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**Costs Associated With the Public Card Catalogs
at the University of Oregon Library**

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Abstract

The University of Oregon Library maintains catalogs in two formats, card and COM (computer output microfiche). To learn how much staff time would become available if the library were to cease maintaining the public card catalogs, staffing patterns and the flow of cards through the catalog department were analyzed. Staff kept daily job logs, then data from the logs were compiled to determine an average week's allocation of time on the tasks of interest.

The study showed that 2.74 FTE (full-time equivalent) positions would be saved if the library were to cease maintenance of the public card catalogs. This staff time, however, was distributed among the jobs of seventeen people and could not immediately be realized as staff savings without a reorganization of the catalog department. The study also found a unit cost of 22.5 cents for filing. The results are expected to accelerate progress toward closing the public card catalogs and reassigning duties.

Costs Associated With the Public Card Catalogs at the University of Oregon Library

This paper reports on a research project undertaken in spring 1984 to determine the costs of producing and maintaining the University of Oregon Library's public card catalogs. The study focused specifically on the time and money spent on public access catalogs in card format, and sought to isolate and identify only those tasks which would no longer be necessary if the public card catalogs ceased to be maintained. Resources absorbed by the shelflist were not considered; neither were costs, such as FTUs (first time use charges) and archive tape costs, which would be incurred regardless of the format of the catalog. Thus, this paper does not address the question of costs associated with producing and maintaining catalogs in general; rather, it seeks to analyze costs of public card catalogs in particular, and to identify those costs which would be eliminated if the public card catalogs were closed.

Purpose of the Study

Motivating factors for the research project were complex. The primary motivation for the study came from the catalog department's need for detailed documentation of what public card catalog tasks were being performed, how, and by whom; how the available labor was organized to do the work; and how much staff time would become available for reassignment if the public card catalogs were closed. A secondary motivation grew out

of the library administration's need for quantitative cost data to present in its campuswide discussion of the issues involved in library automation at the University of Oregon.

Over the past ten years, like many institutions, the University of Oregon Library has made steady progress toward automating library services. It is in a particularly strong position with regard to its database of machine readable catalog records. The local database, begun in 1975, contains over 400,000 machine readable records, a significant percentage of the library's cataloging. Records for most materials acquired before 1975 must be sought in the card catalogs, although a modestly staffed retrospective conversion project, begun in 1983, has added over 96,000 of these older cataloging records to the local database.

The local database is used to produce the library's COM (computer output microfiche) catalog, which is divided into author, title, and subject portions. In addition, the library continues to produce and maintain its author and title card catalogs. (The subject card catalog was closed in 1977.) Thus, the catalog department finds itself charged with the complex responsibility for public access catalogs in two formats, card and COM, simultaneously.

Faced with high expectations for service, limited staff resources in the catalog department, and a larger processing workload due to increases in the book budget, the library administration had difficult decisions to make in spring 1984. With funding for a major automation project seeming less than two years away, a concentrated effort began to gain support for the

next logical step in the development of the catalogs. The library administration supported closing the public card catalogs and relying on the COM for access to current materials until an online catalog could be implemented. It was felt that the catalog department's limited staff resources would be more effectively used if they concentrated on building the local database, which was seen as the library's investment in the future.

Recognizing the need to gain the understanding and support of staff and users, the administration began to gather data, both to plan a course of action and to strengthen its arguments for change. The public card catalog cost study was requested as a part of this fact finding process. At the same time, the administration did its best to stimulate campuswide discussion by organizing educational demonstrations of several vendors' turnkey library systems, circulating position papers, holding public meetings, and so on.

Methodology

At the outset of the study, four catalog department supervisors were interviewed to gather information about the workflow and distribution of labor and to establish an appropriate list of tasks to be analyzed. In this way job logs were developed to use for data collection during the week of April 16-20, 1984. The information gathered in the interviews was used to create an up-to-date organizational chart of the catalog department (see Figure 1). It was also used to chart the work routines associated with the flow of cards through the department (see Figure 2).

Place Figure 1 here

Place Figure 2 here

Based on information from the supervisors' interviews, two job logs were developed. The first was developed for clerical staff, and the second for professional staff. Both job logs contained a list of tasks, and each was used to record the time spent daily on each task on the list.

A meeting was held with clerical staff before the study week to explain the job logs and answer questions about the study. In their regular weekly meeting, professional staff were informed about the study and shown how to keep the logs. Study participants themselves kept the job logs and turned in their sheets daily. The data were then compiled from the log sheets to yield a kind of snapshot of how the catalog department's time was spent on the public card catalogs. As it turned out, because vacation scheduling resulted in work substitutions, and because some tasks are performed monthly rather than weekly, some task times had to be reconstructed or estimated to achieve a result which could be deemed an "average" week. In all cases estimates were made in consultation with the staff member and appropriate supervisor. Finally, a list of study participants' salaries and a year's worth of filing statistics were collected from library administrators.

The data were analyzed using the CONDESCRIPTIVE and REPORT procedures of SPSSx (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, version x), a package of programs which runs on the university's mainframe computer. A powerful

and flexible set of analytical programs used primarily for social science research, SPSSx nevertheless has many practical applications in the library setting.

Outcomes

In spring 1984, the catalog department was maintaining more than ten public card catalogs, the largest of which were of course the author and title card catalogs in the Main Library. A list of the catalogs is shown in Table 1.

Place Table 1 here

It has long been recognized that providing access to a library collection is expensive and time consuming. The means by which access is provided--card, COM, book, and online catalogs being some of the choices--is reflected in the organization of labor in a technical services department. Figure 1 shows how the University of Oregon Library's catalog department was staffed in spring 1984. The chart indicates the wide dispersal of tasks related to the public card catalogs among personnel, and reveals that a major reassignment of duties would be required if the public card catalogs were closed.

A caution should be noted: the chart fails to depict staff involvement in the production and maintenance of the bibliographic database used to produce the COM catalog. In fact, the head of the paraprofessional unit took charge of coordinating needs and problems with the library's COM

vendor, while the rest of the department added or adjusted routines to accommodate the needs of building and updating the COM database. The tasks associated with producing and maintaining the COM database were performed simultaneously with, and in addition to, the tasks related to the public card catalogs.

The flowchart in Figure 2 shows the progress of catalog cards through the department. Some routines have been simplified for ease of illustration, but the chart shows a reasonably accurate picture of the workflow in spring 1984. Like a library collection, bibliographic information is dynamic and changing. The impact of these changes on the catalogs is shown at the lower right of the chart.

There are of course other tasks that relate to the provision of up-to-date bibliographic information which the flowchart does not illustrate. The University of Oregon Library's card catalogs are used by catalogers as the chief means of identifying problems or inconsistencies in new cataloging. This problem solving role is part of the function of any catalog, regardless of format. Therefore, the time and effort spent using the public card catalogs to validate bibliographic information was not considered in this study's design and implementation.

Results of the analysis of the job logs are reported in Table 2. During the study week, 2.74 FTE staff were engaged in public card catalog tasks. The routines involved are mostly clerical (2.58 FTE); professional librarians were involved as filing revisors and through their participation in the AACR2 change procedures. Assuming that all the public card catalogs

in Table 1 were closed, this 2.74 FTE staff savings could be directed to new projects, such as stepping up the retrospective conversion effort. However, it should be understood that since the 2.74 FTE is distributed among the jobs of seventeen people (nine clerical, eight professional), no one of whom engages solely in public card catalog processes, reassignment of duties would not be a simple task. (In fact the minimum time spent on the card catalogs among the clerical group was .08 FTE, the maximum was .77 FTE, and the mean was .29 FTE.)

Place Table 2 here

The weekly filing costs were calculated by applying the library office's formula for determining a person's hourly wage, multiplying the result by the number of hours that person spent on filing routines (tasks 1 through 4 in Table 2), then summing the products for all study participants. Other weekly costs were calculated in the same way.

With this estimate of weekly filing costs, \$455.46, one can go on to estimate a unit cost for filing a card by dividing the weekly cost by the average number of cards filed weekly. Department statistics showed that 150,717 cards (excluding shelflist) were filed the previous year, for an average of 2,898 cards per week. Thus the unit cost per card for labor may be estimated as $\$455.46 / 2,898 = \$.16$ per card. The library was paying OCLC \$.065 per card for printed catalog cards; so one may estimate that the cost of materials plus labor for filing in spring 1984 was \$.225 per card.

Decisions Made or Expected

As of this writing, the public card catalogs remain open, and funding problems have impeded the automation planning process at the University of Oregon Library. However, the efforts of many staff members have built support and awareness of the issues and choices involved in closing the public card catalogs. This study's results were disseminated and discussed in the library and around the campus in both formal and informal forums.

In addition, library staff began working to improve the usage and image of the COM catalog. COM supplements are now received monthly, instead of bimonthly; more copies of the COM catalog are available in the main catalog area and elsewhere on campus; and new microfiche readers and better signage have improved accessibility.

In conclusion, it should be noted that, assuming the closing of the public card catalogs, a full 2.74 FTE staff savings could not be immediately reassigned to new projects, because the catalog department would require reorganization. Jobs would have to be redefined; some procedures would have to be reworked and others created; some routines, particularly those for database maintenance, would acquire new importance. Under present circumstances, the department catches and resolves most heading conflicts and errors at the point of filing into the public card catalogs. If filing was done by a computer (as it is in the COM catalog), the catalog department's authority work procedures would require a major overhaul to ensure quality control over the COM database.

This study has helped to identify issues and problems which need to be resolved before the public card catalogs can be closed or phased out. Charting the workflow provided immediate help in identifying ways to make the card production/maintenance routines more efficient. Although the catalog department must continue to divide its attention between the public card and COM catalogs, some decisions have been implemented to streamline maintenance of the public card catalogs, and some reassignment of duties has occurred. More resources are being devoted to maintenance and quality control of the local database that is used to produce the COM catalog. When the public card catalogs are finally closed, it is expected that the data from this study will be used in further reassigning duties in the catalog department.

Table 1. **Public Card Catalogs** **Being Maintained, Spring 1984.**

Main * (author & title)	Documents * (author & title)
Science * (author & title)	Oregon Collection * (author & title)
Map Room (author-title-subject dictionary catalog)	Juvenile Collection * (author & title)
Douglass Room (author, title, subject)	OIMB (author, title, subject)
IMC (author, title, subject)	Pine Mountain (author, title, subject)

* Subject access provided by the COM catalog.

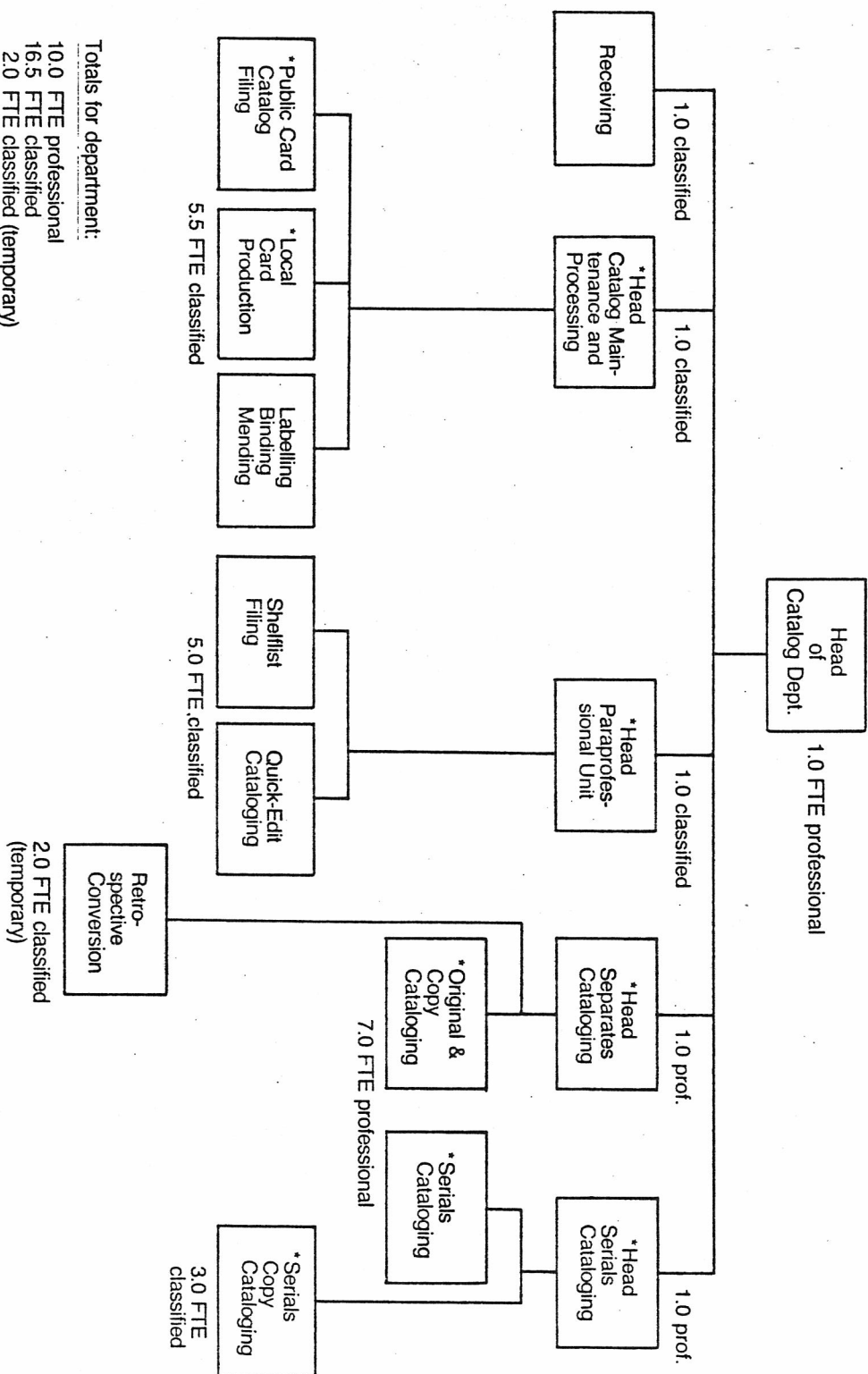
Table 2.

Estimate of Weekly Costs of Public Card Catalogs By Employee Level

	Clerical Hours	Professional Hours	Total Hours
1. Taking statistics, sorting, distributing	3.43	0.00	3.43
2. Preliminary arrangement of cards	20.42	0.00	20.42
3. Filing in all catalogs	31.70	0.00	31.70
4. Revising filing	9.50	5.50	15.00
SUBTOTAL FILING TASKS *	65.05	5.50	70.55
5. Local card production (cross-references and Orientalia)	15.88	0.00	15.88
6. Changes and Updates (added volumes, AACR2 changes, transfers, recats, corrections, etc.)	21.37	1.00	22.37
7. Maintenance of card catalog cabinets	.23	0.00	.23
8. Answering questions about filing; assisting staff using public catalogs	.68	0.00	.68
SUBTOTAL OTHER TASKS *	38.17	1.00	39.17
GRAND TOTAL	103.22	6.50	109.72
TOTAL IN FTES	2.58	.16	2.74

*Based on current salaries of study participants, weekly cost of filing routines is \$455.46; other tasks \$241.08; total weekly cost \$696.54.

Figure 1
Organizational Chart
Spring 1984



Totals for department:
 10.0 FTE professional
 16.5 FTE classified
 2.0 FTE classified (temporary)
 *Involved in maintenance of public card catalogs.

Figure 2
Flow of Catalog Cards
Spring 1984

