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Legacy Government Documents Collections in the Digital Age

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tialities of the WCA mirrored those identified previously by Lucy E. Lyons with regard to WCA's predecessor, OCLC's Automated Collection Assessment and Analysis Services (ACAS). Lyons noted the necessity of performing manual sorts in order to make ACAS's categories meaningful to local institutions.⁶ This holds true for the WCA as well; in many of our analyses we found it necessary to disregard holdings in business, medicine, and government documents in order to account for the different ways in which institutions catalog these collections. Furthermore, the WCA subject categories remain inflexible and often less than useful, such as when philosophy is conflated with religion.

At the decision-making level, however, several limitations prevent WCA from being useful as a research tool for large collection management decisions. Lyons noted that ACAS "presents a huge slab of marble from which to sculpt, with the correct tool, an impressionistic (at worst) or realist (at best) shape of monograph collections."⁷ Lyons's analysis included examinations of collection size, age, growth, title overlap, and uniqueness, all capabilities touted by the WCA, despite no significant improvement over ACAS. Our experience with WCA suggests to us that its broad release was premature, and that the tool ultimately leaves tremendous room for improvement in meeting current and emerging assessment needs.

Where to Go From Here

No librarian can deny the competitive component of some collection analyses. Institutions must often pit themselves against their peers in

obtaining grants and other funding, attracting faculty, building a reputation in a field, and so on. Yet, a narrative of cooperation undergirds modern librarianship, and grows increasingly vital in these times, when ratios of collection budgets to potential acquisitions seem particularly vexing. Even aside from organized cooperation, collection managers must consider the greater contexts within which they are developing collections.

The inadequacies pointed out about this tool, as well as those previously reported with regard to ACAS, need to be taken seriously. The sorts of analyses librarians need for print monograph collections should already be within the reach of a tool such as WCA. Furthermore, as electronic collections grow, newer issues even now arise. As WorldCat now stands, no database built upon its foundation would likely answer many of the questions posed regarding networked resources, including issues of "ownership" versus access, relationship to physical versions, and how to quantify electronic content for comparison in meaningful ways (neither "file size" nor "number of volumes" is sufficient). AACR2 itself lacks a vocabulary for addressing the licensing terms vital to understanding e-collections.

The particular challenges of electronic resources aside, we need a tool robust enough to help selectors consider the multiple concentric and/or overlapping circles of ownership and access. Especially in these times of lower print materials budgets and relatively greater bibliographic visibility, the question of "what do we own?" often precedes such questions as "what does my consortium provide?" and "what is available in my region?" Hopefully, librarians do not in vain anticipate

more flexible and dynamic tools to evaluate collections across institutional boundaries. Building superior research collections in today's world, let alone tomorrow's, already demands as much.

Endnotes

1. "WorldCat Collection Analysis Tool Now Available," 11 March 2005. Retrieved 13 July 2006 from <http://www.oclc.org/news/releases/20054.htm>.
2. The "Google Five" are the first universities which agreed to have the holdings of their libraries scanned for Google's Book Search project. They include Harvard University, the University of Michigan, the New York Public Library, Stanford University, and Oxford University. Since this research was conducted, the University of California has also joined this project. "Google Book Search Library Partners." Retrieved 5 September 2006 from <http://books.google.com/googlebooks/partners.html>.
3. "WorldCat Collection Analysis Tool Now Available," 11 March 2005. Retrieved 13 July 2006 from <http://www.oclc.org/news/releases/20054.htm>.
4. "Endeca at the NCSU Libraries," 13 January 2006. Retrieved 3 August 2006 from <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/endeca/>.
5. Subscription information for this LISTSERV is available at: <https://www3.oclc.org/app/listserv/>. Since this writing, OCLC has reported via the list that the three "bugs" causing this problem have been fixed, but this has not yet been tested.
6. Lucy E. Lyons, "A Critical Examination of the Assessment Analysis Capabilities of OCLC ACAS," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* (2005), 31(6), 506-516.
7. Ibid., p. 516.

Legacy Government Documents Collections in the Digital Age

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In the summer of 2004 the Dean of Libraries at Montana State University formed a Government Information Futures Task Force to thoughtfully consider the future of government information in the Renne Library, a selective depository. The overarching working assumption was that government information is and will continue to be a valuable and critical information resource. However, given the dramatic changes taking place with how government information is distributed by the government to both libraries and the public, along with physical space constraints in the Renne Library, and the evolving expectations of our students and faculty, it was felt that a serious assessment of our documents collection was in order to evaluate how best to meet the needs of our current

and future patrons. This paper details some of the Task Force's findings and recommendations that may be useful to other libraries engaging in a similar exercise.

Collections of government documents in libraries have always had unique characteristics which distinguish them from everything else in a library's collection. They are typically shelved together, separate from the rest of the collection. Usually they are classified according to the Superintendent of Documents Classification System (SuDocs), which classifies by issuing government agency rather than by subject. Additionally, many libraries have separated documents into their own departments within the library, complete with unique reference desks and specialized documents librarians, and in some cases, their own circulation desks. All too often, large portions of documents collections are not represented in a library's OPAC,

or if they are, they may only be cataloged at the series level. Consequently, assessing a government documents collection presents its own unique set of challenges. This situation is complicated by the fact that currently most government information is being made available to libraries only in a digital format, and very few tangible items are being added to legacy collections. This proliferation of electronic government documents, which are stored on disparate servers throughout the government, means that a library's tangible document collection itself is likely to cease growing. Many of the titles taking up precious space on the shelves could be replaced by simply providing access to copies freely available online: not an easy decision because one always wonders if the online copy will continue to remain readily available. It is, and will continue to be, impos-

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sible to assess tangible government documents collections without carefully considering what is available digitally.

The **Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP)** is a partnership which has existed between the **Government Printing Office (GPO)** and participating libraries — called depositories — for over a century.¹ Its objective has been to bring documents to the people by placing **GPO** publications in depositories. Libraries did not pay to participate in the program and received the publications for free; however, there were substantial costs involved in being a depository associated with processing, housing, and providing access to documents collections. Until the advent of the Internet, depositories were the primary — and often only — place that citizens of the United States could obtain access to substantial collections of government information. This partnership provided benefits to both parties: the government had a forum in which to make documents freely available to the public, and libraries were able to add to their collections without having to purchase the materials. Currently there are approximately 1,250 libraries participating in the **FDLP**. These are divided into two types: regional depositories and selective depositories. There are approximately eighty regional libraries; these are institutions which have agreed to take absolutely everything that **GPO** distributes, and to keep it in perpetuity; they are very large collections typically at research universities. Selective depositories have been allowed to choose which publications they wish to receive, and are only required to retain the materials for five years (although many do keep most of what they receive). Selective depositories vary in size from very small serving a very specific constituency — such as a small public library or law school — to large research universities.

The **FDLP** is currently at a crossroads. The **GPO**, under the leadership of **Public Printer Bruce James**, has announced in its *Strategic Vision for the 21st Century*² that it plans to focus the **FDLP** on digital content management. The **GPO** has been for more than a decade now moving towards making its publications available to both depositories and the general public in electronic format rather than distribution of tangible items; however, there has also been a dramatic drop in tangible items being sent to libraries over the past few years, and every indication points to this trend continuing. The Superintendent of Documents announced at the **American Library Association's Midwinter** meeting in January of 2005, that with the exception of approximately one hundred of the most essential titles, printing and distribution of tangible items would cease completely by the end of the **GPO's** fiscal year 2005 (October); this has all but come to pass.³ Libraries would be wise to plan for an environment in which virtually all government information in the future will be digital in nature and tangible receipts will essentially cease with the exception of core titles such as the *U.S. Code* or *Code of Federal Regulations*.

The **GPO** is also in the planning phases of developing a **Future Digital Content System (FDS)**.⁴ Its primary purposes will be: to ensure version control; to verify that digital content within the **FDS** is authentic or official; to preserve information over time for use in its original form or some other verifiable, usable form (to address concerns regarding permanent public access to official U.S. Government publications); and finally, to provide public access to government information.

There is a great deal of skepticism in the depository community about whether or not **GPO** will be able to achieve its goals with the **FDS**. One very significant fear is that nowhere in any official documentation or at any presentations has the **Public Printer** assured depository libraries that they will have *unlimited* or *completely free* access to the **FDS**. In other words, libraries may find themselves in the position of having to pay for some government information that they have hitherto received freely through the **FDLP**. Of course, this is somewhat speculative at this point in time because **GPO's** planning is still very much in the "visioning" stage.

However, should the **FDS** come to pass in a form similar to what is being proposed it will have *significant* implications on how libraries and the public access government information. Indeed, the **FDLP** will probably cease to exist as it does today. Some authors have pointed out that if all the government information available to the public is freely available on the Internet, essentially *any* library with access to the Internet could function as a depository as they all would have electronic access to everything.⁵ It seems clear that the future of government information lies in the digital domain and libraries would be wise to plan on how best to provide access to government information bearing this firmly in mind. How quickly the program will go completely digital is uncertain; but, it is coming sooner than later.

Regardless of the future trajectory of the **FDLP**, most depositories still have large tangible collections (ranging in size from small to virtually comprehensive) which will have lasting value that will persist long into the future as it is uncertain if these publications will ever be made available in a digital format. Regional libraries have committed to retain everything that they have received. Selective depositories, however, do have the option of discarding materials which is older than five years. If a library engages in careful assessment of its documents collection, its mission, and its constituency, its legacy collection can be weeded to create one that is lean, consisting only of materials that will be truly useful to future generations.

The first step in deciding how to manage a legacy collection is for the library to determine what information in the collection will have last-

ing value to future patrons. The outcome of this decision will vary from library to library. Large research institutions, which want to be as comprehensive as possible, will likely choose to keep much of the ephemera that the government produces because today's ephemera becomes tomorrow's history. Smaller libraries might choose to be more discriminatory about what they keep. **MSU** is a medium-sized land grant university, with a curriculum that emphasizes science, technology, and agriculture. Historical publications from the **Department of Agriculture** or **United States Geological Survey** will continue to be valued and used by our students and we definitely want to keep them. A small liberal arts college, on the other hand, may have technical reports from the **USGS** in its collection because at some time in the past a librarian selected them for deposit. If these reports are not relevant to the institution's curriculum one has to ask if it is worth keeping them.

It is also important for a library to not get caught up in feeling as if they need to keep a copy of every document ever produced "just in case" somebody someday asks for it. While there are undeniably rare and valuable titles, there are many more which dozens, if not hundreds of other libraries will have in their collections, and these

will continue to be available to a library's patrons through inter-library loan. At the very least, selective depositories ought to be able to depend on interlibrary-loan from regional depositories for copies of items that fall outside the scope of their collection. Not every library needs to hold the copy of last resort.

Furthermore, a selective library's proximity and relationship with a regional depository can have an impact on how that selective decides to develop its collection. A small library located in a major metropolitan area, with a regional close by, can easily refer patrons and might not need to have as extensive a collection as a similarly sized library which is more isolated: to best serve its patrons a remote library might choose to retain a more comprehensive collection. Likewise, large universities that are in close proximity might each develop collections tailored to each one's academic programs, and then rely on the counterpart for other subject areas.

An important consideration when assessing a collection, particularly if a library plans on withdrawing items, is to remember that these items do not actually *belong* to the library. Unlike other deselected materials they cannot be placed into a book sale or discarded — they are the property of the federal government. Remember, materials acquired through the **FDLP** have only been placed on *deposit* at that library. Consequently there are more hurdles (and perhaps more importantly, costs) to withdrawing government documents. They must be

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listed and offered to a selective library's regional, which then has the option to claim them for its own collection or for other depository libraries. The **FDLP Desktop** Website, located at http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fdlp/mgt/index.html provides all the documents that a library needs in this regard, including instructions to depository librarians and information on depository management.

One of the major problems with how selective depositories select what to receive from **GPO** was that they have been forced to select classes of materials rather than specific titles. For example, almost every government agency has a class of materials called "miscellaneous publications," which includes some very valuable titles that the library wants; but, materials the library would not choose to collect must also be taken. Some extreme examples of this are bookmarks, children's coloring books, and recently even a fridge magnet. Basically, libraries have frequently found themselves in the awkward situation of having to having to take all the bathwater to get the baby that they really wanted. Consequently, especially for libraries which have been depositories for decades and not kept on top of weeding the collection, there is all too often a tremendous number of documents that are of little to no value to patrons.

Many publications from **GPO** superseded those that precede them as newer editions come out. If library staff has been attentive many of the superseded items will have already been withdrawn. For example, every year as new volumes of the *Code of Federal Regulations* come out the new title should replace the old. However, there are many examples of items such as older versions of Forest Service maps and guides or IRS tax guides that are likely lurking in a collection. Again, some libraries will wish to retain these items for historical purposes, but others will not because the most current versions will suffice. Much of the information in older publications of this sort is outdated and now inaccurate.

Classes of materials available for selection from **GPO** come and go as publications cease to exist or agencies are eliminated or combined into other agencies. As these publications grow older, and are no longer being added to with newer versions, a librarian should evaluate whether or not they continue to hold value to patrons.

Similarly, it is very common to have had a library select a certain class of materials, only to deselect the item a year or two later because the materials being received were not what was expected. However, the library was bound to retain the materials for at least five years, and never withdrew the materials after this period. Frequently these short runs of classes have languished on the shelves, sometimes for decades. If the decision was made years ago to deselect a class of materials because they were not relevant to the library then, they are not likely to be relevant today for that library's patrons. Incomplete or short runs of serials likewise are of questionable value. One has to ask: if the library decided to deselect a certain title 25 years ago, why not withdraw it from the collection today?

A more difficult decision for libraries, and especially for documents librarians, is what to do with more recent titles that were issued in tangible format but are also available in electronic format on the Internet. As already stated, there is justifiable concern about whether or not **GPO** will maintain permanent free public access to electronic government information. Individual libraries will have to determine on a case by case basis whether the paper or microfiche version of a document is important enough to their patrons to retain in tangible format in addition to providing access to an electronic copy. In many cases, however, the electronic copy does best meet the needs of patrons. Outside of the realm of government information, many libraries have for some time been choosing to purchase electronic versions of serials because that's the format that their patrons prefer. Not all these libraries have the luxury of continuing to purchase paper copies; so, they rely exclusively on the electronic (to be sure, many libraries—including **MSU**—have decided to withdraw paper copies of journals available through packages such as **JSTOR** in an effort to reclaim space while also responding to the fact that our patrons were choosing to use the online version rather than paper). Why should it be any different with government documents?

Access for patrons to government documents collections has always been problematic because seldom are all of a library's documents collections thoroughly cataloged in the **OPAC**. Documents librarians have long acted as gatekeepers to their esoteric collections. Patrons were forced to accept this because they had no other choice: a depository library was the only place that they could access this information. However, patron expectations are

changing as more government information becomes freely available on the Internet, and these expectations inform attitudes towards government information in general. Libraries should make every effort to enable unmediated patron access to legacy government document collections. So, if materials are important enough to retain on the shelves, they should be added to the catalog. In assessing a documents collection, one place to begin would be to explore what is in the collection that has not been cataloged, and determine whether it has ever been used. If a library decides to keep it—catalog it.

As the **FDLP** continues to deliver more of its content digitally to the American public, it is likely that libraries will continue to play a strong role in providing access to government information. However, collecting government documents is already becoming less of a central activity for depository libraries. In this regard the Internet has had a profound impact on documents librarianship and assessing government documents collections. Many libraries have invested tremendously over the years in their depository legacy collections, and large parts of these collections will continue to be of great value to their patrons. Libraries, while embracing freely available documents on the Internet, need to do all they can to ensure that these legacy collections are preserved in the best fashion possible for the future. Carefully assessing what is truly of value in them, and judiciously weeding them, will make them more accessible and useful.

Endnotes

1. "About the Federal Depository Library Program" [Online]; available at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fdlp.html>, accessed 20 August, 2006.
2. "A Strategic Vision for the 21st Century" [Online]; available at <http://www.gpo.gov/congressional/pdfs/04strategicplan.pdf>, accessed 20 August, 2006.
3. "Essential Titles for Public Use in Paper Format" [Online]; available at http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fdlp/pubs/estitles.html, accessed 20 August, 2006.
4. "Future Digital System" [Online]; available at <http://www.gpo.gov/projects/fdsys.htm>, accessed 20 August, 2006.
5. Seavey, Charles A. "Documents to the People: Musings on the past and future of government information." *American Libraries* 36 (7) (August 2005), 42.

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ment. While the majority of these have neither faculty status nor permanent appointments (27 or 69%), they also include six whose librarians have faculty status and 11 that offer tenure or other permanent appointments (five with faculty status and six without). The table of contents and executive summary from this **SPEC Kit** are available online at <http://www.arl.org/spec/SPEC293web.pdf>. **Ordering information** is located at <http://www.arl.org/pubscat/order/>. www.arl.org/

We can't thank the incredible **Susan Campbell** <scampbel@ycp.edu> and her sidekick **Pam Cenzer** <pam.cenzer@gmail.com> enough for being our **Mentors** for the **2006 Charleston Conference**! They have answered countless necessary questions and soothed us greatly. Thanks, **Susan** and **Pam**! Our **Mentors** will be very visible at the **Charleston Conference** near the registration desk. Be sure to say hi to them!

And speaking of our **Mentors**, **Susan** is expecting her first grandbaby soon. The little tike should be born by now so ask her if you can see pictures. And in between waiting for the baby,

Susan attended her **College reunion** in New York City.

And we have just hired **Pam's** niece, **Melinda Scharstein** <scharsteinm@cofc.edu> in the **Collection Development Department** of the **Addlstone Library** as our **Accounting and Materials Resource Manager**. Congratulations, **Melinda**!

And, speaking of people helping our registrants, thanks should also go to **Michael Poupore** <mpoupore@clientsourceinc.com> who was very

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