

From the Chair

Looking Back, Looking Forward

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By the time this column is published, I will be at or near the end of my term as Chair! Often, endings are a time for reflection and I've been looking back over the past year *and* over the nearly thirty years that GODORT has been my professional home.

Throughout those thirty years our community has consistently advocated for government information as a public good and we have endeavored to ensure citizens have permanent and free public access. Our message has been the same—access to government information is necessary in an informed democracy and we as documents librarians are central to guaranteeing that access.

Many of the challenges have remained consistent as well. GPO is looking at restructuring the depository program and has looked to our community for assistance in designing a program that works for libraries, the public, and government agencies. Funding for depository programs remains a major issue. At the federal level, this year's GPO appropriations and lack of funding for FDsys is just one good example. The "Let Me Google that For You Act" (S.2206), which sought to abolish the NTIS, is another. Many state depository programs are virtually non-existent and IGO depository services, such as the UN program, are in serious jeopardy.

Technology continues to be a major issue. The internet has both increased the availability of government information and made it infinitely harder to manage and preserve. Fugitive documents are as much or more of a problem in the electronic world as they were in a print world. Preservation of collections, both print and electronic, is a pressing issue yet to be resolved.

There is more to do than ever before, yet there is little doubt our ranks are shrinking. In 1989 GODORT had 1,132 personal members, at the start of 2015 that number had dropped by half to 588. Why has there been such a huge drop? I suspect it is because far fewer libraries are hiring a dedicated government information specialist. Most of us—myself included—wear many hats. In some ways, this is healthy. Because we have the same cataloging, collections, reference, and teaching responsibilities as our colleagues, we are not as isolated. We have integrated documents cataloging into our mainstream operations. Our catalogs routinely pull government information into our patron's search results. And our discovery systems now pull results from many of our specialized databases making our resources far more useful.

The flip side of that is we have less time to be the specialist who understands government information at the micro level. I no longer touch every document that lands on our shelves. In

fact, most of the collection doesn't even land on our shelves! It also means that every librarian must have a better understanding of government information. More than ever, we need to reach out beyond our immediate community to help our colleagues use government information if we hope to reach our users.

So, what does it mean for us as an organization? I truly believe we need to reassess how we do business. During the past year I appointed two ad hoc committees to examine GODORT's committee and meeting structures. The Ad Hoc Committee on GODORT Reorganization is examining how we can most effectively leverage our smaller numbers and streamline our committee structures while still achieving our goals. The Ad Hoc Committee on GODORT Virtual Meetings is exploring membership interest in virtual meetings and what needs to be done to draw more of our members (and nonmembers) into active participation. Hopefully you saw and responded to the combined survey these two committees sent out in early May. Please join us for more discussion of both these issues at Annual in San Francisco and Midwinter in Boston. We need your input.

I will hope to charge a group with developing a new strategic plan before I end my term as chair. Our last strategic plan was for 2010–2015 (and beyond). Hopefully the work of the two ad hoc committees will inform the planning process and position GODORT for the future. We will need a strong vision and concerted effort to succeed as an organization.

Last, but not least, I want to thank the people who have been essential to me this past year.

At the top of the list is Stephen Woods. I don't think there has ever been another instance where the Chair of GODORT has had the good fortune to have the Chair Elect in the same institution, much less in the office next door. This has led to many impromptu conversations about the direction GODORT is heading in. Conversations about how we can leverage our back-to-back years in ways that can bring sustained change and growth to GODORT. I look forward to working with him next year as past chair. I have been fortunate to work with an amazing steering committee, and dedicated committee members, willing to do the hard work that is the heart of our organization.

Being a member of the GODORT community for so many years has been a privilege. Documents librarians are the best and brightest in our profession. Being chair has given me even deeper insight into how deeply you all care about the principles surrounding government information and public access. In the end, this leaves me optimistic about the future of GODORT and government information.