



## **GETTING STARTED WITH GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS**

### **OVERVIEW**

"Government Documents" refers to a very specific kind of government information resource. In this case, publications and information products produced by the **United States Federal Government**.

The **3 branches** of the U. S. Government are:

- **Legislative Branch** -- "makes laws" -- bicameral, House and Senate
- **Executive Branch** -- "enacts" or implements laws -- administered by the President (e.g., the Cabinet)
- **Judicial Branch** -- "expound and define the true meaning and operation" of laws (after Alexander Hamilton) -- enforceable legal interpretation -- Supreme Court (SCOTUS) and Circuit Courts

A publication originating from within **any** of the 3 branches may become a "Government Document".

### **GPO AND FDLP : GPO**

**GPO** = Government Printing Office

- Congressional agency established in 1860
- Legal authority vested in **Title 44** of the *United States Code (USCODE)*
- Public printer -- **printer of record for federal information** -- "official publisher"
- Sale and distribution functions added in 1895
- Cataloging (descriptive and organizational) responsibilities substantially revised in 1976 and in 1996
- For more information, see: <http://www.gpo.gov/aboutgpo/index.html>

### **GPO AND FDLP : FDLP**

**FDLP** = Federal Depository Library Program

- How GPO makes federal information products available to the general public
- Program informed by the principle of the "**informed democracy**"
- Titles GPO deems to be of "**high public interest or educational value**" are made available under FDLP
- Program of distributed access -- specially designated institutions serve as custodians for government publications -- publications are received "**free of charge**", but, in reality, in exchange for the designated institution taking responsibility for organizing publications and making them accessible
- Depository libraries = custodial institutions -- established by law or designated by Congressional representatives -- one depository (at least) for each U. S. Congressional District -- currently, app. 1400 depository libraries across the country
- 2 kinds of depositories:

**Regional Depositories** = serve as permanent archives for ALL depository titles -- receive and retain everything -- 2 in Texas -- Texas Tech, Texas State Library (Austin) -- also have administrative responsibilities

**Selective Depositories** = intended to serve particular constituencies -- elect to receive only certain titles offered by GPO according to needs / desires of local clientele -- relatively new phenomenon

- That said, there are approximately 20 "**core documents**" **ALL** depositories are expected to receive / retain
- Depository status can be revoked or resigned -- but doing so means surrendering **ALL** depository titles -- these publications remain the property of the U. S. Government -- they are truly in the "public domain"

### **GPO AND FDLP : SMU AND THE FDLP**

- SMU = selective depository serving not only the University, but also the **32nd Congressional District**
- Awarded depository status in 1925 -- through donors and other acquisitions, SMU owns a good deal of pre-1925 material (most notably, the [Serial Set](#))
- As a selective, SMU receives approximately 78% of offered titles
- SMU's Depository collection is split between the [Fondren Library Center](#) and [Underwood Law Library](#) under a provision known as a "**selective housing agreement**" -- important to remember if you are working with Congressional publications or performing legislative history research
- There are other depositories, each with its own selection profile, in the DFW area, including [Dallas Public Library](#) and the [University of North Texas](#) -- both accept referrals from SMU

## ORGANIZATION OF GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS : SUPERINTENDENT OF DOCUMENTS / SUDOCS NUMBERS

- For administrative purposes, librarians use a GPO stock number to select and track government documents -- this number can be useful if you become very expert in the use of government documents -- for more information, see the [List of Classes](#)
- Key number for library patrons = **The Superintendent of Documents** or **SuDocs** numbers
- Superintendent of Documents = individual responsible for administration of FDLP
- SuDocs are call numbers -- alphanumeric notations that indicate where government documents can be found on library shelves
- Unlike a Dewey Decimal or Library of Congress number, a SuDocs number does **not** explicitly indicate subject / topic -- a SuDocs number indicates "provenance", or the government entity responsible for the creation / promulgation of the publication -- "corporate authorship" -- keyed to government agency hierarchies
- Examples:

PA 1 = Pan-American Union (1910 - 1951)

PA 1.46 = Pan-American Union, Agricultural Cooperation Office (1936 - 1942)

PA 1.51 = Pan-American Union, Music Division (1941 - 1949)

- SuDocs numbers also contain information about the type of publication being described  
Examples:

.1 = Annual Reports

.3 = Bulletins

.7 = Press Releases

.8 = Handbooks, Manuals and Guides

.12 = Posters

T 70.8:F 51/3 = [Federal Firearms Regulations Reference Guide](#), published by the [Department of the Treasury, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms](#)

- X and Y classes are reserved for Congressional publications, as follows:

X = [Congressional Record](#) (and preceding titles), House and Senate *Journals*

Y 1. = Congress, House and Senate "as a whole" (publications typically included in The [Serial Set](#))

Y 3. = Boards, Commissions, and independent or temporary committees; governmental bodies "not specifically designated to the Executive Branch"

Y 4. = Congressional Committees (typically Congressional Hearings)

- For more information, see the [GPO Classification Manual](#), the "U.S. Government Author-Organization Index" to the [Checklist of United States Public Documents, 1789-1970](#), and [Documents Office Classification Numbers for Cuttered Documents, 1910-1924](#)

## ORGANIZATION OF GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS : GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS FORMATS

**4 major formats** for government documents

- **Paper**

Many older publications and "substantial publications" ([Country Studies / Area Handbooks](#)) -- also includes maps -- preferred format for many titles in Underwood -- several government documents serial titles are available in the Fondren Library Center Newspaper & Periodicals Reading Area, such as the [Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents](#) and [Monthly Energy Review](#)

- **Microfiche**

Became the "format of choice" in the 1970's and 1980's -- Fondren Library has extensive microfiche holdings, particularly Congressional publications ([Congressional Record](#)), [ERIC](#) [Education Resource Information Center] Reports, [GAO](#) [General Accounting Office / Government Accountability Office] Reports

- **CD-ROM / DVD-ROM**

Both raw data such as [Decennial Census](#) statistics and multimedia products such as [USGS](#) Historical Reprints and [Patent](#) information

- **Online Resources**

Might be an online-only resource or a Web-accessible version of an existing / established publication -- former = publications of the [President's Council on Bioethics](#) -- latter = Decennial Census data available via [American FactFinder](#) -- although SMU does not "own" these titles, we do receive records for them, and they can be found in PONI

## TOOLS FOR IDENTIFYING AND LOCATING GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS : PAPER FINDING AIDS

Generally speaking, **pre-1976** government documents are not to be found in PONI -- only after the Bicentennial was GPO legally obliged to provide machine-readable catalog records for depository library use

Paper finding aids (indexes, abstracts, card catalogs) are still necessary for the identification and location of historic government documents

- **Monthly Catalog**, aka **MOCAT** (Fondren Library Center Government Information Reference, GP 3.8)

List, compiled each month, of all federal publications made available by GPO -- coverage = 1895 to the present day -- currently, entries are arranged by SuDocs numbers (thus government agency) and indexed by title keyword (NOTE: GPO assigns LC Subject Headings to individual documents as well) -- has greatly evolved over the years, and older **Monthly Catalogs** sometimes provide better subject-based access -- most useful if you have a chronological limit for your research (1950 - 1952, or the 89th Congress, 1965 - 1966)

- **Checklist of United States Public Documents, 1789 - 1909** (Fondren Library Center Government Information Reference, GP 3.2:C 41/2)

Best and easiest to use of comprehensive resources for 18th and 19th Century government documents -- again, arrangement is by SuDocs, indexed by government agency -- supplies important contextual information and offers some indexing of Serial Set materials

- **Cumulative Subject Index to the Monthly Catalog, 1900 - 1971** (Fondren Library Center Government Information Reference, Z1223.A182)

Subjects synthesized from **MOCAT** indexing -- subject headings unique to this resource -- entries are cross-referenced to **MOCAT** volume (year), entry and / or page numbers

- **Cumulative Title Index to United States Public Documents, 1789 - 1976** (Fondren Library Center

Government Information Reference, Z1223.Z7 L47)

Entries are cross-referenced to individual SuDocs numbers

- ***Guide to U. S. Government Publications***, aka ***Andriot's*** (Fondren Library Center Government Information Reference, Z1223.Z7 A547)

Intended to be comprehensive, updated annually -- contains excellent information about major series (continuing publications) issued as government documents, as well as some abstracts and agency history information -- arranged again by agency / SuDocs -- also features title and title keyword indexing

- ***CIS U.S. Serial Set Index, 1959 - 1969*** (Fondren Library Center Government Information Reference, Z1223.Z9 C65)

Most comprehensive indexing available for bulk of Congressional publications (excepting hearings) -- succeeded by the ***CIS Index*** (available at Underwood Law Library)

- ***Government Reports Announcements*** (Fondren Library Center Government Information Reference, C 35.7; C 51.9/3; C 51.9/4), ***Scientific and Technical Aerospace Reports [STAR]*** (Fondren Library Center Government Information Reference, Z5063 .U6344), and ***Energy Research Abstracts [ERDA]*** (Fondren Library Center Government Information Reference, Z5853.P83 E7b)

For science and technical information -- STAR = NASA -- ERDA = Department of Energy [DOE]

- ***GPO Subject Bibliographies*** (Fondren Library Center Government Information Reference, GP 3.22/2)

Currently, app. 160 individual guides to government documents -- uses broad subjects (e.g., "Nutrition"; "International Trade"; "Citizenship") -- entries are annotated and also contain both SuDocs and purchase information

- ***Documents Shelflist*** (Fondren Library Center Government Information Office)

Card catalog containing record of government documents receipts through mid-1980's -- most reliable indicator of whether a certain document is in SMU's collections -- arranged by SuDocs number

## TOOLS FOR IDENTIFYING AND LOCATING GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS : ELECTRONIC DATABASES AND OTHER FINDING AIDS

Electronic databases and other finding aids, often freely available **online**, are very useful for those performing research involving very current government information

- **Local Tools**

**PONI** : <http://poni.smu.edu>

**SMU Online Resources** : <http://www.smu.edu/cul/or/>

Provides subject-oriented access to web-accessible information resources -- "Government Information" entries provide links to agency websites that typically offer information pertinent to the discipline in question

**Government Information and Map Resources Department** website :

<http://www.smu.edu/cul/gir/>

Departmental web pages -- features subject guides with many links to online resources

- **Firstgov** : <http://www.firstgov.gov/>

"The U.S. Government's Official Web Portal" -- intended to provide access to government services to individual citizens, corporate entities, and government employees -- Yahoo!-type interface also includes state information

- **GPOAccess** : <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/>

A large suite of databases and other tools -- includes electronic versions of the *Monthly Catalog* (the *Catalog of U. S. Government Publications*, or *CGP*, 1994 - present), the *Subject Bibliographies*, a list of "New Electronic Titles", and searchable editions of such key resources as the *United States Code [USC]*, the *Code of Federal Regulations [CFR]*, the *Congressional Record* (1994 - present), and U. S. Supreme Court decisions, *1937 – 1975* and *1992 – present* -- extremely useful "one-stop shop" site

- **Thomas** : <http://thomas.loc.gov/>

Legislative database offered by the Library of Congress -- features bill tracking information (including floor votes), full text of bills and laws, cross-references to *Congressional Record* entries, and cross-references to supporting documentation (Congressional reports) -- most useful for those performing legislative history research -- contains information dating back to 1973 (the 93rd Congress)

## FONDREN LIBRARY CENTER GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS POLICIES : CIRCULATION OF GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS

Government documents **DO** circulate, except for:

- Microfiche publications
- Materials from the Fondren Library Center Government Information Reference Collection
- Pamphlets / brochures/ circulars under 12 pages in length
- Materials from the Fondren Library Center Government Information Cage (*Serial Set* volumes, in the main)

Congressional Hearings (in paper) have certain circulation restrictions placed on them -- consult Government Information Resources Staff

## FONDREN LIBRARY CENTER GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS POLICIES : A QUICK GUIDE TO GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS LOCATIONS AND HOLDINGS

- **Fondren Library Center Government Information, US Collection** = documents in paper, SuDocs range from AE (National Archives) to Y (Congress)
- **Fondren Library Center Microform Area, Government Collection** = microfiche in all SuDocs ranges, excepting the majority of NASA Technical Reports and **ALL** Department of Energy technical reports
- **Fondren Library Center Government Information Reference Collection** = documents in paper -- finding aids (indexes, abstracts), general information resources (*Journals of the Continental Congress*) and highly used course materials (*Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg, 14 November 1945 - 1 October 1946*)
- **Fondren Library Center Government Information, CD-ROM Cabinets** = documents on both CD-ROM and DVD-ROM -- consult Government Information Resources Staff for assistance
- **Fondren Library Center Government Information Storage** = documents in paper and microfiche -- largely agricultural publications (SuDocs range A), scientific and technical reports (see *Government Reports Announcements* and *STAR*), and lesser used materials -- consult Government Information Resources Staff for access and retrieval assistance
- **Fondren Library Center Government Information Cage** = documents in paper -- *Serial Set* volumes, 19th Century Decennial Census publications, old / fragile documents -- consult Government Information Resources Staff for access and retrieval assistance
- **Edwin J. Foscue Map Library** = cartographic materials (maps and atlases) published by **ANY** government agency -- bulk of the collection consists of United States Geological Survey (USGS) Topographic Map series -- also, Department of Agriculture Soil Surveys for Texas and some surrounding areas -- consult Map Library Staff for assistance
- **Underwood Law Library** = documents in paper and microfiche -- the "Fondren / Underwood" split most

affects SMU's Congressional Hearings holdings

## FINAL POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Government documents are not difficult to use because the federal government does not want you to have access to them -- GPO sees its mission as critical to the sustaining of the American democratic tradition -- that said, a majority of government documents are primary sources, making them more challenging to analyze
  - Both CUL Reference and the Government Information Resources staff are there to assist you -- don't be afraid to ask questions
  - Government documents are only one component in a grander public information design -- there is always more to learn on this subject see the **American Library Association's Government Documents Roundtable** website (<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/GODORT/>) for more information
  - Clearly, as a government agency, GPO is not immune from government laws, regulations, policies, and administrative oversight -- post-9/11, government documents, if anything, have become more susceptible to larger social, political and economic forces -- government documents are both our collective heritage and our collective responsibility as American citizens
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"The Government Information and Map Resources Department (CUL / SMU) : Getting Started With Government Documents"

[http://www.smu.edu/cul/gir/getting\\_started/index.html](http://www.smu.edu/cul/gir/getting_started/index.html)