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## Constitution Day at Your Library: Promoting Your Federal Depository

Yadira V. Payne

Augusta State University, [yvpayne@gmail.com](mailto:yvpayne@gmail.com)

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## Constitution Day at your library: Promoting your federal depository

by *Yadira V. Payne*

In 1787 our Founding Fathers composed and signed a document that has since become the foundation of our great nation. This short 4,400-word document is the U.S. Constitution and its affirmation on Sept. 17 has been celebrated and observed since that eventful day.

However, its observance did not become a federal mandate until 2005 through the enactment of Public Law 108-447, which states that "Each educational institution that receives federal funds for a fiscal year shall hold an educational program on the United States Constitution on September 17 of such year for the students served by the educational institution." In light of this proclamation and dissipating library budgets, it appeared that using our national treasure to promote Reese Library's federal depository collection and status was a perfect task for me to undertake as the federal depository coordinator and government documents librarian at an academic library.

First, there is an explanation of one of the major benefits of being a federal depository library, followed by a digest of a recent Constitution Day event that was planned and executed. Second, intended outcomes

developed out of the planning stages with the focus of undertaking an active role in promoting this event on the Augusta State University campus in conjunction with Reese Library. Finally, and most notably, the government documents department's Constitution Day event incurred an unexpected and revealing outcome.

### **Federal Depositories in Georgia**

According to the Federal Depository Library Directory (FDLD), Reese Library is one of 23 depositories in the state of Georgia. This sum comprises law, public, college and university libraries, as well as the U.S. Court of Appeals 11th Circuit Library. Except for our regional depository, located at the University of Georgia in Athens, these are all selective depositories.

Selective depository status indicates that we do not request, receive or subscribe to 100 percent of what the federal government publishes but a smaller percentage that we have decided better accommodates our spacing issues as well as the information needs of the stakeholders serviced by our particular libraries. It is advantageous for libraries to be included in this assemblage regardless of depository status.

### **Benefits of Being a Depository**

There are many benefits for libraries to consider applying for or retaining their federal depository status. One such benefit of note in our current national economic downturn and local acquisitions budgetary constraints is that all materials – books, CDs, microfiche, maps, electronic documents and so forth – are provided at no cost to the library. The overhead incurred is minimal when the government documents materials processing is enveloped with your technical services department. As a federal depository receiving materials free from the Government Printing Office (GPO), the library is merely the caretaker and not the owner of the federal documents. This is an invaluable service to not only our faculty, staff and students but to our community users as well, who would not be able to locate these items elsewhere. According to the Subcommittee on Attrition and Retention (SOAR), another benefit of being a depository library is that it "raises the level of visibility and status of the entire library locally, regionally and nationally."

### **Promoting the Federal Depository: Event Planning**

Even with the benefit of receiving

new, highly relevant and interesting items several times a week at no cost to the library, we find ourselves in an era where some libraries are opting to renounce their depository status. As such, it has become essential to promote local depository collections and their documents personnel in creative ways. As a new documents librarian, I am full of passion and eager to promote our library's collection through a famous government document many people are familiar with and respect – the Constitution. Where to begin?

Event planning began with soliciting the advice and assistance of Reese Library's outreach librarian, the business manager, the library director, and the associate library director. As a new librarian, I needed to know the history of the library's outreach efforts in this venue as well as the government documents department's involvement. Finding that involvement had been minimal and held only in conjunction with the campuswide program, I surged ahead with my planning by immediately requesting funding for the purchase of 200 pocket-sized Constitutions to be given away. At a 70 percent discount and free shipping, my request was approved.

Reaching out to the political science department was the next step. This department hosts the annual Augusta State University's Constitution Day reading. I conveyed my plans for Reese Library's Constitution Day event to professor Flanagan, the new chair of the ASU Constitution Day Committee. He was most receptive to my plans and ideas. In communicating with the committee – which included student activities and the dean of students as well – they understood that I wanted to participate in the annual event in a way that would promote the library,

our depository and the Constitution. Phone and e-mail discussions with the committee ensued for several months as plans became concrete.

Having established a campuswide collaboration with the recognized committee, the next task was to create displays in the government documents department, the purpose of which was to offer internal promotion and marketing. Government documents student assistants were given charge of this task. The only instructions given were to be creative and have fun with the display items I purchased and provided. They created three beautiful displays. The "U.S. Constitution" display included not only a charred-edges copy of the Constitution but famous quotes and little-known facts about the Constitution as well. The "Voting and Inauguration Process" display included not only voting and inauguration process items but photos of that year's nominees and the voting date. The final display, "Major Documents in the Framing of Our Nation," included copies of the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights as well as figurines representing every branch of the military. Campuswide e-mails were sent to the faculty and staff announcing an open invitation for viewing these displays.

As an added free marketing tool, I briefly discussed our Constitution Day event plans in a blog posting and posted photos of the displays in my photo gallery in the federal depository library community Web site for other depository coordinators to view and comment on. In a four-month period, the posting received 2,129 hits. This provided free national exposure for our depository collection and its event as well as affording other depositories a little

inspiration regarding their collections. As an added and unexpected benefit of the posting, receiving more than 2,000 hits to the post revealed that there is not only an interest in but a continued need for marketing and promotion of library government documents collections nationally.

### The Event

The day of the event coincided with the campuswide free barbecue event known as Pig Out. Normally, this is not a library-frequented day for students. Not to be deterred, I requested that a table be set up outside of the library near the line for the free food. We were well-received. My having dressed in period costume may have added to the curiosity. My staff and student assistants decorated and manned the table full of free candy, pens, depository brochures, bookmarks, a Daniel Boone coon-skin cap and voter registration booklets. I, on the other hand, mingled with the students in line and those lingering around outside. Walking around, in full costume, I handed out pocket-sized Constitutions and had photos taken with students. Also packed in my little basket of goodies were copies of the "How a Bill Becomes Law" flyer, thus inspiring us to sing the Schoolhouse Rock song "I'm Just a Bill."

Across the breezeway, the Political Science Club set up a voter registration table. Next to our government documents table, and upon my request, the library outreach assistant set up a display regarding the voting procedure, voter registration cards and a who-to-contact directory. The information was well received. In less than three hours, everything had been taken from the table, save for the Daniel Boone cap that my student assistant wore to keep it from disappearing as well.

### After-Event Reflection: Expected and Unexpected Outcomes

Constitution Day was a glorious success for Reese Library and the government documents department. There was campuswide collaboration between departments. Teamwork within the library was promoted. Great fun was had by everyone via an educational platform complete with freebies and a costume-adorned librarian. Constitution Day was promoted to the student body in an “outside the box” environment and format for the government documents staff and student assistants. All of these plus the promotion of Reese Library’s federal depository department, collection, educational offerings and status were expected outcomes.

During the after-event reflection and report preparation, unexpected outcomes were found. First, many faculty and students requested that library instruction classes be offered specific to government documents offerings and data navigation. While they were aware that Reese Library had a government documents department, they were unclear as to what exactly it offered. Having spoken with us, faculty and students were amazed that the government offered so much material that could benefit them in their studies or publications. This identified a gap in library instruction as well as

information dissemination regarding federal depositories. Due to this unexpected outcome, this year I have revised and published the “A Brief Guide to U.S. Government Documents” handout. I have also given library instruction classes specific to government documents information for several departments. Currently in progress are the revamping of the Web page, the creation of an instructional video and the creation of a government documents wiki.

Another unexpected outcome was the number of questions we received regarding the access of government documents. This let me identify that further reference assistance is needed. While they – faculty and students – may not visit the department to ask their questions, in the two and one-half hours that we were out there, we received several hundred valid and thoughtful questions. In progress, as a result of this unexpected outcome, is an internal library instruction class for everyone who covers the reference desk. A government documents refresher is needed so that the reference staff can better assist library patrons with government documents questions. Also, there is a need for me to communicate with and visit the different departments on campus, as the government documents librarian, in an effort to

identify their specific needs and their students’ needs.

### Conclusion

Constitution Day was such a great success that we are currently planning future events complete with costume and freebies. As the Government Printing Office aims for a 98 percent digital publication goal, federal depositories will need to continue to meet the informational needs of their patrons as well as continue marketing and promotion efforts. Augusta State University’s Reese Library’s government documents department is no exception. We will continue to promote the collection in a variety of ways to include using our national treasure — the U.S. Constitution — as the point of access. Let’s remember that the federal depository offers freedom of information just as the Constitution offers freedom for all. ►►

*Yadira V. Payne is a librarian in the Reese Library at Augusta State University. She is also vice president of the Central Savannah River Area Library Association.*

### Resources:

Benefits of Being a Federal Depository Library. Prepared by SOAR: Depository Library Council Subcommittee on Attrition and Retention. <[http://www.access.gpo.gov/su\\_docs/fdldp/council/fdldp-benefits.pdf](http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fdldp/council/fdldp-benefits.pdf)>. (Accessed July 22, 2008).

Constitution Day Announcement. Federal Register. <[www.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/other/2005-2/052405b.pdf](http://www.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/other/2005-2/052405b.pdf)>. (Accessed May 26, 2008).

FDLD Profile Search. Catalog of U.S. Government Publications. <<http://catalog.gpo.gov/fdldpdir/FDLdir.jsp>>. (Accessed July 22, 2008).

***Have you checked out the Georgia Library Association’s home page lately? Take a look at <http://gl.georgialibraries.org/> for the new library profile feature, “Georgia Library Spotlight.” Every six weeks, a new library will share information about its history, facilities, programs and specialties. If you’re interested in seeing your library profiled, please e-mail Sarah Steiner at [ssteiner@gsu.edu](mailto:ssteiner@gsu.edu).***

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