Name Authority Control

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In order for researchers to successfully find needed authors in a library catalog, it is imperative for cataloging librarians to maintain name authority control records. Over the course of a career, writers may get married and divorced; they may utilize their real names and/or pen names, and in many cases, may share the same name as another author. Name authority control helps patrons to connect individuals who have changed their names, utilized abbreviations of their names, and even, been given a different name after they passed away, such as Confucius (Niu, 2013, p. 405). According to librarians Susan Burke and Jay Shorten, (2010) "the justification for name authority control is that patrons, who may be less skilled in finding names, will not find the correct entry if information professionals do not supply the links between different forms of names" (p. 5). Since the 1960s, Machine Readable Cataloging (MARC) has been utilized as a cataloging standard to organize library collections. Within this schema, the 1XX field has been designated to record author names. This has provided consistency across library catalogs (Myntti and Cothran, 2013, p. 96). However, frequent cataloging rule changes, the growth of electronic records that are documented in an Extensible Markup Language (XML), and the expensive and laborious nature of updating records have created challenges for librarians in maintaining name authority control. As libraries become more interconnected in the twenty-first century with linked data, the manner in which name authority control is documented appears poised to change.

Authority control is a mechanism utilized to provide a standardization of names with an "authorized name" that can universally be utilized to find an author. Librarian Sha Li Zhang maintains that this helps provide consistency between library catalogs (Zhang, 2001, p. 395). While this prospect may be useful, librarian Jinfang Niu (2013) contends that it can be difficult

to maintain this consistency as the authorized names are based on cataloging rules, such as Anglo-American Cataloging Rules (AACR2) and Resource Description and Access (RDA), which have frequent rule changes that require time-consuming updates to library records (pp. 412-413). Despite these hardships, Niu stresses the importance of authority files in helping patrons find needed information. She contends that in order to conduct a successful search in an online public access catalog, (OPAC), searches must first be directed to the authority file. Otherwise, "if the authority file is not searched first and the person happens to search using a variant name…then only one bibliographic record will be found" (p. 407). This is one of many approaches to name authority control, which Niu provides excellent commentary on. Alternatively, she explains that if multiple authority records exist, it is also possible to provide links between the authority records. Likewise, catalogers also have the option to combine multiple authorized names for an individual and any variations into one authority record (pp. 408-409).

Maintaining name authority control is a very labor-intensive and expensive task as the Library of Congress issues 7,600 name authority records every week (Aschmann, 2002, p. 33; Zhang, 2001, p. 398). In order for libraries to obtain these records, they must engage in copy cataloging, which involves "continually comparing the in-house authority file to the long list of updated headings issued weekly by the [Library of Congress]" (Burke & Shorten, 2010, p. 6). Librarians Jeremy Myntti and Nate Cothran (2013) assert that with linked data, records will be updated automatically, which means that every institution will not have to update their own records; this will save money and provide more consistency throughout the library community (p. 96).

As it stands today, manually updating records is more likely to be undertaken by large, graduate, research libraries, which are also more likely to be Name Authority Cooperative (NACO)-certified contributors, as opposed to smaller, community college or public libraries (Aschmann, 2002, p. 33; Burke & Shorten, 2010, p. 8). As part of the Program for Cooperative Cataloging, the Library of Congress maintains authority records through NACO, which serves as a national authority file (NAF) (Aschmann, 2002, p. 34; Burke & Shorten, 2010, p. 5; Wolverton, 2006, p. 38). In order for libraries to become certified to contribute authority files to the NAF, they must pay the travel and accommodation expenses of a NACO-certified trainer, who will guide librarians at the host institution to create authority records. Once the NACO trainer approves the authority records created under their supervision, the institution will receive clearance from NACO to add authority files to the NAF (Wolverton, 2006, p. 38).

In their research study, Burke and Shorten (2013) discovered that smaller libraries are less likely to spend resources on name authority control because they feel that they do not possess a sufficient number of resources to merit the effort and expense (pp. 376-377). Smaller academic and public libraries were more likely to verify authority records against their own institutionally created, local authority records, or through the NAF. Large, research-oriented libraries copy catalog files through the Library of Congress as well, but they also utilize pay services, such as the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) and vendor-purchased files (p. 373). Since libraries are often understaffed and frequently face budget cuts, librarians Althea Aschmann and Sha Li Zhang contend that it is more cost-efficient for libraries to outsource their authority control to a vendor, rather performing in-house authority control (Aschmann, 2002, p. 33; Zhang, 2001, p. 404).

Many universities, including Wichita State and Virginia Tech, have utilized vendors to maintain their catalogs. Vendors can be utilized for one-time maintenance or to provide continuous cataloging. Both of these universities, which have similar size databases "report cleaner and more consistent databases after employing authority control vendors for review and updating of headings in their catalogs" (Aschmann, 2002, p. 34). By utilizing vendor supplied authority control, it enabled these institutions to have consistent records from the NAF and to focus their time on creating new NACO records for their locally created authority files (p. 39). While less time spent on authority files might imply the possibility of job losses, Aschmann found that was not the case. In fact, she contends that Virginia Tech would benefit from an additional position to support output processing for vendor supplied authority control (p. 38). With this change, she asserts that all authority records at Virginia Tech "now come from the NAF…[which] spared the work of creating authority records in the local system, and other libraries can benefit from authority work on local headings" (p. 39).

Despite the successes of vendor supplied authority control at these institutions, Aschmann cautions librarians that all vendors are not equal. It is necessary for institutions to do sufficient research on all of the vendors that offer authority control assistance to ensure that it meets the needs of the institution. Likewise, it is essential to communicate needs and wants and to develop a working deadline for when the work needs to be completed. Changing long-established operating procedures at the library does not come without its hardships. By switching from original cataloging to outsourcing authority control, libraries may need to change the structure of how the library operates. At Virginia Tech, Aschmann explains that it "required departmental sacrifices, along with changes in workflow, staff assignments, and in one case a supervisor change….[but] the results are worth the effort" (p. 43).

Since the 1980s, there has been a growing movement towards replacing name authority control with a numerically-based identifier for authors instead of one based on their human identity. Libraries with severe fiscal restraints may welcome this change. Niu explains that this change to a global ID will be necessary in order to accommodate linked data (Niu, 2013, p. 415). This movement, which began in 1980 with the introduction of the International Standard Authority Data Number (ISADN) has gained steam following a recent proposal from the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), which promoted the creation of an International Standard Book Number (ISBN)-type number for authors (Burke & Shorten (2010, p. 5). Having such a number will ensure consistency, which is one of the major problems in the Organization of Information as cataloging rules consistently change (Niu, 2013, pp. 412-413). Myntti and Cothran note that consistency is essential for the success of linked data. With the growth of electronic records that are documented in XML, it will be necessary to provide crosswalks between catalogs based on MARC towards an XML-friendly scheme. Since XML data is not contained in individual fields, however, it may be impossible to convert XML data back to individual MARC fields, such as 1XX (Myntti & Cothran, 2013, p. 99. Librarians Taylor and Joudrey (2009) are comfortable with that and feel that library records should move towards a more digital-friendly format (p. 141).

In the meantime, Niu (2013) asserts that there are alternatives to name authority control. If authorized name headings are not utilized, names and variations for an individual can all be included in an access control record, which can serve a similar function as an authority file. It is also possible to create multiple access control records for an individual and provide links between the entries within a catalog (p. 410). However, Niu contends that with the growing movement toward linked data, searching a bibliographic database, instead of an authority or

access control record may be more beneficial moving forward (pp. 411-412). Myntti and Cothran (2013) explain that "linked data has the potential to change the way [that] library data are structured in the near future. In order to prepare for this change, libraries need to make sure that their data is consistent and standardized so that it has the highest potential for linking to existing control vocabularies that are available as linked data" (p. 112). As users increasingly interact on the web, Niu (2013) maintains that utilizing a bibliographic database would allow users and catalogers to provide links between resources, which may reduce the cost of maintaining a library catalog (pp. 411-412).

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