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USDOCS in Action: A Demonstration of Margaret Mooney's Electronic Check-In Program

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When the University of Memphis became the newest regional in 1989, we knew we would be receiving many more documents than we had as a 68% selective. However, we were dismayed when it turned out that the 32% of items that were added doubled our total receipts! Even though we had always selected a large number of items in the past, the record keeping and check-in of everything overwhelmed our experienced and talented staff. After a while it became apparent that we would have to simplify some of our more detailed shelf list records just to keep up.

In addition, we were facing a move to a new library building where we would be more highly visible, thus increasing our reference activity. Since our library assistants also participate in reference service, this would push everyone to overload. And of course, no one really anticipated quite the sudden explosion of electronic material with its attendant learning curve!

In 1993, a staff member attended an ALA pre-conference program and saw Margaret Mooney's USDOCS check-in system. She reported to us that she was extremely impressed with its simplicity and speed. This sounded like the perfect solution for easing our workload, and in addition, allow us to have a better piece count.

We had read about the program, but had no idea that it was available to other depositories. We requested a demonstration disc from Margaret and reviewed it ourselves. We too were very impressed and thought this was the answer to our dilemma. We consulted with the government publications staff and tried to troubleshoot as many problems as we thought might occur. Finally, we made the decision to implement. Equipment was purchased and the Marcive electronic Shipping List service was ordered.

January 1, 1994 was the target date for the closing of the paper shelf list and the start of the new electronic one. However, several things were not in place, so we weren't actually ready to start at that time. We decided we would stamp, SuDoc, and shelve the documents as

they came in, but not check-in the actual lists until we were up and running electronically. Finally, in May, the computers and software were in place, and we were ready to begin.

The most intensive part of getting started was the coding of the items database with serial and monograph information, which must be given to each item number to ensure its proper database destination, and special handling instructions. Initially, we had thought the coding would be relatively easy by using the Superseded List and the List of Classes. However, it was not long before we decided a detailed examination of our paper shelf list for specific details was necessary. We coded all records we could initially identify, and decided that the ones we missed could be done on the fly. We stopped processing boxes completely in May and did nothing else for 4-6 weeks except locate and enter data in the database file. We found that working all day with shifts of 2 people (one to read instructions, one to enter) was necessary to achieve maximum work flow.

When the items database was finally completed in early June, we began processing the backlog of boxes, and when they were finished, we went back and checked-in the shipping lists we had received from January to May. By the middle of July we were completely caught up and were waiting for boxes from GPO.

We are running USDOCS on a library server but only Government Publications staff members can access it. Government Publications staff members have terminals at their desks and they do not have to share one or two departmental machines. In fact, the only problems we have encountered with the program at all were as a result of loading it on this particular server. But after figuring out a few critical local changes, it has worked like a charm.

[Proceeded to demonstrate check-in features, database maintenance functions, and items database construction.]