

Heads of Cataloging Interest Group
ALA Midwinter Meeting
“Test Driving RDA”
January 2011

Presenters: Linda Smith Griffin (Chair), Louisiana State University
Kate Harcourt, Columbia University
Robert (Bob) Maxwell, Brigham Young University
Sarah Quimby, Minnesota Historical Society
Erin Stalberg, North Carolina State University

Recorder: Christopher Cronin (Vice-Chair/Chair-Elect), University of Chicago

General Overviews

Sarah Quimby began with an overview of the RDA test. She did a quick poll of the audience – the vast majority had already been to at least one RDA session/presentation during Midwinter; there were a number of other formal and informal testers in the audience. Most attendees were from larger library organizations with more than five catalogers.

- Sarah’s institution used an “immersion approach” to the testing because they only had one month of training and practice prior to beginning testing. They budgeted two hours of training/wk for the training.
- Thanked her staff for their hard work.

Kate Harcourt stated that one of the biggest benefits to being a tester is that they have a head start on the transition. Found it to be energizing to be working with colleagues from across the country, to be part of a national initiative, to take the first leap into the Semantic Web and linked data. Thanked Columbia’s staff for their excellent work.

- Kate presented an overview of the decentralized cataloging environment at Columbia. Explained that they did not do a full-scale implementation; took the philosophy that it was a test. But there was a momentum that made other staff want to be a part of the test as well.
- Melanie Wacker at Columbia led the non-MARC (DC, EAD, MODS) portion of the test.
- The testing team met weekly and was largely self-taught. They used LC’s training videos, presentations from Adam Schiff, and Webinars from Troy Linker on the Toolkit.
- They did a lot of practice records and that made them learn successfully.
- Didn’t write many local documents, except to bring together information on NACO requirements. Columbia is historically a strong PCC contributor; it took a while to understand why RDA was so much more complex than what they were used to with PCC core standards. But they also felt that knowledge would be successfully acquired over time.
- They felt challenged by non-MARC production largely because they had to make it all up for themselves without a lot of help or direction. They felt DC was too simple for RDA.

Erin Stalberg covered the demographics of who was a part of the test and the centralized nature of the NCSU cataloging operations. They are not a member of PCC, but generally follow PCC guidelines. She outlined the multiple data, systems, data standards that are used and concluded that RDA was really just another standard to add to the already long, historical, and complex list.

- NCSU used the testing as an opportunity to revive a local training program.
- NCSU was interested in analyzing the cost and value of implementing RDA.
- Involved all staff and there was a lot of interest in staff who were in library school.
- They took the approach of “could we apply what was written in RDA,” so they also didn’t create a lot of local documentation. They are a heavily sci-tech institution, and do not usually catalog many of the categories of resources that seem to present complex issues related to RDA/FRBR.

Bob Maxwell stated that participation at BYU was voluntary but encouraged. Almost everyone involved in cataloging attended the training, and approximately two-thirds contributed to the test.

- They used institution records heavily to make RDA records from existing AACR2 copy.
- Thanked Judy Kuhagen at the Library of Congress for her efforts in communicating errors so they could identify training needs.
- Recommended that audience members who have not started RDA just let their staff learning and practicing. BYU wanted to inculcate a culture that we don’t have to do everything in the same way, and that it is okay to make mistakes at first. This approach contributed to an unthreatening environment with a minimum of fear about what errors they might make.

Challenges with Implementing RDA

- Kate said that challenges included worrying about a slowdown in production levels; the need to think differently about creating linked data for the Semantic Web. Staff liked expressing relationships, and the use of controlled vocabularies in RDA.
- Sarah mentioned her staff’s anxiety about making “mistakes” and her attempts to quell them.
- Erin said that NCSU may need to revisit FRBR training. There were also problems with the Provider-Neutral standard not being compliant with RDA. They also debated whether they should be adding codes in 33X\$b. Cataloger’s judgment is good in theory, but difficult to apply in practice. Staff longed for more RDA examples, of both fields and whole records in MARC.
- Bob reiterated the incompatibility of RDA with Provider-Neutral. The Toolkit was very slow, staff had trouble finding things, and they had firewall issues, which was a barrier especially during the pre-testing practice period.

Effects on Systems Hardware/Software

- Erin said that they use Sirsi-Dynix. The lack of a GMD was seen as a barrier to catalogers looking at browse lists; they may use 33Xs for this.

- Kate said that Columbia uses Voyager, and they had no trouble getting new RDA fields in the system. They are not yet displaying the 33Xs; they also use the GMD for some browsing.
 - The Toolkit was a major problem and unfairly spilled over into people's impressions of RDA.
 - May need to revisit FRBR training in order to use the organization of RDA and the Toolkit itself.
 - Somewhat concerned about potential overhead on keeping workflows up-to-date.
 - Sarah explained that MHS uses a consortial catalog, so they are not yet importing RDA records right now.
 - There were some issues with the Toolkit, and they ended up abandoning workflows in favor of local procedural documentation.
 - Bob simply mentioned to the audience that even if they aren't implementing/testing RDA actively, the sheer fact that RDA copy is being made available in OCLC necessitates that they ready their systems and staff on what to do with those records.
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Impact on Users

- Sarah mentioned that her staff had positive reactions to the relationship designators and the spelled out abbreviations. They ultimately felt RDA records would be easier for users to read, but they did not like the 33X fields.
 - Kate said that Columbia has an internal group that managed user testing. They provided that group with 5 record sets (1 RDA record, with 1 AACR2 record) for comparison.
 - Reference librarians preferred RDA records over AACR2 records. They loved spelled out abbreviations; some liked not having GMDs while other missed it. They felt relator terms were confusing the way they hang off of the access points.
 - Erin said NCSU's experience was similar. They have considered suppressing the display of GMD for *all* records in the catalog.
 - Bob said that staff who looked at records felt the differences between RDA and AACR2 were largely cosmetic.
 - On authority records, Bob stated that his staff felt a responsibility to add 7XX fields to demonstrate they had evaluated the RDA forms of access points. His staff liked the 37X fields, even if that work won't be reflected in our catalogs right now. They felt the value added to authority records was worth more than the extra work.
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Implications for Cataloging Managers

- Sarah offered the following advice:
 - Read FRBR as introduction to RDA;
 - "Just do it" – start practicing;
 - Don't panic – first few records will take a long time, and that's okay;
 - Read slowly – language of RDA can be confusing and it is easy to get tripped up;
 - Don't sweat the small stuff that doesn't affect searching, like punctuation.

- Kate stated that the process of testing turned into a process of evaluating how to manage a mixed metadata environment, even though they thought it would be more about assessing cost and value.
 - Reiterated the challenges of applying catalogers judgment
 - Stated that because they had a portion of staff involved in the testing, they are worried about other staff having to catch up; they may feel marginalized.
 - Wondered what we are doing about relator codes/relationship designators – how can using them be effective when only a fraction of records in our databases will have them.
 - Erin said she felt testing was almost more about testing the culture than the rules.
 - Staff feel uncomfortable making local decision without knowing what LC will do.
 - People like examples, and to know what expectations there are of them. They want to know that cataloging managers will have answers to their questions, while cataloging managers want LC to guide those answers.
 - Catalogers need to know about and think about user tasks to approach their work successfully, and to contextualize their decisions.
 - Every institution is responsible for influencing the future of metadata.
 - Bob stated that during the implementation phase, staff need to feel okay with making mistakes; it's going to happen. BYU has always had a second pair of eyes look at NACO records, but may do the same for bibs going forward. BYU will be re-evaluating local policies in light of RDA. They need to make some decisions on handling copy. They may need to renegotiate contracts with authorities vendors (have not sent them RDA authorities yet). Wondered whether RDA will affect OCLC fees/credits, and whether shelf-ready prices will increase.
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Audience Q&A

- Did testers also give their staff FRAD training?
 - Bob: talked about concepts, but not in FRAD terms.
 - Erin: NCSU looked at FRAD user tasks.
- What advice do you have for people getting started?
 - Focus on your institution's collection, don't get overwhelmed, just start reading RDA, and help each other.
- Will you continue with RDA after the testing?
 - Bob: yes.
 - Erin: yes. They are a copy-heavy institution, so would likely not after June if LC decides it won't.
 - Kate: no, largely because they didn't train everyone. But regardless of the national decision, they will still need to equip staff with how to deal with copy in OCLC.
 - Sarah: same as Kate. Will follow what LC does.
- What advice do you have for library science educators on changing their curriculum?
 - Bob: cataloger will probably need to know how to catalog both AACR and RDA for a while.

- Erin: Erin does teach cataloging and her students feel like they need to know about RDA, largely because they feel there will be pressure in the marketplace for them to know RDA after graduation. Some have expressed that they feel they will be “change agents” for organizations hiring out of library school.
- Kate: the mixed metadata environment will mean that new staff will be different and will need different training because they may not know AACR2 after the curriculum changes.
- What advice do you have for places where there is *no* enthusiasm to make the shift?
 - Sarah: introduce a system of rewards for staff, and do not tie RDA accuracy to performance.
 - Bob: mentioned he has felt a groundswell of support for RDA at the Midwinter meeting that needs to continue, and make RDA less of an unknown.
 - Erin: ride the momentum of the testers. Focus on the benefits of adoption.
 - Kate: it will be easier for non-testers, who can learn from the experiences of the testers.