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Legacy Metadata and the New Catalog

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The nature and purpose of library catalogs are rapidly changing. The future catalog will enhance users' searching capabilities with relevance ranking and provide access to book reviews and user comments. Searching the catalog may be integrated with searching citation indexes and Internet databases. A whole world of new possibilities for the future of the catalog is just around the corner.

At the same time, the contents of the new catalog are also changing. Last year, the Library of Congress released a report calling on libraries and archives to reveal more of their hidden collections—archival and special collections of unique and rare materials as well as other resources not represented by bibliographic records in online catalogs and databases (Library of Congress Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control 2008). Meeting this challenge requires an understanding of the scope of the problem and strategic planning to solve it. This article explores the nature of these hidden materials, how libraries can bring them to light, and what resources will be needed to add this content to the new catalog. Oregon State University's efforts to meet this challenge will be highlighted.

Special collections and archives contain rare and unique library materials in many formats, including print books and serials, manuscripts, photographs, locally produced audio and video recordings, and realia. Many of these items remain hidden from scholars and researchers because the metadata describing them may be difficult to locate, incomplete, or non-existent. The challenge for these repositories is twofold: create metadata so that scholars can search for these materials online, and digitize the resources so that scholars can examine them from their desktops. Digitization enables discovery of the resources as well as preservation of the originals.

The metadata for these materials may currently exist in paper shelflists and catalogs awaiting retrospective conversion. At Oregon State University (OSU), some of our rare books are likely only described in the special collections card catalog, although there are plans to convert these to MARC records in the near future. The History of Atomic Energy Collection demonstrates a slightly different situation. A catalog of the collection was published in print (Laudamus 1990), but in order to locate and use the collection, a researcher must first discover the printed catalog. In WorldCat, only eleven libraries hold a copy of this title. To resolve this problem and make the collection more visible, we have begun cataloging books in this collection, ensuring that the individual titles are accessible via WorldCat.

Special collections and archives also may have backlogs of uncataloged acquisitions. The Northwest Digital Archives project has opened many Pacific Northwest resources to the world at large. Doing their part for the project, OSU archivists have created digital finding aids to many of their collections. Some of these finding aids are for recently accessioned collections, but many are for materials that have been stored in our archives for many years. The finding aids, created in Encoded Archival Description (EAD) format, are converted to MARC records using MARCEdit and then added to WorldCat and our local catalog (and therefore also to Summit, the union catalog of the Orbis Cascade Alliance). By making these records widely available, we provide multiple avenues for researchers to discover the finding aids.

Although the projects mentioned above are moving OSU forward in making our holdings more widely known, we have a long road ahead to achieve our goal of providing



metadata for all of our titles. Many other materials owned by OSU must wait their turn for metadata creation. These include a small backlog of gift monographs (approximately a thousand titles, many of them requiring original cataloging), about a hundred monographs in Farsi, and thousands of serial titles awaiting retrospective conversion. Serials in the Linus Pauling Collection and the OSU Integrated Plant Protection Center Library also await cataloging.

The situation at other libraries is likely no different from OSU. Titles in backlogs are often similar and include various types of gray literature, such as theses and dissertations, foreign publications, and government documents. These materials often require complex and/or original cataloging. With the many demands placed on the limited number of catalogers today, these backlogs tend to be fairly static.

The scope of the problem of materials awaiting retrospective conversion is the subject of two recent studies of the *National Union Catalog, Pre-1956 Imprints* (popularly called *Mansell*). These studies have revealed that 25 to 28 percent of *Mansell* entries have yet to be represented in WorldCat and the approximately 13 million entries in *Mansell*, these studies indicate that as many as 3.6 million titles await retrospective conversion (Beall 2005; DeZelar-Tiedman 2008). Although this cataloging labor is presumably distributed among many libraries, the studies highlight the degree to which many titles are well-hidden from most researchers in today's online environment.

What will it take to reveal these hidden materials in the catalog of the future? Our libraries will need the human resources to create metadata and the equipment to provide quality scanned images. As with any project, funding will be needed to hire and train personnel to create and maintain the



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metadata. We will need library staff who are skilled and can apply their attention to detail, knowledge of cataloging rules, and experience with different metadata schemas to these valuable resources. Since these materials tend to be rare and unique, the trained individuals should have facility with languages as well as knowledge of rare book cataloging and multiple metadata schemas. The manual records of the past, when they do exist, will also need to be upgraded to current standards. Adequate staffing to handle this additional work will likely be a challenge for many libraries given the current economic situation.


In addition to creating or converting metadata, the ability to crosswalk metadata from one schema to another will also be critical. Redundant metadata allows for multiple avenues of discovery. For example, a metadata record in an institutional repository using Dublin Core metadata could be converted to MARC for inclusion in a WorldCat record. Such work requires metadata specialists with the skills necessary to create and adapt macros for metadata conversion.

There are several obstacles to fulfilling these goals. Fundraising is needed for personnel and equipment. Finding skilled catalogers has not been easy in recent years. The supply of new metadata specialists coming from library schools is limited while the number of catalogers currently employed is dwindling. Training paraprofessionals is a possible solution, although training takes time and close supervision.



Subject librarians will need to set priorities to allocate financial and human resources to those materials with the greatest significance to users.

Despite these obstacles, OSU has forged ahead on making our hidden resources more visible. As material budgets and new serial subscriptions dwindle, staff have time to devote to special projects. With training and guidance, they can tackle some of the cataloging backlogs and work on our retrospective conversion project for serials. Special collections staff occasionally requests MARC cataloging of specific titles of importance. Library school interns have helped with some cataloging projects in the past and could be helpful in the future. Digitization projects could include funding for metadata creation; such metadata could then be converted to MARC for inclusion in our catalog and WorldCat. We will continue to seek new and creative ways to stretch our resources and serve our users.

There are many rare and unique resources that are difficult for researchers to locate or use in all of our collections. The objective of including all of them in the catalog of the future will require thoughtful planning, fundraising and execution. The effort we make will enable our libraries to share the breadth and depth of our collections with the wider world. 

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