Cataloger Workflow Study: University Visual Resource Centers

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Goals

To identify the general workflow of image cataloging, including which procedures and challenges are general to the field and which arise in conjunction with specific types of collections. Existing workflow practices will be used as a benchmark to measure the efficacy of the CLiMB Toolkit.

The following data was gathered at three academic Visual Resource Centers.

Methods

The methodology for the workflow studies consists of pre-interviews, observations, and post-interviews. A separate written exercise on paragraph preferences is administered at the time of the observation sessions but is not included as part of the analysis phase of the workflow studies.

Following the observation sessions, the catalogers are debriefed through a summary of our observations and asked to review for accuracy. At this time, notes from interview and observation sessions were also shared with participants to give them a chance to comment.

Pre-Interview: Cataloging Background

Cataloger	Years (current position)	Years (previous positions)	Years (cataloging other materials)
001	9 months	2 years	N/A
002	14 years	N/A	Books (yrs unknown)
003	9 years	1 year	N/A
004	6 months	N/A	none
005	16 years	15 years	Music; videos; (yrs unknown)
006	15 years	1 year at same institution	Photographs (yrs unknown)

Pre-Interview: Education

Cataloger	Courses	Degrees
001	N/A	MLS, Art Librarianship; BA, art history & printmaking
002	N/A	MLS; BA, archeology
003	N/A	MA, Art History, Medieval Art
004	N/A	Art History PhD candidate
005	Cataloging; Advanced cataloging	MLS; BA, History graduate coursework in art history & studio classes
006	510 & 511	Currently enrolled in MLS MA in archeology and ancient history; BA in art history

Pre-Interview: Art/Art History Background

Cataloger	Fine Arts	Art History
001	Printmaking	General
002	No	Archeology
003	N/A	Medieval
004	N/A	Early Modernism
005	Some studio art classes	Renaissance
006	None	Archeology and ancient history

Pre-Interview: Institutional Policies

Cataloger	Policies	Years in Place	Closely followed?
001	Cataloging manual available with instructions for data entry and an in-house controlled vocabulary that is supplemented with AAT and other resources.	N/A	At the beginning, but I no longer find it necessary to consult.
002	""	N/A	At the beginning, but I only consult it occasionally.
003	Yes, based on VRA Core. Converted old schema to match this standard.	N/A	Yes, recently instated
004	""	N/A	Yes, recently instated; still getting used to
005	Yes, but more for shelf organization than online access	Pre-1986	Not at all
006	""	Pre-1986	Not at all

Pre-Interview

- Knowledge / Awareness of users' tasks and needs
- Preliminary Research
- Subject Cataloging
- Resources consulted
- Cataloging Software
- Metadata schemas

Note: This study was redesigned after the first round of interviews and observations and, as a result, some questions were only asked during the later interview sessions.

Knowledge/Awareness of users' tasks and needs

- Describe your users
  - Faculty
  - Students
  - General public
- What kinds of tasks do they do?
  - Lectures
  - Conferences
  - Papers
  - other
- Do you have access to user logs?
  - Limited access
- What kinds of feedback do you get (if any) from users?
  - Faculty: spellings from authorities are incorrect; images and records are mismatched; image orientation is wrong
- Do you do any reference work?
  - Minimal:
    - Email
    - In-person
    - Phone

Preliminary Research

- Do you generally do preliminary research before starting a catalog record? If so, please describe what you do in general.
    - Check catalog to see if already entered
    - Check catalog for records that share some of the same metadata to use as template
    - Deciphering notes on slide mounts. This may entail contacting the faculty member, looking online, or consulting one of the frequently used resources.
    - 'Reviewing the source text to get a feel for what it is I am looking at'

Subject Cataloging

- **To what percentage of records do you apply subject terms?**
  - All six catalogers said that they add subject terms to most new records.
  - Catalogers acknowledged that there are legacy records without subject access points.

- **What determines whether or not you apply subject terms?**
  - Time
  - Availability of reliable information
  - How I think the record will be accessed

Subject Cataloging

- **What are the fields in your cataloging systems for subject cataloging?**
    - Varies: MARC records, VRA schema, local

- **How many terms do you usually enter into subject fields?**
    - Varies: Average range across institutions is between 1 and 8

- **On average, what percentage of your cataloging time is devoted to subject description?**
    - Varies. Depends on a number of factors, including:
        - How quickly the professor needs the image online
        - Availability of information in frequently checked sources
        - Knowledge of and access to specialized resources
        - If other records of similar works have already been cataloged, relevant descriptors in those records can be reused to save time

Observation: Processes and Procedures

The following information was tracked during the observation sessions:

- Steps in the process
- Resources consulted for selecting terms
- Which terms were chosen and the source of terms
- Whether the terms were kept in Natural Language or not
- Which fields were used
- Catalogers were prompted to explain how they decided when to stop subject description

Steps: Generalized Workflow

- Find image referenced on work order slip
- Check the system to see if it is already cataloged
- Check for artist authority records (name, life dates, nationality)
- Enter accession numbers
- Enter title and alternate titles, if applicable
- Enter period/date
- Materials
- Collection / Location
- Source
- Keyword or subject classification
- Indicating person requesting cataloging
- Addenda / Notes
- Save record

Cataloger flowchart

http://www.umiacs.umd.edu/~climb/internal/ImageCataloging_FlowChart.doc

Resources and Cataloger evaluation

- Authorities
- Academic and subscription databases
- Web
- Texts
- People

Authorities

- Getty resources:
  - AAT
  - ULAN
  - TGN
- Library of Congress resources:
  - LOC Authorities
  - TGM
- ICONCLASS

Authorities

Resource	x/6	Likes	Dislikes
Getty: AAT, ULAN, TGN	5	Authoritative; lots of terms; good for Western subjects; good for known info	Lack of non-Western coverage; inconsistent (DeKoonings); a lot is missing
LOC: Authorities, TGM	3	Authoritative; controlled vocab for general topics; lots of terms	A lot of terms are not included
ICONCLASS	2	Provides useful subject descriptors such as "beheading"	Only for Western art
In-house	1		Not updated in excel for a few years

Academic and subscription databases

- ARTstor
- Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals
- Grove Art Online
- ArchNet
- ArtIndex and ArtIndex Retrospective

Academic and subscription databases

Resource	x/6	Likes	Dislikes
ARTstor	2	Can re-use records (copy catalog) or use as a place to start	Lack of standardization across records
Grove	3	More non-Western names than ULAN; Useful tiebreaker for discrepancies 'tween ULAN and LOC; Authoritative; Provides a general sense of what things are	Still lacking in non-Western coverage
ArtIndex	2	Useful for contemporary and Modern, especially for names	
Avery Index to Arch. Per.	1	Good resource for architecture and contemporary objects	
ArchNet	1	Good resource for architecture	Still lacking somewhat in Islamic architecture

Web resources

- Museum websites
- Google as a starting place
- Saskia
- Smithsonian Institute Research Information System (SIRIS)
- Philadelphia Architects and Buildings Database (PAB)
- Roberts' Japanese Artists Index
- Altavista's Babelfish

Web resources

Resource	x/6	Likes	Dislikes
Museum websites	3	Easy to find info quickly; authoritative; lots of manuscripts are being digitized	Some just have highlights, not entire collection online
Google	3	Can use to fill in gaps in titles and names; Much online info for Asian art is unreliable but sometimes something is available through Google; easy to find info quickly; can point to authoritative sources	"A lot of dross"
Saskia	2		
SIRIS	1	Can be helpful with some of the notes on slide mounts	
PAB	1	Good for place names, related metadata	
Japanese Index	1	Among my bookmarked sites that I check when cataloging non-Western images	
Babelfish	1		

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Texts

- Source text (text in which the image appears)
- Benezit
- Stokstad, revised edition
- Gardners, 10th edition
- Princeton Encyclopedia for Classical Sites
- Guidebooks (travel guides for various cities)
- Asian Encyclopedia
- Buddhist Dictionary
- Stacks

Texts

Resource	x/6	Likes	Dislikes
Source text	2	When image is next to or near the text; Helps describe images outside of my expertise in a way that makes sense to people who specialize in that area.	It is more challenging when the image and text are seperated.
Benezit (rarely)	1	This was the preferred source before ULAN. Still useful for names not included in ULAN or Avery.	
Stokstad	1	This is what we teach with.	
Gardners	1		
Princeton	1	Gives history of site, structures' dates, covers more obscure country info.	
Guidebooks	1	Info on the types of collections held by museums in different cities and countries.	
Asian Encyc.	1		
Buddhist Dictionary	1	Uses Sanskrit spelling as standard which is preferred by faculty members in that area	
Stacks	1		Everyone's doing description differently

People

- Colleagues
- Faculty
- Students

People

Resource	x/6	Likes	Dislikes
Colleague	2	If I get stuck, I can just ask the other cataloger.	
Faculty	4	Sometimes the only source of info about an image.	Sometimes difficult to get in touch with; Sometimes they provide a different spelling or attribution than authorities or resources, we go w/ faculty preference.
Student	4	Sometimes we'll hire a student w/ a 2nd language to translate and research preferred spellings in a foreign language.	

Examples of Subject Cataloging

Term used	Field used	Where came from	Kept in NL?
Christian religion	Subject classification	Pop-up authority list in cataloging system	No
Attic red figure, herons, funerary objects, vase paintings, women	Keywords	AAT	No
A portrait of the artist as a classical herm	500	Cataloger knowledge of the subject matter	Yes
Colonial Revival	650	AAT	No
Furniture 20th Century United States	650	Authority list in cataloging system	No
Roosevelt, Eleanor, 1884-1962	600	LOC Authorities	No
A photograph of Eleanor Roosevelt with a Val-Kill worker in the workshop. Val-Kill Industries was sponsored and supported by Eleanor Roosevelt.	500	Source text, some from image caption	Yes

Cataloging Software and Cataloger Evaluation

Name of Software	Likes	Dislikes	Years in place
EmbARK	N/A	N/A	N/A
iView	Allows us to follow standards more closely	N/A	Started this Fall
Voyager	Flexibility	Complaints are more with the Getty and LOC and the way things have been organized	6 years

Note: questions on cataloging software were added later in the studies so only two catalogers were asked to describe their opinion of the software.

Post-Interview Questions

- If there was one thing that would make subject description easier, what would it be?
- Do you feel the need for further subject access in your records?
- Do you get any indication from your users that they do or don't use subject-oriented access?
- If there was one thing that would make the cataloging process as a whole easier, what would it be?

Cataloger suggestions for improving subject cataloging

- Standards. Many times the faculty's spelling preferences or data are entered even if they conflict with authoritative sources.

- A comprehensive thesauri for subject terms. Currently available ones are inadequate, especially for describing non-Western works.

  - Inconsistent and seemingly arbitrary content of thesauri. AAT ex: Cassette players but not woodturning

  - Illogical organization of thesauri: Difficulty navigating thesauri, in particular locating terms that seem likely to be there but cannot locate

Cataloger suggestions for improving the cataloging process as a whole

- Importing authority lists from other institutions
- An authority for demystifying all aspects of non-Western works, not just subject matter.
- Matching images to foreign language data. This is especially challenging when data is minimal and page numbers are not provided.
- Having faculty provide more information in general
- Better books with better captions that contain useful information.
- Eliminating duplication
- A regulated workflow. Workflow is often uneven because of last minute cataloging requests.

The need for further subject access in catalog records

- Yes, people are expecting it. However, patrons also need to understand that keyword may work better than searching by subject heading. Keywords taken from strings of words like those found in Bridgman are not authorized terms but many times they are spelled how they are commonly used, at least in the scholarly literature. Something that's not an authorized term might still be a good description.

- Since we have been creating keyword access, I usually just say to the other cataloger, "What do you call such and such?"

- Yes, but then there's also keyword searching. This allows for people to search for things based on how they think about them; the searchers get to choose the words. Subject indexing isn't always intuitive. [Yet] if you get rid of uniform titles for periodicals, then what's the future for libraries? Is Google going to fill in the gaps?

Do you get any indication that your users need subject-oriented access?

- Faculty are usually searching for known items that they can access by title. Students search primarily online so we have less direct contact with them but I would assume that they are searching for images for papers and that they would expect subject searching, say for something like Pennsylvania churches. They are more used to electronic resources and want to be able to search more ways.

- None. But, the way people discuss art is different from how our authority sources discuss them. From some of the queries we get, we see that there is new terminology that is being developed that is not accommodated by the Getty resources and other authorities. "Mapping" in the context of digital arts for example. These terms may be found in contemporary art periodicals but not in the authorities.

De-briefing

- Summary of Process
- Types of Subject terms
- Catalogers additions/comments

Analysis

- Number of terms per record
  - Varies from cataloger to cataloger, between 1 and 8
- Types of terms
  - General/specific: general is more common
  - Of/about: of is more common
  (Note: most examples of "about" are historical context)
  - Also: materials, discipline, object function
- Similarities:
  - General workflow
  - Time issues
  - Frustrations with authorities
- Differences:
  - Internal: Slides vs. book images, depth of subject description
  - Across Institutions: Metadata schemas, cataloging software

Next Steps

- Conduct observations at other types of institutions performing subject cataloging
  - Museums
  - Public libraries
  - Archives and Special Collections
  - Subscription databases and corporate collections
- Conduct Toolkit studies at these or similar institutions
- Design and conduct end user studies