Suffolk University Law School Library formally dropped our Federal Depository Library status in August 1998. I was the acting Government Documents Librarian at that time and was responsible for the final disposition of the collection. Before we dropped our status, I searched for articles on the actual process of dropping depository status. I found several articles on the costs and benefits of being in the program, but no specific guidelines on how to go through the process once the decision to drop Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) status was made. In this article, I will describe the steps we took when we dropped our status.

Suffolk University Law School Library became a selective depository library in 1981. We selected approximately eleven percent of the available Government Printing Office (GPO) depository material. In 1997, the Law Library director and our former government documents librarian began to consider leaving the Federal Depository Library Program. The main reason for our library director’s decision to drop FDLP status was that Suffolk University was a major factor in our decision to drop our status. The Regional Depository would want to take back only a few government documents librarian and me were asked the Regional Depository librarian about what it would want to take back. This was a major factor in our decision to drop our status. The Regional Depository Librarian informed both the former government documents librarian and me that we would want to take back only a few selected items and we would be able to retain most of the collection. Before considering dropping your status, check your Regional Depository Librarian to find out how much of your collection it wants to claim. If a new depository library is opening or an existing one is expanding in your region, you might have to return your whole collection.

At the same time, the former government documents librarian and I thoroughly investigated the availability of the depository material in our collection from other sources. We went through the list of items we had received in the FDLP and determined which items we wanted to continue receiving in our collection. Some material was available in print sources we already subscribed to in a similar format—such as the annotated versions of the United States Code or administrative decisions reproduced in looseleaf services. Many titles were also available online—free on the Internet or through fee-based service such as CIS Compass. For the titles which were not available in our library already, we tried to obtain them through other vendors. I gave a list of titles that we selected for retaining subscription to our acquisitions librarian. She found a few vendors, including the Government Printing Office, that could continue the subscriptions to the titles we wanted to retain. She set up an account with the vendor within a few weeks after we dropped our status. We tried to start the subscriptions as soon as possible after we dropped our status to avoid gaps in the collection. There was about a two month delay between the time we stopped receiving subscriptions through the FDLP and the time we were able to receive issues through our new vendor account.

Formal Procedures

After my informal discussion with our Regional Depository Librarian about what material it wanted, I read and followed the procedure for dropping FDLP status given in the Federal Depository Library Program Administrative Instructions to Depository Libraries, located at the FDLP Web site at http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/dpos/instruct.html. Chapter One, section D, is on “Depository Termination Procedure.” According to the instructions, our library director needed to send a letter to the Superintendent of Documents to inform him of our decision to drop our FDLP status. After our director sent the letter, it took only one week to receive confirmation from the Superintendent of Documents.

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At the same time, I also contacted the Government Printing Office Library Division Programs Service Office to stop all shipments from the GPO. After I notified the Library Programs Service director, it took about one month to stop receipt of all paper and CD-ROM shipments from the GPO and about another month after that to stop all microform shipments.

After we received the letter from the Superintendent of Documents, our library director sent a formal letter to the Regional Depository Librarian to notify her of our decision to drop Depository status and to inquire further about its requirements. The Regional Depository Librarian requested a list of all the items Suffolk Law Library had by Su Doc number, title, and item number. She requested that we indicate on this list what we wanted to retain in our collection. We wanted to retain only a small part of our collection. Since Suffolk Law Library was only a small Depository for 19 years, there was not much historical or rare material in the collection so it probably would not be difficult to replace most of it.

Most of the material in our depository collection was from the GPO’s basic documents list. Any material that the Regional Depository Librarian did not want to take and we did not want to retain, had to be posted on the National Needs and Offers list. After that, we could dispose of the material as we chose.

Summary of Considerations

The whole depository termination process may take several months. Our process, from the formal notification to the Superintendent of Documents to the final shipment of material to the Regional Depository, took from August 1994 until May 1999. Even before termination, a library should have a list of all continuing GPO subscriptions. It was helpful to us and our Regional Depository to have this list contain the SuDoc number, title, item number, and the dates that we owned.

Another preliminary step is to investigate whether your primary patrons would have access to the former depository material in the collection through other formats or in other locations. We did not have much material that could not be replaced, so the return of some material to our Regional Depository did not cause a disruption to our collection. If a library has some historical or rare depository material, it may want to consider whether the possible loss of this material through termination would affect the quality of its collection in a subject area. The library should investigate how difficult it might be to replace this material in its collection.

The next factor to consider is how expensive it will be to replace returned material and the cost of continuing subscriptions after termination. The final consideration to keep in mind is to be prepared to lose some or all of your collection to the Regional Depository or other depository libraries. This was clearly stated in our termination letter from our Regional Depository Librarian, Gail Fithian, “All GPO publications received through the program remain the property of the U.S. Government even after your status has been terminated.”

The process of dropping depository library status requires careful planning at each step. Before you formally drop your status, it is important to have completed many of the preliminary steps discussed above. The most helpful item to us was the list of all the items we received by Su Doc number. We made this list before we ever considered dropping our status. It gave us a good starting point for evaluating our collection. We found it equally important to have established a continuing relationship with our Regional Depository Librarian. If you start with these and do the pre-planning steps, the process should go smoothly.

Kent Olson Wins Andrews Award

by Amy Eaton

Kent C. Olson has been selected by the AALL Awards Committee to receive this year’s Joseph L. Andrews Bibliographical Award for his book, Legal Information: How to Find It, How to Use It. Olson’s book is a guide to legal resources, designed for those who want to understand not only the law but also the legal system in general. A particular strength of the book is the interweaving of print, electronic, and Web resources. Legal Information: How to Find It, How to Use It is an excellent resource for librarians unfamiliar with legal resources or those returning to the reference desk after an absence.

Kent C. Olson is Assistant Librarian for Public Services at the University of Virginia School of Law in Charlottesville, Virginia, where he teaches advanced legal research. He received his JD and MLS from the University of California, Berkeley. Olson has previously published How to Find the Law (co-authored with Morris L. Cohen and Robert C. Berring) and Legal Research in a Nutshell (co-authored with Morris L. Cohen) as well as numerous articles.

The Joseph L. Andrews Bibliographical Award was established in 1967 in honor of Joseph L. Andrews, Reference Librarian at the Association of the Bar of the City of New York. The Andrews Award is given for significant contribution to legal bibliographical literature, measured primarily by its creative and evaluative elements and the extent to which judgment was a factor in its formulation.

The Andrews Award will be presented during the Association Luncheon on Monday July 17, 2000, at the Pennsylvania Convention Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Please join the Awards Committee and the Association in congratulating the 2000 Joseph L. Andrews Bibliographical Award recipient, Kent C. Olson.

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