MASC Discussion Group Minutes

Annual 2009

Attendees: Sarah Fisher, John Overholt, Ruth Hughes, John Schalow, Alvan Bregman, Ann Copeland, Jennifer Borderud, Ann Myers, Christine Megowan, Jackie Dooley, Erin Blake, Helice Koffler, Francis Lapka, Nina Schneider, Eduardo Tenenbaum, Randal Brandt, Stephen Skuce, Ellen Ellickson, Richard Noble, Martha Conway, Jane Gillis, Deborah J. Leslie, Suzy Taraba, Barbara LaMori, Margaret Nichols, William W. Jones, Tom Larsen, Mark H. Danley, Philip Melzer, Jessica Grzegorski, Megan Winiecki, Elizabeth Lilker, Elizabeth Robinson, Alex Thurman, Jennifer Talley Exum, Susan Pyzynski, Peggy Skotnicki, Becky Thompson, Raegan Wiechert, Josh Fiala, Jane Carpenter, Kate Moriarty, Catherine Uecker, Windy Lundy, R. Arvid Nelsen, Louis Reith.

I. Introductions and announcements

MIT has two 2-3 year term appointments to catalog the Vail Collection on electricity, electrical engineering, lighter-than-air travel, magnetism, and animal magnetism. See the job announcement here: http://libraries.mit.edu/about/jobs/svacvailcataloginglibrarians.html

II. WorldCat Local update

At Midwinter, we heard about the report of the WorldCat Local Special Collections and Archives Task Force. OCLC has now issued its response to that report. A number of concerns raised by the task force have been addressed already, including the removal of the "Buy It Now" link from records for archival collections. In addition, the formatting of records and the labeling of fields has been improved to make complex records easier to understand. One problem still under investigation is facilitating the display of local holdings information, which is a particular challenge since OCLC has not previously retained this information. Solving this is a top priority for OCLC, since it's an essential step toward making WorldCat Local usable as an OPAC. Jackie Dooley is eager to hear additional reactions to or questions about the task force report and OCLC's response. Email her at jackie_dooley@oclc.org

III. Digitization and cataloging priorities

We next turned to the impact of digitization on cataloging priorities and workflow. While large-scale, internally-initiated digitization projects certainly have an impact, they're also easier to plan for and manage. Digitization requests from users, while smaller, often present a greater challenge in the aggregate. A patron request for a single page might be nearly as much cataloging work as digitizing the whole book. There's no clear agreement on how to handle this yet. Some institutions only tie images to a bibliographical record if the whole, or at least a substantial portion of the piece is digitized. Some bridge the gap by digitizing the remainder themselves, or requiring that the patron underwrite the cost of doing so. On the other hand, the fact that

somebody wants one particular page is at least some evidence that another user might as well. Maybe it's best to store everything, no matter how small a piece of the whole.

Ideally, uncataloged material ought only to be cataloged once, and the record crosswalked from the image database to the OPAC or vice versa. Visual materials may not demand rigorous cataloging work, since patrons can see the images for themselves, as opposed to our closed stacks, where the cataloging must replace browsing. Twenty very similar images don't need 20 distinctive titles. Call them a collection and let the users find what they need. What cataloging does get done should focus more on the content of the images than their format.

Perhaps the most crucial issue is putting policies into place to manage the amount of time spent on digitization-driven cataloging, lest it overwhelm every other priority. Tech services should work proactively with other departments to coordinate policies that meet everyone's needs (to the extent that that's possible).

IV. Shelf lists

Our final topic concerned the retention and maintenance of physical, card-based shelf lists. About a third of those in the meeting said they were still actively maintaining their shelf lists, while an equal number said they have retained their existing shelf list but no longer add cards to it. Shelf lists provide several benefits, including serving as backup (possibly more secure) to electronic records, containing information not included in recon projects, and offering a more accurate call number ordering than the OPAC.

Many of the libraries who do maintain their shelf lists noted the difficulty and expense of obtaining the cards to do so, and that they are often tempting targets in space-starved buildings.

V. New leaders of MASC

Sarah Fisher and John Overholt announced they had reached the end of four years as the co-convenors of MASC, and that leadership of the group would be handed over to Ann Copeland of Penn State University and Ellen Ellickson of Yale. Email them with your suggestions for future MASC discussion topics.

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John Overholt
Assistant Curator
The Donald and Mary Hyde Collection of Dr. Samuel Johnson/
Early Modern Books and Manuscripts
Houghton Library
Harvard University
http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/hydeblog
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