ACCESSING FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS WITH RLIN

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Abstract — Online databases and automated bibliographic utilities have greatly enhanced access to federal government publications in recent years. Public service librarians at Colorado State University Libraries (CSUL) are using the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN) to search government publications via a number of access points, including author, title, Library of Congress subject heading, and keyword. Access to fugitive federal publications cataloged at CSUL under a Title II-C project is especially important.

With the proliferation of commerical databases, increasing attention has been paid to searching federal government publications online. A number of studies have examined and categorized databases devoted entirely or partially to government publications [1]. Among databases commonly discussed are GPO MONTHLY CATALOG, ASI, CIS INDEX, AGRICOLA, BLS CONSUMER PRICE INDEX, and NTIS [2]. The advantages of online searching have also been elaborated. For example, bibliographic verification is simplified due to the numerous access points available online. Search results can be tailored to meet the needs of the user. The currency of databases allows the retrieval of citations and information not yet obtainable in print indexes. Citations can often be retrieved when the user has only incomplete information [3]. The cost effectiveness of online searching, with its potential to retrieve hundreds of relevant citations within seconds, has also been discussed [4].

To date, more attention has been given to the retrieval of government publications via databases available through vendors such as DIALOG and BRS than to retrieval through the bibliographic utilities of Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), the Western Library Network (WLN) and the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN). Studies of OCLC have enumerated the advantages of that database. Access to government publications is more up-to-date than through print indexes. OCLC can identify imprecise citations and determine whether an item is actually a government publication. OCLC is seen as "a positive public relations tool for public service librarians" [5]. Not only do the access points available through OCLC allow searches impossible with print indexes, the inclusion of Superintendent of Document (SuDocs) call numbers enables many librarians to go directly from the terminal to the shelf. The location of an OCLC terminal in the government publications area, if one exists, obviously facilitates retrieval [6]. Not surprisingly, the reasons for using OCLC are similar to the advantages given for access via commercial databases.

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RLIN

RLIN had its genesis in 1978, when Stanford University joined the Research Libraries Group (RLG), and agreed to let RLG acquire its BALLOTS system as the base for RLIN. The database is therefore located on the Stanford campus. As additional libraries joined RLG, each contributed cataloging and acquisitions records to RLIN. While most records date from 1977, retrospective conversion efforts are extending the database back in time. The inclusion of MARC and Government Printing Office (GPO) tapes has extended coverage back to 1968 and 1976, respectively [7]. As a result, the size of the RLIN database has grown rapidly. As of June 1987, it numbered over 21.5 million records for books, 2.2 million for serials, and 117,000 for maps. GPO books and serials tapes are loaded on a monthly basis, with an average lag time of twelve days from the time the tape is distributed to the time it is received at RLG. Monographs average 759 records per tape, while serials average 180. The maps tapes suffered a hiatus beginning in April 1984, but a project to update this file is expected to be completed in July 1987 [8].

OCLC VS. RLIN

There have been several comparisons of the use of RLIN and OCLC in a reference setting. Hirst, Thorpe, and Funabiki provide a descriptive comparison of OCLC, RLIN, and the Western Library Network [9]. In 1981, Gould compared the verification of citations in RLIN, OCLC, and print sources, and found that 58.3 percent were in RLIN, 89.3 percent in OCLC, and 95.6 percent in print sources. RLIN's success rate among post-1975 citations climbed to 87.5 percent [10]. Gould notes the small size of the RLIN database at the time. The database has grown severalfold since, and it seems reasonable to believe that a similar study conducted today would indicate a citation success rate similar to that of OCLC. A study by Miller indicates that both OCLC and RLIN are powerful and effective reference tools, but that the ". . . searching capabilities of RLIN far exceed those of OCLC because of the functions of truncation, combined searching, subject searching and free-text searching, and combined index searching other than name/title [11]. None of these studies focus upon government publications, but OCLC and RLIN both include GPO records from 1976 to the present and neither differentiates government publications from other materials. Comparisons applying to the entire database should therefore be equally applicable to the retrieval of government publications.

THE USE OF RLIN AT COLORADO STATE

At Colorado State University Libraries (CSUL), circumstances developed in such a way that public service librarians turned to RLIN rather than to OCLC or the commercial vendors for access to government publications. CSUL joined RLG in late 1979, gaining access to RLIN in the process. Catalog production began in June, 1980. Initially, RLIN terminals were placed in technical service areas where they were used for cataloging and acquisitions. Another terminal was made available for public service personnel in 1981, but its location at a site away from reference stations resulted in too little use. An effort to place terminals at reference stations began. A terminal was installed at the General Reference desk in 1984, and in 1986 the Science Reference and Documents Reference desks also received terminals.

At CSUL, staff limitations have precluded service hours in the Government Documents Department in the evenings and on the weekends. Documents service at those times becomes the responsibility of the General Reference desk, which is distant from the

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BKS/PROD   Books       LON       DCGD5096109-B        Acq Maintenance  CDSG-NS
FIN PN STUBY, RICHARD G - Cluster 1 of 1

Stuby, Richard G.
   Public attitudes toward coyote control / Richard G. Stuby, Edwin H. Carpenter,
Louise M. Arthur. -- [Washington] : Dept. of Agriculture, Economics, Statistics,
and Cooperatives Service ; Springfield, Va. : for sale by the National Technical
Information Service, [1979]
   vi, 11 p. : ill. ; 26 cm. -- (ESCS ; 54)

   Issued May 1979.
   Bibliography: p. 9.
   A 105.25:54
   ISBN (pbk).

   1. Coyotes--Control--United States. 1. Carpenter, Edwin, joint author. II.
Arthur, Louise M., joint author. III. United States. Dept. of Agriculture.
Economics, Statistics, and Cooperatives Service. IV. Title. V. Series: United
States. Dept. of Agriculture. Economics, Statistics, and Cooperatives Service.
ESCS ; 54.

   035: (DGPO)7914693
   ID: DCGD5096109-B            CC: 9662      DCF: i
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Figure 1. GPO/RLIN record: LON format.

documents area. Historically, the CSUL documents collection has consisted almost entirely of federal government publications arranged by SuDocs classification, and therefore the primary identification tools kept in the General Reference area included the *Monthly Catalog of United States Government Publications*, John L. Andriot's *Guide to U.S. Government Publications*, and the CSUL serials list. With the placement of an RLIN terminal at the General Reference desk, it quickly became apparent that a powerful new tool for accessing federal government publications had become available. In a matter of seconds a reference librarian could identify government publications on RLIN that otherwise could take many minutes of searching in the *Monthly Catalog*. Use of the *Monthly Catalog* by both staff and patrons dropped so dramatically that it was eventually removed from the area. The serials list and the Andriot volume remain as supplements to RLIN, but RLIN is normally the first choice when documents inquiries arise.

Farmer has identified a number of uses of RLIN as a reference tool [12]. They include: RLIN used as a complement to online retrieval available through vendors such as DIALOG or BRS, quick verification, RLIN used as a union catalog, and RLIN used as an aid to interlibrary loan. The second and fourth uses are those most common at the CSUL General Reference desk. Verification of a citation when patrons have only incomplete or garbled references is greatly simplified because keywords, either title or corporate/conference, can be searched. The screen display, including SuDocs call number, can be printed and given to the patron along with appropriate instructions for finding the item in the documents collection (Figure 1). Almost all GPO references found in RLIN are in the documents collection. In those instances when they are not, the citation can be printed from RLIN and attached to an interlibrary loan request form.

SEARCHING RLIN

RLIN searching conventions have been described before, so only a brief summary will be presented here [13]. The database includes several files representing different formats of materials. The books, serials, and maps files are of greatest interest to searchers concerned with government publications. Each file can be searched by any one of 18

indexes. Those indexes most useful for public service searching are listed below:

PN: personal name
TP: title phrase
TW: title word
CP: corporate/conference name phrase
CW: corporate/conference name word
SP: Library of Congress subject phrase

Boolean searching is available on RLIN, allowing the combination of indexes or elements within indexes. Right hand truncation also improves search results. Items retrieved on RLIN can be displayed in several ways. The multiple (MUL) display shows brief bibliographic information and codes for libraries owning the item. The primary (PRI) display gives complete bibliographic information and library codes and is useful for interlibrary loan purposes. The partial (PAR) display is similar to the primary display, but substitutes local acquisitions, holdings, and call numbers for library codes. The long (LON) display is in catalog card format and includes tracings. For GPO records, the SuDocs call number is included in the long display.

In December 1986, RLIN instituted an enhancement that allows the user to narrow an existing search result using parameters such as library identifier, date, and language. With this enhancement, the also (ALS) command, a searcher can perform a subject search and then narrow the result to federal government publications by commanding "als dcgd." DCGD is the code for GPO records. For example, a CSUL patron searching for information on the uses of helicopters in the Vietnam War found little that seemed appropriate in the card catalog. A search of RLIN, using keywords initially, followed by LC subject heading searches, retrieved numerous citations, which, when combined with the DCGD identifier gave a final search result of 18 items. Studies of gunships, medical evacuation helicopters, and troop transport helicopters were all included. The search result could also have been refined using the ALS command to include a year or range of years. This is useful when the most current information is desired.

RLIN offers subject searching, a service as yet unavailable in OCLC, which enhances its value for accessing government publications. For example, a recent patron request at CSUL for information on a predator poison commonly called 1080 was resolved through RLIN. A title keyword search of "1080" retrieved several relevant items. The tracings for these were then examined, resulting in an additional search under LC subject headings such as "Coyotes — Control." This search netted a number of items not found in the initial search. Many of these were publications of federal government agencies. Call numbers for these were printed and given to the patron, who proceeded to the documents collection. This patron request illustrates one of the great advantages of RLIN. A patron's search for information can lead to both government and non-government sources when the search is expedited through RLIN. The patron may not have been searching for federal government sources initially, and may not have thought to consult the documents indexes, but an RLIN search reveals these hitherto unknown sources. Any subject search can lead the patron to federal government publications. The CSUL documents collection, like many others elsewhere, is separately shelved, indexed, and classified; the vast majority of documents are not included in the card catalog. All these factors serve as a barrier to its use, but RLIN effectively eliminates that barrier.

Not only do users benefit from RLIN, so does the General Reference staff. The general Reference desk is the starting point for many users, regardless of their interests. Traffic

can be quite heavy, and the former system of identifying federal government publications through the *Monthly Catalog* was time-consuming and frustrating. Often patrons could not receive the assistance they required, or, baffled by the *Monthly Catalog,* abandoned their search. In addition, few among the General Reference desk staff are familiar with the nuances of the SuDocs classification system and the print indexes that access government publications. Using the documents collection can be almost as daunting to librarians as it is for patrons. Use of RLIN helps to overcome some of the more intimidating aspects of federal government documents retrieval.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC CONTROL OF FUGITIVE DOCUMENTS

One of the more unique aspects of public service RLIN searching at CSUL relates to a local cataloging project. Over the years, the CSUL government documents department had made an effort to collect "fugitive" federal government publications not indexed in the *Monthly Catalog.* By 1978, 25,000 titles had been acquired, and CSUL successfully applied for a Higher Education Act Title II-C grant to catalog these titles and provide them with SuDocs classification numbers [14]. The project, and the collection development policy that inspired it, are an outgrowth of the Libraries' role within the mission of the University as a land grant institution. Academic programs in agriculture, forestry, water engineering, agricultural economics, and natural resources result in heavy user demand for federal government publications in these fields, particularly those produced by agencies such as the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and National Park Service. Hence efforts to collect fugitive government publications have concentrated on these subject fields and federal public land agencies [15].

During the project's three-year existence, over 10,000 titles (14,000 volumes) were cataloged and loaded into OCLC to enhance their accessibility. Sixty-three percent were not already represented in OCLC and therefore required original cataloging; the remaining 37 percent needed adaptive cataloging. To give an idea of the work involved, 76 percent of the name authorities established had not yet been established by the Library of Congress. In 1983 the OCLC tapes were loaded into RLIN, allowing CSUL public service staff easy access to the project records [16].

The items cataloged during the project had usually not been supplied to the Superintendent of Documents by the issuing agency due to their cost or specialized nature. Others were administrative in nature or were the products of federal/state/regional or quasi-official organizations. Some had been sent to the National Technical Information Service or the Defense Technical Information Center. Still others were available only from the agency itself. An idea of the subject matter of these publications can be gained from a listing of subject headings from the project's authority file: geographic features, regions, parks, large engineering constructions, computer programs, and insecticides are all represented [17].

RLIN searches resulting in Title II-C project records are typical of government publication searches. Most patrons are interested in either retrieving specific publications for which they already have some bibliographic information, or they are interested in information on a particular subject and may not even be aware that federal government sources exist. In either instance, author searches in the personal name (PN) index are seldom attempted; individual authorship of government publications seems to be the bibliographic information least known to the patron. A search using the title phrase (TP) or title word (TW) indexes is a more likely point of access, for the patron looking for a specific government publication usually has at least a partial title in mind. A search for *Bitter Creek*

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BKS/PROD   Books        PAR       COSG4829779-B          Acq Maintenance   COSG-NS
FIN TP AMENDED TIMBER MANAGEMENT#GRANDE - Cluster 1 of 1
UP'D
United States. Forest Service. Rocky Mountain Region.
   Amended timber management plan for Rio Grande National Forest, Region 2 :
7/1/74-6/30/84 / [prepared by Robert J. Jackson, Robert C. Joslin]. -- Lakewood,
Colo. : U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region, 1978.
   viii, 112 leaves in various foliations, [11] leaves of plates : graphs, maps ;
27 cm.

   ID: COSG4829779-B              CC: 9665         DCF: i
- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -
A 13.126:R 585/1974-1984
   \Imperfect copy: 4 maps wanting.\.

DUC
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Figure 2. Title II-C record: PAR format.

Environmental Impact Statement could be executed in the TP index if the exact title were known, or, if the title were not known with precision, unique words such as "bitter" and "creek" could be searched on the TW index. Usually a TW search will yield satisfactory results. This example is indicative of the fact that RLIN provides the best access to CSUL's large collection of environmental impact statements, superior to that of any print index.

A search using the corporate/conference phrase index (CP) or corporate/conference word index (CW) can also be effective, if the unit or organization does not have too many records in the database. A search for the publications of the Montana office of the Bureau of Land Management produces a reasonably small result, but to attempt a CP search using the Bureau of Land Management would produce far too many records.

Subject searching is especially helpful in retrieving Title II-C records. The searcher can input the names of administrative units (Rio Grande National Forest) as subjects or input more general concepts (Wilderness Areas — Colorado). Subject searches, like any other type of search, can be refined with the use of Boolean operators. Thus, one could use the SP index to search the heading "Public lands" and combine the result with a TW search of the word "sale" or "sales" to retrieve a search set pertaining to sales of public lands. An examination and subsequent use of subject tracings would probably lead to additional items.

RLIN users have the option of searching more than one file at a time. Most public service terminals at CSUL automatically default to search both the books and serials files. However, the searcher can set the terminal to search either one of these files alone or to search one of the other files. Among these, the maps file is of greatest interest. It is far smaller than the books file; as noted above, in June 1987, it included 117,000 entries, as opposed to over 21 million book entries. Still, the number of maps represented is quite substantial. All the searches available in the books or serials files are also possible in maps. In addition, the subject subdivision (SD) index, as yet unavailable in books or serials, allows the retrieval of LC subject headings regardless of the main heading. Thus, an SD search of "Montana" yields a great variety of maps dealing with that state, including those of federal government provenance.

Just as GPO records can be identified by using the "also" command to search the DCGD identifier, so too can Title II-C project records be isolated with the use of COSG, the CSUL identifier. The patron can then be given a printout, with SuDocs call number, of those items of interest (Figure 2). A search can also be limited simultaneously to DCGD and COSG records, assuring retrieval of both GPO records and those of the Title II-C project.

USE OF RLIN SEARCHING CAPABILITIES BY REFERENCE STAFF

General Reference personnel now use RLIN to access government publications to the virtual exclusion of all other database sources, primarily because an RLIN terminal is located at the desk, whereas access to other databases has been dependent upon terminals located elsewhere. Database searching through vendors such as DIALOG has been in existence for 10 years, but many databases containing government sources, such as GPO MONTHLY CATALOG, CIS INDEX, and ASI, are used infrequently. In addition, reference staffers have relied on print sources without giving adequate thought to their automated counterparts. Moreover, with RLIN available, there seems to be no reason to consult a database such as GPO MONTHLY CATALOG. Few will bother with a vendor-based search when the same search appears possible through an RLIN terminal that is continually online during service hours.

In the spring of 1987, RLG initiated the RLIN-DIALOG Link, which allows access to DIALOG databases through an RLIN terminal. This convenience of access, in conjunction with a heightened awareness of databases such as ASI and CIS INDEX, may well result in increased use of these automated government sources, at least for ready reference searching.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that at CSUL the RLIN database is the preferred means of access to federal government publications, particularly for public service staff who are not themselves documents librarians. Use of print indexes has dropped dramatically, and, in the case of the *Monthly Catalog*, has become almost nonexistent. Within seconds, RLIN can identify document citations or government publications bearing upon any given subject and provide the patron with SuDocs call numbers to locate the item or items. Reference staff members themselves feel more at ease in using the documents collection. Like other online systems, RLIN is pointing the way to a time when federal government publications, long an enigma to patrons and librarians alike, could be far more central to library research.

NOTES

1. For examples see Diane Garner and Diane Smith, "Government Databases: a Sampler," *Government Publications Review* 12 (March-April 1985): 143–54; Greg Byerly, "Online Searching: Just Another Tool for Document Librarians," *Government Publications Review* 11 (May-June 1984): 203–10; and Deborah S. Hunt, "Federal Government Documents Online," *Database* 5 (February 1982): 10–17.
2. GPO MONTHLY CATALOG is the data base equivalent of the *Monthly Catalog of United States Government Publications*. ASI (American Statistics Index) indexes the statistical publications of several hundred federal agencies and offices. CIS is based on Congressional Information Service's *Index to Publications of the United States Congress* and provides access to Congressional working papers. AGRICOLA indexes journal literature and monographs dealing with agriculture. It is the database of the National Agricultural Library. BLS CONSUMER PRICE INDEX contains consumer price indexes issued by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. NTIS, provided by the National Technical Information Service, accesses technical reports of government sponsored research and development.
3. Byerly, "Online Searching," pp. 204–5.
4. Linda Futato, "Online Bibliographic Database Searching for Government Documents Collections," *Government Publications Review* 9 (July-August 1982): 317–18.
5. Sharon Walbridge, "OCLC and Improved Access to Government Documents," *Illinois Libraries* 5 (May 1986): 330.
6. Sharon Walbridge, "OCLC and Government Documents Collections," *Government Publications Review* 9 (July-August 1982): 282–3.
7. *RLG in Brief* (Stanford, CA: The Research Libraries Group, Inc., 1983), pp. 2–3; *Searching the Data Bases of the Research Libraries Information Network* (Stanford, CA: The Research Libraries Group, Inc., 1983), p. 3.

8. Statistics on GPO tape loads were supplied through the courtesy of Jan James and Karen Bendorf of the Research Libraries Group.
9. Donna L. Hirst, Suzanne Thorpe, and Ruth Patterson Funabiki, "A Comparison of OCLC, WLN, and RLIN for Public Services: a 1985 Update," *Legal Reference Services Quarterly* 6 (Fall/Winter 1986): 141–58.
10. Allison L. Gould, "Verifying a Citation: Reference Use of OCLC and RLIN," *Reference Services Review* 9 (October/December 1981): 53.
11. Julia E. Miller, "OCLC and RLIN as Reference Tools," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 8 (November 1982): 274.
12. Sharon Cline Farmer, "RLIN as a Reference Tool," *Online* 6 (September 1982): 17.
13. A detailed recent example is Arturo A. Flores, "A User Friendly Guide to RLIN for Friendly Users," *Legal Reference Services Quarterly* 5 (Winter 1985–86): 43–56.
14. Nora S. Copeland, Fred C. Schmidt, and James Stickman, "Fugitive U.S. Government Publications: Elements of Procurement and Bibliographic Control," *Government Publications Review* 12 (May-June 1985): 227, 229.
15. LeMoyne W. Anderson, Fred C. Schmidt, Robert W. Burns, Jr., James Stickman, and Nora S. Copeland, *Cataloging and Indexing of a Subset of Federal Government Documents Not Listed in the Monthly Catalog of U.S. Government Publications* (Fort Collins, CO: University Libraries, Colorado State University. 1982), pp. 1–10.
16. Anderson, et al. *Cataloging and Indexing,* pp. 1–10.
17. Copeland, et al. "Fugitive U.S. Government Publications," pp. 227–28, 233.