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LIS 662
Future of the Catalog Assignment
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Sometimes to move an idea quickly forward, people need to be shocked or at least slightly enraged. Upon reading Karen Calhoun's report, "The Changing Nature of the Catalog and its Integration with Other Discovery" it is clear that she intends to shock the library cataloging world into changing much of its foundation to become more integral to the new techno-savvy research world. At times it is easy to agree with many of her ideas for change, but perhaps that feels a bit too hasty. In comparing the criticism by Thomas Mann to Calhoun's report, he makes the solid point that many of her ideas could lead to users losing access to parts of a collection and also poor information records held within the library system.

However, between both viewpoints, now, work has begun on a middle ground of Internet catalog access through library systems implementing ideas that both Calhoun and Mann addressed in their writings. Calhoun suggests having more Google related searches and browsing through subject headings, and as we have seen through class some libraries, such as the University of Washington, have begun to use these with great success. Also, Mann was concerned with the loss of Library of Congress Subject Headings, and thus far those have been maintained and in these catalogs are working together to suggest alternate titles that a user may be interested in.

Both of these writings do allude to the major struggle facing the library OPAC system, is that it is not very user-friendly. The systems generally process the MARC records to appear very visually un-appealing and can be difficult to confirm basic details such as edition or medium through the OPAC filtering. Furthermore, the systems are great for some, but aren't intuitive enough for everyone to be able to use the system with success initially.

To answer the questions you posed directly: Is the catalog in decline?

The catalog will always be necessary to the library management itself, however, it does seem apparent that the catalog needs to be updated to be more interconnected with itself. Similarly to Wikipedia linking other known pages within itself, it seems as if a library catalog did this as well people could easily browse and refine their results.

Overall, as stated in the above, OPAC systems are not always easy to use and that does not mean that they have to be Google or Amazon as Calhoun implies, but perhaps making the search process simpler could make the catalog once again more popular. Many though love the system of the catalog as it has been established are used to searching by Boolean searching and will always want that option as Mann states in his critique. Google since his writing has implemented Boolean in their advanced search options and perhaps that can also be a method for keeping the old and adapting into the new within the library system. Personally, it does seem crucial to make a change to how the MARC information is displayed to the user, because it can be difficult to narrow the search results to find exactly what you are seeking. The new interlocking capabilities of Google Scholar to a library catalog is refreshing, but the system for change should come within the library system we should not wait for Google to create something as Calhoun suggests (27).

The next question: Are resources Digital? Yes and no. There are large databases online and paid subscription databases at this point to provide a great number of digital resources, but not all can be found there. As Calhoun estimated "it would take 110 years to digitize 32 million books," but it is easy to prefer these results to those you have to seek at a library. Research quality needs to be held to a high standard, but yet many students and scholars are on time restraints for projects, which lead to only using full-text articles and texts that can be found online.

There is no perfect system, both Google Books and subscription databases have their flaws, as do library catalog systems, the goal should always be for the user to find what they are seeking and all of these are definitely options for any researcher. Inter-Library Loan programs are also a digital tool that enhances and networks the library to other libraries in the community and world, so that items can be accessed digitally and then ultimately physically. There is nostalgia and also a need for physical resources still; it is difficult to read from a computer screen and the ability of writing notes and highlighting text is quite important for the research process. Although, as technology progresses with the Kindle and perhaps other similar tools, it will be easier to read digital content, which has always been the issue with the digitization movement. On top of it all, there are issues with copyright permissions for all of these scanned materials and can put the library at risk for a lawsuit if those rules are not upheld.

Third question: Which is the better path: expansion, extension or lead change?

This question is perhaps best answered by stating it depends on the library you are working in. Also, there are parts from each path that should perhaps be implemented in all libraries so it may be that you should not choose a specific path. The lead change seems the most dramatic and costly, involving a wide digitization project and following that up by opening your collection to all (it is unclear who is included in "all"). But there are some less expensive and wider applicable ideas under the lead path; including "helping researchers and learners organize and sustain their digital assets" this is an important skill that many libraries and people are not addressing. As we have been creating all of this digital content, both personally and not, and how do we organize all of these files? Addressing this question could really help bring more people into a library as it is a question that many are concerned with.

The expansion path contains a great list of marketing tools for a library to promote their resources through. Expanding the library's content through outside sources can be a great way to bring people to the library and also gain more funding for the library. Moving into the extension path, it seems as if this is considered to be the first step for a library. The ideas presented here are the easiest to attain and also are not as controversial. So, overall it seems as if this path would be the best for every library at least to consider to making their system a bit more user friendly and also updating outdated practices. All of these paths have points at which they seem inherently flawed or at least not practical, but at least it is a jumping off point for a library to be able to begin to conceptualize a change in their cataloging system.

Next question: Is the Library of Congress's leadership blinkered?

The Library of Congress as we have discussed in class, is not so much a leader as a forerunner of guidelines, rules, and practices that establish a solid catalog and ultimately library. The LC is not so much a leader though, they do not act as a watchdog to other libraries and they are not a traditional national library. Without having this status, they may have never reached the level of leadership as other countries have over their systems. Their system does translate itself well into a solid organization system for most libraries in this country and that is the common practice.

The problem for some librarians with the Library of Congress, at least according to Calhoun and Mann, is the Library of Congress Subject Headings. These perhaps are flawed to an extent, but they do work well for broadening and narrowing a topic in a search. Also, the subject headings can describe something in the work that is not apparent through the title or other parts in a record. The subject headings are not what a user searches by, but they can be an easy way that the catalog can in the future be made more browsable and inherently more user-friendly. The Library

of Congress will always be a form of a leader, but keeping apprised of other libraries in the United States and around the world is important too.

Final question: Which is the better strategy, digitization of resources, or the extension of the catalog? Ultimately it is better to extend the catalog than to digitize all of the resources held within. Digitization is costly but can be a useful marketing tool for specialized items within a collection. Also digitization allows the entire content of a work to be searchable, and while this is useful, it can lead to a lot of unwanted search results. If you want every work that ever mentions the existence of Hamlet, the complete content search can be useful, but most users will probably want less results.

Extending the catalog, does just that it opens it up for the ability of change and new systems to come through and also to be accessed in the future with more ease. The ideas expressed under the extension path, include preparations for RDA and implementing more metadata. Having more access points built within the system will allow this growth and also for the user to be able find what they are searching for. Working with some of the new conventions established by the Internet and search engines, will be key to keeping the library's catalog and OPAC useful. The catalog will always have a place within a library.