



Selection and Reference Use in the College and University Library

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IN THE EARLY YEARS of our history, concern for the preservation of government publications was expressed for their value as historical source materials. Government activities and consequently publications were circumscribed by a limited view of the functions of government. In this century, as the government plays a more directive role in society, supports a growing percentage of basic and applied research, concerns itself with more and more of the activities of its citizens, and issues reports and other publications on its work, access to these documents is essential in college and university libraries. An adequate collection of government documents is one of the most valuable and essential resources of a research library.

Two major factors influence selection and reference use of government documents in colleges and universities—the size and orientation of the institution and whether or not the library is a depository for federal and state documents.

Sixty-six percent of the depository libraries listed in the September 1965 *Monthly Catalog* are college and university libraries. Of the thirty-five regional depositories listed, seventeen are academic libraries. According to Carper Buckley, eighty of the first 127 new depositories established under the Depository Act of 1962 were college libraries. He has emphasized the responsibility which college libraries share with the Superintendent of Documents “for making available the essential information provided by publications of the United States government.”¹

The Government Printing Office is possibly the largest publisher in the world, and the Federal Government the largest investor in research. Over twelve thousand publications (other than bills and

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resolutions) are available to depositories each year. Few libraries can afford to select all of them. Regardless of the size of library or kind of clientele served, whoever has general charge of the documents collection must assume responsibility for selection to avoid gaps or a broken and unbalanced collection. Titles must be selected for present use and future growth of the institution. Overselection is bad in that it results in waste of time, space, and money. Underselection may mean the expenditure of a great deal of time and money to acquire needed items at a later date.

Legally there is no such thing as a "partial" depository. Regional libraries are required to accept all depository items; all other depositories may select only the items they want. There is no general agreement as to what constitutes a basic collection which should be available in all depositories, but the New York State Library is compiling a basic list of federal documents.² The subject range of documents is that of government activity itself, and each member of the college library's varied clientele expects to find in the depository collection material on subjects which interest him.

Selection for depository libraries is not the continuing problem that it is for non-depository libraries. Guy R. Lyle estimated in 1961 that eighty percent of college libraries were not depositories.³ Non-depositories will be forced to rely on *Price Lists*, bibliographies, the *Monthly Catalog*, press releases, and all the other devices which librarians use to keep themselves, hopefully, afloat in a mounting sea of print. Since documents are not handled or listed as are trade books they are more likely to be overlooked in selection.

The Depository Act of 1962 permits depository libraries which are served by a regional library to select materials of current value and dispose of them after five years, though this cannot be taken as *carte blanche* to choose indiscriminantly. Acquisition in the first place may be inexpensive, but bibliographic control and housing while the items are in the library's possession and the very process of disposal which requires obtaining permission from the regional library, attempting to dispose of the material to other libraries, accounting for sold or otherwise disposed of material—all of this is certainly not without cost. Unless materials to be disposed of constitute a considerable body of material, this kind of weeding may be too expensive to be worthwhile.

Probably less than half of all federal documents are available through depository distribution. The remainder are acquired, if at

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all, by an involved and expensive process. The fact that a document has been printed by the GPO may mean that it contains more valuable data than one produced elsewhere, but this is a dubious assumption. Libraries place a value on these non-GPO publications as evidenced by the expense and effort spent in trying to acquire them. Buckley noted that \$100,000,000 worth of non-GPO printing is done each year. He feels that relatively few of these documents are needed by depositories and that a tremendous initial screening needs to be done in implementing the 1962 law with regard to their distribution.⁴ The support given the Documents Expediting Project and the Readex Non-Depository Edition of Government Publications is some evidence of the value which libraries place on non-GPO publications.

In a depository library, reference and selection are usually the responsibility of the documents staff if documents constitute a separate collection, or of the reference staff if documents are integrated with the book collection. For non-depositories, reference and selection will usually be the responsibility of the reference staff.

Certain topics have recurred for years in library literature and in the conversations of documents librarians, e.g., the need for better indexes and bibliographic guides; the need for greater public and professional awareness of the value of documents; the desirability of cooperative acquisitions programs; the need for wider distribution and a depository program with greater possibilities of selection and expansion; the problem of arrangement and the contingent problems based on the choice made; the problems of different sizes and kinds of libraries; the need to eliminate duplication of effort; the responsibilities of the government, the Government Printing Office, the Superintendent of Documents, the Library of Congress, and other national and federal libraries; and the responsibilities which individual libraries must assume. In most cases there is no "solution," since solution implies a finality inconsistent with an evolving program.

In recent years new problems have presented themselves and old problems have taken on new aspects, e.g., microreproductions, government research reports, translations, the increasing responsibility assumed by federal government departments for indexing and bibliographic control in their subject fields, and the increasing emphasis in the academic world at all levels on the use of source materials. A guide through this maze is more than ever essential. Though indexes, catalogs, and bibliographies help, the two essential features of a good reference collection remain—the materials and their indexes, and a librarian who understands them.

An important factor in the quality of reference service provided is the training received in library school. Students in a documents course should acquire an idea of the structure of government, the kinds of publications issued by various agencies, the basic bibliographies and indexes, and methods of acquisition and organization. It used to be considered that the documents librarian should have academic training in the social sciences. Today the natural and physical sciences are increasingly important. There are few fields of knowledge not represented in government publications. In the long run the efficiency of the documents librarian depends on the individual himself—his initiative and ability to sense the possibilities of documents as sources of reference.

The principal approach to documents is through printed bibliographies and indexes. One of the major needs is better bibliographic control on a retrospective and a current basis. Some useful needed items include an index to the *Checklist*; a better index to Poore's *Catalogue*; a compilation of publications from 1909 to 1924, with call numbers and an index; an index for the *Monthly Catalog*, 1925-1939; and a cumulative index to the *Monthly Catalog* for 1951-1960. The lack of adequate cumulative indexes impedes proper and rapid use of the available bibliographies.

The *Monthly Catalog* is an excellent tool. It is questionable whether annotations as an aid in selection, as has been suggested, would warrant the cost involved. These changes however would help: inclusion of all personal authors, not just American ones, in the index; more title entries in the index; more uniform use of subject headings with cross references to previously used forms; and more inclusive listing of non-Government Printing Office publications, even though they may not be in the Superintendent of Documents' collection.

There are tremendous differences in size, organization and use of the collections of government publications in non-depositories, in small college depositories, and in university depositories. There is some relationship, but by no means a precise one, between the size of the institution and the size of the documents collection and, for depositories, the percentage of available items selected. Organization for use is likely to vary enormously. The depository library is more likely to shelve all or some of its documents separately and employ a special scheme of classification or arrangement. The non-depository and the depository selecting a small percentage of available items are more likely to incorporate documents into the book collection. The

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library patron does not know all this and does not care. A documents collection is closed to most readers (and many librarians); it must be opened to them by those who administer it.

From the reference point of view one of the disadvantages of a separate documents department lies in its being set apart. Persons in charge may try to answer questions better answered elsewhere, and other members of the library staff often do not appreciate the value of documents and fail to refer patrons to them. If documents are handled as a separate collection, links are usually provided to the rest of the library. These may be references, general and specific, placed in the card catalog, serials record or periodical directory, and any other generally used listing of the library's holdings. Even more important perhaps is a program to keep those members of the staff who are not directly concerned with documents familiar with new government publications of reference value, new trends in government publishing, and new collections of materials.

In a library which catalogs all or most of its documents, the card catalog is the main bibliographic control and point of access to the collection, regardless of which classification scheme is used. In a library which does not catalog its documents, the *Monthly Catalog of U.S. Government Publications* is the main point of access. With mounting costs of cataloging and crowded card catalogs, even libraries which claim to catalog all documents are making fewer analytics. The *Monthly Catalog* with its subject entries for each item listed remains an indispensable tool for all libraries. For the smaller library with a limited collection it acts as an index and guide, not necessarily to what is in the collection, but to what may be available through interlibrary loan or acquisition. It may be used by any library as a selection tool. In many depositories, the *Monthly Catalog* is checked each month for the library's holdings, then read for selection purposes. This sounds a more formidable task than it is. A librarian with a good knowledge of his library's present holdings, the interests of its patrons, and some awareness of trends of interest, government growth and spending patterns, and expanding fields of knowledge, can very quickly scan an issue and indicate for a typist what should be requested free and what must be purchased and where.

Though secret and so-called administrative publications are excluded from the depository program, many administrative documents are available (and often free), if only one becomes aware of their existence. Some are listed in the *Monthly Catalog*; many more are not.

For many years there has been an increasing reliance by government agencies on printing facilities outside the GPO and on various kinds of office reproduction equipment resulting in publications called "processed." These greatly complicate bibliographic control and acquisition. The Documents Expediting Service secures many of these publications for its member libraries and for the Superintendent of Documents for listing purposes. This is a very valuable service, not just for those libraries which subscribe to the Service, but to all those who use the *Monthly Catalog* as a reference tool. This point might lead one to question the economic basis of the Documents Expediting Service—is this a service which ought to be concentrated in the Superintendent of Documents' Office and operated in a more generally accessible manner with a wider basis of support, even though all publications still have to be purchased?

One of the major problems, intensified by government support of research in an increasing number of subject areas, is bibliographic control and acquisition of government research and development reports. James Skipper, noting the impact of science on academic libraries, has estimated that one hundred thousand research reports a year are being published, seventy-five percent of them unclassified and ninety percent issued by three agencies, *viz.*, the Defense Department, AEC, and NASA.⁵ Because of their large number these reports could not be published in the professional journals, and the existing indexing and abstracting media could not provide adequate bibliographic control. The information program which developed is oriented to the needs of the agencies involved and their contractors; but the by-product received by the academic library has not been very satisfactory for its purposes. Much has been done to index these reports; but there is no cumulative listing and index, and complete indexes to government reports are not available outside of Washington.

The Clearinghouse for Federal Scientific and Technical Information is the central source in the government for the collection and distribution of unclassified research reports and other information generated by the defense, space, atomic energy, and other federal research programs in engineering and physical sciences. One of the primary responsibilities of the Clearinghouse is to collect, catalog, index, and make available for purchase more than fifty thousand research reports a year based on federally sponsored R & D projects, and about twenty-five thousand translations a year of foreign technical materials. It issues *U.S. Government Research and Development Reports, Govern-*

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ment-Wide Index to Federal Research and Development Reports, and
Technical Translations; provides a Fast Announcement Service; and
issues "packages" and selected bibliographies on specific subjects. The
lack of cumulative indexes to the Clearinghouse report bibliographies
is a serious handicap to their use. The larger the library and the more
technically and scientifically oriented its users, the more useful it will
find these publications. Obviously not all of this mass of material is
of equal value. Selection becomes increasingly difficult and reference
use more difficult, frustrating, and time-consuming. Much has been
done to provide bibliographic control, but it seems probable that
printed indexes stand little chance of providing a completely satis-
factory solution.

Several factors are involved in the growing value and usefulness of
state documents for reference purposes. The increase in state functions
and activities brings with it a greater need for knowledge and under-
standing of the past and the present. Growth in complexity means that
practical research to provide a realistic foundation for state legisla-
tive and administrative activities needs complete files and adequate
bibliographic control. The emphasis on data in social science research
means an increasing reliance on the original source documents. Sele-
tion and use of state and local publications requires a knowledge of
government organization and activities.

The smaller a unit of government is, the more difficult it is to locate
information about its publications. It is even more difficult to acquire
them. State and local government publishing is not highly developed
in this country. There is a considerable volume of material because of
the many government units and their decentralized operations, but
much of it is of little value outside its own community.⁶ Few states
have a well-developed system of distribution. Some have depository
systems, but in only two cases, Louisiana and California, do they have
depository programs extending outside their own boundaries. In most
cases, the state library is the depository for publications of the state.

In spite of the volume of materials, there is little or no advertising
or sales promotion. A few state governments issue price lists, usually
by subject, which can be obtained on request. Some departments issue
lists of their own publications. For practical purposes the only adver-
tising is in bibliographies of government publications. Many state and
university libraries issue comprehensive accessions lists of publications
of their own state which have been received by the library. The
Manual on the Use of State Publications (1940) edited by Jerome K.

Wilcox is still an excellent guide and includes a "Bibliography of Bibliographies" of state publications.⁷ The most comprehensive listing for all states is the *Monthly Checklist of State Publications*, "a record of state documents issued during the last five years which are currently received by the Library of Congress." It is by no means a list of all state documents. A number of states issue lists of their own publications usually more nearly adequate than the *Monthly Checklist*, but still not complete. Many of the state lists are impermanent, with gaps in coverage; there are few compilations of issues or indexes.

Lack of publicity and accessibility are very real hindrances to use. There is usually no one distribution center. Some documents are available on request; some state agencies maintain mailing lists; some publications are available only on exchange; others must be purchased. Some are in such short supply they are simply unavailable in their original printed or near-print form.

Many libraries find full cataloging necessary for state and local documents because of the lack of adequate indexes. If documents are not cataloged, reference costs increase. State lists supplement the card catalog. Many reference inquiries leading to the use of state publications are by subject; they may be approached through such indexes as *Public Affairs Information Service Bulletin*, *Biological and Agricultural Index*, *Education Index*, and others.

Selection and reference use cannot begin before awareness, and the first problem in the use of documents, especially below the state level, is one of becoming aware of available publications. Few college libraries, unless there is greater than usual local interest in problems of public administration, will collect local government publications for any area other than their own local municipality and county and perhaps those of the state capital and other metropolitan areas. A careful watch of local newspapers or a carefully cultivated friend in the offices of local government may be the most useful means of hearing of new publications as they are issued. Most local documents are printed in short runs, and the supply may well be exhausted by the time the librarian knows of their existence.

Local documents are relatively expensive to select, locate, acquire, organize, and service. A cooperative microcopy program offers one possibility for collecting and making them available. Regional collections have been suggested as a solution to the problems of mounting costs and infrequent use. The smaller college library may have little interest in local government publications, depending on the extent

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to which it has accepted full or shared responsibility for their acquisition and housing, and on the degree of interest and emphasis on them in the local teaching program. Selection in a small college library will be based on faculty needs and requests, on the instructional program, on whether or not the material is indexed and the indexes available in the library, and on other factors, not least of which are the librarian's interest and diligence.

Free deposit of local government publications is not highly developed. The main sources of bibliographic information are *Public Affairs Information Service Bulletin* and the few accessions lists of special libraries such as the municipal reference libraries in Chicago, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, and New York which are interested in local government problems. The University of California Public Administration Library also issues an accessions list. The *National Union Catalog* is valuable for publications of government units on all levels, but especially for cities and counties. The *American City* carries a monthly column "Municipal and Civic Publications," and the *Municipal Yearbook* includes government publications in "Sources of Information" on topics discussed. A number of periodicals list or review government publications in their subject fields, e.g., *American Political Science Review*, *Journal of Marketing*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *American City*, *Law Library Journal*, *Education Index*, *Special Libraries*, *Vertical File Index*. Some library professional periodicals including *Booklist*, *Wilson Library Bulletin*, and *Library Journal*, also list documents.

As a documents librarian reads the professional literature and talks to other documents librarians, one or two facts about their common "state" emerge. Almost without exception, documents librarians are enthusiastic about government documents and find them interesting, challenging and valuable. They share many common problems and have reached various solutions. Some of their problems can only be solved satisfactorily on a national or regional cooperative basis. It is at least remotely possible that some day all federal documents will be centrally listed and available, if not on deposit, at least on request, that some agency in each state will assume responsibility for centrally listing and providing national service for its state, county, and municipal publications, and that all documents librarians will be trained to provide efficient reference service on any subject at all. Today if the state of selection and reference had to be summed up in a word, that word would almost have to be "varied," for document collections

and the service provided by them range from bad to superb, without any necessary correlation as to size.

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