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Access to Moving Image Collections

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Data Mapping Project

For this project, I chose to compare the MODS and PBCore standards against the MARC standard. MODS is an xml-based schema designed expressly to work well and map over easily to MARC records; PBCore, by contrast, is a Dublin Core based standard designed to work with audiovisual media. Although, of course, it's impossible to gain a sense of a standard as granular as MARC by looking at only twenty fields, the contrast between the three nonetheless highlights their respective strengths and weaknesses.

MARC is the oldest standard, and to be perfectly blunt, the least user-friendly. It provides enormous amounts of detail, with complex codes that allow for the inter-relation of data; when looking at the full listing of MARC format codes, it's almost impossible to imagine that there's any kind of data that's been left unaccounted for. Nonetheless, there were a few areas where I found MARC unhelpful. For example, it does not seem to provide a clear way to collect preservation metadata such as physical damage or deterioration to the item. Perhaps there is such a code for describing this kind of information, buried in among the MARC instructions in such a way that I couldn't locate it no matter how hard I looked – but in that case, that, too, is a flaw in the MARC format records. On the other hand, MARC proved itself far and away the best standard for clearly providing clearly marked fields of detailed technical information such as aspect ratio, digital file size, and frame rate.

MODS is simpler and more user-friendly than MARC, since it relies on xml language-based tags, which make it easier to search for necessary fields. However, in the simplification process, MODS also loses the ability to capture a significant amount of valuable metadata; huge quantities of information seem relegated to the vague and general category of “notes.” This included technical and

preservation fields, as well as rights information. In many ways, MODS came across to me as something of the worst of both worlds for cataloging moving image material: not as granular as MARC, but not as specifically tailored to be useful to moving image archivists as PBCore.

PBCore, of course, in some ways is a moving image archivist's dream standard. Its language-based tags are as user-friendly as MODS, but it provides more specific subfields, and many of them are tailored directly for the needs of moving image materials. In some respects, it even surpasses MARC for granularity, in the way that it is very careful to lay out the difference between metadata related to the work and metadata related to the instantiation that this specific record describes. Even PBCore has its severe weaknesses – specifically, there does not seem to be much room in PBCore to add information about the acquisition of the item. Nonetheless, if I had to choose a standard in which to work as a moving image archivist, after completing this exercise, PBCore would be my first choice.