

Reviewing LCSH Tentative Monthly Lists

Presentation summary

Brian Stearns from University of Alberta and Candy Riley from MARCIVE, Inc. presented on the process of reviewing Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) through the Subject Analysis Committee (SAC). During the 2020 ALA Midwinter in Philadelphia the group wanted to be more engaged with the broader subject community and identified one of the ways to do this was by reviewing as a group LCSH tentative proposals. Since the group had expertise in various domains, they had an opportunity to advocate for change or emphasize the importance of proposed terms by participating in the review process. SAC members commented on these term proposals during the period when LC requests for feedback. Brian went on to describe the process of how these publications list the proposed subject term, it's used for terms, any related and broader terms as well as scope notes. The final step in the process is the summary of the decision which announces the final outcome of the proposal. SAC was able to determine if their comments were considered helpful during the publication of the decisions from the Library of Congress (LC) editorial meeting.

Candy spoke during the second part of the presentation showing examples of SAC comments when evaluating tentative heading proposals. The examples showed SAC comments not being in line with the editorial decision as well as editorial decisions which are in par with SAC comments. Some comments have indicated that the tentative use is already represented by an LCSH and may be used as a reference, a term not being appropriate in LCSH, but should be established in the name authority file, and identification of incorrect grammar and punctuation in the proposal.

SAC has learned during this process that LC will not provide feedback on comments submitted or acknowledge that they have received these comments. SAC did request to LC what they thought about the review done and they indicated even though it didn't change the decisions on the proposals it did help in confirming their thoughts on them. LC also indicated that some of the wording used by SAC has helped with the wording of their editorial decision summaries. Committee members have felt that this review process doesn't take long, is better when more people look at the same proposal, and people capture different types (e.g., issues such as formatting, inconsistent references, or grammar). The comments have centered sound structure and not the term itself. SAC hasn't focused on the philosophical issues around a term or have taken an advocacy position, but as they become more familiar with the process, they can see themselves moving towards this direction.

Member Questions

Question: One of my proposals for 2005 was rejected. Does SAC see a role in dealing with rejections?

Answer: SAC could see themselves helping with this by focusing on why the proposal was rejected. It would be interesting for SAC to help LC with reconsidering some decisions by rethinking their initial thoughts.

Question: Are you aware of other organized groups that review these proposals?

Answer: One group that was identified is the Music Library Association Cataloging and Metadata Committee reviews which reviews music proposals.

Question: Should we work through SACO funnels to be more effective?

Answer: Funnels can be very helpful in some of the structural issues that can occur with these proposals, especially when a person is new to this process. Also, the liaisons of the SACO funnel can be great individuals to lobby the proposal.

Question: Is there a way the cataloging community can make a statement to urge LC to respond to feedback given? LC asks for feedback, but the community would be more likely to provide feedback if feedback was at least acknowledged via reply email, if not responded to in depth.

Answer: SAC will be having a committee meeting soon and thinks this would be a good issue to bring up. It would be nice to have direct feedback rather than having to wait a few months and seeing if the editorial decision summary was similar to what you input in your feedback.

Question: Do you publish the SAC comments publicly somewhere?

Answer: We do not, but we do post them in our discussion list, which is open for anyone to subscribe. Candy then compiles all of this information and submits the comments.

Question: Is there a way to get notified when new lists are up? Or a regular date each month when they go up?

Answer: Announcements on the list are posted on the SACO discussion list. Link to the SACO discussion list: <https://connect.ala.org/alcts/communities/community-home?CommunityKey=5ebcb3ff-bc70-41c3-97fd-8af46d791542> (need to be logged in to ALA Connect to view). They are also published at <https://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/saco/cpsloed/cpsloeditorial.html>.

Question: Can you confirm that you don't need to be a PCC etc. member to make comments?

Answer: Yes, you do not need to be a PCC library to comment on these proposals.