Options in Religion: Survey Results

This paper reports on the results of a short survey to learn more about the use of the five optional arrangements listed under 290 Other religions in the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system. The survey ran from 26 August 2005 through 27 September 2005.

We received a total of 56 responses (not everyone responded to each question). The 35 respondents who provided contact information represent 13 countries (see question 6). Nine respondents reported use of Options A-C; no one reported use of Option D or E.

The survey results were discussed at the Decimal Classification Editorial Policy Committee (EPC) meeting held 12-14 October 2005 at the Library of Congress. We recommended, and EPC concurred, that we explore developing a single optional arrangement with religions arranged in a chronological/regional sequence. Such an arrangement would be similar to the reorganization of Class 2 Religion recently introduced in the Universal Decimal Classification UDC) system. To foster interoperability with the standard version, we could provide a crosswalk between the optional and standard DDC numbers. At some future time, the proposed optional arrangement might even be the basis of a new framework for 200 Religion.

The Dewey editors will be exploring the development of the new optional arrangement over the next year. We will continue to share our proposals and questions with users, and look forward to receiving comments and suggestions. Users may respond to the Dewey blog, or send comments and suggestions to dewey@loc.gov.

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Question 1: Which option, if any, does your library use?

[53 respondents; 3 skipped it]

Option	Response %	Response Total
None	79.2%	42
Option A	5.7%	3
Option B	5.7%	3
Option C	9.4%	5

Question 2. For which religion does your library use the option?

[7 respondents; 49 skipped it]

Religion	Option
All	(B, C)
Islam	(A, No option noted)
Christianity	(A)
Mormons	(No option noted)
Other religions or religious mythology	(C)

Question 3: Please use this space if you want to provide additional information about your use of the option.

[2 respondents; 54 skipped it]

1. "We are a Pacific Island regional library and there are many texts that, if given the religious mythology class, are denigrated by that. And, there are many blends of Christian religion overlaid with 'primitive' mythology which do not fit into any class."
2. "We don't use 298 for the Bible and Christianity."

Question 4: Which version of the DDC system does your library currently use (answer all applicable versions)?

[47 respondents; 9 skipped it]

Version	Response %	Response Total
WebDewey	39.1%	15
Abridged WebDewey	2.1%	1
DDC 22	66%	31
200 Religion Class	2.1%	1
A14	6.4%	3
DDC 21	23.4%	11
Other: Marcive Dewey 19 with extensive modifications DDC 21 (Italian edition)	6.4%	3

Question 5: Please provide any additional comments, suggestions, and/our recommended improvements for 200 Religion.

[6 respondents; 50 skipped it]

1. "The 200's are dominated, made up nearly exclusively, by Christianity, to the point that every single other religion is crammed into the 290's. I feel that, despite not really wishing to reclassify all the books my library has on religion, that the 200's really needs to be reorganized. Scale back on the numbers devoted to Christianity to allow more numbers to other religions."
2. "I think there is a tendency to make Dewey (in general -- not just the 200 Religion classification) overly difficult to read and understand. It's part of that attitude that librarians have that makes us try to assert the scientific, esoteric nature of what we do at work. Just make Dewey readable. Make it more user-friendly. Make it possible for me, a classifier and cataloger, to look at the classification schedule, read the instructions, and make a decision after reading through everything only twice.
3. "TOPICAL PROPORTIONALITY. Greetings. I am an up and coming Information Scientist. I am overjoyed that this topic is being addressed. If only the Dewey's religion section were more topically proportionate, it would approach a perfect system. Although the DDC is more for organizing existing physical media, I expect that in the spirit of eliminating censorship, the system must be revised not merely for religious 'fairness,' but for feasability as dictated by the basic values of librarianship. Instead of being geared toward organizing existing physical media, if the library's mission is to be preserved, it must categorize all types of potential information with topical proportion adhered to. In this way, the priority or marginality of the information is not determined by the classification method, but by the reader. The UDC is wonderful in many ways, but the DDC has the capacity to be useful to a person 'from memory.' I am convinced that the key to the flexible use of knowledge is one's ability to incorporate it into an existing gestalt which forms relationships to other topics within one's sphere of knowledge. This assumes at least a knowledge of numerous topics--something which can be memorized to the thousands place in the DDC due to it's concise layout. For these reasons, I anxiously support the revision of the 200 Religion section as well as the entire DDC to suit it's role in librarianship of preserving and presenting ALL forms of information to seekers of knowledge, and not to be left conveniently, albiet accidentally, prioritizing some topics over others, thereby encouraging and enforcing the passive natural selection of what people choose to focus on, and furthering the agendas of those who would passively benefit from our ignorance."
4. "291.9 Religions of other origins do not convey the particular needs of blended Christian and indigenous Pacific Island animism and nature religions of the Pacific region."
5. "WE are using DDC21 and using 297 for Islamic religion but we have proposal for an expasion of Islam . . .."

6. "Keep emphasis on Christian religion, as it will be impossible to really accommodate all other religions in the world. Classifiers in 'non-Christian' parts of the world can work around this class if it is a problem to them."

Question 6: Please provide contact information.

[35 respondents; 21 skipped it]

Country	Respondents
Brazil	1
Canada	2
Chile	1
China (Hong Kong)	1
Egypt	1
France	1
Italy	1
Malaysia	2
New Caledonia	1
South Africa	1
Switzerland	1
UK	1
US	13