

SACO Program Development: Final Report of a PCC Task Group

The SACO Program has been providing a way for other librarians to join with librarians at the Library of Congress to propose new and changed Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) and new and changed class numbers for Library of Congress Classification schedules (LCC) needed for works they catalog for more than 10 years now. Through SACO many useful changes and additions have been proposed and adopted over this time, and the often-heard criticism that LCSH is unresponsive to change can be answered. The number of these proposals has grown to over 3000 in fiscal year 2002, (see graph at: <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/pcc/saco/sacographsfy02.html>). Librarians participating in SACO have been proud to contribute in this way and grateful to be able to use the new and changed headings needed in their cataloging.

The PCC Task Group on SACO Program Development was formed and received its charge in February 2003. The group's charge has been to address the following points:

- 1) To identify institutional/participant needs to facilitate subject proposal contributions for inclusion in LCSH.
- 2) To recommend parameters for membership in SACO
- 3) To propose a list of responsibilities that accompany SACO membership, both from the PCC and the participant perspective.

In addition, the Task Group was asked to provide recommendations that:

- 1) Outline a SACO training scenario, including what responsibilities the PCC has in providing/sharing the existing subject cataloging documentation or some that might be newly developed.
- 2) Suggest a mechanism for facilitating the contribution and distribution of subject proposals among subject trainers and training institutions for internal review, for final review by LC editorial review staff, and for distribution of approved headings to the community at large.
- 3) Identify whose responsibility it should be to implement each of the elements described.

The mandate for this work grew out of discussions about SACO at the November 2002 PCC Policy Committee. It also followed a commissioned study completed at the Library of Congress by Charles Fenly in July 2002, which examined the SACO program workflow in some detail and outlined possible improvements.

The SACO Program has operated without the formalities of institutional membership characteristic of CONSER, BIBCO and NACO. It has thus been correctly perceived as the most open and egalitarian wing of the PCC. However, as the program has grown, inconsistencies in quantity and quality of subject authorities proposed and in support provided by participant libraries, including the Library of Congress, have been observed.

The task group members have been aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the SACO program to this point in time both through study of the reports and our own experiences with participating

in SACO, and are united in our desire to provide recommendations which will support the emergence of a new and even better SACO Program. In this spirit we submit the following.

Summary of Recommendations

Briefly, the group recommends the following actions be taken.

a. That the SACO Program be expanded to include formally affiliated SACO membership as well as the less structured SACO participation already in place. Letters of two kinds regarding the new option of SACO membership should be sent to all current participants in the PCC. One letter should be sent to those who have contributed at least 5 subject or classification proposals in a past year thanking them for their past contributions and welcoming them for being among the first libraries to be full SACO members. It should also describe the benefits and responsibilities of staying in the program and request written confirmation of their appointed liaison to the program and their intention to continue.

A different letter should be sent to the rest of the PCC libraries announcing the opportunity to become SACO members, describing the benefits and responsibilities of membership, and inviting those interested to apply. Either applying or confirming acceptance of membership status would be a means for libraries to make an official commitment to support and become fuller partners in the SACO Program as members.

Membership responsibilities and benefits should include acceptance of policies as outlined in the Subject Cataloging Manual, LCSH, LCC (if appropriate), and the SACO Contributors Manual; contributing at least 5 subjects, classifications or changes to subjects or classifications each year; special training opportunities and access to documentation to be developed, and access to use of the utilities as a mechanism of contribution and distribution for subjects. The announcement should also point out that libraries not choosing to become SACO members at this time would continue to be appreciated as SACO participants and be able to contribute proposals as they have in the past.

b. That a utility-based submission and distribution option be developed through both RLIN and OCLC by the leadership of the PCC in order to facilitate subject proposals for LCSH. The currently used web-form should also be improved to allow for entering data, saving and later submission, and the options of fax and email submission should also remain viable. It is hoped that a web-form for classification proposals will become available also.

c. That appropriate resources be allocated towards the training of SACO members and towards expediting their proposals. One promising avenue for enhancing SACO members' skills would be to develop a web-based training program under the coordination of the PCC Training Committee.

d. That the SACO discussion list be employed to a greater extent than it has been for sharing and peer-consultation among SACO members.

e. That a provision be developed for the on-going update of the SACO Participants' Manual. This should be referred to the PCC Training Committee.

The cooperation of various parts of the PCC will be needed for this plan to succeed, and the task group solicits energetic and positive responses to our recommendations for SACO Program development.

SACO Membership

The idea of a membership level of participation for libraries proposing classifications and subject headings constitutes a new and exciting opportunity for libraries to cooperate in growth and management of LC subject and classification tools. Libraries choosing to become members will move from a more casual approach to one that is more committed and coherent.

Since SACO has not to this point been an institution-based membership program, it is intended that defining it as such will help to make it a better program and certainly make it more consistent with other elements of the PCC. Therefore, the task group has worked to determine the best ways to define SACO membership and its corresponding privileges and responsibilities as part of the SACO Program. The task group recommends strongly that those current SACO participants who do not become SACO members be allowed and encouraged to continue to propose new headings as that enriches LCSH and benefits all of us. The new SACO Program as proposed will thus include two levels of involvement: SACO member and SACO participant. SACO participants will see little change from their current workflow. SACO members will be distinguished by newly defined privileges and responsibilities.

In SACO, any librarian may now submit subject or classification proposals and have them considered by LC for inclusion in LCSH or LCC. No formal agreement or commitment on the part of the contributing library has been required for SACO participants. The Library of Congress owns and maintains editorial control of LCSH and will continue to do so. All changes and additions going into both print and electronic versions of LCSH are approved by the Subject Headings Editorial team (SHED) at the Library of Congress before final acceptance to assure effectiveness, accuracy and coherence of the body of subjects as a whole. This differs from the NACO program in which member libraries after their training and review period are able to contribute individual name and series authority records without specific review at LC.

Membership Benefits

The task group discussed the various benefits they have enjoyed as SACO participants and tried to identify some that can be developed further for SACO members. The primary satisfactions inherent in developing the proposals and being able to use them after approval will continue to reward both SACO members and SACO participants. The intellectual stimulation and challenge derived from learning enough about a concept to propose it as a subject can be richly rewarding in itself, and being able to provide better subject analysis for our patrons is part of what we strive for everyday.

Utility-based submission of subject authority records to SHED at LC (which retains final editorial review) should become a privilege limited to those libraries willing to accept the responsibilities of being SACO members. Not all SACO members will have access to the utilities so some will need to continue to rely on use of the web-based form, emailing, or faxing proposals.

Formalized SACO membership will enable the PCC to provide the utilities (OCLC and RLIN) with lists of their members who should be given subject authority submission capability. The ability to create and save the record prior to full completion while additional documentation may be acquired and in-house reviewing takes place can greatly facilitate the clerical aspects of proposing subject headings. This will allow individual catalogers in a library to develop proposals for new subject headings or changes to existing headings as they encounter a need for them in their cataloging and save their records, which could then be reviewed and possibly improved

upon somewhat by the more-experienced SACO coordinator before submission without forcing the coordinator to re-key the entire proposal.

Submission via the utilities will also provide a good method to include diacritics correctly when they are needed. When necessary, similar reviewing and editing by other LC staff or funnel project coordinators prior to CPSO consideration would also be facilitated. In addition, the ability to use macros or record generation software like those used to assemble basic authority records for names and series based on the bibliographic record cataloged could be developed and contribute both to efficiency and to reduction in typographical errors on proposals. Since the delays and inconvenience previously associated with proposing subject headings seem to have been barriers to proposing more and better subject headings, these options could result in significant improvements to both the quantity and quality of headings submitted through the SACO program. It is hoped that these improvements in the processes used for preparing and presenting the proposals will result in quicker approval and availability of the new and changed subject headings proposed by SACO members.

It is especially hoped that utilities-based submission as a benefit of SACO membership will serve as a pragmatic means to encourage more libraries to join.

Another meaningful incentive for libraries that will be members of the SACO program through formal agreement could be greater timeliness of proposal consideration and adoption. Streamlining the procedures for approving proposals from SACO members based on the expectation of reliably good quality proposal preparation and delivery of records in MARC format already validated by the utilities will be key to applying staff resources to consideration of an increasing volume of proposals. The possibility of accepting some types of proposals without further review has promise, but will need to be carefully explored and developed subsequent to establishment of the membership option. Similarly, participation of some SACO members as coordinators of funnel projects has appealing aspects that the task group recommends for future consideration.

The group did not as a whole see provision of documentation as a significant incentive to SACO participation. However, a discount on subscriptions to Catalogers' Desktop or a print copy of the SACO Participant's Manual would be a welcome benefit. In general the documentation needed for SACO proposing is either that already needed for cataloging such as LCSH or the Subject Cataloging Manual. By exception, international libraries often lack access to SCM and to some of the tools preferred for supporting subject proposals.

The excellent SACO Participants Manual developed by Adam Schiff is freely available online from the SACO Homepage at <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/pcc/saco.html> and now in both English and Spanish. It will need to be kept up-to-date, and the task group is referring this matter to the PCC Standing Committee on Training for coordinating this.

The last benefit specific to SACO members is the added prestige associated with being called SACO members. It is hoped that this help to persuade some libraries to join the program.

Responsibilities of Membership

SACO member libraries should have their responsibilities defined in their agreement with the PCC. They are responsible for preparation and submission of the proposal according to the established form and procedures (careful paperwork). We could amplify this to say that this includes thorough understanding and use of the Subject Cataloging Manual, the SACO Participants' Manual and relevant reference sources. We need to realize and let our staff and administrators know that this can be a time consuming task. The time aspect should be covered in training sessions as well.

Better understanding of subject proposal requirements can help prevent the deflating experience of having a proposal returned with notes about further research that is needed from the SACO coordinator or from PCC staff. Putting a bit more emphasis on this aspect of the work and the corresponding benefit to other catalogers, public services, etc. would be helpful and would encourage participation. While SACO members are responsible for trying to do as many SACO proposals as possible and as needed to perform quality cataloging, they must also realize their own limitations, especially for subject or language expertise that might be needed in a particular proposal.

SACO members are also responsible for realizing when a proposal or an update may necessitate changes to other headings already in the file and making proposals for these updates as well. It is rewarding for staff when they see they've improved a few related headings.

It would be helpful to put forth a required training program for SACO members, but the task group was not able at this point in time to do so in a fair and practical way. Clearly SACO members will vary in their backgrounds and levels of experience with subject and classification proposals, and each will need to be responsible for identifying their particular training requirements. Possibly after further development and implementation of training programs for SACO a standard minimum requirement can be defined and expected of new SACO members.

It is a reasonable idea and consistent with expectations for NACO members to establish a quota of annual submissions for subject proposals as a membership requirement. This has generated little enthusiasm in the group, which included several members whose libraries have contributed subject headings at a very low rate. However, we are aware of the burden that can be placed on Coop staff-members by, "time-consuming inquiries from SACO participants concerning the status of their proposals," as mentioned in the Fenly report. A combination of faster turnaround time and improved expertise in proposal preparation by SACO members should contribute significantly towards addressing this issue. The need to be more cost-effective as the program continues to grow provides a convincing argument for having the greatest number of the proposals submitted by skilled SACO members rather than new or occasional SACO participants.

Similarity to NACO membership is limited since there is a difference between a library's need for new subject headings and its need for new name authority records. It is a very routine matter in cataloging to encounter names that require establishment of name authorities to provide cross-referencing, etc. It is less frequent that a particular library in its day-to-day cataloging work finds a need for a new subject. In fact, catalogers are skilled at making the best of existing subject headings and seldom even recognize when an item would be better described through establishment of a new and more specific heading. This works against improvement to the rate of proposing subject headings and the quantity of SACO headings at an appropriate level of specificity. Therefore, the group would set the minimum requirement for number of subject

headings that a library would commit to proposing in a given year at the very low number five. This would ensure that the member library remains familiar with the mechanisms of subject proposing while keeping the bar low enough to include smaller libraries and support larger libraries while they work to increase their participation. We all benefit if some smaller, more specialized libraries are encouraged to contribute headings in their areas of specialty, and making the process easier could help them increase their contributions.

Initiating SACO Membership

The task group recommends that the PCC endorse our recommendations to establish SACO Membership. An announcement could then be prepared to introduce this new opportunity for joining the PCC. The announcement should especially be distributed to the libraries that have previously participated in SACO and include basic information on a procedure to be followed by those libraries choosing to become SACO members.

Challenges and Context for SACO Program Development

As it was pointed out in Charles Fenly's report last year, 3,165 headings were submitted through SACO in FY02. This is a very substantial number, and represents a large investment of time and energy on the part of SACO participants as well as librarians at LC. It is also a significant contribution to the ongoing development of LCSH and LCC, together the most important subject analysis tools ever created. It is thus highly important that this program receive the support it needs to continue to grow and that we overcome any problems standing in the way.

The most important needs of individuals and institutions for improving quality and quantity of subject heading contributions relate to becoming better trained and to having a better process for the submission and processing of the subject authority records. When asked why they haven't submitted more subject proposals librarians have responded that it takes too long. Others have not been trained adequately to understand LCSH and the proposal process so that they can identify when it is appropriate to submit a proposal and how to go about doing so.

Training for SACO

The need for stronger expertise in developing and subject authority and classification proposals can only be addressed through an active training program. Training for SACO participation needs to be a "multi-pronged" approach and the best scenario would have the following components:

- Workshops at national conferences, as currently provided by PCC. These attract a sizeable audience (about 40 people per session for ALA sessions) and provide a good foundation for preparing proposals. Workshops on advanced topics provide continuing education, and group discussions are very useful. The basic workshop and several advanced sessions have already been developed, and need only to be kept up to date. It would be possible to train experienced SACO participants to present the workshops to lessen the burden on LC staff.
- Web-based training. Not everyone can attend conference workshops. Web-based training could incorporate some of the materials developed for the in-person workshops, from the SACO Participants Manual, and other materials already on the PCC SACO webpage such as the FAQ and the list of web resources, etc., but would have to be developed by people familiar with this instructional technology. This approach has several advantages. It is likely to reach a public library audience in a way that has not been possible to date. It is more accessible to an international audience. It has the potential to be very interactive, if the instructional design is

sound. It would take a substantial investment of time and expertise to develop and would require a separate committee or task group, including among its members someone with specialized expertise in web tutorials.

- Institutional training and workshops provided by PCC and taught by experienced SACO trainers or LC staff PCC institutional training given at the library has proven very helpful for the institutions that can host a trainer and should be continued as an option. This idea could be expanded by including as trainers people who are seasoned SACO participants. Workshops can be offered taught by experienced SACO trainers as an extension of the SACO workshops currently done at ALA conferences. It would be possible to train a group of experienced SACO Participants to present a basic workshop that could be offered at state or regional library association meetings and other venues.

One member of the task group is currently co-chairing a group that is developing a 2-day workshop on basic subject cataloging using LCSH, which includes a brief session on SACO. It's just 30 minutes, an introduction really, rather than real training. This workshop will have a train-the-trainer component as other PCC programs do, and expanding SACO into more train-the-trainer approaches can be very beneficial. Trainers from outside LC can't give exactly the same kind of feedback about the editorial process, but still have a lot of potential for helping educate people about developing good proposals. The NACO and BIBCO training programs include introductions to SACO that are very helpful, and proposal-specific input from experts at LC is also extremely valuable for building greater expertise in preparing subject heading proposals.

Members of the task group have benefited from many of the existing SACO training opportunities and strongly appreciate the help they have provided. It is important to provide additional training opportunities that will be more accessible to international participants and to others who do not often attend conferences where they have been presented. It is viewed as especially important that the web-based training program as described above be developed and made available to SACO members. Through these various training options a cadre of very highly skilled SACO members will emerge over time and the SACO Program will continue to make significant contributions to the ongoing development of LCSH and LCC.

Processes and Tools

The mechanisms for submitting subject proposals have been a source of frustration. Fax machines are one way proposals have been submitted that permits inclusion of associated documentation, but is subject to the limits imposed by these gadgets and phone lines. Submission by mail was unsatisfactory in the past because it was so slow, and should be avoided as much as possible in the light of new security practices that delay delivery.

Email continues to be an option and is the primary choice for classification proposals, which are not supported as yet by the web form.

The web form now in use for proposals is a great improvement over previous options, but needs further development. It does not permit saving and revision of proposals prior to submission which would better facilitate accurate keying, participation of the institutional coordinator, and subsequent addition of further sources or cross-references to the proposal, nor does it permit keying of diacritics. It also does not provide a MARC version of the record. It would be helpful to add these capabilities to the web form especially for the benefit of subject authority contributors who do not have access to OCLC or RLIN and those who are not SACO members.

The most significant way to offer a better method for submitting SACO proposals is to permit libraries who become SACO members and who do use OCLC or RLIN to use their utilities in a way similar to that used for submitting NACO headings. That will allow use of save mechanisms, correct entering of diacritics, and for many even reduce the need for keying by allowing macro creation to automatically supply parts of the authority record based on bibliographic record data of the work cataloged. Having better methods for actually creating and submitting subject authority and classification proposals in these ways can substantially support continued growth in quality and quantity of SACO proposals.

However, some of the complaints about SACO being too slow were not related to the proposal mechanism but to the length of time between when the proposal is submitted and when it has been approved and added to LCSH. This has not only discouraged participation by being slow, it has also been somewhat unreliable in the aspect of communication to the librarian who sent the proposal as to its progress (or lack thereof). How can this be improved?

If librarians develop better expertise in preparing subject authority proposals, there will be less time required to review and supplement the proposals after they are transmitted. If more resources are allocated to support the processes of reviewing and adopting the proposals, these can be done more quickly as well. In addition, if clear methods are implemented in conjunction with utility-based submission for indicating status and scheduling of each record it will improve the perception of reliability of the program.

The speed of approval of SACO proposals really has increased greatly in recent years, but it is important to continue to process the proposals quickly and to adopt procedures for effective and efficiently keeping SACO members apprised of the progress of their proposals. As this report was in the process of being completed we noted that LC has announced that a new feedback mechanism has been developed and instituted to notify SACO contributors when their subject proposals have been downloaded into the authority file, and the task group welcomes and looks forward to learning more about this development.

Librarians preparing subject authority or classification proposals require access to LCSH and LCC to ascertain the need for the new or changed heading or number, to the Subject Cataloging Manual volumes on Subject Headings (SCM:SH), Classification, and Shelflisting for guidance in formulating the heading, and to a variety of sources for documenting a particular concept and any related terms. A recent report from the PCC Task Group on International Participation noted difficulties specific to SACO participation from outside the United States. Lack of availability of works preferred as sources for documenting certain proposals can limit participation of international librarians. SCM:SH, which is so essential to development of subject proposals, can be hard to find outside the United States and the other volumes of SCM even more so.

The SACO discussion list also has potential as a vehicle for sharing experiences and getting valuable input from fellow librarians while preparing subject proposals. Recently it has become a more active forum for collaboration in identification of sources to document proposals as well as consultation of sources held by other libraries and input towards proper formulation of headings and required proposals for related terms. Subscribing to this list is allowable on request, and should not become limited to SACO members due to its educational value for all contributors.

It will be up to the SACO members to continue to make this kind of use of the SACO discussion list happen on an everyday basis through their participation in sharing interesting experiences and asking and answering questions related to their SACO work.

The task group feels that addressing these concerns and opportunities will remove barriers and pave the way to future growth for the SACO Program.

Respectfully submitted October 24, 2003 by the
PCC Task Group on SACO Program Development:
Jimmie Lundgren, University of Florida, Chair
Janet Ashton, British Library
Linda Gabel, OCLC Liaison
Mary Charles Lasater, Vanderbilt University
Lori Robare, Subject Analysis Committee Liaison
Adam Schiff, University of Washington
Susan Summer, Columbia University,
Hugh Taylor, Cambridge University,
Thomson Yee, Library of Congress Liaison
Joe Zeeman, Research Libraries Group Liaison