2013

Catalogers Unite! Creating Documentation through Collaboration

Patricia K. Falk
Bowling Green State University, pkfalk@bgsu.edu

Elizabeth Hertenstein
Bowling Green State University, eherten@bgsu.edu

Stefanie Hunker
Bowling Green State University, sdennis@bgsu.edu

Introduction

Cataloging is a discipline that encounters change on a regular basis. In recent years, the changes have occurred more frequently with rapid advances in technology. As technology improves and materials and formats are added to collections, it can be difficult for cataloging departments to remain up-to-date and be able to document all of the changes in their standards and procedures. Along with technological and format changes, many institutions have had staff reductions due to economic conditions, attrition, or other organizational restructuring. This can lead to a loss of departmental history and knowledge and create a void in communication and documentation.

Like other academic institutions Bowling Green State University (BGSU) has experienced the challenges mentioned above, which have created a need for collaboration among existing cataloging staff to formulate documentation for local cataloging practices. This article will include a background of cataloging documentation at BGSU, a review of existing library literature, and the process by which BGSU is creating a cataloging manual through the collaboration of its current catalogers.

A Background of Cataloging at BGSU

Cataloging at BGSU is decentralized in the Jerome Library and has been for many years. The materials in the main collections and some of the special collections are cataloged by personnel in the main cataloging unit in technical services, but much of the special collections materials are cataloged by staff in the music, popular culture, and archival units. The main reason is that the special collections materials generally require different procedures in preparation and housing, and often require the expertise

of the staff working in those collections. This practice also minimized the opportunity for loss or theft of valuable materials if they were transported to unsecure areas for cataloging.

In the past five years, there have been dramatic staff losses in the main cataloging department, including the retirement of the cataloging coordinator. This has caused a loss of cataloging knowledge that is not easily replaced, as these catalogers had nearly a century of collective experience. Thus, it became vital for the remaining catalogers to improve communication among the main cataloging staff and the catalogers in the special collections units. With only a few catalogers in the building and each with varying degrees of skills and knowledge, it was important to share existing procedures and ensure that all catalogers are aware of upcoming changes, such as the implementation of *Resource Description and Access* (*RDA*), the cataloging rules that will replace the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*, 2nd edition (*AACR2*).

Formerly, cataloging procedures in the main cataloging unit in technical services were limited and not always shared with catalogers in the special collections. Documentation existed for the music and popular culture materials, for which previously, there had been very minimal or non-existent instructions. For many years procedures for cataloging sound recordings was shared orally. In the Browne Popular Culture Library (BPCL) some procedures existed for the use of students who processed collections physically, but these did not include cataloging procedures. After a Special Collections Cataloger was hired in 1997, she began to create and update procedures as we implemented major changes.

Another factor that made the creation of procedures critical is the hiring of a new faculty librarian cataloger and the merger of cataloging and acquisitions functions under a new coordinator. Once the new cataloger began, it became apparent that the lack of up-to-date procedures made it difficult to learn local practices. We began to review existing cataloging procedures and processes and it became clear that they required an almost complete overhaul to better reflect current practice. We decided to create a comprehensive cataloging manual and make it electronically accessible in a shared workspace or a similar medium. The authors were charged with this project and we began the collaborative process by examining existing documentation and merging these procedures with special collections documentation that had already been established. Collaboration of this nature was never encouraged in the past, so this was a necessary first step in creating a more collaborative cataloging community.

Existing library literature shaped ideas about how to go about creating the cataloging manual at BGSU.

Literature Review

A review of the literature reveals little on methods for documenting local cataloging procedures. The literature focuses primarily on the need for documentation in technical services and tools that can be used to create documentation. Much of the literature is outdated, given the fast-paced changes associated with emerging technologies.

Evans, Intner and Weihs discussed the importance of documenting procedures for newly hired librarians, especially in departments where experienced staff have

retired or are otherwise unavailable for consultation.[i] Schmitt and Barstow summarized why policies and procedures are crucial.[ii] Their survey results found that only 66% of respondents had access to an up-to-date procedures manual, while 7% had no manual at all.[iii] The authors emphasized the need for documentation of workplace policies covering topics such as discrimination and harassment and conclude that having a policy and procedures manual can be of great value in times of crisis. Intner and Johnson encouraged administrators to make manuals "available to anyone who wishes or needs to see them."[iv] They suggested that general department policies, goals and in-depth details be included. Finally, they stressed that policies should be kept in multiple formats, but recommended online documents because they are easy to update.

The practice of putting documentation online is not unique to the library community. William Horton described the benefits of online documentation for businesses.[v] Not only can it be updated more quickly than printed materials, but online documentation can be sent electronically, allowing instant access. Online documentation can also synthesize instructions with references via links. Horton stated that online documentation is flexible in terms of archiving and updating; documents can be changed easily, which may encourage more innovation through ease of distribution and access.

White reviewed the literature of documentation in technical services departments before discussing why it is a crucial resource.[vi] White's earliest references are from the 1940s and 1950s. She argued that the topic of documentation was more prevalent historically in the literature because of the need to "make daily procedures more business-like" in this period. By the 1970s, most technical services documentation focused on the need for collection development policies. White explored the importance of documentation and concluded that it is

needed to explain workflow and goals and to encourage cooperation. Specific to cataloging

units, documentation is important for maintaining statistics, adhering to national standards, and

for training new employees. The importance of policy manuals for new hires was also discussed

by Lee.[vii] Lee stated that one form of training is to have a training manual for new employees.

She also concluded that cataloging training manuals and cataloging procedures manuals need

to be evaluated regularly and updated to maintain consistency.

Brisson discussed the use, importance, and evolution of documentation in

academic libraries.[viii] He began with a discussion of why it has been neglected in the

past and pointed to the shift in which internal documentation became more ubiquitous

with the increase of computer capabilities as a catalyst for change.   The author then

discussed why documentation is not more common. He found that documenting

procedures was often discouraged because of a perceived lack of time and the belief

that institutional knowledge would make documentation irrelevant. Brisson asserted

that with the ability to post documentation online, internal documentation of complex

procedures can now be maintained and distributed more effectively. He concluded by

discussing software tools that can be utilized by a department to develop online

manuals.

The topic of creating a manual for a cataloging department after mass

retirements and new hires was discussed by Plummer and Rigda.[ix] The authors created

an online manual at the University of Akron to overcome obstacles in training new hires.

Catalogers decided that the manual needed to focus on four core elements: "define all

local procedures and practices, provide documentation for the bibliographic description

of the various formats, provide links to essential online cataloging tools, develop

departmental information pages and provide forms for reporting monthly statistics."[x]

The authors described how they created an online manual using HTML, then detailed the process by which they created a website. The first website was not a success because of its lack of readability and overall style. The second version was more successful as they made an effort to keep it simple and to organize information by topics. It included ongoing user testing and was still being used as of the date of their publication.

A second focus of the literature on documentation covers what tools to use to create manuals online. One of the first articles to discuss online documentation was Roundy and Parthasarathy, who used WordPerfect.[xi] They found that using hypertext was crucial for providing an informative and adaptive manual in an online environment.

Scheschy discussed creating an HTML page for cataloging documentation.[xii] Before outlining how to create an online document, she first considered why online documentation is critical.[xiii] Her first argument centered on ease of maintenance. Paper documentation can be time consuming to maintain and is only reliable if individuals remember to update it. The amount of effort to update a paper manual may not be worth it for smaller changes in procedure. Online documentation is easy to update and it is also easy to distribute updates via email. Scheschy also cited the ability to add links to external documentation in online procedures as a benefit. The author described how to create appropriate HTML codes and included examples of tagging. She outlined the importance of appropriate language including using "imperative sentences, active verbs and short sentences."[xiv] Scheschy addressed design aesthetics by suggesting ideas for font and page layout and ended by stressing the importance of checking and validating one's website.

Minčič-Obradovič expanded the discussion of manuals to include the use of wikis as a means to encourage online communication.[xv] The wiki not only encourages communication across cataloging departments but also across universities in cataloging consortiums. The author argued that wikis are valuable because they are "inexpensive and encouraged collaboration and communication."[xvi] She discussed the downside of wikis, including the need for ongoing back-up and the limited number of users who can access the resource simultaneously.

Costello and Bosque discussed challenges in using wikis for online documentation at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV).[xvii] UNLV first used online communication tools in 2004 with the introduction of blogs. By 2007, they introduced the use of wikis to encourage staff communication. After surveying UNLV staff about wiki use, Costello and Bosque found that 94.7% of staff still preferred to communicate via email; only 23% (individuals were allowed to choose more than one option) preferred to communicate via the wiki.[xviii] Feedback showed that 97.4% used the wiki to find information and 62.5% used the wiki on a daily basis.[xix]

Groves began her discussion of evaluation of online department web pages by examining Western Kentucky University's (WKU) technical services web page.[xx] The author explored if and how comparable universities are using web pages to communicate information on external electronic resources. Ultimately the author found that "only 50% of libraries have web pages that include information other than personnel information." Most of the resources on web pages were links to external documentation and resources. The results of this study showed that in 2005 technical service

departments were still trying to understand how to use web pages for their internal documentation needs.

Mundle, Huie and Bangalore evaluated cataloging department web pages for thirty-six Association of Research Libraries (ARL) library web pages.[xxi] Their research focused not only on the online external tools for technical services librarians, but also on internal documentation. They found that 81.6 % of web pages had information on local policies and procedures, while 83.9% also linked to external information and tools on cataloging.

Finally, the role of catalog mentoring and policies in an online environment was addressed by Hopkins.[xxii] She found that even seasoned catalogers need help learning institutional polices and styles when starting a new job.[xxiii] There are not always individuals to answer policy or standards questions; therefore, catalogers are turning to online communities, like e-mail distribution lists to receive the guidance they need.

The current wave of retirements in many cataloging departments will again focus attention on the need for efficient methods for documenting local cataloging policies and procedures, so that remaining personnel and new hires can maintain both quality and uniformity with past practices.

Compiling the Manual

Given the challenges presented earlier in the article, the head of Technical Services charged the authors (the new cataloger among them) with revising the manual to accomplish two things: train the new cataloger and document current policies and procedures in a comprehensive manual for all of University Libraries (UL) at BGSU. We

saw this process as an opportunity to streamline workflows wherever possible, which opened up options for collaboration between units. For instance, new avenues of communication have opened up between technical services and one of the special collections units that have allowed for greater customization of records and a deeper understanding on the part of the special collections staff of cataloging practice and philosophy.

The first step was to assess the available documentation. We obtained procedures from the main cataloging unit and some special collections units. Not all special collections units had written procedures, so new information would be forthcoming from these areas. Existing procedures from the main cataloging unit were incomplete and full of redundancies. In addition, we determined that it was important that BGSU's manual include the documentation of local practice as well as links to external information.

We deleted duplicate and redundant information first. We studied legacy workflows and processes and assessed their currency and relevancy. We changed those procedures to reflect current practice where necessary. We established new workflows and procedures to address changing staff (e.g., the new cataloger, and a smaller staff than before). Additionally, UL had begun using shelf-ready materials, which changed many workflows.

Once current information was reviewed and finalized, we determined that we needed to fill some voids in the procedures. Much of the older materials consisted of text-only instructions, so we added graphic examples (e.g., screenshots or copies of MARC records) to supplement textual explanations. We also added step-by-step

instructions, since the older procedures were brief and not intuitive. We held regular discussions with the other catalogers throughout this process, so there was widespread input.

We divided the work of writing and/or reworking the procedures among the authors, and other catalogers when appropriate. We assigned special collections documentation to catalogers in those specific collections, and general cataloging documentation to one author for revision. Lists of codes and symbols (e.g., much of what would end up in the appendices) were assigned to another author. Finally, all participating catalogers shared the review of system technology documents.

In an effort to keep everyone informed, including catalogers not directly responsible for updating the manual, the Coordinator of Cataloging, and the Head of Technical Services, we created a wiki to store working documents. Everyone had access to either add documents or to review documentation in progress. Some catalogers did not feel comfortable contributing to the wiki, but did feel comfortable reviewing documents. Since some documents needed multiple reviews, it was important that everyone felt comfortable using the wiki.

As each particular section or set of instructions was finished, it was added to the wiki and the manual began to take shape. We discussed what kind of final output we wanted, and one of the authors was assigned the responsibility of compiling the numerous documents into one document with a consistent look and feel.

The sections to be included in the manual were: procedures for cataloging and processing materials for the main collection (for catalogers as well as student assistants

who process materials), Music Library and Sound Recordings Archives (MLSRA) materials'

procedures, and BPCL materials' procedures. New sections were determined to be:

procedures for Government Documents (a separate unit), Curriculum Resource Center

(CRC) and Center for Archival Collections (CAC) materials, a system technology section

which included numerous "how to" documents (e.g., how to print labels, how to perform

global updates and create macros in the integrated library system (ILS)), and generous

appendices which included much of what the old manual called procedures but were

really things such as lists of codes, prefixes, location symbols, exporting commands,

and series Cutter numbers for romance and vintage paperback series. At first the

authors thought we would include a separate section for examples near the end, but we

decided to include examples throughout the manual as relevant procedures and

processes were discussed.

The authors discussed where the new cataloging manual should reside. We

ultimately determined that the best place for the manual to reside is as a single

document in the campus course management system. This system is used by

instructors to manage their classes, but is also used by university organizations or

groups to store and share information and documents with each other. We made the

format read-only, and plan to review it every two or three years to ensure its accuracy

and relevancy. The wiki will continue to serve as a place in which to keep working

documents, such as shelf-ready information.

Problems Encountered

The decentralized nature of cataloging at BGSU has been problematic at times. This became apparent after the retirements of many of the experienced cataloging staff and the project to update the cataloging manual began. In the past, catalogers in the main cataloging unit were not accustomed to collaborating with special collections catalogers to resolve issues or to taking advantage of professional development opportunities. They did not contribute to discussions about current practice and what new practices might be like. Part of the problem was that many employees had cataloged for so long that it was second nature for them, and they were not accustomed to discussing why something might need to be changed. Some of the more experienced catalogers also had a low comfort level with technology, which initially created some difficulty in compiling materials.

After the many retirements in 2010 and 2011, we veiwed the compilation of the cataloging manual as an opportunity to standardize local practices so that it would be easier to incorporate *RDA* rules into our existing workflow and documentation and to more effectively plan for future retirements or unforeseen absences.

Lessons Learned

At present, cataloging is still decentralized at BGSU, but is much more transparent than before. Compiling the manual brought catalogers together to share information and knowledge while simultaneously guiding the new cataloger through local practices. Regular meetings are now held to ensure that all employees are aware of developments in technical services and that everyone can be involved in planning current and future projects. Whereas previous leadership in cataloging tended toward

activities in isolation, current practice cultivates a shared knowledge base with everyone having something to contribute. For example, one cataloger knows more about serials records and serials cataloging than the others and can lead a project involving the correction of serials records for inclusion into a separate shared catalog for depository materials. Another cataloger knows more about rare books cataloging and can be consulted when rare items are donated to special collections. Still another feels more comfortable with new technology than others and can lead that area.

The cataloging manual, while documenting and standardizing local practices, has also brought a sense of accountability to cataloging procedures. We found that with the implementation of *RDA* in our near future, updating our current documentation provided a baseline that was not there before. We are now well positioned to compare our current procedures with *RDA* and determine what changes we will be needed to make this transition. Creating this manual through inter-departmental collaboration offered us an opportunity to build on existing knowledge and expertise and share them more widely.

NOTES

[i] C. Edward Evans, Sheila S. Intner and Jean Weihs, *Introduction to Technical Services* (Santa Barbara: Libraries Unlimited, 2011), 452-458.

[ii] Stephanie Schmitt and Sandra Barstow, "Policies and Procedures Manuals in Technical Services." *The Serials Librarian* 46, no. 3-4 (2004), 257-262, http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J123v46n03_10

[iii] Ibid., 258.

iv   Sheila S. Intner and Peggy Johnson, *Fundamentals of Technical Services Management* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2008), 24-25.

v William Horton, *Designing and Writing Online Documentation Hypermedia for Self-Supporting Products* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 1994), 6-24.

vi Hollie C. White, "Documentation in Technical Services." *The Serials Librarian* 49, no. 3 (2006), 47-55, http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J123v49n03_04

vii Deborah Lee, "The Janus Effect: On-the-Job Training of Twenty-First-Century Catalogers" in *Practical Strategies for Cataloging Departments* (Santa Barbara: Libraries Unlimited, 2011), 51-63.

viii Roger Brisson, "Online Documentation in Library Technical Services," *Technical Services Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1999), 1-19, http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J124v16n03_01.

ix Karen A. Plummer and Christine Rigda, "Creating an Online Cataloging Manual: A Case Study," *Technical Services Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (2004), 25-36, http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J124v22n02_03

x Ibid., 29.

xi Tamara Roundy and Kalyani Parthasarathy, "The Procedures Manual Goes Online: Creating an Online Manual Using a Word Processor," *Computers in Libraries* 16, no. 5 (1996),32-36, http://0-search.ebscohost.com.maurice.bgsu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=iih&AN=9605157524&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

xii Virginia M. Scheschy, "Cataloging Procedures on the Web: The Greatest Thing Since MARC," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (1998), 11-23, http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J104v26n02_03.

xiii Ibid., 11-12.

xiv Ibid., 18.

xv Ksenija Minčič-Obradovič, "New Work Spaces: Wikis for Cataloging Collaborations,"

   Library Hi Tech News 26, no. 7 (2009), 15-20,

   http://journals.ohiolink.edu/ejc/article.cgi?issn=07419058&issue=v26i0007&article=1

   5_nwswfcc.

xvi Ibid., 15.

xvii Kristen Costello and Darcy Del Bosque, "For Better or Worse: Using Wikis and Blogs

for Staff Communication in an Academic Library," *Journal of Web Librarianship* 4, no. 2

(2010), 143-60, http://0-

search.ebscohost.com.maurice.bgsu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lih&AN=53467299

&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

xviii Ibid., 151.

xix Ibid., 153.

xx Deana Groves, "Online Work Tools: A Look at 20 Academic Libraries Technical

Services Web Pages," *Library Collections, Acquisitions and Technical Services* 29, no.

4 (2005), 395-402,

http://journals.ohiolink.edu/ejc/article.cgi?issn=14649055&issue=v29i0004&article=395_

owtalaaltswp.

xxi Kavita Mundle, Harvey Huie and Nirmala S. Bangalore. "ARL Library Catalog

Department Web Sites: An Evaluative Study," *Library Resources and Technical*

Services 50, no. 3 (2006), 173-185, http://0-

search.ebscohost.com.maurice.bgsu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=tfh&AN=21260421

&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

xxii Judith Hopkins "The Community of Catalogers: Its Role in the Education of

Catalogers." *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2002), 375-381,

http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J104v34n03_09.

xxiii Ibid., 376.