DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 254 243 IR 051 045

AUTHOR Davis, Jinnie Y.
TITLE Shelf [illegible] Conversion at NCSU: Factors in Decision Making.
PUB DATE 18 Nov 83
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the SOLINET/TSRT Retrospective Conversion Workshop (Montgomery, AL, November 18, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Libraries; Higher Education; Library Administration; *Library Automation; *Library Catalogs; *Library Collections; Library Networks; Library Technical Processes; Online Systems
IDENTIFIERS *Monographs; North Carolina State University; OCLC; *Retrospective Conversion (Library Catalogs)

ABSTRACT

Written when an in-house retrospective conversion project on the monographs collection of an academic library was 80% complete, this paper presents factors for consideration by decision-makers prior to establishing a similar project. Topics considered together with a description of how North Carolina State University (NCSU) handled each, include: (1) why a library should undertake retrospective conversion; (2) how to set up the project; (3) what is the scope of the project; (4) what resources (e.g., equipment, personnel, funds) are needed to perform in-house conversion; (5) procedural decisions that must be made; and (6) an assessment of the project. It is noted that the variety of conversion methods and the number of vendors offering services to libraries today offer much greater flexibility in approaching conversion activities. (Author/THC)

SHELFLIST CONVERSION AT NCSU:

FACTORS IN DECISION MAKING

by

Jinnie Y. Davis

North Carolina State University

Paper presented at:

SOLINET/TSRT Retrospective Conversion Workshop

Montgomery, Alabama

November 18, 1983

I'm going to be talking about the factors in decision making related to the retrospective conversion project at North Carolina State University--it began in 1976; we do use OCLC to convert the shelflist by ourselves; we're 80% of the way through; and we would make the same decision again, under the same circumstances.

Instead of giving you a straight chronological account of what we did, I thought it would be more useful to focus on the topics or questions that come up in making the decisions involved in setting up and maintaining a retrospective conversion project. I'll use our case and our decisions as examples under each topic. The topics themselves, I think, are factors in decision making that you will need to consider no matter which method of conversion you select.

First, let me give you some background information about N.C. State as a context for understanding our decisions: we are a land-grant university, with a curricular emphasis in science and technology. Our library system consists of a main library and, at the time we began the retrospective conversion project, four branch libraries with collections in specialized fields such as textiles and forestry, for which we do a lot of original cataloging. We're an ARL library now, with a 1.1 million volume collection, but in 1976, our holdings were less than half that size. We are felicitously located in the Research Triangle, so we have the opportunity to join with Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in several cooperative efforts, especially recently, as members of the Triangle Research Libraries Network (TRLN). We joined the OCLC network in October 1975, so we didn't have many machine-readable records at the time the retrocon project began a year later.

The topics I discuss will be: why undertake a retrospective conversion project; how should you go about it; what is the scope of the project; what are the resources needed to do it yourself; what decisions need to be made about procedures; and what is our assessment of our project.

First, why undertake a retrospective conversion project? Related questions are: what are the reasons (whether ostensible or hidden) for it? What are the goals and objectives of the project? What are the immediate and long-range benefits for the library? What kind of support do you have for the project? What kind of priority does it have within the library? The answers to these questions will, of course, affect decisions on how to proceed with the project.

For us, a major impetus for doing retrospective conversion came from our Library Systems staff, which had been planning since the early 1970s for an automated circulation system. In order to implement that, they knew that we had to have a "critical mass" of records in machine-readable form. To that end, the Systems staff members had even begun to convert some post-1968 records (although only partially), in the hopes that they would somehow be able to run their tapes against the MARC tapes and pull the full bibliographic data from the MARC records.

So, at the time, an automated circulation system seemed imminent, and the concept of an online catalog and "total" library system was in our long-range plans. Since then, our cooperative activities with TRLN have made possible the installation of a prototype online catalog, to be up next year, while the automated circulation system is still in the planning stage. Thus, it's possible that the reasons you start out with may change over the course of the project.

Another stated reason for converting our shelflist was the desire to make our collection, with its special emphases, available to other libraries through the OCLC database. Also, we realized that the labor costs involved could only go up, if we delayed the project.

With these reasons in mind, we determined that our archive tapes were intended to be the master database for our library; it was intended to tie in with an automated circulation system and to be usable for interlibrary loan; it was supposed to take account of "unknown future capabilities of OCLC" (e.g., the ability to search fields not indexed at the time). We decided at the time that we didn't want to produce a microfilm catalog of these records (though now we do have a COM catalog, again produced through TRLN). In any case, to do what we intended to do with our database, we knew we wanted full MARC cataloging for these records.

Tied in to the question of why undertake a conversion project is that of what kind of support you have to see it through. Not only did we have strong support from Library Systems, but we also ha. :rong backing from the library administration and cataloging department administration. Outside this line of administration, however, there was little discussion of the project--this was probably a weakness of the project: it would have helped general understanding of what retrocon involved and why it was important. From outside the library, too, our administration received frequent queries about the wisdom of putting resources into converting our shelflist instead of cataloging new books.

It's important also to establish the priority of the project among the other activities of the library. At NCSU, the conversion project within the Monographic Cataloging Department usually received low priority because it deals with records already available to local users in card form. Whenever other special projects or problems came up, it was customary to take people

away from retrocon to work on those projects instead. It will probably be given lower priority in most libraries, because the achievement is less visible than the cataloging of new books, and if you stop conversion activity, no visible backlog begins to build up. This lower priority isn't necessarily wrong, but it helps if you make it clear to everyone from the beginning just what the priority of the project is, or morale in the retrocon unit can suffer.

Whenever our financial resources were tight, too, the shelflist conversion project would be the first place where cuts would be suggested. The question of funding support for the project is an obvious one to raise. In our case, the project was funded entirely from the library budget. At the beginning, there was only enough money for half a professional and half a support staff position. Even then, there was no guarantee that we would receive the labor-payroll (or hourly wages) staff we requested, though we did eventually get it. Now, of course, there are several sources of funding available, especially for libraries converting collections in specialized areas. We have no plans currently for seeking outside support.

The next topic I'll discuss is: how should you go about it? There are two parts to this question: how to make the decision to do it, and how to implement it.

Our decision to go through with it was pretty much dictated by the Library Systems' plans for an automated circulation system, which had rather high priority at the time. By 1975, when we joined OCLC, the library was beginning to realize that using the OCLC system was a better way to convert records retrospectively, and that the conversion effort really belonged in the cataloging department, in the hands of personnel trained in online cataloging.

The second part of the question--how to implement the project--is probably the main question facing most libraries today. At the time our project began, the possibility of using a commercial vendor was not a viable alternative--such services simply weren't available. OCLC itself had only recently expanded its membership beyond its Ohio- and its academic-library base. So there was no serious attempt made to find an outside agency to perform the conversion.

Instead, in 1976, the Monographic Cataloging Department hired a professional half-time to set up the project. Fortunately, the department selected a very well-organized person who studied the existing literature on retrospective conversion and set out an outline of questions that needed to be answered, including many of the ones I'm raising today. He called together a Shelflist Conversion Advisory Committee to consider those questions; basically, it was an advisory group that helped to establish objectives, set up guidelines, and approve procedural decisions. We would recommend involving such an advisory group in the process of setting up a retrocon project, particularly with representation from those areas that will be directly affected by the project: we had members from the Monographic Cataloging Department, collection development, and library systems.

Although there are several ways to approach retrospective conversion (e.g., converting each unconverted item after it has been charged out and returned to Circulation), we decided to base our procedure on the shelflist file alone, hence "shelflist conversion" is an accurate name for our project.

Because of this approach, our answers to the questions in the next topic: what is the scope of the project; what is the nature (problems, special cases) of your particular collection--center on the nature of our shelflist.

Some specific questions to consider are, (1) what are your priorities for conversion? We decided we wanted to convert as large a number of records as quickly as possible. so we decided to convert only monographs at first, with priority given to the identification and conversion of "easy" records (those with matching LC copy).

(2) What is the size of the holdings to be converted? We estimated 300,000 monographic records (not counting added copies or added volumes) needed to be converted.

(3) What will be omitted from the scope of the project? There were some large categories of omissions that we could readily identify, some because of the nature of the materials, others because of OCLC's system limitations at the time. These included documents, pamphlets, maps, serials, microfilms, media, and non-roman language records. There were also several specific problems caused by idiosyncrasies in our local practice: an example is the case of some scientific and technical translations, where we used a single call number to catalog numerous articles and monographs. Eventually, of course, we'll have to deal with the conversion of these items as well.

(4) What is the physical arrangement of the shelflist, and is it really a union shelflist? Not only do we have a main shelflist with records for each branch library catalog and each special location within the main library, but we also have separate shelflists for these separate libraries and collections (sometimes with fuller holdings information). Media and microfilms, on the other hand, are only found in their own separate shelflists. We had to be aware of all these special cases before proceeding with conversion, so we could make sure we had procedures dealing with them. This brings me to the next question.

(5) What are the special problems that require special procedures to handle? Here we get into the nitty-gritty level of planning, and it's very useful to have someone in your library who knows something (ideally, everything) about the history of its cataloging policies and practices, to alert you to idiosyncrasies you may encounter. Our library was first established in 1889 and had only recently grown to become a university-level research collection. The amount of our original cataloging, for example, had quadrupled in the twenty years before the shelfcon project began. Similarly, only recently (in the 1960s and 1970s) had there been an attempt to impose uniformity on our policies and procedures and to make them adhere to national standards. So every past deviation of this sort had to be dealt with by the shelflist conversion staff.

To give you an idea of the range of problems that may exist: at one time, the department used "old-form,"--abbreviated, homemade--shelflist cards in an attempt to save money. Since our approach was based on the shelflist, we had to replace each of these old-form cards (about 125,000 in all) with a card containing the full bibliographic and holdings information. This was eventually done by going to the public catalog, pulling the main entry card, making sure it had full tracings and holdings, sending it off to be photocopied on card stock, and finally filing the new shelflist card and refiling the main entry card. This was a project unto itself and was spread out over the first five years of the conversion project.

Even cards that aren't really problems had to be accounted for beforehand, so the shelfcon staff knows what to do with them. These included withdrawns, dummy cards, and temporary cards.

Since in retrospective conversion you may be applying a relatively recently developed OCLC profile to records cataloged possibly decades ago, you need to be sure that your current profile fits all those records as well.

One of our problems, for example, was the fact that somewhere along the way, before we joined OCLC, we had changed our definition of "oversize": it used to be 30 cm. and above but was changed to 31 cm. and above, and this was what our OCLC profile automatically treated as "folio". On those older records, though, we didn't want a book 30 cm. high to be designated as non-folio in the online record, when it was already marked and shelved as a folio. So each time that situation arose, we'd have to override the automatic stamp.

At N.C. State, the local database that the Library Systems staff had created as an aid to conversion turned out to be a major constraint. They had hoped to run their brief machine-readable records (44,000 of them) against the OCLC database and to pull off the full bibliographic data. Unfortunately, the conversion had been done by students (under the supervision of the Library Systems staff) who were untrained in cataloging and unable to recognize significant bibliographic differences or changes (e.g., dashed-on entries, different editions). A great deal of time and effort was invested in attempting to clear up the problems generated by these preliminary attempts at conversion before we decided in 1982 that it would be easier just to forget that database and search each record as it arose.

We were able, however, to salvage a small portion of that database. It included about 4,000 of our local NCSU theses and dissertations that had been converted into a basic MARC format. OCLC agreed to dump them into the Save file at the rate of approximately 200 a night; during that time, we concentrated our efforts on checking and updating those records alone. I think our timing for that special project was fortuitous because OCLC was interested in building up the database and more conducive to cooperating with us than it might be now, with many other items of higher priority on its schedule.

The next topic for consideration is: what are the resources needed to do it yourself? The term "resources," of course, can include factors such as money, personnel, equipment, telecommunications costs. We haven't stopped to compile a comprehensive cost figure, but I have some basic data concerning our use of resources that I can share with you.

In terms of hardware, we had the use of between four and six OCLC terminals during the length of our project. Depending on where your library terminals are located and how often they're used, you may be able to use another department's terminals, as we did our Aquisitions Department's in the evenings. We also made heavy use of a photocopier, since we didn't want to remove any shelflist cards from our shelflist for any length of time, so ready access to a copier was crucial.

A significant factor in our estimate of costs was the fact that, at the time, OCLC did not impose a charge for records updated for retrospective conversion. We were lucky to have just completed the majority of our conversion before the 16¢ per record (during non-prime time) charge was imposed.

Depending on how soon you begin your project, the telecommunications charges you pay may be anywhere from 60 to 85% higher (according to various estimates of what will happen after April 1984) than it was for us.

In terms of human resources, our shelfcon staff grew from (in 1976) half a professional, half a support staff member, and four students working twenty hours a week each to, at its height, a part-time professional supervising the project, two full-time support staff members, and about ten students working various hours. At the beginning of the project, a great deal of professional time was needed for planning and supervising. Later,

extensive planning was no longer necessary, and the supervisory load (particularly of the students) could be shared by the support staff members. The staff size depended on two factors: one was what we could fit into the physical constraints imposed on us by the number of terminals we had and the number of hours of help available to us. We scheduled every terminal for use every evening until 10 p.m., and on Saturdays as well. Another factor in staff size is the nature of the work to be done. For example, now that the DLC matching records have mostly been converted, this year we just eliminated all student help from the project and are down to just a professional who has general supervision of the project and two full-time support staff members.

So we basically had three levels of personnel doing different levels of shelflist conversion:

(1) student help (hourly wages or labor-payroll). They handled conversion of the easiest type of record, the ones for which there were already DLC records in the database. Even this lowest level of work meant that the students had to learn the OCLC Books Format, including local policies on use of fields such as the 049 and 590 fields. We use a standard format for designation of holdings in the 049 field. They also had to learn to modernize pre-AACR1 records to AACR1 standards. We were fortunate, though, in having a good supply of students with some library training from the nearby Wake Technical College. Although their students in the library technology program usually had no exparience with MARC or OCLC, they had some library orientation and were highly motivated to learn their shelfcon duties. Some of them, in fact, went on to become full-time employees in the department.

Their training--in use of the database and MARC tagging--could be done in four hours (or one evening) for a good student, or maybe three nights

otherwise. At the beginning, they would be required to place all the records they updated in Save, until they were ready to be released to work independently. This usually took from two weeks to a month. If after six weeks the student's error rate was still unacceptably high, that person would be dismissed from the project. After our students gained experience with the project, they were trained to input LC copy as well, although the searching, checking, and final updating was done by a support staff member.

We estimate that from the beginning of the project to the present, before OCLC started to charge for retrocon records, it cost us (and this is just the cost of actually performing the conversion, not of time in planning and supervising, etc.) at first about 25¢ per record to, towards the end, 50¢ a record, for the "easy" records,

(2) The more difficult work was performed by library assistants, and for this level of support staff, we require two years of college or two years of library experience. They handled items with only contributed records in the database, items that need to be recataloged, and items that have no copy and thus have to be entered as original records. Now, of course, with no student help available, the library assistants update LC records and input LC copy as well. This is one of the hardest jobs in the library because our library assistants need to know (beyond what the students are taught) several sets of cataloging rules and must be able to recognize a problem when it appears. Again, for the most part we had a very good staff--e.g., library assistants wrote the student manual and trained the students.

(3) Finally, at the professional level, all the overall planning, implementation, and supervision of the project is done. This includes making decisions on any questions the library assistants can't handle (and shelfcon uncovers all kinds of unusual cataloging problems). The professional also

establishes all AACR2 name headings in the name authority file and sets up other access points for original inputs, and coordinates the shelfcon unit's work with that of the rest of the library. After the project got underway, much of the daily supervisory duties were taken over by library assistants and extensive planning was no longer needed, so the professional time now only takes a few hours a week, depending on the need.

We found that as far as records converted per hour are concerned, the students were able to do an average of ten records an hour (these are the so-called "easy" records). The very good ones could get up to fifteen or seventeen records an hour, and when a professional converted some easy records (as was done at the beginning of the project), he was able to get up to twenty records an hour, because less time was needed to resolve questionable points while at the terminal. The work of the library assistants is more varied, so it depends on the amount of additional editing needed to an existing database record, but they can usually do ten records an hour, if they come to the terminal knowing how and what to edit. Response time, of course, is an additional factor and, at the beginning of our project, it was excellent.

Our statistics for number of records converted are:

October 1976 - June 1977	23,737 (of which 862 were original records)	
July 1977 - June 1978	37,914 (more than 2,250 originals)	
July 1978 - June 1979	35,500 (7,300 originals)	
July 1979 - June 1980	23,325 (1,688 originals)	- Chancellor's Challenge
July 1980 - June 1981	33,005 (358 originals)	
July 1981 - June 1982	38,643	- AACR2
July 1982 - April 1983	34,800	

This comes to a total of more than 227,000 records.

One activity that takes a great deal of time but something that I recommend highly is the documentation of the project's activities. This includes

minutes of committee meetings, policy decisions, changes in procedures, etc. Our training manual for students was done on a word processor, which has been useful for quick updates of multiple copies. Also, many other libraries have written to obtain copies of it. We've also generated a lot of training memos on specific aspects of cataloging that occur more frequently in shelf-list conversion than in cataloging new books (e.g., the use of the 010 field with its numerous special characters). We also found it useful to develop forms for situations that came up often (e.g., "Problems for Recataloging Consideration" and "Series Review" forms).

When you have so many people working in a unit, the supervisory aspect of it becomes very time-consuming. We scheduled shelfcon work even when the rest of the library was closed (e.g., during semester breaks), so this necessitated written procedures on how to lock up, security measures etc.

What decisions need to be made about procedures? When we began, we had few other models to follow. Before we could even start on the actual conversion, we spent months in planning and decision making. First, we made the decisions on priorities and omissions, which I've already discussed. Then we had to make decisions about the details of what standards to follow for those records.

For example, the decision to use the full MARC format at the time raised questions about fields that weren't used by everyone, like the 043 field for geographic area codes (we do use them). We do follow the OCLC Bibliographic Input Standards now too.

Other decisions concerning standards involve the correlation between the 3" x 5" card and its record in machine-readable form. We try to hold the production of a new set of cards to a minimum, so in many cases, minor changes are incorporated into a database record but are not made on the card set, with the intention that eventually we'll be going to an online catalog entirely

anyway. Also, you need to account for the differing modes of cataloging that exist in the OCLC database: there will be records in AACR1 form, Revised Chapter 6, and AACR2 form. Do you have the resources to upgrade to AACR2 cataloging all the time? We took a more pragmatic approach and generally accept LC cataloging in whatever mode we find it, even if it means editing a contributed record that's in AACR2 form back to the LC copy in AACR1 form. If there is no database record at all, we input LC copy if we have it, or if not, we input original cataloging which is entirely in AACR2 form.

The sequence of our procedures was dictated in some ways by the problems in our shelflist. For example, the old-form shelflist cards I mentioned had to be replaced before we began converting by drawer in the shelflist, to avoid complicated record-keeping of what we needed to go back for afterwards.

We began our actual conversion in the middle of the shelflist, with the "M" schedule of the LC classification. The decision to start here was based on one of the constraints I mentioned earlier--the local database that our Library Systems staff started began with this classification. So we started with "M" and went through "Z," then from "A" to "L" in the shelflist.

The procedures are, basically: the students signed up for individual shelflist drawers and took them to the terminal. There, for each shelflist card that was an LC record and had no obvious problems (like information crossed out), they searched on the database for an LC record online. If found, they would edit it (i.e., at least do the 049, 590 (in which we used an asterisk to designate a shelfcon record), and call number field). Then they would stamp the shelflist card itself "OCLC" and write the OCLC number of the converted record at the bottom of the card in the shelflist (this practice has been extremely helpful and we recommend it highly). They also kept a record of the number of updates they performed each day.

The library assistants' job was to go around the shelflist behind the students, picking up the records not already produced through OCLC and not converted by the students. Their work was less strictly tied to the terminal--they also had to go the NUC to search for matching LC copy if we hadn't used an LC card before; for questionable items with or without LC copy, they had to go to the stacks or even to locations outside the main library to examine the books themselves. An especially common question is: is the date used on the shelflist card really a publication date (since the decision as to whether or not to create a separate record can be based on that).

The library assistants also had to photocopy the shelflist cards they were converting, as well as NUC copies, to use them as a basis for their work in verification. Then they updated or edited records on the database and kept track of their statistics.

This brings up the question of what kind of statistics do you want to keep (or need to keep) for a shelfcon project? At one time, we were recording the number of updates at each level of personnel; the new records input; hours spent on the terminal; and the average number of records converted per hour. More recently, we've cut it back to the number of records updated and new records input.

Another area of decision making concerning procedures is how to handle problems as they arise. Some were expected but others were not. We identified several categories of problems, many of which even affected shelfcon records that used LC cards. These included: series problems (where we had used LC copy but traced a series while LC didn't, or didn't trace one that LC did); a more serious type of series problem in which we might have added a series not found on the LC copy at all; dashed-on entries; books that need to be

examined but aren't on the shelves; books that need to be sent to Serials as transfers; non-roman language records. All these problems needed set procedures for the shelfcon unit to follow.

To identify these categories quickly--most of them had to be set aside for more careful consideration and future resolution of the problem--we devised a scheme of color-coded clips to attach to the shelflist cards in the problem categories, as well as those currently being converted. That way, we could also alert any other library staff using the shelflist to the fact that the shelfcon unit was working on that record.

Another area to consider in devising procedures for shelfcon is how to coordinate its work with that of others--the conversion effort does not take place in isolation from the other activities of the library, and doing it in-house allowed us to keep it well coordinated with everyone else. For example, we had to coordinate shelfcon work with that of other departments in the library. Primarily, shelfcon work affects and is affected by circulation activities--our circulation staff notifies us when an item is officially lost and to be withdrawn--this way, we won't convert a record only to have it withdrawn a few days later. In addition, our Circulation Department has been conducting an inventory, so the amount of questions and problems they raise has been even greater than normal.

The professional supervising the shelfcon unit also coordinates the input of original records with the assistant director for collection development--before we go to the effort of creating an original record for an item, since shelfcon deals mostly with older books, he reviews them for possible withdrawal from the collection. For books that had been cataloged as monographs but should be treated as serials, the head of the Serials Department reviews them to make sure that they are worth transferring.

Also, shelfcon activities must be coordinated with that of other units within the Monographic Cataloging Department itself. If you think about all the changes in cataloging that have occurred in the last eight years, you begin to realize the number of new rules, new standards, and new techniques that have had to be incorporated into the shelfcon effort. The coming of AACR2 was one such factor, and it required a lot of time in planning and training.

With AACR2, we set up a name authority file (NAF) for the first time, with a NAF unit to handle its work. Because N. C. State chose not to close its public catalog and open another one, we had to establish guidelines on when to interfile, split, or change headings. Whenever the NAF unit makes a change on a shelflist card with a color-coded clip, it knows the shelfcon unit is working on it and notifies us of what they've done. That way, no shelfcon personnel will inadvertently convert something one way while the shelflist card has just been changed another way. Similarly, with subject headings that need to be changed to a new form, the color-coded clips are a good signalling device to promote coordination. Also, we have a file management unit that handles post-cataloging problems; much of its work can involve records not yet converted or being converted.

Another area in which someone needs to coordinate shelfcon work relates to activities outside your own library. I mentioned our involvement in TRLN. Over the last five years, its activities have increased greatly. Since it involves the design of our own online catalog, our representatives to TRLN have to be aware of what the shelfcon unit is doing, to make sure that there will be no problems when we go through another type of conversion--the change from our records in the OCLC format to the format designed for our online catalog.

One of the tangible products of TRLN so far is our local Online Editing System (called the OES)--this means that as our archive tapes are received from OCLC, TRLN processes them and puts them into a local database that we can access through a Beehive terminal. Then if we need to perform further editing, we don't have to go through the tedious process of calling up the record on OCLC again and reediting the whole thing. Instead, we can use the OES to perform just the change desired. The shelfcon unit uses the OES to correct any errors that it discovers after updating a record. The OES also allows other staff members (e.g., the person in charge of subject authority updates) to make further changes to a shelfcon record without having to reedit the entire record, including modernizations and consulting the books themselves (as I've mentioned, we don't make <u>all</u> these changes on the cards).

The OES also has a validation program that is run against each archive tape as it is processed. This program automatically detects certain types of bibliographical errors and errors of logic (e.g., fixed-field elements that don't agree with the description in the body of the record). Since our 049 field format has a subfield code for the initials of the person who worked on the record, we use the OES error printouts as a training tool to provide feedback on errors by shelfcon personnel.

What is our assessment of the project? This brings up the factor of evaluation. Although we haven't stopped to evaluate it formally, this project, like all the operations of our department, is under constant scrutiny--every time a problem comes up, when personnel turnover occurs, when a natural breaking point in the project occurs. At least once a year, in preparation for the annual report, the shelfcon coordinator submits a written report about the status and progress of the project.

What are the problems we've faced? I've already mentioned quite a few. Some others are: I've mentioned the high quality of the student help we employed. We did have some problems with them as well, until we instituted stricter supervisory procedures. When you hire students, you always have to work around the fact that their jobs are not of primary importance to their lives--class schedules, exams, social life are often going to take precedence, and turnover will be high.

There were other problems we had even less control over. I mentioned the inspirationally named "Chancellor's Challenge"--this was a drive begun in 1979 to bring our volume count up to one million. We succeeded (and are now an ARL library) but at the expense of the shelfcon project's progress. Most of its staff members were assigned to processing new materials that would add to the volume count, which resulted in about a 30% drop in shelfcon records updated during that time. The fact that this drive was followed immediately by the implementation of AACR2 was also hard on the staff and its progress.

Another factor in any library organization is that of the human element. As you know, the personalities and politics involved can often create problems and affect decisions that may otherwise seem straightforward. These had their effect on our project too.

At the beginning of this talk, I said that we would make the same decision again about doing our conversion in-house, under the same circumstances. That's true, but the circumstances are vastly different now. First, there are many people available now to help you with conversion. I'm sure they could handle the type of records that we let our labor-payroll students convert. Having seen some of the other records first-hand, though, I'm not sure anyone but an experienced cataloger who is also familiar with

local policies and procedures, as well as the history and future direction of your library could really do it well. So the question becomes, how well do you want to do it? And the answer depends on just about all the factors I've mentioned: money, people, collection size, quality and degree of deviation from standards in your own unconverted shelflist records.

We know that the last 20% or so of our project (which comes to about 60,000 records) consists of the most difficult records in the shelflist. But by instituting procedures such as actually examining books without LC copy, we have both tried to set a high standard for ourselves and allowed ourselves a great deal of flexibility in deciding how to handle problems, including the option of deciding not to convert an item at all. I don't think a vendor could readily handle these types of problems without access to your collection, your name authority file, your series authority file, etc. So using a service whereby you actually perform the keying in of the data and they match them against the database may be more acceptable. You may still have to do your own conversion of some of the problem categories we're setting aside for later (e.g., media, where the hits are likely to be fewer).

OCLC's recent charge for retrocon records would of course influence our decision today as well. So we're very happy we are where we are today and don't have to be faced with that decision.