

THE EFFECTS ON GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS REFERENCE SERVICE AS A  
RESULT OF A MERGER BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS  
DEPARTMENT AND REFERENCE DEPARTMENT IN AN ACADEMIC LIBRARY.

by  
Nicole Urquhart

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Approved by:

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Advisor

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This paper analyzes the results from a survey conducted regarding librarians' perceptions involving the merging of the government documents department with the reference department in academic libraries, and how reference service is thus affected. The consequences of a merger can be manifested in different ways and can often be the result of the way the actual merger was handled. The focus of this paper is whether the level of government documents reference service diminishes when the documents department is merged with the reference department in a library.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate past experiences in order to provide a synthesis of experiences and lessons learned for those contemplating such a merger in the future.

Headings:

College and university libraries – Reference services

Depository libraries – Reference Services

In-service education

Integrated collections

Reference librarians – Education

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## **Introduction**

The world of information is constantly evolving, it could even be said never more than now. Libraries, as centers of information provision, are frequently facing the need to adapt to this changing nature. This may entail a need to reorganize. As information-seeking behaviors evolve, libraries find themselves having to adapt to changing user needs. To keep up, libraries must constantly evaluate services and programs offered by their institutions (van de Voorde, 1989). Several factors can lead libraries to reorganize their structures and services. Many libraries for instance, have had to face decreasing budgets at one time or another. Budget cuts can lead libraries to reduce staffing levels by merging departments or even eliminating certain units altogether (van de Voorde, 1989). At the same time that budgets may be reduced, costs are usually increasing (Smith, 1993).

Budget cuts are not the only reason why libraries may feel a need to reorganize. Perhaps more significant reasons for such transformations nowadays stem from changes in information gathering methods, e.g., more end-user searching (van de Voorde, 1989), an increase in the use of technology (Hernon & Dugan, 1997) and changing patron expectations (Smith, 1993). The information explosion has meant that libraries cannot acquire every item that their patrons may need (Rawan & Cox, 1995). Advances in technology also lead to new services and different ways to conduct business (Rawan & Cox, 1995). Furthermore, an impetus for reorganization may also be triggered by

physical changes such as when new facilities are built (van de Voorde, 1989), or existing buildings are renovated (Frazer et al, 1997).

These factors, among others, may lead libraries to reorganize their work units, often those that provide services to the public. Those libraries that have more than one reference service point, as in those cases where there is a separate government documents department, may see a need to consolidate the services provided by this department with the reference department.

The United States government is the most prolific publisher in the world. Government documents are an important facet of information provision. As a result, many libraries have extensive government documents collections. The largest collections are mostly found in academic libraries, with some collections numbering up to between one and two million items. In some libraries, documents are housed and handled separately from the rest of the collection, in others, the work is handled by all departments. Whether to keep documents separate or not may depend on each individual library. Many libraries have however, for various reasons, merged the government documents department with other departments in the library. The consequences of this action can be manifested in different ways and can often be the result of the way the actual merger took place.

The focus of this paper involves the merging of the government documents department with the reference department in academic libraries, and how reference service is thus affected. The objective will be whether the level of government documents reference service diminishes when the documents department is merged with the reference department in a library.

Most government documents librarians tend to assume before any merger takes place, that the answer to this question is yes. Government documents librarianship is a very specialized area requiring in-depth knowledge and quite a bit of familiarity with the subject area. Furthermore, most non-documents librarians are often apprehensive about working with government documents and/or have no idea how to approach a reference question dealing with, or that might call for government documents. The purpose of this study is to survey librarians on their perceptions of the merger process and the subsequent results in terms of level of government documents reference service. The ultimate goal of this study is to evaluate past experiences in order to provide a synthesis of experiences, lessons learned, etc., for those contemplating such a merger in the future.

## **Literature Review**

The outcomes of a merger between government documents and reference departments depend to a large extent on the way the actual merger develops. A smooth transition and subsequent actions can ensure that service quality is not diminished. A survey of the literature shows that several factors can influence the outcomes of a merger between departments.

Government documents encompass all subject areas and perhaps the case should be made that they should not be treated separately. Good reference service should include government documents as one of the many resources available for answering patrons' needs. At times, it may even be hard to separate a government documents question from other types of reference questions (Farrell, 2000). Statistics, for example, are often compiled by the government, but a patron will not necessarily know that he/she needs to use a "government document" to get his/her information. Increased and easier access to government documents, especially because of the Internet, shows that more streamlined government documents service may mean that they are being used more (Farrell, 2000). This increase in accessibility by both service providers and patrons offsets the negative impact that a merger can have on the specialized attention that a documents librarian can give a patron in a separate department. In the end, library leadership must keep in mind that the "needs, desires, and expectations of individual units must be judged in relationship to the whole—the entire library's collection, services, and programs" (Hernon & Dugan, 1997, p. 223).

Several possible reasons exist for the need for a merger. Budget cuts can often lead library administrators to contemplate mergers as a means of combining duties and

responsibilities into fewer positions (van de Voorde, 1989). Limited financial resources can also go hand in hand with the view that two reference desks and duplicate sets of certain reference materials are unnecessary (van de Voorde, 1989). The elimination of a documents department is often due to “a combination of the need to reduce budgets and staff, the need reorganize work to take advantage of new information technology, and the need to make the best possible use of available physical facilities” (Frazer et al., 1995, p. 95). The Internet has made government documents more accessible. The view that users are better served at one service desk has also been cited (van de Voorde, 1989; Rawan & Cox, 1995). Other factors that have led to merge functions include “the desire to have more staff knowledgeable about documents, a need to have more people to provide service in a general reference department, and a growing public awareness of documents as a resource” (Wilhoit, 2000, p. 310).

One of the main concerns regarding the integration of departments is a possible reduction in the quality of government documents reference service due to an expected lack of familiarity with these resources (van de Voorde, 1989). At Iowa State University Library, government documents reference is now provided in a much busier environment where less individual assistance can be given to patrons as was given in a separate documents department (van de Voorde, 1989). Government documents have lost prominence as a result of integration and are therefore used less (van de Voorde, 1989). Furthermore, a “dumbing down” of document reference may occur (Wilhoit, 2000). Many non-government documents reference librarians are uneasy when confronted with a documents question (Dilevko, 2000). In addition, they are under the impression that they are not knowledgeable enough about government information to be able to help patrons



with their needs (Dilevko, 2000). Better awareness of the collection and resources, including government documents, can however, have a positive impact on reference service and can be the result of a well-implemented merger. This can be accomplished by spending time and effort focusing on the issues, staffing and preparation of the merger (Wilhoit, 2000). This added benefit to service counteracts the decrease in specialization that results from mainstreaming government documents (Rawan & Cox, 1995). Consistent and ongoing training can make staff competent however, and more likely to provide good reference assistance, as was evident at Old Dominion University Library (Frazer et al., 1997).

One of the key factors for ensuring a smooth transition and consequently good service is good communication. As Fisher and Bonalumi (1997) point out, the merger of two departments involves people, not just two physical units within the organization. They stress that “communication should be direct, clear, informative and accurate” (Fisher & Bonalumi, 2000, p. 578), allowing staff to work together if they know what the expected outcomes are. Developing working groups, or teams, between the merging departments, can serve as a link whereby personal contacts are developed between the groups and these can “help the transfer of knowledge ... the building of interpersonal relationships between ... departments” (Fisher & Bonalumi, 2000, p. 578). As Regenberg et al., (2002) further point out, collaboration between librarians ensures that they can be proactive in the development of a new environment and thus achieve the best outcomes. Successful mergers can be the result of staff involvement in decision-making from the start, coupled with continuous communication during the process (Wilhoit, 2000).

Along with good communication, the key to a successful integration and, subsequently, good reference service is a well-trained staff (Rawan & Cox, 1995). Just as with the acquisition of any other new skill or responsibility, training is required for both general reference staff and perhaps to a lesser extent, documents librarians. Training sessions can help make the transition smoother by giving staff a sense of control, decision-making skills and give them the opportunity to improve customer service (Frazer et al., 1997). Service quality is greatly influenced and affected by the level of knowledge on the part of librarians, which is in turn determined by the amount of training received. Streamlining government documents with the rest of reference, coupled with good training enables librarians to treat government documents as just another reference/information resource (Farrell, 2000). A good training program should be ongoing, in other words, it should take place before, during and after the merger. Additionally, pathfinders and online subject guides for use by both reference service providers and patrons allow good service to be provided and serve as ongoing and continuous training of service providers (Farrell, 2000). Librarians who feel confident with their knowledge-level regarding government documents will be able to provide good basic documents reference service (Farrell, 2000).

Defining good reference service is not a simple matter. As Hernon et al. (1999) point out, “[t]here is no single unequivocally accepted definition of service quality” (p. 10). In fact, most librarians probably do not really think about what it entails, but will probably say they know what it is. Essentially though, the provision of quality reference service is satisfying patrons while using those resources available (Franks, 1997). Hernon et al. (1999) take it one step further by saying that service quality focuses on “how

closely customer expectations match customer perceptions of the service delivered” (p. 10). Service quality is thus defined in terms of decreasing the gap between the provision of services and those expectations on the part of the patron (Hernon et al., 1999). The guidelines developed by the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) (2000) specify that “[t]he goal of information services is to provide the information sought by the user. [Good quality] information service should anticipate as well as meet user needs” (p. 115). Inherent in providing good reference service is the necessary knowledge and preparation of the staff (RUSA 2000). Hernon & Whitman (2001) also stress the empowerment of a well-trained staff as necessary to the provision of quality service. This empowerment comes through knowledge and preparation. Weingand (1997) adds that service quality is also dependent on the ability of reference staff to have a say in the provision of services.

Service quality is made up of five elements: reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness (Hernon et al., 1999). These elements are important when it comes to assessing the level of service being provided. Willingness and knowledge are additional components of service quality. “With willingness comes action that enhances the knowledge of the librarian. With knowledge comes the willingness to help without feeling inadequate. Without knowledge, willingness has little value” (Mendelsohn, 1997, p. 547). The willingness to help ensures a positive interaction, one which leaves patrons satisfied. But the fundamental aim of quality service is “to meet an informational need, to teach about the research process, and to facilitate independence in using the library” (Mendelsohn, 1997, p. 551). Having the right attitude simply enhances this service. Time and morale are also important factors that contribute to quality reference service. Low

morale and constraints on time can mean diminished quality service (Mendelsohn, 1997). In the end, the dimensions that entail quality reference service are all interconnected. And just as important, “[f]undamental to service quality is the belief that an organization exists to serve its customers” (Hernon & Nitecki, 2001, p. 688).

Government documents reference service does not need to diminish as a result of merging if the transition is handled well in terms of communication, training and keeping the patrons and the goal of the library in mind. A successful transition can be ensured by good planning and decision-making, as well as thorough training (Wilhoit, 2000). Those being served are the ultimate reason for any change that may take place, and that should always be kept in mind, especially when ‘human’ problems among staff may develop (Fisher & Bonalumi, 2000). To ensure good service, a confident and satisfied staff is vital. “[M]erging organizations involves merging groups of people, so attention to ‘the human side’ is fundamental” (Fisher & Bonalumi, 2000, p. 579). And just as important, “government information is a ‘product’, and libraries who are responsible for disseminating this product should be as knowledgeable about it as retail establishments intent on selling their products” (Dilevko, 2000, p. 318).

## **Methodology**

In order to learn about the results from department mergers within libraries, librarians and other staff need to provide information on those experiences. For the purposes of this study, a questionnaire survey was developed in order to collect information regarding the perceptions of those involved in the provision of reference service in a newly combined reference desk.

An anonymous survey (see Appendix) was sent to all those librarians who agreed to participate in this study. They identified themselves by responding to a request sent to the GOVDOC-L discussion forum asking for participants who have been through a process of integration and subsequently experienced the results as they reflect on the level of government documents reference service. All of the participants are academic librarians and they are all government documents librarians, which means that the results will be somewhat biased. Ideally one would also survey a larger group of librarians, if possible all those who have experienced a merger of departments in their library, including non-documents reference librarians. A much more rigorous and more inclusive study than was possible, given the time constraints for this paper, would have made the study more complete.

In the survey, participants were asked questions relating to reasons that led to the merger, participation, communication, training, and service. Once the questionnaires were returned, the results were compiled, analyzed and summarized.

## **Results**

Nineteen surveys were distributed, and eleven were returned, resulting in a return rate of 58%. Of these, one returned survey was not included, as it did not involve the merger of the documents department with the reference department. So although the return rate was eleven, only ten surveys have been analyzed.

Participants were first asked whether the government documents department had merged with the reference department. Of the eleven surveys returned, ten said they had. The other survey did not involve the merger of a government documents department with the reference department, but instead with the collection development department and therefore it was not used for this research.

Participants were also asked when the departments merged. The dates given varied from 1994 to 2001. Some respondents gave more specific details, such as when the decision to merge was announced, when the administrative merge occurred and finally when the departments merged physically.

### Reasons

Different reasons exist as to why libraries decide to merge their government documents department with the reference department. Participants were asked what led to the merger and were asked to identify all of the following that applied: budget cuts, redundancy of service desks, redundancy of materials, the Internet, a decrease in staff, reorganization of work, changes in physical facilities, or to identify other reasons that led to the merger. The most common reason given for the need to merge departments was a redundancy of service desks, with seven participants identifying this as one of the reasons. Changes in

physical facilities and reorganization of work were each cited by four respondents as one of the reasons that led to a merger of departments. Although budget cuts have often been cited in the literature as a reason for merging, only three participants identified this as necessitating a merger of departments. Three participants identified a decrease of staff, while only two participants cited a redundancy of materials, and one respondent mentioned the Internet as a reason for merging departments. Other reasons given for the need to merge were: a directive from library administration; that technical services should handle all processing, including government documents; that too many resources were being devoted to documents; because of strategic planning; to allocate physical space to new initiatives and finally because of the development of the cluster system.

Participants were also asked if the decision was primarily indirect (e.g., as a result of other changes taking place), direct (e.g., a specific decision to merge the government documents department with reference) or if there was another explanation. Of the ten respondents, eight cited the decision as being primarily a direct one to merge the two departments. Of these eight, one also mentioned that the documents collection was moved to the same floor as the reference desk and collection, and thus the two were merged. The remaining two participants cited other reasons for the decision: a directive from library administration, and the development of the cluster system as well as the construction of a new building. None of the participants cited the decision as being primarily indirect.

### Participation

As far as staff participating in decision-making meetings with regards to the merger, five participants indicated that they were included and three said they were not. The remaining two indicated that only the administrators or department heads participated in the decision-making regarding the merger. In the second question regarding participation, six respondents indicated that staff from both departments were consulted regarding ways the merger would be carried out. Three participants said there was no consultation from staff.

When asked whether they agreed that the merger process worked well, four participants agreed and three disagreed. One responded “yes and no”, another said it worked well “moderately so”, and another indicated that the merger went OK considering the situation (cluster system). Of the six who responded other than “no”, the following were given as reasons for the merger working: good communication and training were cited six times each, staff involvement was mentioned by five participants, and good leadership was identified by three participants. None of the respondents gave other reasons as to why the merger process worked.

### Communication

In terms of ongoing communication throughout the merger process, the answers were mixed. When asked if there was ongoing communication between library leadership and staff involved, three participants said there was, while another three said there was not. Two indicated that there was some communication, and one said it was minimal. One of



the participants did not check this option so it is assumed there was no communication between library leadership and staff involved.

As far as communication between merging departments, six respondents said there was, one of which indicated it was only between department heads. Two respondents each said there was some communication or a little. One participant said there was no communication, and one did not respond so it can be assumed there was no communication between departments. Three participants said there was communication with other departments in the library, three said not as often, not much or minimal. Three indicated there was no communication, and again, one participant did not answer, so it is assumed there was no communication.

### Training

Participants were also asked a few questions regarding training, specifically whether general reference staff received training about government documents. Of the ten participants, nine indicated that training sessions were held to familiarize reference staff with government documents. One participant said there was no training and indicated that this still causes problems. Types of training held mentioned by participants include the following: documents handouts, practice assignments using major tools, training sessions on government documents, maps, statistics, census, patents, law, legislative history, health, ready reference materials, Superintendent of Documents numbers, GPO access, and one-on-one training. Participants were also asked whether training was still ongoing. Nine said there was, although two of these indicated it was minimal. One participant said there was no training and that their department relies on webpages.

### Service

Participants were asked to state whether in their opinion the quality of government documents reference service was better or worse in the newly integrated department. None of the respondents said it was better. Six participants indicated it was worse, one said it was better and worse, and three did not really answer the question directly. Some of the reasons given for the service being worse were that reference librarians were uncomfortable addressing government documents questions and deferred to the government documents librarian; that general reference staff tend to spend less time with patrons “because that is the nature of their work”; a lack of familiarity with older documents by general reference staff; a lack of cataloging records for older materials; patrons get frustrated because “no one seems to know anything”; and that the service desk is not near the collection. The participant who said government documents reference service was better and worse indicated that reference staff now also use documents to answer questions, but that “the desk is further away from the collection so people wander more”. Of the three who did not really answer the question directly, one said reference service was not quite as good yet (the merger at this library occurred in June 2001), and that more training was needed. Another participant was not at the library at the time of the merger but has observed that most reference staff are still uncomfortable trying to answer government publications questions. The third indicated that the merger got the reference staff to learn about and make use of documents.

Participants were also asked whether they agreed that general reference staff felt comfortable addressing government documents questions. Six respondents indicated that

they were not comfortable dealing with government documents questions. One mentioned that more training and experience were needed. Of the other four respondents, none said that they felt reference staff were more comfortable with documents questions, but did indicate that some were more comfortable now than right after the merger, and that it depends on the individual's level of interest and motivation. One participant indicated that reference staff were comfortable with directional questions but still referred more substantial questions to the documents specialist.

Whether it is difficult to separate government documents questions from other types of questions was also asked. Five participants said it was not hard to separate questions; one said yes and no—that it is harder to do so when the question is subject-related. Four said it was hard to separate. Some of the reasons given were that almost any question can be answered using a combination of subject specific resources and relevant government documents, and because the government offers so many resources, and that both can be used to answer questions.

To get an idea of how much documents are used as just another resource, participants were asked to state how often they used government documents to answer patrons' requests that were not necessarily government documents questions. Some respondents thought it was hard to answer this question, and percentages ranged from five to seventy, with only two participants saying they used government documents at least fifty percent of the time or more. Most participants (eight) indicated between five and thirty percent.

When asked whether participants believed that based on the merger and subsequent level of service, the departments should be separate or together, five indicated

they should be together and four separate. Some of the comments that were given for being together were that it would be beneficial in the long run, that there was no option if the library wanted to continue being a depository due to budget, staffing and changes in workflow, and that “the abilities, personalities and cooperativeness of the people are what make a merger work or not”. Comments in favor of being separate included the belief that there would be more use of documents if there were a separate department and one which has staff dedicated solely to documents. One respondent did not really answer the question but said that reference service works well.

The question was asked whether patrons were better served having a separate documents department. Six respondents agreed that they would be better served in a separate department. Only one participant said they were not, and pointed out that the key to a successfully merged service point is good training, catalog records of documents, and the integration of documents into bibliographic instruction and subject guides. Another participant commented that it has less to do with a separate department, but that rather it is more important to have a specialist on staff to deal with the difficult questions. One respondent commented that the level of service might be higher having separate departments, but that now more questions are answered using government documents. Another participant did not really address the question.

All respondents indicated that government documents were incorporated into subject guides, bibliographic instruction and questions at the reference desk. A few of them however, stated that this was only somewhat, minimal or rare. Other ways in which documents were incorporated included their classification as Library of Congress holdings and in webpages.

All participants indicated that government documents were cataloged in the OPAC. Five of them further specified that this included documents from 1976 to present, from 1995 to present, that they were in the process of cataloging, and that about forty-five percent had been cataloged.

## **Discussion**

As may have become apparent, the level of communication and training greatly affects the outcomes of a merger. Although none of those surveyed expressed that the merger has worked very well and that there were no problems, those that reported more participation, training and communication overall fared better than those that did not. As has been stated in the literature (Fisher & Bonalumi, 2000; Frazer et al., 1997; Rawan & Cox, 1995; Regenberget al., 2002), these are key elements in ensuring as smooth a transition as possible, given the fact that it is no easy task to combine two departments, especially when one of them is as highly specialized as the government documents department is. Yet, as is evidenced by some of the experiences reported here, by involving affected staff as much as possible, and offering substantial training, the negative impact can be minimized.

From the ten surveys analyzed, it can be concluded that five participants indicated that the merger was a negative experience. In general, these five cases share a combination of bad or no communication, with poor or no training at all. Those who worked in the documents department prior to the merger even felt purposefully left out, as one person observed, “staff who worked in documents day to day were not adequately consulted in making the initial decision to merge, in getting input in how to carry out the merger, and the little input they did provide was largely ignored”.

In four of these five cases either none of the departmental staff (both reference and government documents), or just the directors and administrators participated in decision-making meetings regarding the merger. There was more consultation after the decision was made in only two of these libraries in which staff were not initially

consulted regarding ways in which the merger would be carried out. Three had no communication between leadership and staff involved, “there was no involvement by documents staff in any further discussions or plans for the future of document operations”, and the other two had minimal communication. Between merging departments communication was better with only one person indicating there was none. The little communication that did occur has been acknowledged as being beneficial, “communication between the staff of both departments has helped”.

Two of the participants indicated there was no training; one stated there is minimal ongoing training, while the other two did indicate that there is ongoing training. More than one participant felt this lack of training, “staff who would be working with documents after the merger were not given adequate training”, “few people who work the reference desk know of the older resources in the documents collection”.

All five agree that government documents reference service is worse. Four participants indicated that the departments should be separate. The other participant said they should be together, even though this person said the merger did not work well. All five did however say that patrons would be better served with separate departments. “Government documents constitute a body of knowledge that deserves a staff dedicated solely to it”, “It appears that patrons will use the government documents more and in cases like here where nothing prior to 1976 is cataloged, the materials are definitely used more since the access was easier when there was an actual department”, are two of the comments expressed in favor of keeping the departments separate. The view that documents were not considered important by administrators was also cited, “promote documents, tell superiors that they are important; don’t assume your bosses know”.

In one particularly bad case, the departments were merged due to a directive from administration; there was no participation or consultation on behalf of the staff in terms of decision-making or ways to carry out the merger. According to the participant in this case, there was no communication between library leadership and staff involved, between merging departments or with other departments in the library. There is no ongoing training, in fact reference questions that were compiled by the documents department before the merger for training general reference staff were apparently not wanted, “Reference didn’t want them-threw them out”.

Some of the sentiments expressed by these five participants can be summed up with the following observation: “there was poor communication, bad leadership, no involvement of staff who knew document matters intimately”.

Of the remaining five surveys, four indicated that the process worked well (as much as it can), and one was a little more ambivalent. All answered that communication and training took place and was ongoing. In two instances, the participants stressed that ongoing training is essential. A third stated “the abilities, personalities and cooperativeness of people make a merger workable or miserable”. General reference staff were still cited as being uncomfortable handling government documents reference questions, but here those surveyed had a more positive outlook. Comments such as the fact that government documents reference service was seen as “continuous self-education” and that it “depends on interest and motivation” were cited as positive developments. Yet three respondents still said that most general staff refer the more complex documents questions to the government documents specialist. This, in the opinion of one participant adds “a layer of delay that is inconvenient to many patrons,



and defeats the point of one central service point”. Two participants stated that documents reference service was lower, the other three did not really say. One librarian commented “general reference staff are also likely to spend less time with patrons because that is the nature of their work. Many documents questions require going the extra mile ... and require in-depth subject expertise which will never come easily to a generalist”.

All five agreed that having the departments together was better. One participant concluded, “reference service works well being together, level of service is higher if separate but now more questions are answered using documents”. Another indicated that there was no option on this point, as the library would otherwise cease being a depository because of budgetary, personnel and workflow issues. Another expressed some optimism by stating “with the combined Reference/Documents Ready Reference collection behind the desk everyone is beginning to see the breadth of the documents collection”.

## **Conclusion**

It is probably impossible to find a merger situation in which everything goes smoothly and in which all staff will eventually feel comfortable addressing government documents reference questions. Nonetheless, keeping communication channels open, making sure all those affected are involved in the merger process, and providing ongoing training are essential elements which can mean the difference between a good merger outcome and a bad one.

Good communication is key when dealing with reorganization, especially one that involves people. Keeping people in the dark only helps to alienate staff and may even create hostilities. Excluding people from decision-making or consultation regarding the merger process can only hurt in the long run. People do not like to feel as if they have been left out. As Fisher and Bonalumi (2000) stress, “open and frequent communication between managers and employees” (p. 579) is vital, “merging organizations involves merging groups of people, so attention to the ‘human side’ is fundamental” (p. 579).

Just as important as communication, good training is essential for achieving as smooth a merger as possible. The fact is, there will always be subject areas which some reference staff are intimidated by, and government documents usually tops the list. By being as knowledgeable as possible about the resources available in reference, staff can feel more confident about the service they provide and as a result provide better service. General reference staff may never be as knowledgeable about government publications as documents specialists are, but it is important that they become as familiar with the resources as they can.

Any number of circumstances in individual libraries may call for a reorganization, which may involve the merger of government documents with reference. If this is the case, it is hoped that the present study, as well as any future ones that may be conducted, will provide those involved with some lessons learned and some useful information on how to approach such a challenging undertaking. It is also hoped that this study will encourage more research on this important topic. A future study would need to be a much more thorough and inclusive study in order to achieve better results and perhaps more conclusive ones. Ideally, instead of using volunteers, the researcher would find out which of all the depository libraries have merged their government documents department with the reference department. This may prove to be a cumbersome task, but it would be necessary in order to account for all the experiences. In addition to surveying the documents librarians, general reference librarians should also be included to get their opinions, which may or may not be different from what we have seen here.

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## Appendix

### Survey

1. Did the government documents department merge with the reference department at your library?
2. When did the government documents department merge with the reference department at your library?
3. What led to the merger? (Please check all that apply)
 

Budget cuts _____	Redundancy of service desks _____
Redundancy of materials _____	Internet _____
Decrease in staff _____	Reorganization of work _____
Changes in physical facilities _____	Other _____
4. Was the decision primarily:
  - Indirect (e.g., as a result of other changes taking place) \_\_\_\_\_
  - Direct (e.g., a specific decision to merge the government documents department with reference) \_\_\_\_\_
  - Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_
5. Did staff from both departments participate in decision-making meetings regarding the merger?
6. Were staff from both departments consulted regarding ways the merger would be carried out?
7. Would you agree that the merger process worked well?
8. What made it so? (Please check all that apply)
 

Good communication _____	Good leadership _____	
Training _____	Staff involvement _____	Other _____
9. Was there ongoing communication throughout the process?
  - Between library leadership and staff involved \_\_\_\_\_
  - Between merging departments \_\_\_\_\_
  - With other departments in the library \_\_\_\_\_
10. Were training sessions held?
11. Please describe briefly types of training held to familiarize general reference staff with government documents.



12. Is there ongoing training of staff? Please describe briefly.
13. In your opinion, is the quality of government documents reference service better or worse in the newly integrated department? Why?
14. Have subject guides been developed for use by both patrons and reference staff?
15. What are your impressions on the level of government documents reference service after the merger?
16. Would you agree that general reference staff members feel comfortable addressing government documents questions?
17. How often (percentage of time) would you say you use government sources (paper and electronic) to answer patrons' requests that are not necessarily government documents questions?
18. Do you believe it is difficult to separate government documents questions from other types of questions?
19. Based on the merger and subsequent level of service, do you believe the departments should be separate or together?
20. Do you believe that patrons are better served having a separate documents department?
21. Are government documents incorporated into:  
Subject guides \_\_\_\_\_  
Bibliographic instruction \_\_\_\_\_  
Questions at the reference desk \_\_\_\_\_  
Other \_\_\_\_\_
22. Are government documents cataloged in the OPAC? \_\_\_\_\_
23. Were they in the catalog before the merger? \_\_\_\_\_
24. What is the size of the combined government documents and reference department staff?  
Librarians \_\_\_\_\_  
Paraprofessionals \_\_\_\_\_  
Graduate Assistants \_\_\_\_\_  
Other \_\_\_\_\_
25. How many librarians are government documents specialists? \_\_\_\_\_
26. Were you working at the library during the merger process?

27. In which department?

28. What was your position title before the merger?

29. What was your position title after the merger?

30. Was this as a result of the merger?

31. What is your position title now?

32. Is your library a federal depository library? Regional \_\_\_\_\_ Selective \_\_\_\_\_

Please add any comments you may have on how the merger process could be improved in order to provide a better level of government documents reference service in the newly integrated department.