Renewing the Profession: Recruiting and Mentoring Art Catalogers

April 3, 2001

Art Libraries Society of North America 29th Annual Conference, Los Angeles, CA

Moderator: Alison Dickey, Assistant Dean, Palmer School of Library and Information Science

Sponsor: Cataloging Section

Speakers:

V. Heidi Hass, Head of the Reference Collection, Pierpont Morgan Library
Gregory Leazer, Assistant Professor, Department of Information Studies, UCLA (respondent)

It seems increasingly difficult both to interest library school students in cataloging and knowledge management, and to train near- or recent graduates in the basics of cataloging. Internships are one way to interest library students in cataloging. Heidi Hass's description of a successful unpaid internship at the Pierpont Morgan Library provided some insights into what works and what does not from the perspectives of the employer and of the student. She also discussed briefly causes of the current shortage of trained catalogers. Gregory Leazer discussed the education of future catalogers and described UCLA internships for library students. Approximately thirty minutes of open discussion followed.

Heidi Hass:

The goal of any internship program should be two-fold. First, it should provide the intern with a structured environment, where knowledge acquired in library school can be applied and refined in a real-life setting. Second, and as important, the intern ought to make a concrete contribution to the library. This compensates for the time required to train and supervise the student: although training art catalogers is a worthy goal, none of us are willing to be completely altruistic!

The internship at the Pierpont Morgan Library was designed to introduce a student to the world of art library cataloging while benefiting the Reference Collection by completing some long-undone projects. The main features of the internship were use of RLIN and the Voyager Cataloging and OPAC modules, and training in and use of the basic tools of the profession, such as AACR2, the MARC formats, etc., in both paper and electronic form.

Finding an intern was relatively easy, as New York City is fortunate in having five library schools within easy commuting distance of Manhattan. Other sources of interns include library students attending distance learning programs (a student living nearby may be taking classes at a library school 100 miles away), and paraprofessionals in the local public library's Technical Services department or Art and Humanities department. Student staff at the local college or university library might be interested in learning more about cataloging in an art library, with a view to evaluating librarianship as a career.

The ideal intern will have taken at least the basic cataloging course offered by his or her institution, which should ensure that basic concepts and terms are familiar; for non-library-school students, a minimum requirement might be familiarity with the structure of the MARC bibliographic record (the use of an online system for circulation alone probably does not provide enough experience to be useful). Other qualifications to verify are: experience with Windows, use of the mouse, and basic word processing skills. These are not yet ubiquitous, and it is not the purpose of a cataloging internship to impart them.

Evaluating the skills of the intern should be done at the interview. It may seem cruel to give an unpaid student a test right off the bat, but the employer will be able to make an informed decision on taking someone on, while the student will have a benchmark against which to measure the abilities acquired during the internship. It will also help the employer select the most appropriate projects, if there are several. There is an excellent quiz at the start of LC's Cataloging concepts manual (see the list of resources at the end of this summary). The quiz consists of 15 questions in 2 parts: the first 6 ask the taker to extract information from a title page and t.p. verso; the second half presents information in a card format and as a MARC record, and asks questions relating to the translation of the t.p. information into these forms.

The structure required of an internship conducted under the auspices of a library school program will be more strictly defined than in a locally created one, but in any case a well-planned program and schedule will lessen the burden of the supervisor considerably. Initial paperwork which may be required by a graduate program may seem onerous, but it can be used as a framework to delineate the internship, and may prove much more helpful than originally anticipated. Even if the student is not using the internship to fulfill a requirement, manuals such as the Palmer School's Graduate Internship Site Handbook can be mined for structure.
The Library's intern, Erin Elliott, a student at Pratt Institute School of Information and Library Science, began her internship during the Fall semester of 2000. The internship had several different phases. During the initial phase, Erin was introduced to Voyager's Cataloging module, and learned the components of a record (that is, bibliographic, holding and item). Erin was then asked to make basic corrections in the holding and item records. The work was fairly mechanical, but one of the most common learning methods in our field involves the repeated viewing of record after record. Erin was encouraged to examine the records, and to use Cataloger's Desktop to search out unfamiliar elements. Completion of this task gave the intern basic data-entry skills, and the library a database cleanup which would not otherwise have been possible.

The intern then tackled the centerpiece of the project, deriving or creating RLIN records for artist monographs which were skipped during the library's retrospective conversion. The books were mainly European publications from the 20s and 30s; copy was found for some in RLIN, but the majority required original records. Erin identified unconverted shelf list cards (no RLIN id penciled in the corner), pulled the official catalogue card (for tracings and complete publication information), and began the interesting process of translating fifty-year-old cataloging data (and Morgan cataloging at that, with its idiosyncratic local subject headings) into brand new MARC. This part of the project required quite a bit of supervision. Not only was there training--in RLIN, in Voyager, and in cataloging tools--but each record had to be proofed, and major corrections were proofed a second time. Fortunately, subway commutes are a perfect time to proofread records.

Finally, Erin did some work with item in hand. She was asked to look at all records produced by the cataloger, and to compare changes he made with the original copy if there was any, and with the book. She then produced the RLIN record, passed it and imported it into Voyager, and created the ancillary holding and item records. This was very well-received by the cataloger; in return, he selected suitable candidates for Erin to catalogue from our backlog, and reviewed her work with her. This shared the supervisory workload, and gave the intern a chance to see another cataloger's approach and style. In January Erin received her MLS from Pratt Institute; in February she was hired as the Technical Services Librarian at the Bard Graduate Center for Study in the Decorative Arts, an enormously satisfying conclusion to this internship for both the mentor and the mentee.

Heidi concluded by posing several questions about the future of cataloging and the future supply of catalogers. Is there really a shortage of qualified catalogers? If so, why? Is it due to de-emphasis of cataloging in library schools, or to the ascendency of copy cataloging and attendant decline of training and supervision of junior catalogers by more senior catalogers? Apart from establishing internships, what can we do to foster the catalogers of the future?
Reports of the death of cataloging in library schools are somewhat exaggerated. Although ALA accreditation does not require a library school to offer cataloging courses, library schools still teach cataloging, though they may call it something different (Knowledge Management, or Organization of Information). UCLA offers a choice between one course on organization of information, or two cataloging courses, one on descriptive and one on subject cataloging. Even students who plan careers in non-traditional environments, such as dot.com's, take the cataloging courses. In addition, all internships offered by the UCLA library require students to have taken cataloging courses.

Internships are an effective school-to-work technique which benefit both the student and the employer. The operative word is mutual benefit: employers must devise projects that will benefit the library as well as increase the student's knowledge. Institutions prefer a longer period, since it gives the student a chance to move beyond the time-intensive training period into producing some real work. UCLA requires two quarters of work from its interns, which works out to about 16 weeks within two 10 week quarters.

General discussion:

Another way to encourage library students to consider a career in cataloging is to try some outreach to local library schools. Art librarians can offer to make a presentation to the cataloging class, or to students taking more specialized classes such as rare books or art librarianship. Art librarians can also offer to host visits by library students or library school classes, or to be a resource for prospective or current students seeking advice about careers and job opportunities in the field.

European librarian students make excellent interns. The Watson Library at the Metropolitan Museum, New York has had a number of very successful internships with these students. The full-time internships last at least three months, giving both parties a solid stretch of time to develop skills and complete projects, and the students are bright, enthusiastic, and dedicated.

It is particularly important to come up with ways to promote cataloging to library students, since it is becoming increasingly difficult to fill cataloging positions. One solution is to hire competent paraprofessionals. However, several participants felt that although paraprofessionals might perform most cataloging tasks well, they could not be given the other professional duties which are often assigned to catalogers: time at the reference desk, a role in book selection, a voice in making changes to the structure of the catalog, bibliographic instruction, etc. Paraprofessionals may have the ability to create records without a more abstract understanding of basic principles of bibliographic control, such as collocation and the role of records within a file. It is detrimental to the profession to commingle paraprofessional and professional duties beyond a certain point; in any case, union or other formal contractual agreements may prevent such arrangements. It is also short-sighted, in that it opens the door to administrators to downgrade positions in terms of salary and associated benefits (e.g. professional development, involvement in professional associations, etc.). Instead, promising paraprofessionals should be strongly encouraged to attend library school, since they will never rise above a certain level without the additional training and the degree. Some libraries offer no encouragement to their paraprofessionals to become professionals; this is short-sighted, because developing good catalogers ensures the quality of the records we all share.

Another factor contributing to the decrease in interest in cataloging may be the decline in training and mentoring of new catalogers. Several participants recalled that as fledgling catalogers, or even as paraprofessionals, they were supervised by senior catalogers, who revised all their records during the training period and were later available whenever they had questions about cataloging rules or subject analysis. Now copy catalogers are instructed not to review headings, and are trained by unit heads, who do not have much time beyond initial training to devote to honing their skills. Copy catalogers remain in the same job, with no solid grounding in cataloging, and no chance for advancement, unless they get an MLS.

Resources available from the Library of Congress Cataloging Distribution Service

(all descriptions from the CDS web site at http://lcweb.loc.gov/cds)

Cundiff, Margaret Welk.


4 v. (loose-leaf)


Gives trainees the knowledge to:

interpret and use current (AACR2) catalog records
define the purpose and scope of descriptive cataloging

define standard terms used in processing activities

identify tools used for descriptive cataloging of book and non-book materials

Gildea, Matthew E. (Matthew Edward)


2 v. ; 28 cm.


Learn how to apply USMARC coding in a cataloging environment.

Understanding MARC: Bibliographic

An introduction to MARC. This booklet helps librarians and others pull out the information that might seem hidden behind the unfamiliar codes of a MARC record … Library school students can use the booklet as an easy guide to the MARC codes for their cataloging class.

Available on the Web at: www.loc.gov/marc/umb/

Resources available from the Library of Congress Cataloging Distribution Service (cont.)

Cataloger’s Desktop and Classification Plus are CD-ROM products which integrate most of the tools used in daily cataloging. The hyperlinks between the various tools make using them very easy, and provide a good illustration of their interrelationships.

Cataloger’s Desktop includes Anglo-American Cataloging Rules, 2nd edition (1998 revision with Amendments 1999) and Library of Congress Rule Interpretations (LCRI), with convenient hyperlinks between the two, and to the MARC21 Format for Bibliographic Data.

Also included are:

MARC 21 Format for Bibliographic Data
MARC 21 Format for Authority Data
MARC 21 Format for Holdings Data
MARC 21 Format for Classification Data
MARC 21 Format for Community Information
Subject Cataloging Manual: Classification
Subject Cataloging Manual: Shelflisting
Subject Cataloging Manual: Subject Headings
Latest editions of all 5 MARC Code Lists

And other more specialized cataloging manuals

Annual Subscription Price: (4 fully cumulated issues) for a single user is $690 in North America

Classification Plus contains the Library of Congress Classification Schedules and Library of Congress Subject Headings, with hyperlinks between the two files.

Annual Subscription Price: (4 fully cumulated issues) for a single user is $550 in North America
If Cataloger’s Desktop and Classification Plus are purchased together the price is reduced by $100 to $1,140.00.

Internship in the Reference Collection of the Pierpont Morgan Library

The Reference Collection of the Pierpont Morgan Library is responsible for acquiring, cataloging and housing scholarly materials which relate to, and support, the study of the curatorial collections of the Library. The curatorial collections are: Ancient Near Eastern Seals and Tablets; Printed Books and Bindings; Drawings and Prints, Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts; Music Manuscripts and Printed Music; Literary and Historical Manuscripts, and the Archives. The collection numbers about 70,000 volumes in English and western European languages, with some 90 current periodical subscriptions.

Proposal: The main focus of the internship is to provide an interested student with an introduction to practical cataloging skills as employed in a museum library using the Voyager integrated library system, RLIN, and other online and paper cataloging tools. Secondary activities will include: observation of and participation in acquisitions, serials check-in and other related activities; processing of both current and backlog materials, and observation of activity in the Reading Room of the Library, where scholars consult both rare and reference materials.

Outcome: The intern will gain basic grounding in cataloging skills; knowledge of Voyager, RLIN, Catalogers’ Desktop; MARC coding for bibliographic and authority records. First-hand observation will also give the student an understanding of the particular functions of a library within a museum.

Plan of work: It is anticipated that the student will work 8 hours per week for the duration of the semester. The schedule is flexible subject to the requirements of the student and the department.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week no.</th>
<th>Description of activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>week 1</td>
<td>6 hours training using Cataloging concepts (LC, 1993) as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 hours training on Voyager system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>week 2</td>
<td>3 hours training using Cataloging concepts (LC, 1993) as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 hours training using MARC content designation (LC, 1998) as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 hours updating bibliographic records (supervised)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>week 3</td>
<td>3 hours training using Cataloging concepts (LC, 1993) as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 hours training using MARC content designation (LC, 1998) as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 hours updating bibliographic records (supervised)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week no.</th>
<th>Description of activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>week 1</td>
<td>3 hours training using Cataloging concepts (LC, 1993) as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 hours training using MARC content designation (LC, 1998) as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 hours updating bibliographic records (supervised)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>week 2</td>
<td>6 hours updating &amp; searching for bib records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 hour reviewing bib records with supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 hour observing acquisitions procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>week 3</td>
<td>6 hours updating &amp; searching for bib records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 hour reviewing bib records with supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 hour observing acquisitions procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>week 4</td>
<td>6 hours updating &amp; searching for bib records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 hour reviewing bib records with supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 hour observing serials procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td>Activity Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Week 5 | 6 hours updating & searching for bib records  
| | 1 hour reviewing bib records with supervisor  
| | 1 hour observing Reading Room |
| Week 6 | 4 hours training in copy cataloging  
| | 3 hours updating/searching bib records & copy cataloging  
| | 1 hour observing Reading Room |
| Week 7 | 4 hours training in copy cataloging  
| | 3 hours updating/searching bib records & copy cataloging  
| | 1 hour assisting departmental work |
| Week 8 | 6 hours updating/searching bib records & copy cataloging  
| | 1 hour reviewing bib records with supervisor  
| | 1 hour TBD |
| Week 9 | 6 hours updating/searching bib records & copy cataloging  
| | 1 hour reviewing bib records with supervisor  
| | 1 hour TBD |
| Week 10 | 6 hours updating/searching bib records & copy cataloging  
| | 1 hour reviewing bib records with supervisor  
| | 1 hour TBD |
| Week 11 | 6 hours updating/searching bib records & copy cataloging  
| | 1 hour reviewing bib records with supervisor  
| | 1 hour TBD |
| Week 12 | 6 hours updating/searching bib records & copy cataloging  
| | 1 hour reviewing bib records with supervisor  
| | 1 hour TBD |