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## Unpacking the Meaning of “NACO Lite”

*Technicalities* Column

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The name authority program within the Program for Cooperative Cataloging--NACO (Name Authority Cooperative)<sup>1</sup>—has existed since 1979 and some 9 million records have been contributed to its online file. The concept of “NACO Lite” includes a reconsideration of both what the essence of the work is and who is participating in the creation of authority data. The impetus for changes in these areas has been brewing for a long time and NACO Lite has now come to be prominently featured in the Program for Cooperative Cataloging’s latest strategic directions document.<sup>2</sup> In my career I have seen antecedents for NACO Lite in the growth and development of OCLC services and the Program for Cooperative Cataloging. I would like to use this column to attempt to define NACO Lite and to trace some of the history leading up to the concept and having a bearing on it.

### *Proposed Definition*

NACO Lite is the focusing of authority work primarily on identity management, the differentiation of entities, and the relationships between entities. The creation of identifiers is emphasized over the construction of text strings. If this new direction represents a lowering of the barrier to participation in authority work, it is a happy byproduct, not a driving force or the purpose the change.

### *What about This Change Suggests “Lite”?*









Both traditional authority control and identity management have striven to provide a means of precise searching among similarly named entities and comprehensive retrieval of resources associated with an entity. The former increasingly looks like it is harder to accomplish, and sometimes the payoff seems less.

Placing a premium on an authoritative heading puts a lot of pressure on a single text string. It must be loaded up with everything needed for identifying what entity is being referred to and for differentiating it from every other entity already established. It would be simpler to rely on entity attributes residing in separate data elements, such as field of activity and institutional affiliation to distinguish similarly-named individuals. In discovery tool displays those separate data elements could be juxtaposed on the fly with the names of researchers. In the hypothetical enhanced online catalog display<sup>3</sup> below, where the text strings have been successfully differentiated by dates, how informative are the results? How much more helpful are the five additions in helping searchers identify and select the name of interest, with or without the birth dates included?

Help New Search Search History Headings List Start Over

SOURCE OF HEADINGS: Library of Congress Online Catalog  
 YOU SEARCHED: Name Authority Headings = adams, John, 193  
 SEARCH RESULTS: Displaying 1 through 100 of 100.

◀ Previous   Next ▶

#	Bib Records		
 1	0	Adams, John, 1930-1999	
 2	0	Adams, John, 1933-	Photography
 3	0	Adams, John, 1935-	
 4	0	Adams, John, 1936-	Violist
 5	15	Adams, John, 1938-	Economics
 6	0	Adams, John, 1938 Aug. 13-	
 7	3	Adams, John, 1938 August 13-	Geography
 8	10	Adams, John, 1939-	Law

Considerable training goes into standardizing the knowledge and practices used for constructing the heading. Besides the proper order of the data elements within the headings, there are distinctions to be made between the name form found on the chief source and the selected cataloger additions.

Energy goes into assessing the prevalence of various competing forms of name for the same entity, so that something appropriate and relatively stable is selected. That commitment has actually discouraged many NACO institutions from establishing the authors of theses and dissertations, since the headings derived from the relatively full-fledged forms of name seen in those documents are forecast not to be suitable in future cataloging as subsequent publications appear with briefer name forms.

When I chaired the PCC Advisory Committee on Initiatives from 2011-2014, we undertook a survey of 11 institutions to learn about their name and subject authority practices related to work on digital library projects. We encountered beliefs that names encountered in that setting were not welcome or allowed in the LC Name Authority File (LCNAF), or that even if permissible they lacked the necessary “literary warrant” that had to be documented to permit data entry. When those beliefs were not impediments to including the names in the NACO file, there was a common assessment that such activity would require an inordinate amount of time and expense, given the quantity of names often encountered in a particular project. This made it seem impractical to do anything beyond tracking the names in local files.

*(A) The “Control Headings” Functionality in OCLC’s Connexion*

This is the first of a series of four developments in OCLC and/or PCC history that have had a shaping influence on the vision behind NACO Lite. The “Control Headings” functionality<sup>4</sup> enables catalogers to create linkages between the bibliographic record access points and the related LC authority records.

The great benefit of those hyperlinks is propagating automatic bibliographic file maintenance whenever a change is made to the heading within the authority file record.

When this software was first implemented, I remember being struck that this could make possible a two-tiered contribution model in the NACO program. For all those OCLC members not equipped with the training to create full NACO authority records, a new ability could be developed to permit creating skeletal authority records to support the hyperlinking of bibliographic record access points to something representing a single entity. In other words, if there were no conventional NACO authority record to cover a particular name in an access point, the cataloger could create a miniature one consisting of a heading (copied directly from the bibliographic record access point) and a “source found” field that consisted simply of an OCLC bibliographic record number. Such an embryonic authority record could subsequently be augmented or supplanted by a NACO member at any time. If that authority record’s heading field differed for any reason, the existing hyperlinks would trigger all the bibliographic file maintenance.

The ability to discern which access points should be connected to which existing authority records surely is more widespread than the knowledge of how to properly create full NACO records, I reasoned. The same is true for the ability to discern when a matching NACO record is lacking and when a new identifier should be created. This realization occurred over a decade ago, before any re-evaluation of authority work’s essential components took place.

#### *(B) Feasibility of a Two-Tiered Authority File*

I had the fortune of attending the OCLC Global Council Meeting of April 2014 as an alternate delegate. During a segment devoted to showcasing the rollout of new products and services, as well as learning

about initial ideas and plans for future developments, I listened with interest about an exploration of a possible second authority file. That communal venue would serve as an alternative for authority data that would otherwise be consigned to local files and it would be available to everyone unable to use the LCNAF. During the exchange of ideas on this topic, I remember the acknowledgment that there would need to be conventions developed and widely understood concerning when and how a record in the second file would get elevated to the LCNAF. Catalogers verifying names in OCLC bibliographic records would need to search in two different authority files, unless some kind of combined indexing were developed. I have always wondered if those two implications effectively amounted to showstoppers, since I have never heard any further discussion of the secondary authority file idea. My takeaway was that it was not practical to work in tiered files. Broadening participation in authority work in any significant way would likely necessitate working in the same shared file.

### *(C) Emergence of CONSER Enhance Membership*

The oldest of the four components in the Program for Cooperative Cataloging covers continuing resources cataloging. CONSER,<sup>5</sup> the Cooperative Online Serials Program, is close to 50 years old. I was one of the Operations Committee representatives from 1988-2000 and observed the growth of the program. During the 1990s, existing members were producing adequate numbers of new serial records, but the amount of maintenance they were able to contribute on existing records to keep them current with changes in serial publications was steadily declining. I advocated expanding the CONSER program to allow non-CONSER libraries to make changes to CONSER records.

The committee created to study the idea was accurately if inelegantly named the Task Force on the Maintenance of CONSER Records by Non-CONSER Institutions.<sup>6</sup> That idea provoked intense criticism. The initial push back argument was that those interested in editing OCLC's serial records would be

better directed toward activity on the non-CONSER serial records in WorldCat, perhaps in a new “Serials Enhance” program. OCLC’s Quality Control Section staff pointed out that the interest in performing maintenance was focused on the mainstream CONSER records; the non-CONSER records by comparison were held by very few institutions on average.

I argued that it was untenable for existing CONSER members to claim “you’re not capable of doing the work, but we don’t have time.” The eventual compromise that emerged was a new level of “CONSER Enhance” membership; existing CONSER members committed resolve the problem of lack of knowledge by volunteering to be mentors for the new participants.

I remember the hunger to participate meaningfully in the cataloging activity. I believed the impulse to be inclusive was more than altruistic. It was also practical and beneficial to have more people to perform the needed work. This experience further reinforced the sense that sharing the work means working in a shared file.

#### *(D) Development of the “Core Level Record” Standard*

In 1993 the monographic and serial cataloging programs of the PCC<sup>7</sup> jointly launched a cataloging simplification initiative that followed on the heels of efforts to revise the LC Rule Interpretations and institute the concept of “cataloger’s judgment.” The new effort aimed to define a level of cataloging between minimal and full cataloging.<sup>8</sup>

A bitter rancor developed between the operational and policy level participants in the discussions, as a list of core-level data elements took shape alongside an existing full level. Particularly memorable was the visceral cataloger dislike of the term “core,” which called to mind an image of a hollowed out apple,

eaten down to its core. Besides arguing for the superiority of the full level, catalogers noted sarcastically that it would take longer to discern what to leave out of the newly-touted core records compared to the full level record they were used to creating quickly for most materials. The Core Level record standard was defined and disseminated but many cataloging staff disdained using it. The coexistence of the core and full levels probably did not help, particularly when the latter had been established earlier and no explanation was given on why it should give way. The matter never really seemed resolved until the arrival of a new single standard that took the place of both levels in 2010—the BIBCO Standard Record<sup>9</sup> and the CONSER Standard Record.

In light of this history it might seem ill-advised to include a word like “Lite” in referring to a major reconceptualization of authority work. Indeed, some feedback like that appeared in response to the final question of a “Follow-up Poll on ‘NACO Lite’” that the Task Group on Identity Management in NACO devised in conjunction with a recent ALA ALCTS webinar.<sup>10</sup> We had asked for any additional comments or advice respondents might have, and we heard, “Find a moniker other than ‘NACO Lite,’ since what is being proposed (identity management) is different from what NACO does (authority control). Conflating them adds to confusion about the real differences.”

#### *Double-checking “NACO Lite” Against Cooperative Cataloging History*

In reflecting on the history lessons reviewed above, I would like to make a few observations:

1. Nothing is being dumbed down or hollowed out in the changeover to NACO Lite.
2. There is no watering down of authority work proposed in order to enable new parties to contribute.
3. The reorienting of authority control toward identity management is something that should be taking place even within the circles of veteran NACO contributors.



4. There is no diminishing of useful metadata within authority work; it might just be going into different data elements.

Is there a more suitable alternative to “NACO Lite”? The only suggestion I have encountered so far is “NACO Extend.” That phrase seems misleading in that it appears to suggest the primary goal is expanding the participation.

“Lite” need not have a pejorative connotation. Consider the imagery of light rail transit. As Wikipedia notes, “*Light* in this context is used in the sense of ‘intended for light loads and fast movement,’ rather than referring to physical weight. The infrastructure investment is also usually lighter than would be found for a heavy rail system.”<sup>11</sup>

#### *Concluding Thoughts--More on the “Happy Byproduct” of NACO Lite*

An indirect consequence of a reorientation of authority work is that the primary skills needed for identity management work happen to be more widely available. Less training will be needed. The researchers and organizational units of interest to a particular institution and in need of identifiers can be addressed at the local level. An expanded pool of labor raises hopes that fewer legacy and future new names will go without identifiers, and that these entities can receive richer metadata. The move to an identity management focus more closely aligns library energies with that of other parties such as rights management agencies, which will give us even more collaborators for authority work!

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<sup>1</sup> Program for Cooperative Cataloging. “NACO – Name Authority Cooperative Program.” The home page of this PCC program indicates scope of the file includes records “for agents, places, works, and expressions.” <http://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/naco/index.html>

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<sup>2</sup> Program for Cooperative Cataloging. “PCC (Program for Cooperative Cataloging) Strategic Directions, January 2018-December 2021.” <http://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/about/PCC-Strategic-Directions-2018-2021.pdf> Action item 4.1 includes a call to “Further define what is meant by the “NACO Lite” concept.”

<sup>3</sup> John J Riemer. “The Impetus for a Change from Authority Control to Identity Management,” part of ALA ALCTS webinar “NACO, Authority Control, and Identity Management: Evolving Strategies for a Changing Name Authorities Landscape,” presented December 6, 2017. Image is from slide 6 of the combined slide deck: [http://downloads.alcts.ala.org/ce/20171206\\_NACO\\_Authority\\_Control\\_Identity\\_Management\\_Slides.pdf](http://downloads.alcts.ala.org/ce/20171206_NACO_Authority_Control_Identity_Management_Slides.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> OCLC. “Authorities: Use Authority Control for Bibliographic Records.” updated July 2016. <https://www.oclc.org/content/dam/support/connexion/documentation/client/authorities/authcontrol/authcontrol.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Program for Cooperative Cataloging. “CONSER – Cooperative Online Serials Program” home page. <http://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/conser/>

<sup>6</sup> For some of the history of this task group, see the “Serials Cataloging Issues—Record Maintenance” portion of “History of the CONSER Program (1986-1993)” in the *CONSER Editing Guide*, available online [https://www.itsmarc.com/crs/mergedprojects/editgde/editgde/idh\\_sect\\_a2\\_ceg.htm](https://www.itsmarc.com/crs/mergedprojects/editgde/editgde/idh_sect_a2_ceg.htm) and Jean Hirons. “Five Institutions Assist in Maintaining CONSER Records,” in *CONSERline: Newsletter of the CONSER Program*, no. 4 (January 1995) <https://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/conser/conserline/consrl-4.html#maintain>

<sup>7</sup> The monographic bibliographic record component of the National Cooperative Cataloging Program (NCCP) took on the new name BIBCO late in 1995. The serials cataloging program, CONSER, was then independent; it formally became a part of the Program for Cooperative Cataloging, successor to the NCCP, in late 1997.

<sup>8</sup> For some more background on this, see the “Cataloging Simplification” portion of “History of the CONSER Program (1986-1993)” in the *CONSER Editing Guide*, available online [https://www.itsmarc.com/crs/mergedprojects/editgde/editgde/idh\\_sect\\_a2\\_ceg.htm](https://www.itsmarc.com/crs/mergedprojects/editgde/editgde/idh_sect_a2_ceg.htm)

<sup>9</sup> Program for Cooperative Cataloging. “BIBCO Standard Record (BSR) Metadata Data Application Profiles (MAPs).” <https://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/bibco/bsr-maps.html> The equivalent information for CONSER is located at <http://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/conser/issues/CSR.html>

<sup>10</sup> ALA ALCTS NACO, Authority Control, and Identity Management webinar, December 6, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> “Light rail” Wikipedia entry, last edited March 11, 2018. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Light\\_rail](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Light_rail)