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Editorial

Peggy Johnson



I want to draw your attention to an important paper, “Assessing the Cost and Value of Bibliographic Control,” by Erin Stalberg and Christopher Cronin, in this issue. *Library Resources and Technical Services (LRTS)* does not normally publish the work of Association for Library Collections and Technical Services (ALCTS) committees, interest group, and task forces. As a peer-reviewed journal, *LRTS* publishes papers that take a critical approach to the questions and challenges facing librarians and libraries and publishes both research papers and thoughtful explorations of operational issues that have value and implications for other libraries. “Assessing the Cost and Value of Bibliographic Control,” while incorporating a great deal of the final report of the Task Force on Cost/Value Assessment of Bibliographic Control (appointed by the ALCTS Heads of Technical Services in Large Research Libraries Interest Group), is much more than a task force report or a summary of the task force’s work. It met *LRTS*’ rigorous requirements and was vetted through our double blind review process. “Assessing the Cost and Value of Bibliographic Control” is a thoughtful analysis of a complex topic and should be required reading for all who care about the future of bibliographic control and technical services.

Stalberg and Cronin’s paper takes a critical approach to the questions and challenges facing technical services librarians today. How do we measure costs, benefits, and value of bibliographic control? How can we document the value of investment in bibliographic control, which is a central function of technical services operations? How do we communicate this value to library administrators? The authors place these questions in a historical context through their literature review, noting that answering the key questions about cost/benefit have been hampered by the absence of definitions of value as well as methods for assessing both cost and value.

The Task Force on Cost/Value Assessment of Bibliographic Control initially set out to develop and articulate metrics for evaluating the cost and value of cataloging activities, but it realized that a common vocabulary for what constitutes value and an understanding of how value is attained are needed first. At the heart of Stalberg and Cronin’s paper are seven operational definitions of value:

- Discovery success
- Use
- Display understanding
- Ability of library bibliographic data to operate on the open web and inter-operate with vendors and suppliers in the bibliographic supply chain
- Ability to support the Functional Requirements of Bibliographic Records (FRBR) user tasks
- Throughput and timeliness
- Ability to support the library’s administrative and management goals

What strikes me in re-reading these definitions is how useful they are in discussing with administrators what makes cataloging both effective and successful—and how they describe what is too often lacking in many of the vendor-supplied records for e-books.

Stahlberg and Cronin, echoing the task force, stress the need for additional research into which bibliographic elements have the greatest value to, and impact on, users. The authors propose numerous areas for research that will increase understanding of the costs and values associated with bibliographic control. Some of these are feasible as individual research projects, some will require institutional

resources and support, and some are possible only with grant-funded projects. I hope you will read this paper with care and heed the call to advance understanding of the value that bibliographic control brings to the library and its mission to support discovery, access, and, ultimately, research and scholarship.

This issue contains book reviews commissioned by Norm Medeiros, whom I am delighted to welcome back to the *LRTS* editorial board in his new role. If you are interested in writing book reviews for *LRTS*, please contact him (lrtsbookreview@ala.org).