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## To Be or Not To Be a Depository: Answering the Questions and Envisioning a Brighter Future

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Good afternoon and welcome to this afternoon's program, "To Be or Not to Be a Depository: Answering the Questions and Envisioning a Brighter Future." My name is Diann Weatherly. I am the Documents Reference Librarian at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. I will be presenting a non-depository library point of view. Our next speaker will be Anna Sylvan, GIS/Government Documents Librarian from the St. Charles City-County Library District in Missouri. Anna will bring to us a perspective from a public library as well as the smaller library point of view. Finally, Barbara Levergood, Electronic Documents Librarian from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, will look at our topic from the Regional Library perspective

I'm sure there's not just a few of you who wonder just exactly what is our topic! In some ways, this was intentional. What I asked of today's panel, including myself, was to look at the past and current situation of the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP), to consider and answer some of the questions that evolved from this environment, and then to envision a brighter future. What I asked of us was, essentially, to be creative, to imagine what kind of FDLP of the future would solve some of the problems we face in our libraries. Someone asked me if this program would address dropping depository library status. In a round-about way, the answer is yes. However, what I have asked of this panel is to try to take a positive view of the future. I truly believe that unless you can imagine a better situation, it's very difficult to achieve it. Nevertheless, I am a librarian for a Government documents collection in a non-depository library, and I hope to provide some insight in that direction.

Now that you know who we are, please allow us to know a bit about you. If you would, please raise your hand in answer to a few questions. How many of you are documents librarians from public libraries? Academic libraries? What about law libraries or other special libraries? How many of you work with the Federal Government, including the GPO, in some capacity? The next question involves how long you have working in the area of Government documents. How many have worked with documents less than five years? Five to ten years? Eleven to fifteen years? Fifteen to twenty years? Over twenty years? The last

question I have for you is phrased in a manner I don't usually like to use, but please bear with me since I think it is important for us to know: how many of you do not have the World Wide Web available to the public yet? Of those who raised their hands to that question, how many *do* have World Wide Web access available to yourself or your staff? Thank you. I prefer not to ask questions in the negative, but I think it's important for us as a panel and for you as an audience to maintain our perspective about where the documents community stands as far as technological progress is concerned.

In order for you to understand my point of view as a non-depository documents librarian, you have to understand a bit about my situation at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, or UAB. UAB was established as a separate university from the University of Alabama in 1969. The University of Alabama, yes, is the university with "the" football team, "Roll-Tide," etc. It's located in Tuscaloosa, a 45-minute drive from Birmingham (and it happens to be the location of a regional depository library). UAB started from a medical school, for which it is still best known. The enrollment has grown from 5,381 students to over 16,000. The total employee count is over 15,000 - Birmingham's largest employer and the fourth largest employer in the state. The reason employee count almost matches our enrollment count is because of the inclusion of the university hospital staff and all the medical research staff in that total. The University estimates that UAB has a 1.6 billion dollar economic impact in the area.

Mervyn H. Sterne Library is the general library for the campus. There is also a separate medical library at UAB, as you might expect. In 1969, Sterne Library held 10,000 volumes and was housed in two classrooms. In 1996, we held over 1 million volumes and 2,500 periodicals, and we have a three-floor building with seating for over a thousand users. The library online system is NOTIS and includes 17 online periodical indexes shared within a state consortium.

Why would such an important research university not have a depository collection? Well, we tried. In 1970, the library director (our first; we've only had two directors), sought depository status, but the effort failed. There were already as many depositories in the district as the law allowed. Even a senatorial effort failed. Fortunately, as UAB was quickly coming into existence, so also was a company called Congressional Information Service (CIS). The library has subscribed to the indexes and complete microfiche collections of ASI and CIS since the beginning. The library holds an estimated 80% depository equivalent documents collection. If you would like to know more about our library and some of the figures cited below, the details are provided in an article I completed last year: "A U.S. Government Publications Collection in a Non-Depository Research Library: A Case Study," in the *Journal of Government Information*, vol. 28, no. 4, pp. 471-489, 1996.

When I first came to work at UAB in 1985, I held secret hopes to eventually gain depository status for our library. I talked with other Government documents librarians, attended meetings and workshops, and eventually signed on to GOVDOC-L. During my eleven-plus years, I began to see some advantages of my non-depository situation. With my (primarily) ASI and CIS microfiche collections, there were no shipping lists, claims lists, superseded lists, or discard lists. Microfiche, compared to paper documents, do not need to be barcoded, labeled, shelved, or security stripped. I did a five-year comparison (for the years 1989-93) for my best estimate of an 80% paper collection. To shelve 1,520 feet of

paper would have cost our library \$7,478. Instead, for that five-year period, we spent \$2,790 for one microfiche cabinet (which, in reality, holds more than a five-year period of microfiche). I talked to several of the larger depository libraries in Alabama about the number of titles they sent to the bindery during this five-year period. As I estimated the cost for binding for this same size collection, the cost could have been anywhere from \$6,653 to \$31,430 (depending on what a library chose to keep in paper vs. microfiche or discarding, etc.). Sterne Library does purchase some documents in paper copy, but the cost for binding was less than \$1,000 (on such titles as Survey of Current Business, some of the Alabama census volumes, etc.).

I studied surveys, the Federal Depository Library Manual, articles, and GOVDOC-L messages to come up with a composite staffing scenario for an 80% depository library: 1 librarian, 1 paraprofessional, and about 80 hours of student help. At Sterne Library, the documents staff involves one librarian and 2 hours of student help per week (which, at the time of the article, was 19 hours per week). These two hours are still adequate for filing and refiling of ASI and CIS microfiche.

The quality of service with a primarily microfiche collection depends a great deal on good indexing and on good equipment. The reference interview process almost always involves a follow-through to instruction on how to use the microfiche reader/printers. I add here that "browsing" and "serendipity" are not lost, but they are different. My users and I have run across interesting titles through the ASI and CIS indexes, as well as surrounding fiche titles when pulling a microfiche.

The disadvantages of the UAB non-depository collection involve weaknesses in the areas of popular public information (pamphlets usually), monographs, patents, technical documents, and maps. Of course, several of these areas are not a part of all depository collections, either, but you still receive some publications in each category which are not easy for me to obtain. I see the absence of Government CD-ROMs in our collections as both a disadvantage and an advantage, and I bet most of you know what I'm talking about right away. I might want some of the census CD-ROMs, but don't care a thing about supporting all the CD's none of you have figured out how to use yet! The final disadvantage is that microfiche, even with good indexing and equipment, is still microfiche.

You're all wondering about now what this has to do with you, and definitely what it has to do with a "brighter future." Well, I think that my work situation has some parallels to the electronic environment. To a certain extent, a "brighter future" already has some reality to me as a non-depository documents librarian because of greater access.

Like microfiche, Internet-based electronic documents need no shipping lists, claims lists, superseded lists, or discard lists. Superseded documents are updated dynamically, and there is no need for someone to list, pack up, and ship off discarded documents. Like microfiche, electronic documents do not need to be barcoded, labeled, shelved, or security stripped. There's no need for more shelf space, microfiche cabinets, or binding of documents.

Probably the most important point is that the collection reaches far beyond our library walls and is more timely. For many of you in the depository community, you think about what

you're losing. For those outside the "automatic receipt" club, think about what we're gaining! One of my most frequent requests for information is from the Federal Register, both for regulations and for grants announcements. Whereas the information used to come in about a week after publication date, and on microfiche, now I lead a user to the information, perhaps over the phone, on the day of publication. Like microfiche, the information is more hidden, but, in my "brighter future," the indexing is good, whether from the GPO or a private vendor, like CIS. Also, "browsing" and "serendipity" are not lost, but, again, are different (and many Web sites include "browsing" capability as a part of their site).

Once computer equipment is in place and staff is trained, librarian and library staff attitudes will be more positive in helping users. As with microfiche, the reference interview involves instruction with the equipment; the instruction merges with the answer to the question.

I'd like to add here that I believe libraries are going through a computer purchase "hump" right now and, although everyone talks about the 18-month longevity of computer equipment, not *all* computers will need to be replaced or upgraded with every update in technology. Another aspect I envision for a brighter future is more "coherent" service. In my current NOTIS library system environment, our OPAC and 17 online periodical indexes are searched very nearly the same (through the wonder of Z39.50 standards). I don't have to teach a user one methodology to search the Reader's Guide and then another to search PAIS. I have enjoyed a streamlined simplicity that I think I'm about to lose because of the World Wide Web, but I would hope for some standardization in my "brighter future," at least for Government Web sites.

I have three final thoughts for you. I would like to emphasize that documents departments and librarians are not alone. The current changes are library-side changes, not documents changes. Since all libraries and departments within libraries are facing electronic information issues, partnering, or at least conversing, with those outside the Government documents department is very important. Second, and I say this from outside the depository program, the FDLP is still needed because the librarians are trained for access and are an important advocate for non-privatization of Government publications. This issue is important for all libraries, indeed, all citizens. I would think that non-privatization would even be important for private publishers, in order for them to have access to Government information to add value to and resell. Finally, I envision a new type of depository library: an Internet-only, electronic affiliate. It would receive no paper, no fiche, no CD-ROMs; but the librarians would partner to provide access, the right computer equipment, and new depository librarians, who would be added to those trained for access and to the voices of the aforementioned advocates.