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Working in a funnel at the Name Authority Cooperative

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Title: **Working in a funnel.**

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Last September, Lisa Palmer, the Head Cataloger at the Lamar Soutter Library and I went to St. Louis to be trained to work in the NACO Medical Library Funnel. NACO, the Name Authority Cooperative, was founded in 1976 and includes some 395 institutions in 46 states and 16 countries [1]. The NACO program is coordinated jointly by the Library of Congress & participants in the Program for Cooperative Cataloging. The concept of the funnel was decided on for this project because no one library was large enough to have individual membership. The driving force behind the funnel was Marysue Schaffer at the Bernard Becker Medical Library, Washington University in St. Louis. Ours was to be the Medical Funnel/Washington U (Now called the Medical Libraries Project). So the 14 of us labored in a room together for five days at the Becker Library learning the procedures for the correct entry of Personal Names, Uniform Titles, Corporate Names, and Geographic Names. Some of us went out to see the sights during the evenings, including a giant shopping mall and the Gateway Arch that defines the skyline of St. Louis. We also got a tour of Becker extensive rare book room, which had beautifully preserved rare medical texts.

This was an important step for our library. It was the first time that we had joined such an organization. Now we were going to be able to add our own researchers and authors to the authority file as well as contributing to this important international project. The purpose of having an authority file is to make sure that each individual is distinguished from others. In order to do so, librarians must use extra information about the individual, first the middle name or initial, the birth date, the title (such as MD).

About the same time, we received a set of MLA oral histories. Therefore, we could start to add the names of these eminent medical librarians to the file. The oral histories contained full names, birth dates, and places of birth and so were ideal sources of information. The rules state that if you can find a birth date on the source, use it in defining the name. This will allow the reduction of future conflicts with a person with the same first and last names. The addition of full middle names also is helpful. At times we were also able to use information gained from an internet search, such as a nickname, or death date. The project allowed us to add 10 of the librarians' names to the NACO file. We have also been adding other authors and researchers' names to the file and uniform titles from our rare books collection.

The purpose of having a name authority file is so that each individual will have a unique "identifier" in the catalog. Different people with the same name need to be distinguished from one another, (usually by adding birth and death dates). Different works by a person who uses different bylines for them may need to be collocated together under the person's authorized name. For example, typing in the name Alexander Fleming in OCLC's authorities database brings up these people (among others):

Fleming, Alexander

Fleming, Alexander, ǂd 1747-1830

Fleming, Alexander, ǂd 1881-1955

The first one is actually in finance, the second is a minister, and the third one is the famous physician. The catalog record of a work by any of these people must contain the proper name authority. In this way a librarian can direct a user to works by the famous physician (or minister or banker) without giving them books written by a different Alexander Fleming.

By working in this project, a librarian can contribute to a database that is used by most United States libraries and many international libraries for authority control. For more information about NACO, please see http://www.loc.gov/catdir/pcc/naco/.

References

Byrum, John D. NACO: a cooperative model for building and maintaining a shared name authority database. Cataloging & Classification Quarterly 2004 Oct;38(3/4):237-249.