There is a prevalent thought that libraries today are in crisis. One of the issues leading to this is America is in possibly the worst recession since the great depression leading to a decrease in funding for government funded programs. Another issue is, technology and the digital/virtual world has become an increasingly important part of our daily lives; as a result, more resources are becoming available online, which can be accessed virtually and not just in brick and mortar institutions. Because of these factors, it is becoming more important than ever to keep the people who come into the library happy and satisfied with their experience. Surveys have been done in libraries across the country and it has become, “evident that organizing the libraries the way bookstores are organized would be a good way to meet its customers’ needs”¹. Businesses succeed or fail based on the customer experience. Traditionally, libraries have organized and displayed their material using the Dewey Decimal Classification system; recently, in an attempt to emulate the patron focused methods of successful businesses, some libraries have started to adopt the BISAC style of classification. Many libraries today are now facing the question to Dewey or not Dewey. This paper will explore what these two organizational methods are, their pro’s and con’s and a few libraries that have altered or left the Dewey Decimal Classification system behind.

Bookstores are organized by the Book Industry Standards and Communications or BISAC for short. Barbara Fister tells us, in her article “The Dewey Dilemma”,

books are classified, “into 52 broad categories, each with additional levels of specificity. Categories for a book are typically determined by the publisher (a job that often falls to the editor, who knows the book best) and are used throughout the distribution chain by companies like Amazon, Baker & Taylor, Barnes & Noble, Bookscan, Bowker, Ingram, and others. In many

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ways, it fuses the functions of subject headings with classification. Many bookstores work with the categories to organize their shelves, but the categories and subcategories are also used to create a searchable record of a book”

A few examples of these categories are Business & Economics, Fiction, History, Literary Criticism & Collections, and Study Aids. Within these broad categories, books may be farther subcategorized such as Fiction being broken into Mystery, Romance and Science Fiction.

Another tactic many bookstore patrons enjoy is the big, easy to read signs in bookstores directing them to the book genre they are interested in. Once customers are in the genre of their choice they can easily browse for a book that interests them. Bruce Sullivan reports, in “A Librarian’s Dilemma”, “[t]hese BISAC standards allegedly facilitate browsing, giving the library patron a more user-centered, as opposed to professional-centered, experience”

This method of organization has worked well for the bookstore industry, so why not bring it over to libraries? Bookstore customers and library patrons have expressed a desire for libraries to be reorganized according to this system; however, there is still the question of whether or not it is in the best interest of the library to make this switch.

In order to successfully make the switch from Dewey to BISAC, libraries would have to devote hundreds if not thousands of staff hours to completely change the layout of the library, as well as the re-catalog records. At a time when library funds in short supply, it is hard to justify the expense this would take. Once the switch has been made it will still take time to get patrons, librarians and library staff up to date with all the changes and nuances of the BISAC system.

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http://www.lisnews.com/librarian%E2%80%99s_dilemma_three_articles_consideration_ddc_and_its_utility_public_libraries . Internet; (accessed February 20, 2011)
However, if making this change increases circulation and thus increasing the library’s importance in a community, then the cost and time would not have been spent in vain.

There is no question that BISAC is convenient for the customer who goes in unsure of what they want. However, how good is BISAC for the patron who is looking for something specific? Whether the customer is looking for a specific title, author or subject, “the bookseller might decide to shelve the book in one category, but the book may have multiple BISAC headings assigned to it in the computer system”. Until BISAC develops a way to standardize their classification system, the potential for books to carry multiple BISAC headings will continue. How will this translate to the library setting where patrons should be able to find what they are looking for, regardless of whether they are searching for a specific title, author or subject? Michael Gorman, past president of the American Library Association says it best, “Libraries must cater not just to the majority, as bookstores do, he said, but to those with more specialized interests, like genealogy or Greek archeology”.

In the late 19th Century Melvil Dewey became fed up with the lack of organization in libraries. Most catalogs were little more than inventory lists of the library’s holdings. With frustration comes innovation, in 1876 Melvil Dewey created a system which organized a library’s holdings into logical categories using numbers to represent the different categories. “That’s what the Dewey Decimal System is, really—the entire scope of human knowledge, organized by numbers” states Bob Green, in “Dewey Decimals Sold For 7 Figures”.

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4 Bruce A. Sullivan, “A Librarian’s Dilemma: Three Articles in Consideration of DDC and its Utility in Public Libraries.”
difference between Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) and BISAC is, continues Robert McCoppin in “Dewey’s days numbered?” , “Dewey goes deeper and broader than bookstore headings, classifying books much more specifically, with 27,000 categories”.

Although the DDC can be used for browsing, its strengths lie in the ease in which a library patron can find a specific book. Until the end of the 20th century, it was possible for a book to carry different DDC numbers in different libraries due to individual cataloger’s interpretations; however, in 1989 the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) bought the DDC in an attempt to standardize the classification of library material. Dewey’s success is irrefutable. It has been around for over one hundred years and, according to Barbara Fister, “is currently the most widely used classification system in the world, employed in 138 countries by over 200,000 libraries”. Not only is the DDC used in English speaking libraries, but “[a] web site (Dewey.info) is under development that will, among other things, provide linked DDC summaries in nine languages”. With all of this going for Dewey, it’s hard to understand why library patrons and librarians are looking for alternatives to the traditional DDC.

The DDC faces revisions before each new addition, but that does not change the fact it was created for a 19th century world. Dewey was smart enough to leave room in the DDC for additional subjects, at the time of its creation the 000’s were not used and now they hold Computer science, knowledge & systems. It was clever of Dewey to have the foresight to do this but, the scope of human knowledge has changed since the 19th century and the world will only change more. There are topics discussed today that people of the 19th century may not have thought possible. Which category should hold artificial intelligence? Should that go somewhere

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7 Robert McCoppin, “Dewey’s days numbered?”
8 Barbara Fister, “The Dewey Dilemma.”
9 Barbara Fister, “The Dewey Dilemma.”
in the 600’s with Technology, the 000’s with Computer science, knowledge & systems, or somewhere else? What about cloning Neanderthals or Mammoths, should that go under the Medical sciences, Genetics, Ethics, or Psychology category? Why are certain subjects so far away from each other when they appear to be relevant to each other? Gretchen Caserotti and Sarah Ludwig bring up a great example, “Where does personal finance belong in a Dewey collection? Is it next to the books about investing, which could also be of interest to the patron browsing the personal finance collection?”

Another example of this is the 400’s are Language, but Literature is not until the 800’s. A patron interested in French would have to start in the 400’s for information on the language, but would have to go to the 800’s to find French literature to read.

Another complaint patrons have with the DDC is its use of numbers instead of words to represent the different subjects. Professionals within the library system find it to be helpful in locating specific books, but it is considered intimidating by those outside of the profession. In H. R. Courtright’s article “The National Impact of the Dewey-Less Library” it was noted that, “[s]ome customers were embarrassed to ask for help because they didn’t know how to use Dewey and felt uncomfortable. In these situations, customers probably left the library without finding what they wanted”.

Complaints about the DDC do not come only from without the library system, but from within as well. One of the main complaints I found in my research being, “[n]umbered systems are time-consuming for staff members to put on shelves and require regular "shelf-reading," in which staff members check to make sure the inventory is ordered correctly. If a book isn't in the right spot, it's basically lost”. Since books do not have specific

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12 Robert McCoppin, “Dewey’s days numbered?”
shelf spots under the BISAC system, only a category, a book should not appear lost if miss-
shelved under the right category. I did find one non-librarian sticking up for the DDC. In the
comments section of the article, “A Librarian’s Dilemma” by Bruce Sullivan, a poster stated,

“the other day I went to the auto parts store to buy an air filter. I had to look in the big air
and oil filter identification book to find my car. when I found the make and model, I chose a
filter model number from one or two different brands. then I scanned the boxes on the shelves,
arranged by manufacturer and model number until I found the part I needed. it's a numbered
system very much like Dewey. the Fram and Purolator filters had one or even two decimal
classifications which were sorted in an unfamiliar way. but the number ordering informed me
and *empowered* me, and guess what? I found the proper filter without any help. and I'm sure
thousands of people find their auto parts every day, too”.

The example given by this poster does not have to do with an experience with the DDC, but
with a DDC like system, and he brings up the concept of ‘empowerment’. If the current system
is not being understood in public libraries by public library patrons, than shouldn’t librarian’s do
what they can to help the patrons feel informed and ‘empowered’ to find what they are looking
for? Essentially libraries and librarians are wondering to Dewey or not to Dewey.

The answer to this question is not as easy as deciding to switch from DDC to BISAC
because they both have their strengths as well as their weaknesses. BISAC is ideal for the
browsing patron, while the DDC is ideal for a patron looking for something specific. Several
libraries have gone a different route altogether and have created their own ‘mashup’ of DDC and
BISAC to organize and display their collections. I am going to discuss examples of what four
different libraries in America have done in order to answer this question. The San José Public
Library, Rangeview Library District, Darien Library and Maricopa County Library District all
had different ways of answering this question. The first library I am going to discuss is the San
José Public Library, California. This library has decided to implement the BISAC system

because their circulation had been increasing and it was taking too many staff hours to shelve the books back into DDC order. “One of its timesaving innovations is a "direct shelving method" that eliminates steps in getting books back to the stacks. Books are roughly sorted from book drops right onto trucks”14 and then shelved in a “"Marketplace" near the library's entrance, which features new and popular materials in general categories”.15 The Rangeview Library District, in Northglenn, Colorado, switched from Dewey numbers to a system they call “WordThink”. This system embraces the broad subject, subdivided into specific subjects, but instead of having these subjects represented by a numerical system, they are represented by words. Two stickers were placed on the spine of books, one with the broad subject and one with the more specific subject. According to Barbara Fister, “[t]hough it took about 1000 hours of staff time, the changeover was well received”16. Patrons liked this method because they did not have to remember Dewey numbers in order to find the books they were looking for. The Maricopa County Library District in Arizona chose to create something called ‘Neighborhoods” where library materials are grouped based on subject matter. “An example of how neighborhoods work better is the weddings section, which includes materials on wedding etiquette, wedding flowers, wedding food, wedding dresses, and so on. In Dewey, they would be in different places”17. The Darien Library in Connecticut decided not to leave Dewey completely; instead, they found a creative way to combine BISAC and Dewey. Along with changing their cataloging system, they also changed the layout of their library by incorporating enclaves that they called “glades”. The nonfiction collection was separated into the following glades:

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14 Barbara Fister, “The Dewey Dilemma.”
15 Barbara Fister, “The Dewey Dilemma.”
16 Barbara Fister, “The Dewey Dilemma.”
“● Body and Soul: religion, philosophy, parenting, self-help, and health; ● Nature: animals, science, and math; ● Home: cooking, gardening, decorating, and crafts; ● Places: travel, language, and travel writing; ● Lives: biographies and memoirs; ● Times: history; ● Play: cars, recreation, and sports; ● Work: economics, test preparation, accounting, marketing, and college admissions; ● Art and Literature: poetry, art, essays, writing, and literature; ● Finance: investing, personal finance, banking; and ● Technology: these books are not located with the nonfiction collection but rather housed in the Technology Education Center on the lower level of the library.”

Although the glades may look like the BISAC system, within the glades the books are shelved according to their Dewey numbers. Even though the Darien Library tried to make both browsers and patrons looking for specific materials happy, they still ran into some trouble. “[M]any of our patrons had a difficult time with the new system of shelving nonfiction materials. Darien residents are heavy library users, and many of them had become accustomed to finding books using the straight Dewey Decimal System.” One year later, despite these difficulties, “Darien Library’s book circulation grew by 47 percent, which is especially remarkable when compared to DVD circulation, which only grew by 20 percent.”

As future librarians, it will be up to us to decide not just the fate of Dewey, but how we want our library’s to be organized. Do we want to stand with tradition, or do we want to try something new? Melissa Rice and Joanna Kolendo make a good point in their article, “Transition and Reflection: Frankfort Public Library District’s Decision to Go Dewey Free,” “[a]fter all, Dewey, the Library of Congress, and many other systems were attempts to improve the classification systems of their era.” The main thing that we have to keep in mind is whatever system we decide to go with needs to be the same throughout any library that decides to join a consortium and participate in interlibrary loaning. Bruce Sullivan gives a good example

18 Gretchen Caserotti and Sarah Ludwig, “Dewey-Lite”: in “Dewey or Don’t We?” Nanci Milone.
19 Gretchen Caserotti and Sarah Ludwig, “Dewey-Lite”: in “Dewey or Don’t We?” Nanci Milone.
20 Gretchen Caserotti and Sarah Ludwig, “Dewey-Lite”: in “Dewey or Don’t We?” Nanci Milone.
of a potential situation that could arise with libraries following different classification systems, how difficult would it be for the patron or the librarian if the only copy of a book were located at a library organized completely differently from their home library. According to Bob Hassett, “[i]n the end, the point of classification is findability, providing as many access points as possible for users”\textsuperscript{22}. No system is infallible, both Dewey and BISAC have their positives and negatives as classification systems. We should not be satisfied with the idea that library patrons are unable to grasp Dewey or that Dewey is too archaic and antiquated to apply today. It is time that we become innovators take the best of both systems and create a new classification system that best reflects both the world we live in today and makes both browsers and patrons looking for something specific happy.