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## Government Documents as a Special Collection

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Bowling Green State University (BGSU) has a long tradition of special collections. The Music and Sound Recordings Archives and The Popular Culture Library are probably the best known collections and receive national attention. Government Documents has only recently--fall of 1996--moved to special collections.

Special collection department heads report to the Head of Special Collections, a chair position that will rotate every three years. While each collection is unique, we have found a great deal in common, including building research collections and serving users, both internal and external to the university, who have complex research interests. We supervise all aspects of our departments including acquisitions, processing, collection development, reference service, library instruction, resource and staff management, and collection advocacy and promotion.

Special collection heads attend the more or less weekly department heads meetings with the Associate Dean, and the monthly Library and Learning Resources Council meetings conducted by the Dean. We interact directly and regularly with the LLR Dean and participate in helping to set library policy, goals and directions.

As a depository, we find ourselves in a rather unique situation in terms of serving the congressional district. We have, since 1933, served the fifth district. In 1990, however, redistricting split Bowling Green City into two districts: most of the city and county remain in the Fifth district, but the university now resides in the Ninth. Due to our historical ties with the Fifth, and the fact that most of our surrounding users are from the Fifth, we continue to serve that district. We have extended our service, however, to include the ninth district, since that is the district in which the library officially falls.

Bowling Green State University was established as a teacher training institute in 1910. We offer bachelor through Ph.D. degree programs. We are a mid-sized institution, with approximately 15,000 undergraduates and 2,400 graduate students. Our faculty number about 700.

Libraries and Learning Resources (LLR) consists of Jerome Library, Ogg Science Library, Center for Archival Collections, Instructional Media Services, and Popular Press. LLR also manages the Northwest Regional Book Depository, a storage facility that serves Bowling Green State University, University of Toledo, and The Medical College of Ohio. We hold over 2 million books, and 2 million microforms.

BGSU became a Federal depository in 1933 and an Ohio depository in 1956. We currently select 51%. We have approximately 500,000 volumes and 200,000 microfiche. We have a rich historical collection that includes all the census reports from 1790 to date, most of the Serial Set, with a few gaps, the U.S. Foreign Relations reports, extensive Smithsonian series, the Congressional Globe and Record, and a number of other important historical materials. We receive and process about 1,500 documents each month. Most of the documents are housed in Jerome Library, the main library, but we do send USGS and NLM materials to the Science Library across campus. The Map Library is another main library collection and processes and services depository maps.

We have two full time support staff members and generally eight or nine student assistants, and of course, a full time department head with an MLS. In addition to the documents staff, we get by with a little help from library staff outside the documents department. The maps are under the care of the Map Librarian, and we do a very little initial processing before sending maps along to her. Science staff check USGS materials into the catalog and maintain the documents collection. Catalogers search OCLC and download records for us, while reference librarians provide initial public service for the documents collection.

Documents has a checkered organizational history. In 1975, when I started, Documents was a separate department occupying the fourth floor of the library. There were seven staff members and we did all our own processing and reference. We moved to the first floor in 1984, and, in a move to consolidate service points, we moved under the Information Service Department umbrella in 1986. The documents staff focused on technical processing while the reference department provided public service to the collection from the general reference desk. The documents coordinator worked on the reference desk and participated in the typical activities of reference, as well as supervising the Documents unit and staff. In 1992 we reorganized under Technical Services; the office and staff moved to the second floor; and the reference department continued to provide public service, with assistance from the Documents librarian, to a collection which remained a floor away, on first.

During the four years we were under Technical Services, the Documents staff forged a strong working relationship with the Technical Services staff; however, daily processing and collection maintenance was hampered by distance from the collection and, more importantly, patrons seeking expert help had difficulty finding us. With the arrival of a new Library Dean, and after four years of experience in the Tech Service model, we were reorganized once again, this time under Special Collections. Part of the reorganization included a plan to move the office back to the first floor and move all the collections, paper, microfiche, and electronic, next to the office. We completed moving the office, CD-ROMs, and microfiche this January.

As I mentioned, we moved the documents office this last January. The documents office now is a roomy space on the first floor near the front door of the library and close to the

general reference desk. We are still reveling in the new office which has plenty of room for staff and loads of space including extensive processing shelves--no more tripping over boxes. Our microfiche and CD-ROM cabinets are right outside, and the two dedicated documents public workstations are just outside the office door. Our stacks are still some distance away, at the back of the first floor, but we are getting ready to move that collection next to the office in about three weeks.

The documents office is in a prominent area of the library and readily accessible to our users. We find that we can process and maintain both microfiche and CD collections with greater ease and efficiency now that they are closer. And we are truly looking forward to our main stack collection coming over next to the office. Once this move is accomplished, the documents collection, like the other special collections, will be in one identifiable area with specially trained staff nearby to assist users.

I'd like to talk a little bit about our day to day operations next. Like all depositories, we open and process our shipments each day. Our Library Associate, Mrs. Reynolds, supervises daily processing. One student assistant works under her direction, opening the boxes, stamping material, and adding SuDoc numbers to the pieces. Mrs. Reynolds maintains records, such as shipping list tallies, item selection profile, rainchecks, and claims. She also processes separate packages, makes changes and corrections, and resolves a wide assortment of problems including missing shipments or shipping lists.

Our student assistants are assigned sections of the collection (i.e. A-C, D-HE, etc.) to shelve, file, and maintain. They shelve and file paper, microfiche, and CDs daily and record in-house use in a statistical module of our online catalog. They also shift, shelf read, and add pamphlet boxes and microfiche index cards. In addition, they perform special tasks such as searching missing documents, barcoding new volumes and microfiche, photocopying replacement materials, typing discard lists, and other duties as assigned.

We use Innovative Interfaces Inc. (III) as our integrated cataloging system, and we participate in the OhioLINK project. OhioLINK is a consortium of 54 technical, college, and university libraries across the state that provide access to a centralized database of the member libraries' holdings. Users can search and borrow material directly from member libraries.

We began cataloging documents in 1987. In general, we send new titles to the Cataloging Department and they download records from OCLC. Our Library Technical Assistant screens new depository materials and enters volumes into the catalog when a record is available. Periodical issues are checked in on the serials check-in module. Continuations, annuals, and multi-volume parts are added to appropriate records. Revisions are generally added to the bibliographic record and superseded issues are pulled and discarded. Sometimes we have to send a record to Cataloging to be edited so that the revision can be entered. New serials and monographs are sent to the Cataloging Department every Tuesday and most return to us on Thursday. If the record is not in OCLC, cataloging holds and searches for a month. If the piece has still not been cataloged after a month, one of the catalogers enters original cataloging on OCLC. Monographs that return from cataloging are then processed by students: item records are edited and the pieces barcoded. Then they

are shelved or filed. Problems are sent to me to resolve, usually involving SuDocs number discrepancies.

We have been working on several retrospective projects over the past six or seven years. We began first by identifying long series that we were still receiving, such as the Statutes at Large and Vital Statistics, and by sending students to pull and link the entire run of volumes. After our current runs were retrolinked, we began to create records for important historical sets and to link all those volumes. We also created serial check-in records for periodicals and entered all unbound issues, including a number of microfiche titles such as the FBIS series. And finally, we targeted some pre-1976 monographs such as the Smithsonian bulletins and the HE 5's for cataloging.

In 1995 we downloaded 1976-1986 GPO tapes edited by Auto-Graphics (AG) and have been editing and linking them. This has been a long, painful process and we probably will not finish it for another year or two. Last year we went through our paper hearings and linked them to AG records if possible. If an AG record was not available, we sent these materials to Cataloging. This spring we did the same to our microfiche hearings. It has taken nearly two full semesters, but it is a great relief to say that all our hearings are cataloged.

It is our goal to enter our entire collection in the online catalog. We continue to systematically review our collection and link material to AG records or send the pieces to be cataloged. It is also an excellent opportunity to review and weed the collection.

We are a bit behind the times in our item maintenance. We still use a paper card file to review selection choices and changes. We do download and print our item selections from GPO monthly instead of relying on the old printout. We have found that this service helps us keep up with changes a little better. Even though our Library Associate combs through the Administrative Notes Technical Supplement and makes the changes reported to our item profile, we still seem to miss a lot of item changes, so the Item Lister is a big help. I begin each April to review our item selections for the annual update. It usually takes several months to get through all the cards. Of course, over the year I make notes of items I want to add or delete in April. Generally we do not delete items in midyear unless they are a problem, such as the Patent discs. After several months of trying to use these, we decided that they were not for us. Since there were so many discs coming in, I deselected as soon as we decided we did not want them.

We are religious in weeding superseded material, since we don't have a lot of space. A careful and thorough review beyond superseded material however, was not done except in certain targeted SuDocs areas, for a number of years. Several things have forced us into better practice. First, we now have a remote storage site where we can send low-use materials. In order to send items to storage, my policy is that they must be cataloged. But cataloging costs a lot of money, so we review all potential storage titles to see if we have an AG record. If we need to catalog it then we think pretty carefully about whether we need the item in our collection.

I am fairly active in library instruction. I partner with other librarians to teach students who will need to use documents as well as other library resources, and I conduct a number of sessions to focus on such documents resources as the census.

In 1986, when the documents department moved under Information Services, we transferred responsibility for documents public service to the main reference staff. Through all the department transformations, this reference model has prevailed--the first point of documents assistance is the general reference desk. I work closely with the Head of Reference to set service policies and to provide ongoing training and review. Users who need further assistance are referred to the documents staff. We have been faced with tough choices in providing reference assistance because we do not have the full time documents staff to cover a separate service desk. This spring, after the office move to the first floor, we decided to try supplementing the service provided at the general reference desk. We added a documents desk staffed by documents student assistants several hours a day. Our students help patrons with directional questions, guide users to documents in the stacks and microfiche cabinets, place searches on missing items, and show users how to borrow documents through OhioLINK. They also retrieve CD-ROMs, load the discs, and help users with instructions and documentation. They also refer the more challenging questions on to me or the full-time staff.

It's been a long, challenging process to obtain the staff workstations we need. Currently we have one Pentium (on my desk), two 486 workstations for the classified staff, a 386 student workstation, and three dumb terminals for our students.

My staff worked on dumb terminals up until this spring when their machines were finally upgraded. My staff are really happy finally to have Web access and are rapidly learning to use the Web to search agency sites and GPO. We are moving towards automating many of our files and downloading shipping lists and missing agency publications. As staff become more facile with the Web, they build their confidence. Their increased computing skills directly benefit our users, because the documents staff are better able to find electronic information upon request.

We currently have two dedicated documents public workstations and hope to add a third in the next month or two. Students and faculty can access Government Web sites through a wide array of library Web stations, computer labs, and of course from home. We have developed a documents home page to help users find agency resources and Government indexes. The documents home page is still in its infancy. I work on it, mostly in my spare time at home, so it's growing slowly. My student assistants check the links once a week. The two dedicated workstations primarily provide access to the host of CD-ROMs. We run DOS-based CDs on one station and Windows-based CDs from the other in a Netscape front end. We also circulate many of the discs.

Improved communication is probably one of the greatest advantages to the current configuration. As a department head, I meet regularly with the library administration and can communicate our strengths, needs, and aspirations in a variety of venues, from personal to large or small group meetings. As library policy and goals are debated, I have the chance to explain the GPO guidelines that we in documents live by.

I work with a number of department heads and unit coordinators: Reference, Maps, Circulation, Cataloging, Science, and Acquisitions. Crudely put, as a department head, I have the standing to negotiate directly with other administrators to establish procedures. And I believe that our users benefit because we stand out as a separate unit and they can find us easier than when the department was primarily a processing unit under some large department.

I firmly believe that documents processing and reference demand specially trained and focused staff. In an ideal environment reference, processing, and collection management activities enhance each other. The staff who open the shipments and process the materials each day have an intimate knowledge of the collection. That knowledge and awareness of the collection is imperative when answering patron queries. Indexes and locators, while important, do not substitute for daily contact with material. And, in the same way, daily contact with users help us define collection depths and weaknesses. How can I know what items to select or deselect if I don't know what our users want? How can I decide which materials to send to Remote Storage if I don't know how often users will need to access them?

If I am constantly helping faculty and students identify relevant documents, I know what topics are in high demand and can target new publications for reserve or reference. If I am aware of the user patterns, I can prioritize older materials for cataloging projects. For example, we discovered through an in-house and circulation study, that hearings, then the census, then Ohio documents were the most heavily used parts of our collection, and those were the first retro cataloging projects we undertook.

As a special collection, we've been able to define our resource needs and compete for a fair share of the pie. I can draw up our equipment requests and student budget requests and argue our case directly. Of course that doesn't mean that I get everything I ask for--far from it. But at least I'm on a level playing field, and I can make my case directly to the library administration instead of trying to negotiate through a supervisor.

Like the other special collections, documents staff focus their talents on documents so that they can provide special care and attention on the collection and its users. Becoming a special collection provided much of the rationale and impetus for reintegrating the collection and office in a central, separate location.

There is, of course, a downside to this model and that is too few staff and too much to do. One of the major factors contributing to the earlier decision to integrate documents into another department was to save money by downsizing. The urge to cut down on staff by shutting down a public service desk was strong, and the literature abounds with libraries that are even now considering such measures. In our library, we have found this decision was not very good for our patrons. The best reference librarians with the best intentions still can not provide the kind of assistance that documents staff can provide. In our library, we still have to depend on the general reference desk as our first service provider and we supplement that service as we can.

We were fortunate that our processing was not dismantled and moved to Technical Processing. We could not have cataloged as much of the collection or maintained the

processing standards required by GPO in such a decentralized environment. But we pay a price for these decisions. Our staff work under a great deal of stress because of the workload, and it doesn't seem likely that we will regain any staff positions. Without sufficient staff, we have to decide where to concentrate our efforts. Some things we do very well, but other things get short shrift and we can do only the minimum.

In conclusion, we have tried a number of configurations and we are still trying to evolve a stronger model and improve our service. I've planned and moved our office five times and, after June, our collection twice. They say that practice makes perfect, but I hope I never have to move my collection again.