
Depository Collection Management

Databases and Web- Based Resources as Assessment Tools

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While the “Alert Collector” has generally presented columns on building collections in specific topic areas, it is good to remember that managing collections involves more than just selection. It is essential that we also evaluate and weed collections on the basis of our users’ needs and interests as well as on our institutional policies. Here, Charmaine Henriques, liaison and subject specialist at the Northwestern University Libraries, discusses managing depository collections using two case studies.—*Editor*

The Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) is made up of more than 1,250 libraries.¹ FDLP libraries build unique collections to provide free public access to US government information, however the selection and reevaluation of the usefulness of the materials in these collections has always been a struggle. This paper will examine the use of online resources in collection analysis for depository collections, using two libraries’ projects as case studies. While other types of collection development and collection management activities will be mentioned, the focus of the paper will be to discuss and highlight the employment of databases and other online resources for the purposes of collection evaluation.

A collection is a group of materials (both physical items and digital resources) that is assembled, selected, and organized by a library and accessed by its users and staff members.² Over time, collection analysis must be done to appraise the effectiveness of the pieces in the collection. The principal purpose of collection analysis is to determine which areas of a collection maybe deficient and what can be done to further develop it. Collection assessment and evaluation are two of the most basic functions of collection analysis. Collection assessment ascertains how well the collection supports the needs of its users and/or the curriculum of an institution; collection evaluation examines or describes collections either in their own terms or relative to other collections or checklists.³

COLLECTION ASSESSMENT

Quantitative use-based methods such as looking at circulation, interlibrary loan, and document delivery statistics are very popular with libraries when performing collection assessment; however, the standard collection assessment method for US Federal Documents Collections is the zero balance review, where librarians inspect all their item numbers so adjustments can be made to individual depository

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libraries' selection profiles by adding or deleting these numbers to ensure appropriate documents are being received to meet patron demands. While the Government Publishing Office (GPO) recommends that libraries review their selections regularly, each depository library decides on the frequency and whether the reviewing and selection of item numbers will be handled by a group of subject specialist or by an individual selector.⁴

An overlooked but potentially beneficial tool in the collection assessment process is the Needs and Offers (N&O) list, which is hosted by GPO. The N&O list is a device used by librarians who are part of the FDLDP program for collection development purposes. Libraries seeking to dispose of materials withdrawn from their collections may place titles on the N&O list for other depositories to acquire, while libraries seeking publications missing from their depository collections may post needs lists that can be viewed so requests can possibly be fulfilled.⁵ Because it focuses on offers, the N&O list has predominately become an acquisitions tool. However, if materials are no longer useful and deemed unfit for the collection, their removal requires the same thought and care taken in evaluating them in the selection process. Utilizing the N&O list as a collection-management instrument by actively investigating the needs section of the list, one can create a weeding list and start to gather ideas on what should be eliminated from their own collections, all the while identifying potential procurers.

COLLECTION EVALUATION

Many libraries still use commonly known historical print bibliographies and checklists to evaluate depository collections. These include but are not limited to *Checklist of United States Public Documents, 1789–1909*, *Comprehensive Index to the Publications of the United States Government, 1881–1893*, and the famous Benjamin Poore's *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Government Publications of the U.S. September 5, 1774–March 4, 1881*.⁶ More recently created bibliographies can be found electronically in such publications as *DttP: Documents to the People* and the Government Documents Round Table's (GODORT) Occasional Papers series. Whether these new bibliographies focus on older or current content, entries tend to emphasize the online format.⁷ Additionally, standard bibliographies such as those mentioned above are now being digitized, expanding their use in evaluating, inventorying and finding bibliographic information for holdings of legacy collections.

Case Study 1: Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL) Collaborative Federal Depository Program (CFDP)

The Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL) Collaborative Federal Depository Program (CFDP) seeks to provide workable solutions to address the increasing cost of

managing, preserving, and providing access to large collections of federal government publications through the creation of agency-based Centers of Excellence (COE) among libraries participating in the Federal Depository Library Program.⁸

In the presentation *Building Better Relationships with ASERL's Collaborative Federal Depository Program*, Chelsea Dinsmore (then international documents librarian at University of Florida's George A. Smathers Libraries) spoke about the use of ProQuest's digitized version of the *Monthly Catalog of U.S. Government Publications, 1895–1976* in inventorying the Libraries' Government Documents Collection for the University of Florida's Panama Canal Commission Center of Excellence project.⁹

With encouragement from the board of directors of the Panama Canal Society, Judith Russell, dean of University Florida Libraries, initiated a project to digitize federal documents pertaining to the Panama Canal Commission. Because the George A. Smathers Libraries was doing this digitization project, it was felt that they should also take part in the ASERL's pilot project and become a COE for the Panama Canal Commission. At the outset, it was decided that a review had to take place to determine what the library had, what was missing and confirm everything was cataloged. The first step was to identify documents by the Panama Canal Commission. By means of the *Guide to U.S. Government Publications* (otherwise known as Andriot), Dinsmore was able to find seven different SuDoc stems associated with the various iterations of the Panama Canal Commission.¹⁰ Once the SuDoc stems were found the next step was to check for the necessary documents in the *Monthly Catalog*. Carrying out this activity manually using the print version of the *Monthly Catalog* would have been too time consuming, therefore a trial for the digital *Monthly Catalog* by ProQuest was arranged (later purchased) to do the searching. A master list of publications was created to compare against the Libraries' holdings to construct a list of desired documents. Gaps in the collection would be filled by taking advantage of the N&O list, making request via documents networking channels, drawing on the Libraries' gifts and exchange program, and through searching the holdings of other University of Florida Libraries' collections.

Case Study 2: Brief Test Technique

Within the US government documents arena, evaluation is usually driven by the necessity to locate substitutes for missing materials, especially in relation to historic collections. Nonetheless, there are other collection-evaluation methods used by our nondocuments colleagues that can be useful to document librarians in need of performing collection evaluation. A modified version of a qualitative-collection-based evaluation technique known as the brief test method (first developed by Howard D. White) can help determine a collection's strong points while assisting in filling in gaps within a documents collection.¹¹ One could perform the brief test by first creating a random list of fifty to sixty items from

an wide-ranging catalog or standard comprehensive bibliography, or by doing subject searches on a vendor's online catalog or database. The list can then be compared against a library's holdings to determine the strength in a particular subject area.

This method was tested in the documents collection at Northwestern University Libraries when a research request disclosed a high level of shrinkage in the collection of congressional hearings related to the Vietnam War. The missing items had to be replaced, but the question became how? Using the Proquest congressional database, a brief test list of hearings was produced. Individual searches were performed from two date selections: before 1970 and 1970 to the present. Searches were done on various topics including but not limited to Agent Orange, Vietnam veteran's health, missing in action/killed in action soldiers in Vietnam, and Amerasian children immigration. Language found in the descriptors and subjects from search results revealed more terminology that led to crafting more refined searches. A list of 116 titles organized by SuDoc number, which included bibliographic information was generated, and then a student assistant hunted for the hearings in both print and microfiche. A total of seventy-three hearings, equating to 18,452 pages, were discovered to be missing.

Understandably, seventy-three hearings does not seem like a significant amount of missing material, but the US Federal Documents Collection has significant legislative information holdings that is strong in several subjects, among them US public and foreign policy, diplomacy, strategic/security studies, and military history/US intervention abroad. Furthermore, the political science and history departments are core users of the collection, and based on the focus of the hearings (Vietnam-related topics), there was potential effect on the users of the Asian Studies collection. In the end, due to the strength of the collection, the topic, and the academic departments affected, this was considered a detrimental loss.

CONCLUSION

While both projects had similar goals (promoting and encouraging the use of US government information), took on similar tasks, and ended in the same result (filling in holes in collections), their motivations and objectives were different. The focus of the ASERL Panama Commission COE project was to evaluate and inventory a specific segment of a collection to complete the libraries' holdings from a defunct agency to take part in a collaborative collection development initiative and to build a complete collection for the purposes of digitization. The Vietnam Congressional Hearing Project reevaluated a division of the collection that was long held as a strength; the exposure of so many missing hearings in any one subject area was surprising and dismaying. As a consequence there was further scrutiny of the congressional hearings collection using the brief test model. Most notably, a similar project focused on school integration/desegregation

hearings. The "Brief test" yielded more favorable results in relation to completeness than the Vietnam Congressional Hearing Project. Most notably, a similar project focused on school integration/desegregation hearings. The brief test yielded more favorable results in relation to completeness than the Vietnam congressional hearing project. By using the brief test method, the weaknesses within a collection perceived to be strong were uncovered. This led to the reacquisition of the missing materials so gaps could be filled to reaffirm the collection's standing.

While breaches in collections can always be filled by obtaining print materials from the N&O list, borrowing titles from other libraries for preservation photocopying or reformatting, or printing materials directly from agency websites, in the future rifts will more likely be filled electronically. Libraries will be able to use resources such as the NET: New Electronic Title List (<https://1.usa.gov/1WXpgXz>), CGP: Catalog of US Government Publications (<http://catalog.gpo.gov/F>), the Historic Shelflist (<http://1.usa.gov/1H6SBYE>), and DDM2: Documents Dataminer 2 (<https://bit.ly/2eD3OUA>) to create brief test lists for evaluation and to identify needed materials to fill in disparities within their collections. However, instead of seeking print replacements, libraries can ingest digital content for local use or make it available via their catalogs and discovery tools. Both the CGP and DDM2 identify OCLC numbers of born-digital materials for copy cataloging. Additionally, records can be imported from the CGP if an institution's catalog is Z39.50 compliant (records with bibliographic information can be emailed to the appropriate staff from within the CGP and the .MRC record can be converted into the institution's catalog). Bibliographic records can also be created onsite in integrated library systems with links to historic and current online materials that don't have OCLC records. Optimally, once a brief test list is compiled and searched against a library's holdings, the library would take the additional step to verify if any of the missing titles have the same item number; if so, those item numbers can be added to the library's item selection profile not only to guarantee that essential publications in all necessary formats are being acquired to suit the recreational, educational, or research requirements of clientele but also to advance and cultivate depository collections.

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