

# More on What is Going on at the Library of Congress

By

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representing over 1,600 professional employees  
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The judgements made in this paper do not represent official views of the Library of Congress.

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## Outline

This paper deals with the following topics:

- Series authority records
- Integrating the Web into Online Public Access Catalogs (OPACs)
- The Increasing Importance of Precoordination in LC Subject Headings
- Maintaining a balance of OPAC and Web functions rather than forcing a transition
- The pre-eminent importance of the book format for scholarship
- The University of Chicago Task Force Report and its concentration on scholarly users
- Misuse of body counts as determinative of importance
- The proper goal for the Library of Congress and other research libraries
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- The continuing need for onsite books shelved in subject classified arrangements
- The larger information universe and its several component parts
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- The continuing need for reference librarians
- Dumbing down the capability of scholarly research: LC management’s dismantling of cataloging and classification

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I wish to thank James Weinheimer of the American University of Rome for his thoughtful response < <http://eprints.rclis.org/archive/00006741/> > to my previous paper, “What is Going on at the Library of Congress?” < [www.guild2910.org](http://www.guild2910.org) >. I regret the delay in responding, but the officers of AFSCME 2910 who had to review this paper have been pre-occupied in recent months with attempts by LC management to diminish their ability to represent the concerns of the professional employees under the union umbrella; and they did not have time to vet the paper until now. In any event, I hope other experienced catalogers and reference librarians will take the time to join the discussion. The present paper will address Mr. Weinheimer’s comments as well as more recent developments at the Library of Congress.

### **Series Authority Records**

I agree with Weinheimer’s observation that Series Authority Records (SARs) continue to be necessary. Even though (as LC management asserts, although without providing documentation) a small percentage of end-users of catalogs search the series field directly, the presence of controlled information in this field is nonetheless crucial for many people other than the non-librarian “end users”—namely, *librarians* who do acquisitions and selection work, as well as reference librarians. As Weinheimer says, their work “simply *cannot be done* without series authority” [his emphasis]. A fuller exposition of the importance of SARs, written by cataloger and AFSCME 2910 member Gary Johnson, is being mounted on this same < [www.guild2910.org](http://www.guild2910.org) > Web site; I would commend it to the many managers who do not themselves use SARs, in the hope that LC’s recent decision will be reversed. Eliminating SARs is like saying we will take parts out of an automobile to lighten its weight and make it go faster—but choosing key parts of the steering mechanism for elimination. The most serious problem on this issue is not that LC management made its decision without adequate advance notice (which is the “spin” that has been put on it); the problem is that it was, and remains, a very bad decision. It will increase, not decrease, time spent on both cataloging and acquisitions in libraries throughout the world. It is noteworthy that both the American Library Association and Library and Archives Canada are strongly opposed to this decision.

### **Integrating the Web into OPACs**

I also agree with Weinheimer’s point that our catalogs need to reflect the presence of Web sites of interest to our users. (I believe that the “users” of research libraries should be defined, to begin with, as those interested in pursuing scholarly research, rather than those interested in simply finding “something” quickly and remotely. There are real and substantial differences between these groups; I spell them out in detail in my review of the Calhoun report at < [www.guild2910.org](http://www.guild2910.org) pp. 7-8 >). In this connection, I would very much like to see the catalogs

of research libraries include a new kind of form subdivision, along the lines of this example:

Women–Services for  
Women–Services for–Bolivia–Directories  
Women–Services for–Caribbean area–Case studies  
Women–Services for–Ethiopia–Congresses  
Women–Services for–Germany–History  
Women–Services for–Michigan–Evaluation  
Women–Services for–New Zealand–Bibliography  
Women–Services for–North Carolina–Finance  
Women–Services for–Study and teaching–United States  
Women–Services for–Study and teaching–United States–**Web sites (.edu)**  
Women–Services for–United States–Directories  
Women–Services for–United States–Directories–**Web sites (.com)**  
Women–Services for–United States–Sources–**Web sites (.edu)**  
Women–Services for–United States–**Web sites (.com)**  
Women–Services for–United States–**Web sites (.edu)**  
Women–Services for–United States– **Web sites (.edu)**–**Data archives**  
Women–Services for–United States– **Web sites (.edu)**–**Portals**  
Women–Services for–United States– **Web sites (.gov)**  
Women–Services for–United States– **Web sites (.org)**  
Women–Services for–Wisconsin–Periodicals  
Women–Services for–Wisconsin–**Web sites (.org)**  
Women–Services for–Zambia–Directories

Such a browse display would enable researchers to recognize selected, high quality Web sites in relationship to the substantive knowledge records in the library's book collections (or manuscript or other collections covered by the OPAC). The records cataloged under these **Web sites** forms should of course include live links.

I made this suggestion some years ago at the *Bicentennial Conference on Bibliographic Control for the New Millenium*; perhaps it's time to re-suggest it. I would also point out the importance of this kind of browse display of precoordinated subject strings, which are enormously helpful in reference work—again, they enable end-users (including reference librarians) to simply *recognize* a wide variety of relevant aspects of their topics whose keywords they could not think up in advance; and they also enable researchers, at the same time, to discern *contextual relationships among* the aspects that they could never have foreseen.

### **The Increasing Importance of Precoordination in LC Subject Headings**

The importance of precoordination—i.e., the provision of the ordered, linked, subject strings rather than simply individual 'facets' requiring combination 'after the fact' by the user—is an important issue, especially since LC management has recently expressed a strong interest in

eliminating it. Displays such as those provided by Endeca are not as effective as precoordinated browse displays with all subdivision in a *single* roster display requiring an absolute minimum of ‘pointing and clicking’, as in the above example. (Endeca displays require separate operations to call up topical, form, and chronological tags; the three cannot be immediately seen in a single unified list.) Moreover, it is much easier to *teach* the use of single-roster browse displays. I will refer interested readers to more detailed considerations of the increasing importance of maintaining precoordinated strings, at < [www.loc.gov/catdir/bibcontrol/mann\\_paper.pdf](http://www.loc.gov/catdir/bibcontrol/mann_paper.pdf) > and < [http://www.hwwilson.com/reviews/LC\\_Subject\\_Headings.htm](http://www.hwwilson.com/reviews/LC_Subject_Headings.htm) >.

The fact that so many thousands of established LC subject heading strings are so intimately linked to particular LC classification numbers is an especially important point that ought not to be overlooked; the loss of these established connections would make subject cataloging much more time consuming and much less efficient. There are many other considerations that the above Web links spell out. Proponents of faceted systems of single terms, to be combined by users in post-coordinate Boolean combinations, routinely avoid discussion of these issues—as though the very real problems solved by precoordination no longer exist. And yet the fact remains that browse displays of precoordinated subject subdivisions, in a single list, provide better *overview maps* of the book literature of a topic (both current and retrospective, English and foreign language) than any other mechanism (including “query expansion,” folksonomy referrals, and tagging).

In any event, I believe that the inclusion and integration of catalog records for Web sites would indeed make our OPACs more productive for end-users. I believe I have no disagreement with Mr. Weinheimer on this point. I agree with him when he says, “Our collections are no longer isolated.” As a result, our cataloging needs to expand its purview. And I am not opposed on any principle to streamlining some elements in the cataloging record; but I am opposed, on the basis of regularly *using* elements of the cataloging record to produce remarkable retrievals—I am opposed to eliminating elements (e.g., series authority records, precoordinated browse displays in OPACs, geographic area codes) which, apparently, some library administrators have no personal experience in exploiting, but which, nonetheless, continue to directly solve very real research problems that come up repeatedly (especially the difficulty of gaining *structured overview* perspectives on relevant book literature) and that are only exacerbated by automated or algorithmic indexing.

I think the solution to the problem of any neglect of these elements lies in the realm of better education and research instruction for our scholarly audience, rather than in dumbing down cataloging to uncontrolled keyword searching. This is only an impression, but I would say too many research instruction classes (given by librarians) confine themselves exclusively to teaching “how to think critically about Web sites.” If that is the extent of the instruction—to the neglect of both content and search techniques available in research libraries but not available on the Web—then such instruction is itself woefully deficient in critical thinking. (I will return to this point, on what should be covered in research instruction classes, below.) The problems of “too much junk” on the Web will not be solved by Web mechanisms—but they are already solved

by the *alternatives* to Web mechanisms provided by real research libraries.

### **Maintaining a Balance of OPAC and Web Functions Rather than Forcing a Transition**

I do strongly disagree, however, with those who would essentially abandon OPACs as separate search tools and, instead, merge library catalog records into the open Internet, where their retrieval would be effected by Google (or other) relevance-ranking software. (This is not Mr. Weinheimer's contention.) We need to be thinking in terms of "balance" rather than of "transition"—the latter being the persistently constricting template in LC management's perception. And I also disagree with those who would diminish the quality of cataloging for *books*, as though 'more cataloging for Web sites' must entail 'less quality for cataloging books.' (Actually, the options being proposed at LC itself are more accurately phrased as 'more mounting of full texts on the Internet, with *no* cataloging for books [i.e., relying instead on Google's keyword relevance ranking software] other than providing minimal transcription of identifying data [without authority control, subject standardization, or cross-references].')

### **The Pre-eminent Importance of the Book Format for Scholarship**

In the final analysis, the printed book is the format that is most important to scholarship (outside the hard sciences), and to conveying the deepest levels of learning in our culture (knowledge and understanding, as opposed to information). I make no apologies for that statement, and I justify it at length in the Preface to *The Oxford Guide to Library Research* (Oxford University Press, 2005). Moreover, as we know from The Electronic Publishing Initiative at Columbia (EPIC) survey of responses from 1,233 students and scholars. (Available online at: < <http://www.epic.columbia.edu/eval/eval04frame.html> >), students continue to make format distinctions between books and Web sites: "Print is preferred for situations where the material is long or dense, and the reader has to fully comprehend the material. Electronic resources are preferred for situations where the reader is obtaining supplementary or background materials, for current events materials, or for looking up information for short papers/homework assignments."

For these reasons I believe that the first—not the *only*, but the *first*—priority of library catalogs is to continue controlling *book* literature, with Web sites as an important but nonetheless lower priority. Library OPACs cannot realistically undertake to contain "everything"; just as we already must rely on outside sources for access to journal and newspaper articles, so we must also rely on Internet search engines for extensive indexing of the Web. Libraries need to find their proper *niche* (a strategy specifically rejected by the LC-commissioned Calhoun report) within the large context of multiple access mechanisms provided by multiple sources—all of which cannot be reduced to a single search box.

I would suggest that the niche of LC and of research libraries in general is precisely to promote scholarship as opposed to promoting quick information seeking.

To do that we need to continue maintaining OPACs that are separate from, rather than merged into, the open Internet; the latter kind of merger would produce only unsystematic retrievals of “something” determined on the basis of relevance ranked keywords rather than on the basis of conceptual categorization, cross-references among terms, and menu/browse displays of unanticipated search term options. No one disputes the desirability of both library and (substantive) Web resources being discoverable together—but such integration is more effectively accomplished by keeping OPACs distinct from open Web searching, while expanding the OPACs’ purview (as in the above **Web sites** example). To force catalogs into a “transition” of merger into the larger Web would also effectively entail the replacement of controlled vocabulary searching (with authority control of synonyms, cross-references, and browse displays) by relevance-ranked keyword searching, to the serious detriment of scholarship. In the Web environment, any controlled metadata elements would *themselves* be mixed in with all the other words in the record, and subjected to retrieval by the same term-weighting mechanisms that already produce tens of thousands of irrelevancies. Term-weighted displays of results are great for showing “something” quickly, but they are wholly inadequate as substitutes for OPAC browse menus and cross-references in giving researchers the *structured overviews* of resources (especially books) that they need for their research. The relevance ranked displays of the Web are not the same thing as the conceptual categorizations provided by OPACs. (Any Internet algorithm that assigns extra weighting to controlled metadata fields will invite manipulation and “loading” by non-librarian Web masters who have purposes quite different from the promotion of scholarship.)

### **The University of Chicago Task Force Report and Its Concentration on Scholarly Users**

Nor does it really matter to our core mission that there are millions more Internet searches being done than OPAC searches; nor does it matter that most of those millions of Internet searches are not done for scholarly research purposes; nor does it matter that only a comparatively small percentage of the population needs to engage in real scholarly research. Again, the Internet and research libraries fill different *niches* in the overall information universe. The University of Chicago Library recently undertook a study of its own users with a view to determining the priorities and future directions of planning—a study that is well worth reading by all parties in the current debate < <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/staffweb/groups/space/finalreport.html> > and < <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/staffweb/groups/space/abbott-report.html#III> >. Among the U.C. Task Force’s findings:

Most circulation is accounted for by a small group of heavy users, from 500 to 1000 depending on how one counts. This group contained 130 faculty and from 300 to 600 graduate students, plus a hundred or so undergraduates. The majority of library “users” are actually study hall users. The library is thus a laboratory for a core group, and a study hall for most others.

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The main purpose of Regenstein [the main U.C. library] is research and should remain research. There are a variety of aspects to this principle. It means we feel that heavy users should continue to be the highest priority in service, and it is their research success we should be aiming to facilitate.

Such clarity in defining scholarly researchers as the target user group is the very opposite of the assumptions behind the Calhoun Report and LC's administration, which seek, instead, to increase library "market share" by centering priorities around a target "user" constituency of remote undergraduates who do not wish to leave their "cozy dorm rooms" and come inside library walls at all.

Further quotations from the U. of Chicago report:

There is no evidence of a simple succession of older "non-electronic" people by younger "electronic" ones. More important, there is a very powerful and positive correlation at the individual level between electronic use and traditional use. High users of electronic research tools are high users of physical research tools and vice versa. *Other than the shift to the use of electronic rather than physical versions of journals, there is almost no evidence whatever of substitution by our students of electronic for print resources.* [emphasis added]

[Note that this observation is in line with the EPIC study's findings that students continue to value book formats for scholarly research.]

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The rapidly changing technical environment means that we need to develop serious instruction in library research. And despite technical change, many materials other than journals and databases will continue to be either unavailable electronically or more easily used in physical form. Yet most of our students of all levels have relatively minimal experience with library work. The Task Force is persuaded that there remain crucial skills of knowledge assembly that students do not learn on their own, and that a serious effort must be made to teach them.

Again, such good sense is the opposite of the Calhoun Report and of LC's administrative thinking, which refuse to see anything other than a wholesale "transition" to a "digital library"—one in which no research instruction is required, because Google-type software alone, working simply from typed-in keywords, is envisioned as adequate to answer all inquiries "with ease and precision."

### **Misuse of Body Counts as Determinative of Importance**

It is worth dwelling for an additional moment on the propensity of some participants in this debate to judge the success of research libraries by the size of the "market share" of users

they attract. Let me offer an analogy. I recently contacted NASA to inquire how many scientists have actually *used* the Hubble Space Telescope, which has cost the taxpayers of this country six billion dollars. The answer: about 4,000 astronomers. (The lead optical engineer on Hubbel, John Wood, told me it could be as high as 10,000 individuals since various *teams* are involved.) That would be about a thousandth of one percent of the total U.S. population. From a “market share” perspective, then, one could reasonably ask whether the entire Hubble program should be cancelled because *most* people don’t use it themselves? If the criterion of importance is a business model’s “market share” of the general population, then no such program for advanced research could survive. We may reasonably ask in reply, however, “Aren’t the results that come from those few who *do* use it, and the widespread dissemination of those results among the general population, more than sufficient to justify its cost? Is it not, in fact, profoundly misguided to regard the small number of users as the sole, or even the primary determinant of the value of the program?” In the same way, I think we can look at LC cataloging and classification as providing extraordinary “Hubble” access to the country’s book collections in research libraries—without those “instruments” scholars would not be able to “see” into the collections with nearly the clarity and precision they achieve when cataloging and classification are present. Relevance-ranked keyword searching and folksonomy referrals, in contrast, blur, distort, cloud, and truncate the “universe” of observable records.

Further, the results of scholarly research inquiries in libraries redound to the benefit of citizens everywhere—even those citizen who themselves have never set foot in a library. That’s why the federal government funds the Library of Congress at the level it does—to provide the *conceptual instruments* that enable scholars to look efficiently and systematically into book collections anywhere in the country—*no matter how few those scholars may be in proportion to the general population*. LC systems are the “Hubble telescope” of scholarship in large book collections. LC *is* needed for the continued maintenance of its high quality cataloging operations, not only to provide efficient access to its own unparalleled book collections, but also to provide the conceptual tools which enable similarly efficient access to be accomplished by scholars in research libraries everywhere.

In other words, even if most uneducated undergraduates (who don’t wish to leave “their cozy dorm rooms”) don’t use the subject heading system in OPACs or browse the classified arrays of books shelved in subject groupings, those avenues of access are still necessary for the fewer scholars who do need them. (Actually, contrary to the repeated assertions of LC management, most undergraduates do in fact continue to use their academic libraries in addition to the Internet—as user studies consistently indicate. For such students it is not a matter of using one resource rather than the other; it continues to be a matter of using both. As the University of Chicago study found, “there is a very powerful and positive correlation at the individual level between electronic use and traditional use. High users of electronic research tools are high users of physical research tools and vice versa.” Supporting data is available from the 2004 Academic Libraries Survey from the National Center for Education Statistics, which found that both the number of items circulated and the number of interlibrary loan receipts increased in the period 2000 to 2004. Such increases could not come about if students were shunning their library

catalogs. See < <http://nces.ed.gov> >.)

All of this has a direct bearing on determining the niche that research libraries need to fill. It can be readily conceded that, with the easy availability of Google and other Internet resources, no one needs the Library of Congress at all to be able to find “something” on a subject quickly and remotely.

*Therefore*, however, it follows that it should not be LC’s goal to promote something that we are not needed for.

### **The Proper Goal for the Library of Congress and Other Research Libraries**

The country will be better off if we promote LC itself and research libraries in general—in both their contents and the superior search mechanisms they provide—as the major alternative to the Internet in those fewer but more important situations requiring scholarly research rather than merely finding “something” quickly and remotely.

We especially need to promote ourselves as the *alternative* to the Internet (within a larger universe including both scholarly and quick-informational purposes) *rather than* as mere “untapped reserves” that haven’t *yet* been digitized for remote access—the latter being LC management’s view. Endless lamentations that the copyright law “hasn’t caught up with the new digital world” are based on utopian socialist assumptions that copyright restrictions must indeed vanish—and that Google will win in the copyright lawsuits that have been brought against it by various authors’ and publishers’ organizations. (For a more detailed analysis of the naivete of the view that all knowledge can be made freely available from anywhere, at anytime, by anybody, I must refer readers to my longer article “The Importance of Books, Free Access, and Libraries as Places—and the Dangerous Inadequacy of the Information Science Paradigm” in *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 27, 4 [July, 2001], 268-81. Since this paper is not itself freely available on the Internet, its readership will necessarily be restricted to a scholarly audience. It is, however, a paper that I wish would be required reading in library schools, as it exposes some of the bad scholarship and bogus claims to evidence regarding the “inevitability” of the “digital age transition.”)

### **Misreading the Evidence on Interindexer Consistency**

I must disagree with Mr. Weinheimer in his comments about “interindexer consistency.” He asserts that this term “represents how often different catalogers, who are fully trained, assign the same subjects to the same item. It rarely happens.” In support of this claim he footnotes one such study, “Indexing Consistency and Its Implications for Information Architecture,” a 2006 paper by Hope Olsen and Dietmar Wolfram. This paper, however, at < [www.iasummit.org/2006/files/175\\_Presentation\\_Desc.pdf](http://www.iasummit.org/2006/files/175_Presentation_Desc.pdf) >, does not provide any support at all for Mr. Weinheimer’s claim of low consistency among “catalogers who are fully trained.”

I am very skeptical of any such claims that simply cite previous literature without directly quoting what that literature actually says; and I say that for good reason. In 1991 an article entitled “Cataloging Must Change!” by Dorothy Gregor and Carol Mandel was published in *Library Journal*, making a similar claim that studies show there is only a “ten to 20 percent” agreement among subject catalogers assigning LC subject headings. When I checked out the footnotes in this article and actually read *all* of the cited studies, however, I found that not only do the studies not support the claims of Gregor and Mandel, they directly contradict them.

The “ten to 20 percent” agreement figure actually derives from studies of non-professionals trying to guess the same natural language key words, precisely in the *absence* of vocabulary control mechanisms such as thesauri or Library of Congress Subject Headings, and training in their use. I published a lengthy paper documenting these findings, “‘Cataloging Must Change!’ and Indexer Consistency Studies: Misreading the Evidence at Our Peril” in *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 3/4 (1997), 3-45. (Unlike Mr. Weinheimer—and also unlike Gregor and Mandel—I do not, in that paper, simply cite the studies which in turn cite other studies, at third hand. I provide direct quotations of what they actually say.) The new study by Olsen and Wolfram, cited by Weinheimer, is yet another one which does *not* examine the consistency of “catalogers who are fully trained”—it is, instead, a study of MLIS *students*—novices—who were “*playing the role of indexer . . . in an indexing exercise*”; moreover the paper explicitly says “*Terms were not from a controlled vocabulary.*” I would refer Mr. Weinheimer to my paper for additional evidence that 80% consistency (not 20%) among properly trained professional catalogers using LCSH is a reasonable expectation. It does not help that Mr. Weinheimer endorses, without reading the evidence he cites, the “urban myth” of indexer inconsistency among professional catalogers who are following the rules in assigning LCSH terms. (And yes, I am quite aware that much of the cataloging copy being spewed into OCLC these days is, to the discredit of the profession in general and of LC in particular, neither done nor reviewed by *trained professional catalogers*. LC’s abdication of its leadership responsibilities, in failing to adequately review and correct copy cataloging, is particularly to be deplored.)

### **The Integral Need for Reference Service**

I agree with Mr. Weinheimer, however, when he says, “Our users would use digital materials far more often if they knew what existed and where they are, but users don’t know how to find them.” I would add, however, on the basis of having helped tens of thousands of researchers at all levels, over more than a quarter century, “Our users would *also* use printed books, microforms, site-restricted databases and CD-ROMs, undigitized journals, newspaper articles, government documents, encyclopedias, literature review articles, published bibliographies, manuscripts, and people sources if they knew what existed and where they are, but they don’t know how to find *them*, either.” My daily experience at the reference desk is that researchers are routinely delighted to have such things pointed out to them when they had no prior idea at all of how much they were missing on the Internet. (It was specifically to address this problem that I wrote *The Oxford Guide to Library Research*.) I will return to this point, on

the integral need for reference service, below.

### **Proper and Improper Reliance on Remote Storage**

I am very aware that “most libraries have no choice except to store books offsite and that many libraries have multiple locations”—especially since I myself have participated in deciding which volumes of LC’s own overcrowded collections will go to remote storage. The fact that such choices must be made, however, does not mean that all (or most) *books* should go to remote storage warehouses (a viewpoint endorsed by the Calhoun Report but rejected by the U. of Chicago study [which warehouses primarily serials]), *or that there is no continuing need for a substantial core collection of books to remain onsite, shelved in subject classified arrangement.* The latter enables scholars to simply *recognize* relevant pages (in close proximity to each other), whose keywords they could not specify in advance in a blank search box. (See the various user studies reporting that browsing remains an important avenue of access to book collections < <http://www.guild2910.org/google.htm> > as well as the U. of Chicago study which specifically addresses the importance of browsing to scholarly research, at < <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/staffweb/groups/space/abbott-report.html#III> >.) As in the Dreyfus example that I used in my previous paper < [www.guild2910.org/AFSCMEWhatIsGoingOn.pdf](http://www.guild2910.org/AFSCMEWhatIsGoingOn.pdf) pp. 17-19 >, it is often the case in the real world—whose requirements tend to be overlooked at “digital library” conferences—that scholars *would not be able to think up the right words to type into a search box*, even if the texts *were* completely digitized, fully searchable, and freely available to everyone remotely.

Scholarship requires *recognition* access, not just *prior-specification* access, to relevant sources. Recognition access is highly dependent on prior conceptual categorization of the sources.

### **The Continuing Need for Onsite Books Shelved in Subject Classified Arrangements**

In regard to the need for conceptual categorization provided by the subject-classified shelving of books, however, the Library of Congress is now, once again, trying to embark on a course to radically change the very structure of its own cataloging work, and thereby to hobble the *recognition capacity* of scholars in all libraries dependent on the quality and completeness of LC’s classification data. As with the Calhoun Report’s calls to “dismantle LCSH” and “eliminate LCSH” entirely, LC’s brand new “Acquisitions and Bibliographic Access Workflow Task Report” of June 9, 2006 (chaired by Judy Mansfield and Maureen Landry, not yet publicly released) *calls for the wholesale abandonment of classified book shelving.* (This was, not coincidentally, an implication of the Calhoun Report, although not specifically articulated in it. See my review of the Calhoun Report at < [www.guild2910.org](http://www.guild2910.org) >, p. 18.) One of the most radical and far-reaching recommendations affecting the work of AFSCME 2910 (Guild) members in this new report is buried in section “C. Workflow,” page 3:

*Shelve all receipts by fixed location, e.g., by accession number or an MLC-style*

number [Minimal Level Cataloging]. Provide a classification number in the 050 field of the bibliographic record to support browsing *in the online catalog, but do not build complete physical addresses for books from the classification number.*  
[Italics added]

As I have previously documented, the abandonment of subject-classified shelving of books has long been on the agenda of the current LC administration (see “What Is Going On at the Library of Congress?” < [www.guild2910.org/AFSCMEWhatIsGoingOn.pdf](http://www.guild2910.org/AFSCMEWhatIsGoingOn.pdf) > pp. 9-13 and “Height Shelving Threat to the Nation’s Libraries” at < <http://studentorg.cua.edu/slislab/shelving.htm> >.) This disastrous proposal—I can think of few that will do more serious damage to the capacity of American scholars, across the board, to exploit large book collections—is now being actively proposed, without prior consultation with outside stakeholders, by LC managers as the Library’s new policy. (The assertion that browsing mere catalog records in classified order, as opposed to the full texts themselves, is an acceptable substitute—such an assertion is ludicrous to actual scholars who have *experience* of the difference.)

### **The Larger Information Universe and Its Several Component Parts**

Although I maintain that the maintenance of subject classified shelving is crucial to research libraries, I must correct Mr. Weinheimer, who evidently thinks I am mistaking a part of the information universe for the whole:

Mr. Mann likes browsing. I do too, but users need to be aware that browsing is not the best way to find information. The example that he provides of “browsing” to find information relevant to the Dreyfus case is interesting, but ignores the fact that most libraries have no choice except to store books offsite and that many libraries have multiple locations, so that a reliance on browsing the shelves guarantees that users will miss many materials. I have met some users who believe that if they browse the shelves “well enough,” they don’t need to use the catalog at all!

I, too, have met many, many such users who are very naive in their belief that browsing the shelves is the primary means of doing research—just as many others think, with equal naivete, that Google searching is all that is ever needed. I do not myself believe either search technique is routinely “the best way to find information”; but the confinements of my “What is Going on at the Library of Congress?” paper did not allow amplification of just when browsing in the bookstacks is appropriate, and when it is not appropriate (given the alternatives).

I would say, however, on the basis of much direct experience, that there remain times when *no other search technique* actually works to provide the needed information. Browsing in the classified bookstacks is very seldom the first tack I take; but it remains necessary for some situations. It’s like having a variety of tools in one’s toolbox—sometimes you need a hammer, but on other occasions you need a saw, a drill, a screwdriver, a crowbar, a wrench, a pliers, a

scissors, a tweezers, a bolt cutter, or duct tape to get the job done. The fact that any one tool may be used much less often than another does not render that tool unnecessary, or replaceable by the other instruments. Each does a job that the others cannot do. In the total scheme of things, browsing books arranged in classified order on library shelves is only one of the necessary means of access—one avenue among many to some, not all, resources—but it remains necessary nonetheless. The same can be said of any other avenue of subject searching, including the use of subject headings in OPACs or keywords in Google. (I doubt that Mr. Weinheimer would disagree with this; and I recognize that he, too, could not spell out everything he believes within the space of his short paper.)

An even larger issue, however, is this: Library cataloging and classification operations cannot undertake to provide access to *all* knowledge records everywhere—any more than Google can provide access to all knowledge records everywhere (in spite of its grandiose claim to “organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible”). I think cataloging librarians (or their managers) and Google employees are both guilty of *hubris* on this account. Uncorrected, that situation can only lead to both groups biting off more than they can chew, to the detriment of researchers everywhere who will suffer because neither group is doing *well* the limited range of things that it *can* do which the other one cannot do.

Librarians especially need avoid thinking that it is primarily up to us to “control” or “provide access to” the entire World Wide Web—and that the Web should be our primary area of concern. The Google corporation alone is worth over \$150 *billion* dollars. Obviously it has a better chance of dealing with the entire Web than any research libraries do, singly or in combination. Libraries, by contrast, would better serve our more limited scholarly community by incorporating into our OPACs the kinds of records (as in the **Web sites** example above) that will enable scholars to find selected, high quality Web sites *in relationship to the book literature that continues to need the cataloging and classification which Google cannot provide*.

Again, contrary to the naivete of the Calhoun Report, research libraries and Google have different *niches* to fill—nor are all of the required niches filled by *either* OPACs, classified bookstacks, *or* Internet search engines. This really requires a whole book, but let me outline a larger array of niches; for an extensive justification of them I must refer interested readers to my *Oxford Guide to Library Research* book. All of these search methods (each “governing” overlapping pools of content) are needed for the promotion of scholarship:

1. Controlled vocabulary searches (including but not limited to LC subject headings)
2. Searches done via browsing arrays of classified material (including but not limited to books arranged in subject categories by LCC or Dewey [or other scheme], on library shelves)
3. Keyword searches (including but not limited to Google or OPACs).
4. Citation searches (enabling researches to see where a known source is cited by subsequent works, via subscription databases, print sources, and keyword

- searching of footnote elements in digitized full texts)
5. Related record searches (enabling researchers to find scholarly sources having footnotes in common with sources already known to be relevant)
  6. Searches via published bibliographies (mainly, though not exclusively, limited to undigitized print volumes)
  7. Boolean combination and limitation searches (mainly, though not exclusively, limited to digitized resources)
  8. Searches using people sources (not all of whom can be found via Internet contacts)
  9. Type-of-literature searches (i.e., by format [encyclopedias, chronologies, atlases—as in research library reference collections], not simply by subject)

Each one of these nine search techniques is required in the “tool box” of researchers (or reference librarians) who need to pursue scholarship rather than mere “quick information seeking.” *Each is necessary, although none is sufficient by itself.* I do not mean to imply or suggest that each of the nine search techniques is, or must be, used equally as often as the other eight. (Analogously, there is no rule that says a hammer must be used more often than a screwdriver or a drill.) The criteria for inclusion in the list are:

- (a) that each is potentially useful in *any* subject area,
- (b) that none is confined to English language sources alone, and
- (c) that each is capable of turning up significant information that lies, for practical purposes, in a blind spot to the other search methods.

For the latter reason each must be made available by research libraries when their goal is to promote scholarship rather than simply to provide “something” quickly. (This is not a “closed” list; it is open to additions meeting the three criteria.)

Further, formal instruction is required in the use of all of these techniques to spell out the trade-offs between their advantages and disadvantages, their strengths and weaknesses—and to provide the crucial “overview” insight that whatever information lies in a blind spot to one search method is usually discoverable by one or more of the alternatives. None of this is difficult to teach; but all of it *must be taught* because none of it is immediately or intuitively obvious. (The weaknesses of keyword searching, alone, are especially not obvious to most researchers.)

A number of commentators, Mr. Weinheimer among them, have said that librarians need to do more to integrate library resources and Web sites, and I fully agree; but I object to the naivete that the needed integration of *all* elements needed for scholarly research can be fully accomplished *either* by adding more Web sites to OPAC coverage (as in the above **Web sites** suggestion) *or* by simply adding more full-text library content to the Web. Both of these partial measures assume, mistakenly, that the whole problem can be solved, to begin with, by

mechanisms that reduce to computer displays. The fact remains that other mechanisms are also necessary for scholarship—classified and browsable book stacks, published (and copyrighted) bibliographies, people sources (including reference librarians), and reference collections among them—which cannot be reduced to digital screen displays. Even the full range of necessary computer resources themselves cannot be made freely available to everyone, everywhere, because their site-licensed content and proprietary softwares are available only via subscriptions. Subscription access can be made *freely* available to *everyone*—not just to an exclusive clientele of password holders—*only* within physical library walls.

The points most relevant to the current debate on the function of library catalogs (and, equally important, the function of classified bookstacks) are these: Library cataloging and classification, by themselves, can *never* provide access to *everything* scholars need to find. Indeed, all of LC (and Dewey) cataloging and classification are just subsets of #1 and #2 [above, p. 13]—they do not and cannot cover the whole array of required resources.

In the same way, however, Google (and other Internet engines) can *never* provide access to *everything* scholars need, in terms of either content or search techniques; most of Google itself is mainly a subset of #3. (I am aware that the Google “Directory” option does not fit here.) What is needed in terms of a “paradigm shift” is not merely a greater awareness of the open Internet (a subset of #3), but a much more inclusive expansion of service to provide *all* of the elements from #1 through #9.

The library profession is running into serious trouble in persistently trying to reduce the entire information universe to “fit” into smaller niches that need to be regarded as component parts of a much larger universe—parts that individually *cannot* encompass the entire thing.

### **“Under the Hood” Programming for “Seamless One-Stop Shopping”?**

The whole information universe will just not fit into OPAC searching, *or* browsing bookstacks, *or* Google searching—or even the combination of all three. Nor will extensive “under the hood” programming behind library portals, offering federated searching of hundreds of databases, succeed in capturing the full array of necessary search options. (I say “necessary” because, again, each of these nine components is indeed capable of turning up important information that lies in a blind spot to the other search techniques—not on *every* question, to be sure, but often enough that it’s necessary to regard each as a distinct option that does not fully “reduce” to any of the others.) (For an extended, concrete example of the problems with federated searching, see *The Oxford Guide to Library Research* [2005], pp. 80-83.)

Scholarship is necessarily iterative—i.e., proceeding in successive steps, in directions that change based on the results of earlier steps. For that reason alone, “one stop shopping” *cannot* be adequate to scholarly research—whenever I hear the proposal of “seamless” and “one-stop” searching held up as the goal for libraries I can only conclude that its proponents don’t know the difference between promoting scholarship vs. providing merely “something” quickly. Nor can

all of the steps of scholarly inquiry be accommodated by “progressive limitation” of previous inquiries—what will usually be necessary are entirely different searches, using entirely different techniques that will produce results that keyword searching cannot match—i.e., no matter how the keyword results are ranked, weighted, “query-expanded,” or displayed. What is *required* here is better *education* rather than merely better “under the hood” programming. The differences between scholarship, on the one hand, and finding “something” quickly and remotely, on the other, are real and important; for a list of them, again, see my review of the Calhoun Report at < [www.guild2910.org](http://www.guild2910.org) >. (At the risk of oversimplifying, I am making a distinction between *research* questions, which do not have a “right” answer, and *reference* questions, which do. The latter can indeed fall into the domain of “quick information seeking”—which can be one *component* of scholarship, but never the whole thing. Scholarship aims at the level of integrating and understanding all relevant considerations rather than at the level of finding “snippets” of information.)

Attempts to make library catalogs fully revelatory of all requisite resources and search techniques, to an audience of remote users who don’t want to leave their “cozy dorm rooms”—such attempts can only wind up misleading the users into thinking they are getting “everything” when they are in fact missing most of what is actually available to them. They are even missing most of what is available on the Internet if their searching is hamstrung by blank search boxes that require precise specification, in advance, of all desired keywords. Offsite researchers who aspire to scholarship will indeed miss most of what they need to see, most of the time, not only because of the limitations of Internet search softwares, but also because copyrighted and site-licensed content cannot be facily or freely accessed offsite by anyone who wants it. That fact is not going to change.

### **The Continuing Need for Reference Librarians**

What catalogs and portals cannot do, however, what classified bookstacks cannot do, what Internet search engines cannot do, what federated searching cannot do—these things *can* be done by reference librarians who, far beyond the capacity of any “under the hood programming,” are able to provide researchers with expert guidance on the *full range of options* available to them for their particular topics, in an *intelligent sequence of use*, with the best search options and sources *segregated from thousands of blind alleys, dead ends, and mountains of unwanted irrelevancies*.

Reference work, in other words, is not just a nice “add on” optional service; in its dual function of providing point-of-use instruction and overview classes it is *integral* to the efficient use of research libraries and to the promotion of scholarship in general. It cannot be replaced by “under the hood” programming improvements in library catalogs or portals, *especially* when such programming dumbs down multiple complex systems to a lowest common denominator of keyword searching—and also fails to search the vast arrays of resources that are not digitized at all.

If there is any hope for a real solution to providing researchers with access to “everything” they need, then catalogers and reference librarians need to work together—and cataloging theorists need to stop acting as though their own catalogs can indeed provide “everything” in “one stop, seamless” searches, as though reference work is no longer needed at all. Catalogers cannot, in the very nature of things, solve the whole problem themselves; but the parts of the solution that they do contribute are nonetheless necessary, because Google searching (which requires *prior specification* of exact keywords, and which displays results by *relevance ranking*) cannot replace cataloging (which provides *conceptual categorization* and thereby promotes *recognition access* to sources within the categories whose exact terms cannot be specified in advance). The partial means of access provided by both catalogers and Google engineers, however, still need to be integrated into a much larger “whole”—and that integration can be done only by reference librarians who are not limited solely to resources and search techniques that can be provided freely to anyone, anywhere, at any time on computer screens.

But even good reference librarians cannot do what needs to be done if our tool kits are depleted of the full variety of tools that we need (digital and print [and manuscript and microform], onsite and remote, freely available and subscription) to get into all of the resources we need (public domain and copyrighted, English and foreign language, recent and old, in-print and out-of-print) through the wide variety of techniques we must use (the minimum nine listed above [pp. 13-14]). We need both search techniques and content that cannot be fully captured or presented to researchers by either library catalogs and portals or Internet search engines. But in trying to find *books*—which are more important than most other formats to *scholarship*—we *do* need high quality work from professional library catalogers. *And we need those catalogers to continually develop and expand their systems of vocabulary control, authority work, and classification.* For scholarly research, the options of relevance ranking of keywords, tagging, and folksonomy referrals are not *sufficient* as avenues of access to book collections. They are not adequately systematic; they are not adequately inclusive or comprehensive; they are not adequately revelatory.

### **Dumbing Down the Capability of Scholarly Research: LC Management’s Dismantling of Cataloging and Classification**

Unfortunately, we are in much greater danger, these days, of losing the necessary “tools” provided by library catalogers than we are of losing any of the other tools supplied by commercial publishers and vendors. And that danger is a direct consequence of something the American Library Association itself has pointedly noted in its recent testimony before Congress (7/27/06): “It appears that the importance of Library of Congress cataloging to the nation’s libraries and to the development of an educated and informed populace is not sufficiently appreciated by the Library’s senior administration.” LC’s increasing reliance on inadequately reviewed copy cataloging, outsourcing, minimal level cataloging to deal with hundreds of thousands of books in backlogs, elimination of subject expertise in cataloging teams, “service shedding,” and cutbacks to authority work and subject cataloging development in order to make speed “the gold standard” of cataloging—as well as a radical change in institutional funding

priorities that diminishes cataloging in general to a lower level of importance than digitizing copyright-free special collections—all such trends coalesce in dumbing down the quality, depth, and comprehensiveness of access that scholars throughout the country will have to the nation's *books*, in all of the libraries that depend on the quality, consistency, and professionalism of LC's cataloging and classification work.

Librarian of Congress James Billington has said “The overwhelming challenge facing the Library in its third century is how to superimpose the exploding world of digital knowledge and information onto the still expanding world of books and other traditional analog materials.” That statement, unlike some others from LC management, at least recognizes that the world of print sources is itself “still expanding.” The challenge facing LC, however, is not a matter of “superimposition” but rather one of *balancing* the management of digital and non-digital resources and search techniques while *all* of these elements expand simultaneously. It is not a question of “everything” making a *transition* to full-text digital formats, which is the distorting template through which the LC administration views all cataloging problems.

Many LC managers are not comfortable with maintaining a balance of all of the elements needed for scholarly research. They have settled instead into the comfortable groove of a “one search box/one size fits all” mentality that belies the true extent, depth, and complexity of the work to be done. They have become “very comfortable” with an “exclusively digital” mind set, and have no desire to update their skills to support the full range of options needed by research libraries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They have settled into an outdated 1990s “paperless society” belief that “everything is transitioning to digital formats”—a perspective long since discredited by the persistence of copyright law, by the continuing unpopularity of e-book formats, by the staggering increases in conventional book publication, by user studies confirming the importance of browsing in library book stacks, by the ever-increasing costs of digital preservation (with remarkably few implementable results), and by the expanding needs of scholarly research for the *full* variety of sources, tools, and search techniques that cannot be reduced to electronic portals or Google search boxes.

Indeed, the highly touted “digital library transition” at LC itself remains almost negligible in scale—the 10 million images in American Memory (which took over a dozen years to scan) have been selected, to begin with, in such a way that in most cases “one scanned image” *equals* “one complete item” (as in the case of photos, maps, and manuscript pages). If this method of counting were to be applied to LC's book collection, however, then each page of each book would have to “count” as one scanned image. Given that LC has 20 million books, and given the U. of California's “How Much Information” study's assumption that a typical book has 300 pages, a simple calculation (20 million books x 300 pages/book = 6 billion images) indicates that the 10 million images in American Memory amount to *less than two-tenths of one percent* of the six billion un-scanned page images in LC's book collection. And the Library continues to receive printed books at such a rate (1200 per day) that 10 million new page images are coming into the collections *every month*.

Can such a microscopic, and *shrinking*, percentage of LC's digitized holdings (in comparison to the undigitized) continue to be misrepresented to Congressional oversight committees as truly constituting a "transition" to a "digital age"? Although it is very popular with K-12 audiences, should a project that has produced such insignificant scholarly content *in comparison to the full Library* continue to be given *so disproportionate a priority of funding and attention* while funding is diminished for our much larger and more important responsibility—high quality cataloging of the Library's book collections, which cataloging is used by libraries in Congressional districts throughout the country? Indeed, not only has the LC administration been underfunding cataloging positions for years, it has offered voluntary *incentives* for the most experienced catalogers to *retire*.

A new development is in progress, however, whereby LC will work with private funding from the Open Content Alliance to digitize the full texts of millions of books from its general collections—but, unlike the Google Print Project, this one will not attempt to digitize any post-1923 books that may still be under copyright protection. As a reference librarian, I can only applaud such a project—provided that LC management does not read more into it than the project is capable of delivering. In other words, if management runs true to form, it is likely to regard digitized texts of old books, searchable only via "relevance ranked" keywords, as *replacements* for (rather than supplements to) subject-classified shelving of the older volumes; in which case it will attempt to send all (or most) pre-1923 books to remote storage, where they will be shelved not systematically in subject categories but rather in tubs controlled by bar code labels. And it will tout this move as an example for other research libraries to follow. Reference staff (who are sometimes called upon to use the closed stacks unavailable to readers) would lose *recognition* access to the texts of the earlier volumes.

Moreover, in the face of any such (commendable) program to digitize pre-1923 works, it is highly advisable to remember the results of the 2001 study of 40,742 interlibrary loan requests initiated in OhioLINK (*Journal of Library Administration* 34: 329-38). This survey found that 42% of interlibrary loan requests came from undergraduates—the very people who "don't use libraries," according to LC management—and, further, that half of the requested books were published in the preceding seven years, and 90% since 1960. In other words, the Open Content Alliance digitization project will be *no substitute* for a quickly-accessible onsite collection of the copyrighted books that are still needed to answer the vast bulk of user inquiries.

In LC management's view, professional catalogers (represented by AFSCME 2910) are perceived not as providing the backbone of a national service on which all other libraries increasingly depend, nor is their work viewed as filling a crucial niche requirement in the overall information universe. The work of conceptual categorization and classification of the scores of thousands of books published every year, and the standardization and linkage of their retrieval points, is seen as outdated simply because it focuses on something *other* than "digitizing everything." Since the work that catalogers are doing with printed books does not fit the template of "digitizing everything" and since the catalogers' work requires human conceptual thought rather than computer "relevance ranking" algorithms to accomplish, for these "reasons"

catalogers are perceived as dinosaurs who have “no desire to update their skills in the digital era” (“Library of Congress Undergoing Workforce Transformation,” *Government Executive* magazine, 8/16/06). “Updating skills” in this context, however, means the *abandonment* of professional concerns for authority work, standardization of search terms, precoordination, and cross-referencing”—it *means* that, in management’s agenda, the human creation of bibliographic records is, ideally, to be *replaced* by “Automatic metadata generation”—or, at the very least, by a system of radically stripped-down LCSH terms that can be slapped onto records by anyone, “without agonizing” over the *relationships* of the terms to each other or to LC Classification numbers.

Indeed, this administration has made statements to the effect that high quality cataloging in online catalogs, and equally high quality classification for shelving books in browsable stacks, are not necessary *at all* “in the digital era.” To judge from its own statements, this administration believes that Google type keyword searching is all that is needed. (To quote from the distributed minutes of LC’s March 24, 2004, Cataloging Management Team [CMT] Meeting: “Deanna [Marcum] said that Google was seeking agreements with libraries to digitize the content they owned. If Google succeeds in digitizing a library of eight to ten million volumes and making the content available on the Web, what happens to every other library? *She said Library of Congress cataloging would not be needed in these circumstances.* The LC role might be to augment the digital core with its special collections” [italics added]; see the quotation in context at: < [www.guild2910.org/AFSCMEWhatIsGoingOn.pdf](http://www.guild2910.org/AFSCMEWhatIsGoingOn.pdf) >, pp. 4-5.) Further, LC management has somehow gotten Congress to look the other way while the radical switch of Library priorities away from the *cataloging* of *books* to the provision of *keyword access* (non-standardized, non-categorized, non-linked) to *non-book special collections* is being set in concrete through unalterable reorganizations and changed staffing patterns.

Perhaps such reductionist “digital age” proponents, who are resistant to any change that would undermine their comfortable belief that “everything” can be made available simply by means of keywords typed into a Google search box, should themselves be encouraged to retire through targeted buy-outs. What the Library needs for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is an innovative new generation of librarians who can think “outside the box” of the Internet—who are not cozily settled in to the notion that LC’s goal is primarily to provide “something” quickly and remotely to non-scholarly undergraduates (“something” being deemed adequate until “everything” is *inevitably* digitized—with keyword searching alone being deemed adequate to *find* whatever is needed). What the Library needs is a new generation of librarians who believe, instead, in clarifying and reinforcing the Library’s distinctive niche role in the intellectual life of this country. That role entails the acquisition of the greatest array of scholarly resources in the world, the preservation of it, and the promotion of substantive scholarship through the creation of high quality cataloging and classification data for book collections—while also making available [acquiring] and explaining [reference] the full range of alternatives created by commercial interests [publishers, vendors, and Internet providers], whose work neither duplicates nor supersedes LC’s contributions to scholarship.

While partners are certainly necessary in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, so is the need for distinctive leadership from the Library of Congress in the creation and maintenance of library standards, especially in the cataloging and classification of the nation's unique copyright deposit collection of books, supplemented by the largest purchase-collection of foreign books to be found anywhere on earth. The one institution that *gets* the greatest collection of books to work on (at great expense to U.S. taxpayers) also has the greatest responsibility to provide leadership in setting *and maintaining* the standards for cataloging and classifying them. The responsibility to set standards and provide leadership cannot be farmed out to collective bodies whose much smaller acquisitions do not enable them to see the relationships (such as subject similarities and series membership) among volumes within the largest, most language-diverse collection in the world. But it is precisely this responsibility that LC is now actively trying to shirk, under cover of the false assertion that cataloging “in a digital age” isn't necessary any more.

Indeed, the newest proposal of the current LC administration, as indicated above (p. 11), is to abandon the shelving of books in subject-classified order and to eliminate the full Cutter numbers (the second component of the call numbers) that, up to now, we have always provided for the whole nation, so that other libraries won't need to do the considerable extra work of “finishing” the tail end of each class number individually. This policy, if implemented, would have disastrous implications for research libraries everywhere: it would require them either to spend much more money on their own individual cataloging operations—or to stop shelving their own book collections in subject order for browsing access by their own scholarly communities. (Such browsing access has indeed been deemed unnecessary by both LC management and the Calhoun report which it commissioned—both recommend the use of shared offsite warehouses for the storage of books.) If LC stops providing full numbers, cataloging costs will skyrocket in every research library in Congressional districts throughout the country.

Significantly, this latest abdication of standards is being advocated at the same time LC management is also striving to eliminate subject expertise itself, across the board, in LC's own cataloging—i.e., Beacher Wiggins, LC's Director for Acquisitions & Bibliographic Access, is reported to have said “now all catalogers should catalog in all classes A - Z” (report by Division Chief Angela Kinney at the Social Sciences Cataloging Division meeting 8/16/06). This pronouncement has not become official policy—strong objections to it, already voiced internally, are apparently resulting in some managerial backpedalling—but *that such a proposal could being made, to begin with, comes as no surprise from the current Cataloging Directorate*. One veteran LC cataloger (and AFSCME 2910 member), Phil Barber, has called this move “another brutal attack on quality subject cataloging and accessibility for reference/serious researcher purposes.” Barber, who has 29 years' cataloging experience, a Ph.D., and two subject Master's degrees, continues:

. . . in every case I know of in subject cataloging when a cataloger takes on an additional classification schedule for assignment, he/she has always been given at least an orientation to subject cataloging in that area, including both an orientation to the classification schedule (usually one-on-one with someone who has previously done that

schedule) and an orientation (also one-on-one) to the peculiar quirk of subject cataloging in that area, plus an over-view of the particular subject headings likely to be used in that area. What you really need, of course, is a subject master's degree or quality undergrad major to handle properly the subject cataloging of any area.

I have many times given or received such training; in a complicated schedule it could take weeks or months of training. . . . The only persons who don't see the importance of such training are those who don't see or care about the importance of quality subject cataloging.

[Phil Baber, internal AFSCME e-mail 10/6/2006]

Such hard-won expertise, however, is now regarded as unnecessary by the highest levels of LC management. (The fact that subject expertise is present within LC's cataloging department, however, means that it does not need to be present in every Congressional district whose libraries can rely on the accuracy and appropriateness of the subject categorizations created at LC.)

The "spin" now being provided by LC management is that it has chosen to concentrate on language expertise at the expense of subject expertise—but the fact is, the greatest library in the nation has the professional responsibility to provide *both* for the millions of taxpayers who support it, and who do indeed use its cataloging products in every Congressional district. And if either professional realm (language *or* subject expertise) has to be curtailed so that the digitization of less than two-tenths of one percent of the collections—old, copyright-free images at that—can be given a higher funding priority, then a new look at the Library's overall priorities by Congressional oversight committees is very much in order.

These cutbacks truly represent a new nadir in what was once a proud history of LC professionalism. They are rightly matters of deep concern not only to the 1,600 professionals represented by AFSCME 2910, but to professional librarians throughout the entire country, especially since the responsible decision makers at LC are so few in number and so non-representative of the national library community. In that connection, LC management has now announced the convening of a Working Group for the Future of Bibliographic Control, with representatives from the American Library Association, the Association of Research Libraries, and others to discuss the future of cataloging—but it is no secret that this group had to be assembled, to begin with, to provide the LC administration with a way to deal with the firestorm of outrage that sprang up after its previous unilateral decisions to discontinue Series Authority work, and to commission the Calhoun Report as a justification to (among other things) "dismantle" and "eliminate" LC Subject Headings. One sincerely hopes that outside librarians (and scholars dependent on their work) will join AFSCME 2910 in making their views on the need for high quality cataloging known not only to this Working Group, but also to LC's Congressional oversight committees (House and Senate Appropriations Committees, and Joint Committee on the Library).

And one also hopes that Congressional committee members themselves will not facilely

swallow assertions from LC managers that high quality *book* cataloging and classification no longer needs high priority funding *because*—they assert—we are making a “transition” to “a digital age.” When over a thousand printed books continue to come in to the Library of Congress every day, and when so microscopically small a percentage of the Library’s holdings has actually been scanned for the Internet, does the claim of a “digital age transition” really hold up to scrutiny? The “transition” that the Library of Congress administration is asserting to be on the scale of a range of mountains looks much more like a string of molehills to anyone else whose view is not filtered by the radical distortions of their “digital age” lens. Is their blinkered focus on less than two-tenths of one percent of the collections enough to justify the evisceration of the high quality cataloging and classification work, applicable to tens of millions of volumes, that LC has always provided for all of the other libraries in the country? Does their embrace of the Open Content Alliance’s digitization of pre-1923 volumes, through private funding, really make up for so much public funding being already expended to digitize so microscopic a portion of the Library’s holdings, when at the same time the cataloging and classification operations are being starved?

No one disputes in the least that we need to pay more attention to the proliferation of digital resources now available; and no one is making foolish claims that “everything should just stay the same.” Commentators who make these “straw man” assertions show remarkably little knowledge of the *technical requirements* of providing efficient access to extraordinarily complex and varied pools of informational resources—resources that are not fully covered by *either* library catalogs *or* Internet search engines. There is indeed much work to be done in bringing the *full* range of scholarly resources to our varied clientele—but that expansion of work entails much more than an exclusive focus on only the subset of resources which can be provided quickly and remotely—and legally—on the Internet. That expansion must include the maintenance of mechanisms of proven worth and reliability for providing systematic (rather than haphazard) access to the nation’s growing stock of un-digitized printed *books*, which mechanisms are not superseded by “automatic metadata generation,” lacking the conceptual thinking of highly skilled professional catalogers having real subject expertise.

It is a substantive and legitimate criticism of LC management that it habitually shows every sign of wishing to throw out a very real and very live “baby” with the bath water. The “re-engineering” of LC’s professional work for a “digital age” that it proposes is dangerously blinkered and short-sighted in its naive assumption that “everything” can be made available “with ease and precision” by a combination of Google’s (or Open Content Alliance’s) digitization of books joined with LC’s digitization of special collections—to the neglect of professional cataloging and classification work that is *more important than ever* in remedying the problem of massive “junk” retrieval that is routinely *created* by automated search mechanisms lacking human intervention by catalogers. The biggest problems scholars have—that of gaining *overview perspectives* on the literature of their topics (rather than just seeing “something”)—are *solved* by the intervention of professional catalogers. The very same problems, however, are *exacerbated* by the *lack* of such intervention when reliance is placed, instead, on automatic indexing algorithms.

It is time for professional librarians everywhere—both inside and outside the Library of Congress—to speak up in defense of maintaining the cataloging and classification systems that LC management is trying to cut back on a wholesale basis. The American Library Association has hit the nail on the head: “It appears that the importance of Library of Congress cataloging to the nation’s libraries and to the development of an educated and informed populace is not sufficiently appreciated by the Library’s senior administration.”