Growing Our Own: Mentoring the Next Generation of Catalog Librarians

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Abstract

This paper traces the development of a mentoring program for aspiring catalogers, sponsored and administered by the ALCTS CCS Committee on Education, Training, and Recruitment for Cataloging (CETRC). Background is given on the reasons for establishing the program, as well as the two pilot programs that preceded the current, ongoing mentoring service. Results of the assessment of the second pilot are shared. Though CETRC still faces challenges in sustaining the program on an ongoing basis, the Committee feels it is a valuable endeavor worth continuing.

Introduction

Conversations at library conferences and on electronic discussion lists indicate a growing concern regarding recruitment of catalogers into professional librarian positions. When longtime catalogers retire, some institutions are having difficulty recruiting a viable pool of candidates. [1] At the same time, students and recent graduates of library and information science graduate programs who are interested in cataloging careers often have difficulty finding information and guidance on obtaining positions as catalogers, and what to expect as they start their professional lives. A mentor who is a practicing cataloger can help a recent library graduate navigate these waters, but few formal programs exist to facilitate this type of exchange.

The Committee on Education, Training, and Recruitment for Cataloging (CETRC), a committee of the Cataloging and Classification Section (CCS) of the Association for Library Collections & Technical Services (ALCTS), began in the late 1990s to explore whether a mentoring program might help recruit new catalogers into the library profession. In this paper, the authors review the process undertaken by CETRC to establish a framework and documentation for a mentoring program, and the two pilot programs undertaken to test the waters. Selected results of an assessment of the second pilot program are

shared. Finally, the authors report on the establishment of an ongoing mentoring program, the continuing challenges, and hopes for the future. Appendix 1 provides a timeline summarizing the progress of these activities.

Beginnings of the Program

Informal mentoring has long been part of the training of catalogers. Often a seasoned cataloger will mentor a new cataloger through the development of practical skills. This informal mentoring helps to move the mentee [2] beyond simply applying rules to developing and employing cataloger's judgment. Mentors can also help with career advancement at any career stage. In 1996, CETRC began discussions about whether a mentoring program could act as a means of recruitment to the field of cataloging. CETRC's multi-part charge includes recruitment: "to identify and propose methods and materials for recruitment to careers in cataloging."[3] The goal for a formal mentoring program was stated in the initial letter to mentors:

> The program would pair working librarians, like you, who have volunteered to serve as mentors with interested students. The mentee would have a unique opportunity to interact with a practicing cataloger and get a realistic view of the daily operations of a cataloging department and its relations with the rest of the institution. The Committee expects that these experiences will demonstrate the essential and challenging role that a catalog librarian plays in library services, and attract high quality people to the profession. [4]

For a number of reasons, moving from the initial goal to a pilot program took CETRC several years. The chairmanship of CETRC turned over three times in three years. Each new chair needed to learn to navigate the ALCTS CCS bureaucracy. The supporting documentation that CETRC developed —letters, a guide, expectations, and a bibliography—required several rounds of review, editing, and approval. Although much of this work took place via e-mail, at that time ALA committees were less

likely to make decisions via the Internet than they are now. Therefore, final approval of documents was often delayed until the next ALA meeting.

Several CETRC subcommittees worked on the documentation for the pilot. Subcommittee members drafted letters to potential mentors and to library schools to recruit mentees; developed expectations for mentors, mentees and committee liaisons; compiled a bibliography of recent articles on mentoring; and developed a mentoring guide. [5] Additionally, subcommittee members collected sample cataloging job announcements that mentors could share with their mentees in order to illustrate the variety of cataloging positions available.

To avoid barriers to participation, the subcommittee kept expectations for mentees simple. [6] Mentees were expected to respond to the mentor's initial contact, work with the mentor to develop goals and revise them as needed, and participate in an assessment at the end of one year.

Mentor expectations were similar to those for mentees, but expanded. [7] Mentors should share their thoughts on their role in library services and introduce the mentee to the "professional milieu" through role modeling, counseling, coaching and discussion. [8] Mentors should also consider providing professional references for mentees. The Committee recognized that each mentoring relationship would develop uniquely, and kept the expectations broad enough to allow for different types of relationships.

CETRC created *Mentoring Library Graduate Students: Guide* to assist the mentor in developing the mentoring relationship. [9] The main focuses of the guide were areas within cataloging that the mentor could discuss with the mentee. These areas included cataloging theory and practice, database management and systems knowledge, management and supervision, scholarship and research, professional service, and the future of the profession and the cataloger. Among the suggestions to the mentor were recommending internships as a way to develop practical skills in cataloging, and attendance at conferences for networking and development opportunities.

Recruiting for the First Pilot

During this same period, another CETRC subcommittee was working to identify potential

mentors. The subcommittee considered proximity to ALA-accredited library schools to be an important

criterion, as in-person meetings between mentor and mentee could be highly valuable. CETRC members

identified several potential mentors through personal contact with individuals at institutions located near

library schools.

In 1999, the subcommittee contacted ALA-accredited library schools to identify students as

potential mentees, and received several names. In the spring of 2000, CETRC made the initial matches for

the first mentoring pilot. This group was quite small, consisting of four mentor/mentee pairs. Each

mentoring pair was assigned a liaison who was a member of CETRC. CETRC actively tracked the pairs,

with reports at each ALA meeting during the course of the year. However, due to the small size of the

pool, the Committee felt that a more formal assessment would not be valuable. In early 2001, CETRC

decided to expand the pilot to gather additional information.

Second Pilot Program

In the second phase of the mentoring pilot, CETRC took a more open approach.   CETRC sent the

following announcement to the *ALCTS Newsletter Online*, the ALA New Members Round Table

(NMRT) electronic list, and jESSE (library and information science education list):

CETRC is seeking librarians who would like to serve as mentors for graduate students

who have indicated an interest in a career in cataloging, information management, records

management, archives, or library systems.

The program pairs working librarians as mentors to selected students. Mentees will gain a

realistic view of the responsibilities of a catalog librarian and of the value cataloging functions

add to the services provided to our users. CETRC expects that this experience will demonstrate

the challenging role that a catalog librarian plays in library services, thereby attracting high

quality people to the profession. Mentor/mentee pairs will agree upon a one-year plan for content

and meetings. Meetings could be a mix of in-person, phone, and/or e-mail contacts.[10]

Contrary to CETRC's plans, this message was inadvertently forwarded to Autocat (electronic cataloging

discussion list), increasing the audience beyond the initial target. The committee was unprepared to

handle the resulting high level of response. Approximately forty potential mentors and fifty potential

mentees responded for the second phase of the pilot. Since the call for volunteers had not included a

request for specific information to aid in the matching process, each respondent needed an additional

contact via e-mail. If he or she replied, a CETRC member entered the data into a spreadsheet in

preparation for matching. The effort needed to cope with the larger than anticipated numbers delayed the

second phase of the pilot for a number of months.

CETRC learned several of lessons from this phase of the pilot. Certain information should have

been requested as part of the initial open call in order to properly match mentors and mentees, such as

years of experience; cataloging specialty, focus, or interest; geographic or gender preference.

Additionally, CETRC felt that they should have limited the number of participants in the pilot and stated

this limitation in the call for volunteers. Prior to sending out the announcement, CETRC had worried

about recruiting a sufficient number of candidates. Therefore, the group did not anticipate the level of

interest and was overwhelmed by the high numbers.

At the 2001 ALA Annual Conference, CETRC established a subcommittee to match pairs of

mentors and mentees based on the additional information that members had gathered. The subcommittee

received this list of fifty-two mentees and forty mentors in the fall. Because there had been a considerable

time lag since the original solicitation, the subcommittee decided to contact everyone on the list again to

make sure they were still interested in participating. In particular, several potential student mentees had

completed their degrees the previous spring. Therefore, ascertaining whether their contact information

was still valid was necessary. The subcommittee was unable to reach a handful of mentee candidates, and

removed a few potential mentors at their request due to job demands.

The subcommittee used the revised list to discuss potential matches via e-mail, and met at the ALA Midwinter Meeting in January 2002 to draft a tentative list of mentoring pairs. Finding suitable matches with a limited pool proved challenging. In particular, preferences for geographic proximity and cataloging specialties were difficult to accommodate in all cases. Based on some mentee requests for mentors with particular specialties, the subcommittee brainstormed possible additional mentors to recruit.

Soon after the Midwinter Meeting, the subcommittee succeeded in matching twenty-two pairs of mentors and mentees. Each member of CETRC was assigned as liaison to two pairs. The liaison was charged to function as contact person between the pair and CETRC, communicate information and expectations about the program, and help resolve any problems that might occur between the pair.

The liaisons sent e-mail messages to the mentors and mentees, providing them with contact information, as well as the expectations, mentoring guide, and bibliography used in the earlier pilot. The liaisons were expected to keep in touch with the pairs periodically to help monitor and guide the partnership.

CETRC informally tracked this group for one year. Committee minutes reported that "Response was mixed, with some mentor/mentee pairs failing to make or maintain contact. Others reported a very positive experience with ongoing correspondence and establishment of goals and objectives for the project".[11]

Evaluating the Second Pilot

In order to evaluate the program more formally, CETRC sent assessment questionnaires to each participant in November 2002 to evaluate the program, its perceived value, and its effect on the participants. In addition to multiple-choice answers, many questions allowed the participants to provide narrative comments. These comments were valuable in gauging common areas of concern or need for improvement in how the program is managed. The questionnaires were slightly different for the mentors and mentees, though many of the questions paralleled each other (see Appendix 2).

Ten out of the twenty-two mentees, or 45 percent, responded to the survey, while thirteen, or 54 percent, of mentors answered. In many cases, only one mentee or mentor from the pair responded, so the answers given below do not necessarily correspond to shared experiences, nor do they reflect opposing viewpoints among any individual mentoring pair.

Eighty percent of mentees and 92 percent of mentors responding to the questionnaire felt that their match was a suitable one. Many respondees commented that they wished their mentor/mentee was located geographically closer to them. A few conveyed dissatisfaction with the commitment of their mentee or mentor to sustain the mentoring relationship. Some comments associated with other questions reflected this same feeling. More mentors were disappointed by the commitment and response of their mentees than mentees were disappointed by their mentors.

Another question on the mentee survey asked how the program helped the mentee develop professionally. Selected answers appear below:

"My mentor was able to discuss certain dynamics that exist between a catalog librarian and a reference librarian."

"I was able to hear about what really goes on in the working life of a cataloger … aside from the theory that we are taught in library school."

"It helped me understand rare books better and how to handle them."

"It … helped me really think through what I like about cataloging and why I love to do it."

"My mentor told me about her work, sent me announcements of interesting meetings, and gave me some ideas about how to get published."

Answers to this question were not all positive, however. Respondents who did not feel the program helped them professionally had this to say:

"It didn't [help me grow professionally]. Perhaps it was my own lack of initiative and my own inability to juggle everything else in my life."

"[The program didn't help me grow professionally] but I was able to contact another cataloger who has been able to answer my questions."

In turn, mentors were asked how they felt they helped the professional development of the mentee. Selected answers appear below:

"I think it gave her some insight into what the day-to-day work in technical services can be like."

"I think [my mentee] gained a few insights into the job search/interview process, particularly the skills she'd likely need in an entry-level academic catalog librarian position."

"I was able to introduce her to some of the professional organizations operating in [our home state]."

"I enhanced her awareness of publishing & research opportunities within the field. I encouraged her to attend conferences by sending scholarship announcements and also shared my observations of conference activities."

"I believe I assisted the mentee greatly in understanding the job of a cataloger, including what the difference is between what an original cataloger does and what a copy cataloger does. I assisted

her in a job search by providing some guidance and suggestions for a more effective organization and presentation of the information in her cover letter and resume."

While 85 percent of responding mentors would have liked to have spent more time with their mentees, 40 percent of mentees were happy with the amount of time spent. Time spent in contact ranged from a few times a week to "no time at all." Most said they were in contact at least one hour per month. E-mail was by far the most frequent mode of communication, though a few did attempt some phone contact, and those who were able to arrange in-person meetings found them valuable and effective.

One question asked mentors about the personal benefits they had acquired as a result of their participation in the program. Many mentors expressed enjoyment in meeting new people, as well as satisfaction with passing on their love of cataloging and the knowledge they've gained in the profession. Some felt that it was useful to know about the needs of entry-level librarians and about the challenges of navigating the current job market. Several indicated that they felt they learned through the experience; either in brushing up on cataloging rules they may not use frequently, or in exercising their own job-seeking skills. On mentor noted that "It helped me re-commit to my professional interests at a time when routine and familiarity made it seem less interesting."

When asked whether the mentoring relationship influenced their future plans, 60 percent of mentees said yes and 30 percent said no. Narrative answers to this question indicate that many factors, including job location, influenced whether the respondent had actively pursued cataloging positions or planned to do so. Forty percent of respondents had been hired as catalogers, though only 20 percent indicated that they had applied for cataloging jobs. This low number reflects that some mentees were still students, and others already had cataloging positions at the time the mentoring partnership began. One mentee stated that she had applied for two cataloging positions, both of which were cancelled due to budget cuts.

A marked disagreement between mentors and mentees on the role and performance of the liaisons was apparent. Though 100 percent of the responding mentors believed that their liaisons had provided an

acceptable level of support, 30 percent of mentees disagreed, and another 30 percent did not answer the question. Narrative answers indicate that the role and purpose of the liaison was unclear to many mentees.

All ten responding mentees said that they would encourage fellow students to participate in the CETRC mentoring program. Of the thirteen mentors completing the survey, only one did not wish to participate again, and would not encourage others to participate. This person expressed her concerns more fully in the "other suggestions" section of the evaluation:

"I'm sure if my mentee had actually wanted a mentor my experience would have been much better … I think this was a good experiment, but in my opinion should not be continued. I believe mentoring someone who has already decided to be a cataloger is not what is needed. It would be far more valuable to the profession if we recruited new catalogers, both in library school and among paraprofessional staff who already work in libraries."

Other suggestions by mentors included having an online application form to enroll in the program, placing greater emphasis on geographic proximity between mentor and mentee, hosting an ice-breaker for participants at ALA conferences, and allowing one mentor to have more than one mentee.

Mentee comments echoed some of these sentiments, particularly in the desire for face to face meetings. Geographic proximity and CETRC-sponsored gatherings, either at conferences or even online, would help facilitate this.

Establishment of an Ongoing Mentoring Program

Based on the success of the pilot program and the continuing need to actively recruit catalogers, CETRC formed a standing Mentoring Subcommittee charged with overseeing an ongoing mentoring program. The Subcommittee, chaired by a CETRC member and consisting of a mix of CETRC members and past mentors and mentees, began working in the summer of 2003.

The Mentoring Subcommittee began by creating a Web site to centralize all the documentation used in the program, including the application and evaluation forms, bibliography, mentoring guide and

expectations discussed earlier. The core of this Web site is a database developed by one of the Subcommittee members, which serves as an aid in the matching process and a means of tracking mentors and mentees. Upon the submission of an application, the database program automatically enters the information into a number of fields, allowing Subcommittee members to sort applicants by several criteria such as interests, type of library, geographic location and cataloging specialty.

With the database up and operational, the Mentoring Subcommittee began recruiting in January 2004. The initial plan was to recruit mentors first to get an idea of how many mentees the program could accommodate. The Subcommittee sent messages to a variety of electronic discussion lists, including Autocat, the Online Audiovisual Catalogers (OLAC) and Special Libraries Association (SLA) lists, Serialst (serials librarians) and the Archives (archives and archivists) lists. However, though the message stated specifically that mentors rather than mentees were being sought, each list posting generated a number of applications from mentees eager to find a cataloging mentor. While this enthusiasm indicates a need for a program such as this, the CETRC Mentoring Subcommittee has been unable to fully meet the needs of those interested in the profession. The Subcommittee hopes to improve its recruitment of mentors as the program matures and gains prominence.

A month or two after recruiting mentors, the Mentoring Subcommittee sent a message to Autocat specifically recruiting mentees, a message which generated another flood of responses from not only library school students but recent graduates and early career professionals as well. Despite already having a large pool of mentees, the Subcommittee did not want to limit participation to those who happened to subscribe to the lists mentioned above. In addition, the Subcommittee wanted to build relationships with cataloging faculty at library and information science schools. Therefore, the Subcommittee followed the Autocat message with letters to the Deans of accredited library and information science programs to inform them of the program.

Due to the overwhelming response the Subcommittee received, and despite their best efforts, once again the matching process took far longer than expected, leaving many of the earliest applicants waiting many months before being matched. The Subcommittee used common areas of interest as the

primary matching criterion, although members also considered geographic and gender preferences of mentors and mentees as much as possible. Other criteria included geographic proximity (for those not expressing a preference) and secondary interests. Matching continued throughout the summer, resulting in about seventy working pairs; however, about sixty mentees still remained without a mentor. Unmatched mentees received a notice informing them the Subcommittee was unable to provide a mentor at this time, but they were welcome to remain in the database in case an appropriate mentor became available at a later date. Messages were sent to unmatched mentees who had expressed geographic preferences, informing them that this could limit the Subcommittee's ability to provide a mentor, and asking if they would be willing to accept a mentor from farther afield. Also, many of the applications indicated some potential mentees were confused about the purpose of the program, thinking it would provide actual cataloging experience, i.e., an internship or practicum (they sent hours available and/or expressed a desire for practical experience in their reasons for applying). These mentees received a personal note informing them of the purpose of the program and asking if they wished to remain in the database; several chose to withdraw.

As new mentor applications were added to the database, waiting mentees were matched with a mentor as soon as possible. Due to the imbalance between mentees and available mentors, a notice was immediately sent to new mentees letting them know that no mentors were currently available, but their names would remain in the database in case a mentor became available.

In addition to matching mentors with mentees, each Mentoring Subcommittee member served as a liaison for 10-15 working pairs, contacting each pair periodically. In several cases, mentees never responded to the mentor's initial contacts, so the mentor was assigned another mentee. In a few instances, the opposite was also true; in those cases, these mentees were matched with mentors who had "lost" their first mentee.

This first year revealed a few unexpected problems, notably the length of time required to complete the matching, despite having the database to aid in sorting and recordkeeping. Because CETRC expects this program to be ongoing, the Subcommittee is looking for ways to make the matching process

operate more smoothly. One idea is to spread the matching out over a longer period of time. This would require sending a notice to new mentors saying their application has been received, and the Subcommittee providing them with a mentee within a certain time period. Distributing the matching process throughout the year would not only eliminate the burden of matching a large number of people in a short period of time, but also of having applicants filling out an application and not hearing anything for months. It should also allow students the opportunity to find a mentor earlier in their studies. Another idea is to develop a "self-serve" database, which would eliminate the labor-intensive matching process; however, this could lead to a single mentor receiving a number of requests and others receiving none.

As the program reaches the end of its first year, the Subcommittee will ask each participant to fill out an evaluation of their experience, the results of which will be used to make adjustments to the program as needed. Mentors who would like to continue with the program will be provided with a new mentee. The Subcommittee will also begin recruiting new mentors and mentees. In addition to compiling information gathered from the evaluations and recruiting for another year, the Subcommittee is working toward finding a permanent home for the website and database.

The first year of the mentoring program was not without problems and has proven to be a great deal of work, but the large response to the initial calls for mentors and mentees indicate that the program is much needed. Midyear responses of the participants also indicate the program is proving valuable to both mentors and mentees. Prospective mentors do not need to be "experts" who know all the answers; the program is looking for practicing catalogers with an interest in recruiting new catalogers and "publicizing" the profession.

Conclusion

The CETRC mentoring program has faced a number of challenges from its inception. The rapid turnover of committee chairs and committee members, coordinating subcommittee activities long-distance, recruiting an adequate number of mentors to meet the demands of the many aspiring catalogers seeking a mentor, providing consistent and clear communication and timely follow-up to participants, and

finding ways to smooth out the rough edges when mentor/mentee matches fail to connect, are all ongoing issues for which there is no perfect solution. However, the establishment of a standing subcommittee to manage the program was in important step in providing the type of stability and consistency needed to sustain an ambitious program such as this. CETRC and the Mentoring Subcommittee hope that the experiences in establishing the program, both positive and negative, will help future committee and subcommittee members to manage the mentoring program more efficiently and effectively. In addition, the committee hopes that other organizations wishing to establish mentoring programs will learn from CETRC's experiences what challenges to expect and the time and resources needed to be successful.

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Appendix 1: CETRC Mentoring: A Timeline

1996
- Decision to investigate mentoring

1997-1999
- Wrote guidelines, expectations, mentor letters, bibliography
- Identified potential mentors

2000
- Worked with selected library schools to identify potential mentees
- Matched five (5) pairs for the 1st phase of the pilot

2001
- Assessment: decided to expand the pilot.
- Mentors/mentees recruited
- Subcommittee appointed to match pairs

2002
- Matched twenty-two (22) pairs for the 2nd phase of the pilot
- Assessment: decided to move from pilot to on-going program

2003
- Standing Mentoring Subcommittee charged and appointed
- Website and database established

2004
- New mentors/mentees recruited
- Matched seventy (70) pairs

2005
- Assessment
- Began working with ALCTS to migrate website and database

2006
- Developed web application form
- Recruit new mentors/mentees

Appendix 2. Assessment Questionnaires for Mentoring Program Participants

Questionnaire for Mentees in the ALCTS CCS CETRC Mentoring Program:
Please place an X next to your response and add any comments.

1.   Was your mentor a suitable match for you? ___ Yes / ___ No *(If not, what factors could have been considered in making a match?)*

2.   Did you develop and follow mentoring objectives? ___ Yes / ___ No

3.   Did the cataloging mentoring program meet your expectations? ___ Yes / ___ No *(If no, please explain)*

4.   In your opinion, how did the cataloging mentoring program help you develop professionally?

5.   Would you have liked to have spent more or less time with your mentor? ___ More / ___ Less / ___ Time spent was OK *(Please estimate how much time you spent:_____)*

6.   What types of contact with your mentor did you find: effective?   not effective?   did not attempt
(please place a mark by all that apply)

	effective?	not effective?	did not attempt
Telephone	_____	_____	_____
e-mail	_____	_____	_____
in-person meetings	_____	_____	_____
other _____	_____	_____	_____

7.   Do you have a clearer understanding of what a cataloger does? ___ Yes / ___ No *(If no, please explain)*

8.   Has your mentoring relationship influenced your future plans? ___ Yes / ___ No *(Please elaborate)*

9.   Have you been hired in a cataloging position? ___ Yes / ___ No
Have you applied for any cataloging positions? ___ Yes / ___ No *(If no, please explain)*

10. Did the CETRC liaison provide appropriate support? ___ Yes / ___ No *(If no, please explain)*

11. Would you encourage fellow students to participate in this program? ___ Yes / ___ No *(If no, please explain)*

12. How would you rate the CETRC Mentoring Program:
___ Excellent   ___ Good   ___ OK   ___ Barely useful   ___ Not useful at all

13. Please provide any suggestions or other concerns regarding the ALCTS CETRC Mentoring Program.

Questionnaire for Mentors in the ALCTS CCS CETRC Mentoring Program:
Please place an X next to your response and add any comments.

1. Was your mentee a suitable match for you? ___ Yes / ___ No *(If not, what factors could have been considered in making a match?)*

2. Did you develop and follow mentoring objectives? ___ Yes / ___ No

3. Did the cataloging mentoring program meet your expectations? ___ Yes/ ___ No *(If no, please explain)*

4. In your opinion, how did the cataloging mentoring program help the mentee develop professionally?

5. Would you have liked to have spent more or less time with your mentee? ___ More / ___ Less / ___ Time spent was OK*(Please include an estimate of the time spent: _____)*

6. What types of contact with your mentee did you find: effective?   not effective?   did not attempt
    (please place a mark by all that apply)

	effective?	not effective?	did not attempt
Telephone	_____	_____	_____
e-mail	_____	_____	_____
in-person meetings	_____	_____	_____
other _____	_____	_____	_____

7. What were the benefits of the cataloging mentoring program to you?

8. Would you participate in the program in the future? ___ Yes/ ___ No *(If no, please explain; If yes, when?)*

9. Would you encourage colleagues to participate in this program? ___ Yes/ ___ No *(If no, please explain)*

10. How would you rate the CETRC Mentoring program:
___ Excellent   ___ Good   ___ OK   ___ Barely useful   ___ Not useful at all

11. Did the CETRC liaison provide appropriate support? ___ Yes/ ___ No *(If no, please explain)*

12. Please provide any suggestions or other concerns regarding the ALCTS CETRC Mentoring Program.