

## Government Information: Introduction

by Lou Malcomb

The internet provides InULA with the chance to make its Newsletter interactive and continuous. InULA members should feel free to interact and react to the articles by forwarding messages or comments about the articles included. It will be continuous because additional articles concerning other IU government information locations will be added as received. This first "Web-based" InULA Notes focuses on the changing realm of government information and the many resources we have throughout the IU Libraries systemwide. Access has never been greater, nor might it have ever been so challenging for us all.

Indiana University, even in its infancy, received government information. The Catalogue of Indiana University 1842 lists several "presents from Congress" including the American State Papers, American Archives, and Secret Journals of the acts and proceedings of Congress. An official letter dated December 30, 1881 to the Honorable Senator Benjamin Harrison, acknowledged IU as an official depository of public documents. Since that date of course, the [list of depositories](#) has increased establishing a network of libraries around the state and country designated to receive U.S. government information. State, other federal governments and International Governmental Organizations also established depository systems for dissemination of information. Currently many IU Libraries receive government publications either as depositories or through agreements with the designated depository site. For instance, the Geography and Map Library receives many federal maps as part of the IUB Law Library depository status and the Geology Library provides access to USGS materials for IUB's Government Publications Department.

A friend reported that the principle topic of conversation at ALA Midwinter GODORT (Government Documents Roundtable) meetings was GPO's (U.S. Government Printing Office) recent announcement that "by 1998", the chief distribution format for U.S. government information will be electronic. As this occurs, all libraries will become "depositories" of government information, challenging us to be familiar with the organization and nature of government information sources.

So government information will be everywhere....just an electronic connection away. No I am not naive, it is not everything that governments have or ever will publish. It is a tremendous access point and grows at an overwhelming rate. As it expands, all librarians broaden their capability to be generalists. It also implies a greater need of and reliance on the specialist, to be most familiar with the content of the sources and to develop avenues for quick and effective retrieval of information. The challenge for librarians is to find the balance between being expert or generalist in whatever area of information we endeavor. Tom Glastras, former U.S. Documents Librarian at IUB now Librarian Emeriti, made me aware of a Congressional Committee Print entitled Specialists and Generalists: a selection of readings, which others might wish to see for further reading.

User expectations simply grow--almost out of control. Librarians can be there to instruct about the wealth (and the dangers) of all information formats and to enable users to navigate the resources effectively and in some organized fashion. For space sake, it presents opportunities to share in the responsibility for preserving collections without loss of any immediate access. Collaborative efforts enhance our abilities to access and to maintain collections.

Not all IU depositories are yet included in this issue. This is my fault since I failed to get everyone notified. I hope all will contribute and help this issue of the InULA Notes and provide descriptions of all IU government information collections. Initial articles include ones from IPFW, IUB, IUKO and IUN. Websites at the various IU libraries provide basic information about the collections and can be consulted. As we all become Web-librarians, let us relish the tremendous access to government information that IU has had throughout its history, will have, and what we can contribute to that access now and in the future.

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