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Tell Someone Who Cares: Creating Opportunities to Inform the World (Outside of Libraries) About Government Documents

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Good afternoon. The setup of the room has changed a bit since I came in earlier (there were tables instead of the rows of chairs as we have now), so it is going to take me a few minutes to rearrange how we are going to operate. While I do, I'd suggest that you turn to your left, introduce yourself, then turn to your right and introduce yourself. It is important that you do this because you are going to be working together this afternoon.

When I woke up this morning several occurrences led me to the realization that this was not going to be the best of all possible time slots. First, my Left-Hander's Desk Calendar quote for today told me that "According to Islamic belief, everyone is given a book with the record of his or her life. If the book is placed in your right hand, you are blessed; if the book is placed in your left hand, you are damned." Being a natural born lefty, my immediate reaction was, "Damn." Next, I realized that today is the anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic. "Damn." It's tax day. "Damn." My time slot is after lunch, and those of you who aren't beginning to get drowsy from lunch are starting to mentally make dinner plans. And on top of all of that, I'm getting a year older in three days. I have to remember to thank Sheila for this "damned" time slot.

The title of this session is "Tell Someone Who Cares: Creating Opportunities to Tell the World (Outside of Libraries) About Government Documents."

Some of you are probably wondering why you should be here listening to Bob talk about this topic. You don't recall my having any notoriety for being the leading documents evangelist, the literature isn't flooded with Bob articles, and you have probably done as much or more than I have in the way of promoting Government documents. Why are you sitting there listening to me? One big reason is: I asked for it and you didn't. When I received the Administrative Notes issue that had the depository conference schedule listed in it, I noticed several sessions "TBA," "TBA," "TBA," "TBA." My first thought was that this person TBA was damned prolific. But being curious I called Sheila McGarr and asked her what was going on with those slots. Sheila informed me that they all had someone tentatively assigned, but not confirmed yet, and someone might drop out. I took this as an

opportunity, pitched my idea at Sheila, she thought the idea had merit and fit with the conference theme. I asked to be considered as designated hitter if someone did drop out. Someone did drop out, Sheila sent me e-mail stating that I was now "in the batter's box," here I am and there you are. And we have our first example of creating an opportunity instead of waiting for it to fall into your lap. Instead of reading TBA as "to be announced" read it as "To Be Asked (For)."

As I mentioned earlier, I am not an expert on this topic, but I was interested enough in it, and willing to go out and do some reconnoitering for you. I am bringing in experiences I've had, results of an informal survey, and news of what our colleagues are doing. I am not the expert, but collectively we are, and that is what we are going to discover together today.

Part of what we are talking about is changing your mind-set. I need two volunteers. If the two of you would stand? This is the type of mind set we need to encourage. They didn't know what I was going to ask of them, had no idea what was coming, but were willing to take a chance. To try something different. To take a risk. Would everyone please give our volunteers a hand to thank them.

There is an expression you may be familiar with, one used to indicate an inordinate degree of difficulty or impossibility of some activity. It begins "It would take an act of Congress to ¼" If you would open the envelopes I distributed to some of you, you will find slip laws that we documents librarians are all familiar with: acts of Congress. We realize that an act of Congress isn't that difficult to come by. Neither is it impossible to create opportunities to speak or publish outside of library land.

On the Post-it notes I distributed I want everyone to write down a reason you can't or haven't spoken to disciplines outside of librarianship or tried to publish in the literature of disciplines outside of librarianship. As you finish and I move among you, I want you to crumple the note, and throw it into my bag. You now no longer have that as an excuse to hold you back. It is a mind set you have left behind.

Together we are going to realize how to create/take advantage of opportunities to speak and publish outside of librarianship. I am going to provide seed examples of what I and others have done, and in groups we are going to raise a crop of ideas.

I have informally surveyed faculty and administrators in various disciplines. The first question I asked them was if librarians had ever given presentations at the conferences they attend, or published in the literature of their field. Overwhelmingly the answer was no. The next question I asked was, "What would your response or that of your colleagues be to librarians who spoke at your conferences or published in your literature?" The response this time was that there would not be a problem, and librarians would be welcomed if:

1. there were clear indications of how the information presented would affect them (how they do research, when they do research, where they do research);
2. the talk/article were relevant to the field (or focus of the conference);
3. the information/topic was timely;

4. the information/topic engendered new approaches, and
5. they were shown what they have to gain by attending the session, or reading the article.

Other comments were that librarian presentations would be more appropriate at the larger conferences with multiple topic areas - the smaller conferences tend to be more focused or work-oriented. Also that the approach or attitude taken needs to be not "I know more than you," but "Here is how I can help you," "This is what is happening in my field that can impact yours," "You may not be aware of¼"

Admittedly this was a small sample, and not a scientific survey. But it is encouraging, and points to an opportunity for someone out there (this is a hint, people) to do the formal, scientific survey and write the paper, and make the presentation both within and without the library world.

In the past year I have made several presentations on Government documents to diverse groups:

For the Indiana Teachers of Writing conference I collaborated with an English faculty member on a presentation called "A Federal Case: Using Government Documents to Teach Research Writing." The faculty member (Dr. Nadene A. Keene, Indiana University Kokomo) was faced with writing textbooks that had skimpy information on Government documents (if they had any information on Government documents at all), sometimes incorrect information on Government documents, and students with the perennial excuse "I can't find any information on my topic." Dr. Keene outlined the problems, presented her syllabus and the topics chosen by the students. I described the Federal Depository Library Program, explained some of the access tools to Government documents, and showed how Government documents had quality resources (acceptable by the faculty member) for every topic chosen by the students.

Through my work as liaison to the School of Public and Environmental Affairs I discovered from a faculty member (Dr. Robert Lehnen, IUPUI) that members of an association he belonged to, the American Statistical Association, a) were not familiar with the depository program and b) had an upcoming Joint Statistical Meeting conference with a special session on Electronic Dissemination of Statistical Information. I took advantage of the "insider" information and submitted a proposal, "Electronic Dissemination of Government Information: GPO and the Federal Depository Program in Transition," and made the opportunity to inform an international audience of statisticians about the FDLP, the transition to electronic distribution of Federal statistical information, and implications for statisticians.

FOIIndiana is a group of journalists, citizens and citizen action groups in Indiana. For the 30th anniversary of the Freedom of Information Act they sponsored a "Your Right to Know" conference. I participated on their "Records and Cyberspace" panel, talking about and demonstrating Government information in electronic format that is available to citizens.

Other examples of the creative approaches documents librarians are taking:

- In Arizona: Docs Tour '97 (Some Things in Life are Free: Accessing Federal Government Information) is a program to help raise awareness regarding the knowledge and use of Federal depository information in libraries across Arizona. The Tour begins in February and ends in September, covering six cities (Yuma, Glendale, Tucson, Kingman, Flagstaff, and Apache Junction). The workshops are aimed at increasing awareness of existing Federal print and electronic resources, identifying and accessing Federal Government information sources, and locating information in the Federal depository libraries in Arizona. Librarians and educators knowledgeable in the area of Federal documents are teaming up to prepare and present these workshops. And just like a rock tour, they have produced tour t-shirts, which are being worn by a contingent from Arizona here in the front row.
- Anna Sylvan in Missouri attends meetings of the local chambers of commerce, business organizations, informing them about Government documents and making networking connections. She also conducts regularly scheduled bibliographic instruction sessions for the public, and announces them in the local newspaper.
- Tom Lindsey, University of Texas at Arlington, sends information about new Government documents of interest to local groups, such as documents on lowering cholesterol levels, and breast cancer to local jazzercise instructors.
- As Dawn Hammel, Creighton University puts it, "Sometimes you have to be sneaky when promoting documents." She ties documents to the curriculum, billing classes as "Political Science Resources on the Web" and "Economics Resources on the Web," garnering much better response than when the class was listed as "Government Documents."
- Mary Freilich, University of Memphis, delivered a paper on using Web documents in the chemistry classroom to the American Chemical Society entitled "Freebies from the Feds."
- Beth Baur, University of Memphis, has targeted teacher groups during their inservice programs. She contacts them and offers them a different type of program idea than they normally have and has had great response. She has also addressed the Music Catalogers OCLC Users Group. After she had an article published in JGI, she was approached by Bowker-Saur to contribute a chapter to their new music information series. Establishing a track record, and getting your name out there can lead to other opportunities.
- Grace York, University of Michigan, has spoken extensively in the statistical community, partly because of her participation in the State Data Center Program: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, summer conferences, 1980, 1991, 1992. Southeast Michigan Census Council on Internet resources of statistics. Association of Public Data Users on how the Federal Government's move to electronics was affecting depositories. And she got New York Times coverage of her Congressional e-mail list.

- Eleanor Chase, University of Washington, advocates city manager, mayor, and attorney general conferences as targets of opportunity as well as local geographic information systems personnel.
- David Heisser wrote a report on efforts in New England to promote documents: David C. R. Heisser, Marketing U.S. Depository Libraries: Preliminary Report on a Public Awareness Campaign in New England," Government Publications Review 13 (1986): 55-65.

As you can see there are many different ways your colleagues are using to create opportunities to speak and publish outside library circles.

Now it is time for the group work I promised you. For the first few rows on this side of the room (group one) I have copies of calls for papers from the Chronicle of Higher Education Web site <<http://www.chronicle.merit.edu/>

events/edead.html>, and a call for proposals for the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Your task is to identify as many ways as you can where Government documents and the Federal Depository Library Program can have an impact or would be appropriate for these publications or conferences.

Group two: here are copies of the chapters from the english textbooks I mentioned earlier that have poor or inaccurate information on Government documents. Your job is to identify the incorrect information, and decide how the sections on Government documents could be improved. Second, what ideas do you have for updating the information and how would you approach the publishers to get the material corrected and updated?

The third group is tasked with identifying people resources (state, local, national, or international) who could benefit from knowing about Government documents and the Federal Depository Library Program.

And last but not least group four. What organizations can you identify (state, local, national, or international) who could benefit from knowing about Government documents and the Federal Depository Library Program?

When working also think about what approaches or tactics you would use to state your case to these organizations or people.

All of the groups have fifteen minutes to work together. Then a spokesperson will report back to the group and we will put your responses up on the walls.

While you are working I'd like to share with you a fantasy I had in the shower this morning. It occurred to me that we are in the middle of National Library Week. Seven days when (theoretically) the nation is focused on libraries and library issues. And it hit me, Why isn't there a Depository Day? Can you imagine Sheila McGarr approaching ALA and asking for a Depository Day? "We aren't greedy. As depository librarians we are used to doing more with less. We just want '24 little hours,' and we can show what a difference Depository Day can make."

The results of the groups, and the information I presented earlier about what I and our colleagues have been doing proves that there are multiple opportunities to inform the world outside of library land about Government documents.

As group one reported, not one of the calls for presenters or calls for papers specifically mentioned libraries, Government documents, or the Federal Depository Library Program, but we were able to find in almost every instance, an opportunity for documents librarians to have an impact. We need to seek out the calls, read them, analyze them and employ the same critical thinking skills we tell patrons to use. And it is up to us to approach the issuers of the calls because they don't have us in mind when they put out the calls.

There are professional and academic associations that we can approach for presentations or publications: find out where and when they issue calls for participation. (Check conference proceedings, newsletters, journals, the Chronicle of Higher Education, talk to members of associations.)

There are textbooks with out-of-date, inaccurate or lacking information on Government documents.

There are individuals and organizations to network with.

As we have discovered together today, with initiative and creativity we can create opportunities to inform the world (outside of libraries) about Government documents.

James Brown, the Godfather of Soul, the hardest working man in show business, once sang, "I don't want nobody giving me nothing. Open up the door, I'll get it myself." Documents librarians are the hardest working librarians in library land. Today, together, we have opened up the door to informing the world outside of libraries about Government documents. Now go get it yourself.