

Date: March 31, 2006
To: Bernie Hurley, Chair, SOPAG
From: Jennifer Reiswig, LAUC President 2005-06
Re: LAUC Reports on the Bibliographic Services Task Force Report

Four campuses (Berkeley, Davis, Los Angeles, and Riverside) conducted LAUC discussions of the BSTF report during February and March. At the other campuses, separate LAUC discussions were not held and librarians' feedback is incorporated into the campus-level reports already received through the campus' SOPAG members. This report is a summary of the results of the LAUC reports. Because it does not represent a consensus reached at a single discussion or through a single voting process, ranking of recommendations as requested in the Comment invitation was not really feasible. However, there were a number of points on which there was broad agreement.

While the discussions attempted to follow the suggested questions, the LAUC divisional reports include comments and questions that obviously reflect a great deal of thought and analysis. I have pulled some quotes from these in this report, but I am appending the original LAUC division reports as a single additional document –the comments therein may prove useful to the teams that will take up the next steps. There is an additional longer report from Los Angeles with verbatim comments from their internal survey - that is not included here.

All the campus LAUC divisions did indicate that they found the discussions to be stimulating and that the report, while daunting in its scope, represents an exciting vision for bibliographic services at the UC libraries, and we are looking forward to learning more about the next steps.

Question 1 [Which major headings are most important for UC to address?]

All reports agreed on:

II.1 - create single catalog interface for all of UC

These recommendations were in the top-ranked group for more than one division:

I.1 - provide users with direct access to item

I.5 - offer better navigation of search results

II.2 - support searching across the entire bibliographic information space

Several of the reports made reference to the “old” system that attempted to provide a level of interface integration between the MELVYL catalog and hosted bibliographic databases with embedded links to full text and a supporting metasearch service. At the time that system was abandoned, the technology available made it unsustainable. Yet clearly there was value in it.

These were each in the top-ranked group for one division:

I.4 - offer alternative actions for failed or suspect searches

I.8 - provide better searching for non-Roman materials

III.1 Rearchitect cataloging workflow
III.3 Enrich metadata in important areas

Question 2 [For each of the major headings, which sub-recommendations should be given highest priority / added / not pursued]

Which should be given top priority / addressed first

The campuses were not asked to agree on a single list of major recommendations, so this sub-level ranking doesn't really work as a single list. I am reporting individual campus recommendations below:

Berkeley:

Within I.5, selected I.5a, implement FRBR concepts, and also recommended the FAST syntax from III.2b as a related item to pull information together to enhance searching.

Davis: (Davis' LAUC discussion report did not rank sub-recommendations)

Los Angeles:

I.1b - provide an "I want this" option

I.4b - offer constructive suggestions when a search produces zero results.

II.1a - create a single catalog interface, engage in systemwide planning process

III.1a - View UC cataloging as a single enterprise / engage in a systemwide planning process to identify the appropriate mechanism for implementing such a vision.

Riverside:

I.5 was a top recommendation - selected I.5a and b as top priorities.

I.1 was a top recommendation - selected I.1 as the more important of the sub-recommendations.

Recommendations that should be added:

The LA discussion resulted in one additional recommendation:

Provide clear, simple and effective Help in a variety of formats, to accommodate a variety of learning styles and information needs. And, provide support to librarians who want to develop Help in a variety of formats. This support needs to take the form of release time for training, design, development, testing, implementation and assessment, as well as support for instructional technologists, web designers and programmers who will be able to create and revise materials designed by librarians.

Recommendations that should not be pursued...

While the broad concept of adopting new cataloging practices had areas of appeal, all four reports considered this to be a troublesome proposal:

III.2c Consider using controlled vocabularies only for name, uniform, title, date, and place, and abandoning the use of controlled vocabularies

- “Controlled subject headings are critical for discovery and for filtering findings.”
 - One comment pointed out that NCSU’s lauded new catalog interface incorporates controlled vocabulary into faceted browsing in a way that’s truly helpful.
 - “Topical subject headings in bibliographic records are CRUCIAL for discovery, especially for non-English materials.”
 - “In order to build good recommender systems that have high-quality linking, it is essential to include controlled vocabulary terms for both topical and genre terms. Even if AI programs are developed, they must be ‘seeded’ with large sets of metadata that have been verified as valid and appropriate.”
-

Question 3 [Single public cataloging interface issue]

Across the LAUC discussions, there was general support for implementing a single catalog interface for the reasons identified in the BSTF report (patron confusion, potential cost savings, duplication of work), but also concern about a dilution of local features and the impact on Interlibrary Loan, local cooperative agreements, and local policies. While there was support for the concept, there were also many concerns expressed:

- Special collections material was felt to be of particular concern - need to ensure that highly specialized, copy-specific metadata is retained but not in a way that confuses users about the accessibility of this material.
- Single interface would reduce “slogging” currently needed among multiple interfaces, but could overwhelm users who just need to get something now.
- Need to preserve a local view of materials that are easily accessible and relevant locally - to the level of an affiliated/departmental library.
- Concern about the emphasis on cost-savings as compared to potential loss of local customization and functionality.
- The report focuses on the OPAC, cataloging, metadata records, which are “downstream” in the collection management process. There is a need to include the rest of the “bibliographic system” - collection development, acquisitions, ILL, reserves, Systems. All these affect what the ILS is - “important to address the entire cycle, not just cataloging.”

In terms of options for creating/buying/outsourcing, there were no clear favorites, so long as critical functionality is preserved. Issues to be weighed have to include risks of outages, cost, control, and impact on functions like serials, ILL, RLF circulation.

Question 4 [Rearchitecting cataloging workflow: organization options, architecture options]

All the reports indicated support for viewing UC cataloging as a single enterprise.

a. Organization options

In general, the LAUC reports endorsed the first of the three presented options, “coordinate cataloging expertise and practice across the entire system.”

There was uniform rejection of the option of organizing cataloging at one or two centers. “Librarians were concerned that the general turnaround time from acquisition to shelf would be adversely affected; subject areas... deemed critical to one campus would not receive urgent processing...”

There was a consensus that the campuses need to have local cataloging expertise available. Catalogers provide expertise in other areas of the library, such as digital library activities. There was some support for having localized centers of expertise, particularly related to languages and types of materials where experts are hard to recruit, or hiring specialists to handle certain material for several campuses. Special collections is an area of particular concern where it was felt that centralization or consolidation would likely not work.

The reports suggested that efficiencies achieved in better coordination could mean that more resources might be available for creating richer or more specialized metadata that currently isn't possible, and this was seen as a useful development:

“UC libraries would benefit by identifying duplicative work and establishing more efficient, effective procedures UC-wide, and could then refocus the efforts of some into areas needing attention that may have been neglected up to now, or into new endeavors.”

“If the recommendation is to take short cuts to avoid duplicative cataloging of general-interest, modern materials, allowing staff to spend more time cataloging the under-cataloged materials, then that would be much appreciated. A single record is sensible, but we do not want to lose specialist information. We want to enhance the catalog, not take away information.”

Some LAUC members also questioned whether there was a goal of reducing cataloging staff.

b. Architecture options

This issue was not reported on in detail by all LAUC divisions. At LAUC-LA, there was slightly more support for a shared single file than for one single ILS, with the rationale that campuses made ILS decisions for valid local reasons. There is also the complexity of specifying what modules a systemwide ILS would include and whether a product exists that could perform this function. The use of OCLC brought up the same issue - what would the other ILS modules be.

Question 5 [Additional comments / suggestions with regard to next steps]

Question 6 [Anything else UC should be doing in pursuit of improving bibliographic services]

There were philosophical questions raised about the assumptions underlying the report and whether we should feel threatened by Google, whether we serve our users best by focusing on convenience and simplicity.

Several comments were presented among the campus reports indicating a desire to test these assumptions in the report with our users, and not just undergraduates. In particular, features like recommenders, relevance ranking, and “bells and whistles” designed to emulate mass-market sites like Google and Amazon will be difficult and expensive to implement - are they wanted by scholars and faculty? Are there other things we could do to enhance services that would be easier and provide more benefit? The UC libraries serve a wide range of patrons from high school student to professors and a worldwide academic community. A “one size fits all” approach focusing on students may not fit all groups well.

Concerns were also raised about the notion of long term cost-savings, while it seems clear that implementing the recommendations in the report will be expensive. Where will we get the resources to do this?

Because this work will affect all library functions beyond technical services, all divisions expressed a keen interest for clear communication about the process going forward and to keep public services librarians involved in the process.