Government Documents
Houston Cole Library
Collection Assessment
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INTRODUCTION

The Government Documents Collection differs from conventional subject collections in a variety of ways, the most important of these being: it is interdisciplinary, the items are received free-of-charge, some items are not classed using Library of Congress (LC) call numbers and, because the collection is acquired through the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP), it must meet mandates and conform to regulations which do not impact traditional collections. Due to these factors, assessment of the Government Documents Collection by traditional means is not possible (i.e., there are no conspectus sheets). The Government Documents Collection assessment must be, by necessity, more holistic. Consequently, an alternative method of assessment has been adapted from the guidelines established by the WLN Collection Assessment Services. This was done with the hope of modifying the guidelines to fit the unique properties of the Government Documents Collection while creating an assessment that is comparable to those performed on specific subject areas.
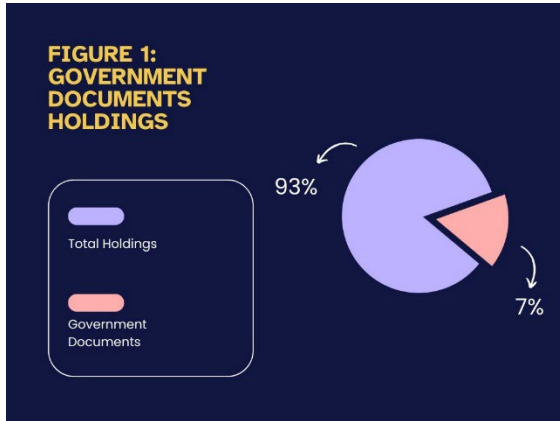
The Government Documents Collection is made up primarily of materials received through the Federal Depository Library Program. The Library has been a selective depository since 1929, and it currently selects **33%** (**3,229** item numbers out of an available **9,784**) of the publications distributed through the FDLP. This is an increase of **2%** since the last government documents assessment.

Based on the guidelines established by the WLN Collection Assessment Services, the Government Documents Collection is rated an overall **3aP** (Basic Study or Instructional Support Level, predominately English). Refer to the holdings counts and checklist analysis for a more detailed examination of the Library's collection.

The primary purpose of the Government Documents Collection is to support the current and anticipated instructional, research, and service programs of the University, in addition to meeting the informational needs of the 3rd Congressional District of Alabama. In addition, the Collection is required by federal mandate to comply with the objectives and regulations of the Federal Depository Library Program.

HOLDINGS

Unlike many institutions, the Library assigns LC classification to its tangible government publications and integrates them into the rest of its collection. The exceptions to this practice include: maps (filed alphabetically by title in the 3rd floor map cabinets), and microfiche (classed by SuDoc and filed in the 4th floor and other fiche cabinets). The Government Documents Collection contains **48,376** titles, which accounts for approximately **7%** of the total library holdings. This count does not include Y4 Congressional microfiche, public [slip] laws, and a few other item types which are not cataloged. It should also be noted that these counts reflect the Library's holdings with regard to federal government documents (i.e., those produced by the U.S. Federal Government).

FIGURE 1: GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS HOLDINGS

- Total Holdings
- Government Documents

93%

7%

As stated above, the Government Documents Collection is interdisciplinary. The largest subject concentrations of the Government Documents Collection include:

- Social Sciences (18%)
- Medicine (13%)
- Agriculture (10%)
- Science (10%)
- Military Science (6%)
- General History (5%)
- Law (5%)
- Education (4%)
- Geography & Anthropology (3%)
- Political Science (3%)
- Technology (2%)
- US & Local History (1%)

HOLDINGS BROKEN DOWN BY MAJOR GOVERNMENT AGENCIES:

SuDoc	Government Agency	Approximate LC Classification Equivalent	Documents Titles
A	Agriculture	S-SK	4,656
AE	National Archives & Records Administration	E-F	174
C	Commerce	H-HJ	1,361
CR	Civil Rights Commission	JC, K, KF	83
D	Defense	D-F, U-UH, V-VM	2,999
E	Energy	TA, TC-TD, TJ-TK	3,445
ED	Education	L-LJ	1,927
EP	Environmental Protection Agency	GE, TD, QH-QR	391
FT	Federal Trade Commission	HF	5
GA	Government Accountability Office	HJ	17
GP	Government Printing Office	Z	6
HE	Health & Human Services	R-RZ	8,677
HH	Housing & Urban Development	HD, NA, TH	699
HS	Homeland Security, FEMA (formerly FEM)	HV	293
I	Interior	E-F, TD, GB, GE, GV	4,139
J	Justice	HV	332
JU	Judiciary	KF	5
L	Labor	H-HD, HF	370
LC	Library of Congress	Z	4,534
NAS	National Aeronautics & Space Administration	TL	734
NF	National Foundation on Arts & Humanities	M-NX	1,094
NS	National Science Foundation	Q-QR	3,504
PE	Peace Corps	HC	30
PM	Personnel Management Office	HF, HG	4
PR	President of the U.S.	HV, JK, KF	30
PREX	Executive Office of the President	G, GB	994
PRVP	Vice President of the U.S.	HV, JK, KF	0
S	State Department	J-JC, JK	490
SBA	Small Business Administration	HC, HF, HG	45
SI	Smithsonian Institution	QH-QL	149
SSA	Social Security Administration	HD	25
T	Treasury	HG, HJ	162
TD	Transportation	T, TE-TG, TL	408
X & Y	Congress*	KF	2,765
	Total		**41,847**

Does not take into account non-cataloged Congressional microfiche
‡Totals will not add up to 48,376 because minor government agencies are not included in this table. Also, some document records do not have SuDoc numbers; therefore, they cannot be counted by agency.

HOLDINGS BROKEN DOWN BY LC CLASSIFICATION/SUBJECT:

LC Classification	Major Divisions, Categories, and Subjects	Documents Titles
A-AZ	General Works	174
B-BX	Philosophy, Psychology, & Religion	23
C-CT	Auxiliary Sciences of History (General)	83
D-DX	History (General) & Europe (General)	2,178
E	United States History (General)	3,080
F	U.S. Local History, Canada, Latin America	676
G-GV	Geography, Anthropology, & Recreation	1,202
H-HX	Social Sciences	8,104
J-JZ	Political Science	1,361
K-KZ	Law	2,349
L-LT	Education	1,927
M-MT	Music	37
N-NX	Fine Arts	794
P-PZ	Language and Literature	347
Q-QR	Science	4,629
R-RZ	Medicine	5,870
S-SK	Agriculture	4,656
T-TX	Technology	942
U-UH	Military Science	2,820
V-VM	Naval Science	179
Z-ZA	Bibliography and Library Science	416
Total ‡		**41,847**

‡Totals will not add up to 48,376 because many document records do not have LC classification
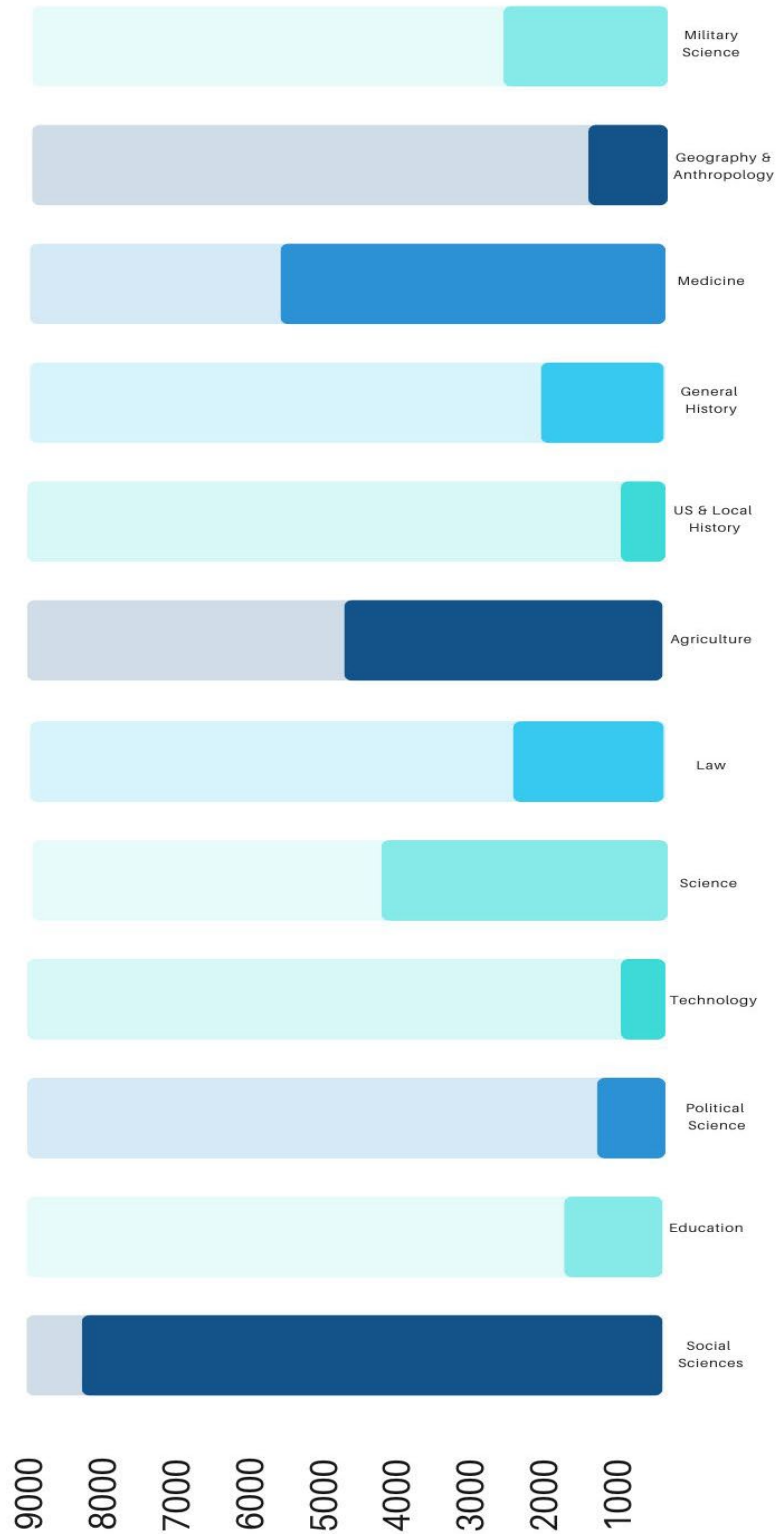
Documents Holdings by Subject

Figure 2: Holdings by Subject Concentration

E-books

The majority of governmental electronic resources added to the catalog are monograph and serial publications by government agencies. These electronic publications are typically made available in HTML or PDF format, although other formats, such as raster images of maps, are also available. In addition, the Library catalogs continuing electronic resources (i.e., websites) for government agencies and entities where appropriate. There are approximately **9,920** electronic government documents titles currently in the Library's catalog, or **21%** of the collection.

Maps

The Library's tangible map collection contains **1,797** government document maps in its collection. The largest categories of maps include geological and soil surveys, census series, CIA, weather, and topographical maps. Of the map classes that the Library does not select, nautical maps and charts make up the majority.

Microfiche

A significant percentage of the Government Documents Collection is in microfiche format. There are currently **3,080** government document microfiche titles, not including the substantive collection of non-cataloged Y4 microfiche and older fiche that has been LC classed and filed in a different location. The Government Documents Collection cataloged and non-cataloged microfiche is located on the 4th floor.

Audio-Visual Materials

The Government Documents Collection contains **69** total audiovisual titles. These titles include **42** videos, **3** kits, **6** sound recordings, and **1** piece of software.

Serials

Of the total Government Documents Collection, **2,940** are serial titles. Government document serials are often irregular in publication frequency, and determining active and ceased publications can be difficult. Government documents periodicals include monthly, quarterly, and weekly journals. Annual reports from government agencies also make up a significant portion of the serials in the Government Documents Collection, though many were originally cataloged individually, making an accurate count of government serials difficult. When discovered, any individual records that should have been cataloged as serials are modified or added to existing serials records.

ACCESS TO ELECTRONIC RESOURCES (Defined Access)

Since the last Government Documents assessment, GPO's legacy system, Federal Digital System (FDsys), has been replaced by GovInfo. The Library selects **32%** (**2,502** item numbers out of **7,855** available) of the online-only titles available from the Government Printing Office, and currently receives approximately **77%** (**2,502** item numbers out of **3,229** total item numbers selected) of its total government publications selections solely in electronic format. In addition, many government publications received in tangible format are also available digitally.

The library's defined access is rated as a 3 (Study or Instructional Support level).

Databases

The Library provides online access to several government databases through the GovInfo web portal (http://www.govinfo.gov). These databases are varied in subject and coverage. Most are full text. In addition to many other functions, GovInfo serves as a metasearch for these databases, which are arranged by collection. Some of the most utilized collections include:

- Bound Congressional Record
- Budget of the United States Government
- Catalog of U.S. Government Publications
- Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)
- Congressional Databases (Bills, Calendars, Committee Prints, Documents, Hearings)
- Congressional Record and Congressional Record Index
- Consumer Information Center
- History of Bills
- Independent Counsel Investigations
- Journal of the House of Representatives
- List of CFR Sections Affected
- Medline/PubMed

- Public Papers of the Presidents
- Public and Private Laws
- Supreme Court Decisions
- United States Code

In addition to the collections available through GovInfo, there are also other government web portals geared towards specific subject areas, such as Science.gov (http://www.science.gov/) and Census Bureau Data (https://data.census.gov).

The Library also has access to government databases (e.g., ERIC) through such general multi-disciplinary database providers as EBSCO and Gale. The government also allows depository libraries no-fee access to databases such as the Homeland Security Digital Library (https://cisa.gov).

Websites

The Library catalogs selected government websites and provides access to them by linking through the Library's catalog. These sites are reviewed, evaluated, and selected by the Electronic Resources/Documents Librarian, or added at the request of a Subject Specialist. These sites can include individual web pages which form discrete publications, or entire sites or portals (e.g., the abovementioned Science.gov). In addition, all FDLP libraries are mandated to have a web presence. The Library complies with this mandate by maintaining the Government Resources LibGuide (http://libguides.jsu.edu/government). It contains information about and links to government resources parsed by type (i.e., Federal, International, State & Local), as well as highlighting new and notable publications.

Figure 3: Government Resources LibGuide

ACQUISITIONS AND FUNDING

All items in the Government Documents Collection are received free-of-charge from GPO through the Federal Depository Library Program. For libraries that are not members of the FDLP, GPO provides a small selection of these publications for purchase, though most are not available at all outside the depository distribution system. Without FDLP membership, the Library would incur considerable cost to provide access to some of the valuable resources that it currently receives for free. Using the prices found in the GPO product sales catalog database,[4] a sample selection of the expenditures that would be incurred over the course of one fiscal year for a few of the Library's widely used government publications is provided below in order to show the benefits of depository status.

Title	Amount
Code of Federal Regulations	$1,804.00
Congressional Record	$2,272.00
FCC Record	$813.00
Federal Register	$124.00
Harmonized Tariff Schedules of the United States	$195.00
Public Papers of the Presidential Papers	$2,272.00
U.S. Code	$5,612.00
Total	**$13,092.00**

WITHDRAWALS

Unlike other materials, the Government Documents Collection must adhere to strict deselection guidelines specified by governmental mandate. In accordance with GPO policy, as stated in *Legal Requirements & Program Regulations of the Federal Depository Library Program*, government documents can be discarded one of four ways:

1. *Superseded materials*. These are items that have been replaced by a newer edition/version and/or whose SuDoc call number is found in the *Superseded List*.
2. *5 year rule.* The Library must retain government publications for a minimum of 5 years. After 5 years have elapsed, they can be discarded, provided that they have been approved by the Regional Librarian and offered to every depository in the state.
3. *Duplicates.* Duplicate items can be discarded, regardless of how long they have been retained.
4. *Substitution.* It is permitted to substitute "official" online versions for tangible publications, and discard the tangible. The "official" online version must be produced and maintained by GPO or a source authorized by GPO.

During FY 2024, the Government Documents Department withdrew a total of **649** items. The majority of these items are ephemeral titles or tangible items deselected in favor of electronic versions. Also, in 2021, we removed our vertical file with government document ephemera, which was not cataloged, due to space concerns.

FEDERAL DEPOSITORY LIBRARY GUIDELINES

The U.S. Federal Government has outlined minimal collection development and maintenance guidelines for all Federal Depository Libraries in Section III of the *Legal Requirements & Program Regulations of the Federal Depository Library Program.* These guidelines are herein examined to determine the extent to which the Library is in compliance.

Collection Development

1. **Depository libraries must develop depository collections to meet the needs and format preferences of their primary library users and the general public.**
   Compliance. The Electronic Resources/Documents Librarian conducts a zero-based review of selections on a yearly basis and liaises with Subject Specialists to add new relevant publications and deselect those that are not useful. Formats are constantly examined for obsolescence, with preference often given to digital versions, and digital versions are also added to the records of tangible documents when available. Electronic resources are evaluated and new titles added monthly using WEBtech Notes and the New Electronic Titles lists.

2. **Each library must demonstrate knowledge of their library community's needs.**
   Compliance. The Library's core constituency is made up of the students, faculty, and staff of Jacksonville State University. To provide for their needs, the Electronic Resources/Documents Librarian keeps abreast of university curricula, programs, and initiatives, and uses this knowledge to select items that will support the current and anticipated instructional, research, and service programs of the University. Consideration is also given to serving the general public in the surrounding community, through knowledge of the demographics of Jacksonville and Calhoun County.

3. **The foundation of a depository library collection includes both tangible (e.g. print, microfiche, CD-ROM/DVD) and online content. Depository libraries must provide access to FDLP content, including:**
    a) **Publications selected, distributed, and received through the Federal Depository Library Program,**
    b) **The FDLP Basic Collection,**
    c) **Publications available through official FDLP partnerships,**
    d) **Online publications cataloged in the Catalog of U.S. Government Publications (CGP), including publications found in the Federal Digital System (FDsys); demonstrated through a combination of cataloging, creation of Web pages, or integration of online material into traditional library finding aids such as subject guides.**

   Compliance.
    a) All selections available through the FDLP are reviewed and evaluated on a yearly basis, adding new publications and deselecting those no longer deemed useful. All currently selected tangible and intangible items are fully cataloged. In addition to the Library's catalog, access is also provided to some electronic resources through the Library's website and subject guides.
    b) The Library selects and provides access to 100% of the titles designated as the FDLP Basic Collection.
    c) The Library provides access to a variety of resources made available through FDLP partnerships, especially those being digitized by entities partnering with the FDLP.
    d) The Library includes both catalog records for and links to online publications found in the CGP and GovInfo (listed as FDsys in the 2018 regulations), as well as including them in subject guides.

4. **Selective depository libraries may only select one tangible format of a publication or series.**
   Compliance. The Library attempts to select only one tangible format of publications, primarily print. Every effort is being made to phase out microfiche and other obsolete tangible formats.

Collection Maintenance

1. **If a library receives a duplicate copy of a publication, the duplicate may be discarded immediately or offered on a discard list to the regional depository library.**
   Compliance. The Library's Government Documents Department has disposal procedures in place that comply with all aspects of this guideline; duplicate copies of government publications are immediately discarded, unless a Subject Specialist specifies they wish to keep duplicates.

2. **All depository materials must be housed in a manner that facilitates timely access.**
   Compliance. The Library's government publications are housed within the Library's main collection, ensuring they enjoy the same ease of access as all other library materials.

3. **Each depository library is entrusted with the custody of depository materials and must ensure that they are properly preserved and protected from theft, deterioration, or damage, in a manner comparable to other library collections and in a way that facilitates their use. FDLP resources must be included in the insurance coverage for the library's collection**
   Compliance. The Library does provide security for its government publications that is comparable to that of the rest of the Library's collection (e.g., they are security stripped), and they are likewise included in its disaster management plans. Government publications, like other library materials, are also sent for mending and binding as necessary. It should be noted, however, that though the Electronic Resources/Documents Librarian attempts to find replacement copies via Needs and Offers lists for government publications that have been lost or damaged, it is often not possible to find a replacement, and there is no system in place for buying replacements, as there is with the general library collection.

4. **All facilities housing depository materials must meet the standards set forth in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or have a reasonable alternative to ensure access. The depository collection must be available for all library patrons, including those with disabilities.**
   Non-compliance. The Library's physical building is not, and has never been, ADA compliant. One example includes areas of the floors (specifically the stacks) that are too narrow to provide wheelchair access. However, every effort is made to provide access to government publications for those with disabilities, according to the individual's situation.

5. **Publicly accessible computer equipment must meet the public needs for the depository collection. Users must have the ability to view, download, photocopy, and print relevant depository content that is available in online and electronic resources.**
   Non-compliance. The Library has computers on every floor for the patrons to access the internet, but we do not have printing accessible to the public. The printing options in the library are limited to JSU faculty, staff, and students.

6. **Microfiche viewing equipment must be available to users if the format is in the depository collection.**
   Compliance. Though an attempt is being made to phase out government fiche for new acquisitions, there is still a considerable retrospective collection of government documents microfiche. Thus, the Library provides microfiche machines for the utilization of this collection in the 6th floor Multi-Media Lab.

7. **If tangible electronic media cannot be viewed on public computers, at a minimum, the library must be able to circulate the material or provide alternate means of access to the content.**
   Compliance. The Library's public access computers on each floor have drives which allow viewing of tangible electronic government documents such as CDs and DVDs. In addition, the majority is shelved in the Library's circulating collection, and thus they are available to patrons for check-out.

SUMMARY

Strengths

After careful examination of total holdings, it is felt that the Government Documents Collection is currently adequate to support the needs of the Library's user community. The Government Documents Collection provides access to appropriate titles in a variety of formats that adequately support the teaching and research activities of the University, in addition to meeting the information needs of the 3rd Congressional district. The Collection is particularly strong in the subjects of social sciences, political science, science, medicine, and agriculture; in addition, the Collection is especially valued for the detailed statistical information it provides on a variety of subjects. The fact that the Library's Government Documents Collection is primarily cataloged using LC classification (an additional step many libraries neglect, since copy-cataloged documents usually come with SuDoc classification rather than LC) and integrated into the Library's main collection gives it much greater visibility, browsability, and usage than the segregated collections found in many university libraries.

Through aggressive adherence to a policy of removal of all superseded items, selection of resources only in useful formats, and replacement of ephemeral publications with electronic substitutes, the Government Documents Department has considerably reduced the number of ineffectual publications and formats within the Collection. This is especially true in the area of former vertical file and microfiche publications, which have been aggressively weeded and screened for selection. The Government Documents Department is continually working to address the issue of obsolete formats and redundancy, and it is felt that the selection and retention policies of the Government Documents Collection are now more appropriate to the Library's needs than they have been in the past.

Electronic resources have profoundly increased ease of access to government publications. The Library offers access to a multitude of full-text government resources that Library users can utilize through any computer with Internet access. These electronic resources are fully cataloged and easily discoverable. In addition to government publications and websites, the Library also provides access to government web portals (e.g., Science.gov) in order to facilitate subject searching within electronic government resources. Subject browsing is further enhanced through the Library's Government Resources subject guide, which highlights new resources and compiles and parses resources into state, local, federal, and international resources. Compared to previous years the number of electronic resources has increased by 11%.

The Library's current selection percentage (33%) is adequate for a medium-sized academic library with JSU's user community, and it also meets and exceeds the goal set forth in the recommendations section of the last assessment, which exceeds the previous assessment selection of 31%.

Weaknesses

One complaint about the Library's tangible Government Documents Collection is that it is lacking in certain retrospective resources useful for historical research (e.g. the Library's Serial Set is incomplete). This weakness is due to the nature of the selection/deselection process of government publications through the FDLP. Publications may be selected one year, dropped during the next update cycle, and then selected again the following year. This can quickly create gaps in sets. Though there are some exceptions, unlike traditional publications, if a government publication is "missed," during selection one year, it usually cannot be found, purchased, and added later on. Publications are often dropped at the behest of Subject Specialists and sometimes re-added at a later date. The government itself sometimes, without warning, ceases to offer a title even though that title is still being published. To help better explain these gaps and keep track of why and when a publication was dropped, and at whose request, the Electronic Resources/Documents Librarian has, since 2005, kept a database of this information, along with records on exactly what is added each year.

The nature of the depository system further complicates the selection process. GPO will occasionally add items to a depository's selection profile without there having actually been selected by that depository. GPO also provides some publications only to regional libraries, refusing to allow Selectives to add them to their profiles. The selection process itself is another issue: rather than being able to select by title, FDLP publications must be selected using item numbers. Some of these item numbers are cross-referenced to a single publication, but many represent entire classes of publications for which no clear description is given (e.g., "Agricultural publications, miscellaneous"). This makes it difficult to ascertain what the Library will be acquiring until the publications actually begin arriving, at which point they must be retained for 5 years before discarding.

The government document bibliographies that have been used in the past for collection assessments have ceased updates and are therefore no longer useful. New publications in this area also do not exist.

Though Library patrons have recourse to regional and other depositories when the materials they seek are not available through the Library's depository, they are usually unwilling to travel to Tuscaloosa or Montgomery, where the nearest regional 100% depositories are located. And though these regional depositories should, theoretically, have all government publications distributed through the FDLP since their date of admission, the reality is that their collections are incomplete, and many resources are uncatalogued, effectively making them impossible for users to find.

One other issue of late has been the demise of certain resources due to the continual federal budget cuts. This situation has noticeably impacted the Government Documents Collection in a negative way, and the Library has attempted to mitigate the problem through purchase of resources such as ProQuest's Statistical Abstract database.

While some attempts have been made through GovInfo, the government's infrastructure for authenticating, but especially for preserving electronic publications, is inadequate. All it takes is one bad budget year for key government resources to disappear altogether, and this is especially true of electronic resources. While the information they contain should not be ephemeral, the format in which they are presented certainly is. Were GovInfo to be defunded, all the electronic resources available through it would vanish, and the result would be catastrophic for the Library's electronic Government Documents Collection.

Government publications outside GovInfo (i.e., those housed on the issuing agency's servers, which make up the vast majority of government publications) are in even more danger from lack of preservation. The Library's electronic government documents often disappear from agency websites and, without local preservation, there is then no way to provide access for the Library's users.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are submitted with the intention of improving the Government Documents Collection and assuring that it is suited to the needs of the Library's user population:

- The Government Documents Department should continue to closely scrutinize items collected to determine their value to the collection, and act on their disposition accordingly.
- The Library should try to acquire (through the use of local and national Needs and Offers lists) publications to complete or supplement the Library's incomplete retrospective governmental resources.
- The Government Documents Department should continue to provide access, finding, and use aids for electronic government resources.
- As mentioned above, as government publications have become increasingly available electronically, the trend at the Library has been to replace tangible documents with electronic resources, even when the tangible version is still available. The Library should be extremely cautious in what it chooses to replace, given the ephemeral nature of government information supposedly "permanently" available on the Internet.
- Given the fact that many supposedly permanently available electronic resources disappear and are never restored by GPO, it is suggested that the Library obtain server space and technology to organize and archive electronic government resources of particular interest and/or importance.
- More online guides/research handouts should be developed to help students find and navigate government Internet resources.