

BCC2002/Auth/4**Authority Control in the Online Environment Interest Group of LITA/ALCTS**
Report from the ALA Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA, June 2002

Submitted by Terry Simpkins, Chair, Authorities Subcommittee

This year's ACIG session was titled "Real World Steps to Interoperability in Libraries" and featured six speakers in two groups discussing various aspects and problems concerning the exchange of information between different library systems. The first group provided background and conceptual information; the second discussed interoperability from an authority control point of view.

William E. Moen (University of North Texas) led off with a presentation entitled "Interoperability: The holy grail of the networked environment?" Dr. Moen provided a concise overview of the somewhat forbidding concept of interoperability. He stated that interoperability goes beyond the idea of Z39.50 compatibility, and stressed that diverse systems and varied content must be made to interact in order to serve users. He provided two definitions of "interoperability." The system-centered definition is that interoperability is the ability of two or more systems to exchange information; the user-centered definition is that interoperability enables a user to successfully search two or more systems at once, retrieve information, and have confidence in the results. Many factors can affect interoperability between systems, including: differing protocols (HTTP, Z39.50), data formats (MARC, XML), metadata schemes, vocabularies (MeSH, LCRI), and character sets. One of the main threats to successful interoperability between systems is the local implementation of indexing decisions. Finally, Dr. Moen discussed his research project, the Z-Interop Testbed (www.unt.edu/zinterop/), which provides vendors and libraries with a means to measure their systems' interoperability. The project also provides suggested guidelines for indexing.

The second session was presented by Carrol Lunau (Bath Profile Maintenance Agency, National Library of Canada), called "Profiles: What Are They and Why do I Care?" According to Ms. Lunau, profiles provide a community consensus for implementing various system options. Profiles can be international, national, or regional/local in scope. The Bath Profile (<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/bath/bath-info-e.htm>) is an international core profile; it can also be enriched nationally or regionally (for example, the U.S. National Z39.50 Profile for Library Applications uses Bath as a core, but provides for specified LCSH and MeSH searches). It aims to allow users and vendors to specify a standard method of interpreting and implementing options within the Z39.50 standard. The Bath Profile defines 6 search attributes within 4 modular areas (essentially, record types). The attributes include "use" (i.e., title), "relation" (i.e., equal, contains), "position" (i.e., any, left-anchored), "structure" (i.e., word, phrase), "truncation" (i.e., yes or no), and "completeness." The areas are bibliographic, holdings, authority, and "cross-domain" (i.e., libraries and museums). For each area, several conformance levels are possible, each involving more specific indexes.

The third session was from the vendor point-of-view. Matt Golner (Fretwell-Downing) discussed how to ask vendors meaningful questions concerning interoperability. He advised potential customers to begin by talking about actual needs, and then match those needs to a profile without worrying about the standard itself. He also briefly discussed the realities of vendor cooperation in a commercial environment, stressing that, for vendors, new standards mean new business decisions.

The second half of the program was kicked off by Larry E. Dixon (LC) with a discussion of "Bath Profile, Functional Area D: Authority Record Search and Retrieval in Online Library Catalogs." Area D is one of the 4 modular areas within the Bath Profile, with the goal of improving authority record accessibility across systems. Area D consists of 2 levels of searches. Level 1 includes 5 specific searches (keyword, keyword with right truncation, exact, first characters, and first words in the field) for each of the name, title and subject indexes. Level 1 also includes 3 exact match scans (name, title, and subject). Level 2 adds a number of more specific searches and scans including personal, corporate, conference, and geographic name searches, to name just a few. Searches such as LCCN and LC Call Number are not included because the Bath Profile is an international standard.

The fifth speaker was Glenn Patton (OCLC), talking about “International Efforts to Improve Interoperability.” He gave a historical overview of several projects aimed at sharing international authority and bibliographic data. Among those mentioned were:

- Project Author – Z39.50 searching of selected portions of 5 European national libraries’ authorities files
- Multilingual Access to Subjects (MACS) (<http://infolab.kub.nl/prj/macs/>)
- Manuscripts and Letters via Integrated Networks in Europe (MALVINE) (<http://www.malvine.org/>)
- Linking and Exploring Authority Files (LEAF) (<http://www.crxnet.com/leaf/>)

Two IFLA projects:

- Minimal Level Authority Records (MLAR) – describes mandatory data elements for internationally shared resource authority records (<http://www.ifla.org/VI/3/p1996-2/mlar.htm>)
- Functional Requirements of Authority Numbers and Records (FRANAR) – working on a conceptual model of authority data, including the discussion of an International Standard Authority Data Number (ISADN)

Finally, the last speaker of the day was Tony Olson (Northwestern University). He described a project at NWU to map LCSH and MeSH headings to one another in a talk entitled “The Integration of Information Languages and Interoperability.” Mr. Olson began by mentioning some of the problems in dealing with competing vocabularies, including cross-references vs. established headings, differing syntax, pre-coordinated vs. post-coordinated headings, differences in semantic relationships, etc. He went on to briefly mention three previous mapping projects:

- Unified Medical Language System (UMLS) at the National Library of Medicine – an attempt to integrate over 60 medical thesauri and classifications (<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/research/umls/>)
- HW Wilson project – an attempt to map 12 vocabularies into a single meta-thesaurus
- MACS – mentioned above.

The NWU project attempts to map the two vocabularies while maintaining the equality and autonomy of each. The mapping data is entered directly into the authority records (that is, it is not maintained in a separate database), using 7XX fields to link headings. Eventually, NWU hopes to make these enhanced records publicly available via anonymous FTP.

Following the open meeting was a brief business meeting. Suggestions for the next open meeting program were solicited, and ideas included programs on authority data and UNICODE, or one on authority control aspects of the Functional Requirements of Bibliographic Records (FRBR). Ann Della Porta (LC) also mentioned that the Library of Congress Authorities would be available on the web beginning July 1, 2002 at <http://authorities.loc.gov/>.

Last updated September 25, 2002