To: Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA

From: John Attig, ALA Representative

Subject: Serials and changes in mode of issuance: Is a new description always needed?

ALA thanks the ISSN Network for this discussion of issues relating to changes of mode of issuance. ALA agrees that this issue deserves further consideration and encourages the ISSN Network to develop a revision proposal.

We offer the following comments from ALA reviewers:

- I can certainly understand the point of view of the ISSN International Centre on this matter. Given the use of the ISSN as an identifier, the issuance of a new ISSN to the same (reorganized) content would have ramifications for all the systems that incorporate the ISSN in their own system of identifiers, such as the DOI and OpenURL, potentially spawning a cascade of broken links.

  As to whether a change in the mode of issuance occurs at the manifestation level or the expression level, I suppose it would depend on the effect the change has on the content. If a journal is reconfigured as a database of articles, but all the articles from the original online issues persist in the database, my inclination would be to treat it as a reconfiguration of content in the same manifestation. Another manifestation might retain the original organization in issues while presenting current content as independent articles. With the proliferation of "online first" articles that are integrated into issues after the fact of publication, we're already living in such a world to some extent. The organization into issues is in some ways merely a display convention. In fact, I could imagine an online journal that was organized primarily by the subject of the content but could reconfigure itself into issues for those more comfortable with that arrangement, simultaneously an integrating resource and a serial.

  I remember the old ISDS Register in microfiche used to exist in this sort of in-between "Schrödinger's Cat" sort of state. Each microfiche "issue" comprised two discrete parts: (1) a set of the most recent new and amended records for the ISDS database (added to the end of the existing base file) and (2) a set of cumulative indexes to the same, with each entry in an index pointing to the latest version of a given record in the base file. It arrived as a serial but became an integrating resource in practice.

  So I guess I would say

  1. A change in mode of issuance is typically a manifestation-level phenomenon, since the content, in the words of the Working Group on Aggregates, remains "substantially the same"

2. At least in cases such as I've described, the appropriate treatment for the bibliographic record is an amendment of the existing description rather than a new description (and consequently a new record)

- We have some concerns about not making a new description when an electronic serial becomes an electronic integrating resource. If you keep the old description when the mode of issuance changes, and then the integrating resource undergoes a major title change, the original serial title could be lost completely. In essence that serial then has latest entry cataloging, instead of successive entry cataloging.

- I can see the value of not treating a change in mode of issuance as a major change for online resources, but I have my concerns about print resources. There are very many updating loose-leaf publications in the legal world that have been changing to print serials. They seem like different things that would be hard to describe on one record. LC's response makes some good points about the issues that would have to be considered before such a change is made.