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### Tag, You're It: Enhancing Access to Graphic Novels

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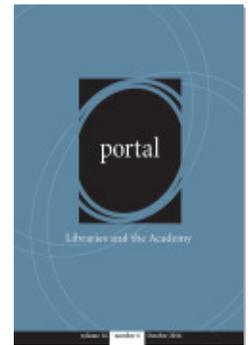
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## Tag, You're It: Enhancing Access to Graphic Novels

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# Tag, You're It: Enhancing Access to Graphic Novels

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Wendy West

**abstract:** Current users of academic libraries are avid readers of graphic novels. These thought-provoking materials are used for leisure reading, in instruction, and for research purposes. Libraries need to take care in providing access to these resources. This study analyzed the cataloging practices and social tagging of a specific list of graphic novel titles in the academic libraries of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). Results found that of the 668 graphic novel records 68 (10.17 percent) used the genre heading "graphic novel" and 99 (14.8 percent) were tagged. This limited access could be improved by using social tagging and genre heading.

## Introduction

Each year academic libraries acquire materials to build and enhance their collections. These resources support an institution's curriculum; its faculty and student research activities; and users' leisure reading interests. For patrons to benefit from these materials, the sources need to be easily identifiable for efficient access so that users can locate them. A great deal of staff time and effort goes into the best methods for ensuring accessibility of library resources. For many years traditional cataloging practices have made this endeavor possible, especially with commonly acquired materials, such as books, journals, and videos. Over the last decade and a half, graphic novels have emerged as a new medium for users to read and appreciate.<sup>1</sup> Graphic novels have become quite popular in public as well as academic libraries. Yet accessing graphic novels is not as straightforward a process as other resources for many reasons, including cataloging. Some libraries are employing social tagging options to enrich access possibilities. To determine cataloging and social tagging patterns of graphic novels this study was initiated. This research explored graphic novels in academic library collections with a specific focus on social tagging and cataloging practices.

Materials with unique publication formats, such as graphic novels, can be difficult to access via online catalogs and other library applications due to cataloging and clas-



sification challenges. Libraries continue to struggle with the best presentation of that metadata for ease of access. Bibliographic records created by catalogers are the foundation of the traditional catalog, and now discovery tools provide another opportunity for access. In the pursuit of making data more accessible and provide functionality in a world that thrives on social applications, it is important not only to create, but to enrich the metadata placed in records. Simply put, library discovery tools and catalogs cannot retrieve data that does not exist within bibliographic records. At present, many libraries are attempting to implement innovative approaches to access library materials through the use of social media applications. Academic libraries are in the unique position to maximize access to library materials through social tagging. Since the newest generation of library users is accustomed to and fluent with Web 2.0 technologies, they have the capability to add and augment library records through a library's next generation

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**The tagging activities performed by specialized and knowledgeable individuals would be an excellent addition to augment the access provided in bibliographic records.**

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catalog or discovery layer. Academic libraries can further increase access by encouraging user tagging in their local communities. In addition, many libraries have users who are experts in a range of disciplines and engage in different areas of scholarly inquiry and research. The tagging activities performed by specialized and knowledgeable individuals would be

an excellent addition to augment the access provided in bibliographic records.

In theory, the idea of social tags supplementing subject and genre headings is an interesting concept. End users would be able to search for materials or resources using terms from both a structured, hierarchal system (for example, Library of Congress Subject Headings), as well as by using natural language terms (for example, social tagging terminology). Much of the prior research focusing on academic libraries' social tagging practices explored relationships with the use of LibraryThing as a social tagging mechanism.<sup>2</sup> LibraryThing is a service that enables individuals and organizations to catalog their resources and share that metadata. LibraryThing gets its metadata (social tags) from a variety of commercial sources and library catalogs.<sup>3</sup> An affiliated resource, LibraryThing for Libraries (LTFL), provides the basic LibraryThing options as well as refined features providing customization and value-added materials, such as reviews. This current research study explored social tagging activities and cataloging practices with a focus on graphic novels.

## Literature Review

### Graphic Novels

There is a wide array of definitions for graphic novels, and as noted by Amanda Stegall-Armour, defining this term is a "slippery slope" for librarians when working with readers who range from graphic novel novices to aficionados.<sup>4</sup> Catherine Labio contends that the phrase is misleading and detracts from the genre.<sup>5</sup> Eddie Campbell wrote that "confusion reigns" defining the graphic novel, with four different ways to do so: as a format,



as a comic book, as a comic book written in a prose style, or one written with a higher ambition.<sup>6</sup> In the United States, the term *graphic novel* was popularized by Will Eisner in 1978, when he placed the term on the cover of the paperback edition of *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories*.<sup>7</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a graphic novel within the “graphic” entry as “a full-length (esp. science fiction or fantasy) story published as a book in a comic-strip format.”<sup>8</sup> Sid Jacobson defined graphic novels as “fiction intended for adults in comic format.”<sup>9</sup> In 2003, Francesca Goldsmith connected the literature aspects of graphic novels and wrote:

Developed plotlines, complex characters, distinctive narrative stylistics, and rhetorical devices such as irony and symbolism are requisites for books we recognize as “literary,” whether we are talking about fiction or about fact. Certainly, what’s considered “literature” is much more than just a recapitulation of formula. Some of the same criteria can be applied to what are called graphic novels, a form encompassing both fact and fiction that relies on pictures (sometimes accompanied by text) to drive a narrative.<sup>10</sup>

Graphic novels tend to present provocative stories, both fiction and non-fiction, in a visually striking format. “Graphic novels as a format,” asserts Ruth Boyer, “produce some of the most thoughtful and beautiful stories in the history of humankind.”<sup>11</sup> Libraries, including public, school, and academic, are actively adding these materials to collections since patrons are eager to use these print resources.

### *Graphic Novels in Academia*

College students enjoy reading graphic novels and professors are integrating them into their curricula.<sup>12</sup> Academic libraries are adding graphic novels into their collections on account of this increasing attention. Graphic novels not only meet users’ reading interests, but are useful in presenting historical and biographical topics. The advantages of using graphic novels in the curriculum have been well documented.<sup>13</sup> Thomas Juneau and Mira Sucharov discussed the value of using graphic novels in college courses, stating that graphic novels reach students on both visual and intellectual levels that traditional texts lack.<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Downey wrote about the successful use of graphic novels to improve student comprehension, awareness of social issues, and ability to better interpret themes.<sup>15</sup> Anne-Marie Davis uses graphic novels to teach concepts

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**The faculty reported that the use of graphic novels in their courses prompted engaged discussions among the students, including those that had previously been reluctant to enter into class conversations.**

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of war, violence, and genocide.<sup>16</sup> To further investigate the use of graphic novels in the classroom, Davis conducted a survey of University of Washington professors. The faculty reported that the use of graphic novels in their courses prompted engaged discussions among the students, including those that had previously been reluctant to enter into class conversations. Davis found that graphic novels were used in areas of study including art, anthropology, European history, cultural studies, and Japanese literature. Steven Hoover advocated for the use of graphic novels in academia “because graphic novels



rely on the synthesis of textual and visual information to create meaning, their potential value is difficult to ignore."<sup>17</sup>

As the use of graphic novels has increased, so has research into their merit. The focus of most of this research has been on the additional context graphic novels provide and their impact on student engagement in the classroom.<sup>18</sup> A recent study by Janette Michelle Hughes et al. found that adolescents demonstrated an increased interest and excitement in writing assignments using graphic novels to improve reading.<sup>19</sup> Val Bunn found that through the promotion of graphic novels, male teens were more likely to engage in additional reading.<sup>20</sup> Paul Alexio and Claire Norris highlighted the value of comics and graphic novels in fostering reading.<sup>21</sup>

### *Graphic Novels and Language*

As libraries find themselves adding graphic novels to collections, they must determine the best method for making these materials available to users. Graphic novels become a bit of a puzzle. Lorena O'English, J. Gregory Matthews, and Elizabeth Blakesley Lindsay noted that graphic novels have never quite fit in with other traditional formats.<sup>22</sup> They are in one sense a novel that can be cataloged and shelved as any other literary work by author or as nonfiction book by subject; however, the visual nature of the novel sets it apart and gives it a unique usage. Some libraries have chosen another strategy by classifying the materials based on the visual nature, mixing them in with art resources.

The phrase *graphic novel(s)* is widely used both in natural language and in controlled vocabulary. For users to locate desired materials it is invaluable for finding aids to use familiar language. The literature suggests that social tagging can provide access points that complement traditional cataloging.<sup>23</sup> With traditional cataloging alone, it is possible that materials that we have carefully selected and added to our collections can become "lost" because vocabulary common to users, but not part of the Library of Congress subject headings, is not included in the bibliographic record. From survey of campus-wide faculty, Davis determined the term or phrase most often used by the faculty to describe a graphic novel was *graphic novel*.<sup>24</sup> Only one faculty member preferred to use the term *comics*. Davis' study demonstrates the importance of having the "current" terms available in the online catalog. It should be anticipated that faculty and the students will expect to find material using the same terms they are hearing in their courses. These terms can be used in social tagging. However, social tagging needs to supplement, not replace cataloging.

## **Social Media and Libraries**

### **Discovery tools**

Social media has greatly changed user expectations, activities, and interest. While users' preferred social media tools may change, the appeal of the tools' shared environment and functionality remains consistent. To adapt to the changes, libraries are engaging staff and incorporating resources to keep up with users' interests. In a recent study, Laura Saunders surveyed academic reference librarians about their engagement with social media applications and found they were spending twenty percent of their time

engaged in a variety of social media-related activities.<sup>25</sup> The use of a discovery tool and the social tagging function is one of those adaptations. Discovery tools facilitate the end user interface with a corresponding search utility for retrieving, displaying, and interacting with the content in a library catalog system.<sup>26</sup>

Social tagging also offers academic libraries the opportunity to take advantage of the knowledge and expertise of the faculty, staff, and student populations on their campuses. For social tagging to be truly complementary to cataloging, there would need to be a vested interest among faculty, staff and students to contribute. Libraries would need to determine their users' awareness of social tagging in the discovery tools, interest, and barriers to creating tags. While sharing some similarities, discovery tools vary in structure and functionality. Previous studies that have focused on discovery tools have had little detail about social tagging at academic libraries. Birong Ho, Keith Kelley, and Scott Garrison reported on the implementation of VuFind at Western Michigan University Libraries and found little interest in social tagging at the time of their research.<sup>27</sup> They felt that lack of interest in social tagging reflected the view of the online catalog as a non-social environment. It has been several years since that implementation, and discovery tools are more commonly found at academic libraries. It would be interesting to review the discovery layer to determine if there has been an increase in social tagging.

As discovery tools become more common, users' expectations about the interface of the online catalog will change as well. Academic libraries have the opportunity to draw upon the subject expertise of their users to develop social tags that enhance access to materials in the online catalog. To maximize the benefits, libraries could encourage and market these tools to further engage their faculty, staff, and students.

Paula Webb and Muriel Nero reviewed academic libraries' sites to evaluate social tagging in four different social tagging systems and discovery tools.<sup>28</sup> They found that the discovery tools had varied degrees of ease of use and each required a certain degree of learning in order to search effectively. A discovery layer that requires a larger learning curve to use is a possible deterrent for the creation of social tags.

### **Social tags**

Social tags are a means of identifying and retrieving digitized information. Social tagging allows users to identify terms and phrases for specific information sources.<sup>29</sup> This Web 2.0 technology is used in many social media applications including Facebook, Flickr, and HuLu, and provides a user-generated labeling on the Internet. Steele pointed out that shared vocabulary, or folksonomy, originates with the end user and offers a positive contribution to bibliographic records because by their very nature social tags reflect users' vocabulary or natural language in its current state.<sup>30</sup> Some would argue that the social tags will be too personal and assigned without consideration of other users.<sup>31</sup> However, when in 2010 Joyline Makani and Louise Spiteri conducted a study on social tagging for CiteULike, a free service that allows users to store, organize, and share their favorite online resources, they found that CiteULike users tended to be selective about the social tags and frequently used social tags created by others. Makani and Spiteri posited that these behaviors were the establishment of a folksonomy within a specific site and suggested that the sense of community and personal contributions strengthen the intellectual authority



of the added terms.<sup>32</sup> The social tags for a specific resource, such as a discovery layer, can create a common vocabulary for a variety of user types. Susan Gibbons stated that

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**Tagging allows users to share information and identify it in such a way that other users, with similar tastes and agendas, can easily retrieve the resource.**

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tagging and the folksonomies options should be offered by libraries for access as well as for promoting users' research.<sup>33</sup> The rapid growth of Web, electronic, and digital resources has created a new and challenging set of information to be searched, retrieved, and organized.

Tagging allows users to share information and identify it in such a way that other users, with similar tastes and agendas, can easily retrieve the resource.

### LCSH versus Tags

For a long time, libraries have used Library of Congress subject headings (LCSH) to enhance retrievability for the end user. Some argue that Library of Congress classification can often be too rigid for end users.<sup>34</sup> Several researchers have studied tagging relative to Library of Congress subject headings (LCSH) to determine patterns and collaborative strategies. These studies have focused on academic settings to compare the LCSH in the records with social tags found in LibraryThing.<sup>35</sup>

According to Marliese Thomas, Dana Caudle, and Cecilia Schmitz, social tagging can play an important role in enhancing the metadata in an online catalog by expanding the terminology available to users who conduct research.<sup>36</sup> Their study examined tagging in academic and public online catalogs that use LibraryThing in seven libraries hosting a variety of discovery tools and tagging systems. The researchers evaluated over 8,000 social tags. The results indicated that more than half of the social tags reflected the topic of the representative work. They found only a small cross section of common terms between the social tag content and the assigned subject headings, and found that almost one third of the social tags represented valid subject headings but had not been included in the record. In another study, Constantia Kakali and Christos Papatheodorou researched the relationship between the use of social tags and subject headings in the online catalog at the Panteion University Library and reviewed over 500 social tags within over 200 bibliographic records.<sup>37</sup> They determined that over ninety percent of the social tags enhanced the subject access of the records. Similar to other studies, they found that the social tags represented both broader and narrower terms than the LC subject headings. In some instances the authors felt that the social tags actually provided better descriptions of the content than the subject headings.

Svein Anfinnsen, Gheorghita Ghinea, and Sergio de Cesare reported that while the social tags may not make sense from librarians' perspective, they are relevant for a user's information retrieval purposes.<sup>38</sup> These metadata are linked in ways that would not be possible with traditional cataloging alone. Scott Golder and Bernardo Huberman refer to this as "sensemaking." This concept focuses on the idea that taggers create metadata in relation to their own life experiences.<sup>39</sup>

Christine Dezelar-Tiedman compared a subset of the subject headings from the University of Minnesota's bibliographic records to the social tags for identical titles in



LibraryThing.<sup>40</sup> She found that more than half of the bibliographic records contained no subject headings; however, more than seventy percent of the same titles had social tags added to the records in LibraryThing. In these instances, the tagging done by users created additional access points for many records, with only a small number of records where the social tags and subject headings overlapped. More than fifty percent of the social tags represented topics not covered by subject headings. A review of the social tags revealed that in some instances, the tags provided a more precise and correct assessment of the material content than information offered in the bibliographic record. The creation of social tags to supplement subject headings can produce a richer set of metadata to help with describing the content of materials. This richness of metadata allows users to create highly specific and successful searches.

The strengths of social tags play to the weaknesses of subject analysis and indexing.<sup>41</sup> Tagging does not require a high degree of maintenance, can provide currency in terminology, reflects research behaviors, and is relatively uncomplicated for the end user. Tagging and cataloging have similar outcome objectives, to create and maintain access to resources through the use of metadata. Used together, they can improve upon the rate of retrieval of materials within a library's discovery layer or online catalog.

Scott McFadden and Jenna Venker Weidenbenner contend that users think in natural language terminology and the manner in which they organize information is different than how it is organized in online catalog records.<sup>42</sup> They further argue that by providing additional access points, librarians can have insight into users' interests in resources and how they think about identifying and accessing them. Lois Mai Chan affirms that by studying patterns of tagging behavior researchers and practitioners can gain insight into users' information retrieval strategies, which will influence the conceptual basis for cataloging practices and policies.<sup>43</sup>

Like social tags, the terminology in genre headings can provide increased access and discoverability of materials in online catalogs beyond what is provided by subject headings. The benefit of adding genre headings is not limited to literature. Carrie Newsom, Jimmie Lundgren, and Nancy Mitchell Poehlmann examined the existing subject terms applied to the resources in their library's online catalog and determined they were not meeting the research needs of the faculty and students in the chemistry and engineering programs at the University of Florida.<sup>44</sup> To facilitate discoverability within their catalog, genre headings were added that included detailed phrases and terms specific to the fields of chemistry and engineering. Music is another subject area that benefits from the use of detailed and specific genre headings and terms.<sup>45</sup> The Library of Congress Music Genre/Form Project Group has worked for several years to create a list of genre and form terms to improve access by including terminology and concepts to end users. For years, the value of having detailed form / genre headings for foreign language films has been discussed, with the benefit identified that users would be able to search by criteria specific to foreign films and achieve more precise search results.<sup>46</sup>

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### **The strengths of social tags play to the weaknesses of subject analysis and indexing.**

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## Research Questions

As noted above, tagging and LCSHs provide needed metadata for users to access resources. While studies have compared the two access utilities they have mainly focused on content for metadata purposes. This study will review resource format and access, in particular graphic novels. Questions include:

- Do academic libraries provide users with the option to add social tags within their online catalog or discovery layer?
- When libraries provide tagging capabilities do end users tag graphic novels to enhance access?
- Are there specific patterns in the tagging terminology of graphic novels (that is, use of the term *graphic novels*)?
- What metadata are catalogers using to identify graphic novels?
- Does retrospective tagging play a role in access enhancement of earlier issued graphic novels?

## Methods

This study was initiated to address these questions and test the practices of cataloging and the engagement of social tagging of graphic novels. By searching in library catalogs and discovery tools, the research attempted to identify specific metadata patterns. The seventy-five libraries selected for this research are academic institutions from the ARL member list, and are also included on the American Library Association list of the largest libraries in the United States.<sup>47</sup> ARL institutions fulfill rigorous criteria for membership and as such it would be expected that cataloging and tagging practices would meet a similar standard.<sup>48</sup> The online catalogs and discovery tools of this set were reviewed to determine the availability of social tagging for users of these institutions. This review determined that 38 libraries (51 percent) offered users the option to tag records in either the online catalog or a discovery layer; the remaining 37 libraries (49 percent) did not. The 38 libraries with tagging options made up the study's sample libraries, all of which use Library of Congress classification (see Appendix B).

The level of tagging and cataloging was evaluated by comparing their holdings with a core list of graphic novels. In Eric Werthmann's study on graphic novel collections, the researcher used graphic novels which had received major awards in the comics' field.<sup>49</sup> For this current study, the author chose a different approach, so as to include both popular (for example, *Maus*, *Maus II*) and less popular (for example, *Amelia Earhart: This Broad Ocean*) graphic novels, which might influence tagging initiatives. The book titles selected for this project were retrieved from OCLC's WorldCat database from July through August 2011 using a series of searches constructed to isolate records for books that were graphic novels but, that lacked the phrase *graphic novel* in either the subject or genre headings. This would provide comparability for tagging. The list of titles that resulted from these searches generated slightly more than 300 results. All of the selections were physically reviewed using the criteria typically accepted for a graphic novel, in that it is a work of fiction or non-fiction presented in a sequential art form. After this review the sample was reduced to 59 titles (see Appendix C).

Once the title list was created, the 59 graphic novel titles were searched in each of the 38 library collections to determine availability, whether the genre heading “graphic novels” appeared in the record, and if the records had been assigned graphic novel tags by users; information for each was documented for further analysis.

## Results and Discussion

### Graphic Novels in the Study

Of the 59 titles, 54 (91.5 percent) were in at least one collection of the sample libraries; five (8.5 percent) were in none of the libraries. The range for the holdings was zero (0 percent) libraries with the title to 32 libraries (84.2 percent) for the two *Maus* selections. Eleven (18.6 percent) of the titles were in at least fifty percent of the libraries (see Appendix A). The publication dates ranged from 1979 through 2010; there was one (1.7 percent) title from the 1970s decade, two (3.4 percent) from the 1980s, eight (13.6 percent) from the 1990s; 45 (76.2 percent) from the 2000s, and three (5.1 percent) from 2010 and on.

### Graphic Novels in Sample Libraries

Results from the libraries’ catalog searches indicate that graphic novels are being added to the collections. The searches for the selected graphic novel titles ( $n=59$ ) found that 668 graphic novels were cataloged in the 38 libraries, each of the study’s libraries contained at least six (ten percent) of the titles; with two libraries containing a maximum of 36 (61 percent). A distribution of the number of titles owned by the libraries showed that four libraries (ten percent) owned between zero and nine titles; twenty (53 percent) had between ten and nineteen titles; twelve (32 percent) had between twenty and 29 titles; and two (5 percent) had between thirty and 39 titles (see Figure 1). The mean number of titles was 17.57, with a standard deviation of 7.5, and the median was sixteen titles.

### Discovery Tools

The social tagging of graphic novels will expand access capabilities to end users. From a review of the study’s libraries the functionality of user tags varied among discovery tools. All of the discovery tools clearly offered the user the ability to tag a record. (Note, one institution provided tagging at the start of the search, upon later review that capability had been discontinued). Thirteen (34 percent) offered users a search utility to retrieve tagged items. Seven (18.4 percent) offered users the ability to refine the results list with tag terms but did not offer the ability to search the social tag terms separately.

The inability to search catalogs using the tag metadata impedes the accessibility of the resources. For users to access graphic novels through a search, they first need to find at least one tagged graphic novel in order to link to others, rather than having a search function to retrieve the desired resources. In some discovery tools, there were tag clouds that the user could manipulate to select *graphic novel* and narrow their search needs. In these tools, the ability to refine a search required the user to first find a tagged graphic novel record in order to find similar records. In some instances, searching on the cloud format became problematic, because since the refinement of the linking mechanism was not limited to the user tag *graphic novels*, but to many other related terms (for example,

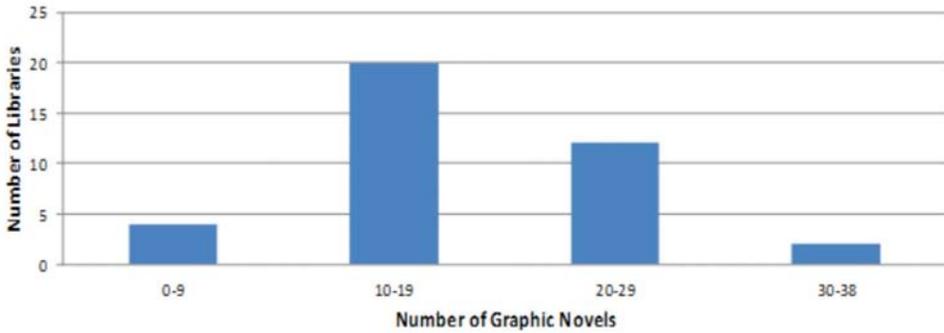


Figure 1. Libraries by Number of Graphic Novels in Collection

## Table 1

### Number of Tagged Graphic Novels by Number of Libraries

Tagged GNs	Number of Libraries	Total Tagged GNs
0	19	0
1	3	3
2	3	6
3	4	12
4	2	8
5	1	5
6	3	18
11	1	11
12	1	12
24	1	24
Total	38	99

*graphic* alone), it searched the entire record rather than just records with graphic novels; thus making the retrieval tool ineffective.

#### Graphic novels and social tagging

Search results of the study's 59 graphic novel titles in the 38 libraries' discovery tools or next generation catalogs for both social tagging activity and genre headings (655) designations indicated that there were 99 tagged graphic novel titles across the collections. The

## Table 2

### Number and Percent of Tagged Graphic Novels in Libraries with Tagged Items

Number GNS	Number GNs Tagged	Percent Tagged
10	1	10.00%
17	1	6.00%
23	1	4.00%
9	2	22.00%
13	2	15.00%
14	2	14.00%
14	3	21.00%
16	3	19.00%
17	3	18.00%
18	3	17.00%
15	4	27.00%
20	4	20.00%
23	5	22.00%
29	6	21.00%
36	6	17.00%
36	6	17.00%
11	11	100.00%
16	12	75.00%
24	24	100.00%

results of tagging activity showed that nineteen (fifty percent) libraries did not contain tags and the remaining nineteen (fifty percent) libraries had at least one graphic novel that had been tagged with that indication. The layout in Table 1 provides the breakdown of the number of graphic novels tagged by the number of libraries. Two (5.2 percent) of the 38 libraries introduced tags using LibraryThing. These two libraries had 100 percent of their graphic novels tagged. This may not reflect local tagging behavior since these tags may have been created by a larger pool of users. While LibraryThing and other tagging tools offer the possibility of increased tagging activity, it may not necessarily be relevant for the target users at the local level.

A closer analysis of the libraries that had graphic novel tagging activity (n=19) indicated that only a small percentage of the libraries' titles were tagged. Sixteen (84 percent) of the libraries had tagged less than 22 percent of their graphic novel titles. Three (16 percent) of the libraries had one library with 75 percent of its titles tagged and two libraries had 100 percent of the graphic novel titles tagged (see Table 2).



## Graphic Novels and Cataloging Practices

The results found limited access to the sample titles using the phrase *graphic novels*. Of the 668 graphic novel records, 64 (9.6 percent) had titles with the phrase *graphic novels* in the genre heading. Further analysis of those 64 records showed that 39 (60.9 percent) records had been updated in WorldCat and include the genre heading “graphic novels.” There were 21 records (32.8 percent) containing the genre heading “graphic novels” added at the local level. The origination of the genre heading placed in the remaining four (6.3 percent) records was not identifiable.

A review of the sample libraries (n=38) found that 28 (73.7 percent) had at least one graphic novel record updated with an identifying genre heading. Of the 28 libraries that had the genre heading “graphic novels,” fifteen (53.5 percent) had used this identifier in less than ten percent of the sample graphic novels; eight libraries (28.5 percent) had used it between 10.1 percent and twenty percent of the time; and the remaining five (17.9 percent) had between 21.4 percent and 43.4 percent of their sample titles cataloged with the genre heading “graphic novels” (see Table 3).

## Accessibility of Graphic Novels using Genre Heading or Tagging

A review of the records was initiated to determine accessibility rates of the sample titles via genre heading or tagging options. Only 143 (21.4 percent) of the sample titles had access either through the genre headings in the bibliographic records or were tagged. Ninety-nine (14.8 percent) of the titles had graphic novel tags added and 68 (10.2 percent) contained genre headings. There was an overlap of twenty (3.0 percent) titles that had both the genre heading and a graphic novel tag. The social tags offered slightly more added access than was offered in the bibliographic records alone. Very little duplication of effort, suggests that increased tagging was beneficial to access.

Traditionally, once a title has been added to an online catalog it is unlikely that the record would be altered unless a specific request was made. Social tags provide a mechanism to enhance records and access of older works. This is reflected in the titles used in this study. For the sample’s 28 titles published between 1979 and 2003, there were 393 (58.8 percent) bibliographic records. For those titles, there were twice as many instances of graphic novel tags (56), than genre headings (24). For the 28 titles published between 2005 and 2010, there was little variation between the tagging and cataloging practices. Of the 280 (41.9 percent) bibliographic records, forty (14.2 percent) had graphic novel tags and 44 (15.7 percent) had been cataloged with the genre heading. There was a slightly larger overlap of five percent containing both genre headings and tags. Compared to the 1979–2003 title set, these records contained a higher percentage of genre headings (10.2 percent vs. 15.7 percent) and comparable percentage of tagging activity (14.8 percent to 14.2 percent).

## Limitations

The identification of “graphic novels” as a genre heading remains controversial. Many cataloging practitioners argue that graphic novels are a format rather than a genre, while others have advocated for the term’s use as a genre heading to improve access.<sup>50</sup> The interest of this study focused on the accessing of graphic novels, and, as such, the use of



## Table 3

Number and Percent of Tagged Graphic Novels with Corresponding Genre Headings in Libraries with Genre Headings Libraries

Number GNS	Number with GN Genre Heading	Percent with GN Genre Heading
7	1	14.20%
11	1	9.00%
12	1	8.30%
13	1	7.70%
16	1	6.30%
20	1	5.00%
26	1	3.80%
28	1	3.60%
13	1	7.70%
17	1	5.80%
15	1	6.70%
20	1	5.00%
29	1	3.40%
10	2	20.00%
14	2	14.20%
16	2	12.50%
18	2	11.10%
23	2	8.70%
36	2	5.50%
24	2	8.30%
28	3	10.70%
17	3	17.60%
9	3	33.30%
14	3	21.40%
36	4	11.10%
11	5	45.40%
22	6	27.20%
23	10	43.40%



this term in the genre heading of a record. Since catalogers have different opinions about cataloging graphic novels, one would expect variations in the results. The researcher did not conduct a survey of the sample libraries to determine these differing philosophies, so a correlation between the two cannot be determined.

Graphic novels are a unique resource and the practice of adding these materials to collections varied among the study's academic libraries. There was a wide range of holdings, which impacted the number of potential tagging opportunities across the libraries.

## Conclusions

The results of this study indicate that while social tags and/or genre headings did provide additional access to graphic novels, their use is limited across the study's library population. Goldsmith points out that if graphic novels are not separated out physically, and are classified the same as other works, they will be difficult for users to locate.<sup>51</sup> Michael Pawuk cautions librarians that, while there are different approaches to cataloging graphic novels, these materials need to be easily distinguishable from others within the library's collections.<sup>52</sup> Happily, the addition of the genre heading (655) and social tagging increases the potential for users to identify and locate the materials. Given the high costs of cataloging, batch loading of records, and reductions in staffing among libraries, it would be advantageous to add genre headings at the point of record origination or facilitate tagging.

Genre headings can be added after cataloging has originally taken place, however, locating graphic novels after-the-fact can be challenging. This is especially true for libraries that have integrated graphic novels into their collections based on the content. An example of this practice of adding genre headings at a later date occurred at the University at Albany Libraries. Cataloging Services conducted a project to identify graphic novels within the collections and add genre headings (655 tag) to their records. Graphic novel titles are distributed throughout the collections and have been assigned a variety of classification numbers due to the varying subjects. The records were retrieved using a series of subject and keyword searches using the terminology or phrase *graphic novels*. This approach retrieved not only graphic novel titles but also materials about graphic novels. It also failed to retrieve records that did not have subject headings or notes that included those search terms. Later, after completion of the project to add genre headings to the records, it became evident that the attempts to identify the records for graphic novel titles were not entirely successful. Several graphic novel titles without genre headings were found in the collections through serendipitous discovery. The difficulty catalogers had in trying to identify graphic novel titles within the online catalog speaks to the difficulties users experience with locating similar material types.

Review of the records for the titles that were updated to include genre headings revealed an increase in circulation for some of the titles. A subject search retrieved 97 records for graphic novels. Forty-two of those titles (43 percent) had no circulation history recorded. The remaining 55 titles (57 percent) had varying degrees of circulation after the addition of the genre headings. Eight of the titles (15 percent) showed no additional circulation. The remaining titles showed varying degrees of circulation that ranged from one to fifteen additional loans.



## Table 4

### Loans Occuring After Adding Graphic Novel Genre Headings (655s) to Catalog Records

Number of Records	Percentage of titles	Additional loans
12	22%	1
11	20%	3
8	15%	4
8	15%	0
6	11%	2
6	11%	5 to 7
3	5%	8
1	2%	15
Total	55	

While it cannot be determined from this data that the addition of genre headings contributed to the increased circulation, it points to an interesting topic for future research with this collection.

The benefits of libraries including social tags in their discovery tools are obvious. How frequently do we find ourselves explaining to a user that the key to finding the resources they want in our collection hinge on finding the correct terminology to search for these materials? Should a user need to regularly open the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* to determine if they are using the correct terms; or hunt in the catalog until they find a record with the subject heading that they need? It is highly unlikely that most users think about searching in that manner. Social tagging provides a provocative mechanism for user access. Libraries need to provide adequate search mechanisms to promote effective retrieval.

The benefits of allowing social tagging in our catalogs and discovery interfaces are clear, given the potential pool of engaged users and resident experts on campus who will enhance records through this process. Most libraries cannot afford to hire catalogers to cover every area of research proficiently. Having the expertise of highly specialized researchers to identify and provide additional access to resources is invaluable.

Genre headings providing more intuitive terminology can be added to bibliographic records to offer an additional access point in the online catalog, when indexed. The review of the libraries' discovery tools and online catalogs determined that the majority of records, 604 (90.4 percent) contained no genre headings with the *graphic novel* term. By changing cataloging practice and adding this term into the heading, end users will have a stronger possibility of retrieving these materials.



Figure 2. Panels from graphic novel. Reprinted with permission from Mariko Tamaki and Jillian Tamaki, *Skim*. (Toronto, Groundwood Books, 2008),105.

Some libraries advocate for other methods of making graphic novels accessible, such as giving some of the titles unique call numbers, adding graphic novel information to note fields, and/or designating special physical locations to set them apart from the rest of the collection, but this is not always helpful in large academic libraries.

The aim of this research was to identify in specific academic libraries current trends in the accessibility of graphic novels, with a focus on tagging and on cataloging with the use of genre headings. The results found that there are gaps in these practices, thus limiting the access of graphic novels. The author proposes a discussion of changes in cataloging practices, as well as the promotion of social tagging tools in the next generation catalogs to enhance record access.

Additional research should focus on academic library users and what motivates them to tag, and include qualitative research for the reasons for tagging/not tagging, and explore techniques for encouraging users to tag materials and bring in added value to our metadata. A review of a wider range of social tags at academic libraries could help identify areas of interest among users and methods of categorization that may deviate from the classification given by catalogers. Having a direct view of how users are researching can assist libraries in making decisions about services, cataloging, and collection building.

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## Appendix A: Graphic Novels and Holdings Counts

Title	Library Holdings	Percent Holdings with Title
Maus II : a survivor's tale : and here my troubles began	32	84.2
Maus : a survivor's tale	32	84.2
Understanding comics : the invisible art	30	78.9
beats : a graphic history	29	76.3
Palestine	27	71.1
Safe area Gorazde	24	63.2
David Boring	23	60.5
people's history of American empire : a graphic adaptation	21	55.3
Cancer vixen : a true story	20	52.6
Breakdowns : portrait of the artist as a young %@[squiggle][star]!	19	50
Skim	19	50
Watchmen book club ed.	17	44.7
Freud for beginners	15	39.5
Pedro and me : friendship, loss, and what I learned	15	39.5
Ethel & Ernest	14	36.8
Fagin the Jew	14	36.8
Malcolm X : a graphic biography	14	36.8
Watchmen	14	36.8
Deogratias, a tale of Rwanda	12	31.6
American widow	12	31.6
Kingdom come	11	29.9
Stinky : a toon book	11	29.9
It was a dark and silly night ...	9	23.7
magical life of Long Tack Sam	9	23.7
Thoreau at Walden	9	23.7
Sandman : doll's house	8	21.1
Sandman : wake	8	21.1
Folklore & fairy tale funnies (little lit: folklore...)	8	21.1



Appendix A. Continued.

Title	Library Holdings	Percent Holdings with Title
Fallout : J. Robert Oppenheimer, Leo Szilard, and the political science of the atomic bomb	8	21.1
books of magic	7	18.4
Pitch black	7	18.4
Clan Apis	6	15.8
Amelia Earhart free in the skies	6	15.8
Jack and the box : a toon book	6	15.8
Adventures of Tintin	5	13.2
Captain Underpants extra-crunchy book o' fun	5	13.2
Fray	5	13.2
Lindbergh child	5	13.2
Silly Lilly and the four seasons : a toon book	5	13.2
Power & responsibility	4	10.5
Around the world	4	10.5
Charles Darwin's On the origin of species : a graphic adaptation	4	10.5
Amelia Earhart : this broad ocean	4	10.5
last knight : an introduction to Don Quixote by Miquel de Cervantes	3	7.9
Into the air : the story of the Wright brothers' first flight	3	7.9
Vögelein : clockwork faerie	3	7.9
No girls allowed : tales of daring women dressed as men for love, freedom and adventure	3	7.9
Mercury	3	7.9
Ghost circles	2	5.3
Hercules : the twelve labors	1	2.6
invisible man	1	2.6
Emperor of the airwaves	1	2.6
revenge of Clayface	1	2.6
Buzz Boy and Fly Guy	1	2.6
Superman, Batman. Public enemies	0	0
dream thief	0	0



Appendix A. Continued.

Title	Library Holdings	Percent Holdings with Title
Solving crimes with trace evidence	0	0
Last son of Krypton	0	0
monstruo del Lago Ness : una misteriosa bestia en Escocia	0	0

## Appendix B: List of Graphic Novel Titles

Title	Date
1. Adventures of Tintin	[1993]
2. Amelia Earhart : this broad ocean	2010
3. Amelia Earhart free in the skies	2003
4. American widow	2008
5. Around the world	2005
6. beats : a graphic history	2009
7. books of magic	1993
8. Breakdowns : portrait of the artist as a young %@[squiggle][star]!	2008
9. Buzz Boy and Fly Guy	2010
10. Cancer vixen : a true story	2006
11. Captain Underpants extra-crunchy book o' fun	2001
12. Charles Darwin's On the origin of species : a graphic adaptation	2009
13. Clan Apis	2000
14. David Boring	2000
15. Deogratias, a tale of Rwanda	2006
16. dream thief	2006
17. Emperor of the airwaves	2009
18. Ethel & Ernest	1999
19. Fagin the Jew	2003
20. Fallout : J. Robert Oppenheimer, Leo Szilard, and the political science of the atomic bomb	2001
21. Folklore & fairy tale funnies (little lit: folklore...)	2000
22. Fray	2003
23. Freud for beginners	1979
24. Ghost circles	2001
25. Hercules : the twelve labors	2007
26. Into the air : the story of the Wright brothers' first flight	2002



Appendix B. Continued.

Title	Date
27. invisible man	2008
28. It was a dark and silly night ...	2003
29. Jack and the box : a toon book	2008
30. Kingdom come	1997
31. last knight : an introduction to Don Quixote by Miquel de Cervantes	2000
32. Last son of Krypton	2009
33. Lindbergh child	2008
34. magical life of Long Tack Sam	2007
35. Malcolm X : a graphic biography	2006
36. Maus : a survivor's tale	1986
37. Maus II : a survivor's tale : and here my troubles began	1991
38. Mercury	2010
39. monstruo del Lago Ness : una misteriosa bestia en Escocia	2009
40. No girls allowed : tales of daring women dressed as men for love, freedom and adventure	2008
41. Palestine	2001
42. Pedro and me : friendship, loss, and what I learned	2000
43. people's history of American empire : a graphic adaptation	2008
44. Pitch black	2008
45. Power & responsibility	2001
46. revenge of Clayface	2009
47. Safe area Gorazde	2000
48. Sandman : doll's house	1995
49. Sandman : wake	1997
50. Silly Lilly and the four seasons : a toon book	2008
51. Skim	2008
52. Solving crimes with trace evidence	2008
53. Stinky : a toon book	2008
54. Superman, Batman. Public enemies	2004
55. Thoreau at Walden	2008
56. Understanding comics : the invisible art	1994
57. Vögelein : clockwork faerie	2003
58. Watchmen	[2005]
59. Watchmen book club ed.	1987



## Appendix C: ARL Libraries

1. Arizona State University
2. Auburn University
3. Brigham Young University
4. Brown University
5. Columbia University
6. Cornell University
7. Duke University
8. Emory University
9. Florida State University
10. Georgetown University
11. Harvard University
12. Indiana University
13. Johns Hopkins University
14. Louisiana State University
15. Massachusetts Institute of Technology
16. Michigan State University
17. New York University
18. North Carolina State University
19. Northwestern University
20. Ohio State University
21. Pennsylvania State University
22. Princeton University
23. Rutgers University
24. Southern Illinois University - Carbondale
25. Stanford University
26. State University of New York - Buffalo
27. Syracuse University
28. Temple University
29. Texas A&M University
30. Tulane University
31. University of Alabama
32. University of Arizona
33. University of California - Berkeley
34. University of California - Davis
35. University of California - Irvine
36. University of California - Los Angeles
37. University of California - San Diego
38. University of Chicago
39. University of Cincinnati
40. University of Colorado
41. University of Connecticut
42. University of Florida
43. University of Georgia
44. University of Hawaii
45. University of Illinois - Urbana-Champaign
46. University of Iowa
47. University of Kansas
48. University of Kentucky
49. University of Maryland
50. University of Massachusetts - Amherst
51. University of Miami
52. University of Michigan
53. University of Minnesota
54. University of Missouri - Columbia
55. University of Nebraska - Lincoln
56. University of New Mexico
57. University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill
58. University of Notre Dame
59. University of Oklahoma
60. University of Oregon Libraries
61. University of Pennsylvania
62. University of Pittsburgh
63. University of Rochester
64. University of South Carolina
65. University of Southern California
66. University of Tennessee - Knoxville
67. University of Texas - Austin
68. University of Utah
69. University of Virginia
70. University of Washington
71. University of Wisconsin - Madison
72. Vanderbilt University
73. Washington University - St. Louis
74. Wayne State University
75. Yale University



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