The Search for Uniformity in Cataloging: Centralization and Standardization

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Regularization of cataloging data has been a recognized goal of efforts toward bibliographical control of library materials for more than a century in the United States. Indeed, it could be successfully argued that ways to achieve consistency in cataloging have been of concern to at least some librarians since the days of the ancient collections in the Mesopotamian Valley and Egypt. Only recently, however, has the goal of one-time cataloging appeared to be attainable, and the effort to achieve it has produced certain reactions which sometimes retard the process. At the outset of any review of movements toward centralization and standardization of cataloging, it must be admitted that relatively little attention has been paid, at least in recent years, to those who maintain that standardization (and quite possibly centralization as well) are not desirable goals. The assumption has been that one-time cataloging is a good thing. Having come so close to accomplishing one-time cataloging, librarians can now afford to direct some serious questions to those who have almost blindly championed standardization as the utopia of bibliographic control.

This review of efforts toward standardization and centralization will first summarize the history of American plans to achieve one-time cataloging. It will also attempt to relate this history to what has been happening in other countries, especially during the past decade, to attain similar goals. Finally, attention will be directed to the challenges issued to the proponents of one-time cataloging by those who question the value of the goal itself.

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The most commonly cited American precursor of one-time cataloging is Charles Jewett of the Smithsonian Institution. Although his scheme proved not to be technically feasible, the basic idea was sound: to provide catalog entries developed by the Smithsonian and other libraries and make them accessible to all libraries which owned the material. Thus, cataloging would need to be done only once, and from the "plates" thus produced, a national union catalog could be developed. It is ironic that the technology for making and storing the plates was so primitive, for the idea was good; it remained for the Library of Congress to perfect the system in the twentieth century before a national union catalog could become a reality.

While the book catalog was the dominant form of bibliographic record in the nineteenth century, the rapid growth of collections resulting from the mechanization of printing, papermaking, and binding (which in turn permitted the economical mass distribution of books and periodicals) caused the temporary demise of the book catalog in favor of the card format. Thus, the Library of Congress assumed responsibility for the distribution of bibliographic entries in card form beginning at the turn of the twentieth century and did not, until the 1940s, turn again to the book format as an effective means of dispensing cataloging data.

The production and distribution of Library of Congress (LC) cards established LC as the primary agency for the development of centralized cataloging. It is not surprising that LC subject headings superseded most local subject authority lists, nor that a popular demand arose for the printing and distribution of LC's own authority record for subject terminology. What is surprising is that the LC classification took more than fifty years to present a serious challenge to the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system for the arrangement of research libraries. LC eventually brought the application of the Dewey system into its own building; however, the LC scheme is the only one which has achieved systematic representation on LC cards, despite the increased number (and sometimes percentage) of Dewey classification symbols being carried on LC card copy during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Perhaps the persisting basic dichotomy may have been reflected in this situation: it is easier to accept standardization of entry and descriptive cataloging than a standardized central application of subject headings and classification. As was shown in subsequent developments, the little standardization in sub-
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ject analysis that has been possible in the United States has not been readily transferable to other countries. Even in the United States, centralized subject analysis has raised more protests than has descriptive cataloging or entry work. Despite the protests, however, enough stark economic factors in the United States have emerged to occasion increasing demand for central application of classification and subject heading work.

The first half of the twentieth century was marked by a period of relative quiet in innovative cataloging. The forces supporting standardization worked inexorably to establish the dominance of LC in the larger libraries. Those small libraries which saw themselves as unable to benefit from the research orientation of LC were also often the ones lacking the money to buy the LC cards. Their needs were eventually separated from those of large libraries through the introduction of the H. W. Wilson Company's card service and the Sears List of Subject Headings. These systems, in tandem with the abridged Dewey Decimal Classification, provided a simplified form of bibliographic control more appropriate to less complex libraries. Because few of these libraries operated as part of large systems, there was little incentive to introduce more complicated cataloging patterns.

While the simplicity of the Wilson/Sears/abridged Dewey approach did not fully preclude the development of consistency between the standards used by the larger and smaller libraries, it made the continued maintenance of such consistency more difficult. Simplified entry forms might closely resemble their more complex counterparts, but they did not always fall in the same place when interfiled in a catalog. Similarly, Sears headings, while drawn from LC originally, began to deviate from the LC norm and again caused problems when headings from the two systems were interfiled. Clearly DDC and LC classification (LCC) symbols could not be intershelfed, but there was nothing to prevent the interfiling of bibliographic records using both systems; and by design, the unabridged and abridged Dewey numbers could, until the issue of the tenth abridged edition, be intershelfed without conflict. Because few libraries in the early period had any particular reason to want to intershelve collections classified in two separate systems, this factor proved to be relatively unimportant. Moreover, the amount of original classification being performed in libraries generally precluded any hope of obtaining a call number in one library which would be identical to that used for the same material in another library.

The boom in publication following World War II and the increas-
ing availability of money to buy new materials for libraries created a series of crises resulting in major changes in almost every aspect of bibliographic control in libraries. Concomitantly, wartime technology was diverted to peacetime uses, enabling libraries to consider the possibility of mechanizing some of the more tedious and repetitive cataloging operations. The same technological interest propelled the publication of the LC catalog of printed cards and its subsequent expansion into the printed version of the National Union Catalog.

So many new developments were witnessed during the 1940s and 1950s that it is still difficult to put them all into perspective. LC card numbers began to appear in a number of additional sources, making it very easy for even the smallest library to order card sets if they wanted them. Increased attention to the National Union Catalog resulted in improved editing and greater consistency. The advent of practical xerographic copying permitted libraries for the first time to utilize LC proofsheets as a basis for making their own card sets—and occasioned the first slowdown in the previously undiminished growth in the sales of LC cards.

The 1956 Library Services Act channeled federal money into public libraries at an unexpected rate. Impetus for the formation of regional systems also brought efforts toward the centralization of all aspects of acquisitions, cataloging, and processing. While LC provided basic card copy and the tools for selecting cataloging data, the sheer bulk of the collections entering libraries all over the country resulted in threatened backlogs of major proportions, simply because there were so many clerical tasks to be performed: finding LC card numbers, ordering card sets, matching materials to cards, verifying card data, completing secondary cards, proofreading all cards, developing authority files and cross references, filing and shifting the catalogs, and physically preparing materials for circulation.

Largely as a result of federal funding from several pieces of legislation—including the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the National Defense Education Act, the Library Services and Construction Act, and culminating in the 1965 Higher Education Act—a number of centralized cataloging and processing agencies were established to take over these operations from individual small libraries. During the same time period (late 1950s and early 1960s), commercial organizations began to offer services rivaling those of the nonprofit processing centers. Questions were immediately raised as to the degree of consistency among these various organizations: Did they adhere to LC standards, to Wilson practices, or to some other
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standard? How experienced and reliable were the staff members? Could the agency be relied upon to give prompt and accurate service? Would the resulting catalog cards be compatible with those already filed? And who would make the cross references and maintain the authority records?  

During this period, LC had been investigating ways to improve its own services. Between the publication of the preliminary second edition of the American Library Association (ALA) Catalog Rules and the 1949 version issued in two separate works (A.L.A. Cataloging Rules for Author and Title Entries, and LC's Rules for Descriptive Cataloging), challenges had been raised to the extent and type of descriptive cataloging being done by LC. The situation became critical in the early 1950s when LC introduced the "no conflict" principle and "brief" and "limited" cataloging in order to conquer its own potentially disastrous backlog. To add to the confusion, the 1949 rules involved a number of stylistic changes in descriptive cataloging which gave many cards something of a new look. Capitalization patterns began to conform to those of conventional written language, and more liberty was taken in rearranging title page information. Collation data and notes were also pared. This trend toward abbreviated records seemed to some to go to excess when, under limited cataloging, LC also reduced added entries to a minimum and was less likely to include more than one subject heading per bibliographic record.

New forms of resources were also appearing during the 1950s. Known alternately as audiovisuals, new media, instructional resources, and nonbook materials, these items occasioned a series of supplementary descriptive rules and additional sections of the National Union Catalog. While these problems were being attacked, LC was evaluating the results of various cooperative ventures with other research libraries in the country. Under such agreements as the Farmington Plan, LC worked with the larger research institutions to acquire catalog copy for all currently published scholarly literature originating in foreign countries. Whereas the Farmington Plan involved the use of cataloging provided by the acquiring library, subsequent LC efforts were to focus upon channeling the materials and cataloging data through LC itself. For example, under the Public Law 480 Program, and later under the National Program for Acquisitions and Cataloging (Higher Education Act) of 1965, LC placed itself at the center of the operation to serve as the coordinator of cataloging decisions.

While LC wrestled with the mechanics of handling multilanguage
materials promptly and distributing catalog copy effectively, it also participated avidly in the catalog code revision process of the 1950s and 1960s.\(^2\) Both editors of the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules* (AACR) came from the ranks of the LC staff, and LC championed the cause of the large research libraries by urging that the rules provide consistent guidance as well as reflect the economic exigencies of maintaining continuity with earlier practices. By 1967, when AACR was finally published, LC and the research libraries of the country had prevailed. Radical changes were avoided in the interest of economy, while LC pursued a policy of "superimposition" in order to forestall having to open a new catalog.\(^3\) Major attention was focused on presenting a more nearly logical array of principles for choice of entry and heading form through AACR, rather than starting over with a fully consistent set of entries. Relatively little attention was paid, however, to the rules for descriptive cataloging, although many of the elements of limited cataloging were given official recognition in AACR. In addition, a new "Part III" was attached to incorporate the nonbook materials rules previously issued as supplements to the 1949 code.\(^4\) It seemed that an era of cataloging standardization and consistency had at last been attained through AACR and LC's superimposition.

A phenomenon of catalog growth during the 1950s and 1960s was the continually rising unit cost of adding new materials to library collections. Particularly in research libraries, where multiple copies were acquired much less frequently than in public and school libraries, the cost of adding unique new items did not become less when more works were processed, as might have been expected in the typical American industry. Thus, the major hopes for cost reduction lay in two directions: (1) automation of clerical routines, and (2) one-time cataloging. Because it was difficult to determine from the relatively few cost studies available which of the two solutions might be more effective,\(^5\) LC and the other major American research libraries launched attacks on both fronts. The technological progress in the development of computer systems during the 1950s provided the leverage to initiate automation projects, while federal largesse once again gave impetus to the dream of one-time cataloging.

The late 1950s had witnessed the seeming failure of what has been termed "prenatal" cataloging, or the so-called Cataloging-in-Source Experiment.\(^6\) It had become fairly obvious that the most successful form of one-time cataloging would be one which could appear simultaneously with the release of the material itself. A close coo-
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tion between publishers and LC would ideally permit the direct incorporation of catalog copy into books and other forms of materials. Like Jewett's grand plan of the nineteenth century, however, the mechanics of completing catalog copy and publication at the same time and of transferring the catalog record onto a usable card set were unfortunately not sophisticated enough in 1958-59 to justify the effort expended. Cataloging-in-Source was abandoned, but was to be resurrected in another decade as Cataloging-in-Publication (CIP).25

More effective as a one-time cataloging stimulator was the National Program for Acquisitions and Cataloging (NPAC). Reversing the process used under the Farmington Plan, NPAC established relationships between LC and major foreign bibliographic capitals to channel cataloging copy to Washington, and from LC to the research libraries of the country. Over a period of time, NPAC became partially meshed with the similar plan created under Public Law 480, thus establishing a network of shared cataloging.26 The effects appeared to be dramatic: libraries which had had to perform original cataloging for 40-60 percent of their acquisitions were able to reduce the proportion to 20 percent or less under NPAC, at least according to the information passed orally at ALA conferences.*

With respect to automation and computer-based systems, progress could be noted on several fronts. Each major branch of the national library system approached automation somewhat differently. The National Library of Medicine opted for the creation of a current bibliographical data retrieval program through MEDLARS;27 the National Agricultural Library moved into the so-called housekeeping area to try to bring its internal processes and record maintenance under control;28 and LC developed a system for the computerized communication of basic bibliographic data for English-language monographs through MARC (Machine-readable Cataloging).29

Although the three libraries began their automation programs at different points, they shared information and were careful not to develop new standards unilaterally. Both the MEDLARS and the MARC programs have undergone such major modification since their inception that it is hard to recognize either in its original form.30 They have not, however, lost their chief characteristic: an extensive machine-readable data base of bibliographic information capable of being manipulated in any number of ways to produce a variety of reference aids.

Another automation program of the Library of Congress was instigated in the 1960s to bring order to the threatened chaos of the
LC Card Division. The burden of receiving, processing, completing, reporting on, and billing orders of LC printed card sets had become excessive, and LC simply did not have the facilities or staff to cope with the resultant problems. As a long-range solution, work was begun to create an automatic retrieval and distribution system called CARDS. Its two-phase attack, eventually coupled with the power of MARC through retrospective conversion (RECON) of selected older LC printed cards, and the current data enabled LC to construct a system for filling card orders almost literally "untouched by human hands." By channeling CIP data into MARC at an early stage, LC could monitor bibliographic information through the publication schedule of the material and, with the help of CARDS, be ready to distribute a printed card set on or before the actual publication date of the material.

Development of the potential power of the MARC system was left largely to the consumer. Although LC devised a number of programs to search and print out portions of the MARC data base, its work was performed utilizing a "processing format" somewhat altered from the "communications format" received by those who bought MARC magnetic tapes. Not surprisingly, subscribing libraries began to work out their own MARC uses—from simply printing out card sets to creating fairly elaborate specialized information searches. The flexibility of the data base made it a more powerful tool than many had at first imagined; it remained only for the scope of MARC's input to be extended to include languages other than English and formats other than monographs to make it a dominant national structure.

Although a few of the processing centers serving primarily public and school libraries experimented with MARC, it fell to a network of academic libraries to exploit the system to develop a major shared data base. The formation of the Ohio College Library Center (OCLC), viewed by a number of librarians as merely another centralized cataloging alternative, quietly ushered in a new dimension of bibliographic control and forced the Library of Congress to share its dominance of the field. The genius of OCLC was, curiously, that it appropriated the standardization built into the MARC records and allied it with the flexibility of the computer to select data and reformat bibliographic information, producing "tailor-made" cataloging services for member libraries. OCLC made minimal demands on its users, offering them the option of retaining their unique systems while purchasing many of their clerical services outside the library.

The economic euphoria of the 1960s soon gave way to the strin-
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gency of the 1970s. As libraries throughout the country began to move into the computer age, their resources to support automation projects significantly diminished. Quite naturally, they turned to OCLC to solve the dilemma. OCLC was able to put its services on-line, and was willing to expand its constituency to include library systems all over the United States. The competition offered by a few commercial agencies and a handful of other academic libraries utilizing the MARC data base apparently has not presented a serious challenge to OCLC. Amid questions, challenges, and predictions of future disaster from its detractors, OCLC has emerged as the first operational comprehensive bibliographic network in the nation outside the Library of Congress.

The wake of the economic recession of the 1970s has tended to clear away a number of older systems which appear to have outlived their usefulness. By 1975, the H. W. Wilson Company had stopped further production of card sets, and many of the hastily organized commercial processing services of the 1960s quietly disappeared. Although there were fewer sources of complete “cradle-to-grave” processing as a result, the commercial sphere took advantage of the MARC developments by offering fast card duplication services. Once again the dominance of LC in the card production field has been seriously challenged; however, it should be noted that LC views these “intrusions” by private organizations as desirable, provided they do not reduce the quality of the LC bibliographic record. Unfortunately, there are few regulatory devices to assure that quality is not eroded by these essentially secondhand services.

Thus, in 1976 librarians are surrounded by a plethora of essentially machine-based bibliographic systems competing for their attention. They can opt to do it all on their own—at considerable expense—or to join a nearby system; they can contract out their card duplication work or participate in an OCLC-affiliated network. Whatever the decision, librarians need to understand not only the prospects for further standardization of bibliographic systems in the United States, but also the potential impact of current developments on the international scene.

INTERNATIONAL CATALOGING

Among many American librarians, especially catalogers, the reputation of British and European libraries for maintaining scholarly systems of bibliographic control has been higher than their reputation.
for speed, accessibility and efficiency. The typical European library, according to American folklore, is crowded, dusty, austere, and ten years behind in its cataloging. While the image may have been more or less accurate prior to World War II, it has been severely eroded in most countries since that time. Even relatively small libraries in medium-sized European cities have mechanized or computerized many of their recordkeeping functions. While they may not have extensive card catalogs (that form of record has not been as popular overseas as in the United States), they frequently produce catalog supplements using computer techniques.

Although the postwar period occasioned perhaps more adjustments in Europe than in the United States, many Americans assumed that the war's devastation had permanently hampered library activities on the Continent and in Britain. A few Americans were acquainted with and followed the activities of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), but the agency was widely believed to be oriented more toward communications exchange than toward action. The older International Federation for Documentation (FID), with its sponsorship of the Universal Decimal Classification, enjoyed considerably greater visibility in the United States than did IFLA. Even Unesco, a relative upstart, could boast of a permanent headquarters and regular staff far beyond IFLA's expectations for the near future, and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) was better funded than IFLA in many respects.

Americans probably underestimated the need of European countries to share resources among themselves after the war. As the continental bibliographic centers rebuilt their operations, the old national barriers to cooperation seemed less formidable. Concern grew about the seemingly unnecessary deterrents to the easy exchange of bibliographic information resulting from the inconsistency of cataloging rules among nations. Of particular concern were the differences between the Anglo-American codes and the "Prussian Instructions" in the matter of entry structure. The once seemingly-insoluble problem of Anglo-American predilection for corporate author entries and Prussian rejection of the concept began to be viewed as a matter for negotiation rather than confrontation. Under the auspices of IFLA's increasingly active Committee on Cataloguing, a major breakthrough was accomplished at the International Conference on Cataloguing Principles, held in Paris in 1961. The resulting "Paris Principles" provided the first solid basis for the development of an international cataloging code.
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This period has been called by one iconoclastic American "The Year the Innocents Went Abroad." During the 1960s, Americans were only beginning to understand the rigors of negotiation at the international level; and with the somewhat smug assurance that American cataloging efficiency could be offered as a model to the rest of the world, they returned from Paris and proceeded to bargain away several of the new-found compromises. While their British colleagues protested unsuccessfully, the Americans, with the consent of the Canadians, preserved the annoyingly complex place name entry for a large category of corporate bodies. Eventually the British filed a minority report and published their own version of AACR as the "British Text," in contrast to the "North American" edition.

There is little doubt that the American departure from the Paris Principles adversely affected the influence of the United States in cataloging circles abroad. During the 1960s, although American librarians enjoyed rich communication and contact with their European counterparts, they allowed the Library of Congress to dominate international negotiations in the field of bibliographic control. The "shared cataloging" made possible by the Higher Education Act of 1965, while impelled by the mounting cataloging costs in American research libraries, was realized only through the statesmanship of key LC staff members. It is ironic that the program which most Americans saw as the panacea for their cataloging arrearages actually laid the vital groundwork for what may be the end of American dominance in the field of bibliographic control.

Once LC had indicated its willingness to accept descriptive data on foreign publications from the national bibliographic offices of the countries producing the publications, and to accept the data without making major alterations in it, the way was cleared for higher levels of cooperation. NPAC then went on to demonstrate the feasibility of one-time cataloging, at least with regard to "description." Entry choice, heading form, subject analysis, and classification still required local interpretations, but the basic elements of a publication's bibliographic history could be interchanged. It was only a short step further to obtain international agreement on the order and punctuation of the bibliographic elements. This was accomplished not by LC or ALA, but by IFLA, through its funded outgrowth of the Committee on Cataloguing, the Cataloguing Secretariat.

Largely instigated by key British librarians and bibliographers, the idea for an International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD) was activated. When ISBD for current monographic publications first
appeared in the early 1970s, the United States was somewhat preoccupied with its own efforts to improve and make effective use of MARC. The prescribed order and punctuation of descriptive elements embodied in ISBD(M) initially produced only a ripple of interest in the United States. As the word got around, concern grew, and LC's plans for quick implementation of ISBD(M) were adjusted. Somewhat belatedly, ALA (which was busily cutting back its international involvements) discovered ISBD and began to take a more active role in its evolution. Despite protests from several sectors of the American library community (notably from computer-based commercial services and later from certain librarians concerned about ISBD's effect on an unsuspecting library public), ISBD(M) was adopted by IFLA's Committee on Cataloguing. In addition, a revised version of AACR Chapter 6 (covering the descriptive cataloging of separately published monographs) emanated from ALA, although authored primarily by LC.

Before the shock of ISBD(M) subsided, plans for ISBD(S) (for serial publications) were well underway. International efforts at standardization seemed to emerge from IFLA, FID, Unesco, and ISO so rapidly that they caused alarm in the United States. It seemed that at the very moment when ALA's international involvement was at its lowest ebb and when financial assistance for travel abroad was scarcest, the developments on the international scene were most critical. By 1974, it became clear that ALA must establish its place once again in international cataloging circles or forfeit all initiative to Britain and the major European nations. Even the developing nations of Africa and Asia appeared to have a sense of international involvement far beyond that of most American librarians.

By 1975, IFLA's Cataloguing Secretariat had been transformed into the Universal Bibliographic Control (UBC) Office and Unesco was busy sponsoring an intergovernmental conference on national planning for the coordination of library, archival, and documentation efforts at the national and international levels. At that conference, the danger of fragmentation of such efforts became clear. The previously established Universal System for Information Science and Technology (UNISIST) program, together with its sponsored program, the International Serials Data System (ISDS), recognized the UBC Office's work on ISBD(S) as a potential area of conflict, particularly in the matter of establishing the official title of a serial for bibliographic purposes. As the "standards" agency at the international level, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO)
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complicated matters by reserving the right to approve such documents as ISBD. To Americans newly awakening to the importance of international negotiations, the scene appeared to be hopelessly complex. It was difficult to envision how the authority for establishing international standards could be placed effectively without creating an international bibliographic incident of major proportions.

Meanwhile, the International Standard Book Number (ISBN) had been initiated and nationalized under British impetus. Furthermore, the British began to create a national library superstructure which would bring under one administration the major components of British bibliographic control: British Museum Library, British National Bibliography, National Lending Library, and several other units operating in a national context. With the UBC Office physically located in the new British Library, a powerful base was established for the further development of international cataloging standards. The British worked out their own MARC, partially benefiting from the early mistakes of LC MARC. They also initially backed away from the LC list of subject headings and under the direction of Derek Austin, began to create a subject analysis process called PRECIS (Preserved Context Indexing System) which might provide the framework necessary to build an international subject control system which previously had seemed to be limited to national levels of agreement.

There were efforts, too, to arrive at agreement on a classification system which could be accepted worldwide. Ironically, the scheme which American research libraries increasingly rejected—the Dewey Decimal Classification—assumed international status as possibly the only viable candidate for multinational acceptance. Efforts of the Forest Press to further this acceptance were notable: conduct of an international survey, addition of British and Canadian librarians to its Editorial Policy Committee, introduction of international options into the scheme, encouragement of translations into many languages (including a complete French translation), and support of international exchange of personnel between LC and the British National Bibliography (BNB). The BNB's nearly complete adoption of the eighteenth edition of DDC as the basis for the arrangement of its bibliographic listing pushed DDC into the forefront overseas in a way not likely to be achieved again in the United States. FID's sponsorship of the Universal Decimal Classification, currently somewhat lagging because of the scarcity of funding, has not significantly counteracted the influence of DDC abroad. It appears that only DDC

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offers the prospect of unifying classification on a broad international basis.

At the international level, the concepts of UBC and ISBD appear to go relatively unchallenged. It has therefore been easy to undertake a major revision of AACR in the hope of laying groundwork for the development of an international cataloging code to standardize entry and heading rules. Although IFLA has continued its efforts to reach agreement in these areas, especially through the Copenhagen International Meeting of Cataloguing Experts and the IFLA/UBC publication program and "working group" structure, many prominent catalogers believe that AACR contains the best framework for building a total international code. With the financial support of the Council on Library Resources, the revision effort to produce a second, unified edition of AACR began in 1974. Although the Joint Steering Committee—composed of representatives from ALA, LC, BL, the Library Association, and (in combination) the Canadian Library Association and National Library—initially viewed its task as primarily that of producing a combined British and North American text of AACR, the council insisted that the new edition be viewed as a step toward an international code, and prescribed that royalties from the second edition of AACR be set aside to fund future revisions and expansions.

The establishment of still another ISBD working group under UBC's aegis has grown out of the code revision process. This time, however, the effort is directed toward creating ISBD(G)—a generalized standard—to codify and to place some logical restrictions on the possibly excessive number of deviations from ISBD(M), which were beginning to creep into the proposed ISBDs for early printed books, maps and nonbook materials. Although Americans are gradually speeding up their rather ponderous processes of reviewing suggested new standards, current democratization forces consider (with some justification) the international procedures followed by IFLA, FID, Unesco and other world organizations to be almost totalitarian. The following questions must be raised: Can international cataloging standards be developed and promulgated without depriving local librarians of the opportunity to tailor bibliographic systems to fit the needs of the clientele whom they serve directly? Is the goal of one-time cataloging more a "snare and delusion" than a bonanza?
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THE DESIRABILITY OF STANDARDIZATION

Perhaps the fact that one-time cataloging and the standardization of bibliographic data for international exchange were for so many years simply a utopian goal lured Americans into a rather unquestioning desire for such standardization. The shock of encountering dissent among the American library community has certainly not been fully vitiated by initial attempts to explore the reasons for dissent. It is possible that the uniformity which so often accompanies standardization can actually be a stultifying agent in the delivery of competent and imaginative local library service.67

If standardization is to live up to its advance notices, certain conditions must be established for its adoption. These conditions should therefore be discussed in the hope that the American library community can appropriate the best which standardization has to offer, while retaining the elements of quality service, individual attention and flexibility of systems which Americans prize so highly.

One condition is that standardization of bibliographic information systems should elevate rather than reduce the quality of local catalogs. The introduction of ISBD or an internationally accepted code for selection of entries and headings could, if employed totally and consistently, significantly improve the quality of all bibliographic records, whether local or international in scope. Equally clear, however, is that American libraries do not expect to redo their catalogs every time a standard appears. This situation leads to multiple superimpositions of standards and a resulting inconsistency of catalog structure and style. The idea of a standard is to impose consistency if not uniformity; yet the essentially organic nature of catalogs inhibits their complete renovation every few years. The question thus becomes one of the level of tolerance of a library's clientele: How many major changes can be introduced into the catalog before the library user is prevented by the resulting discrepancies from locating and utilizing desired resources?

Little research has been conducted to resolve such questions; therefore, opponents of ISBD can maintain that the breaking point has already been reached, while its advocates argue (with an equal lack of evidence) that ISBD: (1) represents an attempt to resolve the confusion, (2) will eventually benefit the user, and (3) is no more likely to inhibit access to resources than did earlier changes occasioned by the issuance of new cataloging codes. As LC plans to close its catalog within the next decade, it appears not to be anticipating any con-
comitant closing of the MARC data base. Total revision of catalogs by means of initiating new ones is clearly not anticipated. Only a more comprehensive form of research on catalog use than has yet been projected can resolve the differences of opinion among librarians as to whether the quality of the catalog will be significantly undermined by the introduction of new standards.

A second, closely related condition for the acceptance of standardization is its ability to be monitored for consistency of application. In other words, a standard such as AACR which produces contradictory interpretations in practice can in some views be worse than no standard at all, for it destroys trust on the part of the user and it cannot be taught effectively to future practitioners. Although complete uniformity may be both undesirable and unattainable, reasonable consistency in the application of a standard is essential. If standardization is to be considered a desirable goal, there is little doubt that it must be accompanied by the possibility of establishing a monitoring program to maintain some form of quality control. Unfortunately, relatively little international effort—or even discussion—seems to have been directed toward this end. Until provisions for quality control emerge, opponents of standardization will continue to be able to point dramatically to much obvious contradiction and poor logic in American cataloging systems.

A third condition necessary to the acceptance of standardization is flexibility—not the flexibility which produces contradictory bibliographic records, but one which allows the suppression of extensive detail in favor of simplified and reformatted listings. It is at this juncture that the computer appears to have potential. Systems such as those maintained by OCLC offer participants the chance of tailoring bibliographic data to fit their own clientele. At present, however, computer-based systems are more easily appropriated by the larger and frequently research-oriented libraries. It is the smaller libraries, ironically, which most need the ability to reduce the complexity of bibliographic information—a process which is presently too costly. If standardization is to provide flexibility benefiting all clienteles, then it must be effectively coupled with multitiered information and materials networks which accord to the smallest library outlet the same options available to the largest ones. It is to be hoped that agencies such as the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science will direct more attention to the furtherance of such networks.

A fourth condition is the increased democratization of the process
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by which standards are developed and adopted. Although interna-
tional agreements are more easily reached through the auspices of a
small group of recognized experts in the field, too frequently such
groups are formed without regard for the official designation of
responsible representation from organizations with legitimate con-
cerns in that field. Drafts of standards are often circulated to only a
few people directly connected with the expert group, and are revised
on the basis of possibly skewed input. While the efficiency of devel-
oping a standard may suffer in a wide review of its proposed
contents, its likelihood of being adopted and universally implemented
is increased by slower and more elaborate evaluation prior to official
promulgation. One of the major contributions which American li-
brarians can make to the cause of standardization may be to insist that
no standard be issued by IFLA (or any of the various other interna-
tional library bodies) until it has been officially reviewed by the full
constituency of the body—or its duly recognized representatives—
and not merely by self-appointed or aristocratically appointed “ex-
erts” in the field.

If these conditions are heeded in the development of standards for
bibliographic control, the process of standardization will probably
continue to be viewed by the majority of librarians as not only
inevitable but desirable. Rampant, uncontrolled, undemocratic de-
velopment of standards, resulting in hopelessly confused and incon-
sistent cataloging records, could occasion growing resistance on the
part of the American library public. It would be truly unfortunate if
the new opportunities to achieve a viable international transfer of
bibliographic data were vitiating simply because librarians were too
unsophisticated, or unconcerned, to make sure that the job was well
done.

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8. With the 10th abridged edition of DDC, published by Forest Press in 1971, a major change occurred in the relationship between the abridged and unabridged versions of DDC. Until that time, the abridged had been constructed to complement the unabridged, and classifiers were barred from creating numbers using the abridged edition which would have different meanings in the unabridged. In 1971, this compatibility was dropped in the interest of providing simpler numbers in the abridged at many points. It is thus no longer possible to intershelve abridged and unabridged numbers without at least a small amount of potential conflict in their meanings. The effect of this change remains to be measured.


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27. Early reports on NPAC's effects were reported in Norman D. Stevens, ed. "The National Program for Acquisitions and Cataloging: A Progress Report on Developments under the Title II of the Higher Education Act of

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44. “Grant Enabling IFLA to Establish a Permanent Secretariat for Cataloging Activities,” *Library Resources & Technical Services* 15:550, Fall 1971.

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69. Freedman, op. cit.