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Lessons Learned About Converting from Dewey Decimal Classification to Library of Congress Classification



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ABSTRACT

In 2015, West Coast Baptist College purchased an 80,000 volume library collection from a closing Bible institution. During 2017–2020, both the original 40,000 volume collection and purchased 80,000 volume collection were merged, relocated to a larger facility, thoroughly weeded into a 60,000 volume collection, and converted from Dewey Decimal Classification into the Library of Congress Classification. This article summarizes several factors to consider on switching classifications and our experience from the conversion process

Introduction

In 2015, the original West Coast Baptist College Library had approximately 40,000 volumes using the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) and was kept in a modular building on the east side of the college campus. West Coast Baptist College (WCBC) purchased an 80,000 volume library collection from a Bible college that closed in 2015. One-third of the purchased collection was classified using the Library of Congress Classification (LCC) with the remaining two-thirds using the DDC.

Due to the small size of the modular library and lack of space for the new collection, it was decided that the original WCBC Library would be relocated to the second floor of the new athletic building, now called the Walther Athletic Center (WAC), being built on the south part of the WCBC campus during 2015–2017 which would allow the transformation of the original library modular building to become college offices in 2021. This purchase and library physical transition meant there would be about 120,000 total items to process, with roughly 25,000 books in LCC and 95,000 items in DDC from both the original collection in the modular library and the purchased collection.

The books that were already classified in LCC and the highly used sections of DDC (such as religion and history) were set up in 2017 in the newly finished library in

the WAC. The remaining items not placed in the WAC library were stored in boxes or pallets in either the modular library or an unused room. Due to local permit complications with the new WAC building, the library could not officially open for patron usage until Fall 2017, which gave time to library staff and volunteers over the 2017 summer to finish copy cataloging the books in both LCC and DDC in the WAC into OCLC's Worldshare for library operations that fall.

In the summer of 2017, the previous librarian retired and the current library director was hired to help facilitate library operations, oversee the final stages of the initial copy cataloging process, and began working towards obtaining a master's degree in library science. Once the library collection in the WAC was completely cataloged using OCLC's WorldShare by Fall 2017 for student usage, the conversion process into LCC began. The decision had already been made by the administration before the current library director's hiring to begin conversion to LCC once the initial cataloging was complete. Some of the primary reasons were because of LCC's academic prestige and because other peer universities were using that classification. Other factors included providing an opportunity for thorough weeding to take place, removing duplicates, and reclassifying books into one classification.

The conversion process took three years to complete whilst serving student patrons, weeding through thousands of books in both the WAC library and original library modular, and many personnel hours dedicated to the conversion process, especially during the library's closure during COVID-19 lockdown in early 2020. By God's grace, the conversion project was completed in Fall 2020.

Conversion Process

The previous librarian already set the precedent for what labels to use but was using DDC for incoming books during 2015–2017. After summer 2017, the same labeling materials continued to be purchased from the same vendor so the label sizes would be consistent. Incoming books underwent an updated procedure and were cataloged into LCC instead of DDC upon arrival.

Using copy cataloging and locating LCC call numbers from OCLC's WorldShare, the WCBC Library converted slowly over 2017–2020 while balancing helping students locate books (in both DDC or LCC in the WAC), back-shifting converted books into their new location and weeding out duplicate or books in poor condition in the old storage modular. Call numbers were taken from the holdings' information in OCLC's WorldShare, from other libraries' catalogs, or manually created using the Library of Congress Classification PDFs (<https://www.loc.gov/aba/publications/FreeLCC/freelcc.html>) in rare exceptions. Cutters were created using Kyle Banerjee's Cataloging Calculator (<https://calculate.alptown.com/>).

The primary focus was to start on converting the larger sections of DDC (such as history within DDC 900s into the appropriate history sections in LCC's D and E sections) and then work through the smaller DDC numbers such as the 400–700s. DDC's 800s and 200s were the largest sections to process into LCC's P and B sections, respectively. The final section to be converted was the 200s into the appropriate B section in the Library of Congress classification.

Just before COVID-19 became an issue in March 2020, the conversion project was at 65% completion. On March 13, 2020, WCBC decided to send the students home for online learning for their safety during the 2020 spring semester (more can be read about this in the COVID-19 Impact forum [Sultanik, 2021]). The library closed for visiting patrons and progress on the conversion project halted until WCBC obtained a grant in late April. This grant enabled the hiring of eleven full time work-study college students who were unable to return home due to travel restrictions and four library assistants to focus solely on this conversion project. COVID-19 safety measures were enacted by which the teams abided while completing the project.

Four teams were created consisting of three to five work-study college students with each team dedicated to complete specific tasks. One team included a converting crew using copy cataloging from OCLC, a second team focused on creating and applying labels to the newly converted library books, and a third team focused on reshelving and backshifting the books into their proper positions. A fourth team was also created to help weed out remaining books from the storage modular in the former library location since that collection had never been weeded. Books with water damage, mold, or in poor condition beyond simple repair were considered to not be worth keeping.

Thanks to the Herculean effort of the 2020 summer crew, 30% of the library was converted over an 8-week period which brought the conversion rate to 98%. This included converting the call numbers in the library's software, new labels being created and applied, and reshelving the collection into its new location. The remaining 2% was completed just before Thanksgiving of the Fall 2020 semester.

Factors to Consider

The conversion from DDC to LCC brought up several important factors to the success of the conversion process. These factors should be considered by others seeking to implement a similar conversion.

Benefits of Converting

Weeding

To maintain a relevant collection, a library must practice weeding (or deselection). When a library converts classifications, this gives an opportunity for librarians to

examine its collection in its entirety and determine when weeding is necessary. Several key reasons for weeding a library collection include efficiently condensing a collection to save physical space and staff time while increasing usage, and creating room for new technologies (Slote, 1997). Deciding which books to remove from a collection can be decided on several factors, including age, use, condition, currency, duplication, curricular integration, appropriateness to collection, bias, and obsolete formats (Baumbach and Miller, 2006).

For the WCBC Library, the decision to weed out a book from the collection fell into one of two categories: physical condition and duplicates. Books were evaluated by physical condition for mold, rips, tears, and worn materials. Duplicates in good condition were then evaluated by the need for the book using previous circulation data and required reading for offered college classes. Faculty were involved in the weeding process if they had time to spare, but the library staff and library student workers were responsible for weeding the collection. Limited faculty availability means that library staff would be overly cautious on removing material that was not in their field of specialty (Arbeeny and Chittenden, 2014). Weeding standards were created in the library's handbook which included CREW's MUSTIE acronym:

- **M** - Misleading, factually inaccurate;
- **U** - Ugly, worn beyond mending or rebinding;
- **S** - Superseded by a new edition of by a much better book on the subject;
- **T** - Trivial, of no discernible literary or scientific merit;
- **I** - Irrelevant to the needs and interests of the library's community; and
- **E** - Elsewhere, the material is easily obtainable from another library (Muthu, 2013)

Content considered obsolete, such as VHS tapes, magazines, and journal sets published before the birth year of incoming students, were removed from the collection or recycled according to the new weeding standards. Books deemed unnecessary but in decent condition were sold via book sales in the library or sent to Better World Books.

Ease of use

Because the collection was using both classifications, it was important to get it converted into one system as quickly as possible to make it easier for library operations and patron usage. However, balancing this conversion process while being open for serving patrons did slow down this process more than anticipated. Lund and Agbaji (2018) found in their study that their respondents favored LCC because of the ease of use and effectiveness of the organization. We also found this to be true in our experience for both students and library student workers. Several student patrons

who self-identified as having dyscalculia (also called number dyslexia) told the library director that they were able to use the LCC collection with a better experience than with DDC. Future studies focusing on this topic would be recommended.

Matching other libraries using OCLC

Another benefit of switching to LCC is that it becomes easier to match other libraries' collections in library software, such as OCLC's WorldShare. The information necessary for converting is readily available in OCLC's WorldCat and helps to ease the transition while converting individual books. The bibliographic utility provided easier access to LC cataloging and classification numbers than previously available, as well as assistance in retrospective cataloging. (Shorten et al, 2005). The LCC call numbers stored within OCLC's WorldCat were invaluable during the conversion process.

Room for Growth

Because of its structure, LCC currently has unused classification letters, such as I, O, X, etc. This gives the classification the flexibility to add to its classification when needed as new technology and new fields develop. Some libraries take advantage of this flexibility by using a letter to accommodate a specialized collection, such as Seventh-Day Adventists using the W classification for a specialized exhaustive Ellen White collection (Tan and Robertson, 2018).

Perceived Academic Prestige

Many academic libraries switched classifications in the 1960s and early 1970s primarily for the economic reasons of improving efficiency in cataloging and reducing processing costs (Shorten, et al, 2005). Because of this, LCC has the reputation of being used by prestigious academic libraries. LCC is considered to be more flexible and easily expanded when needed and can use shorter numbers than DDC. This makes it easier to quickly read a library label on the spine of a book thus making it easier to locate books. DDC may not be able to manage expanding categories (such as science and technology) as efficiently as LCC could in a large research library (Lund and Agbaji, 2018).

Team focus and unification

The conversion team consisted of volunteers, library staff, and student workers over the years. Everyone was on board with getting the library into one classification. An effective team can accomplish much when they work together towards one vision to achieve the big picture rather than focusing on individual roles (Maxwell, 2001). Experienced library staff helped to convert books' call numbers using OCLC's software. Workers who were proficient with word processing helped create new labels and apply them to the newly converted books. Those who thrived with personally

handling the books got to help shelve and organize the converted books as they were relabeled. This overall sense of purpose gave a vision and focus for all library workers, from administrators to student workers that was consistent throughout the entire process. Other libraries also used dedicated teams for accomplishing specific tasks such as Carnegie Mellon University in 2007. Communication was a large factor in their success as well as taking care of their workers with breaks, treats, and parties for continued motivation (Bright et al, 2010).

Challenges of Converting

Unfamiliarity

Most incoming students are more familiar with DDC rather than LCC because of DDC's popularity in public and school libraries (Lund and Agbaji, 2018). Incoming students usually do not have a history of using LCC from their high school experience. Most school libraries and public libraries use DDC, which means that new students would have to learn LCC in addition to learning how to live life as a college student, such as learning the layout of the campus, locating a job, living in the dorms (if applicable), etc.

Training is required for new library workers so they can get up to speed on using the new-to-them classification. Using an institutional learning management system (such as Canvas), new library student workers can go through a training course completing different modules learning about library operations, policies, and procedures. Handbooks can also be used as well as training sessions (Bright, 2010). Information on how to use LCC can be included and emphasized during library training. New student library workers tend to learn the new classification system quickly during hands-on training with experienced library workers guiding them as needed. Using this hybrid approach has worked well in the WCBC Library.

Due to the changing landscape of the library layout during the conversion process, signs would get updated frequently showing the current location of DDC and LCC books, which could cause confusion for students who become accustomed to certain topics being located in specific areas. Updating the locations can confuse both new and previous students who remember the former configuration from their earlier visit. Clear signage helped guide students to the books they needed but students often needed library staff vigilance to ensure accuracy due to the fast pace on which the books were back shifted into their proper places as conversions took place.

Bias

While bias is typically seen as something to avoid, it is present in library classifications, including DDC and LCC. DDC is notorious in the library community for its dedication to nearly an entire classification number primarily focusing on Christianity. When creating the DDC, Dewey reserved the first 8 classes of the 200s

section for different aspects of Christianity while the 290s held all non-Christian religions. This bias in the classification system could make it challenging for students to research specific aspects of cultures and other religious systems since those are typically marked as “other” in DDC. When DDC was created, libraries were smaller and mainly used by a specific demographic, mainly adhering to the white Christian male perspective (Lund and Agbaji, 2018). While some development has occurred since the creation of the DDC, one researcher commented “No matter how far the DDC expands, it is still operating within the constraints of its form” (Higgins, 2016).

In today’s society, libraries have more materials to offer and larger demographics to serve which require a classification, such as LCC, to give room for expanding subclassifications in technology and give equality to other cultures and religions. However, it is worthy to note that LCC has a similar bias, especially in its religion (B) section. Because of LCC’s background in nineteenth century North America, LCC has a similar Christian and Protestant bias just like the DDC (Tan and Robertson, 2018). Baker and Islam (2020) write that LCC is biased because of unequal real estate, ethnocentric category boundaries, and assumed universal categories, favoring Christianity above other religions. LCC also caters to those familiar with the English alphabet. International students may thrive better with a numerical system like DDC since numbers tend to be more universal. Despite these differences, LCC is still used by many academic libraries.

This bias towards Christianity in either classification may not be a large factor to consider for a Christian academic library, but it is one to be aware of especially during these times with controversial issues such as diversity audits and censorship are current library issues. A large subsection of books in either classification that focus on books relating to Christianity can improve services for libraries in Christian institutions. With this in mind, DDC appears to have more limitations in its subclasses overall than LCC, especially relating to discoverability in minority scholarship which could be an additional factor worth considering for some institutions.

Specific cataloging Issues

Not all new incoming books from certain publishers may have an LCC call number available online or in OCLC. This would require the librarian to manually create a call number for that specific book for the library catalog. This can be done by finding similar books’ call numbers, but it takes extra time on the librarian’s part to locate that information, which takes time away from completing other duties (Shorten et al, 2005).

Physical work required

Depending on the size of the collection, there are many personnel hours and physical work requirements to consider if switching classifications. Some of this physical work

includes converting the book's call number inside the library's software, updating the catalog and subsequent shelving location, creating and applying the new label, and reshelving books into the new order. If the overall collection is being moved from one location to another, that adds another level of complexity to consider as some books may need to be stored until they can be processed properly. While the label creation process can be completed on a computer, moving and reshelving many books would require physically capable workers.

Finances

Another factor to consider is whether the library has the resources necessary to complete the project. New labels and subsequent label protectors will need to be purchased. The budget should also be considered when determining how many personnel hours can be applied to the project, and whether it can be realistically completed within a predetermined period. If a large collection is estimated to take several years to convert, that would affect several years' budgets. If a team is dedicated to completing the project, it is possible that new computers, printers, and possibly book-mending materials may need to be purchased. Relationships may need to be established with vendors that specialize in weeded books if a library wishes to offload its unneeded books to the vendor for resale.

Conclusion

Some libraries are not opposed to switching from DDC to LCC except for the funding factor. Reasons can include a lack of staffing, funding, room to reclassify, and an unwillingness to endure a split classification collection during the process (Shorten et al, 2005). A split collection between DDC and LCC can cause considerable frustration to library users and workers.

LCC tends to divide resources into smaller subclasses and may be more suitable for larger collections. Several factors can play a part in the success of LCC, such as the practicality of LCC for academic libraries, the ease of use in a specialized collection, and the ability to grow for expanding libraries and the ability to easily add new topics as needed. The collection size, depth of the materials, and intended use of the library collection should be considered when choosing between classification systems.

However, using LCC just because it is considered to be more academic or prestigious does not mean it is the right classification for every library. Smaller collections may be more suited for DDC because of the classification's more generalized nature. DDC is not going to completely disappear from academic libraries (Patterson, 2019). Some libraries may be more suited for a generalized classification depending on the collection size, materials' depth, and patrons' academic needs. Each library must consider which classification would best serve its collection and most importantly, its patrons.

The WCBC Library staff is grateful to have the majority of its collection classified and organized into the Library of Congress classification. The WCBC student patrons are using this classification successfully by using the library catalog, following proper signage, and getting assistance if needed. However, the author recognizes that using LCC may not be the best option for all religious academic libraries.

Ultimately, God is to be given the glory for this accomplishment. He provided for West Coast Baptist College during the COVID-19 closure in 2020 and enabled the WCBC Library to finish this conversion project within three years of beginning the process. He blessed the library with a new facility that is beloved by students and sees consistent usage when the doors are open. Psalm 118:23 - This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. ✝

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