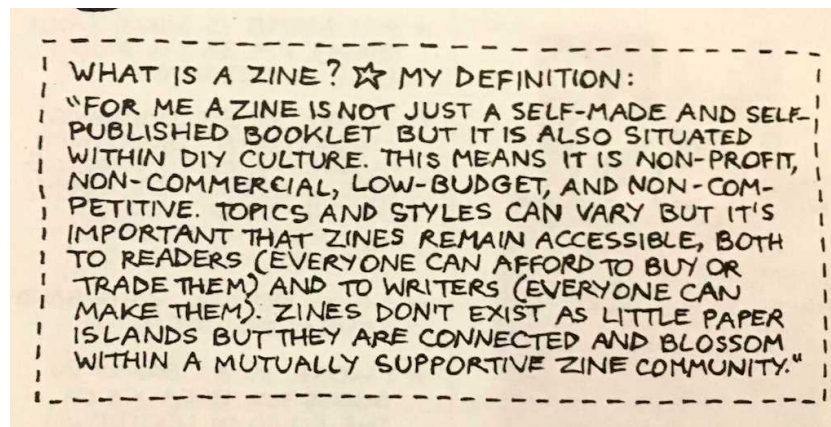


Zine Union Catalog: Narrative

Introduction

The [Zine Union Catalog](https://zinecat.org) (ZineCat) is a shared catalog dedicated to zines. A zine, short for fanzine or magazine, is a DIY publishing medium traditionally used by subculture communities for sharing their lives and knowledge. A shared catalog is a resource where libraries can mingle cataloging and holdings information. Zines are primary sources for humanities, social sciences, and other fields, but due to the diverse standards and practices among libraries, archives, and community organizations that collect and maintain them, accessing zines through traditional research discovery systems has been challenging. ZineCat empowers researchers to discover zine holdings by searching a single catalog, helps librarians copy catalog records to eliminate duplication of effort, and facilitates lending. ZineCat serves educators, researchers, librarians, archivists, zine makers, and anyone with an interest in zines.



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ZineCat contains three primary components:

- Catalog records for zine titles (descriptive metadata), which give identifying (title, creator name(s), production date and location) and contextual information (subjects, genres, abstracts, biographical and historical details)
- Holdings information (details about libraries that hold specific issues)
- Digitized and/or digital content when available

Developed by Jenna Freedman (Barnard College) and Lauren Kehoe (NYU) in our MA Digital Humanities (MADH) program at the City University of New York Graduate Center (CUNYGC), ZineCat's prototype² combined into a Collective Access catalog³ thirty records each from three libraries with different metadata schema: MARC, Dublin Core, and an 18-column spreadsheet³. The prototype has grown to include almost 34,000 zines from eight collections with more ingests in progress.

¹ Nijsten, Nina. [Scissors & Chainsaws No. 2: Diary Comic Zine](#) Made in July 2020 During International Zine Month. Gent, Belgium: Nina Nijsten, 2020.

² <https://zinecat.org>

³ <http://collectiveaccess.org>

The zine library community values cooperation and intentionality, so we need to match the prototype growth in concert with improved infrastructure and participant collaboration systems. NEH funding creates space for deliberation, care, and clarity as we unite our catalogers and contributors in person. The grant will enable us to accomplish this necessary next step.

Significance

Zines provide firsthand accounts of social, political, economic, and cultural experiences and insight that, unlike journalism and academic scholarship, are not filtered through gatekeepers or formal editorial structures. They are produced in small runs and are often distributed by the author(s). Zines facilitate knowledge production and dissemination within marginalized, racialized, and socially alternative communities that have been overlooked or excluded by cultural heritage institutions. They are used as primary sources by students, journalists, scholars,⁴ and anyone interested in material culture, print culture, and book history. Topics represented in zines, zine culture, and zine topics, include, but are not limited to: [girlhood](#), [music fandom](#), [homophobia in high school](#), [people of color in punk](#), the [Michigan Womyn's Music Festival](#), [midwifery](#), the evolution of desktop publishing, self-publishing as activism, [reactions to 9/11](#), [fat activism](#), and [pandemic life](#).

Even before they were called zines or fanzines, self-publications were a mechanism for people holding marginalized identities to share their experiences with people of similar or questioning identities, and others. The 1926 [Fire!! Devoted to Younger Negro Artists](#) by Wallace Thurman, et al.⁵ and [Vice Versa](#), launched by Lisa Ben (an anagram for lesbian) in 1947,⁶ are forerunners. Zine movements have been accurately characterized as heavily populated by white people, despite the contributions of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) creators throughout zine history, but in recent years zine culture has become significantly more representative. For example, the NYC Feminist Zinefest, held at Barnard College annually since 2014 (on hold due to Covid), has had a steady growth in BIPOC tabler presence each year. In 2020, more than 50 percent of the tables were to be staffed by individuals and groups of color.

Perhaps because zines exist in counter cultural spaces, they were first collected and circulated by independent zine libraries. By the early 21st century, public libraries, special collections, and academic library workers began collecting zines as research resources and as part of leisure reading collections. This hybrid environment of zine collections translates to dispersed and varied mechanisms for access. Zine descriptions and metadata, and thus discovery of zines, are strewn across library catalogs, archival finding aids, standalone databases, spreadsheets, print handouts, and proprietary online platforms. This multiplicity poses impediments to finding and using zines in aggregate for research, teaching, and learning. ZineCat [saves a reader's time](#) by collocating metadata from these disparate sources.

Zine librarians field personal and research questions from people looking to find themselves represented on library shelves, to discover others who share cultural shorthands, or who have

⁴ See Appendix for a selected bibliography of zine scholarship.

⁵ <https://schomburgshop.com/products/fire-devoted-to-the-younger-negro-artists>

⁶ <http://www.outhistory.org/exhibits/show/queer-youth-campus-media/media/vice-versa-the-first-lesbian-m>

experienced the same joys and torments. ZineCat will host holdings from any and all collections that wish to participate and will become an essential resource for answering lay and scholarly inquiries.

By harmonizing metadata rather than standardizing it, ZineCat allows the zine community to preserve its diversity and leave control over represented words, images, and ideas to the original makers, a hallmark of zine culture." Control over one's words, images, and ideas is a hallmark of zine culture. For example, in the appendix, we have included a table of descriptors of one zine held at six different libraries. Each record for [Doris by Cindy Ovenrack Crabb](#) is notably different from the others. Some contain narratives in addition to basic metadata. The metadata do not always agree, even with regard to the author's name. *Doris*, a serial with several distinctly titled issues, is variously cataloged as a serial and a monograph. For a zine like *Doris*, ZineCat will serve as a hub for information, connecting but not necessarily overlaying serial, monograph, and finding aid records.

Current and Anticipated Use

In 2014, the ZineCat group surveyed zine makers,⁷ zine researchers,⁸ and zine librarians⁹ in order to understand the need for and anticipated uses of ZineCat. 91% of the 107 maker respondents indicated that their top use would be "Finding zines I didn't already know about (by doing author, keyword, subject, etc. searching)" and the smaller pool of scholars--9 responses--are most interested in "Finding out which libraries have a zine I am interested in."

In one sample semester, Jenna directed to ZineCat scholars doing research on the effects of social media on zining and self-publishing culture, zines about (outer) space, riot grrrl, the environment, BIPOC sex education, specific zines, letterpress and risograph, and queer and transgender immigrant rights.

Collaborative Zine Librarianship Timeline

2002: first issue of *Zine Librarian Zine* published

2003: zine librarians email discussion list founded

2007: zine libraries create a [website](#)¹⁰ to share resources regarding collections, programming, preservation, and promotion

2009: Zine Librarians (un)Conference launches. ZL(u)C host cities and organizations rotate each year

2009: first discussion of union catalog with participants considering Drupal, FileMaker, LibraryThing, and ZineWiki as possible platforms

⁷ [Shared Zine Library Catalog: What Do Zine Makers and Readers Want, If Anything](#), results appended

⁸ [Shared Zine Library Catalog: What Do Zine Researchers Want?](#), results appended

⁹ [Shared Zine Library Catalog: Library Survey](#), results appended

¹⁰ "Zine Libraries Interest Group." <http://zinelibraries.info/>. Accessed 4 July 2021.

2013: [Zine Pavilion](#) established at American Library Association conference

2014: [ZineCore](#), an extension of Dublin Core, tailored to zine description established. ZineCore allows heterogeneous zine metadata to be crosswalked and transformed to one interoperable format to pave the way for metadata integration in ZineCat

2014: a nationally distributed collaboration of zine librarians, metadata specialists, and web developers begin holding virtual meetings in addition to talking at conferences

2016: [Zine Librarians Code of Ethics](#)¹¹ initiated at a conference and drafted by 14 zine librarians from around the US is published

2017-2020: Jenna and Lauren advance ZineCat as part of their MA in Digital Humanities coursework at the CUNY Graduate Center

2020: ZL(u)C, originally scheduled to take place in Montréal, is reorganized as an online event, attracting zine librarians from at least fifteen countries on five continents

2021: [ZineWiki](#)¹² revived after years of neglect. ZineWiki is an encyclopedia-style MediaWiki¹³ installation about zines and zine creators, that will serve as the name authority resource for ZineCat. In turn, ZineCat will serve as a resource for identifying data that may not be currently captured in ZineWiki. Using a WikiData model and in accordance with current trends in library authority work, ZineWiki will allow open contributions, version control, discussion, collocation around Uniform Resource Identifiers (URIs) rather than text strings, and discovery in web search engines

Project Scope and Duration

Now that Jenna and Lauren have completed their MADH degrees and laid the groundwork for ZineCat to expand, the group is ready to re-invigorate the collaborative decision-making and planning begun in 2016. Egalitarian workflows will be foundational to ZineCat's success and longevity. Key to this endeavor is bringing ZineCat collaborators together to work with one another in the same physical space. The project is at a critical juncture with regard to determining, and clearly articulating, the project's mission, vision, and decision-making structure.

Funding from the Humanities Collections and Reference Resources grant will support a two-day foundations meeting to be held at Barnard College with representatives from a wide range of library types: low- or no-budget community libraries and archives, academic collections, and public institutions from around the US. ZineCat participants and contributors will assemble at Barnard College's Milstein Center for Teaching and Learning (MLC), in the Morningside Heights neighborhood of New York City, for a face-to-face meeting to determine shared decision making,

¹¹ Zine Librarians Code of Ethics

<http://www.zinelibraries.info/2016/05/30/code-of-ethics-1115-web-version/>. Accessed 4 July 2021.

¹² "ZineWiki." <http://zinewiki.com>. Accessed 4 July 2021.

¹³ "MediaWiki." <https://www.mediawiki.org/wiki/MediaWiki>. Accessed 5 July 2021.

ratify technical specifications, and chart a plan for the future development of ZineCat.¹⁴ The MLC is also the home of the Barnard Zine Library's archives and open stacks collections.

Meeting Design

While the pandemic has taught us how much can be accomplished online—zine librarians threw a [successful online conference](#) in October 2020—and it was thrilling to interact with other zine librarians from all over the world—the downsides in terms of depth were significant. Time zones pose cascading challenges. Participants are distracted by the temptation to multitask. It is hard to digitally replicate the powerful secondary aspect of conferences: the spontaneous conversations that arise in hallways and over shared meals. There is a tradition among zine librarian unconference participants of staying in college dorms and playing MadLibs. While a round of [punk MadLibs](#) may not solve the difficulties of crosswalking disparate metadata, it builds camaraderie, friendship, and accountability and inspires the kind of collaborative divergent thinking that results in creative solutions. It is this kind of face-to-face relationship-building that allows the zine library community to maintain positive, productive interactions once we adjourn to digital means of exchange.

At the meeting, to be held at Barnard during Summer 2023, participants will:

- Discuss, draft, propose, edit, and approve an articulation of the decision-making framework and goals for the ZineCat project going forward.
- Review and discuss a policy framework, metadata guidelines, and ingest and editorial workflows.

The meeting will be led by a trained, social-justice-focused facilitator, preferably with an interest or knowledge of zines and zine culture. We prefer to meet in person and will observe government and common sense mandates about safe, in-person gatherings. In addition we will develop a workflow that enables robust virtual communications throughout the grant period. We envision the use of actual paper and pen, some of which might stick to walls and workspaces, as part of a charette-style, collaborative thinking process, and some of which may end up incorporated into a white paper zine at the end of the proceedings.

At the conclusion of the in-person meeting, approximately seven participants will be identified by the group to serve on the core project team for the grant year following the two day foundations meeting. The workflow will guide the core project team in accomplishing the goals listed above in addition to:

- Formalizing a sustainability plan for ZineCat. (Further discussed in the Work Plan later in this document.)
- Identifying and liaising with stakeholders across the community.

The core project team will proceed remotely but will also leverage opportunities to hold in-person meetings during subsequent existing conferences. Finally, a year after the inaugural

¹⁴ Should global health demand it, we will switch to an online meeting, but in-person collaboration is preferred.

foundations planning meeting and virtual check-ins, the project team will schedule a follow-up in-person meeting with the zine libraries community to coincide with the annual ZLuC held in summer 2024. Current and updated policies, plans, and workflows will be shared with the community in addition to identifying further implementation needs post planning grant.

Questions that will guide this work are:

- How will decision-making be shared, distributed, and transferred across the community?
- How will metadata guidelines be updated?
- Who will manage ingest policies and editorial workflows?
- How will collection metadata ingests be quality controlled?
- How will ZineCat be member-funded in an equitable manner?

A tangible deliverable of this planning project will be a comprehensive white-paper-like print and digital zine, that articulates ZineCat's vision and goals. The zine will articulate decision-making structures, steering and standing committee leads, a schedule for milestones and check-ins throughout the year, an implementation plan, and project assessment. Relevant documentation produced by ZineCat teams will be referenced in this white paper zine and will be preserved and made freely accessible via [ZineCat's GitHub repository](#), ZineCat's site, and blog.

We will follow the in-person planning meeting remotely with further development from a representative selection of participants who will implement planning meeting directives. The representatives will concern themselves with devising a governance framework and a distribution of labor plans that will sustain ZineCat. At the conclusion of the grant period, the group will formally launch ZineCat at the International Zine Librarians (un)Conference in 2024.

Sustainability

A key outcome of this planning grant is defining what sustainability looks like for ZineCat. Barnard College, NYU, and ZineCat developers are committed to the project's long term sustainability, as demonstrated by the long and careful history of volunteer and academic labor¹⁵ documented in [meeting notes](#) going back to 2014.¹⁶

Two timelines must be considered in addressing project sustainability: the immediate outcomes of the grant and the longer term maintenance of the union catalog. In the short term, this collaborative planning project is designed with intentionality to create documentation to guide the project's implementation phase. The project's white paper zine and other written products will be preserved and made openly accessible on the ZineCat repository, website, and blog.

In addition to planning for the expansion of ZineCat, in-person gatherings will allow the project team to gauge member attitudes towards potential models for ZineCat support and participatory governance. Key questions will be raised, including:

¹⁵ See Appendix B for institutional letters of commitment.

¹⁶ Zine Union Catalog <https://etherpad.wikimedia.org/p/zineunioncatalog> Accessed 4 July 2021.

- How do we create an organizational structure that better serves our contributors and users?
- How can we fund ongoing maintenance and system upgrades?
- What new partnerships might be beneficial?
- How will we track our accomplishments and ensure accountability?
- How will we distribute responsibility equitably over time?

Considering these questions will help articulate a clearer vision for what sustainability means for ZineCat. The plan may include the formation of steering and standing committees and an advisory board to help ensure on-going and broad-based leadership for the support, development, and promotion of ZineCat, including next steps for seeking implementation funding.

We wish to draw attention to the zine librarian's track record, with many participants having been involved for 15 or more years, but simultaneously being welcoming to newer folks. The wave of interest in zines, zine librarianship, and zine as scholarship is waxing, as evidenced by [zines presence in popular media during the pandemic](#), a [DIY Methods Conference](#) that attracted 80 zine applications its first time out, and the return of the Zine Pavilion at ALA in 2022.

Dissemination

ZineCat is itself a dissemination platform. The scope of potential users of ZineCat includes scholars from all disciplines, librarians, K-12 teachers and students, zine creators, and non-scholars interested in the genre. The open, online format of ZineCat means that the public will have aggregated access to zine collections for the first time. To reach these audiences, we will continue to promote ZineCat through social media, zine events, library and archives organizations, and conference presentations. Project participants will be encouraged to make use of their existing communication channels and outreach opportunities. Furthermore, ZineCat metadata will be freely available for study, reuse, and ingestion into other metadata aggregation platforms. ZineCat and ZineWiki metadata will be available for harvesting through Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) and the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH).¹⁷ Attention to current and emerging web development standards and practices will boost ZineCat's discoverability on the web, as well as the site's accessibility to those with physical and cognitive disabilities.

Work Plan

Pre-Grant Activities

- May 2021-December 2022 : NYU Humanities Seed Grant funds developer, metadata specialist, and generalist
- Summer 2021: crowd-funded freelancer hired to ingest two new collections
- Summer 2022: Barnard funding for metadata specialist

¹⁷ "Open Archives Initiative: Protocol for Metadata Harvesting." <https://www.openarchives.org/pmh/>. Accessed 5 July 2021.

Grant Period Timeline

Time	Activity
April 2023	Initial planning begins
June 2023	Project managers and facilitator finalize venue and travel arrangements for project kickoff meeting
Summer 2023	Two-day meeting held in person in New York City. Zine Librarians (un)Conference, location and date to be determined. See appendix for outline of the two day meetings which include tentative agendas.
Sept - Oct 2023	Project managers and facilitator organize planning documents produced from in-person meeting, disseminate to project team
Oct- Nov 2023	Project team drafts, circulates, edits, and finalizes all documentation
Dec 2023	Project team submits final documentation to project managers
January 2024	Project managers draft white paper zine
Feb - March 2024	Project managers circulate white paper zine draft for feedback
April 2024	Project managers incorporate feedback, edit, and finalize white paper zine and relevant documentation; deposit it to GitHub; and circulate to the Zine Libraries community. Project managers submit white paper zine and all final reporting to NEH

PostGrant Activities

- Continue building ZineCat by ingesting more metadata from more collections; build additional support documentation
- Pursue implementation funding
- Expand awareness about ZineCat
- Present on grant accomplishments at Zine Librarians (un)Conference, Summer 2024, and other professional gatherings such as the American Library Association (ALA), Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), Art Librarians of North America (ARLIS/NA), OpenCon, among other local and national gatherings.

Staff

The project team consists of project managers, participants, and a meeting facilitator.

Project managers will identify a meeting/strategic facilitator prior to the event. The payment referenced in the budget is based on the rates posted at [Aorta: Anti-Oppression Resource & Training Alliance](#).¹⁸

Following the Zine Librarians (un)Conference held at Simmons College in Boston, 2016, a subset of zine librarians brainstormed a [possible decision-making structure](#). The project managers and meeting facilitator will determine whether to build upon that proposal or start fresh at the meeting.

Jenna Freedman, Curator of the Barnard Zine Library, and Lauren Kehoe, Accessibility & Accommodations Librarian at New York University, will serve as the project managers and coordinate the grant project with input from an expert, racial and social justice-trained facilitator. Communication will occur through email, web updates, and project meetings. During the grant term, the project managers will monitor project progress, facilitate communication, and supervise project teams. Project managers, Jenna and Lauren, will contribute five percent of their work time to the project—about 80hrs each, over the course of a year.

Project participants will discuss foundational and governance decisions during the in-person meeting in New York City in Summer 2023. This group will determine how to proceed with further meetings, including engaging other stakeholders as appropriate.

- Jenna Freedman: Project Manager (Logistics) — coordinates the logistics of the meeting including securing facilities, housing, and catering. Works with the Project Manager of Communications and the Meeting Facilitator after the meeting to coordinate documentation. Jenna is the founder and curator of the [Barnard Zine Library](#) (BZL), which holds approximately 12,000 zines, including [350+ zines created under quarantine](#). She selects, catalogs, teaches with, and provides research support for the BZL. She has represented the BZL at conferences, in articles and book chapters, and zine fests. Her work has been profiled in book chapters by scholar Kate Eichhorn (*The Archival Turn in Feminism*) and commercial writer Marilyn Johnson (*This Book Is Overdue*). Jenna has been [making zines](#) herself since 2001.
- Lauren Kehoe: Project Manager (Communications) — coordinates the communication strategy (email, website, paper materials) to ensure that project participants have the information they need when they need it to meaningfully participate in the event. Works with the Project Manager of Logistics and the Meeting Facilitator after the meeting to coordinate documentation. Lauren has been a librarian since 2009. She first learned about zines while working with a faculty member in the art department at St. Joseph's College who developed a first year seminar course that included zine making. Over the last few years, Lauren has attended the Zine Librarians (un)Conference, presenting on ZineCat there and in other venues. Most recently, Lauren wrote a chapter in the American Library Association book, [Zines in Libraries: Selecting, Purchasing, and Processing](#), that provides an overview of ZineCat.

¹⁸ "Anti Oppression Resource & Training Alliance (AORTA) Rates." <https://aorta.coop/rates> Accessed 5 July 2021.

Zine Union Catalog: Shared Decision-Making

- Meeting facilitator — a skilled facilitator to lead meeting participants in a structured and scaffolded series of sessions to develop a framework for shared decision-making.
- In addition to the project managers, likely participants at the in-person event include individuals from:

Academic	Archives	Community	Digital	Public
Minneapolis College, MN San Diego State U., CA U. of Connecticut, CT	New York University, NY Sallie Bingham Center/Duke U. NC	ABC No Rio Zine Library, NY Albuquerque Zine Library, NM Denver Zine Library, CO Salford Zine Library, UK	Queer Zine Archive Project, WI Talk of the Town Library, TX	Brooklyn Public Library Salt Lake City Public Library, UT Seattle Public Library, WA

Support letters from these participants can be found in the appendix.

Because asking for project participants to volunteer time without compensation favors people who are in a position to work for free, grant funds will be used to provide stipends for project team members that continue working after the Barnard meeting.

In addition to staff, stakeholders including zine creators, other zine librarians and archivists (especially those from collection types underrepresented among the project participants), scholars, students, and people who read zines for leisure will be identified and recruited by the project participants, as needed. During the grant period, they may be invited to provide input or attend selected project meetings. Stakeholders will also be called upon during any user research or testing phases which would happen during the implementation phase of the project.

ZineCat fills a hole in archival cataloging, but it can only do so responsibly with the active and coordinated input of all the disparate stewards of zine archiving. As Dr. Jac Batey of the University of Portsmouth, UK, attests "...an internet search on 'mental health zines' returns me over 700K mixed results that I would need to check individually to assess their relevance, whereas ZineCat returns 97 specific results using the same research terms that I can trust are pertinent. ZineCat also links me to where the zines are held so I could contact that collection, it also contains the information I'd need to be able to cite the zine accurately. One of the defining characteristics of zines, that I initially was drawn to, is that they capture voices not always represented in the mainstream, and these are the thoughts and voices we are in danger of losing if zines are not saved, archived and disseminated internationally through an accessible format, such like the one being proposed by ZineCat."¹⁹.

We are grateful for this opportunity to further develop ZineCat, in service of diverse creator and user populations while adhering to the community ethos of zine librarianship.

¹⁹ Batey, Jackie. *Support Letter for ZineCat*. 3 June 2021.