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## "Pivoting Cataloging Staff to Remote Work Without an Integrated Library System: Gaining Metadata Skills and Promoting Faculty Scholarship with Wikidata"

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# Pivoting Cataloging Staff to Remote Work Without an Integrated Library System: Gaining Metadata Skills and Promoting Faculty Scholarship with Wikidata



**Christa M. Strickler, Resource Description Librarian  
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When Buswell Library's Resource Description department had to move to remote work in March 2020, we were preparing for a migration from Voyager to Alma, so not long after the shutdown there was a long period in which we could not do metadata clean-up in our ILS. Without access to physical materials to catalog and without the ability to do typical metadata remediation work, we needed to find valuable work we could do from home. Our Resource Description department consists of one full-time librarian and one full-time staff member who create and manage metadata for print monographs, so we needed to find work for two people.

Many libraries are beginning to experiment with linked data as a way to structure and share metadata, so we decided to try working with linked data using Wikidata, the structured data interface behind Wikipedia. This would give us practical exposure to linked data in a way that could prepare us when linked data becomes more prevalent in bibliographic metadata. To add value to our institution while experimenting with linked data technologies, we chose to contribute data highlighting the scholarly work of Wheaton College's faculty.

Using publicly available data from faculty profiles on the college's website, we began by manually creating new pages in Wikidata for faculty members (e.g., Jamie D. Aten: <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q55076179>), linking them to Wheaton College, their educational backgrounds, areas of study, and scholarly memberships. This created baseline profiles, all linked to Wheaton College, that we could then link to scholarly publications.

Contributing data on scholarly publications was both more and less challenging than creating faculty profiles. Not all faculty share their publication history on the college website, so we had to look for the information in multiple places, such as internal publication lists, Google Scholar, and article databases, and it is still far from complete. This part of the workflow was also less challenging in that all data gleaned from article databases could be captured with Zotero, an open-source reference management tool, and then exported to OpenRefine, an open-source data cleanup application commonly used in metadata work. From there, we could align the data with a schema and bulk upload it to Wikidata. Once we mastered this batch loading workflow, we found it quicker and easier than manual data creation.

This project provided benefits for the college. The faculty profiles in Wikidata act as the source for a Wikidata service called Scholia, which generates user friendly scholarly profiles with data visualizations drawn from Wikidata. A faculty profile in Scholia (e.g., Jamie D. Aten: <https://scholia.toolforge.org/author/Q55076179>)<sup>1</sup> could show a list of the scholar's publications, the number of publications published each year, co-authors, topics commonly researched, and more, depending on the data available in Wikidata. Scholia also includes institutional profiles, so Wheaton College's profile (<https://scholia.toolforge.org/organization/Q747179>) acts as a hub for all Wheaton-affiliated profiles, showing visualizations of researchers, publications, and research topics associated with the college. One can use these profiles as a snapshot of scholarly work linked to Wheaton College. Additionally, libraries have been experimenting with using linked data sources such as Wikidata to enhance library discovery layers (see Huda Khan's LD4 presentation on "The Library Catalog and Linked Data" for more details: <https://ld42020.sched.com/event/cjle/share-vde-discovery-interface-library-catalog-and-linked-data-linked-bibliographic-data-at-google>). As such work becomes more widespread, scholars with profiles in Wikidata will be more prominently displayed in discovery layers.

The Wikidata project also benefited the library. In addition to generating work for Resource Description employees lacking access to traditional cataloging tasks during the pandemic, it also provided practical experience with concepts and tools that will become more prevalent as our bibliographic data structures move to linked data. Experience with metadata manipulation in OpenRefine is increasingly important in metadata job descriptions, so the Wikidata project expanded our skills to fit with a changing profession. Additionally, OCLC's recent *Project Passage* (<https://www.oclc.org/research/publications/2019/oclcresearch-creating-library-linked-data-with-wikibase-project-passage.html>) shows that Wikibase, the editing interface powering

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<sup>1</sup> Trigger warning: Scholia profiles sometimes include images of topics and institutions affiliated with the scholar. Jamie Aten is a disaster ministry expert, and his profile includes an image of a burn injury.

Wikidata, has potential as a linked data cataloging interface, so experience using Wikidata can give cataloging staff a way to prepare for new ways of creating and managing bibliographic metadata.

Resource Description staff now have limited access to the library building and full access to our new integrated library system, so the Wikidata project has slowed down as we focus on more traditional cataloging activities, but the experience of experimentation with Wikidata has been invaluable. We found creative alternatives to traditional cataloging activities and expanded our metadata skillset while highlighting the excellent work done by faculty at Wheaton College. Though a pandemic combined with a data migration created considerable challenges for our work, the shift in work environment and structure provided significant opportunities for creativity, experimentation, and growth. †

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Christa Strickler is the Resource Description Librarian and an Associate Professor of Library Science at Wheaton College in Illinois. She has a Master of Library and Information Science degree from the University of Washington and is currently pursuing a Master of Arts in Theology at Wheaton College. You can contact her at [christa.strickler@wheaton.edu](mailto:christa.strickler@wheaton.edu) or connect on LinkedIn at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/christastrickler/>.

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