**Learning About Current Federal Libraries' Resources**

By Angela J.A. Kent, Recent MLIS Graduate


The 35th Federal Library Resources Institute, hosted by the Catholic University of America took place this past July 7-13, 2013. For one week, my fellow Library & Information Sciences (LIS) peers and I, visited and learned about the diversity of federal libraries. We used FEDLINK's "Competencies for Federal Librarians" and "Seven Information Trends." Led by Michelle Masias (Department of Justice) and Mark Brzozowski (The Catholic University of America), our class met librarians from nearly ten federal agencies in one week.

Of the many federal libraries within just the D.C. region, the Federal Libraries Resources Institute visited and/or met with librarians from the following departments and agencies: the Library of Congress (LOC), Department of the Interior (DOI), Department of Justice (DOJ), the Federal Reserve Board, the National Library of Medicine (NLM), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the National Archives & Records Administration (NARA), the Government Printing Office (GPO), the Defense Technology & Information Center (DTIC), and the Department of Transportation (DOT).

If you're interested in reading more about these specific experiences, I posted my daily entries on my blog here:
http://ajakent.wordpress.com/category/clsc-887-federal-libraries/

The federal librarians we met had different information demands and, therefore, different ways of managing their library's resources.

### *Library of Congress: Library of last resort, library of first resort*

For some librarians, namely conservationists, the Library of Congress (LOC) is viewed as the library of last resort. The LOC, with its broad collection mission and resources can be viewed as the library of last resort. To house and conserve such a large collection, the LOC has invested in resources, like a box maker for fragile materials, not found in many other institutions.

Additionally, the LOC invests in preservation and conservation testing and research, two areas that many other institutions cannot invest in. For these efforts, LOC preservations and conservationists can then share recommended preservation standards. These recommendations not only assist other libraries, but individuals who are looking to preserve their personal treasures.

The other side of the LOC as the library of last resort, is the LOC as the library of first resort. This was presented most clearly by the Digital

Reference Section. As most other librarians have experienced, the Internet makes it possible to assist individuals well beyond the boundaries of their physical libraries. At the LOC, some researchers will think first of the Library of Congress before their local public library. In order to manage and prioritize the digital flow of reference questions, the LOC invests in reference services programs that allow questions to be answered in order of receipt or delegated to the appropriate points of contact. Quite similar to Information Technology (IT) services ticket programs.

### *Department of Interior: Agency of everything else*

What happens when your federal library has a history of being the "agency of everything else?" How do you preserve? How do you collect? How do you select hard and electronic resources? The Department of the Interior's (DOI) library answers these questions on a regular basis, while also delivering research instruction that is open to the public. Their website reflects the variety (and challenge) of speaking to different audiences; notably resources for department employees (which span the professions of scientist to park ranger) and the general public.

The evolution of resources can literally be traced within the DOI library's stacks. Hard copies of union catalogs and Congressional Indexes, to their online access, to their in-person speaker series and training sessions, to their subscription to various online databases and digital libraries.

There were two libraries whose missions reflected the lifecycle of government documents:  The National Institutes of Health (NIH) library and the Government Printing Office (GPO).

### *National Institutes of Health: From discovery to publication*

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) library focused their resources that helped their researchers with their discoveries, generating useful data from those discoveries, and assisting with publications. Specifically, they use Springshare's LibGuides to ensure their resources are reaching across the NIH campus and around the globe, with online library resource analytics that are captured in part by Google Analytics.

Unique to the NIH, they have invested in a full [Bioinformatics Program](http://nihlibrary.nih.gov/Services/Bioinformatics/Pages/default.aspx) (http://nihlibrary.nih.gov/Services/Bioinformatics/Pages/default.aspx) that supports and serves NIH researchers with generating analysis from raw data. They have also made a large investment in computers that can process and store large amounts of data, available through the library, supported by library IT staff. On the publication end, the NIH Library offers editing services, among other traditional library resources and services.

### *Government Printing Office: From publication to preservation*

On the other end of the government document spectrum is the work of the Government Printing Office (GPO). While the GPO does not house or maintain a collection of government documents, they make government documents available and accessible through their catalog (http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/), while also developing guidelines and procedures to ensure that government documents that are available online are accurate and unaltered. Their catalog, along with the article level metadata and faceted search options, makes the FDsys a significant source for legislative history, specifically, and government documents, writ large. Of note, was their emphasis in authentication (http://www.gpo.gov/authentication/faq/), particularly since we had not heard this emphasized by other libraries.

### *Promoting public access to resources and data*

A common issue among federal libraries is the balancing of library resources and services for departmental employees and those that can be made available to the public. On a daily basis, federal libraries can be challenged with knowing that their resources are publicly funded, but cannot be made available to the public. While the purpose of a federal library's resources is to ultimately serve the public interest, the route can necessarily become quite indirect. Yet, regardless of department, each federal librarian spoke directly about how they serve the American public and the importance of making publicly-funded, government documents and data available to the American public.

One trend that I noted throughout the week was how federal agencies, and federal libraries specifically, practiced making publicly-funded government information discoverable and accessible. While providing "open source" information is a general library practice, federal libraries can also face security (e.g. classified information) or even accessibility (e.g. grey sources) limitations.

Across the government, federal libraries are now assisted by the Open Government Initiative (http://www.whitehouse.gov/open) mandate and the Office of Science and Technology Public Access Policy (http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ostp/library/publicaccesspol icy).  With regard to open data, at the National Library of Medicine, for example, they make that their data completely available so that users can develop their own products. The NIH is set to become the standard-bearer for government-funded publications for the rest of the science and technology government community. Ultimately, where others may be reticent or even against such actions, librarians are champions and leaders in bringing these materials and data to the American people.

### *Resourcefulness and Creativity*

One of the few similarities shared among federal libraries is the need for resourceful and creative librarians. Sequestration, shrinking personnel, and more, must be faced, all while meeting the ever-increasing demand for information. This requires making the right library resource investments, getting what you need out of your resources in a (sometimes) creative way, and all the while addressing questions of access and security. If there was one resource that evolved the most within each of the federal libraries we visited, it was the librarians themselves.

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