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Getting inside Orbis, a shared academic database for Oregon

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I magine being able to search your local library's online catalog for materials and then, with a single keystroke, repeat your search in a very large combined statewide catalog that uses the same screen menus and search commands. Such a possibility is now a reality in Oregon and is the beginning of an effort to develop a comprehensive shared academic database for Oregon which solves the problem of having to search individual libraries' online catalogs in serial fashion.

What is Orbis?
Orbis is the name of the academic union catalog consisting of the catalogs of seven public and private institutions of higher education in Oregon. This new venture, funded with start-up money by the Fred Meyer Memorial Trust, merges the databases of the libraries of Eastern Oregon State College, Linfield College, Oregon Institute of Technology, Southern Oregon State College, University of Oregon, Western Oregon State College, and Willamette University into a single, unified database. Each of those libraries uses the library automation software and hardware developed by Innovation Interfaces, Inc., for its local system. Access to the union catalog from the local system is provided by Internet connections. The ongoing maintenance cost of the system is funded in part by the Oregon State System of Higher Education and in part by the private institutions involved.

George Shipman, University Librarian at the University of Oregon and members of his staff, including Alice Allen, Andrew Bonamici, John Helmer, Nancy Nathanson and others, developed the original concept, prepared the grant request to the Meyer Memorial Trust, and provided leadership in getting the project off the ground. During the developmental phase of the project, Alice Allen was the chairperson of the Orbis Council, which consists of the library directors of the seven institutions. Staff members at the other institutions worked closely with the University of Oregon Knight Library staff on the implementation of Orbis and development of an administrative structure.

The mission of Orbis is "to support the research and scholarly programs of the participating institutions of higher education. Through the enhancement of existing library and information resources and services, the participating institutions shall provide an enriched learning environment for Oregon's academic community."

The grant from the Meyer Trust enabled the University of Oregon to purchase the hardware and software for the union catalog from Innovative Interfaces and hire staff as well as renovate the Knight Library's Technical Services Center and provide space for union catalog equipment and staff. Loading of the bibliographic data from the initial seven libraries was completed at the end of February 1995. The resulting database has over 1.4 million records for books, periodicals, sound recordings, videotapes and films, manuscript materials, etc., and is expected to grow significantly as the holdings of other libraries are added. Order records for materials are also included in the database.

The Orbis software is based on a product developed by Innovative Interfaces for the OhioLink system in Ohio. That system, one of the first of its kind in the nation, allows the libraries of twenty-one private and public institutions of higher education in Ohio to merge their collections into one very large database accessible through the Internet from their local online catalogs. In addition to listing bibliographic records and the status of each item, the OhioLink system also allows patrons to directly place orders for materials they have identified in other libraries. Although Orbis does not yet have the patron-initiated interlibrary loan circulation feature, we are currently seeking funding for it.

One major difference between the OhioLink system and Orbis is the funding method. OhioLink is a very expensive project which is wholly funded through state appropriations. In contrast, Orbis has been developed incrementally as cheaply as possible. The initial start-up cost for Orbis was less than the price many libraries have paid for their local systems. Another major difference between OhioLink and Orbis is the projected inclusion of non-Innovative libraries in Orbis.

Many academic libraries in Oregon have expressed an interest in the Orbis project. The other three public universities, Portland State University, Oregon State University, and the Oregon Health Sciences University have installed library automation systems from vendors other than Innovative Interfaces, so their participation (and full functionality) will depend in part on developing the interfaces needed. Because of the number of vendors involved, the programming work required may be complex. A number of other private and public academic libraries in Oregon have selected the Innovative Interfaces library automation software and have indicated

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A break-out session followed this discussion in which small groups were asked to come up with actions librarians could take to help keep the profession involved in the development and use of the Internet. Suggestion included:

• Develop a concept of ourselves as information consultants and facilitators.

• Market the kinds of Internet support services we can provide to the campus community.

• Encourage library schools to teach the concepts of our roles as consultants, facilitators, and marketers.

• Train students how to evaluate the information they find on the Internet.

• Educate the faculty as to the difference between their information needs and a student's needs.

Written by Charles (Oregon Coast Community College) with help from Loretta Rielly (Oregon State University) and Carolyn Gaskell (Walla Walla College).

Dull People

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you've never taken the time to visit.

"Knowing I loved my books, he furnish'd me, from my own library, with volumes that I prize above my dukedom" Tempest, Act I, Scene 2.

In these words Prospero, explaining to his daughter, Miranda, the circumstances under which they came to the deserted island on which they live, shows how a friend made his life there more bearable. These books enabled him to educate his daughter and to weave the magic spells and potions that causes the tale of The Tempest to unfold. We have booked a bloc of tickets for Friday night in the Winningstad Theater in Portland's Performing Arts Center - literally only a block away from the Hilton. The Tygres Heart company which is putting on this production have made their name performing Shakespeare in this very intimate theater - only 300 seats; so the experience will be very different from Ashland. The evening starts with a buffet supper at the Hilton at which two speakers from the Tygres Heart company will give you an insight into the company, the play, and their production. This should be a very exciting evening, so take the opportunity of being in Oregon's big city and have a night on the town!

After you've read of all these exciting offerings, and been tempted, go back to your conference packet and look for the flyers which give you full details of how to register for the tours and get to the play.

Academic Database

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their intention to join the union catalog project as soon as possible.

What is the relationship between Orbis and local library systems and how does Orbis work?
Orbis does not replace the local systems at participating libraries nor is it an unconnected catalog. Links are established between the local catalog and the union catalog which allow real-time updating of information and transactions. The interactive nature of Orbis means that when an item is cataloged and the bibliographic record posted to the local system of a participating library, the cataloging data is also automatically posted to the union catalog within seconds. It also means that when an item is checked out at a participating library, the information about the loan of the item (or its return) is automatically posted within seconds to the union catalog. Order records and holdings information for periodicals are also posted to Orbis shortly after being keyed into the local system.

Patrons can choose to search for materials in the local catalog first. If too few or no matches are found or the needed items are checked out, they can pass through the local catalog to search the union catalog by entering one keystroke. The search is repeated in Orbis without the need for re-keying the data. Patrons can also choose to go directly to Orbis and search for materials in the combined database.

Although the circulation module is not yet available in Orbis, the status of all items held by member libraries is displayed in conjunction with the bibliographic record. Patrons can use existing interlibrary loan services to retrieve the items displayed.

How is Orbis governed?
Orbis is governed by the Orbis Council which consists of the library directors of the participating institutions. Each has signed a "memorandum of understanding" contract which outlines the shared governance structure of the project and details the rights,obligations, and responsibilities of the member libraries and the University of Oregon Library (the host site).

What are the benefits of Orbis for Oregon?
The goals of the Orbis project are to support instruction and research by making it easier to search library holdings at member libraries and, importantly, to support resource sharing. As Orbis grows, it will become Oregon's equivalent of a virtual research library, easily accessible, comprehensive, and tied to a responsive document delivery program. It will also promote cooperative col-

lection development activities and serve as a vehicle for delivering more than just bibliographic records.

As Larry Oberg of Willamette University has said, "Orbis is a model of library cooperation and clearly illustrates what smaller [and larger] libraries in large geographical areas with dispersed populations can accomplish by working together." He expects it to become a national model that will be emulated in other states and regions.

What is the future of Orbis?
In order to serve the information and research needs of the State of Oregon and its citizens, Orbis needs to grow include the records for all academic libraries in the state. The first priority is to get the participation of the institutions which already have purchased or are purchasing the Innovative Interfaces library automation software. Adding them to the union catalog will be relatively easy. More problematic is the addition of academic libraries which have purchased software from other vendors. However, Innovative Interfaces has committed itself to the programming work required to make Orbis work in a multi-vendor environment.

How can I gain access to Orbis, especially if I am not a participating library?
To use Orbis, connect to any member library catalog and choose the option on the main menu or subsequent screens to initiate an Orbis session. Ten ports have been set aside on the Orbis host computer for access through the Internet by non-participating libraries. You can telnet directly to Orbis with the following address: orbis.uoregon.edu

Whom do I contact for further information?
For further information about Orbis or to make comments and recommendations, contact the University of Oregon Library Systems Department:

voice: (503) 346-3049

fax: (503) 346-3485

e-mail: libsys@oregon.uoregon.edu