2006

Government information research

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Susie A. Skarl

Introduction

Prior to the mid-1990s, much government information lay outside the mainstream of library catalogs and core indexes and, consequently, was greatly underutilized. Finding government information required negotiating cumbersome search tools, specialized indexes, and separate call number systems. By the end of the 1990s, government information had become more accessible on the World Wide Web. Although the Internet has made searching and finding government information less taxing for patrons, most still require instruction from library staff in order to satisfy their needs in the best possible manner. Concurrent with this rapid transition from print to electronic government information, many government documents reference desks have been merged into general reference service points. Therefore, the need for staff instruction and guidance in government resources has gained in importance. This chapter focuses on lesson plans, instruction techniques, outreach activities, and assessment activities that will acquaint you and increase your comfort level with government information resources. I offer training approaches you can use to familiarize both colleagues and library users with print and electronic resources. The CD-ROM accompanying this book includes several government information–related handouts and PowerPoint

presentations to use as training tools (see items 17-1, 17-2, and 17-3 on the CD-ROM).

I emphasize staff training for two reasons. First, government information is multi-disciplinary, making it useful in most library reference settings. However, reference staff often lack regular contact with government information, hence the desirability of in-service training to help them gain skill in answering patrons' questions and guiding them through the maze of government publications and resources. Second, pending changes in the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) will likely de-emphasize tangible depository collections. FDLP stakeholders, including librarians, administrators, and Government Printing Office (GPO) managers, are anticipating a reduction in the number of depository libraries. Thus it is necessary for the current generation of government publications librarians to educate other library service providers concerning the content and means of retrieving this information (Seavey, 2005). These developments are mirrored in the publishing and dissemination of international, foreign, state, and local government information as well.

The Scope of Government Information

U.S. federal government information and public documents encompass nearly every subject area. Whether a patron needs information about a recent law passed by Congress, transcripts of a hearing from decades ago, current health information, crime statistics, or information about a NASA space mission, it is likely that an entity of the U.S. government has published something on it. For over 100 years, such publications have been distributed through a system of federal depositories, mainly situated in public, academic libraries across the country (Mann and McDevitt, 2003).

Government publications are often "the best kept secret" in a library (Hutto, 2004). Many depository libraries have housed government documents in a separate section from their other books and periodicals. Most have shelved their U.S. documents according to Superintendent of Documents classification (SuDoc), unlike the rest of the library collection, which is typically organized under the Library of Congress or Dewey Decimal classification system. At best there were only a select few persons in each library who knew the ins and outs of government publications and could help users find them. All of this began to change near the end of the twentieth century, first with the Internet, then with the point-and-click technology of the World Wide Web. Web publishing was eagerly embraced by national, state, and local governments eager to get their information to the masses in a cost-effective manner (Mann and McDevitt, 2003). At the Patent and Trademark Depository Library Program's annual training seminar in April 2005, the GPO's Judy Russell announced that, for the first three months of the year, 93 percent of items distributed through the Federal Depository Library Program were available on the Web.[1] This migration is precipitating change in many libraries. Many federal depository personnel, functions, and services are being merged into general reference departments in their host libraries (Cox and Skarl, 2004). More important, every library today can have a respectable

virtual collection of federal government information. Libraries must implement effective practices to deliver this virtual collection to users.

Training Library Staff

Any government information training program for staff should provide background information on how documents are received and processed, an overview of the FDLP, and a sampling of patron needs and the types of questions they asked (Farrell, 2002). To meet the challenge of keeping colleagues informed of the rapid changes and updates in government information resources, education and training of staff should be integrated into existing staff training programs; announcing new resources to reference staff; and alerting staff to new databases or Web sites (Farrell, 2002; Rawan and Cox, 1995; Taylor and Schmidt, 2001). Rawan and Cox also note that trainers should emphasize answering questions, solving problems, and allowing hands-on practice with sources, with less emphasis on lecturing (1995).

In an introductory government information training session for colleagues, begin with brief overviews of the FDLP and your state's depository program. A ninety-minute training session should include a brief history of the programs and cover how these collections are organized, focusing on the Superintendent of Documents (SuDoc) classification system and the Swank (state) or other state systems for classifying state government publications.

Following this introduction, staff should gain familiarity with the most important tools used to find government information in print and online formats. Discuss and distribute common reference books such as:

- *Statistical Abstract of the United States*
- *City and County Data Book*
- Your state's statutes and administrative code

For an active learning activity, break the participants into groups and give them a reference question using a specific source. For example, using the *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, ask one group to find approximately how many people are covered by health insurance in the United States. Using the *City and County Data Book*, ask another group to name the top five cities in the United States with the highest Asian population in 2000.

You can provide a good introduction to government resources available online with an overview and hands-on time with *GPO Access* (www.gpoaccess.gov), *Firstgov.gov* (www.firstgov.gov), and *Google Uncle Sam* (www.google.com/uncle sam). Demonstrate *Google's* "Advanced Search" and limit your search to the .gov domain. Another good exercise is to give two groups the same question to search on two different sites. If you want to know what the U.S. government has published on Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), have one group search for the term on *Firstgov.gov*, and the other group search on *Google Uncle Sam*. Ask participants to discuss the search strategies they used on various sites and to summarize what they found (e.g., research studies, consumer health-oriented publications, and statistical information). In addition to federal Web sites, provide an overview of

related resources found on state, county, and local government sites (including online statutes, administrative codes, and school district policies).

Federal, state, and local governments collect and publish statistics on a wide variety of social, economic, and environmental topics. *Fedstats.gov* (www.fed stats.gov) is perhaps the best government statistical portal, providing links to official statistics collected and published by more than 100 federal agencies. It is relatively easy for novice searchers to use, in part because they do not have to know in advance which agency produces the statistics they want. *Fedstats.gov* also provides links to data on states, cities, counties, and Congressional districts, data access tools, and various online statistical reference sources. Some practice questions to try on *Fedstats.gov* are:

- At midyear 2003, how many inmates were held in the nation's local jails?
- Find the number of live births to 15- to 19-year-olds in 2002.
- Find the number of marriages in the United States in 2002.

Other sources you may want to cover in your first training session include the U.S. Census Bureau Web site (www.census.gov), its *American FactFinder* (AFF) component, the *AFF* tutorial (http://factfinder.census.gov/home/en/epss/tutorials .html), and *Thomas* (http://thomas.loc.gov; covered in the chapter on teaching legal research to nonlaw students).

A sixty- or ninety-minute session would typically allow you to cover three to five Web gateways or subject categories. As such, do not expect all attendees to feel completely at ease with government-related questions after this session. Remind them of some applications for social science-, science-, health-, and public policy-related questions and encourage them to consult with you and other knowledgeable staff when they feel the need to do so. Your supportiveness can be just as important to your colleagues as gaining new knowledge to use in reference encounters.

Follow-up training will help reinforce topics you introduced earlier, give staff an opportunity to ask questions, and allow you to cover more topics and sources. Once you have laid the groundwork, it will be appropriate to offer more sessions, each covering a single subject or resource in greater depth. Possibilities include federal, state, and local legislation, ordinances and codes, the U.S. Census Bureau and *American FactFinder* Web sites, health information, and a more detailed look at government statistics. Consult regularly with your colleagues to identify other government-related subjects that would benefit them and library users.

If your library subscribes to commercial databases that include government information, you should focus on them in staff training. Some of these databases are:

- *Academic Search Premier*. http://search.epnet.com. This aggregator database includes full-text access to U.S. federal government periodicals, such as *Environmental Health Perspectives, Joint Force Quarterly*, and *Public Health Reports*.
- *CQ.com*. www.cq.com. A news and analysis service that tracks legislation before Congress and alerts users to late-breaking news.
- *CQ Electronic Library*. http://library.cqpress.com. This database contains full-text articles on a comprehensive range of public policy topics in three

components: *CQ Public Affairs Collection*, *CQ Researcher*, and *CQ Weekly*. A fourth component, the *CQ Voting and Elections Collection*, presents national election statistics.

- *LexisNexis Congressional.* http://web.lexis-nexis.com/congcomp. This database provides access to congressional publications, including hearings, reports, prints, documents, hot topics, bills, laws, regulations, and legislative histories.
- *LexisNexis Primary Sources in U.S. Presidential History.* www.lexisnexis.com/academic/luniv/hist. This database provides the full text of both primary and secondary sources related to U.S. presidential history. In addition to autobiographies, case law, and statutes, the database includes speeches, government publications, and photographs.
- *PAIS International.* Available from several vendors; FirstSearch version available at http://newfirstsearch.oclc.org. *PAIS* includes citations to and limited full text of books, government reports, proceedings, and journal articles on public policy and the social sciences in general. The FirstSearch version of *PAIS* works with link resolvers.

Along with federal and state sources, an introduction to international and intergovernmental publications would be beneficial to library reference staff. Such familiarity will assist service pool members in library instruction and reference consultations in the subject areas of political science, history, geography, and international business. For example, H. M. Sheehy and D. Cheney developed an Introduction to Research in International Relations course to focus on the intergovernmental organizations and selected resources related to international relations from the U.S. government, Canada, and the United Kingdom (1997). In a workshop such as this, you can explore the structure and function of each government and organization, in addition to the way in which a government or organization's activities are controlled by its departments or its member states.

Some online sources and databases to highlight when discussing international resources include:

- *LexisNexis Statistical.* This source provides access to statistics produced by the U.S. government, major international intergovernmental organizations, professional and trade organizations, commercial publishers, independent research organizations, state government agencies, and universities. It is comprised of three indexes: the American Statistics Index (ASI), Index to International Statistics (IIS), and Statistical Resources Index (SRI).
- Northwestern University. *Foreign Governments.* www.library.northwestern.edu/govpub/resource/internat/foreign.html. This Web site provides links to foreign national governments.
- Northwestern University. *International Governmental Organizations.* www.library.northwestern.edu/govpub/resource/internat/igo.html. This gateway is a comprehensive list of links to intergovernmental organizations (IGOs).
- *Official Documents System of the United Nations* (ODS). http://documents.un.org. ODS covers all types of UN documentation from 1993 to the present in several different languages.

- *UNBIS* (United Nations Bibliographic Information System). http://unbisnet .un.org. *UNBIS* is an official catalog of UN documents and publications, in addition to commercial publications and other non-UN sources.

In addition to training sessions or seminars, which allow you to expose your colleagues to a baseline of government-related knowledge and information-finding skills, it is beneficial to provide them with periodic updates on new sources and services. Some examples include:

- Government information in the news. An excellent example of this is *New Mexico News Plus*, a Web-based service of the New Mexico State Library that is updated daily and provides access to government reports, legislation, federal court decisions, statistics, and regulations mentioned in the news (www.stlib.state.nm.us).
- Legislative information (especially when your state legislature is in session).
- New department and agency Web sites. These commonly appear after new federal and state executives take office.
- Environmental agency sites with new impact statements.
- Patents, trademarks, and copyrights.

Workshops, your own one-on-one contacts, and service alerts will encourage staff to integrate government resources into their routine searching strategies when assisting or instructing patrons and help them keep abreast of new sources. Listservs such as GOVDOC-L, PTDLA-L, and INTLDOC and mailings from the UN Depository Program often list new reports on popular topics. You can forward these messages to your coworkers, mention them in discussions, and link to the pertinent reports on your library Web site.

Liaison Activities with Subject Specialists

One of the most successful ways to integrate government publications into the mainstream of your library's instructional program is to consult regularly with your library's subject specialists. There are several benefits when you alert subject librarians to government resources specific to their areas of interest. Not only will you help them increase their knowledge about the most up-to-date government resources in their fields, but you will also prepare them to introduce these resources to their user groups. If you are a government information specialist and also have subject or departmental liaison responsibilities, make your own efforts a model for your colleagues.

There are so many government resources online that you should maintain an up-to-date gateway on your library's Web site, linking to the most pertinent information for your users. When you do this, patrons and your coworkers will come to rely on your Web pages and consider you a trusted resource for their government information needs. You may find it useful to collaborate with subject specialists when designing and adding content to your Web pages. Doing so will make them more knowledgeable concerning government information in their specialties, and

they will be more likely to introduce and promote these resources to their users. For example, it would be mutually beneficial to meet with your library's health sciences specialist to discuss health-related government resources, including the following topics:

- Online databases, including *PubMed* (linked from www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)
- Consumer health information on *MedlinePlus*: http://medlineplus.gov
- Statistics from the National Center for Health Statistics at www.cdc.gov/nchs/default.htm

Collaborating with Subject Specialists in Instruction Activities

It is especially valuable for government information librarians to collaborate with subject specialists when planning and delivering instruction. C. LaGuardia and colleagues, D. J. Morganti and F. C. Buckalew, and C. Daniels and D. Jurena argue that successful team teaching will benefit instruction librarians by exposing them to more information resources (both licensed and free), new teaching perspectives, and techniques, by building confidence and aiding classroom management in labs (Daniels and Jurena, 1997; LaGuardia et al., 1993; Morganti and Buckalew, 1991). For example, in a graduate construction engineering course, an engineering librarian and government documents librarian can introduce students to engineering research databases, such as *Compendex*, *Scopus*, *ScienceDirect*, and *INSPEC*, and then present government resources focusing on construction and housing. The following are some related U.S. government sources:

- *American FactFinder*: www.census.gov
- *Census Bureau Housing Topics*: www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing.html
- *Construction Statistics*: www.census.gov/const/www
- *National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health* (NIOSH): www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/construction/default.html
- *Science.gov*: www.science.gov

Faculty and Graduate Seminars and Brown Bag Lunch Discussions

Many academic libraries promote library resources by offering faculty or graduate seminars or informal brown bag discussions about library resources. If your library offers these kinds of events for users, suggest presenting a seminar focusing on a specific government resource or topic. This type of seminar not only provides an opportunity to teach the faculty about a specific government resource, but also allows you to introduce yourself to faculty, promote the library's print and online resources, offer individual research consultations, and suggest pertinent government-related instruction sessions for their students.

A seminar on the U.S. Census Bureau and *American FactFinder* Web sites may interest faculty and graduate students in several departments, including education, social sciences, business, and engineering. In a sixty-minute session, you can

give a brief overview of information on the sites and show attendees how to construct and retrieve demographic profiles for local geographic areas, including your state, county, municipalities, census tracts, block groups, and zip codes. After they retrieve a table, tell participants to click on *FactFinder*'s Data Sets icon to find more related data. Provide participants with handouts or links that give definitions and summarize what other types of data can be found on the census Web site. For example, you may want to highlight some of the following:

- *About the Data*: An overview of Census Bureau data, censuses, and surveys, with links to the Decennial Census, American Community Survey, Economic Census, Population Estimates Program, Population Projections, and more.
- *Data Sets*: Access to all data in *American FactFinder*, including Decennial Census, American Community Survey, Economic Census and Surveys, and Population Estimates Data.
- *Fact Sheet*: Easy access to data for the United States, states, counties, cities, towns, and zip codes
- *Maps & Geography*: *American FactFinder* (AFF) has two tools for creating, viewing, printing, and downloading maps:
  - Reference Maps: A tool to view the boundaries of census geographies, such as counties, cities and towns, urban areas, congressional districts, census tracts, census blocks, and more.
  - Thematic Maps: A tool to view geographic patterns in census data. Thematic Maps are available for Census 2000, the 1990 Census, the Economic Census, and the Population Estimates program.
- *Reference Shelf*: Includes links to population reports and publications, data and statistics, and Census Bureau resources.
- *Subjects A to Z*: Essentially a public site map to census information.
- *Tools*: Includes links to data extraction tools, such as data sets; state and county quick facts; the Census Bureau's *DataFerret*; and several other resources.

Working with Teaching Faculty

In today's electronic information environment, librarians and instructional faculty have new opportunities to teach students to find government materials and incorporate them into their research. Data and full-text documents are now available from most federal Web sites. This type of collaboration can create teaching alliances to aid students in finding electronic government information (Asher et al., 2002). As with any other library instruction "one-shot" session, you should meet with the faculty member in advance to plan the session. Discuss the Web sites, primary sources, and government and licensed databases you are considering for the class. This sort of consultation helps you build a relationship with a member of the teaching faculty and provides another opportunity to promote pertinent government-related resources.

What to Teach

J. A. Downie suggests that government information specialists examine their library's instruction program to find teaching opportunities focused on student assignments (Downie, 2004). Although academic librarians have some opportunities to include government information in instruction and encourage their use by students, pertinent government information is frequently omitted from library orientations (Downie, 2004). Once students are aware of government sources and learn some search skills and strategies to find them, they will discover additional materials that can help them with future assignments.

How can students benefit most from government information instruction in a one-shot session? P. Ragains states that students will benefit most from such lessons if instruction on the use of relevant information and search techniques is integrated meaningfully into course assignments and if follow-up assistance is available from course instructors or librarians (Ragains, 1995). S. Anthes notes that in order to hold the participants' attention, instructors need to show enthusiasm about the documents collection, focus on a particular class assignment or information need, and concentrate on key concepts (Anthes, 1993). This will be more effective and less confusing than trying to include everything. The most important points for students to learn are that the government publishes information relevant to their needs and that the information is freely accessible to them. Since users and staff often see documents as different or difficult compared to other library collections, it helps to stress the online and free aspects first, and then introduce students to the print documents collection.

Mainstreaming Government Information in Instruction

The following scenarios show how to introduce students to government information resources in a library session that is not specifically focused on government resources:

- Comparing primary and secondary sources. Many English and Communication faculty ask librarians to teach students the difference between primary and secondary sources. To illustrate this point, break the students into groups comparing primary and secondary sources. Examples of primary sources include Congressional hearings, census data, and the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*.
- Authoritativeness. Government Web sites are excellent examples when instructors request a demonstration of authoritative, comprehensive, current, and accurate sites. Choose from among Web sites providing statistics in health, education, and crime, expert testimony. Showing government research reports, such as those on the recent prisoner abuse scandals in Iraq, will bring home the point of authority when examining a Web site.
- Courses focusing on college majors or careers. Introduce students to the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* at www.bls.gov/oco.

Presenting Government Information to Students "On Demand"

As mentioned previously, history and particular social science courses often have a clear connection with government-produced information, and assignments in these fields often call for use of such sources. Following are two examples to use in political science courses:

- In a freshman-level Introduction to American Politics course, students have been assigned to research a proposed constitutional amendment. Present and allow hands-on practice with the U.S. Constitution (www.house.gov/ Constitution/Constitution.html) and your state's constitution. Walk them through a search for legislative histories on *Thomas*. See Chapter 16 and item 17-3 on the CD-ROM for sample lessons using *Thomas*.
- In an upper-division undergraduate course on focusing on public policy (which could be offered to nursing, education, social work, criminal justice, or political science students), show pertinent government sources and give an overview of the organization of government publications. Give demonstrations and allow students to practice using your library's online catalog, government information Web site, and any pertinent commercial databases your library may license, such as *LexisNexis Congressional* or *PAIS International*. If government publications are listed in your library catalog, you can easily show how to find government, scholarly, and popular publications on the same topic. Critical thinking comes into play when you ask students to consider the different perspectives characteristic of information sources based on authorship and target audience, even when the publications are on a single subject. The same is true when you discuss search results from multi-subject databases like *Academic Search Premier* or *PAIS*.

Graduate-level library instruction usually involves smaller groups of students with specific research interests. When meeting with graduate students it is often best to present sources in more depth than you would for undergraduates and to discuss advanced search strategies. You may choose the same sources you would present to undergraduates, but discuss them in a more detailed manner, for example, explaining the usefulness of particular information sources in professional practice. Graduate students are typically well motivated and on the watch for resources and services they can use for their own benefit. They are more likely than undergraduates to tell you what they want and let you know when they are not getting it. By forcing you to dig more deeply into your own knowledge base, meeting with such groups also sharpens your own reference and instruction skills.

Assessment

Many government information librarians focus on outreach and instruction efforts to increase the exposure of colleagues, teaching faculty, and students to the rich resources found in government publications. How well are we doing? What are our library users learning? J. A. Downie encourages librarians to assess instruction

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Figure 17-1   Government Information Staff Training Workshop: Practice Questions

1   Search the Library Catalog for the following title: *Supporting Families in Transition: A Guide to Expanding Health Coverage in the Post-Welfare Reform World.*
    What is its SuDoc number?
    What agency issued this document?

2   A patron needs the following information about Nevada Senator John Ensign:
    a. His birth date
    b. Besides being a senator, what Ensign's other profession is
    c. The phone number of his Washington office
    Please list your search strategy and information sources you used to find the answer.

3   This month, the federal government introduced a Web site that compares detailed information about Medicaid- and Medicare-certified nursing homes in the country. What is the URL of this new Web site? What federal department is associated with this Web site?
    Please list your search strategy and the information sources you used to find the answer.

4   A patron has the following call number: Co29-C54-C73/9:C76x/1992-1996. Just from the call number, can you tell what level of government published it? Can you tell if it is a monograph or a serial? Try to answer without looking at the publication. Find the publication on the shelf to see if you are right. What is it?

5   A patron comes in saying she heard about a controversy over the train tracks in Reno and that the Nevada Supreme Court recently made a ruling about it. She wants to find the ruling.

6   Can you find the Nevada Supreme Court opinions in the catalog? (Hint: you may have to try a keyword search). What is the call number for the Nevada Supreme Court opinions? Is there another way to find the opinions besides going to the shelf? Try to find the opinion your patron is looking for and give a one-sentence summary of the court's decision.

7   Go to the Clark County, Nevada, Web site. Find the Elections Department page. How would you find out which county commission district you are in and who your commissioner is? Find out and write the answer below.

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efforts by analyzing reshelving statistics, Web logs, and citation lists from papers, in addition to putting counters on Web pages and asking the reference staff to record their use of government sources before and after training (Downie, 2004). Similarly, Barclay states that there are typically four methods of collecting information to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction: anecdote, survey, test, and evidence of use (Barclay, 1993).

Figure 17-1 is a "homework" assignment to give staff after an introductory session on government information. This assignment would cover many of the federal, state, and local sources discussed at the training session and would give colleagues an opportunity to become more familiar with the sources by solving a patron's research question. You can modify this worksheet to fit your library and use it as an outcomes assessment tool.

Figure 17-2 is an example of a short online survey to give students after an instructional workshop. When designing a feedback survey such as the following, you will have to consider how you would like to collect the survey results. If you have a relatively small amount of results to analyze, the completed surveys could

go directly to an e-mail address and you could calculate the results manually. For surveys with a larger response rate, you may want to use a database such as *Microsoft Access* or *MySQL* to analyze the results.

Emerging Trends for Government Information Instruction

A survey of instruction-related literature published since the early 1990s shows that government information librarians have made substantial progress in alerting colleagues and library users to government resources. To strengthen your own promotion efforts, consider the following:

- Work directly with teaching faculty to develop pertinent assignments and guides incorporating government information. For suggestions, see Chapter 2 of this book, which covers collaborating with faculty.
- Work with your library's instruction department to create an online tutorial focusing specifically on government resources.
- Create a monthly or quarterly e-mail or online newsletter for colleagues, teaching faculty, and library users that will announce new government resources. An RSS feed (an acronym for both "Rich Site Summary" and "Really Simple Syndication") from your library catalog can alert them to new

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Figure 17-2   Political Science 320: Online Feedback Form

Please take a few moments to give us some comments about your library instruction session.

1. Who was your instructor?

2. Rate the effectiveness of the instructor who taught your class in terms of good organization and clear presentation.
     _____Excellent
     _____Good
     _____Fair
     _____Poor

3. Your class included an introduction and hands-on time with various government information resources. Please rate the overall value of learning about government information. Will it help you with your research assignment for this class?
     _____Excellent
     _____Good
     _____Fair
     _____Poor

4. Should library instruction with an emphasis on government information continue to be included as part of this class?
     _____Yes
     _____No

In the space below, please let us know how the library instruction workshop can be improved.

Thank you for taking the time to complete our survey.

Figure 17-3   Usability Test for "Gateway to Government Information" Workshop

Indicate your class standing:

Freshman   Sophomore   Junior   Senior   Graduate student

Usability Test Questions

1   Locate the Libraries' "Gateway to Government Information" Web site.

2   Where would you go to download 2004 U.S. tax forms?

3   Who are the senators for the state of Nevada?

4   You are thinking about majoring in hotel administration, and you would like to find out about working conditions and salaries in the hospitality or casino/gaming industry. Where can you find this information?

5   Many government publications in the library can be checked out. Where do you go in the library to check them out?

6   You are doing a report on agriculture and need statistics on agriculture in the United States. Where can you find these statistics?

7   You need some basic information on the Supreme Court. Where can find out about the Supreme Court?

8   You are doing research on ethnic minorities and need population figures for ethnic groups in the United States. Where would you go to find this information?

9   You need to do a speech on the federal government. Where can you find basic information about the federal government and its divisions and agencies?

10   You need to do a persuasive speech on a current issue, and your instructor has assigned you the topic of gay marriage. Where would you go to find government information about this topic?

11   Find the text of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Write its citation below.

Post-Test Interview Questions

1   If you could say one thing to the people working on this Web site, what would it be?

2   What did you find especially good about the Libraries' Government Information Web site?

3   What did you find frustrating about the Libraries' Government Information Web site?

4   Are you currently using any sites or search engines to find government information?

5   How would you prefer to learn about changes or enhancements to the Libraries' Web site?

6   Do you have any other comments about the Government Information Web site?

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acquisitions by library department or branch, in particular subjects, or within other parameters.

- Work with other government document librarians in your city, state, or region to offer instruction, training, and outreach activities. An event such as a "Government Information Training Day" is an excellent way to teach, promote, and highlight federal, state, and local government resources to library staff.

- Conduct periodic usability testing with library users on your government resources Web pages. Usability testing assesses how easy your target audience

finds the site to use, understand, and navigate. As user needs change, so must the site. Considering users' reactions to your library site will help the organization be more responsive to their needs (Cobus, Dent, and Ondrusek, 2005). Figure 17-3 is a sample usability test for the government information suite of pages on an academic library Web site.

Conclusion

The World Wide Web has given the public unprecedented access to government information. Government information specialists must continue their efforts to familiarize users with the wide range of resources available. By collaborating with library instruction and subject librarians and pursuing outreach and liaison activities with faculty members, government information can be integrated into the mainstream of library reference instruction services. Increased awareness of these resources will enrich the experience of students and other users we serve.

Note

1. Judith C. Russell, Address delivered at the Patent & Trademark Depository Library Program Training Seminar, Alexandria, Virginia, April 7, 2005.

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