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From the Editors

Dear Fellow GD-SIS Members,

Summer is just around the corner, and so is AALL in Chicago. We encourage you to consider contributing articles about this year’s meeting for Jurisdocs to either of us directly, and remember to have fun and learn a lot.

Sincerely,
Stacy Fowler and Michael Umberger,
Your Editors
When I first became a government documents librarian, I was having a conversation with Larry Meyer. Someone came up in the conversation, and I commented that he was no longer a docs librarian because his job duties had changed. Larry firmly corrected me and told me that the person most definitely was a docs librarian and always would be. It has taken me a long time to fully understand this concept, but the conversation came back to me last week when I was helping a student.

My duties at UNT Dallas College of Law are evolving, and I find myself doing less and less library work over time. While I enjoy my new duties, I do miss the library duties. Last week, a student came to me looking for “what was repealed in 1987 in the Texas Local Government Code” in a particular section. We looked at the credits, which were not very helpful, and then went to work solving the mystery.

We pulled the session law, but it showed only the new language, not the previous. As most of you will know, 1987 statutes are generally too old for Westlaw and Lexis to have on hand, and are too new for HeinOnline, which unfortunately currently stops in 1925 for Texas. Google Books and HathiTrust block access to no more than snippets because they statutes are newer than 1923, and they cannot differentiate between copyrighted and public domain works. It is thus in that middle ground of digital nonexistence. We are too new of a library to have the print statutes from the 1980s, so my student and I had a conundrum. We could send him to our friends over at SMU, who would hopefully still have the print statutes. The government document librarian in me had a memory, however…

A few months earlier, an email had gone out from the Texas State Law Library about a digitization program. The Law Library was hosting digitized copies of the Texas Statutes from 1856 to 1960. It was not quite far enough forward, but the student actually only needed to know the topic of the section that was repealed, not the full 1987 text. So, we pulled the appropriate statutes and looked up the text, and Eureka! We found what the student needed.

After the student left to write a summary of what we had found for his externship employer, I sat back and reflected on the interaction. I realized that I, too, fell into that “Once a Gov Docs Librarian, Always a Gov Docs Librarian” stereotype. I use government documents to solve problems all the time. I even integrated government documents into my Advanced Legal Research: Business class without really thinking about it (who else teaches the US Catalog of Government Publications?). It is an amazing thing to be a Government Documents Librarian, and I am proud to be one for the rest of my life, even if my professional title does not explicitly state that at the moment.
Spring Public Policy Round Up and Looking Ahead to Summer

Peggy Jarrett
Government Publications and Reference Librarian
Gallagher Law Library, University of Washington School of Law
2015-2016 AALL Government Relations Committee Chair and GD-SIS Advocacy Committee Chair

The biggest news of interest to GD-SIS members this Spring is the introduction of two companion bills, the Equal Access to Congressional Research Service Reports Act of 2016 (H.R. 4702/S. 2639). This legislation, if passed, would direct the Government Publishing Office to “maintain a public Website containing Congressional Research Service (CRS) Reports.” AALL joined a coalition statement, and that statement was printed in the Congressional Record when the Senate bill was introduced. Although we have seen legislation like this before (and over many years), the word is that these particular bills have a good chance of getting a hearing. We may not see passage this year, but there is fresh, renewed, and substantial interest in no-fee access to the work of CRS. We do have reason to hope this time!

Access to CRS Reports was the single most popular issue AALL members took action on during Virtual Lobby Day on March 16. On all the issues together, more than 400 emails were sent to our Senators and Representatives. That is a record level of participation for this day. Well done! It’s not too late to take action on this or any other of our legislative priorities. Just use the Legislative Action Center to make your law librarian voice heard in support of, for example, funding for GPO and the Library of Congress.

And speaking of GPO and LC funding, AALL submitted written testimony to both the Senate and the House subcommittees on legislative branch appropriations in support of the requests of these core institutions. It is no surprise that the second most acted on issue during Virtual Lobby Day was support for GPO and LC funding. We know it takes funding (and a village of law librarians) to ensure, strengthen, and expand permanent public access to government information.

Looking ahead to summer and the AALL Annual Meeting in Chicago, please attend the Legislative Advocacy Training on Saturday, July 16, from 8:30-noon. It’s free, it’s useful, and it might even be fun. The Government Relations Office and the Government Relations Committee are trying some new things this year, so even if you are a seasoned advocate, it will be worth your time to attend and reconnect. If you are new to advocacy, or not quite sure what it even means in the context of AALL, this is the perfect event to help develop some skills, learn about the issues, and meet other advocates. The next day, Sunday, July 17, features two excellent programs. From 11:30-12:30 is the GD-SIS/GRC program, Harvesting Democracy: Archiving Federal Government Web Content at End of Term, and from 2:30-3:30 is the Public Policy Update. At the Public Policy Update, along with learning about the work of each of the public policy committees (Copyright, Digital Access to Legal Information, and Government Relations), you can help us honor the winners of the Robert L. Oakley Advocacy Award and the Public Access to Government Information (PAGI) Award.

See you in just a few months!
On Friday, April 8, Northeastern University School of Law hosted a joint meeting between the Law Librarians of New England (LLNE) and the Association of Boston Law Librarians (ABLL). As a member of the GD-SIS Board, I was particularly excited that the theme of the conference was “Access to Government Information.” The keynote address and three panels discussed the importance of law libraries in their role of providing access to government information, along with the need to form partnerships to make projects succeed.

Sarah Glassmeyer kicked off the day with her keynote address, “Hot Messes, Dumpster Fires and the Role of Law Librarians in the 21st Century.” As Research Fellow at the Harvard Library Innovation Lab and Affiliate at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society, Ms. Glassmeyer researches free legal information and its relationship to access to justice. She finds that there are at least 14 barriers to accessing legal information. Of those, one in particular stood out to me: technological barriers. For example, some laws are only available online in PDF, which might not be readable for a person whose only connection to the internet is through a smartphone. You can read more about her project at http://www.sarahglassmeyer.com/StateLegalInformation/.

The rest of the speakers were also experts or innovators in the field of providing access to or advocating for free government information. For example, Dan Jackson, the Executive Director at NuLawLab, described how his organization partnered with several others in Connecticut to create a video game which teaches pro se litigants how to navigate the court system. To play the game and provide feedback, go to http://ctlawhelp.org/represent. Mr. Jackson and others emphasized the importance of working with law librarians to ensure the success of their projects. In the case of the video game, NuLawLab valued the input of Connecticut Judicial Branch librarians to verify the accuracy and usability of the game.

As is typical of all LLNE meetings, their Service Committee organized a project to coincide with the conference, this time collecting books for inmates in Rhode Island prisons. They also used the book drive as a jumping off point to start an advocacy effort to standardize the rules on determining which reading materials are acceptable in Rhode Island correctional facilities. Currently, prison officials have wide latitude to remove materials they consider unfit or harmful, which can vary depending on the facility and the leadership in charge at the time. For more information on this and other projects, see http://llne.org/committees/service/.

This was just a short snapshot of the many inspirational partnerships in the context of law librarians and open access to government information discussed at the joint LLNE/ABLL spring meeting. I thoroughly enjoyed the conference and made sure to encourage all those in attendance to join GD-SIS to further this worthy cause.
2015 Biennial Survey Results: Summary and Analysis

Erik R. Beck
Digital Services Librarian
University of Colorado William A. Wise Law Library

Results are in for the 2015 FDLP Biennial Survey. A total of 1,139 libraries participated in the survey, representing 98% of all FDLP institutions. Of those 1,139 libraries, I calculate at least 200 government and academic law libraries, about 17.5% of the whole. It was a very high response rate, and law libraries were adequately represented.

This year, GPO brought in a business research consultancy firm named Outsell to collect and analyze the survey results. This is the same firm GPO contracted with to administer the 2009 Biennial Survey. You may not have noticed it, but Outsell gave us the same survey questions as in 2009. In their report, which came out on April 18th, they compare our responses from 2015 with 2009’s results and note variations and/or continuations in the data over time.

I was actually quite surprised with how consistent 2015’s responses were with 2009’s. There was no significant change in results for the “Problems and Challenges” portion of the survey. Budget constraints and personnel shortage continued to top the list. Perhaps this shouldn’t be so unexpected since the one constant in librarianship is that we are all over-worked and under-paid. Anxiety over costs and budget did subside somewhat, however, perhaps due to restored funding following the recession.

Libraries reported offering similar services between 2009 and 2015 with modest increases in a few areas. Libraries’ unmet needs were not significantly different in 2015 either. Demand remained high for a digitized historical collection and cataloging records for pre-1976 items. Libraries continued their neglect of performance metrics, though the practice of collecting metrics did increase by a few percentage points in certain categories.

There were a few instances where survey results deviated from 2009. Libraries are using social networking tools and promoting mobile access 30% more often more often than they were in 2009. There were also modest increases in “scan on demand” services and video conferencing.
Demand for and satisfaction with training webinars increased by about 30%. Credit should be given to GPO and its Outreach Librarians for recognizing this trend and effectively responding to it. Increasing tech aptitude combined with decreasing documents experience (as evidenced by the renewed demand for training and operational guidance) seems to suggest that a surge of young, less experienced depository coordinators is beginning to enter the FDLP. GPO will need to be responsive to this growing population of new practitioners and adjust their support accordingly.

After comparing responses from 2009 and 2015, isolating data by library type, and highlighting critical areas of concern, Outsell reports a number of key findings and uses these to form a list of recommendations for action. I agree with nearly all of Outsell’s conclusions; however, I challenge their findings for questions 2 and 2a of the Survey, which relate to estimated potential and actual user populations for individual depository libraries. In the weeks leading up to the survey deadline, depository coordinators shared their confusion and consternation over these questions on the GovDoc listserv, citing their inability to calculate these numbers with any degree of precision or accuracy. A quarter of participants abstained from responding to question 2 and a third abstained from 2a. Most remaining coordinators provided uninformed estimates for these figures, which, without more guidance about measurement and delimiting factors, very likely failed to represent anything of any significance. Thus, I argue that Outsell’s assertions that “FDLP libraries are supporting more users compared to 2009” and “Many potential users are not being reached because libraries are under budget constraints” are groundless and should be disregarded.

Setting aside the portion of Outsell’s analysis that depends on questions 2 and 2a, I find the remainder of the 2015 Biennial Survey to be sound and highly informative. The points of comparison with 2009’s survey add a new dimension of significance and meaning to this year’s data which was lacking in previous years. For the first time, we are able to detect trends and variations in depository practices. This information should allow the GPO to create a needs assessment for the FDLP which is historically coherent and relevant to the contemporary state of the program. I hope that the GPO will consider doing more standardization of its Biennial Survey so that more historical analysis can be done.
On February 3, the Government Publishing Office launched an updated interface to their Federal Digital System (FDsys) called govinfo.gov. The new site was developed over several years and features a modern, mobile-friendly responsive design and new search and navigation features to make finding government information easier. Agency Director Davita Vance-Cooks introduced the new system to invited guests representing key agencies, both houses of Congress, and the depository library community.

Govinfo is in beta release, and GPO is actively soliciting feedback from users. Visit https://www.govinfo.gov/features/news/meet-govinfo so you can have a say in the ongoing development of the site. Govinfo will eventually replace the current FDsys web site for public access to government information. Please share your feedback with GPO directly or send comments to Depository Library Council member Scott Matheson (scott.matheson@yale.edu), who will relay them back to GPO staff.

Like the recently launched Congress.gov, Govinfo.gov should help our patrons find the information they need and make it easier for us to use online government information.
GD-SIS Grants

The GD-SIS awarded five grants in the 2015-2016 cycle.

The Committee awarded two $750.00 grants to attend the 2015 Federal Depository Library Conference. The recipients were:
· Taryn Marks, Reference Librarian, Lawton Chiles Legal Information Center, University of Florida
· Charlotte Schneider, Government Documents & Reference Librarian, Rutgers Law School

In addition, the Committee awarded a grant for one GD-SIS member to attend the AALL Business Skills Clinic. The recipient of the grant was:
· Bonnie Shucha, Associate Director for Public Services, University of Wisconsin Law Library

For the upcoming AALL Annual Meeting in Chicago, the committee awarded 2 grants in the amount of $1250 each to assist in the cost of registration, travel, food and lodging. The recipients are:
· Sheri Huppert, Government Documents Librarian, Minnesota State Law Library
· Rena K. Stoeber, Reference Librarian, Beasley School of Law, Temple University

As a condition of receiving a GD-SIS grant, members are asked to write up a short article for JURIDOCES. Congratulations to all, and we look forward to your upcoming articles.

If you are attending the meeting in Chicago, look for these members to congratulate them personally.

The grants committee consisted of Pat Behles (University of Baltimore Law Library), Eric Beck (University of Colorado Boulder) and Katie Lewis (Boston College).
OFFICERS

Chair: Kate Irwin-Smiler  
irwinsc@wfu.edu

Vice-Chair/Chair: Jenny Wondracek  
Jennifer.Wondracek@untsystem.edu

Secretary/Treasurer: Rebecca Kunkel  
rkunkel@kinoy.rutgers.edu

Past Chair: Edward T. Hart  
edward.hart@untsystem.edu

Advocacy Committee: Peggy Jarrett  
pjarrett@uw.edu

FDLP Task Force Committee: Taryn Marks  
tmarks@law.ufl.edu

Grants Committee: Pat Behles  
pbehles@ubalt.edu

Listserv Owner: Michael Samson  
ad4092@wayne.edu

Member-at-Large: Cate Kellett  
cate.kellett@yale.edu

Nominations Committee: Amy Taylor  
amytaylor@wcl.american.edu

Program Committee: Jenny Wondracek  
Jennifer.Wondracek@untsystem.edu

Public Relations Committee: Shannon Roddy  
roddy@wcl.american.edu

Publications Committee: Emily Carr  
ecarr@loc.gov

Webmaster: Erik Beck  
erik.beck@colorado.edu

Addie the Eagle

Government Documents
Special Interest Section
American Association of Law Libraries