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Doing More Together: Building New Partnerships to Bring Library Services to the Unserved

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Doing More Together:

Building New Partnerships to Bring Library Services to the Unserved

Introduction

One of the parts of my job that I have always enjoyed and embraced is working at a Land Grant university. As the holder of the Gray Family Chair for Innovative Library Services, this means specifically looking beyond the needs of the organization to see how our tools and services can add and improve existing services to libraries around the state. Sometimes, this is a tough thing to do, especially when it may not be economically feasible to start new services or seek new partnerships. However, maybe it's in those times of economic hardship, when organizations are most focused on their own needs, that the mission of the land grant institution is the most important. As public and private institutions focus their scarce resources on serving their ever expanding populations, it is even more critical for land grant institutions to stand in the gaps and build partnerships with other organizations. Doing this not only makes the collaborating organizations stronger, but it provides services to those libraries that are least able to fund and support them. At Oregon State University Libraries, we embrace wholeheartedly our role as the state's land grant institution and the special relationship we have with the citizens of Oregon.

Two years ago, shortly after being named to the Gray Family Chair for Innovative Library Services, I knew that I was in a position to actively promote how OSU Libraries could play a greater role in helping to meet the needs of Oregon's unserved and underserved populations. Talking to then University Librarian Karyle Butcher and others within the state, it was clear to me that Oregon's cultural heritage organizations house a vast treasure trove of materials that are not always easily accessible to citizens within the local library community. My goal was to create a program that would place the OSU Libraries in the position of mediator to facilitate discovery of Oregon's exceptional digital collections and a partner for Oregon's cultural heritage institutions looking to begin or expand a digital preservation program. Continued discussions and encouragement from Karyle and State Librarian Jim Schepke were instrumental in shaping the program and setting realistic goals for OSU Libraries. We understood that success would depend on seeking active partnerships from many communities. To that end we looked to partner with the State Library of Oregon and the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Advisory Council to come up with a short-term and long-term plan to make these programs a reality.

Understanding the Need

For me, the impetus behind this project was a visit to the Linn County Historical Museum where I saw firsthand the exceptional local treasures being housed there. Throughout Oregon, local cultural heritage organizations like the Linn County Historical Museum tell the stories of the people of Oregon. In many cases, these cultural organizations are looking for partners to help make their collections more accessible to the world at large. For many, finding volunteers to digitize the content is the easy part of the process. More difficult is building the infrastructure needed to store, preserve and provide access to a set of digital objects. Institutions like OSU Libraries have the capacity to make that infrastructure available allowing these digital programs to flourish. In considering these programs, OSU Libraries wanted to build a model that could be used for future collaboration—a model that could be used by other OUS institutions around the state.



In 2008, the Oregon Library Association (OLA) convened a taskforce charged with creating OLA's 2020 vision statement. This statement would represent a set of core values and assumptions for Oregon libraries moving into the next decade. While the document provides a number of areas for thought, one of the primary themes that emerged from the taskforce's work was the need for further collaboration between Oregon's OUS institutions and the state's public cultural heritage organizations. The report calls out the need for Oregon libraries to "rely on dynamic professional networks—local, statewide and beyond—for resources, support and expertise (Vision 2020)." Within these shared networks, libraries will work together to share collections, extend library services and develop and share best practices, standards and technologies around the state. OLA's shared goals, expressed in the Vision 2020 document, underscore the need for libraries within the state to take a more proactive role in looking beyond their own needs and services and to focus on the shared goals of providing information services to all Oregonians within the state. The OLA Vision 2020 document is a rallying cry for libraries within Oregon to find ways to do more, and to do more together. For Oregon's seven OUS institutions, the OLA Vision 2020 document should be viewed as both a challenge and an opportunity. Oregon's university libraries have an uneven legacy of partnering with public libraries. We serve different communities with vastly different focuses. However, we share the common values of providing access to information and creating an informed population of life-long learners. These shared values offer points of collaboration if we are to come together to build shared services for all Oregonians.

Unfortunately, the needs faced within this state are great. In the January 2010 report to the Oregon State Library Board of Trustees Benchmark #38 Strategy Committee, State Librarian Jim Scheppke reported on new data from the 2008–2009 year concerning the unserved and underserved populations within Oregon. For the purpose of this report, "unserved" was used to designate individuals living outside the service area of a public library (a city, county or district), while "underserved" was used to designate those that had access to a public library, but were not adequately served by existing library services. For the years of 2008–2009, the data indicated that only 78 percent of Oregonians were currently receiving adequate library services. Since 1990, this number represents the lowest number of Oregonians receiving adequate library services. Of the remaining 22 percent, 4 percent of those individuals had no access to public library services, while 18 percent represented a large, and growing, underserved population within the state. The report underscores the fact that community library services exist within a volatile environment as local governments wrestle to adequately fund community services. This volatility recently played out in Hood River County, where the failure of a library district measure cut off library services to 21,000 residents (Zisko, 2010). Thankfully, a similar measure passed when it was voted on again last November and the Library plans to reopen this summer.

Building Partnerships

In partnership with the State Library and the LSTA Board, the OSU Libraries has been working to collaboratively address some of the issues raised by the OLA Vision 2020 document. Over the past two years, the OSU Libraries has used resources made available by two LSTA contracts to examine how Oregonians find and access digital information created by the state's cultural heritage organizations, and to find new and innovative ways to help



unserved populations gain access to content purchased on their behalf by the State Library. These two projects, the *Oregon Digital Library* (<http://odl.library.oregonstate.edu>) and the *Libraries of Oregon*, represent ongoing efforts by the OSU Libraries to work collaboratively with Oregon's cultural heritage organizations to promote library services to Oregonians.

Oregon Digital Library

<http://odl.library.oregonstate.edu>

The *Oregon Digital Library* functions much like a Web search engine for primary digital resources created by Oregon's cultural heritage institutions. Over the past ten years, a number of Oregon's libraries and museums have initiated programs to digitally capture, preserve and provide access to primary resources from their collections. These collections represent an eclectic range of Oregon's past and present, covering topics related to historic industries like fishing and logging, multi-cultural populations like the Braceros work programs of the 1960s, important historical figures, and cutting edge research being done at Oregon's universities. And yet, as these programs have developed and become rich with content, access for the general library user has become increasingly difficult. While search engines like Google and Bing index some collections, many remain poorly indexed and difficult to find. The purpose of the *Oregon Digital Library* project is to provide a unifying digital portal to Oregon's digital content, simplifying access to resources across multiple institutions.

Utilizing open protocols like the Open Archives Initiatives Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH), and previously funded LSTA development framework, Library-Find™, the Oregon Digital Library project harvests and indexes metadata from collections that support open metadata harvesting standards. The project then indexes the metadata. This allows users to find direct links to collections when they query the portal—and to retrieve primary resources from collections spanning multiple institutions.

As part of the Oregon Digital Library project, OSU Libraries also collaboratively developed two digital collections with the Oregon Coast History Center and the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center. These partnerships grew out of OLA's 2020 Vision document stating the need for better collaboration between Oregon's cultural heritage institutions. This collaboration piloted a model in which OSU Libraries made their digital production infrastructure available to the two partner sites to provide long-term preservation and access for large-scale digital collections. The partner sites supplied the personnel required to digitize and describe the documents. Over the course of the pilot, OSU Libraries ingested nearly 12,000 digital objects from its partners, providing access to these digital collections through its digital image management system. Likewise, these materials were then harvested into the Oregon Digital Library portal to promote greater access and use. The successful pilot can serve as a model for future collaboration, as OSU Libraries works to make this a permanent service offering to Oregon's heritage organizations.



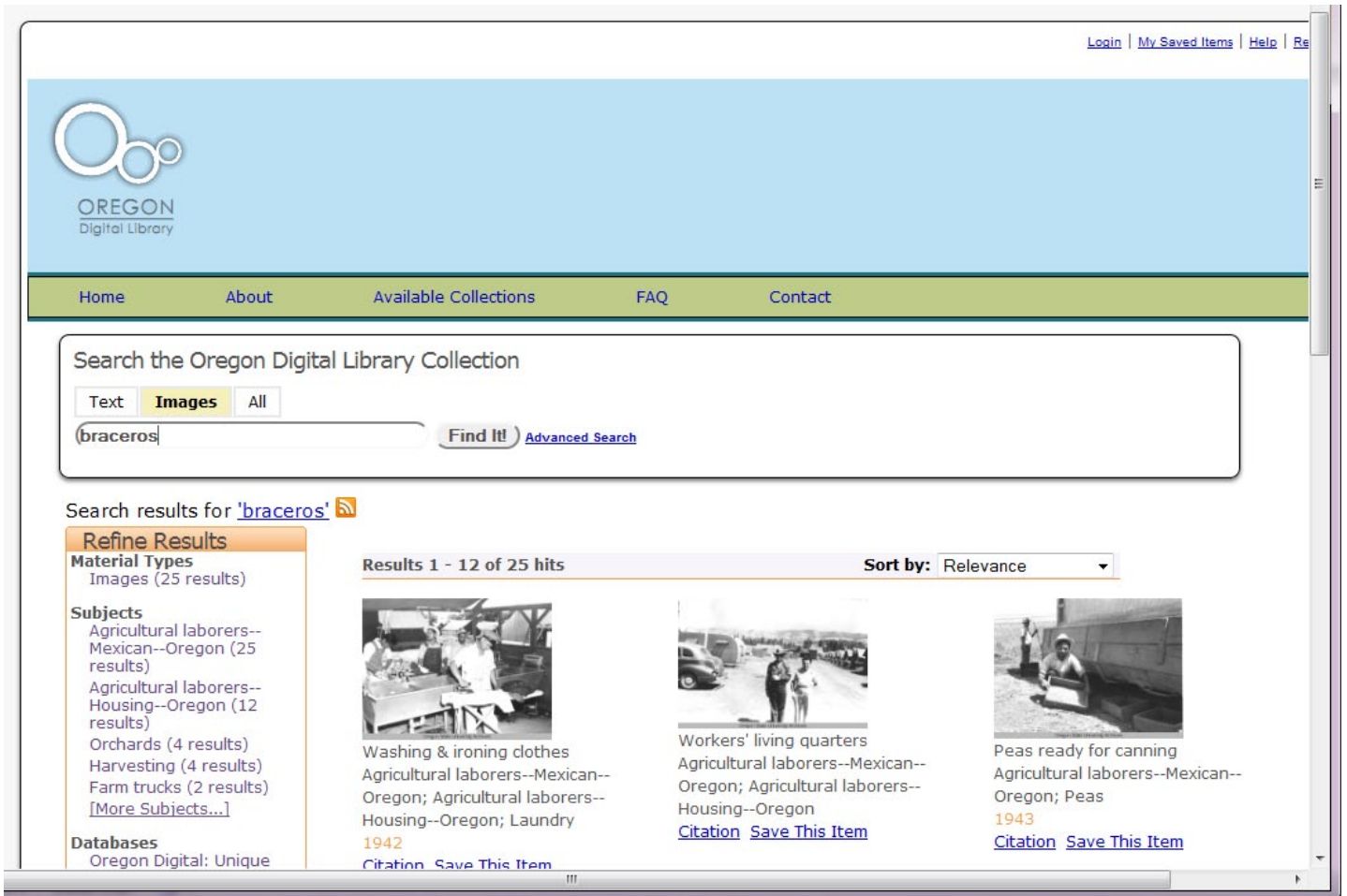


Figure 1: The Oregon Digital Library offers patrons three methods for search: Text, Image and All content.



Libraries of Oregon

Completion Date: Aug. 1, 2011

The *Libraries of Oregon* represents a new partnership between OSU Libraries and the public libraries of Oregon. The *Libraries of Oregon* project seeks to strengthen the connection between Oregonians and their local public libraries, while at the same time, reaching out to the unserved populations of Oregon and providing access to state supported library services. The project will provide quick access to Oregon's statewide services including access to: the statewide article databases, primary collections of digital photography and documents, the L-NET service, a state-wide library catalog based on OCLC's WorldCat and other resources currently provided to Oregonians through the LSTA program. Likewise, the *Libraries of Oregon* portal will serve as a clearinghouse of information, directing visitors to local libraries and providing local libraries with tools and widgets that they can utilize to interface with the *Libraries of Oregon* project. While the development of this project is geared towards Oregon's unserved population, the goal is to provide a resource that can serve all Oregonians and provide Oregon's public libraries with a rich set of tools and services to enhance their organizations.

In keeping with these goals, the *Libraries of Oregon* project will include for the first time, two new access methods relating to the discovery of materials. One of these access methods relates to traditional library catalogs. For a number of years, the State Library and the LSTA Advisory Council have sought to develop a comprehensive catalog of library holdings from around the state. Such a catalog would allow patrons to search for any item within the Oregon library network and potentially request access to the content. Up until now, efforts to create a comprehensive Oregon catalog have been stymied by ineffectual technology and an unrealistic expectation that all items would be represented. While that expectation may be unrealistic, the *Libraries of Oregon* project will provide access to a near comprehensive library catalog, utilizing OCLC's WorldCat database to provide access to library holdings from around the state. OCLC's WorldCat database was chosen as the data source primarily due to the ubiquitous nature of the resource within the Oregon library community. Will utilizing this method result in a fully comprehensive Oregon union catalog? No—but the resulting tool will provide a much closer state-wide discovery experience.


In addition to the development of a comprehensive library catalog, the *Libraries of Oregon* project has been working closely with the State Library and our statewide e-journal providers (primarily Gale) to develop for the first time, geolocated patron authentication. Presently, library patrons must go to their home library's Web site, click through a special link and enter their library patron information in order to access e-journals provided by the state. Patrons outside of a library district currently have no options available to gain access to the state-wide databases. This project is working to change that by moving authentication away from individual patron authentication, to a more robust geolocation service that will automatically authenticate any user that is within Oregon. By making these simple changes to how authentication will take place, the *Libraries of Oregon* project will provide streamlined access to all users within the present underserved and unserved populations.

The development of the *Libraries of Oregon* portal represents the first step in what I hope will be a long-term partnership with the State Library and public libraries as we continue to address issues related to the unserved and underserved populations. For example, as



more materials become available online, how do we as a community, address the lack of adequate high speed data access? In creating the *Libraries of Oregon* portal, we will be addressing this through the creation of mobile specific tools to improve the functionality of the site for cell phone users. However, more work will need to be done in this area and the areas of accessibility as we continue to move forward.

Building for the Future

As these projects demonstrate, the time is right for Oregon libraries to build strong partnership which will benefit individual libraries as well as all Oregonians. The technology to do this exists and I believe the will to do this also exists. As Oregon libraries move into the future, our success and relevancy will largely be determined by the partnerships that we develop today. These projects represent will help to build and strengthen partnerships between Oregon's academic and public library communities and provide a vehicle for these two groups to continue to work together. They not only improve access and availability to precious resources but they are a concrete demonstration to the Oregon legislature that funding and collaboration can leverage modest resources in ways that benefit all Oregonians. In tough economic times, what could be better? 

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