

DRAFT- Online Audiovisual Catalogers (OLAC) Statement on OCLC's Proposed Policy for Use and Transfer of WorldCat® Records

In November 2008, OCLC announced an updated policy on the use and transfer of WorldCat records. A copy of the proposed policy and related information is available from <http://www.oclc.org/us/en/worldcat/catalog/policy/default.htm>. OCLC planned to implement the policy in February 2009, but has since decided to convene a Review Board of Shared Data Creation and Stewardship to review the policy from the membership point of view before a new policy is implemented. A summary of the online discussion of the proposed policy is available at http://wiki.code4lib.org/index.php/OCLC_Policy_Change.

OLAC has some concerns about OCLC's proposed policy for use and transfer of WorldCat records.

We do not believe that trying to control the use and transfer of bibliographic metadata is in the best interests of OCLC member libraries. As catalogers, our mission is to make information and materials findable and from that perspective, making library metadata as widely and freely available as possible would seem to be a good thing.

We don't want library data to be marginalized in the long run. We are afraid that short-term protection of bibliographic data is not in libraries' future best interests. Trying to control things too closely or put them behind walls has historically often been counterproductive. For example, one of the reasons that Encyclopedia Britannica has lost market share to Wikipedia is the ability to freely access and re-use Wikipedia's data (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reusing_Wikipedia_content). The Web 2.0 world is founded upon the principle of sharing data so others can create something new. Open source software companies make money by providing support, while the software itself is free. OCLC should seriously consider basing their approach to bibliographic data upon that model.

There clearly are costs associated with creating and maintaining bibliographic metadata and there needs to be a viable economic model to support this. If library bibliographic data is made freely available on a large scale so that it can compete in the Web environment with data from entities such as Amazon.com, organizations such as OCLC that may rely on re-selling bibliographic data for a significant portion of their income will have to find new ways to generate that income.

OCLC is an important and unique provider in the world library community. OCLC would strengthen its relationship with its members by focusing its economic model on services as opposed to treating bibliographic data as a proprietary commodity. We appreciate the services OCLC has provided to libraries and to catalogers in particular such as improvements in cataloging software and ongoing quality control work in WorldCat. OLAC has also greatly benefited from our interactions with OCLC, including OCLC's support and promotion of OLAC's work and conferences, the opportunity to provide input and receive guidance on issues related to audiovisual cataloging and OCLC's liaison work with OLAC. OCLC is also clearly looking to the future with its research agenda and looks towards product development as a potential revenue line.

The policy as written is vague and nonspecific, which means libraries have to trust OCLC and how OCLC will interpret the policy, both now and in the future. Libraries seem to have no recourse if they disagree with OCLC's interpretation of the legitimacy of a certain activity under the policy. We are particularly concerned about the constraints on development and innovation from the "reasonable use" clause in the policy, which excludes any development that OCLC interprets as discouraging "the contribution of bibliographic and holdings data to WorldCat, thus damaging OCLC Members' investment in WorldCat and/or substantially replicat[ing] the function, purpose, and/or size of WorldCat." It seems to us that enabling a variety of experiments in this vein would be beneficial for the library community in the long run.

We are also concerned about the impact of this policy on OLAC's own plans to experiment with improving access to moving images through creating and leveraging FRBR work-level records (<http://www.olacinc.org/drupal/?q=node/27>). In order to do what we envision, we would need access to bibliographic and holdings data for moving images from individual OCLC member libraries that wish to be involved in the project and also to provide some sort of public search interface to this data. It is not clear to us whether or not these things fall under what OCLC has defined as "reasonable use," although it seems to us that the library world is desperately in need of ways to provide more efficient, effective access to film and video. We emailed the OCLC Record Use Group about the implications of the proposed new policy on our project in early January, but have not yet received a response.

There are probably many other promising ideas for applications and interfaces that could be built on top of existing bibliographic data and it is not possible for OCLC, with its limited resources, to implement all of them. We, therefore, recommend that OCLC investigate ways to provide useful services to member institutions without maintaining such strict control over other uses of the bibliographic data, particularly non-commercial and research-based uses. We recommend that OCLC broaden access to library bibliographic data so that data can become a significant player in the Web world through multiple channels and so that a variety of experimental approaches using this data can be tried. We believe this path has the greatest chance for future success both for OCLC and for libraries.