

Proceedings of the 7th Annual Federal Depository Library Conference

April 20 - 23, 1998

Distributed Regional Responsibility: Tennessee's Shared Regional Holdings Arrangement

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The establishment of the University of Memphis as Tennessee's regional depository in 1989 presented some unique challenges in establishing a regional collection for the state. Tennessee's depositories had never been served by a regional, and collectively held over a hundred years of material in collections that had never been weeded in any way. Other than through the Government Documents Organization of Tennessee, a unit of the Tennessee Library Association, there were few avenues for formal communication between depositories. A shared holdings arrangement in which seven institutions share the responsibility for the pre-1989 regional collection has proven a creative and effective solution to these challenges.

Tennessee Depositories

Tennessee has twenty-four selective depository libraries. Fifteen of these are academic libraries, four are public libraries, three are law libraries affiliated with university law schools, and the Tennessee State Library and Archives is also a selective depository. One Federal agency library, located at the Tennessee Valley Authority in Chattanooga, is a small selective depository but is excluded from the procedures discussed here as its disposal procedures are coordinated through the Library of Congress.

Tennessee's selective libraries range widely in age. The oldest depository is at the University of the South in Sewanee (1873) and the youngest is the Law Library of the University of Memphis (1979). The Tennessee Valley Authority library is the smallest, selecting four percent of the available items, while the largest, the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, selects seventy-eight percent. The average age is fifty-three years, and size is twenty-eight percent.

The University of Memphis was a large selective depository (60-80%) and known as Memphis State University when it sought regional designation in 1989. The library was a relatively young depository, established by representative designation in 1966, but had

exercised every opportunity to build its collection retrospectively in areas of important and standard series. Its major obstacle to regional designation was space; the anticipated discards of twenty-two depositories could not be housed in the library, although a new library was in the planning stages.

A Shared Holdings Arrangement

The University of Memphis staff sought partners in the summer of 1990 in five institutions: Vanderbilt University, the Memphis/Shelby County Public Library and Information Center, East Tennessee State University, the Tennessee State Library and Archives, and the University of Tennessee-Knoxville. These institutions were sought as some of the largest and oldest collections, along with those with specialized, long runs of material, and it was hoped that these institutions could and would house the regional collections of these materials. After an initial positive response from these five institutions, an open letter was sent to all Tennessee depositories seeking any additional partners. Tennessee Technological University joined the partnership in September of 1990, and representatives met to plan the initial "adoption" of specific agencies that each institution would take responsibility for. Agencies were selected or suggested based upon existing collection strengths, the curricula of the academic institutions involved, and, to some extent, the geography of the state.

Each institution signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the University of Memphis to solicit and maintain pre-1989 material in appropriate agencies. The University of Memphis "reserved" certain agencies or classes to remain with the post-1989 regional collection. The group of institutional representatives also established a semi-annual schedule for depositories to weed. The specific agencies or classes chosen by each institution follows:

Partner institution and description	Agencies housed
Vanderbilt University (est. 1884, large academic, 58% selective)	Department of State Executive Office of the President President All hearings Some major serials, including: <i>Official Gazette, Congressional Globe and Record, Scientific and Technical Aerospace Reports, Energy Research Abstracts</i>
Memphis/Shelby County Public Library (est. 1896, large public, 45% selective)	Department of Labor Smithsonian Institution Small Business Administration
East Tennessee State University (est. 1942, medium academic, 60% selective)	Bureau of Mines (and predecessors) Environmental Protection Agency Mining Enforcement & Safety Administration Mine Safety and Health Administration Appalachian Regional Commission

Tennessee State Library and Archives (est. unknown, state library, 51% selective)	Department of Interior (with exceptions) Library of Congress War Department
University of Tennessee-Knoxville (est. 1907, large academic, 78% selective)	Department of Agriculture Bureau of the Census Department of Transportation Congress (Y 1.'s) All maps
Tennessee Technological University (est. 1969, medium academic, 47% selective)	Fish and Wildlife Service (and predecessors) All independent Councils, Commissions, and Boards (Y 3.'s) (with some exceptions)

The Process

Withdrawing libraries are required to list publications in SuDocs classification order when each agency is called for in the schedule. The list must include title, format, dates, and linear measurements or number of volumes when appropriate. Libraries must also indicate if volumes are bound. Libraries are not limited in the size of their lists, and may photocopy shelflist cards instead of listing if they so choose. The lists are sent to the appropriate institution and the regional simultaneously if pre-1989 material appears on the list. Within the shared holdings institutions, some libraries have indicated if they would also like to review lists in a particular class, after the responsible library and the regional have made selections.

Lists are marked with requests and returned to the withdrawing libraries. Either the shared holdings library or the regional may require shelflist cards for selected publications, if they desire. Boxes must be packed in SuDocs classification order (indicated on the box) and postage is the responsibility of the withdrawing library.

Problems

The initial rounds of weeding and discarding were not completely uneventful. Several shared holdings libraries found they were spending far more time checking lists than creating lists of their own, and adjustments were made in the weeding schedule. The need to mark documents received under the arrangement as regional copies was also noted, and libraries receiving lists of large sets (such as hearings) often found themselves in receipt of multiple copies of the same publications. A minor, but heartfelt problem arose when discarding libraries packed discards in very large boxes that were unmanageable at their destination.

The largest problem encountered during this period became the adoption of the many miscellaneous agencies that had yet to be claimed. The shared holdings representatives met twice to assign additional agencies, but it was clearly becoming difficult to find homes

for some of the more esoteric groups of documents. (At one meeting, a representative suggested adopting regional responsibility for the Peace Corps because their ex-spouse had been a member!) The problem was finally resolved by the completion of a new library and acquisition of remote storage in the old building at the University of Memphis in 1994.

Comments

The staff of the University of Memphis have observed an approximately even split of selective libraries among those that weed regularly, weed occasionally, or never weed collections under the new arrangement. The experience is generally characterized as one of "remarkable cooperation." Shared holdings libraries have found that while the arrangement has generated a great deal of work, any disadvantages have been outweighed by both the increased opportunity to weed their collections while allowing the creation of superior collections that complement existing subject strengths.

Selective depositories that are not shared holdings libraries have found the greatest benefit in having the opportunity to weed at all. They have also found that the turn-around time required to dispose of unneeded material has been reduced, since the workload is shared among seven libraries. In addition, several librarians have commented that public service is improved because they "automatically" know other libraries' collection strengths.

Few Tennessee documents librarians had experienced the benefits of a regional prior to 1989. The shared holdings program, coupled with technological solutions such as a statewide listserv, have provided mutually beneficial opportunities for communication and networking.