

# The Transition to Automated Authority Control in the Smaller Academic Library

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This article will examine the character of authority control in manual and automated catalogs from the viewpoint of the small-to-medium-sized academic library. It is based on the experiences and observations of the author in two such libraries, that of Jacksonville University in Jacksonville, Florida, where the author served as Assistant Cataloger from 1983 to 1987, and of the University of Evansville in Evansville, Indiana, where the author has served as Catalog Librarian since 1987. In addition, the article will review authority control activities currently underway at the University of Evansville, and will examine decisions which any small or medium-sized academic library will need to make in preparing for and implementing an automated system.

## Authority Control in a Manual System

Before turning to online authority control, let us first examine manual systems. Perhaps the most outstanding feature of name authority work in this environment is that truly effective authority control is often just out of reach, certainly in the smaller library. This is usually because of the

lack of available staff whose time can be devoted to the task. It is ironic that catalogers find themselves in this situation at a time when OCLC has made up-to-date information readily available through its online Authority File. Presented with such a source of continuously updated and easily consulted authority records, the librarian is confronted with the problem of how to respond to heading changes as they are encountered, given the constraints of staff size and available time. A library could respond by attempting physically to make all the changes in the catalog as they are discovered, but this would entail an army of people to pull and refile cards, to erase and type headings, and to type cross reference cards. Those who have worked in libraries where this was actually attempted can assure any who doubt that this is not a satisfactory solution. For one thing it is very labor-intensive, and staff often cannot be spared from the cataloging of new materials to devote the kind of time required to undertake complete manual changes. Furthermore, there is a psychologically negative aspect to such an undertaking as staff may find it demoralizing to work on a project that, because of its

very nature, seems never to end and never gives one a sense of accomplishment. Instead, one is confronted with a list of headings to be changed which only seems to grow longer and longer. To retreat from this prospect, the alternative might be to make cross-references from all the old headings in the catalog to their replacements employing, for example, a card reading: "items cataloged before such-and-such a date will be found under the heading: . . ." In this way a considerable amount of work may be avoided, but in effect, the burden of authority control is now placed on users as you rely on them to encounter those cross-reference cards, to read and interpret the reference correctly, and to search as instructed on the card. That's a lot of "ifs," and one might suspect that many users do not always make it through this labyrinth. In addition, another undesirable consequence of this form of authority control is that the public catalog soon fills up with multiple headings or forms of headings which represent the different cataloging rules in effect at different times. Some libraries have tried to compromise between these two solutions, manually changing the headings when there are only a handful to be done and employing cross-reference cards in all other cases. The first alternative allows for a neat catalog, but usually must be forgone due to staff constraints, thereby forcing the library to be satisfied with the second alternative. Whichever method a library chooses, keeping up-to-date with heading changes while still coping with the demands of cataloging and processing newly acquired materials is daunting.

It is no wonder that, for catalogers, an online system may be seen as a way out of this dilemma. One must bear in mind that an online system cannot be expected to solve all

of a library's name-authority problems. Automation can, however, provide a more realistic chance of bringing headings into line in a timely fashion and can also eliminate the problem of having multiple forms of headings. This latter situation is made easier if a system provides for conflict detection and/or global changes.

### Introduction of Online Authority Control at the University of Evansville

It would be appropriate at this point to review the history of authority control at the University of Evansville. Prior to 1985, OCLC was the only automated component of the cataloging process, the local catalog being entirely manual. A separate authority file was not maintained; instead, the catalog itself served as the authority file. As changes in headings were encountered through the *National Union Catalog*, through LC printed cards, or, in later years, on OCLC, cross-references were typed, and sometimes physical changes were made. With the introduction of AACR2, an attempt was made to set up a manual authority file, although it wasn't as much a true authority file as it was a record of established AACR2 headings and a tally of the number of records in the card catalog which matched those headings or variants of them. With the approach of automation this file had to be abandoned, because the time spent in maintaining it needed to be redirected to prepare for online cataloging. The NOTIS system was brought up for local cataloging in 1985 and priority was placed on finishing retrospective conversion through an OCLC Microcon project and on loading bibliographic records. Later priority shifted to barcoding the collection so that when it was possible to bring up the NOTIS

circulation module the entire circulating collection would already have been prepared, and the circulation staff would not have to contend with unbarcoded materials. While those projects were under way, no authority work of any kind was undertaken other than to check the OCLC Authority File as new materials were cataloged and to edit new records accordingly. In the spring of 1988, the NOTIS name authority module was brought into use experimentally, with the idea that eventually a vendor would be approached for an authority file, either by buying another library's file or by having a vendor create a local file by matching the local database against LC authorities. At that time, NOTIS software permitted name authority records to be searched themselves, but could not yet generate cross-references, either in staff mode or in the online public access catalog. Now, however, libraries running NOTIS release 4.6 have cross references in the staff mode, and NOTIS release 5.0 is expected to expand this capability to the public catalog.

Ironically, the online catalog represents, at this stage, a step backwards because we have temporarily lost the ability to provide patrons with cross references. The reference librarians can search NOTIS for individual authority records and provide the information they find to a patron, but this will happen only if the patron takes the initiative to ask for such help. There is nothing the system can do to help those who have difficulty searching but who do not ask a librarian for assistance. We have resigned ourselves to this situation only because we know that cross references will be available to the public eventually. In the meantime, authority records are being created for internal use following certain rather

elastic criteria. Records are loaded for compound surnames and for foreign-language names if they have variable spellings or if they are transliterated from non-Roman alphabets. Records are also loaded for corporate names and conference names which have been judged to be confusing or otherwise not obvious. For the most part, no attempt has been made toward any retrospective authority work, and the library will be reluctant to do so until experience is gained with the full authority control capabilities available on upcoming versions of NOTIS. However, a special project was undertaken to load the names of musical composers and of foreign-language literary authors. In addition, reference librarians are encouraged to recommend headings which need to be added to make access possible to certain names. As an example of this cooperation, a problem arose with the established form of the name Ferdinand Magellan. It appeared from our catalog that we had no materials at all with this name as a subject heading. The established form of the name Magellan is the Portuguese spelling, Fernão de Magalhães, a name which is not readily apparent to users. We loaded a name authority record in response to a request from the Reference Department, so that in the future library staff will have access to this name. This record is shown in Figure 1. Note that the Portuguese form of the name is in the field tagged 100. This is the established heading. The four fields which follow (all tagged 400) are cross references from variant forms of the name in Spanish, English, and Portuguese and serve as the basis for online cross references in NOTIS release 4.6.

When the university's system department is ready to install the NOTIS software which supports cross references, the names loaded in this

project will already be present. Admittedly, the problem with this method of building an authority file is that the authority work is done "after the fact." Once the first patron has searched unsuccessfully and then asked for assistance, we are at least able to get the record in the database. Lacking the staff to do retrospective authority work, the library is forced to be satisfied with this compromise. When cross references are available online and there is the opportunity to work with and experiment with the system, it is expected that priorities and workflow will change.

### Considerations in Planning for Online Authority Control

If a local library makes the decision to begin preparing for an online system, there are some points that should be considered. These will have a bearing on decisions that must be made regarding workflow and allocation of staff resources to authority control.

One must always bear in mind which groups of users will have access to a particular feature or facet of authority control in the system to be chosen. Technical Services personnel, at least those responsible for cataloging and authority control, will need access to all the information provided by the authority records. Public Services personnel, especially reference librarians, also stand to benefit directly from authority records, not only in the form of cross references (if the system chosen can generate them), but also from the records themselves, which often contain useful information about library tracing practices, enumeration systems, call numbers, and so forth. Of course, this requires that Public Services librarians be trained to interpret the authority record, particularly if the system supports full

MARC records. Users of an interactive public catalog will also be using authority data indirectly in a system that supports such cross referencing. Some systems are also able to redirect a search to the established form of the search term, using the data contained in the authority records. The amount of time and staff resources devoted to authority control will depend on which of these groups of potential users will actually be using authority data.

The devotion of more resources to authority control may also be justified by special features bearing directly on Technical Services. NOTIS, for example, will detect headings in the catalog which conflict with established headings and list them in the form of a report, eliminating the need to search individually for errors and obsolete headings. Similarly, it will generate lists of new and dropped headings.

The authority control procedures at the University of Evansville are based on decisions reflecting the needs of various groups which will be able to access authority data in the system, as well as the desire to be cautious in decisions made, pending the installation of subsequent versions of the NOTIS software. Personal name authorities have been the primary concern, because it is apparent that this is an area needing immediate attention. The decision to place emphasis here is an attempt to address the needs of the users, as reflected in the nature of the questions posed at the reference desk, and the library staff. Beyond that, more emphasis has been placed on subject authorities than on other types of name authorities, such as corporate names, conference names, and series authorities. These have been placed on the back burner, not because they are unimportant, but because experience with a largely undergraduate

student population suggests that resources are better invested in personal names and subjects.

### Conclusion

In summation, for many small- and medium-size academic libraries, the advent of the automated library catalog offers the prospect of systematic and effective authority control, something which is frequently out of the question in a manual environment. However, even with the greater power and control offered by these newer systems, the old problems of restricted budgets and limited staff will continue to force librarians to

analyze the nature of the service they wish to provide, and sometimes to compromise for the sake of efficiency. Still, for the University of Evansville Libraries, the potential benefits of automated authority control justify the gradual shift of resources to this previously-neglected activity.

Figure 1

LTUE DONE

CAM5310

NOTIS CATALOGING

UE# CAM5310 FMT A RT z DT 04/15/88 R/DT 04/15/88 STAT mc E/  
LEV n H476 SRC LANG ??? ROM n MOD UNIQUE a GOVT S/  
SYS a D/I n NUM n S/TYP n NAME a SUBJ c SER b AUTH a  
H/ESTAB a T/EVAL a IP a RULES c

010: : \$a n 50039489

035/1: : \$a (OCoLC)00074705

040: : \$a DLC \$c DLC \$d DLC

100: 10: \$a Magalhães, Fernão de, \$d d. 1521.

400/1: 10: \$a Magallanes, Hernando de, \$d d. 1521.

400/2: 10: \$a Magellan, Ferdinand, \$d d. 1521.

400/3: 10: \$a De Magalhães, Fernão, \$d d. 1521.

400/4: 10: \$a Magallanes, Fernando de, \$d d. 1521.

670/1: : \$a Peillard, L. \$b Magellan . . . 1948.

670/2: : \$a Berzovic R., F. El descubrimiento de Chile por  
Fernando de Magallanes, c1983: \$b p. ix, etc. (Hernando de  
Magallanes; nacido en Oporto, approx. entre los años 1472-73)