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Government Information: Past, Present and Future

The Documents Interest Group of Oregon (DIGOR) began in 1981 as an independent organization of individuals having a professional interest in government documents. At that time, the alternative format of most concern was microfiche, which the Government Printing Office had begun to use for distributing an increasing portion of federal depository documents. Few libraries even had online catalogs, and the most technologically advanced device on most librarians’ desks was an electronic typewriter.

Much has changed since then in the world at large and in libraries particularly. The technological revolution created by waves of innovation in computer and telecommunications technologies has forever changed our society, especially in the ways we create, access, and use information. Today, the new formats of most concern are the various electronic file formats accessed via the Internet. Most of us spend a good portion of our workday using a personal computer, and we communicate with our colleagues more via electronic mail than by postal mail or telephone. Yet many of the issues that were of concern in that earlier era of government information librarianship (even the terminology has changed somewhat) are important still: attempts to privatize government information, budget cuts, fugitive documents, resource sharing among libraries and librarians...the list goes on. Against the backdrop of ever-increasing technological change, the fundamental tenet of our specialty has remained: Citizen access to information by and about the government is of vital importance to a representative democracy.

As chair and vice-chair of DIGOR in this first year of its official affiliation with OLA, we are pleased to serve as editors of this special issue: Government Information: Past, Present and Future. We are especially honored to have our lead article contributed by the superintendent of documents, Francis J. Buckley, Jr. We hope that these articles will give you new and valuable perspectives on our rapidly changing field.

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