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## Govdocs: A Voice for the People

Heidi Gauder

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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE  
DIVISION OF PUBLIC DOCUMENTS  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20402

MAY 23 1969

May 21, 1969

Honorable Charles W. Whalen, Jr.  
House of Representatives  
1428 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Whalen:

This is to inform you that the Albert Emanuel Library at the University of Dayton which you designated on May 5, 1969 to become a United States Government Depository to receive publications under the selective plan of distribution, has qualified and the designation has been accepted.

We have forwarded the Classified List of United States Government Publications from which they may select the publications desired. As the system is not retroactive, publications will be forwarded from date of entry on the mailing list.

Sincerely,

*Carper W. Buckley*  
CARPER W. BUCKLEY  
Superintendent of Documents

WEDNESDAY MAY 15, 2019

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# Govdocs: A Voice for the People

By Heidi Gauder

In a letter dated May 26, 1969, the director of the Albert Emanuel Library at the University of Dayton received notification from U.S. Rep. Charles Whalen that the library had been accepted on May 21 for designation as a United States Government Depository — depository 0467A. With that brief letter, the University of Dayton joined the effort to make government-produced information more easily available to the public — the constituents of the 3rd District of Ohio in particular.

For 50 years, we at the library — first Albert Emanuel and now Roesch Library — have received at no cost a selection of materials distributed by the federal government. These publications include documents important to our democracy, such as the Supreme Court Reports, United States Code, Code of Federal Regulations, Federal Register and Congressional Record, as well as congressional hearings and reports on a variety of issues. We've seen materials that cover the opioid crisis, drinking water, prescription drug prices, immigration and more. If you've seen a headline about an issue, chances are the library has a government document on that topic. The depository collection at Roesch Library offers an interesting snapshot of issues that the nation has wrestled with over the past 50 years.

Recently, three of us whose careers have revolved around the government documents collection — “govdocs” in library speak — discussed our experiences being part of a federal depository library.

## NEW MEDIA, NEW METHODS

Kathy Webb, dean of the University Libraries, was the documents librarian from 1993 until 1998. During that time, depositories began dealing with a new information

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format — CD-ROM, short for “compact disc-read-only memory.” The Government Printing Office, now called the Government Publishing Office — GPO for short — had been distributing information on floppy disks, but Webb recalled starting the job with two 5-foot stacks of CD-ROMs awaiting shelving. New cabinets had to be ordered to hold all of them. Other changes also made government information more accessible, such as the addition of government document records to the online catalog. For the first time, users could search for document titles in the online catalog. Previously, users had to visit the library’s government documents office for reference assistance from the documents staff. Webb also recalled implementing what was known as the Gopher protocol at the library in order to remotely access government databases. Gopher, developed at the University of Minnesota in the early 1990s, was an early means to access the Internet; in time, however, the World Wide Web overtook it as a more universally accepted protocol.

A documents librarian’s specialized knowledge comes from understanding the organization of government documents and a certain fearlessness in navigating the sources. These skills translate well in promoting and teaching about government documents to many users. Webb recalled working with multiple departments to help users find relevant documents. She taught research classes that focused on tracing legislative histories; conducted citation checks for law review students; and located esoteric technical reports for engineering faculty.

**Scott West**, an information resources specialist in the University Libraries since 2010, has most closely observed the shift to digital access. As the person who processes the GPO shipments, he noted that the library no longer receives titles in CD, DVD or VHS formats. The print collection has also changed in scope, as the government continues to produce more online documents — a shift that reflects larger changes in academic settings as libraries consider space needs and ease of access.

## ADVANCING TEACHING, RESEARCH

I've been the Libraries' documents librarian since 1998; I likewise recall helping law review students and tracking down technical reports. The start of the 21st century also brought data from the 2000 Census. As soon as the census data was available — via the Census Bureau's American FactFinder website — I quickly learned how to search and teach others about census data. In recent years, with improved online government information access, the focus of teaching has been less about access to the documents themselves and more about how government documents can fit into the research process.

Increasing access to government documents has been an ongoing theme over these last 50 years. After the library began listing document titles in the catalog, we began including URLs to online documents. This meant users could find not just documents in tangible formats — print, CD-ROM, microfiche and floppy disks — but also those that were “born digital.” The University Libraries have also supplemented the federal depository collection with commercial databases that allow users to research congressional hearings before 1969 and easily search census data prior to 1970.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

As government documents become more accessible online, is there still a role for Federal Depository Libraries? All three of us mulled this question over; for the time being, the consensus is yes. Government documents offer an immediacy to information that books and articles, which can take months or years to publish, do not. Congressional hearings, Supreme Court decisions, executive orders and other documents represent the government at work. Not all government information is available online, so depository libraries play an important role.

## A VOICE FOR THE PEOPLE

The right to government information is vital. Documents librarians are a voice for the people, not only in making sure that faculty, staff, students and the public have access to information, but also in preserving this information. The documents we receive reflect issues of concern, help us understand catastrophic events and celebrate our democracy.

— Heidi Gauder is coordinator of research and instruction and current government documents librarian.

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE  
DIVISION OF PUBLIC DOCUMENTS  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20402

May 21, 1969


Charles W. Whalen, Jr.  
Representatives  
North House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Whalen:

I inform you that the Albert Emanuel Library at the University of North Carolina which you designated on May 5, 1969 to become a United States Government Depository to receive publications under the selective plan of the Library of Congress, has qualified and the designation has been accepted.

I have forwarded the Classified List of United States Government Publications from which they may select the publications desired. As this list is not retroactive, publications will be forwarded from the mailing list.

Sincerely,

  
CARPER W. BUCKLEY  
Superintendent of Documents

# Letter from Carper Buckley, 1969

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Letter  
announcing  
UD's designation  
as a U.S.  
Government  
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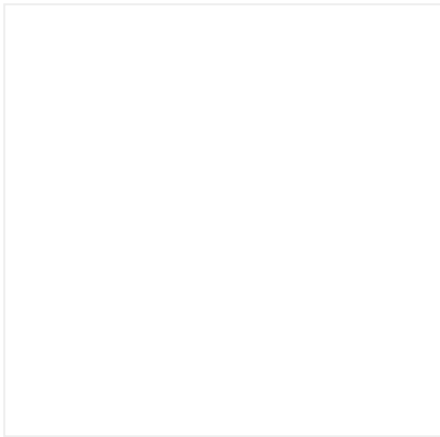


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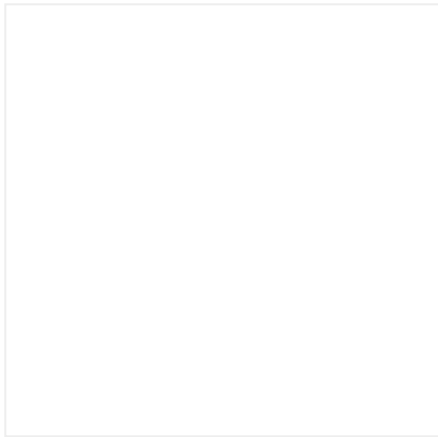
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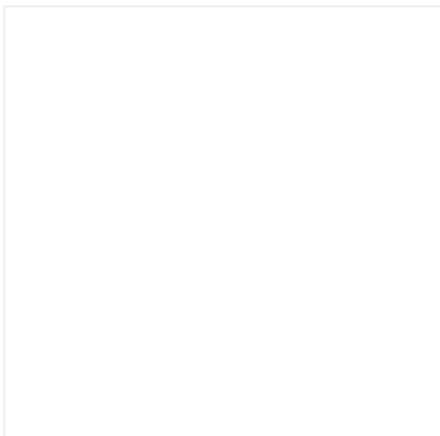
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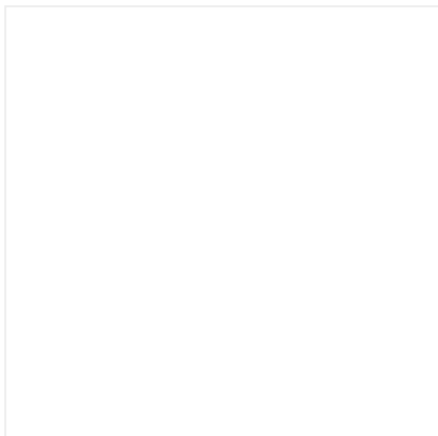
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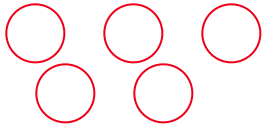
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