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A Fistful of Headings: Name Authority Control for Video Recordings

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A Fistful of Headings: Name Authority Control for Video Recordings

Abstract

Cheaper DVD prices and increased patron demand have led to more video recordings in library catalogs. With long lists of cast and crew, these catalog records are more detailed than many books. For institutions requiring authorized name headings, both personal and corporate, heavily detailed catalog records for video recordings can be burdensome. Not all libraries that contribute original cataloging records to utilities such as OCLC are authorized to create corresponding authority records. A recent survey asked a sample of catalog librarians of video recordings in different types of libraries about their viewpoints and workflows in the context of authority control.

Introduction

The late 1990s brought great changes to the film industry as well as the way films and media are collected by libraries. The introduction of the DVD in 1995, commercially available in 1997, with its bonus features and easily accessible chapters, and the explosion of the Internet, suddenly available outside the computer lab and accessible in any household with a dial-up connection, brought with them a new standard to what patrons expect from their home media collections, and in turn the collections of their libraries. Improved connectivity and later Web 2.0 technologies including Wikipedia and Internet Movie Database (IMDb) have allowed industry professionals and film fans to interact in previously impossible ways.
The DVD, like its immediate predecessor, the VHS cassette, continued the proliferation of mass distributed visual media, which allowed the average movie lover to cheaply acquire both classic and contemporary films that could be easily played on a television, without a projector and screen. This development coincided with the shift to online catalogs in libraries. Individual records could be longer than before because there were no longer multiple cards for catalogers to create. For libraries, VHS and DVDs are easier to store and circulate than 16 or 35-mm film canisters and, more importantly, less expensive to collect. The DVD is generally easier to catalog than the VHS cassette. As most computers have DVD players installed, it is both easy and convenient to toggle between the DVD player and the cataloging utility as important information appears on screen. Chapter menus allow for instant access to the film’s end credits, without having to fast forward through a videocassette, and then rewind again. The ease in access, however, has led catalogers to be more generous with their time, making records much more detailed than before.

Increased granularity in the notes fields (5xx) is being reflected in personal and corporate name headings (700, 710), but the Library of Congress and NACO’s Name Authority File (LC/NACO NAF) cannot keep up, leaving many film records with unauthorized headings. This is mainly because becoming a member of the Name Authority Cooperative Program (NACO) requires a commitment to the creation of a specific number of authority records per year, after the completion of training and evaluation period from the Library of Congress. Therefore many libraries who can contribute original cataloging records to utilities such as OCLC cannot contribute the corresponding authority records. When these bibliographic records are uploaded by NACO-member libraries, many of whom have policies where each name heading needs to be authorized, an even larger workload can be inherited.
This article will examine the issue of authority control within the context of film cataloging, and consider possible alternatives to what can be problematic in many libraries, even among those who outsource. An analysis of the video cataloging records at the University of Mississippi during a one-year reporting period showed that 596 records exported from OCLC had a total of 4083 name headings, both personal and corporate, or an average of 6.86 headings per record. While many of the name headings already existed in LC/NACO NAF and were available for export into our local ILS, eighteen percent of the 596 records required creation of at least one new name authority record, and some required as many as eleven new name authorities. This analysis inspired a survey of a nationwide sample of librarians who catalog video recordings for different types of libraries to ask about their viewpoints and workflows. Though catalogers take collective pride in a thorough catalog record, possibly with more information than the patron is looking for, is it necessary to provide granular detail for every film in the collection? Do we expect more from film records than from book records? Does the library catalog need to be the authoritative source on a particular film, or is it enough to let the patron know which version of the film is in the library’s collection?

**Literature Review**

Though there are books and articles about authority control, and about the cataloging of films and videos, there is a gap in library literature concerning authority control of films and videos. *Maxwell’s Guide to Authority Work* is the go-to guide for formulating authority records, from personal, corporate, and geographic names to subjects and series statements. His explanations of authority standards and procedures are an excellent supplement to the literature.
provided during NACO training, which makes reference to many Library of Congress Rule Interpretations (LCRI). However, neither resource addresses issues particular to film cataloging.

Papers from the 2003 International Conference on Authority Control were published in two special issues of *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly*. The conference included sessions on the theory of authority control and its “State of the Art”, standards and metadata, authority control for names and subjects, and reports from authority control experiences and projects. Within the papers, across the sessions, was a consistent theme: to recognize the importance of controlled access to names and subjects. Gorman contrasts “simplistic” metadata schemes with the more complex MARC family of standards and relates the concepts of precision and recall to authority control in library catalogs. Authority control, he writes, is concerned with access points and standardization, each of which leads the user to the record to find an item. Therefore, without authority control, there can be no bibliographic control.

Byrum and, later, Penney look at the origins and development of NACO, the Name Authority Cooperative project, established in 1976 by the Library of Congress, and managed by the Program for Cooperative Cataloging after 1995. Byrum outlines the history of NACO, its membership requirements, and the benefits to participants, such as helping “to shape the future of cataloguing practice.” Both authors raise concerns about the financial and time commitments required of NACO member libraries, but suggest participating in funnel projects, which require fewer records per participant, as a compromise. Taylor surveys instructors in library and information studies programs who teach authority control. All agree that authority control is an important concept, but that they run out of time in course of the semester, or that the concept is not understood by all colleagues, closely paralleling the experiences of working catalogers: that
they do not have enough time to do authority control correctly, and that their administrators do not understand the importance of the concept.

Vellucci\(^7\) discusses the reasons for and the types of outsourcing authority control to external companies or services for both retrospective projects and ongoing database maintenance to update what has changed since the last batch load. Pricing is typically lower than equivalent work in house, but the vendors do not create new name authority records. They only machine match with what already exists. Therefore, if an outsourcing library creates a record with one or more unauthorized headings, no one will create that authority record until the bibliographic record is downloaded by a NACO institution. The use of folksonomies, such as collaborative tagging, is suggested as a user-generated alternative to traditional authority control.\(^8\) This seems to have better success with subject headings, instead of with personal and corporate names.

Meanwhile, library literature about video recordings focuses on the acquisition, cataloging and physical housing of this format. The “Cataloging Tools and Training Documents” section of the Online Audiovisual Catalogers (OLAC) website\(^9\) includes an annotated list of useful tools for building authority records, but does not refer to any best practices. Weitz\(^10\) is an undisputed authority on video cataloging, contributing to numerous cataloging journals as well as each issue of the OLAC newsletter to answer cataloging questions based on his experience at OCLC. Olson’s manual\(^11\), frequently updated since its initial publication in 1981, is an indispensable resource. But neither text discusses authority control. Other important works about the cataloging of video recordings are Plummer’s timely comments\(^12\) about DVDs after the final revision of AACR2, and Ho’s summary\(^13\) of the discussion on AUTOCAT of the addition of form and genre subject headings, which still have not been adopted by all libraries despite LC’s establishment of subject authority records and
instructions in the Subject Headings Manual. From the acquisitions angle, Bergman et al\textsuperscript{14} are able to update Schotz’s 1995 book about video acquisition\textsuperscript{15} in one article because of advances in online resources and vendors by 2007. Kennedy\textsuperscript{16} proposes an interesting study of cost-per-use for CDs and DVDs, but limits her parameters to the accompanying materials that come with books and other texts.

Naun and Elhard’s comparison\textsuperscript{17} of OCLC and the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) skirts around the issue of authority control, by discussing cataloging principles of video recordings and the tools used, both subscription-based utilities and free internet resources about the motion picture industry, but never actually discuss the issue of name authorities, and the challenges of using such “collaborative” sources. They focus on IMDb’s use of a uniform title, like in a MARC record, and that conflicting personal names are given Roman numerals, such as “Michael Moore (II),” instead of birth dates, “Moore, Michael, 1954 Apr. 23,” though that information is often but not always provided. They do not, however, acknowledge that IMDb is a resource frequently cited in name authority records, both personal and corporate, of film-related entries, particularly those of the post-1997 DVD era. Recent efforts by members of the Screen Actors Guild to suppress birth dates of actors, and especially actresses, under the guise that it encourages age discrimination by casting agents, does not bode well for film catalogers.

**Workflow**

Authority control can be approached in different ways, depending on a library’s staff and workflow. One method is to have a designated position be responsible for the integrity of the catalog’s entries, working from weekly or monthly lists of unauthorized headings generated by the ILS. Another method is to divide these same lists among cataloging staff, perhaps according
to who originally processed the item. A more time-consuming method is to create any headings not already in the LC/NACO NAF while the item is in hand. While it is good practice to do this work when a specific page number can be referenced if working with a print item, it can create a delay in the processing time from receipt of the item to its circulation if there are multiple headings to create.

A typical print monograph might have anywhere from one to three entries that need authority control, usually the primary author(s) or corporation which produced the work. The “rule of three” that so many catalogers cite keeps the added entries to a manageable number, unless there are local interests that request more detail. But even in the case of an edited volume, it is only the first three editors who receive 1xx or 7xx recognition. In sound recordings, it is the composer and/or the performers who are represented in added entries, whether personal names, or in the case of musical groups, corporate entries.

Video recordings generally provide significantly more added entries than print monographs because a film or video is usually a team effort. A typical release from a mainstream studio distributor will have entries for the director(s), the producer(s), the screenwriter(s), anywhere from one to three actors, the cinematographer, the music supervisor, and more. While it is entirely appropriate to include such information in the cast and crew fields in 5xx, is it common that our patrons, even in specialized film archives, will be searching for all the films of a certain music supervisor in a university’s library catalog? More likely a patron, having already consulted IMDb or similar sources, will have made a wish list of films to consult, and will do a title search to check our institution’s holdings, or search in World Cat Local. Does the average patron care about the name of the film’s production company enough to search for it in the library’s catalog? Ho points out the contradictions in rule interpretations 21.29D and
7.7B6, with regard to how production companies should or should not be traced\textsuperscript{18}. In most online library catalogs, a keyword search can pick up information in the 5xx fields, including technical positions such as editor, visual effects coordinator, costume designer, and so on. These positions do not necessarily need added entries in the 7xx fields. Cataloging video recordings without contributing the corresponding NACO records can potentially create more work for the next institution that downloads the record, though the cataloger at the next institution has the option to locally delete any fields deemed unnecessary at his or her institution.

**Survey Design and Results**

In July 2010, the Institutional Research Board of the University of Mississippi approved a 10-question survey which was uploaded to surveymonkey.com. A link to the survey was then posted to the AUTOCAT listserv specifically for catalogers, the OLAC listserv specifically for catalogers of video recordings, and the listserv of the Western European Subject Specialists (WESS) which would reach colleagues at many ARL-affiliated institutions. During the 30-day window of availability, 171 participants provided answers to the required questions, and 74 chose to give optional textual feedback.

The first question asked about the type of library where the respondents work: academic, public, or special. Distinction was made between “academic, member of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL)” and non-ARL academic libraries. Nearly two-thirds of respondents came from academic libraries (65.5%), with the next highest number coming from public libraries (26.9%), and special libraries (4.7%). Unfortunately, placing an additional option about membership in the Program for Cooperative Cataloging in this particular question threw off the total percentage, which does not add up to an even 100%. Of the two-thirds majority of
respondents in academic libraries, the division between ARL members (31.6%) and non-ARL members (33.9%) was almost even.

The next two questions were about loading or exporting authority records from national utilities, such as OCLC. Question 2, referring to books, and question 3, referring to video recordings, were answered almost identically: 85.4% download authority records for books, while 14.6% do not, and 81.3% download authority records for video recordings, while 18.7% do not. The answer to question 4, “Does your library create NACO records?” is especially telling. While over 80% of respondents in the previous two questions export authority records, only 46.8% actually create them, and 53.2% do not. Similarly, the answer to question 5, “Does your library require that each name heading be supported by an authority record?” only 30.4% of respondents answered yes, and a clear majority of 69.6% answered no, indicating that the majority, but not all, NACO-member libraries require their name headings to be supported by authority records.

Among respondents, answers to question 6, “Does your library outsource authority control?” the answers were closer in range: 40.9% yes, and 59.1% no. If the question had been posed with more granularity, such as “Does your library outsource special projects, but do new records in house?” or “Does your library outsource all authority control projects?” perhaps the outcome would have been different. Nonetheless, it is interesting to see that almost half of the survey respondents are using outside vendors, which can only maintain the records in a catalog, but cannot add to the LC/NACO NAF. This is significant because while they are not contributing to the name authority file, these libraries frequently contribute new records to OCLC, without the perspective of the work required in NACO-member libraries when cataloging the same
materials. This lack of perspective, in a cataloging niche without a list of best practices, is what leads to excessive tracing in the 7XX fields.

In question 7, respondents were asked to check boxes for “Which of the following film production categories are essential to include as access points?” from a list of ten, with an additional “other” text field included for comments. Scoring highest, each in the 90th percentile, were “director(s)” and “actor(s)”. The cast note (511) or crew note (508) can have any number of names and responsibilities listed, which will show up in a keyword search, but how many need to be searchable by name or linked to similar records by a 7xx field? The next group of choices, each in the 60th percentile, included “producer(s)”, “screenwriter(s)”, and “production companies”. If an executive producer serves as a “name above the title” to help get a film distributed, but might have had little or nothing to do with the actual production beyond financing and fundraising, does there need to be an added entry for his/her name? And does a production company, especially an LLC created for one specific project, need to be searchable other than by keyword? Certainly, it depends on the cataloging guidelines of the individual institution, but a NACO-member institution might choose to locally strip out these less-than-necessary fields rather than invest the time to create new NACO records. 33% of respondents selected “Distributors” as essential to include, less than 20% selected “cinematographer” or “music supervisor”, and less than 3% selected “costume designer” or “special effects coordinator”. Distributor information, usually a 710 field, frequently reflects what is found in the 260 publication field. Though it scored low among respondents, costume designers are frequently traced in vendor-supplied records, as are editors and other crew members. Additional fields suggested by respondents included composer (similar, but not always, to the music supervisor) and/or lyricist, narrators or hosts, creators of original work (in the case of
adaptation), animators, and anyone who might have won an award, such as an Academy Award. These numbers are consistent with Ho’s 2002 survey of search patterns among faculty and graduate students for videocassettes, which revisits Hume’s 1995 survey conducted shortly after the implementation of the first OPAC at Concordia College. Ho’s study differentiates between “catalog record elements perceived as useful to search” and “catalog record elements perceived as useful to display.”

With this many “essential” categories, a catalog record for a video recording may need anywhere from three to thirty authority records, depending on the level of granularity. The three-disc DVD set of Steven Soderbergh’s Che has 56 personal name entries (including 11 producers) and six corporate entries. While many names are in the LC/NACO NAF, especially those frequently included on mass-produced titles with wide distribution, the multiple fields that require NACO creation can be a burden for NACO members. Question 8 of the survey asked if the cataloging for video recordings should be more like that of sound recordings, which generally only provides access points for composers and performers. The majority of respondents, 67.8%, said no, while 32.2% said yes. In popular sound recordings, the band is considered a corporate entry. While individual players are notated in the 5XX, they are not traced unless they are essential for locating the band itself. It is enough to trace “Rolling Stones”; it is not necessary to trace “Jagger, Mick,” “Richards, Keith, 1943-”, but of course there are records that do. In classical sound recordings, including opera, the symphony itself is traced as a corporate entry, and the conductor(s), soloist(s), and composer(s) are traced as personal entries. But there are not notations for each member of the orchestra, as that would be excessive. Yet this sense of restraint is frequently absent in the cataloging of video recordings, where even the DVD distributor is traced.
Question 9 asked if the average video recording record is too detailed or does not have enough detail, with additional levels in between. The majority of the respondents chose “very” (36.8%) and “just enough” (31.6%), which are similar choices. The remaining third skewed to the extremes of the spectrum, “too detailed” (18.7%) and “not enough” (31.6%). Two-thirds of respondents find the status quo acceptable, one-third would like to see practices change, though in two different directions. This question also included an “other” field, inviting commentary, and most responses included a variation of the phrase “varies greatly,” because the types of materials cataloged varies, from an expensively packaged Hollywood movie with a well-documented insert to a 15-minute video from a catalog that has no information on the container. Some respondents mentioned that many technical details are present in video records that are not in sound records, and that generally, there are “too many name headings but not enough subject detail.”

The tenth and final question was an open text box, and asked respondents to “add your thoughts/comments on authority control and video recordings”. Most who added comments agreed that name authority control adds to the value of the catalog, regardless of the item’s format. But several respondents cited a lack of time, personnel, and administrative support as reasons they cannot contribute records to the LC/NACO NAF. One person wrote, “Tracing so many names (down to editor level) makes authority control too time consuming to be cost effective,” and another noted, “Our catalogers do not have the luxury of time to check all headings, let alone create NARs for [each] one.” The isolation catalogers sometimes feel is expressed by this comment: “If I had a full staff to help, I would be more detailed. Since I don’t, I do the least that helps find the video.” At the local level, this is appropriate, as long the local record is consistent. But when contributing a record to a shared utility, such as OCLC, the use of
unauthorized name headings, often due to improper searching technique, leads to what one commenter called “a proliferation of records,” many of which are very similar. Judging from the comments, there is also a discrepancy between what different cataloging professionals believe should be included: one commenter says, “The completely arbitrary inclusion on names in 245c vs. notes is problematic in many ways. Making a lot of access points is mostly a waste of time and causes too much variety in record creation, not to mention that deduping is pretty much impossible with all this variety,” while another professional writes, “I don't understand why people put names in the 511 or 508 when they don't put in 700s. I was told they were mandatory and have to spend a lot of time fixing them.” Few PCC-level libraries are contributing official PCC records for video to OCLC. In a 2003 report from PCC’s Standing Committee on Standards, there were several video-related issues left unresolved because “only a few members have experience with video cataloging.” Since several media vendors, including Midwest Tape, already contribute original records for their products to OCLC, libraries may not want to duplicate existing records. Though these bibliographic records rarely need to be enhanced or corrected, they are frequently missing corresponding authority work. Other issues mentioned in the comments section that fell outside the parameters of this study include the absence of uniform titles for a film’s name, the use of genre/form subject headings, the wording of corporate records, and whether one should acknowledge if cataloging from a container only. Each of these comments fall back to one issue: a lack of standardization within the practice. The wisest comment of this section is this one: “I feel that the balance between accuracy and access point is absolutely the most difficult in the video recording records.” This balance is what many catalogers struggle with, regardless of format.
Conclusion

Since most video recordings are the product of group efforts, it is not surprising that generally their catalog records will be more detailed than the average book record with one author. As the realities of time management with increasingly limited budgets and personnel dictate departmental workflows, it is tempting to view authority control as a luxury item that can be trimmed away. A consideration of what information our patrons at a local level want to see reflected in the catalog is essential – if there is a film studies program that wants the entire cast and crew to be traced, then it is appropriate to include these details in the record – but before spending staff time and resources on an overly detailed record, we should ask who this effort is for. Calhoun writes of how “a large and growing number of students and scholars routinely bypass library catalogs in favor of other discovery tools, and the catalog represents a shrinking proportion of the universe of scholarly information.”23 What information is necessary to tell the patron about an item in our collection beyond its existence and its availability?

The Task Group on BIBCO Standard Record Requirements for Projected Visual Materials was charged to “define a set of required elements for bibliographic records for the monographic projected visual materials format using a single encoding level.”24 The BIBCO Standard Record (BSR) for projected visual materials, based on the BSR for textual monographs, emphasizes access points rather than “extensive monographic data” (1). This project is a step in the right direction toward a list of best practices for video cataloging, as distinction is made between “mandatory” and “mandatory if applicable” elements. Assuming this BSR is adopted by the cataloging community, the number of name headings per record for video recordings, both personal and corporate, should standardize, and reduce the number of granular headings needing
to be traced. In the context of shared cataloging, the cataloger’s judgment determines what is included for the cataloging community at large, and what is best for the local level only.

Opportunities for future research on this topic might include: following up on the BIBCO Standard Record for Projected Visual Materials to see if it leads to a set of best practices for video cataloging, comparing authority workflow among peer institutions (including type of material and type of library), and comparing the number of headings in a bibliographic record with the decision to provide authority control.

Appendix: Survey and results

1. Is your library (choose all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic, ARL</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic, not ARL</td>
<td>33.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of PCC</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Does your library load authority records from OCLC, or other national authority utilities, for books?

   Yes: 85.4%
   No: 14.6

3. Does your library export authority records from OCLC, or other national authority utilities, for videorecordings?
4. Does your library create NACO records?

Yes: 81.3%
No: 18.7%

5. Does your library require that each name heading be supported by an authority record?

Yes: 46.8%
No: 53.2%

6. Does your library outsource your authority control?

Yes: 30.4%
No: 69.6%

7. Which of the following film production categories are essential to include as access points? (choose all that apply)

Producer(s): 66.1%
Director(s): 95.3%
Actor(s): 94.7%
Screenwriter(s): 63.7%
Cinematographer(s): 16.4%
Costume Designer: 2.9%
Music Supervisor: 15.2%
8. In your opinion, should videorecording cataloging be more like sound recording cataloging, which (generally) only provides access points for composers and performers?

Yes: 33.2%
No: 67.8%

9. In your opinion, the average videorecording record is:

A: Is too detailed: 18.7%
B: Is very detailed: 36.8%
C: Has just enough detail: 31.6%
D: Does not have enough detail: 12.9%
Other (please specify): (26 responses)

10. Please add your thoughts/comments on authority control and videorecordings here: (74 text responses)

1 Robert L. Maxwell, Maxwell’s guide to authority work, (Chicago: American Library Association, 2002)


5 Byrum 242


11 Nancy B. Olson, *Cataloging of audiovisual materials and other special materials: a manual based on AACR2 and MARC 21*. (Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2008)


18 Jeannette Ho, “Faculty and Graduate Student Search Patterns and Perceptions of Videos in the Online Catalog,” *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (2002): 72.

19 Regrettably, the words “load” and “export” were used interchangeably in the survey, when “export” alone should have been used.


