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# Better Health Sciences Collections with OCLC's WorldCat

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## **Better Health Sciences Collections with OCLC's WorldCat**

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### **Abstract**

As the world's largest bibliographic database, OCLC's WorldCat has a unique value in identifying materials for building a high-quality health sciences collection. WorldCat on FirstSearch is a valuable addition to the librarian's collections development toolbox to help compensate for the cessation of the Brandon-Hill lists. The database's large size, powerful keyword search feature, currency, and the ability to highlight important information through OCLC's FirstSearch interface all contribute to its usefulness in collections development. Several pilot projects and ongoing research in open access, "work-based" record design hold much promise for increased versatility.

Keywords: OCLC, WorldCat, FirstSearch, collection development, gray literature, open access

### ***INTRODUCTION***

Health sciences librarians who remember OCLC from library school as "mostly for cataloging and ILL," are encouraged to take another look. WorldCat's OCLC is the world's largest bibliographic database with 58 million records, and can be used as an invaluable resource for building better health sciences collections. No longer MARC-based, WorldCat was moved to a new, more flexible new platform in April 2004, where its enormous size and large number of searchable fields may be used more effectively to select appropriate, high-quality titles for health sciences collections. WorldCat, also known as the "OCLC Online Union Catalog," helps fill the gap left by the demise of the Brandon/Hill lists, the "gold standard" in collection development for the past forty years (Brandon/Hill). Several interfaces may be used for searching WorldCat, but this article will focus on using WorldCat on FirstSearch for identifying and adding health sciences materials to collections.

## ***AVAILABILITY***

OCLC's subscription-based WorldCat on FirstSearch is particularly useful for library collection development, since it is designed for online reference use, in contrast to OCLC Connexion, which is marketed primarily for cataloging, and Open WorldCat, which accesses only a subset of the WorldCat database and is targeted primarily to end users. Many libraries already subscribe to WorldCat on FirstSearch through a state library network or regional consortium, and may use it for reference, title selection, and other non-cataloging uses without incurring hourly or per-use charges. The Kentucky Virtual Library, for example, has placed WorldCat on FirstSearch at the fingertips of all Kentuckians with Internet access; librarians without institutional access may obtain a password through a local public library.

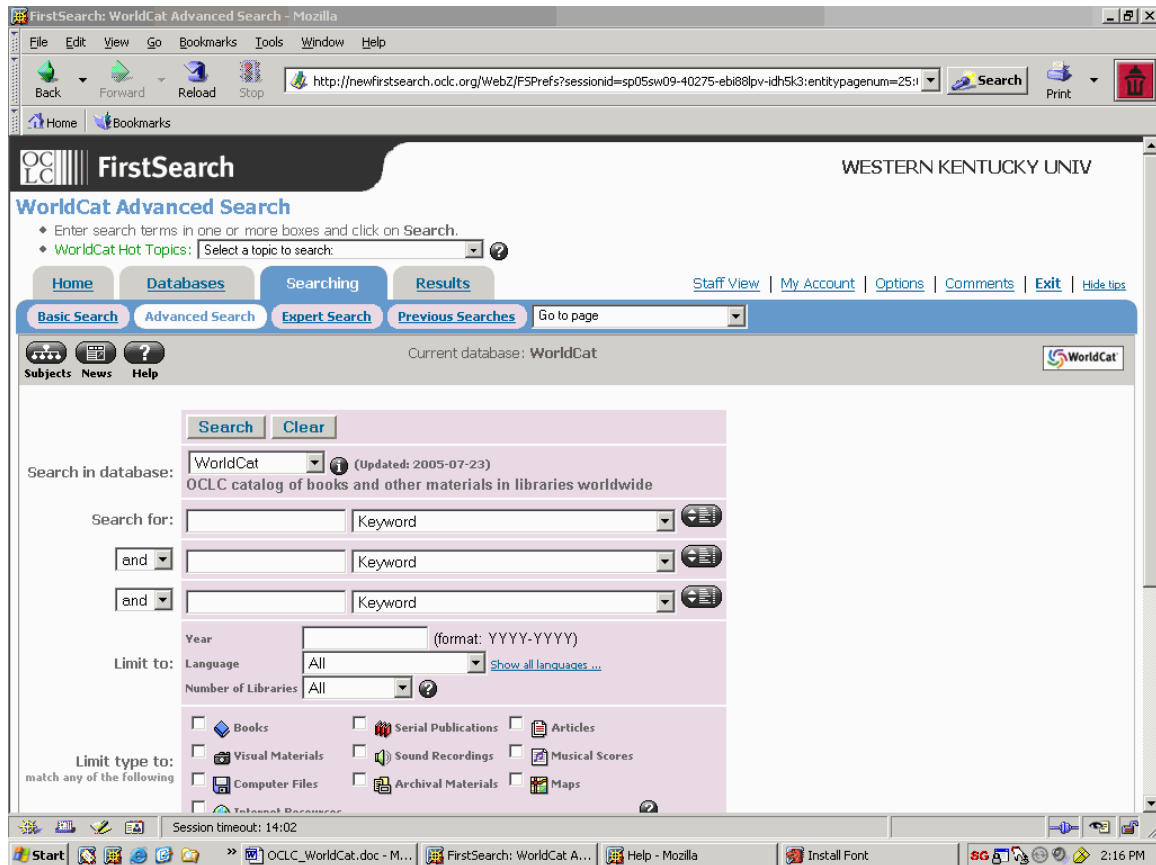
## ***SEARCH FEATURES AND COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT***

### ***Search levels***

WorldCat on FirstSearch offers three search levels, "basic," "advanced," and "expert." The "advanced" and "expert" levels are most useful for librarians using WorldCat for title selection, because the search screen enables the user to limit by document type, audience, content, and format. The librarian using the "advanced" or "expert" level may quickly limit a search to nonfiction works, "not juvenile," or works with specific publication dates. Western Kentucky University's FirstSearch defaults to "advanced," which is the intermediate level. The "advanced," in contrast to the "expert" screen, offers multiple search boxes for greater ease in adding search terms (see Figure 1). The "expert" search level enables the user to browse indexes such as personal and author names and

phrases, Library of Congress (LC) and National Library of Medicine (NLM) call numbers, and Medical Subject Headings (MeSH).

FIGURE 1 WorldCat on FirstSearch Advanced Search Screen



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### ***Keyword Searching***

WorldCat on FirstSearch, unlike some older versions of OCLC, is easy for the non-cataloger to use. Its intuitive interface may quickly be grasped by Google and Yahoo! Users. The most powerful and versatile feature of WorldCat on FirstSearch is the newly enhanced keyword search; entry terms are searched in the geographic indicators, extended title notes, subject, and author fields. A keyword may be used as an entry term

to locate valid LC Subject Headings or MeSH. If the keyword is part of a heading or subheading, it is highlighted in yellow and the user may click the hotlink for the desired heading to find related items. If the keyword found in the title or other searchable fields is not a valid subject heading, the user may click “related subjects,” to see a list of relevancy-ranked related headings and select items of interest. Search terms may be truncated or combined by proximity or Boolean operators.

### ***Search Results***

In addition to being easy to use, WorldCat on FirstSearch highlights important information in the list of results. A visual cue beside each record denotes the physical format of the item (a picture of a book, a set of serials, a globe for the World Wide Web, etc.). In some other OCLC interfaces, information about the format is more difficult for the non-cataloger to interpret. The default ranking of the results list is by “Number of libraries,” so that important titles held by a large number of participating libraries and of interest to a large number of users display first. If the host institution is an OCLC participating library, a visual cue appears by each record in the results list to indicate ownership of particular items.

Within each record, a complete list of holding libraries may be viewed, with holdings information for local libraries displayed first. The full name of all holding libraries is given, so that the user can identify quickly all participating libraries that have cataloged the title. At a participating library, the FirstSearch user may click the library name to link to the local OPAC to see how many copies of a work are already owned, where they are located, and whether they are checked out; this information might be used to help determine whether additional copies are needed.

### ***Comprehensive Coverage***

WorldCat on FirstSearch has several other attributes that are especially important for health sciences librarians. First, it is comprehensive. OCLC's 53,000 participating libraries hold multiple editions, works by obscure publishers, older materials, and non-print formats. This comprehensiveness is vital when locating works on highly specialized medical topics. Second, WorldCat is timely. LC prepublication data appears promptly, giving a "heads up" on forthcoming titles so that materials in rapidly changing medical fields may be acquired before they are seriously out of date.

Furthermore, WorldCat on FirstSearch includes multiple access points – subject and geographic access is especially helpful in pinpointing subspecialties and health care practices specific to a geographic area.

Finally, WorldCat's most invaluable feature for collections development is that it is produced by a nonprofit library cooperative and one may use the judgment of other librarians as to what is most useful to acquire.

### ***Useful Selection Tools***

WorldCat helps fill the void left by the discontinuation of the Brandon/Hill Selected lists. The Brandon/Hill lists served as comprehensive selection tools for medicine, nursing, and allied health print journals and books. The nursing list ceased after its 2002 edition, and the medical list and allied health list were discontinued after the 2003 editions, following the death of Alfred Brandon and the retirement of Dorothy Hill, the original list compilers.

Health sciences titles are expensive, and wise choices are even more important than when the Brandon/Hill lists began in the 1960s. Price increases have been staggering.

The average Brandon-Hill nursing book title cost \$13.67 in 1965 and \$49.55 in 2002; the average nursing journal title cost \$21.21 in 1979 and \$169.66 in 2002. The average medical book title cost \$15.00 in 1965 and \$132.19 in 2003, and the average medical journal title cost \$13.90 in 1965 and \$391.92 in 2003 (Brandon Hill).

Several other tools have been suggested as possible replacements including Doody's, Web sites of book distributors such as Rittenhouse and Majors, and various specialized bibliographies. However, none of these rivals WorldCat in versatility and sheer size for librarians who want to know "what is out there."

### ***Hard-to-Locate Materials***

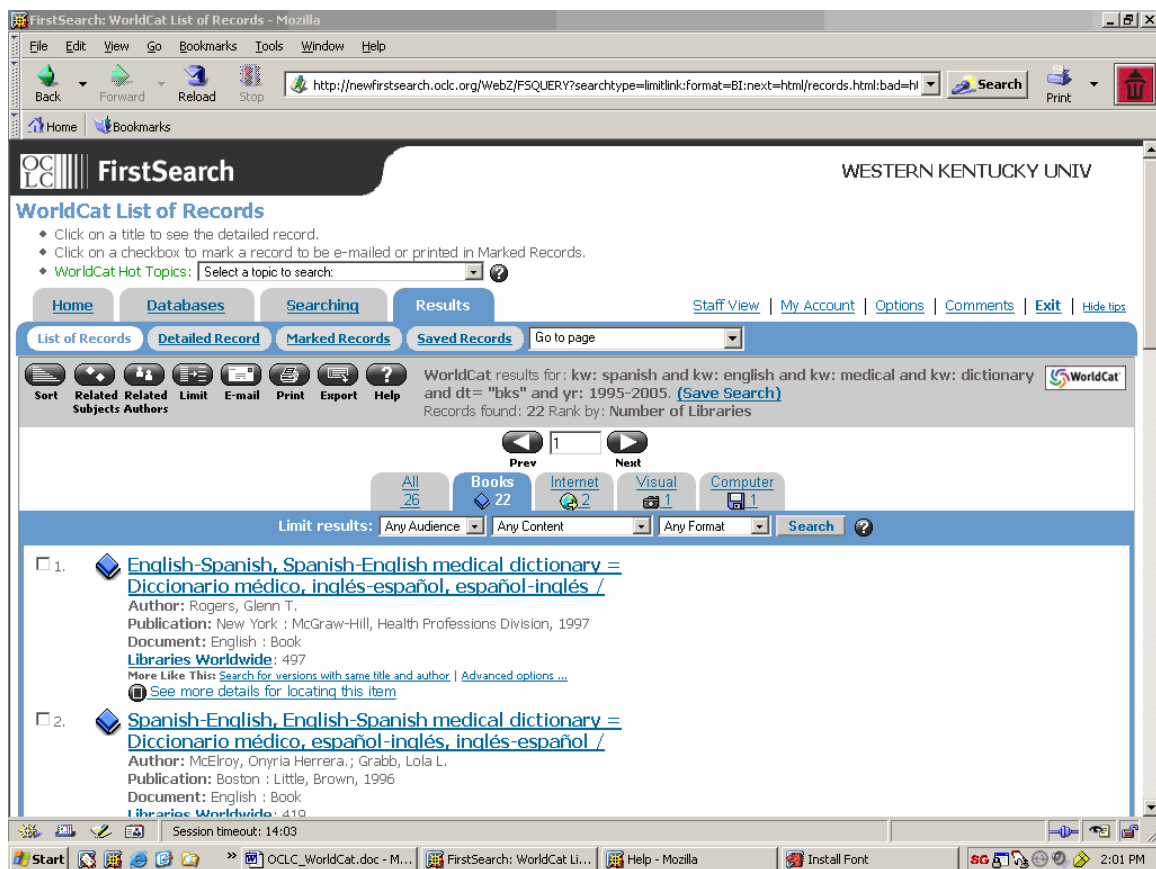
The health sciences field has been particularly hard-hit by the "scholarly communication crisis," with the proliferation of expensive, hard-to-locate materials. Frequent publishing mergers and takeovers add to difficulties faced by librarians. For example, the 2004 merger of Springer and Kluwer resulted in the relocation of many titles to a joint Kluwer-Springer Web site so that titles were hard to find using the library's existing links. *Prevention Science*, for example, was formerly published by Kluwer; WorldCat on FirstSearch (OCLC record #46479930) contains a link to the current location of this title on Springerlink at <http://www.kluweronline.com/issn/1389-4986>

### ***Widely Held Titles***

WorldCat can be used to sort through a huge list of choices to find one or several titles on a given subject that might be especially desirable. To do this, the user looks at the first few titles in the results list from a WorldCat subject search. The most widely-held titles display first. Of course, popularity does not always equal quality, but a large number of holding libraries means that many librarians have added the title to their collections. In

the health sciences, such a search should usually be limited by publication date, since the rapid rate of change in this field means that many titles soon become outdated. The user may click live links in the result list to expand the search. For example, the librarian might search for a Spanish-English medical dictionary published in the last ten years. (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2. WorldCat Search Results for Spanish-English Medical Dictionaries, 1995-2005



Or, one might look for the fifty most widely held pediatric nursing titles published in the last five years to check for key titles that should be ordered.

### *Grey Literature*

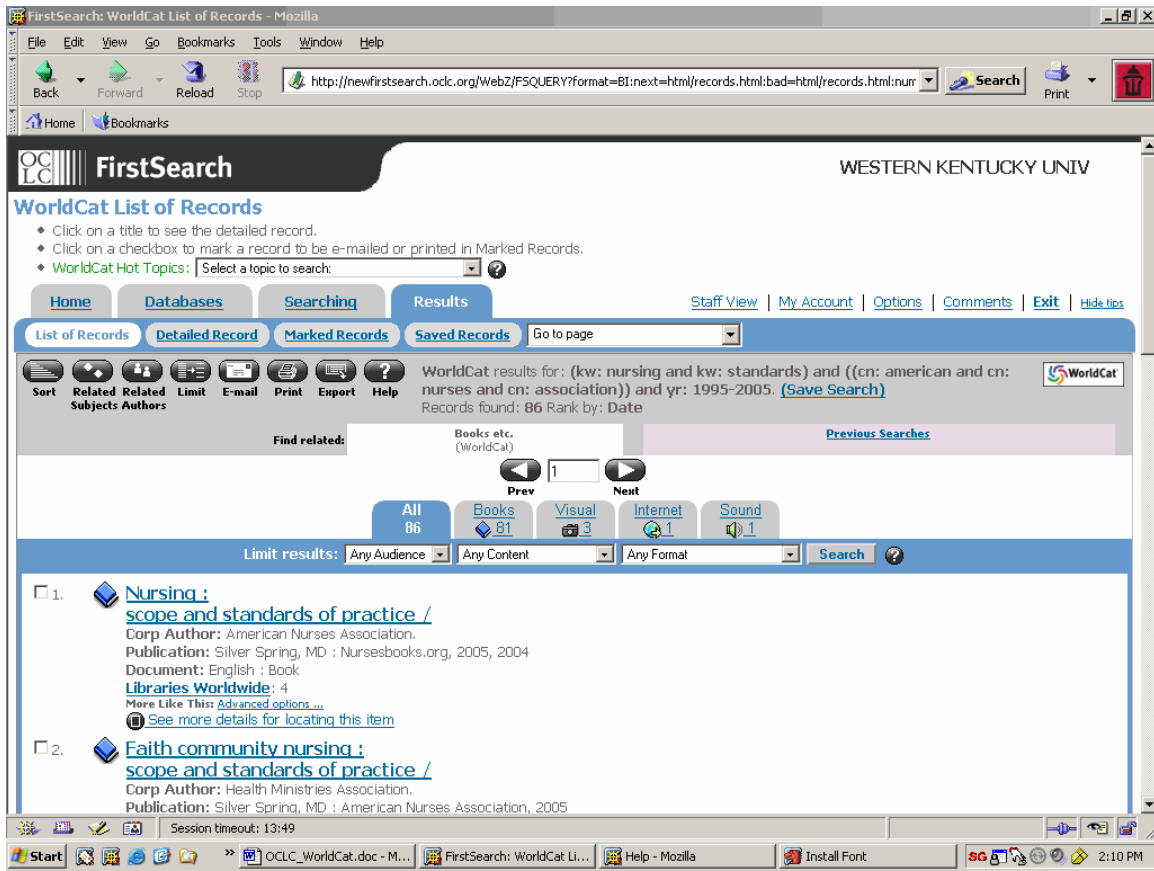


WorldCat is also useful for searching for obscure items such as “grey literature” (i.e., research reports found in resources other than traditional, peer-reviewed publications), historical materials, and professional association standards. For example, The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation publishes many reports of public health interest. A librarian might enter the keywords, “Kaiser Foundation” to locate this foundation’s reports.

As another example, the keywords “Frontier nursing service” could be used to produce a list of materials about the Frontier Nursing Service (many of which are older and might be ordered from an out-of-print book dealer).

As a final example, the search terms “Nursing standards” would identify standards of nursing practice that have been published by a professional organization and cataloged by member libraries (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3. Search Results for Nursing Standards Published by the American Nurses’ Association, 1995-2005, Sorted by Date.



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### *Collection Development Decisions*

WorldCat can also help the librarian decide if an unfamiliar title is worth adding to the collection. If a publicity flyer or gift book is received, should the title be bought or added? Suppose the title, *Living with stroke, a guide for families*, published by Richard C. Senelick in 1999, is donated as a gift to the library. Is this the latest and most current edition? How many and what kinds of libraries have added it to their collections? If it is held mostly by public libraries, it might be most appropriate for laypersons. If it held by public, university, and special libraries, then other librarians might view it as suitable for both popular and scholarly use. If the title is held by few libraries or no libraries, it might be of uncertain quality and the librarian should investigate further before adding it to the

collection. A search of WorldCat on FirstSearch reveals that the 1999 edition of Senelick's book is widely held, but it is not the latest. The librarian might consider rejecting this gift book and ordering the later edition instead.

### ***Different Formats***

WorldCat on FirstSearch is also useful in searching for items in a specific format. For example, an instructor wishes to find a movie relating to AIDS on DVD. The tabs at the top of the results list may be used to select items in a specific format. If "visual" is selected, a list of audiovisuals appears and "DVD video" identifies those in DVD form. Audiovisuals are often produced by obscure companies, and WorldCat is extremely useful in identifying them.

Identifying the e-journal counterpart to a print journal title is often challenging to the health sciences librarian; the e-journal must often be licensed from a different source than the print title. WorldCat contains many useful links from print health sciences journal records to e-journal Web sites. For example, OCLC record #1743347 for *The American Journal of Nursing*, held by 3186 member libraries, includes a link to a partially fee-based Web site where full-text articles may be viewed (see Figure 4)

FIGURE 4. WorldCat Record for *The American Journal of Nursing*, with Link to Online Version.



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### *Special Features*

Since WorldCat has been unchained from the MARC format, many nontraditional features may be found in OCLC records. Many records contain cover art, helpful in visually identifying a particular title and gaining an overall impression of a book's design. Detailed tables of contents are included for many titles, so that the librarian can see whether a book might address issues of particular local interest. Many records contain links to sources of online full-text, including NetLibrary if the host institution is a subscriber. Links to non-library web sites, including booksellers, general search engines,

reviews, and the like, are also included; some may be turned on and off in the administrative module at the discretion of the individual library.

### ***Government Documents***

WorldCat is also a “gold mine” of information on free and low-cost publications of the U.S. federal government. It provides quick access to print materials and, increasingly, gives easy access through a PURL (persistent URL link) to free online publications such as statistical publications, reports, hearings, and consumer health brochures. The PURL link acts as a “pointer” that directs the user to the currently active URL, so that users without immediate access to the print copy can easily link to the document online from the institution’s OPAC. For example, the record for *Health United States* includes a link to <http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS2649> to allow researchers or students to link to the latest annual edition.

A keyword search for the name of a specific state, when linked with a subject search, can be a powerful way to verify the existence of hard-to-locate state-specific materials (Watwood, 2004) . For public health, in particular, many crucial resources may be accessed free of charge on federal and state government web sites such as the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) at <http://www.cdc.gov/> and linked to library OPACs and other library finding tools.

### ***OTHER WORLDCAT INTERFACES***

Are other WorldCat interfaces designed for cataloging and other uses suitable for collection development? A new version of OCLC’s Windows-based Connexion cataloging client, released recently, has some of the same advantages as FirstSearch (true

keyword searching, Boolean operators, and the ability to enter multiple terms with a single index label) (4), but the Connexion interface is designed primarily for cataloging.

### ***OPEN ACCESS***

Is there an “open access” route to WorldCat records that may be used by librarians without access to FirstSearch? For the present, the answer is “no.” In the future, open access to WorldCat records through Open WorldCat may supplant some of the uses of WorldCat on FirstSearch. The Open WorldCat project links OCLC records to non-library web sites. Records for widely held items are being added to Yahoo! and Google. Other partner sites include Abebooks, Alibris, the Antiquarian Booksellers’ Association of America, Biblio, BookPage, and HCI Bibliography. In the Open WorldCat Pilot, a subset of 2 million records for widely held items has been pulled from WorldCat and “opened” for free access to users of Yahoo! and Google in order to guide users of these popular search engines to library-owned materials. Initial reviews of this pilot project have been mixed. The underlying idea is promising, but search results are inconsistent and library records tend to get “buried” in multiple pages of results. Targeting library records for retrieval may require a special syntax that is non-intuitive to the average Google or Yahoo! User (5).

These search engines are not yet effective as a good way to search WorldCat records, particularly for health sciences books, which tend to be less widely held than popular novels. If Google or Yahoo! Must be used, several “tricks” may make access easier. For Yahoo! Users, a toolbar featuring one-step access to WorldCat records using a clickable icon may be downloaded from the OCLC web site

<http://www.oclc.org/toolbar/default.htm> .

For Google users, library results are more visible on the Google Scholar beta “scholarly research” subset. For example, a search of Google Scholar at <http://scholar.google.com/> for the topic “health statistics United States” includes widely-held books on this subject in the results list. Clicking on the Library Search link for these records directs the user to the closest OCLC member library that holds the title. Continued “open access” through Yahoo! And Google may also depend on developing a good funding model that does not “tax” participating libraries to subsidize free access by others (Quint, 2005).

### ***COLLECTION ANALYSIS***

A promising new service is OCLC’s subscription-based WorldCat Collection Analysis, which debuted in 2005, and can produce charts and graphs analyzing library collections by institution, group, year, subject, etc. In some ways this service is a large-scale, formalized version of the title selection methods described in this article. Many libraries can produce such customized reports themselves or obtain them from a book distributor, but librarians interested in such an analysis can see a preview at <http://www.oclc.org/collectionanalysis/onlinedemo.htm>.

For all its versatility in non-cataloging uses, however, WorldCat on FirstSearch still recalls a phrase used by Tennant in describing the library OPAC: “an interface only a librarian could love” (Tennant, 2005). According to OCLC vice president for research Lorcan Dempsey, Google and Amazon are so popular because they “squeeze as much value as they can from the data they have.” He goes on to say that in order to broaden OCLC’s appeal, “we need increasingly to think about how we want to use data programmatically” (Dempsey, 2005).

To fully unlock WorldCat's rich storehouse of information for collections development and other uses may require a radical redesign. Ongoing research by OCLC, RLG, and other vendors gives a tantalizing glimpse of future possibilities for nontraditional use of databases originally developed for cataloging. One promising model uses IFLA's 1998 *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records* (FRBR) to group OCLC records for a "work-based approach" that reduces scattering of records for a particular work and gives greater weight to key resources (Dempsey, 2005). A screen shot of a sample "work-based" OCLC record may be viewed .

RLG's RedLightGreen is Open WorldCat's counterpart, and is the one of the first "library production" databases to use the FRBR model (Mattison, 2005).

RedLightGreen's unique record structure may be viewed at <http://www.redlightgreen.com/> , but its lack of ability to highlight the most useful information and to link to other systems both limit its usefulness as a reference database for librarians.

### ***CONCLUSION***

Begun in 1971, WorldCat is still very much a "work in progress" in its increasing usefulness for non-cataloging purposes such as collection development. For health sciences librarians, WorldCat's FirstSearch "public services" interface fills an important role because of its versatile keyword search capability, the sheer size of WorldCat, the ability to highlight important information, the currency, the coverage of government documents, "grey literature," obscure publishers and non-book formats, and the inclusion of non-traditional features. Several exciting initiatives, such as open access and the potential development of an FRBR conceptual or "work-based" rather than a "cataloging



record” format, hold much promise in unlocking the rich data store of WorldCat for more diverse uses.

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