

THE REVISION OF THE UNIVERSAL DECIMAL CLASSIFICATION FOR ASTRONOMY

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ABSTRACT. The Universal Decimal Classification system is widely used throughout the world for the arrangement of books in libraries and for the indexing of papers and reports as an aid to the retrieval of information. It is a comprehensive and language-independent system. The classification for astronomy and related topics (UDC 52) is used by many persons whose main interests are outside astronomy as well as by astronomical specialists. It is important that the classification be kept up to date, but the revision of UDC 52 is now overdue, as the last major revision was made in 1975 and published in 1977. It is clearly the responsibility of IAU Commission 5 to provide expert advice to the International Federation for Information and Documentation (FID) on the revision. Persons who are willing to participate in the work of revision are invited to write to the author, who is the current chairman of the relevant revision committee.

1. THE USE OF UDC 52

The Universal Decimal Classification (Robinson 1979) is a comprehensive scheme for indexing information in all branches of knowledge as a coherent pattern of interrelated subjects. It is used to control the storage of books and other documents in an orderly manner and to provide a language-independent method of describing concisely, but yet precisely, the content of any document from many different points of view. Its notation, which is based on arabic numerals that are recognised throughout the world, facilitates the international exchange and retrieval of information, while its decimal structure allows indexing to be carried out to any desired depth in any part of the schedule. UDC is widely used throughout the world, although in the USA the Library of Congress system is predominant for the cataloguing of books. UDC is maintained by the International Federation for Information and Documentation (FID), although schedules in various languages are issued by national standards organisations.

The schedule for astronomy (in UDC 52) is used in many astronomical libraries and in an even larger number of general libraries. It is desirable that the schedule be kept up to date for the convenience of all who use the system. The full schedule for UDC 52 was last published over ten years ago (BSI 1977). Since that time there have been major developments in astronomy, and so the schedule needs to be extended to cover new types of object and phenomena, new methods of

observation and new concepts. The schedule also needs to be modified to reflect our new ideas about the nature and structure of the observed universe.

2. THE REVISION PROCEDURES

The responsibility for proposing changes to the schedule for UDC 52 clearly rests mainly with Commission 5 of the IAU, although it is the responsibility of FID to ensure that such changes are consistent with the general policy and structure of UDC. Proposed changes are always circulated by FID for comment before they are adopted. The last revision with which the IAU was concerned took place in 1973-75 and concerned mainly the subdivisions 520, 521, 523 and 524; the schedules for 522 and 525 were cancelled and are now available for new uses, as is 526 since at about the same time a new schedule for 528 (Geodesy, etc.) was introduced. The schedules for 527 Navigational astronomy and 529 Chronology were left largely unchanged, although they too were also in need of major revisions. The schedule for 528 now needs further revision to take into account the development of new techniques that have revolutionised the practices of surveying and cartography in recent years. Thus, it is now appropriate to consider the whole of 52, even though the first concern of the IAU must be the updating of 520/524.

I inherited from D.A. Kemp, who was the driving force behind the previous revision for astronomy, the chairmanship of the FID Revision Committee on UDC 52. So far I have been unable to devote an adequate amount of time to this task, but I hope to be able to take it up properly in 1989. Any persons who have suggestions for improving the present schedules are invited to send them to me, but I would be particularly glad to hear from any persons who would be willing and able to assist in the detailed work of review and revision of the schedule and its index. After the last revision I drafted a handbook on the use of UDC for astronomy; but it was never published; I hope that it will prove to be useful during the coming revision and that it will itself be revised and then published.

3. EPILOGUE.

Since speaking on this topic at Washington and Baltimore I have had several offers of help from librarians, but I would be glad to hear from a few astronomers who would be prepared to make their expertise, and time, available to the revision committee.

REFERENCE

- BSI 1977. UDC 52 Astronomy. Astrophysics. Space Research. Geodesy. BS 1000[52]: 1977. London: British Standards Institution.
- Robinson, G., 1979. UDC: A brief introduction. FID 574. The Hague: International Federation for Information and Documentation. (Gratis).