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## SHIFTING GEARS: PLANNING AND PROCESSING OF A LARGE GIFT SERIALS COLLECTION

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### Introduction

Mitchell Memorial Library recently received a sizable donation of gift journals and serials from the libraries of several agencies: Mississippi Geological Economic and Topographical Survey, Bureau of Geology in Jackson, Mississippi, and the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ). The impetus for the donations was the imminent move of the MDEQ. The agency library was being moved to a smaller facility, and there was no space to take everything. The core of the library is the geological library started by the Mississippi Geological Survey a century ago. The state geologist/director of the library was responsible for making decisions about what to give away or discard. The core geological library would be kept intact, including key journals, other state geological survey publications, USGS series and reference books. Reducing the volume of material was mandatory. MDEQ desired that the more valuable of these publications go to an institutional library where they would be incorporated into the collections and made available for use.

This article provides a case study of how an academic library coordinated efforts among several departments to process a large donated collection. Specifically, it describes how Mississippi State University Libraries carried out the project.

### Literature Review

A review of the library literature reveals numerous articles dealing with gift policies and evaluating, accepting, and processing gift collections. However, case studies such as the one detailed in this article, which focuses on the processing of a large gift collection from the state and coordinated departmental efforts, are scarce.

Gift materials in libraries are an important source for collection enhancement, yet present unique problems for libraries. Gifts are seldom free. Payment to the donor seldom means any financial cost to the library (Johnson, 1993). Gift materials can strengthen a library's holdings, fill gaps, replace damaged or missing items, and out-of-print material not available for purchase. A focused gift collection, such as the one described in this article, can add both depth and breadth of coverage to a library's holdings. However, large collections are labor-intensive and must be sorted and require much physical handling by staff members. When offered a large collection, the library must decide if the cost of processing and storage is justified by the ultimate gain.

As publication costs continue to rise, gifts will become increasingly important for collection development (Carrico, 1999). It is important to accept and select gifts that fit the collection development policies of the library. Several considerations for accepting and processing gifts include taking into account the condition of the gift, the value to the collection, stipulations placed on the donation, and the cost of adding the gift in terms of staff time. Thought should be given to the processing costs involved in the acceptance of a gift. This is especially true of serials, which incur initial cataloging costs and further costs as more issues come in and additional volumes are bound (Bostic, 1991). Items received as gifts should receive the same degree of care and speed in processing as purchased materials.

Methods of handling gifts vary. In most libraries, gift materials necessitate a separate gifts and exchange unit with individual processing procedures. Acquisition of new serial titles through gift or exchange generally involves the cooperation of three or more library services:

subject area specialist for evaluation of the gift, Gifts and Exchange contact person for the donor who coordinates pickup of the gift, and the Serials and/or Cataloging division, which is responsible for entering the title in the public serials list (Stevens & Swenson, 1980). Coordination among these areas is necessary.

Is the accepting and adding of gifts worth the effort? Gifts processing is not part of the daily workflow, and may take staff time away from the processing of firm orders of new books and serials. Library staff should try to make procedures efficient by disrupting the usual processing routines as little as possible (Diodato and Diodato, 1983). Processing serials is complex, due to the fact that serial gift issues must be compared to the serial holdings list. The size of the gift is a factor to consider, for a long run of back issues of a new title has a greater chance of being added than a few scattered issues. Diodato and Diodato concluded in their study of gift usage at a medium sized academic library that despite relatively low use for gifts, there certainly is evidence that some gifts are worth the effort to acquire. Measuring usage of serial gifts would have to include in-library use statistics.

### **Background**

Mississippi State University is a public land-grant institution offering doctoral and master degree-granting programs in a wide array of disciplines, with emphasis on programs related to the life sciences and engineering. The primary information centers that support the research and educational needs of the university's approximately 17,800 students and over 1,200 faculty are the MSU Libraries.

The Department of Geosciences at Mississippi State University (MSU) is the focal point and advocate for the earth sciences at MSU (Mississippi State University Department of Geosciences, 2009). It provides fundamental education in geosciences and specialized education for majors in geosciences subjects. The department also conducts applied and basic research leading to the illumination of the nature of the earth sciences in Mississippi, the southern

United States in particular. No other geosciences program of its kind exists in Mississippi; therefore the department has a unique role within the state. It was believed that this gift donation would enhance the research efforts of the department by providing extensive historical and background materials.

### **Gift Policy**

Mississippi State University Libraries welcome gifts of books, audiovisual materials, journals and other materials which support the curricular and research needs of the University and which fall within its collection development guidelines. The gifts are considered to be materials given outright without expectation of other materials or services in return. The Libraries do not accept gifts upon which the donor has placed conditions, unless they are of sufficient importance to warrant special consideration.

### **Nature of the Donated Collection**

The donation included 378 linear feet of geological surveys from thirty-six states with which the MDEQ has exchanged publications for decades. Many volumes were bound. Some state's holdings went as far back as the 1800s. One-hundred fifty-six journals were offered for donation which comprised 224 boxes of materials. There were two waves of donations – the first wave comprised foreign publications materials; the second wave was state geological surveys. (See Table 1).

### **Planning and Data Collection**

Mississippi State University Libraries was approached early in 2008 about international geological titles that were of interest to the Head of the Geosciences department at MSU, specifically Geological Survey of Canada, British Geological Survey, and Australia. In addition to these international publications, state geological surveys for thirty-six states were being considered. The Serials Librarian reviewed MSU print and electronic holdings for each of the countries and developed an Excel spreadsheet. This research was facilitated by the Association of American State Geologists (AASG), which maintains a website with links to

all the surveys (American Association of State Geologists, 2009). The MDEQ provided the list of states that needed to be released along with linear feet of shelving. Many of the state holdings went as far back as the 1800s, but an inventory was not available. A good portion of the state surveys were bound volumes. Based on evaluation of the MSU holdings, the Head of Geosciences recommended that MSU should receive all of the state surveys.

### **Processing of the Materials**

Table 2 gives an outline of the workflow involved with the project. The Technical Services department, Cataloging division, dedicated two paraprofessionals to the cataloging of the geological publications determined to be serials. The records were downloaded from OCLC. Individual volumes were barcoded, an item record attached to the bibliographic record, and labels printed. The serials were then sent to the Serials department for stamping and stripping. These would ultimately be available for check out.

For titles that were treated as journals, the Cataloging staff imported the bibliographic serial records. The Serials Librarian (in Serials department) was responsible for adding MARC summary holdings statements. These journals were then subsequently stamped, stripped, boxed in Princeton files and shelved in the Bound Journals. These would not circulate.

### **Preservation of the Materials**

Early on a decision was made regarding binding of the material. Some of the materials were already bound. The library's professional binding budget was limited with enough funds to bind only sixty volumes, with the priority being English language materials, such as the state geological surveys, which would probably get more usage than the foreign language materials and be higher priority for binding. Fastbacking the individual journal and serial issues was considered. This is a method of thermal tape binding in which loose printed pages are secured with a strip of tape or plastic strips fused with heat. Due to the limited binding budget, the age

of the material, and space constraints it was agreed that the binding unit of the library would oversee the placement of materials in Princeton file boxes for shelving purposes. Fastbacks presented a height issue when shelving materials. Princeton boxes add width to sparse shelf space, but would be less costly since a good number of them (over 200) were available. However, many Princeton boxes were in poor physical condition and had to be cleaned and repaired. Student assistants from the binding unit wiped them down with Lysol to protect against mildew. Minor tears were repaired with clear book tape. The unit (two staff and three student assistants) was also responsible for creating adhesive paper labels for the front side of the Princeton boxes with the name of the journal and the volumes and years of the holdings. For the items classified as serials, several were put in one box and a call number range included on the label.

Two student assistants in the Serials department were involved with the physical processing of both the analyzed serials and the bound journals. The materials were already marked with property stamps for the Mississippi Geological Survey Library. Student assistants marked through the property stamps with black magic marker, then stamped the items with the MSU Library property date stamp. Security strips were put in all volumes, except those that were too fragile and brittle, or items that were envelopes containing maps.

### **Shelving the Materials**

One complication discovered in the processing led to the decision by the Serials Coordinator to wait until all donated serials had been cataloged before placing them in Princeton boxes. If the materials were boxed as they were cataloged, the possibility existed that additional materials might subsequently be cataloged that would be within the call number range of what was already boxed. When this indeed happened, the situation existed where barcoded items had to be shifted from box to box and the boxes subsequently re-labeled. It appeared to make sense to hold off on boxing the materials until all donated serials were cataloged. The processed materials were being stored on shelves in the Serials department, until Stacks

Maintenance freed up room to shelve them in the general collection.

### **Change of Direction**

After several months of processing of the gifts by the Cataloging, Serials, and Binding departments the decision was made by the head of Technical Services to discontinue further processing. This was done for several reasons: (1) Space issues were a primary concern. Stacks Maintenance simply did not have additional space in the general collection to shelve the added volumes. However, all of the donated journals did get integrated into the Bound Journals collection, shelved alphabetically by title. (2) Cost purposes – the existing supply of Princeton file boxes was depleted. It was estimated that at least \$2,500 worth of file boxes would have to be purchased to complete the project. The current budget did not allow for this expense. (3) Staff resources – it was estimated that technical services paraprofessionals spent 35-40 hours per week to process the serials: importing bibliographic records, barcoding items, adding item records, and preparing spine labels. (4) An ultimate consideration in the decision to discontinue the processing was the fact that the MSU Geology department felt that no one was currently doing the type of research that would possibly require these types of publications, so they would probably get very little use.

### **Alternative Plan**

With the need to rethink Plan A (processing the entire collection for circulation in the general collection), Plan B was formulated. Space constraints being the major stumbling block to completion, the project was taken in another direction. The geology serials collection would be kept together, and stored in cardboard boxes labeled consecutively with a box number and the title, “Geology Gift,” to be located in a remote area of the library. The Cataloging Department would create a list of publication titles in an Access database that would be published to the library website and searchable by title of the publication or series title. The database would include the following categories: Box number, series title, analyzed title, volume and date range

for the series, and summary holdings (general statement with the caveat that holdings may be incomplete). The public would be required to make an appointment with a library staff person to have access to the closed collection. The geology serials that were already barcoded and processed would be de-processed, withdrawn from the online catalog, and then stored with the unprocessed volumes.

### **Lessons Learned**

The following are suggestions and matters to consider before accepting a large gift donation to ensure that the end results match the expectations for the project and the resources available for processing the materials:

- Review the guidelines of the collection development and gift policy in place with the institution before accepting a donation of any kind.
- Evaluate the costs that will be associated with the processing of the collection. Include hidden costs such as staff time.
- Examine the resources available for storage of the materials prior to processing and the ultimate shelving location of the material.
- Decide if the collection will circulate and be accessible to the public via the OPAC, or searchable database.
- Determine the acceptable condition of the material – will it be preserved or put on the shelf in “as is” condition.
- Last, but not least, question if the donated material will be of use to the library’s patrons or of value to the collection, balanced by the costs of preparation.

The author believes valuable insight was gained through this project. It leads the way for future endeavors of this type. MSU’s gift policy guidelines may need to be addressed. Hopefully, other libraries can benefit from these recommendations so that they may successfully plan and carry out any project involving a large added collection, donated or otherwise.

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**Table 1**  
**Nature of the Donated Collection**

Type of Publication
Geological Surveys for 36 states (378 linear feet/ 189 boxes)
International Titles (Australia, Canada, Great Britain)
Annual reports
Bulletins
Proceedings
Special Publications
Technical Reports
Journals (224 boxes)

**Table 2**  
**Departments Involved with Processing Donated Collection**

Duty	Department and Staff Responsible
Accepting Gift Donation	Technical Services/Associate Dean
Pickup Items	Stacks Maintenance
Storage	Cataloging/Serials
Evaluation	Acquisitions/Coordinator
Download serial records	Cataloging/Library Associates
Barcoding	Cataloging/Library Associates
Stamping and Stripping Assistants	Serials/Library Associates; Student
Holding Statements	Serials/Librarian
Preservation	Binding Unit/Student Assistants
Shelving	Stacks Maintenance