Guest Editorial: RLG and OCLC: Combining for the Future

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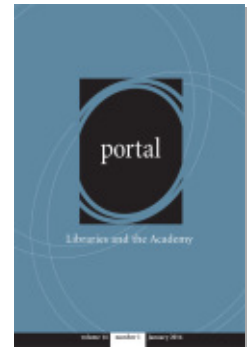
RLG and OCLC: Combining for the Future

Lizabeth Wilson, James Neal, and Jay Jordan

Introduction

On July 1, 2006, RLG and OCLC combined their organizations and resources. RLG's products and services are being integrated with OCLC's, and RLG's program initiatives are going forward in a new division of OCLC Programs and Research. In this article, the authors offer their views on the coming together of the two organizations and the prospects for the future.

The View from the Boards—Lizabeth Wilson and James Neal

In April 2005, we (James Neal, chair of the RLG Board of Directors, and Lizabeth Wilson, chair of the OCLC Board of Trustees) had a conversation. Our two organizations had been cooperating in several areas—preservation standards, CJK record exchange, and sharing of bibliographic information—for some time, but we both believed that we could do more. Was there a way for us to deepen our collaboration? Were we ready to do something bold?

Those questions set in motion a year-long exploration of issues that culminated in our recommendation in May 2006 that OCLC and RLG be brought together. Driving our discussions was a sense of urgency. We believed that we needed to create a collaborative organization for the research community that would benefit the larger information community and society. We wanted to eliminate redundancy and create more value for more institutions. Acting separately, neither of us had been as effective as we would have liked. Working together, we could better meet the needs of research libraries, museums, and archives on a global basis.

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Although both boards agreed early on that we should take urgent and united action, it was not clear how we would do so. We had much in common, but there were also significant differences. There were legal, financial, membership, programmatic, and— not least—cultural issues that we had to resolve as we moved forward in our

negotiations. Indeed, at times we faced what Walt Kelly's comic-strip character Pogo has described as "insurmountable opportunities."

Nonetheless, we pressed on. A small group of trustees from both organizations met in person or by phone or e-mail on a regular basis over those 12 months:

RLG Board
- James Neal, vice president for information services, Columbia University
- David Cohen, former vice president for arts and sciences and dean of the faculty, Columbia University
- David Ferriero, Andrew W. Mellon Director and chief executive, The Research Libraries at The New York Public Library
- Carol Mandel, dean, Division of Libraries, New York University

OCLC Board
- Lizabeth Wilson, dean of University Libraries, University of Washington
- Larry Alford, vice provost for libraries and university librarian, Temple University
- Edward W. Barry, president emeritus, Oxford University Press
- William Crowe, Spencer Librarian, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas

They were skilled diplomats and negotiators. Most of all, they were really good at keeping a secret!

Of course, the presidents and chief executive officers of RLG, James Michalko, and OCLC, Jay Jordan, and a small cadre of senior leaders of both organizations were closely involved from the onset. Their attention to detail and willingness to work together helped us overcome our "insurmountable opportunities" and were absolutely critical to our success.

On June 9, the RLG membership approved the proposal of the RLG and OCLC boards that the two organizations be combined. On July 1, 2006, our two organizations came together. There are two key components in this combination. First, RLG's online products and services are being integrated with OCLC's. Second, RLG's program initiatives are being continued as RLG-Programs. RLG-Programs will operate as a new division of OCLC Programs and Research.

Let us say a few words about RLG-Programs as it relates to the board and governance. RLG-Programs will remain a membership organization, whose participants will be referred to as partners. Partner dues will support the agenda of RLG-Programs. Partnership will be separate from OCLC membership, but we hope and anticipate that partners will already be OCLC members or see the benefits of being members in both. RLG programs will be advised by a 12-person program council comprised of the following people from the RLG and OCLC communities:

- Shirley Baker, Washington University in St. Louis
- Nancy Eaton, Pennsylvania State University
- Kenneth Hamma, J. Paul Getty Trust
- Tony Hey, Microsoft, Inc.
- Wendy Lougee, University of Minnesota

- Clifford Lynch, Coalition for Networked Information
- James Neal, Columbia University
- Carol Mandel, New York University
- Chris Rusbridge, University of Edinburgh
- Gary Strong, UCLA
- Lizabeth Wilson, University of Washington
- David Zeidberg, Huntington Library

The program council will report to the OCLC Board through a standing committee that will be called the RLG Board Committee. Initially this committee will be configured with three appointments from the current RLG Board and three from the current OCLC Board, with the chair designated from the RLG Board. The members of the RLG Board Committee are:

From RLG
- James Neal, Columbia University
- Nancy Eaton, Pennsylvania State University
- Carol Mandel, New York University

From OCLC
- Elisabeth Niggemann, Die Deutsche Bibliothek
- Jane Ryland, Internet 2
- Lizabeth Wilson, University of Washington

RLG-Programs will combine RLG's successful tradition of identifying issues and building consensus among research institutions with OCLC's research capacities and robust prototyping capabilities. The potential is enormous. OCLC and RLG staffs are working together to develop plans and strategies to integrate systems, products, and services. There is much work to be done as we complete this transition. Clearly, we are off to a great start. In the years to come, we know that we will look back and say that this was a seminal event in the history of librarianship.

Building the Future—Jay Jordan

As I have noted in many venues, the coming together of RLG and OCLC could only have happened at the board level and only through the resolve of its leaders, Lizabeth Wilson and James Neal. With the addition of RLG, we in the OCLC cooperative have gained a rich talent pool of skilled practitioners. We have also expanded our horizons in the museum and archive community. We have indeed acquired enormous potential, and now we must put that potential to work.

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I am pleased to report that the interactions between RLG and OCLC staffs throughout the transition process have been very positive. There is great mutual respect between the two teams, due in part to the fact that our staffs have worked together on important issues over the years. Uniting our teams will provide the OCLC cooperative with new

leverage in developing services and software and advancing a research agenda that will benefit research libraries and all institutions participating in our global cooperative. We have already hit the ground running in the area of standards advocacy.

Since 2000, RLG and OCLC have jointly sponsored the PREMIS Working Group, a team of 30 experts from five countries that is working toward establishing an international open-source standard for handling preservation metadata. In 2005, the group published the PREMIS Data Dictionary, which has received awards from the Society of American Archivists and the British Library.

Last May, RLG and OCLC staffs participated in a meeting in Washington, D.C. on digital registry standards attended by representatives from LIBER, the University of Gottingen, and the National Library of Portugal. The participants agreed on international standards for minimum field requirements for records.

We are just starting to integrate our services. Our goal is to make this integration happen as quickly as possible in a way that minimizes costs and user effort. We are exploring how best to merge WorldCat and the RLG Union Catalog. We have discussed this merger of catalogs with RLG members and are about to begin loading their data into WorldCat.

We are also integrating the RLIN21 online cataloging service into the OCLC Connexion cataloging service. This entails addressing functionality gaps, such as record clustering, between the two services. We have been meeting with RLG users to gather their requirements and vet possible approaches.

We will continue the SHARES resource sharing program, which enables participating institutions to agree on prices, procedures, and policies for resource sharing. RLG's ILL Manager, a standards-based system that handles borrowing and lending transactions with other interlibrary loan systems, will be merged with WorldCat Resource Sharing.

We are also migrating RLG's third party databases from Eureka to the OCLC First-Search service. We anticipate that these databases will be transferred to our technological platform by December 2006. We are also in the process of transferring RLG's image-based services—CAMIO, Trove.net, and the Archive Grid—to the OCLC data center. We are, however, maintaining the RLG office in Mountain View, California.

Our combined memberships represent a critical mass of libraries, museums, archives, and other cultural heritage institutions. Going forward, we will use this concentration of collections and resources to advance our public purposes through research, programs, and new alliances with new partners such as Google, Yahoo!, MSN, Ask, and others. We are off to a strong start.

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