

Summary Analysis of Comments Received on “Dates in Personal Name Headings” Proposal and Corresponding Decisions

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS:

The Library of Congress Cataloging Policy and Support Office (CPSO) received 139 messages in response to the call for comments on allowing the addition of dates to personal name headings in existing AACR2-coded name authority records (NARs). (This total does not include multiple postings from the same individual or responses from one individual to another, where CPSO received a carbon copy.) The comments generally fell into 4 categories, some with additional comments. The largest category was the “Yes” vote.

1. 93 “yes” comments: wholeheartedly supporting the proposal as posted.

Proponents of this choice included many U.S. and international institutions and membership organizations. Of these “yes” votes, some brought out additional issues, including request that:

- information in original scripts should be added to the NAR since this separates names that are transliterated the same
- a similar approach be taken regarding place names; adding the province [or prefecture]” to further distinguish those names, too
- reinstate the 678 field (Biographical or Historical Data) along with the decision to add dates at will
- need for notification lists of the names changed in order to expedite bibliographic file maintenance (BFM) in local catalogs
- several requests that the former heading (without dates or without death dates) be retained in a 400 field to expedite BFM or machine “flipping” in some local systems.

2. 28 “partial yes” comments: approved adding death dates to name headings with open dates, but *not* the addition of dates “at will” (except as per usual when needed to break conflicts) in order to reduce the initial impact of BFM for headings that are neither misleading nor in conflict. Proponents of this choice included many of the larger PCC partner institutions as well as the PCC-Standing Committee on Standards. These additional issues were also raised:

- enabling the 680 field (Public General Note)
- adding a 400 with the former form of the heading
- issuing a revision to LCRI 22.17 to reverse the AACR2 option decision—that is, to disallow the addition of dates to headings when first creating them
- reinstating the use of field 678
- examining other LCRIs, especially eliminating the continued acceptance of AACR2-compatible forms.

3. 12 “non-voting” comments.

Several respondents did not express approval or disapproval, focusing instead on the issues of BFM, the need for an orderly implementation, the need to conduct a project to see what the impact might be.

4.6 “no” comments: totally disapproved of any proposal to add dates to existing headings. These respondents generally cited the impact of BFM as a reason for preferring the “status quo,” although some additional suggestions were included:

- reinstatement of field 678
- suggestion to use “b.” for all beginning dates, thus eliminating open dates altogether (note that this approach runs counter to AACR2 instructions for living persons, and raised considerable discussion about the impact this would have on sorting headings in local systems).

In addition to the formal responses sent to the CPSO account, several cataloging-oriented e-mail lists (e.g., AUTOCAT, PCCLIST) were monitored for messages and discussions related to the proposal (due to the nature of such lists, the discussion often evolved to topics not directly relevant to the proposal). Many (but not all) of those who participated in these discussions also sent formal responses to CPSO. There were no “new” issues raised in these discussions that were not incorporated in responses to CPSO. Requests to consider other issues not specific to the proposal on the addition of dates to personal name headings will not be addressed at this time, but will be kept for consideration as the relevant LCRIs become candidates for simplification or are re-evaluated in light of RDA (see 5. below).

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS DECISION:

Although the majority of comments favored the proposal as originally posted, CPSO carefully considered the dissenting opinions and additional comments and made a revised recommendation to LC cataloging managers that has been unanimously accepted by those managers. The approved approach incorporates the major thrust of the original proposal, but also respects some of the concerns related to disruptions to the file. The basic decisions are outlined below for your information, but in the interest of an orderly implementation, **LC requests that the new policies not be followed until the relevant documentation can be revised.**

1. Allow the optional addition of death dates to established headings that contain birth dates only. An overwhelming majority (85%) favored the addition of death dates in such circumstances. Emphasis should be made that such heading changes are not required – catalogers may continue the current practice to cite death dates only in 670 citations (or not at all). Although many respondents felt that adding death dates to existing headings should be reserved for “prominent” individuals, the difficulty/futility of documenting and enforcing such a restriction was also acknowledged. In order to minimize the duplicative effort and load failures resulting from multiple changes to the same heading from different sources LC will monitor the load reports from the NACO nodes and may alter implementation strategies if the duplication becomes problematic.

1A. LC will investigate the development of a notification service for changed headings. Several respondents indicated that a “changed heading” report of some kind would be very useful for monitoring the addition of death dates (or other heading changes)—armed with such a report, individual libraries could decide whether to update their local files of authority and bibliographic records, or not. Such a report would serve in much the same way as the subject “weekly list”

notification. LC, in cooperation with other interested parties, will investigate the feasibility of producing such a list.

2. Continue the “status quo” regarding the restriction to adding dates (birth and/or death) to existing headings that previously had no dates and are not in conflict with other headings. As was noted by many respondents, headings without dates do not give the same appearance of being “wrong” that is often perceived with open birth dates for deceased persons. Catalogers would continue to follow the current practice of recording birth and/or death dates discovered after-the-fact in 670 citations. Although many libraries now have the system capabilities for mass heading changes, it was clear that quite a number of systems have not yet developed such capabilities (or like LC, use more labor intensive alternative mechanisms to compensate for systems that may not be as robust). By limiting the changes to the addition of death dates only (when birth dates are present), the impact of local file maintenance will be somewhat mitigated. Since it is also difficult to predict what the file maintenance impact will be (e.g., how many catalogers will apply the option to add death dates), this conservative approach may be the most prudent until the full impact is known. LC will review this policy after one year to determine if the cautionary steps are still warranted.

3. For name authority records being newly created apply the option in AACR2 22.17 to add known dates without exception. Currently, LCRI 22.17 has an exception to applying the option that prohibits the addition of dates when the heading is represented by an access point on an existing bibliographic record in the catalog and that heading is otherwise in accord with the AACR2 formulation. This exception to the policy as currently outlined in LCRI 22.17 was originally implemented to lessen the impact of bibliographic file maintenance with the adoption of AACR2. Because “the catalog” being searched is potentially different for each NACO participant, consistent application of the exception is simply no longer possible, and it is believed that most headings used prior to AACR2 that are likely to need establishment under AACR2 have already been established. Removing this exception should be a welcome simplification that will make training easier.

4. Investigate changes to the MARC 21 authority format for coding “former headings” in a discrete MARC tag. Responses and list discussions revealed that there was not a uniform understanding of when former AACR2 headings could be recorded in 400 reference fields in an updated authority record. This is in part a training issue, but some also felt that all former headings should be allowed as 400 references to assist in machine “flipping” in some local systems. This is an issue that is raised periodically— CPSO continues to believe that misusing reference fields for this purpose is ill advised and that a new MARC tag for this purpose is needed. An authority record laden with standard fields containing obsolete data will only exacerbate the confusion of reference staff and users at large (the same constituency we’re trying to appease by the proposal to add dates), pose indexing dilemmas for local system vendors, and increase the number of headings that pose potential conflict in an already very large file. CPSO would like to see the authority format changed to accommodate a discrete field for “former heading” information and will be investigating this possible solution.

5. Monitor the development of RDA vis a vis possible changes to the construction of personal name headings. Given the proximity of the implementation of changes to the current cataloging rules with the development of RDA, CPSO is not amenable to interim

changes recommended by some that would provide a new set of guidelines, such as rescinding the option to add dates to new headings when the date is available, or the suggestion to change the form of all dates to “b.” in order to eliminate the open date. Those who raised these suggestions are encouraged to forward proposals to their corresponding representative to the Joint Steering Committee for the Revision of AACR (JSC) such that the ideas can be discussed in that broader context.

6. Decision not to pursue the use of 678 or 680 fields in Name Authority Records. With the decision to proceed with the addition of death dates to headings, the addition of 678 or 680 fields does not seem cost-effective relative to the overhead for the NACO program and local systems at this time.

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