Cataloging Production Standards in Academic Libraries

Claire-Lise Bénaud
Sever Bordeianu
Mary Ellen Hanson

ABSTRACT. The cataloging profession has not defined quantitative standards by which cataloging output can be uniformly measured and compared among libraries. In today’s climate of decreasing budgetary resources, increasing service demands, and the need to do more with less, how do cataloging departments quantify performance expectations? In an effort to determine what cataloging production standards exist in academic libraries, a survey of selected ARL and non-ARL libraries was conducted. The survey covered library characteristics, staffing patterns, cataloging tasks, production standards, and the effect of technology on productivity. The survey revealed a lack of production standards in many libraries and a variety of standards among those that have them. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: getinfo@haworthpressinc.com]

Production standards present catalogers and cataloging managers with certain ambiguities and paradoxes that are not immediately apparent. On one hand, there is the assumption that cataloging results in an easily quantifiable product because the output can be measured. Most libraries, in fact, keep cataloging statistics. On the other hand, the profession has not defined standards by which cataloging output can be uniformly measured and compared among libraries. Professional, psychological, and political factors can make production standards difficult to formulate.

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Cataloging department managers are concerned with production. In today’s climate of decreasing budgetary resources, increasing service demands, and the need to do more with less, how do cataloging departments quantify performance expectations? Cataloging managers want to optimize cataloging productivity without compromising quality in order to provide timely and effective access to library collections. To do so, they need to be able to document and justify staffing needs to library administrators.

Cataloging production standards are rarely defined in the literature. Discussions of productivity contain caveats, cautioning that cataloging practice and staffing patterns vary widely among libraries. As a result, few articles tackle the issue of cataloging production standards directly, and virtually none prescribe specific standards for catalogers. This situation makes it difficult for a library to gauge its own performance in comparison with national practice. Problematic as they may be to establish, production standards serve three purposes. First, they help define professional practice by spelling out expectations for trained, expert catalogers. Second, they provide a basis to evaluate institutional staffing and budget needs. Third, they provide accountability necessary for program and individual performance evaluation.

This article describes the current status of cataloging production standards in selected academic libraries. For this purpose, a survey of academic libraries was conducted in the fall of 1997 to determine what staffing is devoted to cataloging, what processes are performed by what level of staff, and whether individual libraries have developed quantitative performance expectations for catalogers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the library literature reveals more articles dealing with the issues that surround cataloging production rather than actual production data. The most comprehensive study about cataloging production was published in 1988 by Philip Smith. His literature review yielded little information on production but an abundance of articles on other topics related to cataloging. The literature review conducted by the authors for the present article presents a comparable picture, that is, a scarcity of articles dealing specifically with cataloging quotas.

In his meticulous survey, Smith addressed theoretical difficulties associated with production quotas, which are still valid today. He
noted that no one attending the Cataloging Norms Discussion Group meeting of the Resources and Technical Services Division (RTSD) at the 1986 American Library Association (ALA) Annual meeting had production norms, “but all wanted to know what standards other libraries used.” Only 50% of his survey respondents reported having in-house standards, and among those there was little consensus about what activities constituted cataloging.

Only three articles (Philip Smith, Mary S. Konkel, and Erik de Bruijn) deal with numbers regarding production, and two of those do so only in general terms. Smith’s study documents minimum, median, and maximum levels for various categories of cataloging. Smith’s figures, based on the survey responses, indicate average individual production levels of 170 monographs, 50 serials, and 35 audiovisual titles per month. Konkel, in a document discussing quotas and evaluations, states that quotas were set in close cooperation between cataloger and supervisor and, moreover, each cataloger’s quotas were based on that person’s expertise. De Bruijn summarizes pre- and post-automation cataloging productivity at the University of British Columbia. In comparing 1973 and 1986 per capita production, he reports a 40% increase in copy cataloging and a 43% decline in original cataloging. Neither Konkel nor de Bruijn mention any raw numbers that would put these percentages in perspective.

Issues related to cataloging productivity which have been discussed in the literature include: terminology, deprofessionalization, the quantity vs. quality debate, political considerations, and the apples and oranges debate.

**Terminology**

Terminology poses a dual problem when discussing cataloging production standards. On one hand, there is some reluctance to use words such as quotas, norms, output, or throughput, which are emotionally charged for some catalogers. Philip Smith’s assertion that he deliberately avoided the word “quotas” in his survey so as not to upset people is a case in point. Despite that effort, some of Smith’s respondents “decried” the attempt to determine quotas for catalogers. The other problem is more prosaic. As Smith notes, definitions as to what constitutes cataloging vary widely in libraries. For example, “copy cataloging” means different things in different libraries. What one library considers “cataloging,” another considers “maintenance.”
Deprofessionalization

Some catalogers feel that quantifying output diminishes the value of their work. Eleanor Payne in a 1977 document explains that resistance to imposing production standards on cataloging is based on the perception that quotas have historically been assigned to blue-collar workers. Thus, quantifying output would deprofessionalize cataloging. Catalogers, who rightly believe that they perform a professional job, might feel that quantifying the output of their work diminishes the work and turns it into a product. In this vein, Arnold Hirshon, in a discussion about core library activities, contends that if an activity can be measured, it is not professional. While this argument is faulty—consider that library consultants have no such qualms about recording the application of their expertise in billable hours—it represents the thinking of many in the profession who feel that keeping statistics on an activity diminishes its importance and makes it unprofessional. This attitude may explain the paucity of articles on the topic in the library literature and may indeed be the reason for some catalogers’ opposition to production standards. Librarians who function in the academic environment may be more comfortable with the concept of peer review and comparison with colleagues outside their own institutions. Moreover, academic libraries are compared with other institutions by rankings in organizations such as the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), or through accreditation reviews.

Quantity vs. Quality Debate

Several writers explore the psychological and morale issues related to quantification and cataloging production quotas. De Bruijn states that the acceptance of copy cataloging, with “as little modification as possible” for the sake of productivity, threatens catalogers’ sense of professionalism. William Benemann addresses cataloging productivity in the context of industrial psychology and concludes that catalogers are more productive when given more complex tasks. Steven J. Smith adds another important element to the discussion by asserting that production levels are not an indication of quality. This argument addresses the quandary of quality vs. quantity, which may have a strong impact on catalogers’ perception of their work. National and international cataloging rules define qualitative standards. They do not address productivity. Consequently, it is natural for catalogers to de-
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fine their own work in qualitative terms. Steven J. Smith adds that quality is as important as quantity in the automated cataloging environment and states, "if quality is not an important element of the cataloging process, why bother to catalog? Why not index?" 15

Political Considerations

Reporting statistics can be a double-edged sword. Numbers can hurt a department if the activities reported do not reflect all the complexity involved in production or if production falls below expectations of library administrators. Alan D. Pratt and Ellen Altman, in a recent article in Library Journal, point out why cataloging managers might be reluctant to disclose statistical norms. In a discussion of public service output measures, they found that libraries which gave themselves credit by counting specific tasks received better funding from the parent institution than libraries which counted fewer, more general tasks. 16 There are many implications related to choosing what statistics to keep and how to report them. Catalogers might be reluctant to discuss statistics out of concern that they will not compare favorably with others.

Apples and Oranges Debate

Several arguments against uniform production standards are present in the literature. One is that each library is different and therefore inter-library comparisons are not valid. Another is that cataloging workflow differs in each library. A third argument is that each title cataloged is unique and therefore comparisons cannot be made among catalogers. Eleanor Payne, for example, notes that in order to quantify, the "raw materials" need to be uniform—each book cataloged should require the same amount of work. 17 The fact that libraries do use production standards indicates that it is feasible to develop and to apply them. Managers have addressed differences in levels of cataloging complexity by establishing different quantitative standards for copy and original cataloging and monographic, serial, and non-book formats. It can also be argued that academic libraries are more alike than they are different. They all serve academic research and curriculum. They acquire similar titles via approval plans, subscriptions, and individual purchases. These titles reflect the same variety of subjects, languages, and media which support higher education. Academic libraries follow the same national cataloging standards; they share and contribute records using the same bibliographic
utilities; and they use similar online systems locally. The size of an academic library’s collection is a general indication of the range of formats and languages cataloged as well as the number of staff assigned to cataloging functions. For this reason, productivity standards in both ARL and non-ARL libraries are of interest.

THE SURVEY

In the fall of 1997, the authors sent a survey to the 109 academic members of ARL and to 110 medium-sized U.S. academic libraries with holdings between 300,000 and 900,000 volumes. The non-ARL sample included private and state university and college libraries from every state. The survey, addressed to the head of the cataloging department, covered staffing, cataloging processes, and production standards. Every aspect of cataloging was included: searching, authority work, record creation and editing, bibliographic maintenance, and participation in national cooperative programs. A copy of the survey is appended. Responses were received from 27 ARL and 42 non-ARL libraries for a total of 69.

The complexity of cataloging and the variety of practices extant in libraries contributed to a lengthy survey. Devising the survey questions reflected some of the difficulties already mentioned regarding the lack of uniformity in cataloging practices among libraries. The multitude of tasks performed in cataloging and the different levels of staff who perform these functions required detailed questions to determine institutional expectations.

Some survey answers were difficult to interpret and tabulate, for example: staffing data reported in hours per week rather than full-time equivalent (FTE) as requested, the number of serial issues checked in reported as the number of serial titles cataloged, and other discrepancies. In these cases, the data were not included. Because of this inconsistent data, it was not possible to derive production averages across the sample using the number of FTE catalogers, the number of hours per week spent cataloging, and the number of titles cataloged by each institution.

Library Characteristics

Demographics of Cataloging

Libraries were asked to report the number of staff involved in cataloging, expressed in FTE, both within and outside the cataloging
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department. Four categories were indicated: professional MLS (Master of Library Science degree), paraprofessional, student, and volunteer.

Regarding the number of professional catalogers within the department, ARL totals range from a low of 1 to a high of 17.5, with an average of 5.9 FTE. One library reported that it has no cataloging department. The number of paraprofessionals in cataloging ranges from 2 to 36, with an average of 14.6 FTE. Nine libraries have students involved in cataloging, ranging from 0.5 to 5.6, with an average of 3. Eleven libraries reported professionals from outside the department also contribute to cataloging. Fifteen libraries also reported that paraprofessionals from outside the department contribute to cataloging. Five libraries reported using students from outside the department. Only one library reported using volunteers to catalog.

The number of professional catalogers in the department reported by non-ARL libraries ranges from zero to 7, with an average of 2.2 FTE. Three libraries reported that they have no professional catalogers. The number for department paraprofessionals ranges from 1 to 9.5, with an average of 4.1 FTE. Of the 42 respondents, 25 use department students to catalog. Regarding staff outside of cataloging, 18 libraries reported using professionals, 20 use paraprofessionals, and 9 use students. Two libraries use volunteers but only on a limited basis.

While ARL libraries employ more catalogers than non-ARL libraries, the locus of cataloging is similar in both types. Although the preponderance of cataloging is done in cataloging departments, some is contributed by outside department members, as shown in Table 1.

Time Spent Cataloging

The number of hours spent cataloging by individual catalogers in ARL libraries ranges from 7.5 to 35, with an average of 22.1 hours per week. For paraprofessionals, the numbers range from 13 to 40, with an average of 30.1 hours per week. Outside the department, professional catalogers spend from 4 to 40 hours, with an average of 17.9 hours per week, and paraprofessionals spend from 5 to 40 hours, with an average 25.5 hours per week.

In non-ARL libraries, the number of hours spent on cataloging by professionals in the department ranges from 0.75 to 40, with an average 20.6 per week. Paraprofessionals spend from 2.75 to 40, with an average of 28.9 hours per week. Outside the department, the numbers range from 1.3 to 20 hours per week for professionals, and from 0.2 to
TABLE 1. Average Staffing and Time Spent Cataloging in Cataloging Departments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ARL Libraries</th>
<th>Non-ARL Libraries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>**Professional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>catalogers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average no. of</td>
<td>5.9 FTE</td>
<td>2.2 FTE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>catalogers in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>department:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average time</td>
<td>22.1 hrs/week</td>
<td>20.6 hrs/week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spent cataloging</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>per individual:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paraprofessional catalogers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average no. of</td>
<td>14.6 FTE</td>
<td>4.1 FTE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>catalogers in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>department:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average time</td>
<td>30.1 hrs/week</td>
<td>28.9 hrs/week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spent cataloging</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>per individual:</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20 hours per week for paraprofessionals. In both cases, the number of libraries reporting using outside staff is small.

These numbers reflect the fact that catalogers in both types of libraries have other responsibilities besides cataloging. Professional catalogers, on average, spend half of their time cataloging, while paraprofessionals, on average, spend three quarters of their time cataloging, as shown in Table 1.

**Number of Titles Cataloged**

The number of monographic titles that ARL libraries reported cataloging in the previous year ranges from 12,000 to 106,317. The number for serials ranges from 259 to 5,437. The number for the non-ARL group ranges from 2,200 to 28,016 for monographs. The data for serials reported by non-ARL libraries was not usable. It appeared that in several cases libraries reported holdings rather than titles cataloged.

The responses to questions 1 and 3, as listed in the appended survey, allow comparison at the institutional level between number of cataloging staff and total cataloging production in the sample year. While these figures provide a broad context, they should not be used to characterize individual productivity for catalogers.
Outsourcing

Most ARL libraries reported purchasing bibliographic and authority records from vendors. Twenty (74% of respondents) purchase bibliographic records. Of those, 9 libraries also purchase authority records. A majority of non-ARL libraries, 26 respondents (62%) also purchase records from vendors. Of those libraries, 19 also buy authority records. Libraries cited a variety of sources including Marcive, TechPro, PromptCat, Baker & Taylor, Autographics, OCLC (Online Computer Library Center), LTI (Library Technologies, Inc.), and WLN (Western Library Network).

Card Production

Card production is on the way out. Most respondents from both ARL and non-ARL libraries have discontinued card production, 63% and 64% respectively. Those libraries still producing cards do so for limited applications such as shelflist, non-Roman materials, and special collections or branches.

Bibliographic Utilities and Local Systems

Libraries often use both a bibliographic utility and a local system to catalog. Of the 27 ARL respondents, 20 rely on a bibliographic utility and 9 respondents catalog both on a utility and in their local system. For example, one library noted that it performs original cataloging on the utility and copy cataloging in its online public access catalog (OPAC). Non-ARL libraries catalog in a similar fashion: 41 of 42 respondents catalog on a utility and 20 libraries report using both a utility and a local system. Few libraries catalog exclusively in their local system.

Editing

The majority of ARL respondents, 19 (70%), reported that they perform minimal editing on copy records and 10 (37%) perform some moderate editing. The majority of non-ARL respondents, 26 libraries (62%) perform moderate editing, and 16 libraries (38%) perform minimal editing. Extensive editing is the exception: only 3 ARL respondents (11%) and 4 non-ARL respondents (9%) edit copy exten-
sively. In both groups, some libraries checked more than one category, depending on the type of records, their source, or their format. In the present environment of shared cataloging and staffing constraints, it appears that libraries are accepting a significant amount of copy without extensive local editing.

Cataloging Tasks

This section was designed to identify the level of staff involved in the entire cataloging process from pre-cataloging searching through post-cataloging maintenance. This section, consisting of 20 questions, addressed specific cataloging tasks: pre-cataloging searching, such as searching and verifying records; cataloging both original and copy; authority work; contributing to national cooperative cataloging programs such as NACO (Name Authority Cooperative Program), SACO (Subject Authority Cooperative Program), BIBCO (Bibliographic Record Cooperative Program), and CONSER (Cooperative Online Serials Program); post-cataloging tasks such as downloading records and item creation; and physical processing. The summary of the answers can be found in Tables 2 and 3.

Both ARL and non-ARL libraries show similar patterns regarding the level of staff who perform a given category of cataloging. Cataloging support functions are performed predominantly by paraprofessionals or students. Original and complex copy cataloging is performed equally by professionals and paraprofessionals. Professionals are more extensively involved in contributing to NACO, SACO, BIBCO, and CONSER. Based on the survey results, the more “core” cataloging a task is, the more likely it is to be performed by professionals, while cataloging support functions are performed to a larger extent by paraprofessionals and students. Despite these trends, there are cases where any level of staff can be found performing any task—students doing original cataloging or professionals marking books. However, no library reported that students contribute to national cooperative programs.

Following are some representative findings from this section of the survey. In the area of original cataloging and complex copy, professional and paraprofessional catalogers in ARL libraries participate equally: 96% of the respondents note that professionals do original cataloging and 81% indicate that paraprofessionals do. In contrast, in 81% of non-ARL libraries, professionals do original cataloging while paraprofessionals do so in only 48% of the libraries. In both library
TABLE 2. Staffing Levels for Cataloging Tasks in ARL Libraries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Professional cataloger</th>
<th>Paraprofessional cataloger</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-cataloging searching</td>
<td>4 15%</td>
<td>17 63%</td>
<td>9 33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create original bib. on paper workform</td>
<td>9 33%</td>
<td>5 19%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create original bib. online</td>
<td>26 96%</td>
<td>22 81%</td>
<td>2 7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edit complex copy bib. record</td>
<td>22 81%</td>
<td>25 93%</td>
<td>2 7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edit simple copy bib. record (DLC)</td>
<td>5 19%</td>
<td>25 93%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assign call number</td>
<td>27 100%</td>
<td>19 70%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute to OCLC Enhance</td>
<td>13 48%</td>
<td>6 22%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute to NACO</td>
<td>14 52%</td>
<td>6 22%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute to SACO</td>
<td>9 33%</td>
<td>2 7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute to BIBCO</td>
<td>4 15%</td>
<td>2 7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute to CONSER</td>
<td>4 15%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search/verify name and series authority</td>
<td>21 78%</td>
<td>25 93%</td>
<td>4 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edit/create name and series authority</td>
<td>24 89%</td>
<td>17 63%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search/verify subject authority</td>
<td>21 78%</td>
<td>20 74%</td>
<td>4 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Download bib. record to local system</td>
<td>17 63%</td>
<td>25 93%</td>
<td>8 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Download authority record to local system</td>
<td>14 52%</td>
<td>17 63%</td>
<td>3 11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create item record</td>
<td>18 67%</td>
<td>24 89%</td>
<td>6 22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perform local database maintenance</td>
<td>17 63%</td>
<td>25 93%</td>
<td>7 26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print labels</td>
<td>3 11%</td>
<td>12 44%</td>
<td>8 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other physical processing</td>
<td>1 4%</td>
<td>13 48%</td>
<td>11 44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For each task, boxes contain 2 figures: the number of libraries that responded and the percentage of the sample.

groups, simple copy editing is done mostly by paraprofessionals. Assignment of classification numbers is evenly distributed between professionals and paraprofessionals in ARL and non-ARL libraries. Item records are created by professional catalogers in 67% of ARL libraries and by paraprofessionals in 89% of ARL libraries. The situation is slightly different in non-ARL libraries, 52% for professionals and 86% for paraprofessionals. A higher percentage of non-ARL libraries, 38%, have students create item records compared to 22% of ARL libraries.
TABLE 3. Staffing Levels for Cataloging Tasks in Non-ARL Libraries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
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<th>Paraprofessional cataloger</th>
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<td>20 48%</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create original bib. online</td>
<td>24 57%</td>
<td>9 21%</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edit complex copy bib. record</td>
<td>33 79%</td>
<td>30 71%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edit simple copy bib. record (DLC)</td>
<td>8 19%</td>
<td>41 98%</td>
<td>5 12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assign call number</td>
<td>37 88%</td>
<td>27 64%</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute to OCLC Enhance</td>
<td>8 19%</td>
<td>4 10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute to NACO</td>
<td>5 12%</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute to SACO</td>
<td>2 5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute to BIBCO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search/verify name and series authority</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For each task, boxes contain 2 figures: the number of libraries that responded and the percentage of the sample.

Professional catalogers in ARL libraries are the predominant contributors to national cooperative cataloging programs. Most ARL and non-ARL respondents create original records online. Paper workforms are used on a limited basis, for specific formats such as manuscripts.

Production Standards

This section was designed to determine whether libraries have established production standards and what they are. This was the heart
of the survey. The results were disappointing because few libraries disclosed specifics even when they noted they had standards. As a result, there was not enough data from which to draw conclusions about national production standards. Paradoxically, many survey respondents indicated their interest in knowing what the national standards were or lamented the lack of consensus about standards in the profession.

Only half of the ARL libraries indicate that they have production standards for individual catalogers and 41% indicate that they have production standards for the cataloging department as a whole. Two libraries note that they have production standards for paraprofessionals but not for professional catalogers. Of those libraries that have standards, 6 report they are formalized in department policy and 9 report that they are informal. Of the non-ARL sample, only one-third have production standards for individual catalogers and 45% have standards for the department as a whole. Of those, 11 report that standards are formalized and 14 report that they are informal. When standards for performance exist, they are reportedly used in performance evaluations. While a larger percentage of libraries do not report that they have production standards, ARL libraries tend to use standards more than their non-ARL counterparts. Several libraries did indicate that they are considering establishing production standards.

Criteria for Establishing Standards

Libraries were asked if the following criteria were used to establish different production expectations for individual catalogers: length of experience, individual characteristics, languages or formats cataloged.

Length of experience is a criterion for 67% of ARL respondents and 63% of non-ARL respondents. Individual differences such as cataloger’s education, expertise, and efficiency are factors taken into consideration by 60% of ARL libraries and 45% of non-ARL libraries. Language of material is a criterion for 65% of ARL libraries and 43% of non-ARL. The format of materials cataloged is a criterion for 79% of ARL libraries and 57% of non-ARL libraries. ARL libraries put more emphasis on these criteria than their non-ARL counterparts. However, in both groups there is greater tendency to use length of experience when establishing performance expectations.
Consequences and Rewards

Respondents were asked to indicate if there were negative consequences for not meeting production quotas. Of the ARL respondents, 80% reported that there were consequences for not meeting expectations, compared to 53% of the non-ARL sample. Libraries were also asked if there were rewards for exceeding expectations. Of the ARL respondents, 64% indicated some kind of reward, compared to 48% of the non-ARL sample. It appears that libraries are more likely to punish than to reward. It is clear from the responses that many libraries do not have the flexibility to either reward or address performance deficiencies due to budgetary restrictions, civil service requirements, or other institutional limitations. Both positive and negative consequences range from the intangible to the formal: pat on the back or slap on the wrist, good or poor annual evaluations, merit pay increases and promotion, or disciplinary action. In reading the comments volunteered by the respondents, there is the impression of a disconnect between performance evaluation and institutional reward.

Quantitative Expectations by Level of Staff and Type of Cataloging

This part of the survey addressed what specific quantitative expectations libraries have for their professional and paraprofessional catalogers. Determining what current quantitative expectations exist in libraries was the primary objective of this study. The response rate was lower than for other questions, and it is difficult to draw generalizations from the data received. Only 10 ARL libraries (37% of respondents) answered the questions about expectations for professional catalogers, and 12 (44%) answered for paraprofessional catalogers. Of the non-ARL libraries, only 9 (21%) responded for professional catalogers, and 16 (38%) answered for paraprofessionals. More libraries report having quantitative expectations for paraprofessional catalogers than for professionals.

Libraries were asked to report monthly or hourly quantitative expectations for professional and paraprofessional catalogers in the following categories: monographic original records, monographic complex copy, monographic simple copy, serial original, and serial copy. Libraries responded according to their practice, which did not always correspond to the survey categories, or which combined categories.
Original Monographic Cataloging

Professional Catalogers:

In 5 ARL libraries, expectations for professionals expressed in titles per hour range from 1 original title per hour to 1 per two hours. One library reported an expectation of 100 titles per month. Two libraries reported expectations for original and complex copy combined, ranging from 80 to 100 per month. One library reported expectations for original, complex, and simple copy combined: 200 titles per month. One library made no distinction between monographs and serials and expects 100 titles per month.

For the non-ARL group, one library reported 2 original titles per hour, one reported 6 titles per day, and a third reported 100 titles per month. Two libraries made no distinction between monographs and serials and expect 3 titles per hour and 90 titles per month respectively.

Paraprofessional Catalogers:

Six ARL libraries expressed expectations for paraprofessional catalogers in hourly terms, ranging from 7 originals per hour to 1 original per 1.3 hours. One library reported an expectation of 100 titles per month. One library reported its expectation of 100 to 125 titles per month for original and complex combined.

Four non-ARL libraries reported expectations for original cataloging. One library reported an expectation of 6 originals per day; one reported 100 titles per month; and two other libraries reported their expectations combining original and complex, 45 titles per month; and combining all monographic and serial cataloging, 3 titles per hour.

Complex Monographic Copy Cataloging

Professional Catalogers:

Only 3 ARL libraries reported hourly expectations for complex copy done by professionals. One library expects 1 title per hour; the other two expect 2 titles per hour. Other libraries reported combined expectations for original and complex copy as noted above.

For the non-ARL group, one library reported 3 to 5 complex copies per hour. Three libraries reported expectations in terms of titles per month: one said 120 complex copies per month and the other two libraries, 200 complex copies per month. Two libraries made no distinction between monographs and serials as noted above.
Paraprofessional Catalogers:

Eight ARL libraries reported expectations for complex copy cataloging. Seven expressed hourly expectations ranging from 1 to 5 titles per hour, and one library reported an expectation of 100 titles per month. Three libraries reported expectations for complex and simple copy cataloging combined ranging from 400 to 600 titles per month.

Three non-ARL libraries reported expectations for complex copy cataloging. One library reported 5 titles per hour and two libraries reported 200 and 300 titles per month respectively. Four libraries reported expectations for complex and simple copy cataloging combined. Two reported hourly expectations, 6.8 per hour and 10 to 12 per hour. One indicated 300 to 400 titles per month for copy cataloging. One indicated 300 to 500 titles per month for all monographic and serial copy cataloging.

Simple Monographic Copy Cataloging

Professional Catalogers:

One ARL library reported expectations for professionals doing simple copy cataloging: 3 to 4 per hour. Two non-ARL libraries reported hourly standards for professionals: 2 and 5 titles respectively. One non-ARL reported a monthly standard of 225 titles.

Paraprofessional Catalogers:

Nine ARL libraries reported expectations for paraprofessionals doing simple copy cataloging. Six expressed hourly expectations ranging from 3 to 10 titles per hour and three reported monthly expectations ranging from 300 to 350 titles per month.

Ten non-ARL libraries responded. Three reported hourly expectations ranging from 2 to 5 titles per hour. Six libraries reported monthly expectations from 225 to 1000 per month. One library, whose catalogers also do ordering, reported that it assigns 3 points per simple title cataloged and 2 points per title ordered. Catalogers are expected to earn 750 points per month.

Original Serials Cataloging

Professional Catalogers:

In 3 ARL libraries, expectations for professionals were expressed in titles per hour, ranging from 1 title per hour to 1 title every 2 hours.
Two libraries reported monthly expectations of 50 and 100 titles respectively. Two non-ARL libraries responded: one expects 1 to 2 per hour and the other expects 2 original serial titles per day.

Paraprofessional Catalogers:

Three ARL libraries reported hourly expectations ranging from 1 title per hour to 0.4 titles per hour (the equivalent of 1 title per 2 hours and 12 minutes). One non-ARL reported that it expects 2 original serials per day.

**Serials Copy Cataloging**

Professional Catalogers:

For the copy cataloging of serials, four ARL libraries reported standards ranging from 2 serial titles per hour to 1 every two hours. One library reported 150 serials per month. Only one non-ARL library reported an hourly standard for professional catalogers of 3 to 5 titles.

Paraprofessional Catalogers:

Seven ARL libraries responded. Four expressed hourly expectations ranging from 10 titles per hour to 1 title every 2 hours and three libraries reported monthly expectations ranging from 50 to 150 titles per month. One non-ARL library reported an expectation of 2 serial copy titles per hour.

The data in this section exemplify two difficulties in comparing or establishing production standards among academic libraries. Not only do libraries maintain statistics in many different ways (hourly, daily, monthly), combining various categories of material and staff; but their expectations vary greatly within discrete categories. For example, in the case of serial copy cataloging, reported expectations range from 1 title every two hours to 10 titles per hour.

**Cataloging Tools and Technology**

The majority of the ARL library respondents, 24, indicated that technology has had a positive impact on their productivity; 2 had no opinion; and 1 indicated that it had not implemented automated cataloging tools. Of the non-ARL sample, 29 libraries indicated that technology had a positive impact; 10 indicated that it did not; and 5
had no opinion. Three non-ARL libraries answered “yes and no” to this question, emphasizing that technology solves some productivity problems and creates others. Typical responses cited benefits related to the elimination of card production, customization of catalogers’ workstations, cut and paste capabilities among systems, elimination of workflow redundancies, and online access to cataloging tools. Some respondents mentioned negative impacts from the stress of continual system and hardware changes and the impact on staff from new tasks such as troubleshooting and increased maintenance. One respondent stated that, “The technology just gets more complicated; not necessarily more efficient to use,” and “the stress level brought on by constant change and increased complexity has increased dramatically.”

**Survey Comments**

Respondents were asked to add comments if they wished to expand or clarify their responses. Their comments illustrate ideas, assumptions, and concerns about the cataloging environment in academic libraries.

Some respondents reacted negatively to the concept of production standards or saw no need for them. Sample responses include:

- Numerical output measures for staff and librarians are “somewhat offensive.”
- Instead of output standards, “we want to encourage question-asking and problem-solving and discourage ‘push-button’ cataloging.”
- “The only real measure we use is to keep up with incoming, new materials, [and] don’t allow a backlog to develop.”
- “The primary cataloging production standards are generally not numerical, but [include] 48 hour turn-around, maintaining currency (within two weeks), reduction of backlog (20%).”
- “We haven’t yet established production quotas. Instead, we work in terms of turnaround time; our goal is to have the material to the shelves within one week after it comes off the review shelves.”
- “Gains have been achieved without . . . formal or even informal production standards.”
- Quotas have “made professionals feel like paraprofessionals and [have] created a great deal of resentment.”
“We do what needs to be done as expeditiously and efficiently as possible. Production standards/quotas are irrelevant.”
“Quality control . . . is of more concern to us than productivity rate.”
One library reports that it finds it difficult to set production standards because its catalogers catalog a variety of formats and they perform a variety of tasks, such as library instruction, ordering, and reference service.
Two libraries report that they use performance standards only because it is required for state civil service evaluations.

Other respondents reacted positively to the concept of production standards. Sample responses include:

“Production stats justify personnel and material/processing costs.”
The present “survey has prompted us to focus on these issues.”
“We implemented our standards about 15 years ago, when we were having productivity problems and had a backlog . . . For some years we have paid little attention to those standards . . . That move 15 years ago enabled us to establish a general culture of productivity in Technical Services.”
Several respondents expressed interest in the results of this survey.

A third group of responses reflected ambivalent or contradictory attitudes regarding the use of cataloging production standards. Such observations include:

“We intentionally don’t have production standards for professionals, but, we do monitor their production and may ask why a figure is low for a particular month.”
Production standards “would be useful in outsourcing agencies . . . where it’s a business product that we are paying for.”
One library has outsourced routine cataloging, leaving more complex materials for in-house catalogers, “which makes it harder to use earlier quotas.”
“We don’t have [production standards] but we do expect staff members . . . to produce about the same as their peers.”
CONCLUSION

We had hoped to discover what peer libraries are doing and from that to generalize about appropriate production standards for professional cataloging practice. We did not achieve this goal. Despite a very detailed survey, we did not receive sufficient comparable data to make prescriptive generalizations about cataloging productivity. We were able to collect and summarize enough data about cataloging practice in individual libraries to realize that their differences do not outweigh what they have in common. At least theoretically, the profession should be able to develop production expectations that are relevant to academic libraries.

The survey responses reinforce the findings of the literature search, that quantitative expectations have not been well defined. Less than half of the libraries responding to the survey indicate that they have production standards for their catalogers or their cataloging departments, and of that group, even fewer indicated what those standards are. One central theme that emerges from the survey is ambivalence about numerical quotas. Librarians feel that if they are processing materials in a “timely fashion” or if there is no backlog of uncataloged materials, there is no need for quotas.

The findings of the current study are very similar to those of Philip Smith in 1988: relatively few libraries have production standards and, of those that do, there are wide discrepancies in expectations. It is surprising that the quantitative aspect of cataloging is still so undefined, given that the qualitative aspect is so extensively prescribed. One might also expect that, given political and budgetary pressures, academic libraries would be now more likely to have production standards.

How would uniform production standards benefit or affect the profession? Production standards could prompt the cataloging establishment to reevaluate its assumptions which focus on quality without regard to actual cost. Production standards might provide some counterweight to the profession’s propensity to develop increasingly complicated cataloging rules, which have a direct impact on productivity.

The cataloging department which embarks on developing production standards benefits from examining its operation: the level of cataloging appropriate for its collection, the skills of its catalogers, the number and level of catalogers needed, the role of students in cataloging, its internal workflow, and its role in national cooperative catalog-
ing programs. Production standards would enable cataloging managers to document the cost of cataloging, thus making meaningful comparisons for justifying staffing requests, evaluating outsourcing proposals, and evaluating catalogers objectively. While the process of establishing standards is time consuming and often controversial, it ultimately will benefit the department.

Production standards are important. The profession needs to devise numerical standards that validate to insiders and outsiders alike the importance of cataloging. Quality alone will not do that. At present, individual librarians are expressing interest in quantitative standards but there is not a concerted effort from the leaders in the profession or from professional organizations to formulate standards. Librarianship has been willing to take action on such varied issues as professional ethics, outsourcing, and readers’ rights. Why not address the issue of quantitative standards for cataloging? Far from being a threat to catalogers, quantitative standards would substantiate the vital role this activity fulfills for the profession.

NOTES

APPENDIX

Please return by November 10, 1997

CATALOGING PRODUCTION STANDARDS QUESTIONNAIRE

Name of university:______________________________________________________
Your name:____________________________ your title:__________________________

I. Library Characteristics

1. How many people in your library catalog, expressed in FTE?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional (MLS)</th>
<th>Paraprofessional</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Volunteer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in cataloging dept.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other departments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. How many hours per week, on average, do catalogers actually spend on cataloging?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional (MLS)</th>
<th>Paraprofessional</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Volunteer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in cataloging dept.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other departments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. How many titles did your library catalog during the past fiscal year?

____________ monographs _____________ serials

4. In addition to in-house cataloging, does your library purchase records from vendors?

no ___ yes ___

bibliographic records (please list vendors): _____________

authority records (please list vendors): _____________

5. Do you still produce cards?

no ___ yes ___

If yes: _____ shelflist _____ public catalog

6. Do you catalog?

_____ on a bibliographic utility _____ in your local system _____ other

7. How much editing do you perform on copy records?

_____ extensive _____ moderate _____ minimal
II. Cataloging Tasks
Please check the categories of staff that perform the following tasks in the normal cataloging process. For those tasks that do not apply, please leave blank.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Description</th>
<th>Professional Cataloger</th>
<th>Paraprofessional Cataloger</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. pre-cataloging searching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. create original bib. record on paper work form</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. create original bib. record online</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. edit complex copy bib. record</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>e. edit simple copy bib. record (e.g., D.L.C.)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. assign call number</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. contribute to OCLC Enhance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. contribute to NACO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. contribute to SACO</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. contribute to BIBCO</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. contribute to CONSER</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l. search/verify name and series authority record</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. edit/create name and series authority record</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n. search/verify subject authority record</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o. download bib. record to local system</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. download authority record to local system</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q. create item records</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r. perform local database maintenance or corrections</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s. print label</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t. other physical processing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III. Cataloging Production Standards

1. Do you have production standards for individual catalogers?
   yes ___ no ___

2. Do you have production standards for the department as a whole?
   yes ___ no ___

3. If yes, are they formalized in department policy?
   yes ___ no ___

4. Are they informal (i.e. unwritten)?
   yes ___ no ___

5. Are they used for performance evaluations?
   yes ___ no ___

6. Are different expectations established for individual catalogers based on?
   a. length of experience    yes ___ no ___
   b. languages cataloged    yes ___ no ___
   c. formats cataloged      yes ___ no ___
   d. individual differences yes ___ no ___
   e. other (explain)        yes ___ no ___

7. Are there consequences for not meeting expectations?
   yes ___ no ___
   Please explain:

8. Are there rewards for exceeding expectations?
   yes ___ no ___
   Please explain:

9. What are the expectations for MLS professional catalogers for?
   a. # of monographic original records: _____ per hour OR _____ per month
   b. # of monographic complex copy titles: _____ per hour OR _____ per month
   c. # of monographic simple copy titles: _____ per hour OR _____ per month
   d. # of serial original titles: _____ per hour OR _____ per month
   e. # of serial copy titles: _____ per hour OR _____ per month
   f. other: _____ per hour OR _____ per month
10. What are the expectations for paraprofessional catalogers for?

a. # of monographic original titles: _____ per hour OR _____ per month
b. # of monographic complex copy titles: _____ per hour OR _____ per month
c. # of monographic simple copy titles: _____ per hour OR _____ per month
d. # of serial original titles: _____ per hour OR _____ per month
e. # of serial copy titles: _____ per hour OR _____ per month
f. other: _____ per hour OR _____ per month

11. What are the expectations for students?

IV. Cataloging Tools and Technology

1. Has technology, such as cataloger’s desktop, PC workstations, Passport for Windows, etc., increased the cataloging production in your library?

_____ no (please explain)

_____ yes (please explain)

V. Comments
Please make any additional comments regarding cataloging production standards in your library and in your experience as a librarian.

THE END. Thank you for replying to this questionnaire.