

**Current Practice In Government Publications:
Preliminary Report and Recommendations**

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1. An Overview of the Collection

1.1 Background

The Library's Government Publications unit collects various documents from governmental publishers, notably Canadian federal and provincial publications; publications from the US and United Kingdom; and from agencies such as the United Nations and OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development).

For the most part, these are centrally located on the third floor; however, there are both CODOC and LC government publications in Education/Fine Arts (notably, items from the Department of Education used for teacher preparation), and various items in the Main Library LC collection. The Government Publications collection is, in general, classified according to CODOC, although it does have a small amount classified in LC.

1.2 Canadian Federal Government Publications

The Government Publications unit is a *selective depository library*¹. Within Saskatchewan there are two libraries that have *full depository status*²: the Saskatchewan Legislative Library, and the Government Publications department of the University of Saskatchewan Library.

As a matter of past practice and (unwritten) policy, the department tries to acquire all *paper* items that are made available to selective depositories through the DSP (This does *not* include the linking or printing of items that are listed in the checklist as being available in an electronic format). This process is done online (at <http://dsp-psd.communication.gc.ca/index-e.html>) by the LA II (James Saunders). Alternatively, an email might be sent by the LA II (as directed by the Librarian) to the appropriate agency.

Items in the checklist are in the following formats:

- **New Mailing Lists:** The LA II currently requests to be placed on every new mailing list advertised in the weekly checklist; issues are sent automatically thereafter.
- **Paper copies of items available through the DSP free of charge to selective depositories:** These items are denoted in the weekly checklist by a single dot. The LA II currently requests all items released in this manner.
- **Electronic Publications:** notification is made that items are being made available in an electronic version only (i.e. pdf.). There is currently no fixed acquisition/collections policy on these items; links are selectively added for some print documents in Voyager, which have pdf equivalents available online³. Links to documents available solely online are generally not provided, both because of a lack of policy, and because of uncertainty over cataloging procedures for purely

electronic documents. There is also the question of checking these links for currency.

- **Paper items available only through the issuing agency:** Notification is made that an item is available, but because of limited numbers only full depositories are automatically sent copies. Selective depositories must request these items through the issuing agency – these are *not* available through the Depository Services Program.

There are two problems with this approach: 1) only a small percentage of publications of the various federal government departments are available through the DSP program, and 2) many publications are available only through the departments' checklists, which are accessible via the departmental Web sites. Staff either request materials online from these departments, or print items available on the site and place them in the collection. This is not done systematically, but, rather, is usually done in response to reference requests from faculty and students, or as staff becomes aware of the availability of various publications. The essential point is that many federal government publications are never made available through the DSP, nor is any notification made of their availability.

1.3 Provincial Government Publications

There is no depository service for Saskatchewan government publications. The Saskatchewan Legislative Library sends a checklist of publications, which is used to request items which may be missing (such as a departmental annual report) or which may be of interest to library patrons. Because Saskatchewan government publications are purchased, received via permanent mailing lists or requested because of reference requests from patrons, the checklist is used as a tool to supplement other acquisitions methods.

The checklist is, however, far from complete. Departments are routinely checked for available publications. This procedure is ad hoc, not systematic; publications are requested (in general, by the LA IV's) in response to patron requests (past or present), or in response to current events.

Publications from other provinces are acquired on an ad hoc basis, often in response to faculty and student requests.

1.4 Municipal Publications

Regina municipal publications are a minor part of the collection. Collections work in this area is done on an ad hoc basis, and, in general, the publications are difficult to acquire. It was noted that we do not even have the city bylaws in the collection.

Use of these publications is infrequent; examples include classes in urban geography using the city's annual report for information on housing; social work classes using the

annual reports of the Regina city police; and civil engineering classes seeking information on road design.

People are routinely referred to City Hall; collections that were held in the Saskatchewan Archives Board were transferred to the city, and a new city archivist has been hired. The city archives is now the main repository of municipal publications

1.5 U.S. Government Publications

The department purchases U.S. government and United Nations publications through Bernan, a vendor. It is also on the mailing list of various U.S. government publications. Some agencies are exhaustively covered, like the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

1.6 U.K. Government Publications

The department is on mailing lists for various UK agencies, such as the Home Office. About 15-20 series are currently on standing order; these are cataloged as monographs. A monthly catalog is scanned (by the Government Publications librarian) for items relevant to the collection; this catalog contains both free and for-purchase items.

1.7 Statistics Canada

The bulk of the Stats Can publications arrive as part of the selective DSP programme. Occasionally, there are items that do not come automatically which are listed in the weekly checklist. As a matter of policy, the department requests to be placed on all mailing lists for Statistics Canada publications. However, because the department is a selective depository it must specifically request items that are not listed in the checklist. Unfortunately, there is no systematic way of identifying these items, though they are sometimes listed in the *Statistics Canada Daily*. As well, many Statistics Canada items are available only on the department's web site. These items are occasionally available in another format as well – paper or CD-Rom – but often they are Internet only.

2. Other Libraries

2.1 Simon Fraser University (Todd Mundle; (604) 291-3266)

SFU follows a distributed model in terms of government documents; that is, they are not centrally located, but are classified with the rest of the LC collection. At present, they do not have a government documents librarian, and Todd Mundle indicated that it is highly unlikely that they would have one in future.

In general, they rely on the Depository Services Program for the bulk of their acquisitions. Occasionally, liaison librarians (equivalent to our collections librarians) will order materials not coming in automatically on the checklist; these are purchased through their own subject allocations. Additionally, liaison librarians decide whether a link to a

web resource is required (these are *not* printed and catalogued). Government Publication serials are handled through the Serials Department.

Unlike other government documents, Statistics Canada publications are kept together at SFU: "At the Bennett Library, most Statistics Canada publications are located at the end of the Reference Collection, and are arranged by the five digit Statistics Canada number. Census publications are filed by census year, then publication number (e.g., 1996 Census no. 92-350-PPB) at the end of the collection."⁴ The SFU library is depository library and automatically receives one copy of Stats Can paper format publications.

As for data, SFU library has a librarian in charge of a concentration that consists of maps, RDL (Research Data Library) and GIS. This librarian, Walter Piovesan, works closely with the Geography Department. They also have a liaison librarian for geography.

2.2 University of Saskatchewan (Andrew Hubbertz; (306) 966-5989)

Government Publications, Maps & Microforms is located on the second floor of the Main Library. For the most part, the collection is centrally located there, with the exception of Supreme Court decisions held in the Law Library, and publications of the Geological Survey held in the science library (there is also the occasional title in the LC collection). As for Data Library Services, it is located next to the reference department on the main floor, a situation that Andrew Hubbertz says is not desirable, given its natural affinity to government publications. U of S Libraries operates this service with support from Computing Services for mainframe front-ends (for more info, go to: <http://library.usask.ca/data/about.html>).

At present, the librarian in charge of government publications reports to the Head of Research Services (Linda Fritz). The department has decreased in size, from two to one librarian; Andrew indicated that service has not suffered as a result. Overall, there are seven people in the unit. Some of the staff there does minimal level cataloging in addition to 2-3 hours of reference. Andrew indicated that he would like that changed to copy cataloging.

The U of S library is presently undergoing a reorganization that will see four departments, namely, Government Publications, Maps & Microforms, Reference, Special Collections, and Collections reporting to (or forming) Research Services. Thus, Government Publications will lose its status as a separate department.

Andrew strongly recommended that any library considering a more decentralized approach should, nonetheless, keep legislative material and Statistics Canada publications together and separate from the rest of the collection. Other material can be safely integrated with the rest of the LC collection, although there may be preservation issues with some of the flimsier pamphlet-type publications.

2.3 University of Windsor (Gwendolyn Ebbet; (519) 253-3000 ext. 3161)

A small university of some 1200 students, U Windsor has recently advertised for the position of Data Services Librarian. This position will report to (as it's presently envisioned) the Head of Reference. University Librarian Gwendolyn Ebbet said that librarians there have to report to a unit head by dint of the contract; librarians there also have secondary relationships with other departments. The secondary relationship for the Data Services Librarian is expected to be collections, although it is likely that the person in this job will have to interact with many departments (as an aside, Gwendolyn expressed regret that librarians place themselves in "boxes"; as librarians we have to be able to work across departments and have various skill sets).

The Data Services Librarian will work out of reference. The major component of the job will be data; faculties want the library to coordinate efforts in that area. The person will also be in charge of the map collection. There is also the hope that, depending on the person's skill set, the Data Services Librarian will participate in GIS activities on campus.

Government publications at the Leddy Library have been, historically, centrally located. However, more and more items are being placed in the LC collection. Basically, if a MARC record exists, the item is placed in LC. If not, it gets a CODOC number. Most of the collection is in CODOC; Gwendolyn indicate that she probably would not expend resources to recon. Acquisitions and cataloging of government publications used to be done separately by the Government Publications unit; but the retirements of 5-6 staff (positions that were lost due to attrition) have shifted these activities to Acquisitions and Cataloging departments.

The Leddy Library is a full depository for national and provincial government publications. For materials that are web accessible, some effort is made to either print off heavily used items, or to provide links in the OPAC (which then have to be periodically checked to make sure the URLs are still accurate). Gwendolyn says that their studies have shown that publications that are placed in the LC collection tend to get higher use.

Gwendolyn said that, in her opinion, having separate collections is a disservice to students; that the more things are kept in separate collections, the greater the chance that something will be missed by students. She expressed a clear preference for integrating government publications with the rest of the collection.

2.4 University of Manitoba (Nicole Michaud-Oystryk; (204) 474-9211)

Ten years ago, the library at the University of Manitoba made a change that parallels our own: the centralized Government Publications collection was moved from the second floor to the main floor, next to its reference desk. The Government Publications Librarian takes a turn at the desk, and while all reference staff can help patrons with reference queries, it is not uncommon for questions to be referred to the GP librarian.

The University of Manitoba is a full depository library. The majority of the publications are housed in the Dafoe Library next to the reference department; however, collections librarians can order materials using their subject allocations, and house these materials in other libraries on campus (as well, some important publications, like Royal Commissions, might be housed in more than one location). While collections responsibilities are, thus, decentralized, Nicole indicated that this was not working too well in terms of controlling the acquisition of documents falling outside of the depository program.

Two support staff service the collection, including processing of incoming documents, shelving, prioritizing new documents for the Cataloging Department, and signage. Occasionally, when there is a lack of space, other libraries on campus are asked if they're interested in having materials transferred to their collection. The move towards more electronic availability of documents was noted; links to documents are made in the catalogue.

In terms of personnel, there's one GP librarian and two support staff (this is down from five, in years past); the GP librarian also has responsibility for maps (the map collection is located in the reference room). The Data Services Librarian has responsibility both for data, and for GIS. The latter liaises with the Geography Department and has, in fact, collections responsibilities in Geography and Natural Resources.

Nicole said that the decentralized approach for acquisitions and cataloging is working well, but expressed concern that there has been a loss of concentrated expertise in government publications, and that some of the expertise has shifted to data library services.

2.5 University of Calgary (Helen Clarke; (204) 220-3796)

University of Calgary Library has also decided to integrate most of its government documents into the circulating (LC) collection. There remains a remnant of the former collection, mostly Statistics Canada publications, on a separate floor (i.e., not located next to the reference area). The Library has general reference desk in the Information Commons area; referrals to the collection, or the GP librarian, are made from that location.

Data library services (including socioeconomic and spatial (GIS) data) are integrated with the map collection in a separate service area in the Main Library.

The Library is a full-depository, and has one Government Documents librarian. Other collections librarians can purchase documents on their allocations; or, they can request that they be purchased on the Government Documents fund. All purchases are done through the library's Acquisition Department, and are given LC call numbers, with the exception of Statistics Canada publications, noted above, and statutes which are located in the Law Library.

Helen indicated that she has some mixed feelings about this arrangement. On the positive side, having most of the collection in LC is a bonus, since browsing access to publications is improved. On the other hand, she feels that the remaining GP collection could use a higher level of service, and that it is a lot of work for one librarian to stay on top of the situation. Her preference would be for a merged social sciences service point, saying that separate service points can simply offer a higher level of service (however, she noted, it is unlikely that their situation will change). She suggested that Memorial's model might be worth looking into. Evidently, they have merged data, GIS, maps, and government publications into one unit.

2.6 Summary

As these libraries were arbitrarily selected, no conclusions can be drawn as to what might constitute "state of the art" practice in government publications in Canada. The following observations can be made:

- The move to integrating the collection into the LC collection is not uncommon among those libraries queried.
- In terms of service, some libraries noted that documents get used more when placed in the LC collection, while others expressed concern at the loss of concentrated expertise that occurs when the collection is decentralized.
- There are various groupings of government publications, data, maps, and GIS: no consistent picture emerged.

3. Discussion

Certain key decisions already have been made with respect to our Government Publications unit, and it is worth reviewing these before focusing on reference and instructional, technical, and collections services. These key decisions are: 1) the collection will be co-located with the Main reference collection; 2) the collection will have open-access; and 3) acquisitions and cataloging will be centralized under Technical Services.

3.1 Reference and Instructional Services

There are obvious implications for service and training. Some of the libraries interviewed regret the loss of service that a specialized unit offers. On the other hand, Main Reference can offer expanded service by dint of adding government publications; and service to users will be improved because of the increased hours of access afforded by an open collection.

- **Training of Main Reference Staff**

While it is doubtful that individual staff members will ever acquire the depth of knowledge that accrues to a separate, specialized unit, nonetheless some inroads can be made, perhaps by focusing on the 20% of the collection that gets 80% of the use.

- **Mediated Access to the Collection**

Some procedure should also be adopted whereby existing, in-house expertise is readily available to the reference staff for referral.

- **Instruction**

Given the specialized nature of some, if not all, government publications, classes of instruction should be offered to library users.

Recommendation 1: Reference and Instructional Services should develop a training plan for its staff with respect to government publications. It may also consider developing a policy detailing which questions should be handled by reference staff, and which should be referred to in-house to those with the requisite expertise. This might be part of a more general policy on mediated access.

3.2 Technical Services

Since the department has been decentralized various issues that have technical service implications need to be considered. As noted above, the collection will be co-located with the Main reference collection. Main Reference will also be receiving the Education/Fine Arts reference collection. As space as always at a premium in the reference area, a reduction in the size of the Government Publications collection would seem desirable.

- **Co-location of collection**

Recommendation 2: Identification should be made, using in-house expertise, of which documents should be located in Main Reference.

Statistics Canada publications, and all legislative materials, such as statutes, are obvious candidates. Royal Commission reports and annual reports might also be considered.

- **Classification**

Recommendation 3: Government Publications remaining in Main Reference area should retain, in the shorter term, their existing classification numbers.

As pointed out by Andy Hubbertz of the University of Saskatchewan, Statistics Canada Publications have a useful internal numbering system that facilitates retrieval of documents.

Recommendation 4: New materials should be given LC class numbers (excepting those materials destined for the Main Reference collection) and integrated with the circulating LC collection where appropriate.

This would appear to be an obvious recommendation; the only difficulty being that Technical Services would have to develop a means of correctly identifying incoming materials.

- **Re-classification**

Recommendation 5: Where possible, those government documents that would benefit by being located in the circulating (LC) collection should be identified, reclassified, and integrated with the circulating collection.

Some of the libraries interviewed have taken this approach, moving, for example, geological publications into the science collection and statutes to the law library. There are, of course, many other possible items that could be transferred, such as (these are actual titles): *Radiation levels in Saskatchewan Caribou 1995*; *How acid rain affects forests, crops and wildlife*; *As the world turns: a profile of Canadian immigration at century's end*.

3.3 Collections Development

The Library has to come to grips with the changing face of government publications, and has to make a number of policy decisions on existing practices. Should government publication collections activities, within the current context, be decentralized? Or should an entirely new approach be adopted? Before these questions can be answered, the fundamental sea change in the publication of Canadian government documents has to be understood.

Three comments from colleagues across the country illustrate the essential features of this change⁵:

- Andrew Hubbertz (University of Saskatchewan) said that upwards of 83% of all documents are published electronically. The print collection is, essentially, a heritage collection.
- Marilyn Rennick (University of Ottawa) said the average length of time an electronic document remains available electronically is 44 days.
- Marianne Scott (former National Librarian) indicated the National Library has difficulty in keeping track of Canadian government publications.

Most of us think of a depository program as being one in which a print copy of all government publications are deposited in a designated institution. This, clearly, is no longer the case. The program is now a mechanism for distributing *selective* print publications; and as an alerting mechanism for *selective* new mailing lists and *selective* documents published in electronic form. This is true even of the full depository program.

Having said that, *most* of what is acquired is a function of the selective depository program and the routine list checking of the *Weekly Checklist*. That is, outside of these two mechanisms, firm orders, and ad hoc requests for documents based on past and current user demand, account for only a fraction of all acquisitions.

The policy question to be decided is whether the current method of government publications acquisitions (which seems a more accurate description of current activities than collections development), as described above, should be maintained. If the answer is yes, the parts of the process that might be decentralized are firm orders and ad hoc requests. Perhaps vendor catalogues could be distributed to the collections librarians more widely. The one advantage of this approach, since it consists almost entirely of list checking, is that it is not labor-intensive. Whatever documents are available, as indicated in the *Weekly Checklist*, are acquired automatically.

The disadvantages, aside from some practical difficulties⁶, are twofold. First, it is somewhat arbitrary. The DSP program is, basically, disappearing. By focusing on the remnants of that program, the Library is missing relevant information. On the other hand, the materials that *are* acquired may or may not be of benefit to our users. Secondly, this approach does not address the shift to electronic publication.

What is required is a comprehensive policy on government documents. It should be noted that we are probably not alone in not having a policy. A 1997 survey of all 949 full and selective depository libraries showed that most did not have policies relating to collections development, cataloguing, reference, and so on. The area that was most often covered by policy was collections development, but even here only 22% of responding libraries indicated having a policy⁷.

Recommendation 6: The Operations Committee, or its designate, should develop a comprehensive policy on the full range of government documents (print and electronic), including, but not limited to: collections development; cataloguing; acquisitions; and archiving.

Regarding **collections development**, there is a need to create a profile matched to program and user requirements. Existing collection policies would have to be consulted (note that the standardized policy included a line on government publications).

In terms of **cataloging and acquisitions**, the procedures are well understood for print documents. Electronic documents pose a challenge in terms of cataloguing and archiving⁸. Some way must be found to systematically scan the departmental web pages, and catalog the relevant records. There are three possibilities: 1) creating or downloading MARC records for inclusion in Voyager; 2) creating or downloading Dublin Core records; or 3) mapping Dublin Core records into MARC. No matter which method is chosen, it would, of course, be preferable to include these records in Voyager, as opposed to an external database.

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While this report could not have been written without them, it goes without saying that any errors and omissions (not to mention conclusions) are the responsibility of the author.

Peter Resch
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NOTES

1. “Selective depository libraries use the Weekly Checklist to choose those items they are entitled to order. Selective depository status is granted to Canadian public libraries and libraries of Canadian educational institutions which are open to the general public or clientele at least twenty hours per week and have at least one full-time employee.” (From the Depository Services Program website: <http://dsp-psd.communication.gc.ca/Info/elig-e.html>)
2. “Full depository status is granted to Canadian libraries that are nominated and approved by a Committee consisting of representatives of the National Library and the Depository Services Program. This status is granted as either English, or French, or bilingual, depending on the clientele of the library in question. Full Depository Libraries automatically receive a shipment of all publications listed in the Weekly Checklist of Canadian government publications for that week. There are forty-eight full depositories in Canada and one each in England, Germany, Japan and the United States.” (From the Depository Services Program website: <http://dsp-psd.communication.gc.ca/Info/elig-e.html>)
3. Examples of such documents can be seen if one does a keyword search on “pdf” in Voyager. In some cases the field **Internet Links(s)** says “Internet resource”; in other cases, the phrase “Click here to access the electronic version of this publication” appears.
4. From the Simon Fraser University Library website:
<http://www.lib.sfu.ca/kiosk/mbodnar/statscan.htm>
5. Andrew Hubbertz, personal communication. Marilyn Rennick and Marianne Scott; statements made during CLA plenary session (June 19).
6. Some of these difficulties include:
 - There is a basic incompatibility between the current division of the acquisitions budget into subject allocations on the one hand, and the various government departments on the other. It’s not immediately

evident how the latter should be divided up amongst the collections librarians.

- The Government Publications fund is a deposit account. While the various collections librarians could submit their requests to acquisitions and have them taken off the account, there would be the problem of overall management of the fund. Presumably, separate deposit accounts for each collections librarian is unlikely.
7. Vaughan, Liwen Qiu and Elizabeth Dolan, "Transition to electronic access of government information: are the depository libraries prepared?" *Canadian journal of information and library science*, 23(4) December, 1998: 76-77.
 8. One option would be to systematically scan the departmental web pages (in concert with whatever policy is in place), make a print copy of the documents, and have them catalogued and placed on the shelves. While this would potentially solve the **archiving** problem (given that these documents routinely stop being electronically available), dealing with electronic documents on their own terms seems logical and preferable; that means providing links to these documents, either in the library catalogue, on a web page, or both.