Book Review

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Introducing RDA: A Guide to the Basics. By Chris Oliver. Chicago: ALA, 2010. 117p. $45.00 softcover ($40.50 ALA members) (ISBN 978-0-8389-3594-1).

Chris Oliver's primer on Resource Description and Access (RDA) provides the reader an opportunity to grasp the new cataloging code without necessarily having any previous knowledge of it. Those already familiar with the broad strokes of RDA and the two theoretical models that serve as its foundation, Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR) and Functional Requirements for Authority Data (FRAD),[1] will have an easier time grasping the concepts chronicled. For those readers still green to this new way of describing resources and whole catalogs, *Introducing RDA* should be a rewarding experience as Oliver guides them through unfamiliar cataloging waters.

I discovered during my reading that various chapters of the text can be grouped together by theme, and I chose to follow this approach in my review. Readers may want to bear these divisions in mind for their own encounter with the book and consume digestible chunks of this volume in stages.

Chapters 1 ("What is RDA?") and 2 ("RDA and the International Context") describe the origins and contextual background for RDA. The first chapter summarizes terms and events before recounting them in greater detail later, a sometimes frustrating structural device because some concepts and vocabulary are introduced before being adequately defined by the author. Still, the content here and in the second chapter, which addresses RDA's relationships to internationally recognized cataloging standards and

principles, lay the groundwork for the more exhaustive coverage of RDA later on in the book.

Chapter 3 ("FRBR and FRAD in RDA") introduces one of the best summaries of the FRBR and FRAD conceptual models and their relationship to RDA's objectives and principles that I have come across. I found particularly insightful Oliver's well-conveyed rendition of FRBR entities and relationships in the context of a typical bibliographic record encoded in Machine-Readable Cataloging (MARC) format (26–27). However, I feel she missed an opportunity here to use more FRBR- and FRAD-to-MARC-record examples to demonstrate to a greater extent how these models are part of the fabric of today's library catalog. Despite this, and though some complexities behind FRBR and FRAD cannot be explained away with a short summary, Oliver's rendition of these two theoretical models is a welcome addition to the many other synopses that populate the print and online cataloging literature.

More practical cataloging matters are addressed in chapters 4 through 6. In the first of these chapters, "Continuity with AACR2," Oliver points to the connections between RDA and the second edition of the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules* (*AACR2*).[3] Not the least of these is the similar intent and outcome of many equivalent instructions despite the differing terminology of the guidelines' respective texts. Other points of intersection include the compatibility of RDA and *AACR2* records, RDA originating from a "radical revision of AACR" (42), and the continuity of governance that maintains the two cataloging codes.

Chapter 5's title, "Where Do We

See Changes?" poses the same question found on the minds of catalogers new to RDA. Oliver answers it successfully. Indeed, based on coverage alone, I believe most readers will consult this chapter before all others for general information on RDA. Though she cannot speak to all differences in cataloging practice between *AACR2* and RDA, Oliver succinctly describes the more important distinctions, including a very good description of the three elements new to cataloging under "RDA: Content Type, Media Type, and Carrier Type" (50–56).

The last chapter in this group of three on practical cataloging matters, entitled "Implementing RDA: Transition from AACR2 to RDA" (chapter 6), dedicates several pages to the *RDA Toolkit*, an online suite of cataloging tools that includes the full text of RDA.[3] Readers new to the *Toolkit* suite will benefit from Oliver's orientation to this online resource, especially if they sit down before the *Toolkit* while thumbing through this portion of the chapter.

Of further interest in chapter 6 is the section "Encoding and Display of RDA Data." Oliver discusses the use of MARC as a container for RDA content, including, but not limited to, an assessment on the shortcomings of MARC in accommodating the granularity of RDA data. She uses the 300 ‡b as an example of a single subfield holding any number of descriptive data depending on the format cataloged (84). Another equally valid example is the 260 ‡c, which under *AACR2* cataloging holds dates of creation of unpublished resources, publication dates, distribution dates, and copyright dates. RDA considers each of these dates to be completely separate entities and, by intimation,

recorded in discrete areas of whatever encoding standard the cataloger uses.

The final chapter, "Advantages, Present and Future," stands as conclusion, summary, and in some respects editorial commentary. Oliver lays out the known and potential benefits of cataloging under RDA while describing some of the shortcomings of *AACR2* and MARC. *AACR2*'s instructions on recording abbreviations for the purpose of brevity, she writes, counter RDA's principle of representation. This is exemplified, for instance, by the recording of edition statements, which under the new cataloging guidelines are transcribed as given on the source (98). "Descriptive practices that served as shortcuts in the card catalog environment are eliminated because they do not serve the user well," Oliver submits (99).

Introducing RDA ends with a fine index and a surprisingly rich bibliography for such a short text. Citations are grouped by topic, such as "FRBR Family of Conceptual Models: FRBR, FRAD, FRSAD" (106) and "Development of RDA" (108), each group rounding out the subject matter Oliver touches upon in this work. Many of the resources here are listed as available online.

When I look back on the text as a whole, I witness Oliver's direct writing style sacrificing further illumination on some matters for speed of communication. I mentioned above the lack of additional MARC record examples to account for the presence of FRBR and FRAD in our current catalogs. Another tack she might have taken would have been to include a narrative of the cataloging of a simple book or other resource following RDA guidelines. Granted, this may have called for an additional chapter—perhaps stationed after chapter 5—but its incorporation I believe would have served as a fruitful culmination of the many observations Oliver made in the previous chapters.

To conclude, I shift gears from the book's content to comments on its carrier. The setting of the text on the page is clean and legible. Illustrations (many of which are screen captures from the *RDA Toolkit*) are very readable; none suffer from the pixelation found in some other books that employ snapshots of on-screen images. I was disappointed in the quality of the binding, however. Though the print block seems well fixed to the spine, the cover is flimsy, calling into doubt the long-term viability of the cover and possibly spine to hold the book together. Owners of this text who believe they will consult it often may want to reinforce the cover with plastic film or further secure the cover to the print block as a preemptive measure against future deterioration.—*Mark K. Ehlert, (ehler043@umn.edu), Minitex, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.*

References

1. International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions Study Group on the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records, *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records: Final Report* (The Hague: International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2009), http://archive.ifla.org/VII/s13/frbr/frbr_2008.pdf (accessed Nov. 15, 2010); Glenn E. Patton, ed., *Functional Requirements for Authority Data: A Conceptual Model* (Munich: K. G. Saur, 2009).
2. *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*, 2nd ed., 2002 rev., 2005 update (Chicago: American Library Association; Ottawa: Canadian Library Association; London: Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, 2005).
3. *RDA Toolkit: Resource Description & Access* (Chicago: ALA; Ottawa: Canadian Library Association; London: Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, 2010), http://www.rdatoolkit.org (accessed Nov. 15, 2010), subscription required.