Deprofessionalization of Classification and Cataloging Work

chat from SAC meeting June 10, 2022

09:40:17 From Iman Dagher to Everyone:

Relying more on shelf ready and vendors records can be a factor

09:40:51 From Margaret Joyce to Everyone:

Good point Iman.

09:42:13 From Casey Mullin to Everyone:

+1 Karl. Danny Joudrey can speak to this I bet

09:42:32 From Adrienne Seely to Everyone:

Paraprofessionals can usually do excellent cataloging if enabled to do so, of course. But typically employers don't or pay for them to have pcc-level training, or to take work time to improve their skills.

09:42:56 From Violet Fox to Everyone:

Thanks, great point Adrienne.

09:43:42 From John DeSantis to Everyone:

+1 Karl - few library school grads are trained in LCSH. My library school had a separate course just on LCSH, but this was over 30 years ago

09:43:46 From Deborah Tomaras to Everyone:

I think it's particularly acute in cataloging, but deprofessionalization is happening across the profession, particularly in public libraries, for example. Low pay, low budgets, generalized sense that catalogers aren't as useful because they aren't public-facing, etc.

09:43:49 From Casey Mullin to Everyone:

My unit is entirely parapros except for me. It takes years to train even to a fairly basic level of proficiency. And I've had a rash of retirements in recent years. It's a real worry how I can shore up our collective expertise let alone reinstate it back to what it once was.

09:45:48 From Adam Schiff to Everyone:

And our new standards won't make it easier

09:46:05 From Dave Van Kleeck to Everyone:

+1 Adam

09:46:11 From Deborah Tomaras to Everyone:

+1 Adam

09:46:19 From Bonnie Dede to Everyone:

The results of our work are public facing!

09:46:45 From Karl Pettitt to Everyone:

Much like Casey my department is all paraprofessionals, some of whom have been there for over ten years. I do worry that professional catalogers will simply be managers of departments. The paraprofessionals I work with are amazing catalogers but I can't really imagine replacing any of them. Those I hire will likely be new to cataloging with little to no training.

09:46:59 From Deborah Tomaras to Everyone:

But we don't check out books to patrons, or read to children. If there are limited dollars to spend, and the library has to be open a certain number of hours, publics won't spend as eagerly on catalogers.

09:47:00 From Margaret Joyce to Everyone:

Agreed Bonnie.

09:47:34 From Leigh Ann Martin to Everyone:

I have had undergraduate student employees who have done excellent copy cataloging work-- these skills are very trainable. I think as catalogers, in a time where that training is harder to come by, we should be open and accepting of anyone who is interested learning the practice of cataloging and help to train them on the job where we can.

09:47:42 From Deborah Rose-Lefmann to Everyone:

There is a certain irony in the deprofessionization of cataloging given that the cataloging standards are becoming more and more abstruse and hard to understand, even for professionals

09:48:18 From Calli Neumann to Everyone:

+1 Deborah

09:48:20 From Deborah Tomaras to Everyone:

Agree, Deborah. It's a really bad time, and seems tone-deaf, given the current challenges for libraries.

09:48:52 From Karl Pettitt to Everyone:

I will also say that my cataloging course is full every quarter and students wish there were more.

09:48:55 From Tina Gross to Everyone:

I'd like to meekly suggest that we try to transition the discussion to generating ideas about things we/SAC might do. What power do we have, where could we get traction? What are the opportunities to nudge the needle?

09:49:06 From Violet Fox to Everyone:

lol I'm on it Tina

09:49:21 From Casey Mullin to Everyone:

+1 Tina. How do we engage in advocacy around this?

09:49:45 From Allison Badger to Everyone:

I recently hired a paraprofessional cataloger with no cataloging experience (but library experience) after a failed search for a Cataloging and Metadata Librarian (faculty). My paraprofessional is picking the cataloging basics quickly. I'd love to let her do more (original cataloging) but her job description doesn't allow for that

09:50:43 From Deborah Tomaras to Everyone:

I'd love to tell RDA "don't do what you're doing!" :]

09:50:49 From Allison Bailund to Everyone:

My original cataloging work (as a parapro) was under the "other duties as assigned" in my job description

09:51:27 From sherman clarke to Everyone:

+1 Deborah T.

09:52:20 From Leigh Ann Martin to Everyone:

same as Allison!

09:52:22 From Heidrun Wiesenmüller to Everyone:

The German cataloging community has decided to emancipate ourselves from the official Toolkit. We're working on a cataloging manual which will be a really useful tool for catalogers.

09:52:33 From Iman Dagher to Everyone:

For certain non-English languages, librarians would usually prefer to work as selectors/curators more than working in the metadata librarianship, so we have less professionals in this field

09:52:35 From Casey Mullin to Everyone:

How about this group too? https://www.ala.org/core/member-center/interest-groups/competencies-and-education-for-a-career-in-cataloging

09:53:02 From 100 1\_ Joudrey, Daniel N. to Everyone:

Thanks Casey, I was looking for that link to share.

09:53:03 From Pete Wilson to Everyone:

I worry most about outsourcing in many guises. So many of our cataloging records come in from shelf-ready vendors or e-book providers or in batches with collections we buy, and a lot of it's TERRIBLE. And also here we are having to outsource a lot of Latin American cataloging, which has in the past been a specialty, because of not enough staff. That work has been done all right, though, compared to the other sources I mentioned.

09:53:53 From Tina Gross to Everyone:

Is a statement (policy, or whatever) from CORE within the realm of possibility? Would that have more influence from something coming from cataloging bodies? (or is CORE the audience...)

09:54:48 From Rebecca Belford to Everyone:

I would love if advocacy for cataloging came from our public-facing colleagues, not us.

09:54:48 From Karl Pettitt to Everyone:

There is also this IG https://www.ala.org/core/member-center/interest-groups/role-of-the-professional-librarian-in-technical-services

09:54:51 From Violet Fox to Everyone:

I think Core would be willing to support such a thing, yes.

09:55:10 From Deborah Tomaras to Everyone:

Statements are a nice idea (we could advocate for better training in library schools, or RDA being written in understandable text, and not behind a prohibitive paywall). But how does it materially change the conditions of catalogers in the field? Is there a way to try to influence that somehow?

09:55:52 From Violet Fox to Everyone:

Rebecca, I'm not willing to wait around for public-facing library workers to say we're valuable. Many have been quiet as cataloging departments have been dismantled over the years.

09:56:08 From Tina Gross to Everyone:

The statement would need to include some concrete recommendations/best practices, something like that

09:56:45 From Deborah Tomaras to Everyone:

+1 Tina.

09:57:04 From Allison Bailund to Everyone:

+1 Tina

09:58:23 From Pete Wilson to Everyone:

Are we talking most specifically about subject cataloging, or generally about every aspect of cataloging? Subject cataloging gets worse and worse

09:58:50 From Violet Fox to Everyone:

I had originally brought up the Best Practices for Archival Term Positions document, created by RBMS, about when precarious positions are justifiable (and when they're not). https://rbms.info/blog/news-events/announcement-best-practices-for-archival-term-positions/

09:59:00 From Adam Schiff to Everyone:

+1 Pete, especially with the crap we get from vendors, where the most general terms are supplied

09:59:03 From John DeSantis to Everyone:

I dispute the suggestion that LCSH does not have a place in the future of cataloging

09:59:39 From Deborah Tomaras to Everyone:

I think part of the problem is that many libraries are doing "traditional cataloging" (publics, schools, etc.). And leaving them out to advocate only for future practices like BIBFRAME won't help all catalogers.

09:59:59 From Sarah Hovde to Everyone:

+1 Deborah

10:00:02 From Allison Bailund to Everyone:

And in my experience working the reference desk, the reference librarians mostly search databases and or records that have vendor supplied metadata

10:00:03 From Pete Wilson to Everyone:

Sometimes it isn't even general terms so much as random near-nonsense, Adam

10:00:09 From John DeSantis to Everyone:

Agreed, Deborah

10:00:25 From Dave Van Kleeck to Everyone:

My Dean sees the huge volume of records in our consortial catalog and feels a strong sense that more automated processes need to be developed/implemented to edit and add data to the catalog, rather than having human, record-by-record work done. The scale of the issue is a huge consideration for her.

10:01:01 From Adrienne Seely to Everyone:

I'm not optimistic that actions other than organizing library labor through unionization, attempting to strengthen labor laws in this country etc. will have a significant impact.

10:01:30 From Pete Wilson to Everyone:

How about pointing out to students and users that the catalogs they use have awful records with useless subject information?

10:01:39 From Violet Fox to Everyone:

Adrienne, you're not wrong, but as an ALA unit, this is what SAC can do.

10:01:49 From Adrienne Seely to Everyone:

Yes of course :)

10:01:57 From Deborah Tomaras to Everyone:

You may be right Adrienne. For lots of library positions, wages are lower than fast food jobs.

10:02:02 From Adam Schiff to Everyone:

I see this issue as under the purview of Core too

10:02:14 From Tina Gross to Everyone:

Violet, I like your idea about a document/statement clarifying paraprofessional posotions

10:03:30 From Iman Dagher to Everyone:

Also, the policy and funding of institutions is a great factor

10:03:53 From Dave Van Kleeck to Everyone:

+1 Iman

10:06:06 From Scott Dutkiewicz to Everyone:

paraprofessional positions may be one key. Advocate for training, higher salaries. Think locally and advocate-- who am I training now? Are they getting decent salaries? When positions are vacated, what happens?

10:06:29 From Tina Gross to Everyone:

We should also keep in mind that catalogers will soon have the ALA president's ear in a way that we usually don't, that timing could be important.

10:06:53 From Violet Fox to Everyone:

Great point, Tina.

10:06:57 From Rebecca Belford to Everyone:

This seems to all tie in with the Cataloging Ethics group and possible redundant work.

10:07:01 From Allison Badger to Everyone:

In my experience, salaries and job descriptions play a huge role in what parapros can/can't do

10:07:02 From Casey Mullin to Everyone:

For a great example of a pithy advocacy document: https://cmc.wp.musiclibraryassoc.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2019/01/Authority\_Control\_Statement\_.pdf

10:08:07 From Thomas Whittaker to Everyone:

Perhaps we should seek consensus within the broader cataloging community on where (i.e. at what level) certain work should occur. While I understand that work has to happen and budgets are unlikely to increase...I don't care for the thought that at some places PCC-level work (if we consider that our highest standard) is being produced by people barely making a living wage, where at others it is reserved for MLS librarians. Having a broad consensus doesn't necessarily keep the work from being pushed down lower and lower, but it does give managers/supervisors something to point to when arguing for increasing job classifications

10:08:44 From Casey Mullin to Everyone:

+1 Thomas

10:08:51 From Adrian Williams to Everyone:

I'd be interested in joining

10:09:10 From Tina Gross to Everyone:

same, willing to be member

10:09:15 From Casey Mullin to Everyone:

O

10:09:20 From Iman Dagher to Everyone:

I would join not chair

10:09:22 From Allison Badger to Everyone:

Willing to join

10:09:23 From Casey Mullin to Everyone:

I'd join if I weren't rotating off!!

10:09:25 From Leigh Ann Martin to Everyone:

I would be interested in joining as well

10:09:28 From Allison Bailund to Everyone:

same, willing to be a member

10:09:33 From Violet Fox to Everyone:

Thanks everyone for your comments in the chat, they'll help inform this conversation!

10:09:41 From Nicholas Bennyhoff to Everyone:

I'm also interested, but not a SAC member, and would really rather not chair.

10:09:47 From Adrienne Seely to Everyone:

You're looking for committee members to volunteer or is this open to anyone?

10:09:52 From Violet Fox to Everyone:

A SAC member has to be the chair.

10:09:59 From Adam Schiff to Everyone:

I don't believe you have to be on SAC to be on it

10:10:18 From Adrienne Seely to Everyone:

Yes I wasn't asking about chairing :)

10:10:39 From Margaret Joyce to Everyone:

I would also like to join

10:11:02 From Adrienne Seely to Everyone:

I'm interested in joining.

10:11:45 From Adrian Williams to Everyone:

I've also been noting those interested

10:11:54 From Violet Fox to Everyone:

Thanks Adrian.