Bibliographic Access at the University of Oregon: An Overview

What is bibliographic access?
Bibliographic access is the systematic description and analysis of library materials to enable people to find, select, and retrieve (physically or virtually) those same materials. Bibliographic access has traditionally been considered to be the province of cataloging departments. In reality, however, there have always been some types of bibliographic access that have been provided by groups other than catalogers: for instance, bibliographies have traditionally been provided by subject specialists and many indexes and abstracts have been provided by commercial vendors. With the explosion of new metadata schemes and new technologies, there are many possible ways of providing systematic bibliographic access to a wider range of library materials.

What is metadata and why do we care about it?
The term metadata has been used only in the past 15 years, and has become particularly common with the popularity of the World Wide Web. Metadata refer to structured data about data, the process of providing consistent labels to identify the function of different types of data within a document. In the library world, the term refers to any data used to aid the identification, description and location of library resources. Library catalogs, based on the MARC format, represent a well-established variety of metadata. Many different metadata formats now exist, some much simpler than MARC, such as Dublin Core, and others more complex, such as EAD. Although the level of detail and the labels used to characterize data differ from one metadata scheme to another, all schemes provide, to some degree, the elements needed to identify, describe and provide some level of access to the data being documented. See http://libweb.uoregon.edu/catdept/home/metadata.html for more detail about some of the different metadata schemes being developed and used today.

The concept of metadata is being widely discussed today because almost all of us use it, in some fashion, when we make documents or information about library materials available in electronic form. When someone sets up a database with distinct fields or areas to record different kinds of data, they are using metadata. Many of our user communities are developing and using their own specialized metadata schemes. We care about metadata because we need to share our expertise and develop enough common ground between the different schemes so that we can readily share the information from one system to another.

What are some of the options for bibliographic access?
Not all of the following options for bibliographic access are performed by Metadata Services and Digital Projects staff. The various options require different degrees of training for the people carrying them out and some take longer than others. Available staffing resources will always be a factor in deciding what level of access is appropriate and when it can be carried out.

- **In-house cataloging**: item-level (a detailed record describing the extent and analyzing the content of an individual bibliographic resource) or **collection level**

  Bibliographic and authority records created or edited by UO Library staff using the MARC format and loaded from OCLC into the local online catalog. These records conform to
international standards in a cooperative environment with thousands of other libraries so that libraries can share data and records and avoid duplication of effort.

- **Vendor-supplied records to be loaded into the online catalog**

  Records created by vendors using a version of the MARC format and loaded into the local online catalog. These records often follow minimal standards and generally lack authority control. The vendors will sometimes customize the data in the records, for an additional fee. Some examples are: Marcive records, Ebsco aggregator records, etc.

- **Brief bibliographic records (brief bibs) in the online catalog**

  Records created to provide immediate and temporary control of uncataloged items. Brief bibs are typically created by Acquisition staff to provide a basic level of author, title, publication information for identification purposes to which order information can be attached. These records provide some bibliographic access to items in cataloging backlogs. It is expected that such records will be replaced by fuller bibliographic records when the items are cataloged.

- **On-the-fly records**

  Records created by Circulation staff for older items that have already been cataloged but that are not yet represented by bibliographic records in the online catalog. These records contain basic author, title, and call number information to which an item record is attached for circulation. It is expected that such records will be replaced by fuller bibliographic records when the items are retrospectively converted.

- **Locally-created Web lists**

  Lists of resources displayed on a Web site, often arranged under broad subject terms. Links are sometimes provided to cataloging records or lists may be generated automatically from data in catalog records, as with many of the University of Washington subject lists. They may also exist in complete isolation from cataloging records. Such static lists are often created by systems, collection development, or reference staff independently of the traditional cataloging process and require revision of the entire document to be updated.

- **In-house databases created and maintained by local library staff**

  Computer databases available through a stand-alone computer, in a networked environment, or through a Website. Some databases may be linked to the catalog through MARC records describing the database, such as the PPPM Terminal Projects Database.

- **Finding aids**
Descriptions of archival and manuscript collections. They include a scope and content note and often a box and folder list or "inventory" of the collection. They may be in paper or electronic form. Encoded Archival Description (EAD) is the current archival standard for web-based finding aids, but they might also be encoded with HTML. A database of EAD finding aids is available at the Northwest Digital Archive at http://nwda.wsulibs.wsu.edu/

Is there a right way to provide bibliographic access to library materials?
We believe that there is no single "right" way to provide bibliographic access. Different materials require different levels of access and people from all areas of the library can contribute successfully to the effort. More effective bibliographic access can be achieved, however, when the different service and user groups approach the provision of access as a partnership. We believe that there are several ways to accomplish this and offer the following recommendations:

- Develop a set of guiding principles for all databases, finding aids, bibliographic records, etc. developed by UO Library staff.
- Develop a set of "core" elements that all databases, finding aids, bibliographic records, etc. developed by UO Library staff will contain to avoid the duplicative effort of examining the same issues over and over again. Having a set of core elements does not require one particular type of access, nor does it preclude the inclusion of additional, unique data elements.
- Share information about specialized collections of materials that need some level of bibliographic access with colleagues and information about existing databases, finding aids, records, etc. that have already been developed to provide some level of bibliographic access.
- Work towards the goal of centralized access to all library resources, through a library portal, so that users don't have to navigate through many different Web pages and links. Build on the existing strength of the online catalog, where possible. Strive towards greater interoperability.