue, Susu hunts down information about the profession.

Dear Susu, Do you happen to know where I could go to get information and statistics regarding becoming/being a librarian? Such as, the basic amount of schooling required, the male/female ratio, new trends, etc? Thank you, Liz Genest

Dear Liz, The Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, includes information on becoming a librarian in its **Occupational Outlook Handbook**. They also published an **excellent article on librarians** in the Winter 2000 issue of *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*.

This article listed several "non-traditional" career paths for librarians, including:

- Book publishing workers who use their knowledge of books to choose and edit manuscripts
- Chief Information Officers who decide which information technology a business needs and how employees will share information
- Content managers who find and organize material for online communities
- Database administrators who organize, update, and store data using extensive programming skills
- Information brokers who conduct research for people who contract for it
- Salesworkers who sell software and other products to libraries
- Taxonomists who work for data processing and e-commerce companies by classifying information and putting it in appropriate categories
- Webmasters who design, maintain, and program websites

It probably doesn't take a government statistician to predict that the largest growth will be in these non-traditional career paths - the article notes zero growth within academic libraries, and negative growth within federal government libraries. I think we already have quite a bit of anecdotal evidence to show that newly minted grads are bypassing libraries on their way to fame and fortune in the private sector.

Statistics about librarians – other than employment, salary, and age statistics – are difficult to find. I did find a few things related to the ratio of males to females within the profession:

1. Statistical Abstract of the United States (2001), U.S. Census Bureau - Section 12. **Labor Force, Employment, and Earnings**: 85.2% of librarians employed within the U.S. are female.
2. **Annual Salary Survey** (1999-2000), Association of Research Libraries: 63% of ARL librarians were female, 37% male. Male librarians outnumbered female librarians among directors (51%) and in systems departments (68%).

3. [Survey of Racial and Ethnic Diversity among Librarians](#) (1998), American Library Association: 68% of academic librarians and 79% of public librarians were female, 32% of academic librarians and 21% of public librarians male; among school librarians, 92% were female and 8% male (according to data from a 1994 survey).
4. [Program Presentation to the American Library Association, Office of Accreditation](#) (1998), University of Michigan School of Information: in the section on students, part C, [Composition of the Student Body](#), they report that 73% of their students were female, 27% male.

Data from the [United States 2000 Census](#) will undoubtedly be useful when the data on occupations is released. You probably won't find a table showing you occupations by gender (at least there wasn't one in the 1990 data that I could find), but you can download the data sets and run your own cross-tabulations.

Most universities and colleges publish a student profile of some kind, but in looking at the student profiles for the [Top 10 LIS Programs](#) (from the 1999 *U.S. News & World Report* rankings), I couldn't find data that cross-tabulated program of study by gender.

Searches in the library literature revealed articles on age demographics and closing the gender gap regarding salaries. However, I didn't find anything new about the ratio of males to females within the profession. I was also unable to find any data about special libraries and non-traditional career paths for librarians related to gender.

Now, on to the "hot topics" in the profession. According to [Librarians in the 21st Century](#), a web site created in 2000 by students at the School of Information Studies, Syracuse University, the following are the future trends and issues:

- Censorship
- Digital libraries
- E-books
- Electronic publishing
- Internet filtering
- Libraries and the Internet
- MIS in libraries
- Non-traditional library jobs
- Outsourcing

Where else can we look to see what the trends and issues are? Library associations and organizations are a great source of information about this. What task forces and working groups are being formed within our national and state/provincial associations? What issues have been in the media? What issues are librarians talking about locally? What's showing up in the library literature?

And remember, there are [several of us](#) keeping track of what's going on in the profession. If you want to stay informed on life as a librarian, check in from time to time.



Tanya Rabourn graduated from The School of Library and Information Science at The University of Texas at Austin in August 1996. Today, she works with the Research & Development Group in Academic Information Systems (AcIS), at Columbia University in the City of New York. She works on a variety of digital publishing projects from concept to code, and wears her skirts too short and her love for information architecture on her sleeve. In this issue of TechTalk, Tanya presents us with a painless introduction to metadata and includes many exciting examples. She can be reached at rabourn@columbia.edu.

Let's say you wanted to make a list of all the CDs that you own . . .

Let's say you wanted to make a list of all the CDs that you own. Yeah I know, that would be a lot of work, and we should probably worry about people that actually do this sort of thing. But let's just say that you were going to do it. You would probably make a few columns and give each a label. Perhaps the first would be the title of the CD, then the name of the artist. Depending on how elaborate you wanted to make your list, you might even include the year and it was released and record label. Each of those markers — title, name of artist and year — are “metadata.” Metadata is the data that describes the information you are recording in your list. If you shared your list with someone unfamiliar with **Moby**, the metadata would let her know “Play” is the title of the CD and Moby is the artist, not the other way around. That's a pretty basic example, but it's good to remember that big ideas start this small.

Chances are metadata is already familiar to you since it's found in library catalogs (eg. title, author, and call number). Actually, the concept of metadata has been around for quite a while. It existed long before the Internet. However, it's gotten a lot of attention lately because it is especially useful for describing data that networked computers share. Computers aren't that bright. It's essential that each bit of data is labeled for them. If you entered your list of CDs into a database on your computer, you would have to tell it which are the titles and which are the names of the artists. Without the metadata, the information about a particular CD would be very difficult to retrieve. It would be like searching your library's catalog if it contained just a big mass of information about books, but the system had no idea which bits are titles, which are authors, or even which titles went with which authors. Sounds a bit like searching the Web doesn't it? It doesn't need to be that way though.

The Semantic Web

The “semantic web” is a vision of the Internet where all the documents, videos, images — anything available — is well described with labels (metadata) indicating an item's content, structure, and creator. In fact, any information that would be useful to identify that item would be available and properly labeled. Additionally, an item could also carry with it administrative metadata, such as who may access

it, copyright information, and if there are other versions of it. A user would then be able to readily access that item and know its authenticity, history, and *relationship* to other items.

As you can imagine, to make the vision of the semantic web a reality, it will involve a lot of cooperation among those that publish on the Internet. It has inspired a number of groups, each with their own particular areas of expertise, to work together to come up with common sets of metadata to describe digital objects. It is essential that they also agree on how to encode the metadata and a common vocabulary to use for descriptions. This kind of detailed cooperation is familiar territory to librarians; we know how to cooperatively establish interoperable standards and develop specialized vocabularies to share complex information over networks.

Vocabularies

A controlled vocabulary normalizes the use of terms in descriptive information. For example, in your library catalog, there is only one correct way to catalog an author's name. There may be entries to lead searchers from Samuel Clemons to Mark Twain, but all of his books will only be cataloged under "Twain." Authority files make it possible to ensure that all publications for a single individual can be efficiently accessed. It's difficult to imagine this level of control over the wild wild web, but it sure would be nice.

Because language is ambiguous, it is important for descriptions of digital objects to use standardized terms. Since the semantic web will lead you to related items, a structured vocabulary will also need to point out related terms, broader terms and narrower terms, just like the Library Of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) does. In fact, LCSH is an example of a structured vocabulary. However, there are many other more specialized prescriptive lists known as thesauri. This sort of thesaurus isn't the kind you use to find synonyms to augment your prose, but instead, like the LCSH, it's a list of preferred terms that indicate how they relate to other terms. One example of a thesaurus is the Getty's [Art & Architecture Thesaurus](#). It is useful for groups interested in providing access to materials concerning art, architecture, and material culture. These cooperative efforts will result in increased accessibility to digital objects due to richer, standard fields for searching across multiple collections. It will also allow creators to include rights and access information plus any technical requirements for use.

Metatags

One way to jump right in and get started building the semantic web is to take advantage of the `<meta>` tag in HTML. When you mark up your Web pages, you can include the following meta tags between the `<head></head>` tags to let search engines know a bit more about the content:

```
<meta name="description" content="A painless introduction to metadata including many exciting examples">
<meta name="keywords" content="metadata, semantic web, internet, html">
```

There is one particular group, the [Dublin Core Metadata Initiative](#) (DCMI), that has taken on the task of establishing an online metadata standard and developing specialized metadata vocabulary. The DCMI, an open forum for the development of standards has established a [base set of 15 elements](#) which you can make use of in Web pages as well. Here is the complete list with examples:

```
<meta name = "DC.Title" content = "Metadata">
<meta name = "DC.Creator" content = "Rabourn, Tanya.">
```

```
<meta name = "DC.Subject" content = "Metadata">
<meta name = "DC.Description" content = "A painless introduction to metadata including many exciting
examples">
<meta name = "DC.Publisher" content = "newbreedlibrarian.org">
<meta name = "DC.Contributor" content = " Benedicto, Juanita">
<meta name = "DC.Date" content = " 2002-05-22">
<meta name = "DC.Type" content = "Text">
<meta name = "DC.Format" content = " Text/HTML">
<meta name = "DC.Identifier" content =
"http://www.newbreedlibrarian.org/archives/02.03.june2002/techtalk.html">
<meta name = "DC.Source" content = "Tech Talk http://www.newbreedlibrarian.org/columns.html">
<meta name = "DC.Language" content = "en-us">
<meta name = "DC.Relation" content = "http://www.newbreedlibrarian.org/archives/02.03.jun2002/">
<meta name = "DC.Coverage" content = "2002-05"> (Can also be used for geographical coverage)
<meta name = "DC.Rights" content = "©2002 newbreedlibrarian.org">
```

If you have a Web site search engine that indexes a site you publish, it may already be configured to understand Dublin Core elements. Including them in your pages is a powerful way to facilitate the discovery and organization of resources on your Web site.

There are also several special interest groups that are working to establish common Dublin Core syntax for particular areas of interest such as **museums**, and **educational materials**. There is even a group interested in establishing Dublin Core standards for music, so if you really wanted to go nuts with your list of CD's, have a look at **MusicBrainz**. Maybe cataloging our CD collections isn't such a crazy idea afterall?

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L E T T E R S

::: JUNE 2002 :::

01 JUN 02 :: "[The] complaint about librarians' knowing what [is] wrong but not having the will to fix it [is] flawed."

It may be unfair to criticize a "rant on demand," but I thought Matt Wilcox's complaint about librarians' knowing what was wrong but not having the will to fix it was flawed. He praised Sandy Berman and called him "our token radical," consigning all the rest of us activists to his despised "whiner" category. The reason things don't change is because those who actually do agree with us radicals are in the minority. We continue to try to bring people onto our side, but as long as Matt and others like him see us as "whiners," nothing much will change, will it? And Matt himself is not so far from being a whiner in his rant; the main difference being that Matt is pessimistic to the point of thinking it's not worth trying. (This doesn't represent a considered opinion about Matt Wilcox - it's just an internet reaction.)

Rory Litwin

Editor's response: Rory, I didn't read the article as a criticism of all librarians. I think Matt's rant must be taken as a whole; he uses Sandy Berman as just one example of how we perhaps don't always practice what we (or those whose ideals we admire) preach. But I do appreciate your comments; differing viewpoints are always welcome at NBL. [CB]

Author's response: I was obviously unclear if you think that I would include you and other like you in the whiner category. That what I wrote could be so misinterpreted is a clear indication of how poor a writer I am. I should have provided an example of the type of listserv whining that we are all familiar with and the type I was referring to. (you know, "oh i hate librarian stereotypes!" "Yes, me too!" etc...) I find what I read of yours and the things you point to in Library Juice to be clearly in the category of people who are NOT whining, but rather are acting on what you believe in. In fact, I rely on what you do in your high profile activism as a resource and aid for my low profile local activism where I work.

As far as the rest of the piece goes though, I stand by it. You point out that the reason things don't change is because those who agree with the activists are in the minority. I am just taking it a step further and use Berman as an example: things don't change because there are too many people who agree with you (and Berman and fill-in-the-blank) but don't do a damn thing to act on that belief. There is a disconnect between agreeing and acting on what you believe. And the bits on library systems is dead on (if I do say so myself :)

In the end, the more I think about it, it is maybe a problem of audience (and not considering that is another indication or my writing skills). Those who read new breed librarian are likely to be more like you or me (you would be, I assume, far more optimistic about things than I, but I imagine we are not far apart on many issues). So, rather than getting anybody thinking I will probably piss off the wrong group of people — that small (my pessimism sneaking in) community of people who do get it right.

I do hope that in light of this email that the new breed piece makes more sense. — Matt

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