We started asking ourselves and our fellow Taxonomy Division members (i.e. YOU) to describe a typical day in their (YOUR) work-life by responding to the following set of questions. If you haven't responded yet, we'd would love to hear from you. As you can see below, we live very varied work lives!

Please join us and send your response to: martha.heyman@cengage.com .

1. *What is your current role and who is your  employer?*
2. *Describe your work environment.*
3. *What part of your work do you relish?*
4. *What part of your work do you least enjoy?*
5. *Take us through a normal day.*

**Stories:**

* [**Who:** Kathleen McElhinney, Metadata/Cataloging Librarian](http://taxonomy.sla.wiki/157548592.html#ADayintheLifeofa%22Taxonomist%22-Who%3AKathleenMcElhinney%2CMetadata%2FCatalogingLibrarian)
* [**Who:** Alice Redmond-Neal, Chief Taxonomist](http://taxonomy.sla.wiki/157548592.html#ADayintheLifeofa%22Taxonomist%22-Who%3AAliceRedmond-Neal%2CChiefTaxonomist)
* [**Who:** Marti Heyman, Executive Director, Metadata Standards and Services](http://taxonomy.sla.wiki/157548592.html#ADayintheLifeofa%22Taxonomist%22-Who%3AMartiHeyman%2CExecutiveDirector%2CMetadataStandardsandServices)

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**Who: Kathleen McElhinney, Metadata/Cataloging Librarian**

(Kathleen.McElhinney@usd.edu)

* *What is your current role and who is your employer?*

Metadata/Cataloging Librarian and recently named Manager of Acquisitions and Technical Services for the University of South Dakota, in Vermillion, SD (southeast corner, by Iowa and Nebraska).

* *Describe your work environment.*

My office is in the middle of campus, in the University Library building, at the back of the Academic Commons floor.  Several read posters adorn the outside walls ("Take an Unexpected Journey" and "All the secrets of the world are contained inside.  Read at your own risk") and inside is a U-shaped desk, a small table with 2 chairs and 3 bookcases.  Lots of folders everywhere, but I can usually find what I need.   The bookcase books are titles on cataloging, genealogy (I'm the staff expert), taxonomy, ontology, web design and systems analysis, along with 90 year old Sears Roebuck catalogs (archival property).  On my desk is the oft-used Manual of European Languages for Librarians, Chicago Manual of Style, AACR2, guides to philosophy, mathematics and computer science and boring stuff like Everyday HR.

I have a large high-resolution monitor for image work and a docking station for my laptop, though my laptop and I are often off to various conference rooms and other buildings for meetings.  Occasionally, I’m found reading in the corner of the 3rd floor (the silent floor), where the views north and west are striking on a clear day.

* *What part of your work do you relish?*

I relish making unique materials findable and useable in our Digital Library.  I get to handle (metaphorically, since I work mainly from the digital images) materials as diverse as the manuscript of "Why I am a Pagan" by Sitkala-Sa (white name:  Gertrude Simmons Bonnin), two 18th century violin treatises written by Leopold Mozart and herbarium specimens collected by a well-known South Dakota State Biologist.

* *What part of your work do you least enjoy?*

I do not enjoy the bureaucratic aspects of working at a university.  It's hard on the psyche to have projects put on hold in multiple areas at the same time, even if the reasons for doing so are quite sound.  That's where the Digital Library comes to my rescue, giving me a chance to "touch" something real while adding to the research resources available to students and researchers.

* *Take us through a normal day.*

There is more to do than can possibly be done in any one day, so it's all about priorities.  Two days a week have a 2-hr block at the Reference Desk.  At high teaching-load times, I help out the reference staff teaching information literacy in freshman speech and English classes.  Of highest importance are my liaison duties to math, computer science and philosophy.  We're starting a review of our print journals soon, which will make this a fun school year (faculty can be amazingly attached to their print). J

Once my liaison areas are taken care of, I focus on what's currently the highest priority.  I may work with the subject analysis of theses and dissertations or assist the Archives in determining official collection titles or subject access to a collection.  I do service work for SLA, the university and library committees I am on.  Then I get to the really fun stuff:  I review the cataloging done by the Oral History Center, and when new collections are added to the Digital Library, I get the opportunity to create the metadata schema that will make the collections both findable and useable by students and researchers.  Every once in a while I put on my systems administration hat and work on our digital library or archival management systems.  When there's time, I also do original cataloging of items in our regular collection.  Over lunch, I generally catch up on discussion lists in cataloging, SLA and the technology I use:  CONTENTdm and TMS.   My latest challenge is manager of the Acquisitions and Technical Services department.  Now I also have to worry about gift books!

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**Who: Alice Redmond-Neal, Chief Taxonomist**

(ared@accessinn.com)

As chief taxonomist with Access Innovations, my work revolves around developing, evaluating, and maintaining a variety of taxonomies or thesauri, and implementing them with our categorization tool for information retrieval. I work with 8-10 others on a variety of projects involving domain analysis, taxonomy development, content categorization, and other editorial work. Some of the activity consists of permanent in-house projects, but most of our work is on short term projects and assignments for clients, with a typical project running two to six months. We work mostly onsite in our company office, enabling necessary and frequent dynamic interaction and progress meetings, though many employees do some work at home.

Taxonomy work is just part of my information management activity. In addition to maintaining two thesauri for different projects, I am responsible for abstracting and indexing for three projects. With other projects coming and going, my focus and priorities change daily. A small amount of my time goes toward training others (internal users, clients, and conference presentations) on taxonomy concepts and on using our taxonomy and categorization software. I am also involved in marketing our software and services, primarily through online demonstrations, and in customer support.

I came into the field through a side door, not as a librarian or IT specialist but as a speech-language pathologist with an affinity for language. The aspect of this work I most enjoy is word play. It is a pleasure to collaborate with others who care about nuances in meaning as well as structure and organization. I find taxonomy work to be like moving furniture around in a room, or playing with a 15-square puzzle in which you move one tile at a time to achieve the final picture. This is like moving taxonomy terms and branches around, with modifications along the way, until the whole makes sense and looks right. I also find it fun to work with our categorization software, creating rules that enable machine understanding of endlessly variable human language and accurate application of taxonomy terms for subject indexing.

The subject matter I deal with is constantly changing, or at least rotating through the week, month, or year. I consider myself a subject matter expert in little of it. Most challenging is researching highly specific topics in areas I have little knowledge of to start…though we pick up knowledge rapidly. Least enjoyable is reading certain of the materials for abstracting. These are again materials I have marginal knowledge of and primarily aim to generate a good abstract for in 20 minutes before moving to the next article to abstract.

A typical day starts with checking through a mass of email, mostly spam since my name and email address are on the company website. The priority for each day is different but may include an online demonstration of software to a person interested in taxonomy and categorization tools; reading and indexing a dozen articles for a society’s research journal or another dozen for its bulletin; and reading, abstracting and indexing 20 varied articles provided by a client. Note that taxonomy work is not foremost, unless I’m working on a specific taxonomy project. However, through the course of abstracting and indexing, taxonomy work is always present. This may be a matter of considering and researching new terms for concepts that arise through materials being abstracted, wrestling with how the concept should be worded, consulting others for their opinions or researching the most commonly used phrasing online, finding the appropriate location for a new term in the taxonomy, and finally enriching the term record by adding synonyms, related terms, and scope notes. A less typical day may involve evaluating a client’s taxonomy for possible revision, writing or editing marketing materials, or even reviewing manuscripts written by others on taxonomy and information management.

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**Who: Marti Heyman, Executive Director, Metadata Standards and Services**

(martha.heyman@cengage.com)

* *What is your current role and employer?*

I work for Cengage Learning, but many of you may be more familiar with Gale and Thomson Learning (which merged to form the current company). I am currently responsible for all aspects of the descriptive metadata associated with the content used within our products. We’re a publishing company (educational materials as well as library reference & research resources), so there is a lot of content! The organization I run creates and manages subject thesauri and authority files, indexes content using manual and MAI techniques, develops the metadata architecture which supports features & functionality within digital products, participates in developing industry-specific external metadata standards (e.g. LRMI) as well as defines internal Cengage metadata standards, handles receipt and processing of serials content for eventual inclusion within products, and develops & manages the extensive publication metadata which includes descriptive as well as administrative elements.

* Describe your work environment.

I work in a typical office building where the cubicles are near the external windows and the offices are in the center of the building. I’m in one of the offices – you know, 4 walls and a door made more acceptable with my books and photos. In the common spaces there are ping pong tables and foosball games and comfortable seating. We’re in the suburbs with no walkable options for lunch but there is a café in the building. For the most part, the atmosphere is very relaxed and collegial. There is a concerted effort to foster cross-functional innovation and collaboration as we work towards shifting from a print industry to a digital industry. Frankly, it’s an awesome time to be a metadata person in the publishing industry!

* *What part of your work do you relish?*

This one is a hard one for me to answer because I really do love (almost) all aspects of my role. If I want, I can dive in and do hands on metadata work (which I love) or I can think strategically and make new things happen, or I can mentor younger professionals, or I can educate senior executives about the power of well-formed and managed metadata within digital solutions. It’s all good!

* *What part of your work do you least enjoy?*

If I really have to identify something I least enjoy, I’d have to say it’s the bean counting work like reconciling invoices from vendors with payments in order to assess run rates and remaining budget. Not because it’s math (after all, it’s very EASY math) but because it’s tedious and doesn’t genuinely deliver value to staff or to products.

* *Take us through a normal day.*

I get to the office between 8:30 and 9 AM. I spend the first hour of everyday getting any sort of approvals out of the way along with any budget related stuff. I like to do the bureaucratic things before my brain wakes up enough to object. After that, all bets are off. I never have the same day twice. Most days are a varied mix of opportunities to work with product teams, with marketing and with my own organization to advance the quality of our authority files & thesauri or to grow our metadata registry or to further the investigations into linked data and ontologies. My brain is usually done working at about 6 PM and, with luck, that coincides with the end of my work day.

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