

Passing the Torch: Challenges for New Government Information Librarians in Academic Libraries

Elizabeth Sanders, Lamar University

Government Information Day(s)

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Elizabeth Sanders

- Research, Engagement, and Learning Librarian & FDLP Coordinator for Lamar University



- Previously LS 102 Coordinator & FDLP Coordinator for Southeastern Louisiana University

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My Experiences

My Experiences: 2016-2020

- 2016: Gov Doc Librarian retires
 - Full Time Gov Doc Librarian, Support Staff, and Student Worker Positions Eliminated from Library
 - I become FDLP Coordinator, focusing on reference & instruction duties, on top of full-time position
 - Pre-existing knowledge: 1 Gov Docs class in MLIS, interned at Poynter Legislative Library
- 2017-2020
 - Three partners: Me, Head of Library, Head of Cataloging
 - 2018: Participate in FDLP Coordinator Certificate Program

Maintain and update LibGuides, teach specialized one-shots

My Experiences: 2020-2022

- 2020:
 - May: Head of Library, Reference, & Cataloging retire
 - Sole experienced gov docs librarian now, and experience limited
- 2020-2021
 - Media Department on 2nd floor taken for lab space
 - First gov doc weeding project: CDs and DVDs
 - Maps cases moved, so began inventorying
 - Virtual one-shot sessions
- 2021-late 2022
 - Finish updating Government Information LibGuide (3-year project)
 - Accept current position

- Prepare Government Document Starter Kit to help others when leave

My Experiences: Now

- Asked to be FDLP Coordinator when I arrive as part of duties
- Former FDLP Coordinator took over much as I did at SELU • Full time gov doc librarian position eliminated after last full-time holder • FDLP Coordinator duties added to full time job
 - No support staff, student workers, etc.
- Upcoming weeding project due to library renovation • Goal: 90% of physical collection in 18 months
 - Technical Services' spearheading, so I'm collaborating
 - Hiring 2 contract staff and 4 student workers to do bulk
- 2023 = 65th Anniversary with FDLP
 - Trying to arrange programming for event

- Minimal outreach & promotional experience

Challenge #1:

“Accidental” Government Librarian #1: Why Challenging for Beginners

- Didn't plan on being a government information librarian
 - Not much training in or knowledge of government information
 - Professional development constant, even when “not required”
- Never a full-time government information librarian
 - Not only or even primary responsibility
 - Learn what need to know, when need to know it
 - May lead to uneven knowledge base

- Hard to share what learned
- Lack of institutional priority
 - May lack dedicated department, funding, support staff
 - Weeding because “need space”

#1: Why Remains Challenging

- Reflection of long-term challenges, especially budget and staffing
- FDLP Surveys (2017, 2019):
 - 2017: Question #10: Biggest Issues Library as whole facing? (p.32-42)
 - Constraints in the budget (23%) – 58% of responses Academic General Lib. •
 - Use of physical space (20%) – 61% of response Academic General Libraries •
 - Staffing (19%) – 55% of responses Academic General Libraries
 - 2018-2019

- 25% turnover rate of depository coordinators (p.5)
- Question #14: What Affected FDLP Operations?
 - Staffing (294 libraries) and Budget (101 libraries) (p.75)
- Note: These numbers are pre-COVID, pre-"Great Resignation," and only FDLP libraries. Current challenges likely higher.

Challenge #2:

You Don't Know What You Don't Know #2: Why Challenging for Beginners

- Unaware of History and Scope
 - Institutional
 - State / Regional

- National
- International
- Lack Pre-Existing Knowledge
 - May not know how or where to find documentation (if available)
 - May not understand documentation (if available)
 - May not know available resources and/or how to use them
 - May not have opportunity to work with predecessor
- Information Overload

#2: Why Remains Challenging

- History, Scope, and Resources Hard to Share
 - Expertise not built quickly, so can't teach quickly
- Requires some understanding of field and lingo
- May not have opportunity to work with successor

- Creating & Maintaining Documentation • May have to create with no prior information/examples • May lack time and resources to create and update • Focus, Processes, Tools, and Resources always changing
- Unsure How Best to Help
 - Documentation?
 - Staff and peer-training?
 - Mentoring?
 - Publishing?

Challenge #3:

Navigating Shifting Terrain

#3: Why Challenging for Beginners

- Historical & Contemporary Shifts in Gov Docs Ecosystem • Changes impacting collections & role
 - May lack knowledge of how impacts or how to handle impacts
 - Historical Example: GPO (Print, Microfilm, Fully Online) •
 - Contemporary Example: Trump's Presidency
- Historical & Contemporary Shifts in Gov Docs Librarians • Changes in duties, role, and expected knowledge
 - May lack knowledge of how impacts or how to navigate •
 - Historical Example: Shift from Separate Unit in Academic Libraries •
 - Contemporary Example: "Accidental" gov docs librarians
- Unique to each institution

#3: Why Remains Challenging

- Lived Experience Varies
 - “Accidental” Gov Docs Librarians
 - Amount of Institutional Support
- Continuous Learning & Application Required
 - Building own knowledge
 - Applying to institution/tools
 - Sharing updates with others
- Physical & Emotional Toll

Suggestions & Resources

Suggestion #1: Pace Yourself

- Why?
 - Normal to feel overwhelmed
 - If you don't, can burn out
- Not One-Size-Fits-All
 - For any suggestion, mix-and-match as needed
 - Set realistic goals and increments
- Remember:
 - It's okay to start small.
 - You don't have to learn everything all at once.
 - You don't have to learn it all alone.

Suggestion #2: Locate & Review

- Why?

- Helps you identify what know, what need to know, and who might know
- Example #1: Login information
- Example #2: Current and Past projects, goals, statistics

- What?
 - Any documentation related to gov docs at your library
 - Example #1: Annual Reports (within library) / Biennial Surveys (if FDLP)
 - Example #2: Any Gov Doc specific Policies/Procedures
 - Example #3: Past or Current Partners (within or beyond library)

- Where?
 - Filing cabinet, desk, office, USB drives of predecessor
 - Shared files/documents on departmental drive
 - Library Policies, Website, & LibGuides
 - Ask colleagues

Suggestion #3: Plan

- Why?

- Identifies immediate needs and long-term goals
- Prioritizes tasks
- Helps avoid burnout
- What?
 - Goals: What You Want/Need To Do
 - Limit to 2-3
 - SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound
 - Tasks: Actions to reach Goals
 - Needs: Anything Needed for Tasks
 - Timeline
 - Include time for Documentation & Assessment
- Priorities?
 - Depends on individual situation
 - Priority #1: Supporting Daily Roles & Responsibilities

Suggestion #4: Document (1 of 3)

- Why?
 - Records current & historical information for future reference
 - Captures observations and ideas
 - Starting place for assessment, revision, and reporting
 - Area #1: Current Tasks
 - Explain how and why tasks done
 - Describe resources used (e.g., title, purpose, login)
- Your Experience: Projects, Challenges, Works in Progress
- Examples
 - Timeline & Notes related to Goals, Tasks, & Needs
 - Policies & Procedures
 - Contacts: Name, Role, Email/Phone, What Helped With
 - Logins: Username, Password, Description of Resource, How to Reset
 - Important Resources: Title, Access, Description, including how used

Suggestion #4: Document (2 of 3)

- Area #2: Assessment & Reporting
 - Describe process and product
 - Scope & Frequency: Departmental, Institutional, Specific Programs
 - Statistics: What and How Gathered
 - Reports: How to Arrange & Submit
 - Collection Development
 - Collection areas, including any changes over time
 - Cataloging & Weeding Projects
 - Updating Policies & Procedures
 - Explain how previously done and why changing
 - Describe updated practice
 - Include any details regarding transition
 - Describe Other Updates/Changes
 - Projects
 - Partners
 - Departmental

Suggestion #4: Document (3 of 3)

- Area #3: Institutional History
 - Building in Areas #1 and #2, but Area #3 also future focused
 - Consider: What Do You Wish You Had Known?
 - Keep Good Records
 - How and Where Documentation Kept
 - Details: When, How, Why, What Next
 - Revise and Update Routinely
- Specific Suggestions?
 - Tackle as a process
 - Keep everything (with provisions)
 - Not everything permanently – just until write up
 - Keep everything final: Emails with Decisions, Meeting Minutes, Reports
 - Implement a routine updating schedule

Suggestion #5: Build Network

- Why?
 - Gain opportunities to learn
 - Gain insight from veterans
 - Place to ask for help
- Who?
 - Past or Current Partners (within or beyond library)
 - Experienced library faculty and staff
 - Regional Coordinator, if FDLP Selective
- Any Specific Suggestions?
 - [GovDoc-L](#) – helps keep finger on pulse + helpful for questions
 - Ask all questions to as many audiences as possible. • Share what you learn with those you consulted.

Recommended Resources - General

- Getting Help
 - [GovDoc-L](#)
 - [DocTech-L](#)
 - [GODORT Friday Chats](#)
 - [ALA's GODORT](#) (+ your state associations)
 - [Federal Depository Library Directory](#)
- Professional Development
 - [FDLP Academy](#)
 - [Help! I'm an Accidental Gov. Info. Librarian \(GODORT\)](#)
 - [Help! I'm an Accidental Gov. Info. Librarian \(NCLA\)](#)
 - [ASERL](#)
 - [U.S. Census Bureau](#)

Recommended Resources - Beginners

- [Beyond FDLP.gov](#) (LibGuide)

- [FDLP Information for New Depository Coordinators](#) (LibGuide)
- [Tips and Tricks for New Gov Docs Librarians \(Help! I'm an Accidental Government Information Librarian Webinar\)](#)
- Readings
 - Sproles, Claudene. 2022. "Technological transformation of United States government documents librarianship." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 48, no. 2, (March): 1-10.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2022.102498>
 - Sinclair, Gwen. 2020. *Government Information: A Reference for Librarians in Hawai'i*. <https://pressbooks.oer.hawaii.edu/lis648/>

Recommended Resources - Documentation

- [What Does the Green Dot Mean? Documenting Your Collection's History](#) (2022 Fall DLC)
- [Passing the FDLP Torch: Planning for Succession](#) (FDLP)

Academy)

- [FDLP Succession Planning](#) (LibGuide)

Example:

Government Information Starter Kit

Example: Table of Contents

Government Documents Starter Kit

Last updated 8/16/22

Table of Contents

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• Requirements **p. 2-4** • Government Documents Logins **p. 5-6** ○

General

- FDLP Exchange
- AskGPO
- GPO's Z39.50
- ASERL

• Biennial Survey **p. 6**

• Important Resources/Documents **p. 6-7** • Important Contacts **p. 8**

Helpful Resources p. 9

Example: General Information

General Information

Background

Here are some quick facts about Sims Memorial Library:

- FDLP Number: 0231A
- Depository Type: Selective
- Depository Designation Year: 1966
 - Library Size: Medium (250,000 - 1,000,000 volumes in the library)
- Congressional District: 01
- Type of Designation: Representative
- Regional Depository: Louisiana Tech University

Sims Memorial Library is a selective depository in the FDLP program. A selective depository chooses what materials to select for their collections and reports to a regional depository.

Regional depositories must select 100% of all FDLP publications. Louisiana has 2 Regional Depositories:

- Louisiana State University
- Louisiana Tech University

Our direct Regional is Louisiana Tech University. That means if we have questions, need assistance, must send a report to our regional, etc., we contact Louisiana Tech University's FDLP Coordinator.

Requirements Example

Requirements

The [Legal Requirements & Program Regulations of the Federal Depository Library Program](#), last updated in 2018, describes the current legal and Program obligations of libraries in the Federal Depository Library Program.

Two helpful resources in meeting these requirements are:

- [Information for New Depository Coordinators](#)
- [FDLP QuickStart Guide](#)

All documents related to government documents for Sims can be found at: J Drive>Gov Docs

Here are some specific, helpful documents in that folder:

Example: Table Describing Institutional Documents

Document Details

1990s-2016 (Lori Smith Era) All digital documents inherited from long-time Gov. Docs Librarian Lori Smith. Invaluable for history of operations of gov. docs at Sims

2017-2022 (Elizabeth Sanders Era) All digital documents inherited from FDLP Coordinator Elizabeth Sanders, features most up-to-date materials. Note that during her time, Elizabeth Sanders focused primarily on Reference and Instruction so most of her documents are related to those areas.

Archived Emails contain history and decision-making documents.

2022_Gov Docs_Starter_Kit This folder contains introductory information, including logins and the legal requirements for FDLP libraries.

Reference & Instruction This folder contains all resources related to BIs and RCS's related to government information. NLAB 334 is the most frequent one, but others have happened.

Reports and Surveys This folder contains previously completed Reports and Surveys.

These include:

- Annual Reports (2006-2016)
- Biennial Surveys (2011-2021)
- Other Surveys & Feedback

Example: Table Describing Resources/Documents

Important Resources/Documents

Resource/Document Notes

[Plan for Federal Depositories in Louisiana](#)

Plans related to federal depositories in Louisiana, especially helpful during weeding, last updated 2015

[FDLP QuickStart Guide](#) Helps get started with FDLP

[askGPO](#) Allows you to send inquiry to GPO, also has easy links to FAQ and FDLP Directory

[GOVDOC-L](#) Federal Government Documents Listserv required for FDLP Coordinator but also SUPER helpful for finding out about news and asking questions/seeking help from other gov docs colleagues

[FDLP News & Events](#) FDLP Coordinator required to be subscribed email to set up account for new FDLP

[ASERL Documents Disposition Database](#) Coordinator/whoever else needs

Database

Required when weeding documents, dispositiondb@uflib.ufl.edu

[BayouDoc](#) Louisiana Government Documents Listserv, helpful for news and local colleagues

References

- Government Publishing Office. 2018. *2017 Biennial Survey of Federal Depository Libraries Summary Report*.
<https://purl.fdlp.gov/GPO/gpo152519>

- Federal Depository Library Program. 2021. *State of the Federal Depository Library Program, 2018-2019*. Office of the Superintendent of Documents, Library Services & Content Management, U.S. Government Publishing Office.
<https://purl.fdlp.gov/GPO/gpo152519>