



V O L U M E 2 N U M B E R 4

:: AUGUST 2002 ::

FEATURE – corey a harper**Technical versus Public Services: Bridging the Fictional Gap Between "Opposing" Aspects of Librarianship**

Arguing that cataloging *is* a public service, Corey examines the perception that there's little common ground between technical and public services, and demonstrates that there's plenty of opportunity for everyone to provide services to the public.

INTERVIEW – Eric Miller

Eric Miller is the World Wide Web Consortium's lead person on the [Semantic Web](#) project. In this interview, he gives us the scoop on the Semantic Web - what it is, why we should care, and the role libraries can play.

PEOPLE

In this issue we hear from Fiona Bradley, youth issues director of Sydney, Australia's essential community radio outlet [2RRR](#), and host of the entertaining *and* informative library affairs program [Between the Stacks](#) (and MA candidate to boot).

ASK SUSU

Susu, our sometimes irreverent advice columnist, answers your questions about work, school, the job hunt, and librarianship in general. In this issue, Susu gives us the low-down on proposing subject headings.

TECH TALK

In April 2001, Colleen shared her favorites from the exhibit halls at the ACRL Conference in Denver. This month, she's sharing a new, highly selective, completely subjective list of what's new and what's cool in library technology, culled from her visits to the exhibit hall at the ALA Annual Conference in Atlanta.

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F E A T U R E A R T I C L E

::: AUGUST 2002 :::

Technical versus Public Services: Bridging the Fictional Gap Between "Opposing" Aspects of Librarianship

COREY A HARPER

Corey is a recent graduate of the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill's School of Information & Library Science. His interests are eclectic, from participation in "the new, electronic grassroots," to the Nez Perce War of 1877 and literary criticism. He's also a bassist, which will put him in plenty of good company as a member of the University of Oregon Libraries faculty. He presented a version of this article during his interview, and we thought it would make a great feature article.

For some time now there has been a very imagined division in the field of library sciences between Technical Services librarians and Public Services librarians. The two groups are often seen as being mutually exclusive, in part due to prominent stereotypes regarding personality differences.

The concept of the Technical Services librarian conjures up clichéd images of the public librarian from 1950s and 1960s television: bookish, quiet, somewhat quirky and not very social or outgoing, as depicted in the *Ghostbusters* movie, and recently making an appearance in the latest installment of George Lucas' *Star Wars* saga: presuming the library infallible and not being particularly helpful when confronted with a reference question by a hapless Ewan McGregor.

This is the standard imagery that came to the minds of many of my friends and relatives when I announced an intention to enter this profession. It is also the librarian mantle that this 'zine endeavors to cast off, attempting to help redefine the profession and establish a new image for people to associate with the librarian at their local university or high school, at their public library or at their place of business. One major stumbling block to such a redefinition is that this very stereotyping goes on within the profession as well as outside of it. Many librarians will support the notion that there is a strong personality difference between a reference librarian and a cataloger. While the reference librarian is a gregarious individual who loves talking to and helping people locate information, the cataloger loves books, and is most comfortable when behind a closed door, in a room full of inanimate information, well away from patrons and the user population.

As early as 1983, when a special issue of *The Reference Librarian* was devoted to interactions between public and technical services, a movement was afoot to blur the division in this imaginary dichotomy. One article in this issue addresses the "people people" versus "book people" split, stating that there is imagined to be

"two 'kinds' of librarianship . . . [one] concerned with esoteric 'technical' matters and populated by reclusive adepts, has concerns which are mysterious and methods which are suspect...The second is

concerned with 'The Public' and populated by bluff men and women (democrats all), deals with real issues, real people, the library user in tooth and claw." (Gorman, 1983, p56)

When Michael Gorman wrote this article, he was in the process of effecting a massive library organizational overhaul at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, where he held the position of Director of General Services. The article goes on to advocate a flat structure where all librarians partake in a range of activities on both sides of the division, a structure that is more likely to be in place at a smaller college or a special library. The presence of a Director of General Services position at Illinois indicates that they had some success with this sort of experimental structure, but the University has since returned to a more traditional administrative setup. In part, this may be due to the difficulty in developing thoroughly generalist librarians at such a large institution, where a certain degree of specialization is necessary to make things run smoothly.

However, it should come as no surprise that this vocal advocate of library reorganization was also the first editor of the 1979 revision of the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules*.

Historical Perspectives

This controversial publication created an uproar in the community and had a pronounced effect on the relationship between technical services and public services departments. Drastic changes that were made to the structure and nature of cataloging rules have a powerful effect on the work done by public services librarians. Decisions about bibliographic standards were made with considerable input from subject specialists.

As early as 1980, Phillip Bryant authored an article in *The Journal of Documentation*, which stated that "very little attention has been given during the past decade to subject retrieval from library catalogues compared to the attention which has been afforded descriptive cataloging. There are signs that the tide is turning and that concern with the problems of providing subject access will grow in the immediate future." (Bryant, 1980, p. 157)

These somewhat drastic changes in bibliographic standards, especially in regard to choice of access points, was further augmented by the widespread adoption of Online Public Access Catalogs and other mechanisms of library automation. OPACs served to change the way people used catalogs, as the more automated instantiations are more adapted to facilitate topical searching but not as rich of a browsing tool.

Additionally, information production increased considerably over the last few decades. As information produced became more and more voluminous as well as specialized, the general effect was that scholastic inquiry became considerably deeper, allowing for far fewer true generalists. This made it extremely difficult for even the most stalwart of academics to stay abreast of important developments in their field, as well as a variety of related and auxiliary disciplines.

This trend also has a powerful effect on the nature of cataloging, requiring catalogers to take even greater care in providing access to materials. The purpose of effective cataloging is to provide a service. This purpose includes such notions of resource discovery via serendipity, the establishment of "hidden" or non-obvious connections between different classes and types of resources and the provision for a sort of "interdisciplinary bridge" to enable discovery in disciplines and areas so removed from the originating subject as to deter searching, but extremely relevant to the given context. Achieving all of this requires the development of rich, robust subject cataloging and authority control.

Who do we catalog for, anyway?

A more public services approach to cataloging decreases instances of searches resulting in recall without precision, precision at the expense of recall, and discovery without access, due to a lack of context sensitivity in the results given. As a library user as well as employee, I know that there is only one thing that frustrates me more than irrelevant results in a search or positive, useful resources falsely dropped from a set of search results due to low recall. This mother of all annoyances can be summed up in three words: discovery without access!

Now, in regard to traditional print resources this doesn't serve as much of a problem. With the exception of the occasional lost book that has not yet been indicated as missing in the catalog, OPACs don't generally contain records for materials they don't own.

In the environment of electronic resources, especially journal articles, this becomes a more significant issue. Many library patrons, especially in academic environments, seem to have begun taking for granted the availability of full-text access to articles. In and of itself, this is not a significant issue, but when combined with the variety of vendors who provide access to indexing and abstracting services, a somewhat serious problem soon develops. Often times, a subscription database such as *MedLine* or *Web of Science* will advertise a link to the full text of an article that has been found, only for the user to discover that his or her institution does not carry a subscription to the electronic content through the publisher indicated by the indexing service. This is even more infuriating when the institution in question *does* have access to the resource in full text format, but through some alternative aggregator or vendor not indicated by the abstracting and indexing (A&I) database.

There are a number of developments in rectifying this problem, yet the library community proper does not have as much control over this as it should. The 2002 ALA midwinter conference included numerous exhibitors that were touting innovations in the D2D (Discovery to Delivery) area of integrated library systems, recognizing and enhancing the role of the library catalog to establish and steer the user to linkages between a variety of different services, such as from the catalog to or from an index entry or abstract to the library's print catalog, or a listing of online journal holdings, or even to an interlibrary loan request entry form. These initiatives are being developed by ILS vendors, in an attempt to make the OPAC the top level of a library's web presence, as opposed to being a single link among many on a home page. Some librarians would also appreciate developments of this kind.

Major steps in this direction are being taken, materializing in the form of products such as **Serials Solutions**, which attempts to provide one-stop, hyperlinked access to *all* electronic journals located at an institution, whether through aggregators, vendors, subscription agents or publishers and **Syndetic Solutions**, which provides keyword access to tables of contents, notes and annotations (such as text of reviews and précis from book jackets), and information about authors (e.g., institutional affiliation). Many other services are being developed that focus on "reference-linking," attempting to provide cross-links between a variety of A&I databases and full-text databases in a manner that is sensitive to the context of the institutional subscriber. Examples include: **xrefer**, **SFX**, and **CrossRef**.

Even in cases where access to the full text of articles is not completely supported, there are still trends in place toward providing information in a variety of forms that are more useful to the information seeker. Even OCLC's *FirstSearch*, which many librarians find to be an extremely un-user-friendly search tool, is now supporting **direct export of abstracts and citations** to ISI's *EndNote* software.

A New Kind of Librarian

Job titles in the field are more frequently containing words and phrases such as "data services," "catalog enrichment" and "metadata." All of these concepts imply an addition of various sorts of enhancements to an existing resource base, in the form of tools or utilities or added services. In many respects, such enhancements depend on the public services approach to cataloging described above.

Some of my peers who have just graduated from UNC Chapel Hill's School of Information and Library Sciences have taken positions such as those listed above, and I was interested to learn that, in many cases, these positions were located within the public services side of their respective library's organizations. A discussion regarding the development of metadata standards and records for a variety of electronic resources available to the institutions in question led to an adamant denial, on the part of some of the involved persons, that the work engaged in by metadata librarians is intricately related to the work historically performed by catalogers.

Part of the objection raised over the course of this conversation was that cataloging did not have the public services orientation that was required for effective discovery of electronic resources, and that metadata should be developed and applied by individuals who are involved daily with the task of assisting the user population. When I made the argument that this should be the case with all cataloging, at least in terms of attention to user categories and behaviors, all those present agreed, but questioned the practicability of the proposal, as the attitude described above is not one commonly attributed to catalogers.

Let's cultivate a clear vision

I undertook to write this article, in large part, because I wanted to reach a fairly wide audience with the broad and seemingly unrelated spectrum of concepts that have been included. In part, the above ramblings represent an extremely informal call to action, on the part of catalogers, technical services librarians, cataloging departments and library science instructors who teach tech services classes. *It is time for us to jump on board with, formulate or participate in some sort of vision!*

Examples of such visions were shared at the Conference on Bibliographic Control in the New Millennium (CBCNM) held by the Library of Congress in November 2000. **Clifford A. Lynch** gave a keynote speech, in which he discussed the concept of a "**spectrum of bibliographic approaches.**" He spoke of bibliographic surrogates, such as the abstracts and catalog records libraries have been using for ages, but also discussed the need to augment this traditional mechanism with other approaches that have been common in commercial information retrieval systems and the research and development community. These types of approaches currently include, but need not necessarily be limited to, computational models such as vector searching, latent semantic indexing and the development of new search algorithms comparable to the proprietary ones used by search engines such as *Google*. A third component of this spectrum of access arises

"through social processes that exploit the opinions and actions of communities that author, read, and evaluate works, and the information seeker's view of those communities of people involved." (Lynch, 2000, paragraph 4)

Carl Lagoze presented a paper on what he and his colleagues have termed "**event aware cataloging**", which is based on the notion that as more information becomes electronic, there is a need to have succinct bibliographic records that document the version or action associated with a work rather than

having a record that describes the item itself. Lagoze states that new information is far more dynamic and fluid in electronic form, there is much greater need for identifying the parties publishing or asserting given information, and resource description is becoming a more decentralized process (the **Dublin Core** is an example of a resource description designed to be applied by non professionals). For these reasons, it is necessary for a catalog to document the various changes that a resource undergoes, as well as who is responsible for any given change, rather than just describing the document as a static entity.

There are numerous areas where technical services expertise is extremely valuable. Examples include:

- metadata initiatives, in both academic and corporate environments;
- the development of encoding schemas and standards, such as the **Resource Description Framework** (RDF) and **Ontology Web Language** (OWL) (see also <http://www.w3.org/2001/sw/WebOnt>); and
- the development of "digital libraries."

The development of encoding schemas like RDF and OWL serve to provide a mechanism for encoding the meaning of web content, providing a mechanism for another Vision: Tim Berners-Lee and the **World Wide Web Consortium's** concept of the semantic web.

"The Semantic Web is a vision: the idea of having data on the web defined and linked in a way that it can be used by machines not just for display purposes, but for automation, integration and reuse of data across various applications." (<http://www.w3.org/2001/sw/>)

In Tim Berners-Lee's image of the semantic web, controlled vocabularies come together to provide a mechanism for complex knowledge representations that can be used to express meaning in a way that can be used by machines in the ways described above. An excellent depiction of this vision is found in a recent *Scientific American* article on the **semantic web**.

Much of this concept involves the development of a "Web of Trust," whereby browsers can determine the value and authenticity of an assertion based on the context the user is searching in combined with known information about the person or organization making the assertion.

Additionally, the development of a "Web Of Trust" is a potential application for the authority control experience of the technical services community, as is described in a **paper by Barbara Tillett** at the 2000 CBCNM conference cited earlier.

A major step forward in the elimination of the perceived gap between technical services and public services is for technical services librarians to use this unique point in history as a jumping off point. We are at a juncture where the expertise of catalogers will be a useful and (hopefully) welcomed commodity in areas that include a broad range of participants, from computer scientists and computer engineers to linguists and philosophers. Such a movement would represent an opportunity to re-establish the commitment of cataloging as a practice to the needs and desires of those who use our catalog. We must make the world know that **cataloging is a public service**.

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Eric Miller is the World Wide Web Consortium's Activity Lead on the [Semantic Web Initiative](#). He was previously a Senior Research Scientist for OCLC, as well as co-founder and Associate Director of the [Dublin Core Metadata Initiative](#). We're pleased that he's taken time out of his busy schedule to give us the scoop on the Semantic Web.

NewBreed Librarian: In 75 words or less, what is the Semantic Web?

Eric Miller: The Semantic Web is an extension of the current Web in which information is given well-defined meaning, better enabling computers and people to work in cooperation. Suppose you want, for example, to compare the stock price of a company with the weather at its home base, or you want to search online catalogs for an equivalent replacement part for something. The information may be there, but currently only in a form which can be poured over by people.

The Semantic Web will allow two things. First, it will allow this information to be surfaced in the form of data, so that a program doesn't have to strip the formatting and pictures and ads off a Web page and guess the data. Second, it will allow people to write (or generate) files which explain – to a machine – the relationship between different sets of data. For example, one will be able to make a "semantic link" between a database with a "zip-code" column and a form with a "zip" field that actually mean the same – they are the same abstract concept. This will allow machines to follow links and hence automatically integrate data from many different sources.

This notion of being able to formally and explicitly define how two "resources" (terms, documents, people, etc.) relate is an important one. With this we can begin to move from a web of 'links-to' relationships (which is what we have with the HTML A or anchor tag) to a more expressive, semantically-rich Web, a Web where we can incrementally add meaning and express a whole new set of relationships (hasLocation, worksFor, isAuthorOf, hasSubjectOf, dependsOn, etc.), making explicit the particular contextual relationships among resources. This in turn opens new doors for a whole new set of effective information integration, management and automated services.

For more information on the Semantic Web, check out the [Semantic Web Home Page](#).

NBL: Can you provide one or two examples for our readers of how the Semantic Web might function?

EM: Excellent question. I should preface this example, however, as it may not be especially novel to many in the library community. What I hope that *is* of interest to the readership is the realization that some of these very simple ideas and concepts that are familiar to this community are going mainstream and helping to bridge various information sharing gaps among communities and organizations.

OK, simple, silly, and yet particularly relevant to me at the moment :) reference library question : "What

causes headaches? And what is the best cure?"

The information seeking and processing tasks reference librarians engage in depend on various resources that are available and the knowledge of the limitations and capabilities of such resources. Searching for "head-ache" and "headache" yield different results, searching "migraine" also provides a new set of answers. A hand-full of online databases are available for the reference librarian; however, the results from these are still manually cut and pasted, interesting key-points are synthesized by the reference librarian and then either resources are presented to the patron where they in turn can continue searching, or an answer is presented.

In the Semantic Web, terms and concepts are given URI's. These concepts in turn are related (broader, narrower, synonymous, etc.). The Semantic Web facilitates the discovery of information by providing the enabling standards and technologies for allowing communities to express data in ways in which it can more easily be integrated, merged and effectively searched.

Switching gears slightly, but along these same lines, imagine two medical research firms (one in France, one in the US) are working on cures for various ailments. They each have a controlled vocabulary of the various ailments at which their products are targeted. The US firm provides a unique identifier (URI) for what it means for 'headache'; similarly the French firm also defines a URI for 'mal de tête'. Each firm may then relate this ailment to various other ailments their company is focused on (migraine, sinus pressure, etc.).

Current search mechanisms trying to locate products from both of these firms would only succeed if their ailments used the same spelling. In this case (the case where these firms represented their information in terms of the Semantic Web), one might define an 'equivalence' between the URI for 'headache' and the URI for 'mal de tête'. Thus any products that solve one, would also solve the other.

Same issue (and one that sure sounds similar to the library problem mentioned above) – to the extent that we can reduce these kinds of data integration, aggregation, discovery and management issues across *all* communities, we facilitate more effective knowledge exchange and communication.

The Web provides the framework for these (and other) groups to declare their respective vocabularies in terms of URI's. The Semantic Web provides their base standards for how to declare these vocabularies and allow one to declare how these vocabularies might relate.

This is a very simple example, but one that I hope might illustrate small incremental steps of the Semantic Web.

NBL: What are the components of the Semantic Web? What pieces or technologies are needed to make it work?

EM: The current web (URI's, HTTP, etc) provides a useful and powerful foundation for the Semantic Web. With the introduction of XML we have an incredibly flexible, powerful markup language that can be used to represent a large variety of information. The Semantic Web builds on these technologies that provide for a standardized representation for data (**XML/RDF**) and for the conceptual structures behind that data (**RDF Schema, Web Ontology**) to support a variety of new information management and data integration applications.

The technical components to the Semantic Web are only part of the equation. A social component is

additionally required. The technologies supporting the Semantic Web enable 'anyone to say anything about anything.' *Who* says what is an important part of the equation. Libraries traditionally have strong social trust. Being able to answer queries and look at the Web through a set of "Librarian's glasses" (as well as other trusted parties) is a huge and important contribution.

NBL: Is the W3C the only player in this project, or are there other organizations involved, and if so, what is their role?

EM: There are many commercial, not-for profit, and academic organizations from all over the world working with W3C on creating the Semantic Web. Remember that the Semantic Web technology integrates existing work such as Web technology, knowledge representation technology, and Digital Libraries, so a lot of existing work is being leveraged. There are also a number of companies that are very excited about this, and are looking to it as a solution to the problem of integration of the different applications in an enterprise.

The roles of these various organizations range. Several of these groups are participating in various Semantic Web-related **working groups**. These participants are actively involved in helping define the enabling standards. Even more groups are participating in various Semantic Web **interest groups** and are focused on applying these technologies to various tasks, including calendaring, and collaborative annotations.

There are additionally a growing set of individuals participating in helping define an increasingly powerful set of open source tools and technologies.

Additional information on this, as well as how others might be interested in participating, can be found on the **RDF Home Page**.

NBL: What is the timeline for the implementation of the Semantic Web? Is it something we'll see in practice within the next 5 years or so, or are we looking at a longer timeline?

EM: Good question. We're taking a step-wise approach with respect to deployment of the Semantic Web. The underlying goals here are to make the simple things simple, and the more complex things possible.

The Semantic Web is all about data integration, and much richer ways of organizing things based on contextual relationships. Various communities have already adopted these technologies for supporting their various metadata requirements. These include, for example, **Dublin Core Metadata Initiative**, **RSS** focus on news syndication, **PRISM** for supporting the publishing industry, and **Creative Commons**, focusing on Digital Rights Description, just to name a few.

Products such as Adobe's **XMP Toolkit** are designed to work across all of Adobe's products, leverage these technologies for supporting their metadata management requirements.

Perhaps the best places, however, to see the benefits of these technologies is to take a look at sites that leverage these kinds of technologies. A small set of examples include **Meerkat**, **MusicBrainz**, and **Epinions**. Meerkat is an open wire service integrating news information from a variety of sources. MusicBrainz is a collaborative meta-database site that deals with music tracks. Epinions logs products of all types and integrates pricing, catalogs and consumer opinions. Here are three simple examples of what can happen when information is brought together in a meaningful way, making things greater than the

sum of the individual parts.

Much work is still required, and the above communities, projects, and examples are but the tip of the iceberg, but they provide a sense of where we're at and a hint of where we're going.

NBL: How will the Semantic Web change the work information professionals do?

EM:In order to best answer this question, its important to understand what the Internet was like before the Web.

In 1989, there were many different documentation systems and "help" systems. They ran on different computers and used different human interfaces, and it was very difficult to get information from one to another. At best you could do it with a lot of manual copying and pasting between different windows. (Many of the readers of this article may be saying to themselves.. 1989?! we still have this now! They, unfortunately, would be right!)

Then (and and to some extent now), the framework of hypertext allowed every document and screen in each system to be expressed in a common language. An abstract space was created in which, to the user, all the documents would seem to exist, even though in fact they were still stored on many different computers.

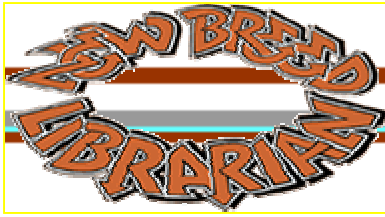
Now, we have a wonderful interlinked world for documents, but not for data. Imagine browsing a Web page about an event – maybe a conference – that you might want to go to. The page has information about people, places, and times. You also have on a computer an address book and a date book, as well as a GPS (Global Positioning System) device which can help you get to places. When you decide to go to an event, it's important to absorb the relevant information about people, times and places. You need more than just a human-readable copy of this information. You want this information in a form that a machine is able to understand in order to connect the times in your date book to the people in your address book and, when needed, tell your GPS where you need to go. But without the Semantic Web you have no hope of doing it, without a lot of manual copying and pasting between different windows!

The Semantic Web is simply an extension of the current Web that allows for more effective sharing and combining of information. To an information professional, this translates into greater access, more accurate and timely information, and reduced costs.

NBL: Finally, what opportunities to participate in or learn about the Semantic Web are available for information professionals at this point?

EM: There are several, some directly with W3C through the various Semantic Web **interest groups** I mentioned earlier. Some that require a bit more work (setting up your own special interest group focused on a particular theme or topic relevant to your community). I would be very supportive of ALA, IFLA, AALL, and other library organizations establishing interest groups for better explaining the benefits of the technologies to their respective communities.

The Digital Library community was very influential in the original standards and technologies for supporting the Semantic Web. Metadata is at the core of what libraries do and this core is the basis for the Semantic Web. Libraries have the potential for being extremely powerful stakeholders in this future.



P E O P L E

::: AUGUST 2002 :::



In what will sadly be the last *People* column, we hear from Fiona Bradley, youth issues director of Sydney, Australia's essential community radio outlet **2RRR**, and host of the entertaining *and* informative library affairs program **Between the Stacks** (and MA candidate to boot.) Last one out, please turn off the lights . . .

I work at **SBS** in Sydney, which is a multicultural radio and television station in Australia, broadcasting in 68 languages. Our library provides music and reference services to radio broadcasters and television staff. We're a team of four (with another team of four in Melbourne) - my main responsibilities are looking after serials, patrons, and community announcements. Our requests on an average day range from finding music to suit a story on figure skating, to analysing Census data, to compiling details of upcoming United Nations days for our broadcasters.

Most of our collection consists of music from around the world. We have CDs and LPs for every group that broadcasts on radio, plus a wide selection of English language pop, production music, and sound effects. One of the most challenging aspects of working in a multicultural music library is getting to know the musical culture of each region. A perfect working knowledge of Neo-Psychedelica isn't so useful when someone's looking for Tabla music from Bengal!

The other challenge is the language barrier. We have to rely on our broadcasters to translate all of the details on the CDs that they buy before we can catalogue them. We have little use for database services such as Kinetica, everything we catalogue apart from English language books has to be original cataloguing.

Since SBS is so unique, I was interested in finding out how other news and music libraries operate. I established the **Music Library Special Interest Group** of the Australian Library and Information Association which is aimed at radio libraries in government, commercial, and community sectors, as well as more traditional music research libraries. The aim of the group is to share ideas about where to find music, and discuss issues like copyright and music broadcast licensing. And since the SBS library also performs some of the same roles as news libraries, I wanted to research how other media libraries conduct research for journalists. I am currently researching a Master of Arts on this topic.

I'm inspired by the limitless range of questions that our clients ask. No two workdays are ever the same! I'm also amazed by the willingness of the library community to share ideas about themselves and their organisations. I've tried out so many things that others have suggested online - I don't think that any other profession has a community quite like we do.

I've often turned to listservs when I've hit a brick wall on a subject. Be it finding magazine holders, looking for citations, getting details of upcoming conferences, or searching for details of obscure music, you'll always get an answer on a library listserv. And often not from just one person, but four or five!

Listsers are also a wonderful breeding ground for new ideas in the profession, especially on lists connected to topics like Information Literacy. There is a lot of debate going on between those in the field that often matter the most, those actually out there and doing, putting new methods and ideas into practice. Feedback about how different ideas work is invaluable, whether it's feedback on how you should arrange the chairs in a training session, to defining competencies for different learner groups.

Students can also use listservs. If you're unsure about what aspects of librarianship you want to pursue after library school, join a few listservs. You can get a good idea of what people do this way. Job postings are also frequently sent to lists, so you can check out job descriptions and salary. I discovered that I was interested in Information Literacy after joining an Australian listserv, and participating in a couple of debates.

Being a librarian is great - I never thought that I would get a job where I could listen to rock music all day, suggest appropriate sound effects of "Man - being strangled" for television productions, or organise a serials collection from scratch!

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A S K S U S U

::: AUGUST 2002 :::

Susu, our sometimes irreverent advice columnist, answers your questions about work, school, the job hunt, and librarianship in general. In this issue, Susu gives us the low-down on proposing subject headings.

Dear Susu, How does one submit subject heading proposals to the Library of Congress? Do you have to be a member of SACO?

Dear Proposer,

You don't have to become a member of anything to submit subject heading proposals to LC through SACO (the Subject Authority Cooperative Project). Any individual cataloger who needs a subject heading not available in LCSH can do it.

There are a few basic requirements, though. It is important to have a good understanding of the structure of LCSH and the principles behind it. For example, LC tries to be consistent in the way subject headings are formulated, and if you propose a new heading in a form that is very different from similar headings, it's less likely that it will be accepted in that form. On the other hand, another principle maintains that LCSH terms should reflect current American usage as reflected in the literature for that subject area; so, you may be able to make a case for breaking away from an existing pattern.

You'll need to do some research in authoritative sources, such as dictionaries, indexes, or other reference works to demonstrate that the proposed heading reflects current terminology. You may also discover other terms used for the concept that should be added as cross-references. With this information at hand, you're ready to start building your proposal.

It's important to have access to the most current edition of the *Subject Cataloging Manual: Subject Headings*, published by the Library of Congress. An entire section of this manual tells you how to prepare a proposal — how to choose the best terminology for the subject heading, which cross-references to include, how to select broader term references that will help fit the new heading into the existing structure, and how to document the research you've done. Get to know these guidelines so that when you submit proposals, they are likely to be approved.

There's a lot of help available on the [SACO web site](#) including the forms you fill out to submit your proposal. The forms are annotated with very helpful instructions for the different kinds of headings you can propose: [new topical headings](#), [geographic headings](#), or headings for [biological organisms](#).

You can also propose changes to [existing records](#) (like adding cross-references) and [new LC classification numbers](#) through SACO. The forms can be submitted by e-mail, mail, or fax.

One of the most active participants in the SACO program, Adam Schiff, wrote an excellent guide to the whole process, [SACO participants' manual](#), which is available as a PDF file on the SACO page or in print from the Cataloging Distribution Service. Adam's book is helpful because it provides many examples of the kinds of headings a library might want to propose and describes how an experienced SACO contributor would think through the proposals.

If you go to ALA conferences, check the web site for information on [free SACO workshops](#) taught by LC staff. These are great for learning the basics. Additionally, there are specialized workshops in different subject areas for more advanced SACO participants.

Once you submit a subject heading proposal, it goes through an extensive editorial review at LC to ensure that sufficient research has been done and that it is formulated in a way that is consistent with LC practice. Proposed headings appear on [tentative weekly lists](#). After final approval in an editorial meeting, the subject headings are added to LCSH and subject authority records are distributed to bibliographic utilities and vendors.

It may sound complicated — and for someone just starting out as a SACO contributor, there is much to learn. But there's also help available, and it's very satisfying to see the subject headings you proposed become part of LCSH, thus shaping the subject vocabulary that provides access to our collections.

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In April 2001, Colleen [shared her favorites](#) from the exhibit halls at the ACRL Conference in Denver. This month, she's sharing a new, highly selective, completely subjective list of what's new and what's cool in library technology, culled from her visits to the exhibit hall at the ALA Annual Conference in Atlanta.

I have rules for visiting exhibit halls at conferences:

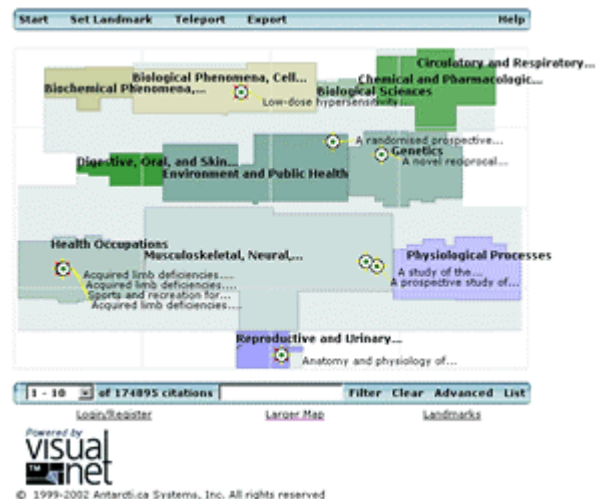
- Wear comfortable walking shoes and a backpack containing a bottle of water, money, and a stack of business cards.
- Limit each visit to the exhibit halls to 1 hour, and no more than 2 visits per day.
- Do not pick up more than 1 sheet of literature from any one vendor - you can usually find what you need on the web.
- Leave the pens and mousepads alone - go for the toys.

These rules have served me well, and I haven't yet left a conference without having walked past every vendor's booth at least once. If something catches my eye, I'll stop to chat. If not, I keep moving. It works well for me, and allows me to see what's being offered at a somewhat leisurely pace.

I tend to be most interested in products for academic libraries (go figure!), especially "cool" technology products. Not necessarily the bells and whistles variety, but technology that is useful, that allows us to do things better or in a different way, or that accommodates other ways of thinking. So, given all this, here are my best picks from the ALA exhibitors in June 2002.

First Place

[Antarctica Systems](#), located in Vancouver, B.C., deserves top prize for its [Visual Net for Libraries](#). We know from learning theory that some people are textually oriented, while others learn best through visual stimuli. Visual Net allows users to browse your library catalog using spatial relationships and visual cues to guide their search, but also allows traditional search and display methods. And since it can represent the relative sizes of collections, it doubles as a handy collection development tool.



Second Place

The National Library of Medicine just keeps adding cool new features to its [PubMed](#) database, features that are equal to or better than the ones for which we pay big bucks. One of the latest: [LinkOut](#), a "jumping-off point from PubMed citations to relevant resources on the web, such as full-text articles, library holdings, commentaries, author biographies, practice guidelines, consumer health information, and research tools." (Yeah, I know, there are other products out there, but the point is that this one doesn't force you to mortgage the ranch to pay for it.)

And for a little added value, try [Antarcti.ca's visual PubMed interface](#).

Third Place

The Association of Research Libraries' (ARL) [Scholars Portal](#) project is still in the "vaporware" stage, but shows great promise. Remember reading about the idea of a [Scholars' Workstation](#) waaaaaay back in the 1990s? This project updates the idea for the 21st century, using the power of the web portal - a "single point of access on the Web to find high-quality information resources and, to the greatest extent possible, deliver the information and related services directly to the desktop." ARL is hoping to make it happen with the help of Fretwell-Downing Inc.'s [ZPORTAL](#) product. (Now if only we can get a really cool interface like the one from [Minority Report](#).)

Honorable Mention

The following products didn't make it into the top cut, but they still deserve mention here:

- [RefWorks](#)
Bravo to RefWorks for creating a web-based citation manager. A lot of the same functionality as [EndNote](#) and [ProCite](#), but much more affordable for campus-wide use. Import citations from databases, format a bibliography according to a particular style, and integrate citations into a research paper.
- [AGent](#)
Auto-Graphics offers a search tool that can search multiple databases at once (from different vendors, as well as locally-developed databases), offers deduped and detailed result sets, has a flexible, customizable interface, and searches repositories of documents in a variety of standard formats, including MARC21, XML, PDF, Word documents, and SQL. It can also offer remote patron authentication via several industry standard protocols.

So there you have it, folks - five more products with the NewBreed Librarian stamp of approval.

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