Competencies and Education for a Career in Cataloging Interest Group
ALA Midwinter Meeting | Friday, January 8, 2016

45 attendees participated in the Competencies and Education for a Career in Cataloging Interest Group Midwinter business meeting.

SUMMARY OF THE MEETING

Interest Group co-chair Jennifer Liss introduced the [Cataloging Competencies Task Force](#) charge and membership. Interest Group co-chair Karen Snow highlighted the historical context for the Task Force's work, including competency efforts that have come before.

Bruce Evans, Chair, Cataloging Competencies Task Force, introduced the work of the Task Force to date. His overview included the Task Force's research methodology, a summary of findings, preliminary models for representing cataloging and metadata creation competencies, and potential next steps. Presentation slide and handouts are available on the Interest Group's ALA Connect website.

Presentation slides: http://connect.ala.org/node/249298

Job Qualifications Tally Sheet: http://connect.ala.org/node/249249

Job Qualifications Explanation of Categories: http://connect.ala.org/node/249251

Draft Competency Job Duty Correlation: http://connect.ala.org/node/249248

Draft Cataloging Competencies Blueprint: http://connect.ala.org/node/249250

Following the presentation, the Interest Group leadership asked attendees to discuss a list of questions regarding the Task Force's findings. The Interest Group was particularly interested in hearing suggestions for next steps.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Responses to the question, "What are your thoughts on the work performed by the task force thus far? Are the results surprising?

- No one was surprised by findings from the Task Force's mining of job ads, as well as articles and presentations on the topic of cataloging and metadata creation competencies.

- Language in the [Draft Blueprint](#) was too prescriptive (language knowledge was specifically mentioned)

Is there something you were surprised to see not listed in the core competencies?"

- Where does the work of "other duties as assigned" get acknowledged? Managing or selecting an ILS, managing metadata for digital collections; document may benefit from a broader definition of metadata creation (not just MARC-RDA-LCSH cataloging), one that may also include metadata creation in a linked data environment
- Metadata transformation; ability to create metadata application profiles to aid in schema mapping/crosswalks
- While there's certainly an increased need for expertise in human languages, there's no mention of facility with computer languages; query languages such as MySQL; as well as programming and reporting languages such as PERL and Python
    - The phrase "bibliographic knowledge of Catalan [or other language]" exists; is there an equivalent phrase that means "I can read and troubleshoot Python" (without an expectation of being able to write code and program); where can a functional user/data manager (i.e., cataloger) be of help to programmers who need to do things with our data?
- There should be a competency called "comfort with ambiguity"—being able to work and thrive in an environment where one's broad knowledge of field and experience are relied upon when there isn't one right answer to a metadata problem
- What to do with soft skills (time management, organization, multitasking)? Participants argued that soft skills are necessary for all library careers; there was concern that not saying that soft skills were important would indicate that they were NOT important for a successful career in metadata creation
- There's only one mention of diversity in any of the documents pulled together thus far
    - What about bias inherent in metadata standards? Value standards (LCSH terms) but also content standards (surnames, etc.); subjectivity of describing resources
- Need for being able to understand data formulated with multiple content standards (ALA, AACR, AACR2, etc.)

Responses to the question, "What are your thoughts on structuring the competencies in terms of Fundamental, Intermediate, and Advanced?

- The categories "Fundamental," "Intermediate," and "Advanced" are fluid—new kinds of work emerge and shift the boundaries of what is "intermediate"
- How to apply one chart to both para-professional (some are union-represented, some are not) and professional positions? A single chart, such as the one the Task Force mocked up, won't scale

- Para-professional encompasses a huge range of tasks, from BIBCO/CONSER work to only checking descriptive information (not assigning access points)
- Positions that require a tenure component have unique competencies (publication and research often required)—will document accommodate those kinds of positions?
- Many agreed that "leadership" does not necessarily equate to a management position; Task Force was urged to define a spectrum of activities that require leadership, such as leading a team or project, chairing a working group, participating in committees (local or beyond)—this is important in cementing advocacy as a core competency
  - Tie leadership to decision making (cataloger's judgment) rather than management
- How might this framework be reconfigured so as not to alienate anyone or scare away graduate students considering careers in metadata?
  - Some positions cannot reach an "advanced" level, given that position's job duties/scope of responsibility
  - What would a graduate student be expected to know? Much of a cataloger's knowledge comes from on-the-job experience
- What if categories were "I've had exposure," "I have relevant experience," and "I'm an expert and can teach someone others"
  - "teaching" may be interpreted too literally; instead: "I can serve as a resource to others")

How might competencies categories be structured differently in order to capture different types of cataloging positions and career trajectories?"

- Wished for knowledge-based document with a focus on catalogers who do not manage; it was pointed out that some administrators in charge of metadata units don't catalog (and may have never cataloged)
- Visualizations might help make the document easier to apply (bubbles, tag clouds, use of a circle rather than a chart)
  - Document should allow flexibility for an institution to create a tailored "tag cloud" that interprets a competency for the local context
- Explore structuring document to be used as an a la carte menu

How do you imagine using a cataloging core competency document?

- Aid in crafting job descriptions; preparing interview questions for job candidates
- Help Departments shift focus to creating metadata for unique, local collections

General Observations

- Competencies document must be a guideline, not a formula or a mandate; taken too prescriptively, a competencies document may be abused
- How does one judge aptitude for metadata creation (important in recruitment as well)?
- A final document could link to relevant training
- Look for the ALCTS Training Outline
- Move this document up the appropriate channels to get ALA competencies updated
- Research utility of using personas as a way to test whether the competency document is useful in a wide variety of use cases