Bibliographic Utilities

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Bibliographic utility is a new term used to describe the big three nonprofit library networks: OCLC, Inc., RLIN (Research Libraries Information Network), and WLN (Washington Library Network), which maintain large on-line bibliographic files and specialize in providing computerized bibliographic products and services to libraries and other information agencies. The capability for searching for specific bibliographic records, the provision and sharing of catalog data through input of new records, the adaptation or modification of existing records for individual libraries, and the production of catalogs in various formats are services provided by all three utilities, but the manner in which each service is provided differs from utility to utility. Each also provides its own unique services.

OCLC, Inc., currently serves more than 1,900 libraries, either individually or through various library networks such as OHIONET, SOLINET, AMIGOS, FAUL, etc. Through the OCLC shared cataloging system, a library may obtain individualized cataloging records in card or magnetic tape form, but the individual record is not retained in the OCLC on-line data base of master records; so it cannot be made accessible later for an individual library's catalog system. The library symbols of each library using the master record for cataloging are linked to that record, thus providing a type of union catalog of holdings for its members. OCLC now provides interlibrary loan and serials check-in services; it plans to begin experimenting with an acquisition system, perhaps as soon as next year. OCLC has no authority system but does plan to have the Library of Congress' machine-readable name authority file available for searching by the end of this year. OCLC has author/title and title but no subject searching capability.

RLIN began as Stanford University's processing system for its own libraries under the name of BALLOTS, then began to allow other libraries access to the system. Recently the entire system was taken over by the Research Libraries Group, when Stanford joined that group, and now serves as its processing facility. RLIN's cataloging subsystem is available to some 150 other libraries; acquisitions and in-process systems are currently available to Stanford libraries only. RLIN provides catalog cards to its members; it also stores participating libraries' individual catalog records for on-line access. Various libraries' records for the same title are not linked to a single bibliographic master record such as is done by OCLC; so there is no union catalog capability as yet. RLIN provides searching by author/title, title, keyword, and subject; an authority control system is being planned.

WLN began as a network of approximately thirty Washington libraries but now provides services to 120 libraries, including some in Alaska, Idaho, and Oregon and one in Canberra, Australia. Additionally, WLN offers its computer program software to other libraries or networks that have their own computer facilities and want to duplicate (not join) WLN. WLN has an on-line union catalog and can also produce Computer Output Microform (COM) catalogs for its libraries. It has an authority control system for 1.8 million authors and subject entries, with links between ALA and AACR 2 forms of entry. An acquisition system is in operation on a limited basis only and a circulation system is being planned. Author/title, title, and subject searching are possible.

RLIN and WLN have recently agreed to exchange magnetic tape bibliographic information in their data bases. Eventually they hope to be able to develop on-line exchange of information. Joint develoment of serials, authority file, acquisitions, and interlibrary loan programs are also being planned. Given the number of very large research library members, once the kinks are worked out, this interutility cooperation and possible linkup will provide formidable competition to OCLC, Inc., and put RLIN–WLN into the national bibliographic system sweepstakes.

Calendar of ACRL Events

January 20–26, 1980—ALA Midwinter Meeting, Chicago.

June 24–28, 1980—ACRL Rare Books and Manuscripts Section, International Rare Books Conference, Boston.

June 26–28, 1980—ACRL Preconference on Designing Staff Development Programs in Academic Libraries, New York City.

June 27–28, 1980—ERIC Users Preconference for Academic Librarians, New York City.

June 28–July 4, 1980—ALA Annual Conference, New York City.