

ALCTS AND THE FUTURE OF BIBLIOGRAPHIC CONTROL: CHALLENGES, ACTIONS, AND VALUES

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

In July 2006, the Cataloging and Classification Section Executive Committee received the following charge from the Executive Committee of the ALCTS Board of Directors:

“The Cataloging & Classification Section Executive Committee (CCS EC) is charged with developing a series of recommendations or discussion points for next steps that ALCTS should take to enhance its leadership position with respect to the changing nature of bibliographic control (cataloging and classification).

Although this charge is occasioned by the recent decision by the Library of Congress (LC) to cease series authority record creation, the recommendations should not be limited to actions that directly relate to LC. The desired deliverable is a fairly brief document that suggests both challenges and possible ALCTS actions to address them. The ALCTS Board of Directors will use this as a catalyst for discussion and development of a strategic action plan.”

To address this charge, a discussion list (CCS-Next) was created. This document considers three topics: challenges faced by ALCTS; categories of action; and frames or value statements. Although this document is concerned primarily with bibliographic control, we regard the major points below as of potential relevance to all activities with which ALCTS is concerned.

Summary of challenges:

- The need for a stronger focus by ALCTS on the revolutionary changes in the larger environment of which libraries are a part;
- The challenge of developing our standards and practices to work well in both the spheres of revolutionary change and of traditional services;
- The challenge of building alliances with both skeptics inside the profession, and with creative individuals outside the profession, to reach a mutual goal of positively transforming bibliographic control;
- The challenge of understanding and responding to the changing position of the Library of Congress, with regard to its position as a member of the bibliographic control community;
- The need for ALCTS to communicate and respond much more quickly and flexibly;
- The need for ALCTS to become comfortable with newer communication tools.

Summary of suggested actions:

- In-person communication: continuation of programs and forums (at Midwinter Meetings/Annual Conferences), and development of expanded, multi-constituency discussions, summit meetings, etc.
- More advanced uses of digital forms of traditional publication;
- Making better use of newer, digital forms of communication in general.

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Summary of frames:

- ALCTS serves libraries of all types and sizes.
- ALCTS understands and respects the most diverse needs of all types of library users for all types of materials.
- We understand that the development of information technology has made possible the significant reuse and extension of existing bibliographic/authority metadata.
- In the realm of advanced digital applications, we are interested in collaboration, not competition.
- Budgets are the outcomes of political processes; budget decisions have ethical and moral implications.
- Librarianship is an international profession; technical services specializations have become globalized.
- The future is longer than the past.

Detailed discussions of the above points follow.

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I. CHALLENGES

The group discussed the major challenges facing ALCTS in fairly broad terms, and considered them in two categories: those based in the larger environment, and those pertinent to ALCTS' internal culture. (We understand that these categories interact with each other.)

1) Environmental challenges

ALCTS as an organization needs a stronger focus on the revolutionary changes in the larger environment (publishing, communications, Internet, etc.) of which libraries are a part. ALCTS needs to more forcefully relate those changes to what we do to provide valuable services within that larger environment. This need may also be true for many ALCTS members (active, inactive, and potential).

We face the challenge of developing our standards and practices to work well in both the spheres of revolutionary change and of traditional services. Despite many predictions to the contrary, physical media, and a broad range of patron desires for items in those media, are neither going away nor significantly lessening in importance. A dozen years after the rise of the World Wide Web, the evidence still points to a broadening of media choices, rather than the wholesale replacement of traditional by digital.

We face a great challenge in working with colleagues inside librarianship, and potential partners outside the profession, who apparently tenaciously believe the opposite of the above. They seem to regard physical media and the desires for them as always-about-to-disappear, and appear uninterested in, or barely tolerant of, a more inclusive view.

As a result, we have the challenge of building alliances with both skeptics inside the profession, and with creative individuals outside the profession, to reach a mutual goal of positively transforming bibliographic control by blending what we already do well with the many possibilities offered by the most current technologies.

Of great importance, we face the challenge of understanding and responding to the changing position (and potentially the changing mission) of the Library of Congress, with regard to its position as a member of the bibliographic control community. While we understand that LC is not a national library *de jure*, it has been true that, for decades, it has *de facto* served the function of a national library that sets the standard in creating and providing cataloging data. For many years, the cataloging community in the United States has geared its efforts toward providing input to LC, reacting to changes in LC policy and practice, and working with the Library to develop new standards and programs. This model, of a national library that provides cataloging data in the manner to which we are accustomed, is changing. It appears that LC will now be driven to meet its own needs first, perhaps giving up many of the services that we have grown to expect. This change will leave a void in the bibliographic control community. ALCTS will need to take a leadership role in determining if and how to best fill that void, as we move to a new--undetermined--model of professional collaboration.

2) Organizational challenges

ALCTS needs to be able to communicate and respond much more quickly and flexibly than it has generally been able to do, while still allowing for the deliberation appropriate to any given situation. The current strategic plan's emphasis on "nimbleness" obviously recognizes this.

ALCTS needs to become comfortable with a wider range of means of communication, with the goal of becoming more of an online community than it has been. ALCTS has a Web presence with a significant amount of relevant content, and for many years has used email extensively to conduct its business. However, ALCTS has been hampered in both its internal communication and outreach to others by its relative unfamiliarity with more current forms of digital communication and collaboration, and by its reliance on protocols that are more pertinent to paper than to digital forms of publication. The valuable services that members create for themselves and others by participating in the organization need to be

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supported by a robust IT infrastructure. In this regard, we recognize the recent important work done by the ALCTS Evolving Communication Technologies Task Force, and understand that the Task Force's Final Report will have an impact on the issues discussed here. (Please note that this paragraph does not is not intended to imply a predicted end of communication or publication in physical media.)

As a corollary, ALCTS needs to involve a much greater proportion of its membership, via activities extended through multiple media of communication and collaboration. We do not believe that live conferences can or should be completely replaced with digital communications. However, we have the opportunity to greatly enlarge our active community, and in doing so, act more effectively on behalf of the issues with which we are concerned.

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II. ACTIONS

The types of actions identified may be sorted into several classes (although, in contrast to most classification systems, the following groupings are not mutually exclusive).

Any of the three categories of action discussed below may be explicitly geared toward continuing education for all levels of staff. All of these types of actions are essentially acts of communication. Regarding communication in general, group members emphasized the need to communicate with many constituencies, including but not limited to reference librarians, public librarians, school librarians, systems librarians, information professionals outside librarianship, and the general public. We also need to maintain and enhance contact with colleagues and organizations on the international level.

1) In-person communication

a) Forums at ALA. These involve short planning timeframes (less than one year, typically between Annual and Midwinter or vice versa), and are oriented toward "hot issues."

b) Convening discussions, summit meetings, etc., with parties outside as well as within ALCTS, both at and outside Midwinter Meeting/Annual Conference. Giving further emphasis to this form of communication may help with discovering major changes in practice, policy, and technological advances that are "in the works," so that the library community at large is not blindsided by unilateral or small-group actions on the part of major members of the community. It will be important to involve the Library of Congress in these formats to ensure the opportunity for them (and others) to bring issues to the table. This approach may involve strengthening liaison relationships with other groups that share similar purposes (e.g., PCC). The ALCTS Creative Ideas in Technical Services Discussion Group topic tables model may be fruitful to emulate.

One possibility raised in group discussion is "a joint discussion forum of ALCTS with LAMA at ALA. Also, we could invite administrators -- or ALCTS/CCS might encourage its members to recruit their library directors -- to ALCTS' smaller group discussions."

c) Programs and preconferences at ALA: this traditional form of activity will, and should be, continued. At present, it is better at addressing issues in a longer timeframe (a year or more ahead).

2) Publications (online/printed content, ranging from essays and position papers to research articles)

We need to make more extended use of existing venues to communicate our perspectives: e.g. *ALCTS Newsletter*, *LRTS*, *American Libraries* and others outside ALA/ALCTS.

This includes more advanced uses of digital forms of publication. As one group member said, "we need to promote and sponsor research on issues such as the use of series (for open publication on the Web so it doesn't take years) to support our positions and counteract assumptions." Moving toward quick, open Web publication of ALCTS or ALCTS section statements will support the aim toward "nimbleness" expressed in the strategic plan, but will also involve reexamination of our current publication models. In this vein, another group member advocated the use of wikis for developing publications: "We need to balance the need for getting information out quickly with the need to have quality control for that information. Maybe what we need is wikis with a controlled group of potential contributors. These wikis would be available for *viewing* by anyone in the world, but the permission to *contribute* would be controlled, for example, by the Research and Publications Committee, who, instead of vetting the publications themselves, would vet the wiki contributors."

One group member proposed an approach to relating publications to live events: "if a specific topic is identified (through a Forum or through another avenue), a Task Force could be appointed to do wide consultation and write a white paper that could become an ALCTS position paper. That could be a good way to follow-up on the energy generated at a Forum and have a more lasting outcome."

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Other group members gave examples of potential expanded approaches to publication, including “a comprehensive online article database for our professional literature -- not just cataloging, not just technical services, but all of it,” and “an online archive of LRTS which would be free to members” as well as electronic access to ALCTS monographs.

3) Digital communication (broadly considered)

This category is an extension of both the emphasis on personal communications in the first category, and the more formal publications considered in the second category. In addition, making better use of newer, digital forms of communication will broaden the reach and appeal of our messages. It will be important to investigate what the Online Communities software has to offer in relation to these possibilities, for both internal and external communication.

ALCTS (and/or any of its sections) should create one or more blogs. “Interesting Times” was suggested as the title of a blog dedicated to cataloging news and discussion. The development of one or more online forums, on topics such as “bibliographic control in the digital age,” was advocated as well. The use of wikis was again advocated; webcasts, podcasts, and the development of RSS feeds to push updated content to those interested were also mentioned. While there was no interest expressed in creating further email lists, group members did mention that we should continue to make use of existing electronic discussion lists (e.g., AUTOCAT, OLAC, SERIALST, OCLC-CAT, EDUCAT).

One idea which generated great interest was the possibility of developing “virtual interest groups ... as a possible method of enhancing ALCTS’ reach to the membership that does not attend conferences.” In this model, people would join an interest group that had both a defined topic and a defined timeframe for existence. As one example, “we could have a group that forms to discuss ‘Publishers as access points.’ People could point to research being done on the topic that is on the web or make presentations via a list, could talk about what they are doing locally, or about how they wish it could be done, could complain about how publishers are inconsistent in printing their own form of names, etc. The group could be constituted, with a Chair and Vice-Chair that serve as moderators, and they could state that the discussion will last 6 months, at which time they’ll summarize discussions for the *ALCTS Newsletter*.” Another group member suggested that the discussions themselves could be available in a searchable archive. While the existence of these virtual IGs could be widely advertised via existing lists and forums, membership might be limited to ALCTS members, as a benefit of membership.

4) Notes on process

In addition to suggesting specific types of actions, group members strongly emphasized the need to build follow-through into all processes. Following are some of their suggestions:

“I think it is really important somehow to set up mechanisms or processes so that good ideas are transformed into constructive actions. In a sense, that is what CCS Exec already does (or should do) with committee and discussion group reports. But do we need to set up something more formal or explicit? Even if it is just remembering to ask ‘what next?’ after each discussion group or committee report?”

“I’d like it if information weren’t just disseminated but **acted upon** in some way. If a statement needs to be made to someone or some body, we make it or see that it gets made. If education is needed in some area, we see that the appropriate course/publication/whatever is developed and presented.”

“We need to follow up with written summaries posted on the website, lists of action items, and open discussion via blogs or other mechanisms.”

Finally, one group member stated, “We could ask to investigate two potential follow-through areas vis-à-vis the LC series authority decision. Would it be possible to determine, after a year perhaps, the initial outcomes of OCLC’s policy changes in response to the series authority decision? It would also be interesting to see what actual data might be available from LC itself, in terms of the justifications given for the decision: how much time was saved and to what was it redirected? Can this be demonstrated a year from now?”

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III. FRAMES (VALUES, VIEWPOINTS)

For ALCTS to effectively “enhance its leadership position with respect to the changing nature of bibliographic control,” it is necessary not only to consider challenges and potential actions, but the base of values from which ALCTS acts. The following set of suggested frames may be regarded as viewpoints, or axioms, describing a world view with regard to essential issues in technical services librarianship. We do not assume that all members of the ALCTS Board will share the all of the values described below. Some individuals may have serious disagreements with some of these statements. Nevertheless, we hope that these statements will provide the Board with, at minimum, a basis for useful discussion.

1. ALCTS serves libraries of all types and sizes.

Because most active ALCTS committee members are drawn from academic and government libraries, we must be extra vigilant to keep in mind the needs of all libraries, such as public, school, etc. Additionally, we need to operate from the understanding that libraries which are larger and/or more technologically advanced do not speak for librarianship in general.

2. ALCTS understands and respects the most diverse needs of all types of library users for all types of materials.

There are no "transitional" users. Library users comprise both those who sometimes, or always, prefer non-digital resources and those who now prefer digital resources, among others. All are to be treated with equal respect and without condescension. Similarly, the concept of "legacy materials" needs to be treated with caution. Whatever the values conferred by digitization of “non-born-digital” resources, we realize that those are *added* values, beyond those inherent in the resources as originally created. In other words, resources which are not universally available are not inherently of lesser value. We do not assume that non-digital resources are simply waiting to be digitized.

3. We understand that the development of information technology has made possible the significant reuse and extension of existing bibliographic/authority metadata.

We treat with skepticism the concept of "legacy metadata." We are careful to keep in mind that existing MARC-based metadata, in particular, has a long and useful life ahead, regardless of the future of the MARC formats proper. We support work and thought to promote the transformation of MARC as we know it, a process which we recognize may lead to its replacement.

4. In the realm of advanced digital applications, we are interested in collaboration, not competition.

We take as axiomatic the idea that library catalogs and bibliographic databases on the one hand, and Web search engines on the other, have complementary strengths. No matter what their respective popularity may be among the general population, neither of these broad categories of tools can compete with the other, on the other's own ground. Realizing this, we maintain that "future catalogs" discussions based on the idea of "competition between the catalog and search engines" have become passé, leading to redundant sets of questions and answers. Such discussions lead to foregone, dead-end conclusions which tend to ignore points 1-3 above. The interesting questions about "the future of the catalog" now have to do with collaboration, not competition. Collaborations with librarians and nonlibrarians who operate social networking sites, implement "Web 2.0" or "Library 2.0" services, and pursue creative mashups of the most heterogeneous types of metadata, will invigorate both our practice and theory, as well as strengthen our relationships with our user groups. These collaborations will also be fueled by our expertise in metadata creation, of the traditional library type as well as in newer forms. Because recent and future data mining products, such as Endeca, will continue to require sources of rich metadata, the value of bibliographic metadata itself is likely to increase.

5. Budgets are the outcomes of political processes; budget decisions have ethical and moral implications.

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Technical services librarians too often display passive negativity with regard to budget and staffing decisions. Each of us has a responsibility to shape our environment and be a positive influence for change. As budgets and other decisions are the outcomes of political processes, we need to have the willingness, the tools, and the support to be a part of these processes. ALCTS members should take leadership roles in shaping a climate where creative, proactive, collegial activities are supported. This includes the development of vision-driven workflow models which enable technical services operations to be run in a fiscally responsible manner while still maintaining high standards of quality. In addition, recognizing the radically contextual nature of all economic decisions, we treat phrases such as "common-sense business decisions" and "fiscal inevitabilities" with skepticism.

6. Librarianship is an international profession; technical services specializations have become globalized.

We accept responsibility for being part of the international community. We are aware that major changes in policy and practice cannot be confined to our own borders. We understand that librarianship, including technical services librarianship, is not bounded by practices taken for granted in wealthy countries.

7. The future is longer than the past.

Our work is situated in time. This implies that, first, while it is of course necessary to act on the basis of present expectations and resources, policy and practice decisions have multiple ripple effects extending further forward in time than we are able to imagine. Second, remembering the continuity of actions in time will help us to explore new ideas for improving access to information resources, while continuing to understand and value the best of our accomplishments to date.

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The group which produced this document was based in the CCS Executive Committee, but includes ALCTS colleagues outside the EC proper. Those who participated are listed below. We are grateful for the opportunity to have engaged in stimulating and productive discussions on the future of ALCTS, and hope that the present statement will be of value to the ALCTS Board.

Respectfully submitted,

The ALCTS Cataloging and Classification Section Executive Committee
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