Reclassification and Recataloging

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Reclassification has existed in some form since the beginning of cataloging and classification itself. However, the term as we use it today means the complete reorganization of a book collection from one scheme of classification to another. Such change of classification systems has taken place in all kinds of libraries—public, school, special, government, college and university—but in the last it has predominated. In the past thirty years many institutions have made conversions, and for the most part this has meant a shift from the Dewey Decimal or Cutter to the Library of Congress Classification.

Professional literature tells little about the efforts of early libraries to find a desirable classification. Because collections were small, the librarians possibly were not confronted with the difficulties facing us today, and the classification in use was one that sufficed. However, by the early 1920's, when the national library in Washington made available in printed form its classification schedules, many librarians began to see the adaptability of that system for large, fast-growing collections, and the wave of reclassification began.

Some of the libraries that became interested in this change in the twenties and early thirties have seen the job through to completion. Others began but were unable to carry out their programs because of discouragement and insufficient funds. However, in the last ten years a new surge of interest has developed, and more libraries are feeling the need for an expansive system of classification, as necessitated by the changing nature of society and the new developments in most areas of learning. This not only has meant the influx of large quantities of new materials, but also great growth of knowledge, especially in the fields of science and technology. Productive research in social science and the humanities likewise has increased book collections,

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to the extent that the problems of organization and management have become acute.

The enhanced interest in reclassification has become especially apparent in colleges and universities. In the following institutions libraries now are changing from the Dewey Decimal Classification to that of the Library of Congress, the dates being those at which they began the process: Washington University, St. Louis, 1946; the University of Tennessee, March 1950; the State University of Iowa, September 1950; the University of Miami, March 1952; and the University of Mississippi, September 1952. Another, that at Alabama Polytechnic Institute, is considering such a move, as recommended by a survey made in 1948–49. There are undoubtedly other libraries, including special and public, in the process of conversion. The literature cites only a few, but contributions by K. A. Baer, Rosamond Danielson, and Dora Pearson attest that libraries other than college and university are reorganizing their book collections. There is also evidence of the reclassification of special collections, resulting in the modifications of some standard classification schemes.

Because of the growing interest in reclassification, there is need for a review of the recent trends in libraries with particular reference to the organization and functioning of such projects. Many libraries have suffered during the period of conversion, either because needed information has not been available in the literature or through misunderstanding of the problems evolving from the change. Until recent years, when N. L. Kilpatrick and Anna O’Donnell published their article on the special reclassification project at the State University of Iowa, little has been written on this subject since the important contributions of Maurice Tauber in the early forties.

Since reclassification usually implies recataloging, the terms are used here somewhat synonymously. In most libraries a lack of uniformity in records has developed through the years, and the mere purchase of new Library of Congress printed cards to replace the old and soiled ones means recataloging in a broader sense. In reclassification the opportunity exists to weed the card catalog of needless and outdated cross references, to eliminate the extra analytics rendered unnecessary by the accessibility of printed bibliographies, and to accept a more logical system of bibliographical organization. All of this means recataloging in one sense of the word, and therefore any reference to reclassification means recataloging as well.

Many reasons for reclassification of book collections are given in
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the literature. Tauber, as a result of his doctoral research at the University of Chicago, has summarized them in his writings. Twenty-five years ago R. H. Gjelsness expressed the following philosophy, which still applies today:

The perfect classification, even to meet all contemporary requirements, has never been devised; it is much less to be hoped that any one scheme of arrangement will find acceptance in its entirety, over a long period of time. Books remain in libraries, materially unchanged, for centuries, but readers' use of them, and attitude toward them, changes, as external aspects of human activities change from one generation to the next. This shift in the relation of books and readers recurs more frequently in a rapidly moving age such as the present, and in library service, is met more promptly in a country such as ours where the emphasis is on the use of books. To some degree, this explains the extent of reclassification now under way in American libraries.

Some of the obvious reasons for the current trend toward reclassification are:

1. Recent publication in the fields of science and technology has forced many libraries to use a broader, more expansive, and up-to-date system of classification. This is especially true when the librarian understands that "the water-tight compartments, into which scientific knowledge used to be divided, have broken down completely, and now the different branches of science and technology are inseparably intermingled." 14

2. The trend today is to get books and users together, and hence there is an emphasis on "wide-open" libraries. This is evident in the growth and use of divisional libraries, such as those at the universities of Colorado and Nebraska; in the special undergraduate collections designed for a specific clientele, such as Harvard's Lamont Library and the Undergraduate Library at the University of Illinois; and in the unique experiment at Iowa, where books are arranged by historical divisions and where the whole collection is open to direct student use. If library users are to browse and live with books, there is definite need for a fairly logical arrangement that will allocate literature adequately.

3. Economy in processing materials may be promoted by reclassification. Most libraries today use the Library of Congress printed cards, in buying which they are subscribing to a service backed by some of the best professionally trained personnel and specialists in
subject areas. Furthermore, most large libraries are using the L.C. Rules for Descriptive Cataloging and the L.C. List of Subject Headings. An acceptance of such work already performed materially lessens the time spent on cataloging and classification. A change to the Library of Congress system seems to be the nearest libraries can attain to centralized cataloging and classification as it is available today.

4. The appearance of the fifteenth edition of the Dewey Decimal Classification has prompted some libraries to consider reclassification under a system which is constantly being revised and kept up to date. Too, large libraries using the fourteenth edition of Dewey with the modified expansions have found that much reclassification would be necessary if the fifteenth edition were to be used.

5. An increasing number of faculty and research members of institutions throughout the country have become familiar with and have recognized the merits of the Library of Congress Classification. Their interest in the arrangement of books has developed through study in other research libraries. Tauber, speaking before a group of faculty members at the University of Tennessee in 1949 on the subject “Book Classification in University Libraries,” found this concern in such a group to be amazing. As a result, the faculty became interested in the problems of book organization and a thorough study was made, with the resulting decision to reclassify the library’s holdings.

The University of Mississippi exemplifies further the interest in book organization by members of an institution’s administration and faculty. As part of a planned liberal arts development program partially financed by one of the foundations, a sum of $45,000 was set aside to reclassify the university library over a period of three years, beginning in 1952. This proposal came first from the administration, particularly the dean of the College of Liberal Arts, and from different department heads in the College, and not from the librarians on the campus. Further, there had been a collection of some twenty thousand volumes in the library that was classified only by the broad classes in Dewey. This group of books had been weeded by representatives of the various departments, and the remaining volumes were to be assimilated into the collection. Most of the periodicals had never been classified and were arranged alphabetically by title, and hence caused constant irritation to members of the faculty doing research in subject areas. The chairman of the Library Council, who was head of the Department of Psychology, was much interested in having the journals in his field

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grouped with the books. Because of these factors, the decision was made in the late spring of 1952 to reclassify the book collection according to the Library of Congress system.

The following excerpt of a letter from A. L. McNeal, Director of the University of Miami libraries, further reveals interest in reclassification by an administrator of an institution of higher education:

When the Vice President raised the question of reclassification, I was not unprepared to discuss it. His reaction was to the effect “If it is desirable and is something we will eventually come to, let’s begin on it now.” I pointed out the difficulties involved, the expense, and the handicaps to service. On the other hand, as a result of the purchase of a major library about two years prior to my coming here, there was a backlog of 20,000 to 30,000 volumes to be cataloged. It seemed to me an opportune time to undertake reclassification, even though no extra funds were available for it either from foundations or from our own institution.

After a decision has been made to reclassify a collection, a careful study of methods and organization is extremely important. The literature on reclassification reveals most of the problems. However, it takes a careful analysis to select the answers most applicable to an individual situation. Some help can be found in studies of the literature and of current practices that have not yet found a way into print. Too little has been written on the solutions individual libraries have found to the problems. The general process of reclassification is, in its essentials, much the same for all libraries. It is rather the details of organizational procedure that vary.

The preliminary phases of a reclassification program involve existing administrative relationships, especially in a college or university. Institutional officers to whom the librarian is responsible should understand the problems and needs and give approval of the project. The faculty as a whole should be informed of the contemplated undertaking, and their cooperation should be solicited. The library committee should be in sympathy with the change and give its approval. Heads of departments and faculty members having charge of office or departmental collections should be consulted, as books in these collections have to be called in for reclassification. Students, especially graduate students, should be informed.

Frequent consultations should enlist the close cooperation and coordination of all departments in the library. "Reclassification and recataloging are not isolated intellectual or clerical processes carried..."
out by a few specially trained workers in the confines of the Cataloging Department." Department heads and assistants throughout the library system must have an understanding of the problems and the part each may be expected to play. Cooperative planning well in advance of the actual beginning of the work can do much to insure the efficient functioning of the operation as a unit in which all are involved and to which all may contribute in one way or another.

Libraries that have carried through reclassification programs have found some preliminary activities most useful. An inventory of holdings, by locating lost books, setting the stacks in order, and clearing the records, saves time later. Because of size or lack of adequate personnel, some libraries do not find it practical to maintain systematic inventories. Others have established inventory processes as a regular routine that goes on continually. Such a practice can be carried out quite well in conjunction with reclassification. Special collections or sections of the stacks can be covered in units ahead of the reclassification project. If the catalog department makes the inventory, it is least complicated to have it completed before reclassification begins.

A program of weeding the collection can be staggered ahead of reclassification, since it is not the responsibility of the catalog department. The possible procedures vary. The Providence Public Library began systematic weeding over a year before starting reclassification, with an experienced reference assistant recommending titles for withdrawal. The prevailing practice seems to be for staff members thoroughly familiar with the collection, local conditions, and the use and demands upon the library, to do the preliminary work, with such aid as they may require from the librarian and from faculty members or specialists in the field, and with an adequate group of bibliographical tools to consult. A series of time studies on costs of discarding reported from the State Teachers College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is applicable where one may be considering the cost of reclassifying.

Reclassification gives an added impetus to the current trend of using storage space or reservoir libraries for little-used titles and duplicates. Old editions, duplicate copies, serial sets rarely used, and other items may well be put in storage without reclassification. The Providence Public Library reported in 1949 that "Quantities of infrequently called-for books and old files of bound periodicals have been cleared from the central library shelves but remain within reach of the occasional reader and research worker." Not only is time saved by not reclassifying storage collections, or in deferring it to a later date, but

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also additional shelving space, which may be needed in reclassification, is provided.

The period before beginning reclassification is an appropriate time for critical examination of circulation procedures and the routines of technical processes. Unnecessary and cumbersome details in circulation can hinder the progress of the work immeasurably. Some librarians have found after starting that they could have proceeded much more efficiently had this problem been presented to the head of the circulation department for careful consideration. An over-all view of technical processes needs likewise to be taken. Some routines may need to be changed or eliminated. In reclassifying, careful organization and strict economy are imperative. If any necessary reorganization is effected before the operation begins, arrears can be more nearly brought under control or eliminated, and the department prepared for the accelerated program usually necessary in making the change.

Any major revision in library procedures calls for examination of the physical and financial resources, and of the personnel to accomplish the change. The size and arrangement of the main building, the number of outlying collections and their distance from the main library, and the plan of the stacks cause variations in procedure. One can scarcely overemphasize the necessity for a careful survey of the entire situation, since weaknesses in the physical arrangement are bound to be intensified in a reclassifying project, where a rapid flow of work is desired. Tauber reports three recent surveys that were “general examinations of all facilities and services of the libraries involved. In all three instances, reclassification or reorganization of the materials was presented as a major consideration.” The State University of Iowa made a “detailed study of the cataloging practices currently in use” in its preliminary study prior to reclassification. The Chemists Club Library in New York preceded reclassification by a survey of the library. Such preliminary studies are incalculable aids in establishing policies that will not have to be changed later, and in avoiding mistakes that could make the end-product of reclassification of questionable value.

The amount of reclassification and the speed with which the project operates is in most cases determined by the funds available for the purpose. Some libraries have been the recipients of special grants. Columbia University was given special appropriations by the Board of Trustees at different times. The State University of Iowa, which reclassified a part of its collection in 1950/51, was allowed a special
budget of $27,000. William and Mary College received a grant from the General Education Board in 1943-45 to continue its project. Some libraries have begun a reclassification program without additional money by carrying the expenses on the library budget, the work being performed by the regular staff. The Indianapolis Public Library used a special fund for part of its juvenile collection in order to make the change more rapidly, but the adult books were done without an added appropriation. The District of Columbia Public Library did not request unusual finances. Its project was undertaken "without disruption of the library budget or additions to the library staff. This meant careful organization and strict economy." The University of Tennessee is carrying on a reclassification program begun in 1950 without a special appropriation. Libraries have found that a survey of the processing department may increase efficiency and allow extra time and money for reclassification. This may mean at first little more than the processing of new material in the new classification. However, by planning the work carefully, a cataloger may soon be devoting full time to reclassification. Saving can be effected by accepting the classification number on the printed cards and making full use of the cataloging entry as given. Additional time can be found by delaying the processing of some types of material, such as maps, films, and older less-used titles, although cataloging should be kept up to date for current acquisitions and those in particular demand.

The rate at which the task proceeds is dependent on the number of personnel and of the professional and nonprofessional members that may be added. A staff that can hardly process current accessions or that has accumulated a large backlog of material should hesitate to undertake reclassification without additional help. Incumbents may contribute to the classification project by adding all new accessions, by reclassifying old editions when new ones are received, by reclassifying titles when extra copies or new volumes are added, and by reclassifying titles which also require recataloging. However, work can go ahead much more rapidly and satisfactorily if there is a special staff. A large amount of routine duty must be performed by clerical or non-technical workers, who must be closely supervised. A head of processing who can coordinate all operations can secure a more efficient and uniform result.

Before beginning reclassification, some general policies must be formulated. The first question is the extent of the undertaking. Practices have varied with local conditions. Some collections have been
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completely reclassified while others have minor areas that will never be reclassified. Because of size, money available, or some special nature of the collection, some libraries have found partial reclassification feasible. This may be practical for sections badly in need of attention, such as science and technology or literature, groups most used, or open-shelf collections. In university and college libraries, special or departmental collections may be maintained very easily in classifications different from that used in the main library.

Libraries have found by experience that reclassification involves a considerable amount of recataloging. Older libraries and libraries reclassifying several years ago found that problem most acute. The advent of Library of Congress cards and their widely accepted use has brought a marked improvement in card catalogs in recent years. Nevertheless, most libraries still have old cards with incorrect or incomplete entries, in outdated or improper forms, and with inconsistencies in added entries and subject headings. A catalog badly in need of revision slows the process of reclassification and adds considerably to the cost. Some decision must be made as to the amount of recataloging that will be done. Princeton adopted a policy of reclassifying with a minimum attention to the catalog, but the results were not wholly satisfactory. The University of Michigan found that recataloging needed as much attention as reclassifying. W. W. Bishop \(^{22}\) concludes from these experiences: "... reclassification alone, with no recataloging at all, is an impossibility. And unless the catalog has been exceptionally well made, the recataloging will be a much more serious job than the reclassification. The result, however, of the two processes should be a remarkable increase in efficiency of the library as a whole."

Every library arrives at its own decisions as to how much it will deviate from the Library of Congress Classification and descriptive cataloging. Most libraries make some changes, but the general consensus seems to be expressed by Miss Pearson in describing the practices followed at the District of Columbia Public Library:

An attempt is made to make the fullest possible use of printed cards and other aids commensurate with the requirements of good service. ... They are not accepted blindly, but, with a minimum of checking and of changing, they prove, of course, to be thoroughly adequate in a large proportion of the cases. Their main entries, their subject headings, and the Dewey classification are adopted, with some corrections, some adjustments and some simplifications, but with few variations from their established policies and practices. The basic assumption is
that individual library variations are seldom necessary and that in a project such as this, their omission is a definite timesaver. In original cataloging for titles without L.C. cards, the new A.L.A. Rules for Entry and the new L.C. Descriptive Cataloging Rules are used, [and] the L.C. List of Subject Headings is the basic list. . . . 4

Library literature indicates a general accord on policy regarding acquisitions. It is to begin at a set date to put all incoming material in the new classification, except for those areas not to be reclassified at all. The decisions on where to start and the order of procedure vary somewhat, but the general trend is toward beginning with open-shelf and special collections, and then proceeding to the stacks by areas of subject matter, working from the shelf list. The Chemists Club Library in New York commenced with a general reading collection of eight hundred volumes. The University of Tennessee started with the branch libraries, proceeded to the reference collection, and then to the stacks. The Providence Public Library began with the open-shelf collection in the circulation department and moved then to specialized fields.

Decisions on methods of handling special types of material must be made by individual libraries on the basis of their own needs and interests. Probable methods were thoroughly investigated in the Tauber studies. Since that time scarcely anything in library literature indicates what libraries engaged in reclassifying actually are doing. The University of Tennessee did not reclassify fiction, preferring not to group it with literature, whereas a PZ arrangement in the L.C. scheme did not seem enough of an improvement over the F plan to warrant a change. The District of Columbia Public Library also did not reclassify fiction. Again, utilizing L.C., biography at the University of Tennessee was placed with the subject, when possible, otherwise in CT; and collective biography went into CT. Bibliography was classified in Z, whereas the Chemists Club Library placed it with the subject. Periodicals in subject areas at the University of Tennessee were reclassified in the L.C. number, but many libraries, especially public and small college libraries, prefer an alphabetical arrangement, unclassified. Additional studies on the processing of all continuations, including government and United Nations documents, could well be made. The cost of handling, particularly in the duplication of records, is a problem many libraries have not worked out effectively.

Every library has minor groups of special materials. Juvenile collections, textbooks and courses of study in a university library, theses
and archival material, and local history, present problems that could well be worked out by standard and uniform methods, if current practices were more fully presented in the literature. Changes in existing procedures come most logically at the time a regular reclassification project is under way.

Libraries may need to examine various forms of records and statistics in beginning reclassification. Some, such as that at William and Mary College, have formed a new catalog in the process; others have interfiled the cards. Departmental catalogs often need to be made or old ones improved. Some libraries add shelf lists for departmental collections; others eliminate them. The use of temporary author cards does not seem to be widely recommended. If a routine is worked out by which cards are pulled and changed one day and returned to a preliminary tray for filing the next day, the time spent on temporary cards is largely wasted.

The value of a staff manual for reclassification is as debatable as that of one for regular use in a library. A few policies and practices must be formulated, and if deemed advisable they may be put in writing. The cost and time spent in devising a manual and in keeping it up to date, however, as well as the efficacy of its use, should be carefully explored before one is worked out.

In the final analysis, the success of any reclassification project depends on its organization and administration. Properly organized, no library should suffer during transition. Some libraries have experienced a period of chaotic confusion; others have undergone only minor interruption of service. Harriet MacPherson, in reporting a study of some twenty libraries using the Library of Congress Classification, quotes as follows a reply received from one of the institutions in which reclassification has been going on for twenty-five years: “We believe that reclassification can be so organized that a so-called ‘general upheaval’ is not necessary.” The increasing number of libraries that are reclassifying is some evidence that the change can be made smoothly and effectively.

In planning any program of reclassification proper attention should be given to the kind of equipment necessary and the additional supplies needed. The problem is not so great as it may appear, however, and the actual expenditure of funds for this phase of the program is negligible in relation to personnel costs. Too, the amount and kind of equipment and supplies necessary will depend largely on how the organization is set up and the speed with which the project is carried on.
Extra typewriters will be needed, and hand erasers to remove old call numbers from the cards. Some system needs to be devised for expunging the call numbers from the books. The difficulty of this rests primarily on the kind of marking that has been done through the years, whether with white ink, electric stylus, or labels. Kilpatrick and Miss O'Donnell found that black automobile paint could be used in covering the old call number. Other libraries are employing electric machines, designed to run continuously, with flexible shafts into which eraser plugs can be inserted. This way of treating the call numbers seems to be the most desirable in removing old white ink and shellac. In the case of books marked with the electric stylus, the number is easily taken off by certain chemical solutions. Labels can be removed most effectively by moistening and scraping with a knife. Additional catalog cases are unnecessary unless the decision is made to separate the card catalog during the process, although space should be provided to allow for normal growth.

Card reproduction is unavoidable in most libraries, and this will be true especially during any reclassification program. Many of the present catalog cards will need to be replaced because of soiled condition and poor cataloging. If the Library of Congress printed cards are used, many titles will not be available or will be reported out of stock, with indication that they will not be reprinted. The multilith machine has grown in popularity for manifolding in recent years, although many libraries are still using mimeograph devices. Funds must be provided for the purchase of new Library of Congress printed cards and for plain catalog cards needed in reproduction of entries. Many libraries carry these items along on the regular budget for supplies.

One main objection to reclassification in libraries has been the difficulty of maintaining the collections. Constant references are made in the literature to the excessive shifting of books and to the evil of having to look in two locations for materials desired. The problem of shelving depends first on space allotments within the library. The solution is not so difficult in a new building where one has room to begin expanding in the new classification while the older classification gradually diminishes in size. In libraries less fortunate, the old classification may be closed in and the new classification started in the space accumulated. If storage shelving is available the lesser-used volumes in the old classification may be put away, allowing space for growth of the new collection. The problem becomes less serious in a small library. An interesting experiment has been to place the volumes in the new
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classification on the same shelves from which the books came originally.

In a closed-stack collection, where access to material is by call number, the problem of arranging the book collection in two different places is not so great. Here graduate students and faculty members and others having direct access to materials soon learn that their books can be found in one of two places. If the dual arrangement exists on the same stack level, users may be willing to cooperate until the project is finished. In open-shelf collections the problem is somewhat more acute; however, it is those collections which are usually reclassified first, so that the period of time in which it is necessary to confront two different arrangements of the books is brief.

The cost of reclassification varies with the kind of program established. At the State University of Iowa, where a special sum of money was made available, the operation was planned on an assembly line basis. Close statistics were kept and the cost was estimated at forty-five cents per volume. At the University of Mississippi a separate reclassification unit has been set up, but some of the processes, such as the refiling of the cards, are being performed by the regular cataloging staff. This university determined that it takes between 1½ to 3 minutes to erase the number on a book and about 1½ to 2 minutes to reletter it. With these indicating a part of the total cost, an approximate figure can be derived for the collection. However, personnel, supplies and equipment, and time consumed in pulling and refiling cards all need to be considered. Further, the spending of additional time by other library staff members in helping with the project makes it impossible to determine the exact cost of reclassification. At best it can be only an estimate.

Results of reclassification depend somewhat on the reasons for reclassifying in the first place. The nature of the collection, new demands of the clientele, changing concepts of the organization of library materials, the economy of processing and efficiency in servicing—these necessitate changes in the placing of materials to fit new needs and interests. There are those who believe that no classification plan can assure systematic arrangement of collections. However, until the thinking on proper bibliographical control and documentation brings fruitful, practical results, librarians need to house and service the vast quantity of material at their disposal. Then why not choose that scheme which seems most logical, systematic, and economical, even though it means reclassification?
References

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