

The Catalog Card Problem— LC or “Do-It-Yourself”

BY ALBERT M. BERKOWITZ

THE RELATIVE MERITS of original cataloging and local card production as opposed to using Library of Congress catalog cards have been pondered by the administration of The Catholic University of America libraries no less than by that of any other institution. Early in 1960 it was proposed that I undertake a comparative cost study of the two methods of securing cards, as a master's dissertation in library science.¹ Conversations and conferences led to the inception of the study in March 1960, and the gathering of information was completed in seven months. The study had a threefold purpose:

1. To determine comparative personnel and materials costs of cataloging books with LC cards and by original cataloging methods,
2. To examine the cataloging process with a view to securing information that would lead to a tightening of controls for accuracy and efficiency,
3. To necessitate a detailed examination by the members of the staff of their working methods.

The study was not intended to be a cost study of the entire department, but rather to examine, comparatively, part of the procedure of taking a volume into the collection, *i.e.*, from the time it arrived in the cataloging division, already accessioned, until the cards were com-

Mr. Berkowitz is Reference Librarian of the Public Library of the District of Columbia in Washington.

pleted for the catalogs. The usual operating overhead and the existence of all equipment was presumed, including a Friden Flexowriter for the production of the cards. Serials were excluded completely.

It was clearly understood that jobs were not at stake and that the investigation was not in any way intended to be a spying operation. Without the complete confidence of the staff, the time and cost data secured would have been valueless. All observations, interviews, and stopwatch timings were carried out by the writer.

As a national center of Catholic culture, The Catholic University of America and its libraries have unique qualities. With extensive collections of material in theology, and a large intake of foreign-language books and dissertations, only about 50 per cent of the volumes received have Library of Congress cards available. This was the 50 per cent in which we were interested. During the period of the study, the library would ordinarily absorb, each year, about ten thousand new titles (fourteen thousand volumes) and operate on an annual budget of just under three-hundred-nine thousand dollars. Some subject headings used by the Library of Congress would not be used at the university, which accepts as an authority for certain subjects *Catholic Subject Headings* by Oliver L.

¹ Albert M. Berkowitz, "A Study of the Costs of Cataloging Books with Library of Congress Catalog Cards and by 'Original' Cataloging Methods" (unpublished Master's thesis, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Catholic University of America, 1961).

Kapsner, O.S.B. Some parts of the LC classification scheme (in religion) are replaced by *An Alternative Classification for Catholic Books* by Jeannette Murphy Lynn, revised by Gilbert C. Peterson, S.J. Finally, in some cases, Father Kapsner's *A Manual of Cataloging Practice for Catholic Author and Title Entries* would replace the ALA rules. These variations from usual practice make it even more important for such a library to examine most carefully an LC catalog card prepared for LC use rather than for students and scholars in a quite specialized institution. Suitability must certainly be a major consideration.

The problem of arriving at comparative costs was attacked in three interlocking units:

1. Preparation of new job descriptions for every position in the cataloging division to determine who was doing what, without referral to the cataloging division manual. Each staff member was interviewed in order to evolve a listing of duties *as he understood them* and *as he performed them*.
2. Preparation of flow process charts which traced sample books through the division, indicating each process and by whom performed, for five different types of processing. This served to fix the limits of the study.
3. Step-by-step description and timing of seventeen sample books through cataloging. Each book was put through by the LC card method and then the entire process was retraced by the original cataloging method, and cards actually produced in the division. These descriptions included notation of all errors, the necessity for staff members to stop and ask questions of supervisory personnel—in short,

what actually happened during the processing of the book.

The selection of the books to be tested was made by the assistant director of libraries, the head of the technical processing department, and the head of the cataloging division, who agreed on each sample. The titles chosen were to be representative of the 50 per cent of acquisitions which would have LC cards available. At the outset, it was determined that fifteen of the books had entries printed in the LC catalogs. Of the seventeen books selected, eleven had entries in the LC catalogs and cards were available; four had entries in the LC catalogs but cards were not available; and two had LC card numbers printed in the books, entries not yet printed in the LC catalogs that were available at the university, but cards available for purchase.

The cataloging division personnel are divided into three major job classifications, professionals, GLA's (graduate library assistants who are students in the library science department working for the M.S. in L.S., and who are rotated through positions in technical and public services), and clerical. At the time of the study, the only clerical positions were those of the Flexowriter operators.

The costs of materials used in the cataloging process were as follows:

7-part printed multiple order form	\$.02421	each
LC cards (ordered by number)		
First card . . . . .	.07	each
Additional cards . . . . .	.05	each
5-part typist's guide blank for original cataloging . . . . .	.0172	each
Flexowriter paper tape . . . . .	.0000833	per inch
Flexowriter card stock . . . . .	.00475	each

Personnel costs were arrived at by establishing the number of hours worked by each employee per year, establishing a per-hour rate, and then working this figure down to salary per second.

A point may be raised as to the com-

parative quality of the stock in an LC card and the stock used at the university. At the time of the study, the university was using a card stock which was selected to satisfy its needs, a 50 per cent rag, 120 substance card. Any institution can order the quality which satisfies its requirements. Under certain circumstances a 100 per cent cotton stock may not be as desirable as one with less.² A more flexible card may reduce the likelihood of cracking. A thinner card will take up less space in the catalogs. In any event, the difference in cost over a year between card stocks of reasonable quality should be very small.

As noted earlier, plant, equipment, and normal continuing overhead were not included inasmuch as they would remain constant for either method of cataloging. The existence of the Flexowriter was presumed, since roughly half of the acquisitions would require original cataloging and card production.

The evaluation of the end-product—a card from the Library of Congress and a card produced by the Flexowriter—was not a requirement of the study, but samples of each for the books studied were included in the finished dissertation for comparison. Accurate comparative costs

² *Permanence and Durability of Library Catalog Cards* (Chicago: ALA, 1961), p. 8.

could be produced, but the hard judgment required of others was an evaluation of any saving in cost against a catalog card which might not be completely suitable. In this, as in any similar study, the conclusion of the investigation was the beginning of the job for the administrator.

In presenting some of the results, it would be most meaningful if the books were treated as three groups, indicating time and cost by groups. The three groups may be broken down as follows:

Group A: Eleven books. Entries in the LC catalogs. Cards ordered from LC and received.

Group B: Four books. Entries in the LC catalogs. Cards ordered from LC but not available.

Group C: Two books. LC card numbers printed in the books but entry not printed in the latest LC catalogs received at the cataloging division.

Inasmuch as individual times and costs for each book would be pointless without reproducing a major portion of the study, only totals for each group are given in order to produce comparative figures for like items.³ Since the closest average unit we can arrive at is the individual card, there is also included a table

TABLE 1
TIME AND COST BY GROUPS
(Time is shown in minutes and seconds)

	GROUP A (11 BOOKS)		GROUP B (4 BOOKS)		GROUP C (2 BOOKS)	
	LC cards (62 cards)	Orig. Cat. (62 cards)	LC cards (23 cards)	Orig. Cat. (24 cards)*	LC cards (9 cards)	Orig. Cat. (9 cards)†
Professional Time	57' 32"	73' 3"	28' 14"	15' 50"	1' 18"	77' 1"
GLA Time	144' 28"	182' 17"	101' 4"	84' 34"	29' 41"	13' 56"
Clerical Time	—‡	93' 16"	39' 10"	40' 40"	—‡	10' 33"
Total Time	202'	348' 36"	168' 28"	141' 4"	30' 59"	101' 30"
Personnel Cost	\$5.78735	\$ 9.18928	\$4.45044	\$3.49367	\$.75690	\$3.56737
Materials Cost	3.58631	.85454	.30931	.31821	.53842	.14149
Total Cost	\$9.37366	\$10.04382	\$4.75975	\$3.81188	\$1.29532	\$3.70886

TABLE 2
TIME AND COST BY GROUPS AVERAGED OUT ON A "PER CARD" BASIS
(Time is shown in seconds)[§]

	GROUP A (11 BOOKS)		GROUP B (4 BOOKS)		GROUP C (2 BOOKS)	
	LC cards (62 cards)	Orig. Cat. (62 cards)	LC cards (23 cards)	Orig. Cat. (24 cards)*	LC cards (9 cards)	Orig. Cat. (9 cards)†
Professional Time	55.7	70.7	73.7	39.6	8.7	513.4
GLA Time	139.8	176.4	263.7	211.4	197.9	92.9
Clerical Time	—‡	90.3	102.2	101.7	—‡	70.3
Total Time	195.5	337.4	439.5	352.7	206.6	676.7
Personnel Cost	\$.09334	\$.14821	\$.19350	\$.14557	\$.08410	\$.39637
Materials Cost	.05784	.01378	.01345	.01326	.05982	.01572
Total Cost	\$.15119	\$.16200	\$.20695	\$.15883	\$.14392	\$.41210

* The difference in the number of cards produced is as it occurred during the test. To add one more card by the LC card method would involve a piece of stock costing \$.00475 and an almost negligible amount of time.

† One of the cards produced by original cataloging was prepared for the National Union Catalog.

‡ No clerical time required inasmuch as cards were ordered and available. Cards were not produced on the Flexowriter.

§ Time has been rounded off to the nearest one-tenth of a second. Any discrepancy in the last decimal place of any total results from the rounding off of individual items.

of figures indicating a "per card" time and cost breakdown, and then a table showing differences in time and cost by totals and on a "per card" basis.

It should be noted that even the card is not an exact unit. For example, in original cataloging, a card containing a longer main or title entry, bibliographies, contents notes, and many subject headings or added entries will involve more time on the part of the typist to produce a guide for the Flexowriter operator, take longer to produce on the Flexowriter, and use more Flexowriter tape, as well as consume more professional time to revise. The cost of a single Library of Congress card remains the same regardless of the amount of copy. However, recognizing that each title represents a unique item, this is about as close as we can come to the "unit" and, practically speaking, we have to start somewhere. The accompanying tables

³ The original dissertation required 317 pages plus the five flow process charts. A Xerographic copy is available of an abstract which includes all of the introductory material and the job descriptions, a sample testing of one book in each of the three groups, all eleven tables of time and cost data, conclusions, the appendix, and the flow process charts. The abstract consists of 142 pages plus the flow process charts.

summarize, by groups, the findings in time and cost of the study.

Barring obvious minimum standards, the quality of the card may well lie in the eye of the administrator, colored by the needs of the library's users. Table 3 shows up the fact that by using original cataloging rather than Library of Congress cards in Group A and Group C, both time consumed and cost are greater, and in the case of Group C perhaps alarmingly greater.

Starting with Group C, in general it would appear that in the case where card copy is not yet available, but a card number has been printed in the book, the simplest form of author-and-title temporary cards might be used in the main catalog and shelf list, and cards ordered from the Library of Congress by number. The two books tested cost almost twenty-seven cents more *per card* to produce by original cataloging than by using Library of Congress cards.

In Group A, original cataloging cost just over one cent more per card. In the group tested, with card copy available, it would be possible for an additional pen-

TABLE 3
DIFFERENCES IN TOTALS

By GROUPS—IF ORIGINAL CATALOGING IS USED

	Total Time	Total Cost
Group A (11 books)	2 hrs. 26 min. 36 sec. more	\$.67016 more
Group B (4 books)	27 min. 24 sec. less	\$.94787 less
Group C (2 books)	1 hr. 10 min. 31 sec. more	\$2.41354 more

ON A "PER CARD" BASIS—IF ORIGINAL CATALOGING IS USED

	Total Time	Total Cost
Group A (11 books)	2 min. 21.9 sec. more	\$.01081 more
Group B (4 books)	1 min. 26.8 sec. less	\$.04812 less
Group C (2 books)	7 min. 50.1 sec. more	\$.26818 more

ny a card to make any revisions of LC card copy that might make the card more suitable for a particular library.

Group B shows up as costing almost five cents less per card by original cataloging, and the reason is simply because this method cut out the steps necessary in first ordering cards, learning they were not available, and then going through the process of original cataloging using available card copy as a guide. Two of the samples in this group had imprint dates of 1915 and 1926 respectively, and the other two were published abroad. It is possible that some rule of thumb could be established to determine whether or not an attempt should be made to order cards depending on the year of publication or the nature of the work, even though copy is available in the LC catalogs. In the case of the samples tested, an average of almost five cents per card less when cards were *not* ordered may be a strong argument.

A study of this kind prompts suppositions. Here are some samples. Presuming that the library receives materials in any appreciable quantity that will require original cataloging because cards are not available, ordering LC cards whenever they *are* available will release time of professional catalogers to perform this work. (Compare the professional time used by each method in Groups A and C.) With professional catalogers concen-

trating on material that must be originally cataloged, there is a better chance of keeping up with the work load and not accumulating undue backlogs.

On the other hand, if original cataloging were used exclusively, the position of the card order clerk could be abolished. In addition, one part of the printed multiple order form (the LC card order slip) could be dispensed with. If original cataloging were kept up to date, it is possible that the temporary shelf list and main catalog slips could be dispensed with since permanent cards would be available within a matter of a few days. This would save two additional filing operations as well as two more parts of the printed multiple order form.

And so the rumination goes on. How important any single conclusion may be in the over-all picture will depend, again, upon the institution and its needs. Although it is doubtful that many, or perhaps *any* institution is able to disregard cost entirely in favor of quality and suitability, these factors must be weighed in the scale with budget to produce the proper balance. Finally, charting a system on paper can look impressive; it is the individuals who make it perform impressively.

Any study of this kind can only aid in the formation of judgments that will lead to the card best suited to the library at the cost it can afford to pay. ■■