Where Are the Periodicals?

By Marcia Kingsley
Head, Serial Resources

Some years ago, at another university, one of my colleagues was an exceptionally helpful, patient, approachable reference librarian named Tom. Tom's career path was marked for success and he was tapped for promotion to the position of Assistant Library Director. When I congratulated him on this achievement, he said, with a tip of a hat to me: "The best part is that I won't have to keep explaining to patrons where the periodicals are."

Librarians have never had an easy time, regardless of the size and type of library, giving a concise or simple answer to the question: "Where can I find the periodicals (or magazines or journals)?" With unbound issues in one shelving area; microfilm and microfiche in another; bound volumes on shelves, in sorting locations, and on book trucks throughout Waldo and the branches; volumes and issues left here and there after photocopying or reading; and some issues out of the library for commercial binding, journals and other "serials" are not easy to find in the University Libraries. Despite signage, detailed location guides in WestCat, and assistance from many staff members, library users are still confused. Now that our libraries have contracted with numerous vendors for access to thousands of electronic journals that include full-text, the librarian's answer to the "where" question has gotten longer and longer—or, at least, more time-consuming.

Where are the periodicals now? A particular article in a journal or the magazine can be in any and all of the traditional places that are noted above. And, at WMU, it can also be in an online collection of electronic journals or "full-text" periodicals such as JSTOR, Project Muse, Science Direct, Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe, and Catchword. To add to the excitement of the search, a magazine may be available as an individual electronic title offered through the Internet by the publisher, or contained within a database on the FirstSearch system, e.g., ABI INFORM or WilsonSelect.

Most sources called "electronic" or "e-journals" contain all the information included in a corresponding print journal. For example, Theatre Journal is provided online by Project Muse. This electronic version, which is accessible and readable from any University computer, has all the same content as the print version on our shelves, including articles, book reviews, and letters to the editor. Many other periodicals, however, appear online only in part. For example, the ABI INFORM database on FirstSearch provides Bank Marketing articles, but not editorials or the table of contents. Yet, this type of listing usual goes under the misnomer of "full-text" journal.

The many variations found in so-called full-text electronic periodicals present a unique challenge to the librarians and staff faced by patrons who want to know "Where are the periodicals?" No catalog answers all the questions, no listing of databases and indexes provides immediate answers, and no Web site on Electronic Journals is a one-stop searching approach. But, the vast amount of information that is found appears because of the work that has been done behind the scenes. The role of the Serial Resources Department of the University Libraries is to assure that serial publications, i.e., all types of subscriptions, are available to the WMU community. The division used to be called the "Serials Control" unit, but anyone who claims to control or impose order on serial publications is engaging in wishful thinking. At the same time, however, this unit must closely control over $2,900,000 in expenditures and subscriptions.

A major task of the Serial Resources employees is to manage and pay for about 7,000 ongoing subscriptions to print and electronic titles. In addition, a certain number of new titles, subscriptions, are added each year. A simple count shows that in a given year, the unit receives 39,000 journal or magazine issues, another 10,000 directories, almanacs, and other serial updates, and some 25,000 invoices and pieces of correspondence. This means that 49,000 items are "inventoried" in WestCat so that library users can see exactly which issues of journals or editions of a yearbook have been received—and if not, the SR employees must send a claim as soon as possible.

Many other steps occur in the attempt to maintain control. The physical issues of the journals and other serials must be distributed to the correct location in Waldo Library or one of the branches. At a later point, when it is time to bind, nearly all 39,000 journal issues are returned to us, prepared for binding, and shipped out. Again, every effort is made to record this information in WestCat. The Libraries' catalog of books, periodicals, media, Web sites, and other resources, is key to retrieval of the actual item—either physically or online. Any new subscriptions to a serial approved for purchase involves notifying the Cataloging Department so that they can add the descriptive record to WestCat. The library Web site also has links to all of the electronic journals and databases. Additional information on "holdings," the year and volume with which the subscription starts, is added by Serial Resources. Moreover, as each existing periodical arrives physically in the Libraries, it is Serial Resources that notes the latest volume of a directory or the latest issue of a journal found in the Current Periodicals area of Waldo Library.

Maintaining accurate information about the ever-evolving subscriptions is very labor-intensive. Publishers change the titles of scholarly journals frequently. They may split one journal into two—or merge two into one. The Libraries' catalog, WestCat, must reflect the new information and the serial entries must be adapted—by human intervention. To add to the complexity, libraries, in their dealings with electronic journals, also must update electronic addresses or Uniform Resource Locators (URL's). If the publisher forgets to inform us of even a minor change—a

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To complement Marcie Kingsley's analysis of how to manage serial resources in the University Libraries, an introductory user guide to finding serials at WMU follows:

FINDING JOURNAL/MAGAZINE ARTICLES: To locate an article on a particular topic, click on Research Resources on the Libraries' Home Page (http://www.wmich.edu/library/). Then select Databases and Indexes. If you know your database title, go directly to the alphabetical listing and click on it. If not, use the dropdown menu to select a subject area and identify an appropriate database or index. When you reach the search screen, enter your keywords and identify articles that you wish to locate. Electronic or e-journals are also found on the Research Resources page, and can also be searched alphabetically or by keywords.

RETRIEVING JOURNAL/MAGAZINE ARTICLES: Selected databases and indexes offer full-text articles by clicking on a heading that indicates that the online full-text is available. In such cases, you will then see the text of the article on the screen. You can e-mail it to yourself or print it right from the screen.

If the citation to the article does not indicate that full-text is available, you must check WestCat, the online catalog, to learn if the University Libraries holds the volume and issue that contains the article. Be sure to note title of the periodical (not the article), volume and issue number, date, and pages for each article that you want to locate before leaving the database or index that you searched. Click on Home and open WestCat. Open the Author/Title/Subject Index and mark the box for "Journal Title." Type in the journal title. If the Libraries has the periodical title that you have typed in, you will either get the descriptive entry, or a list of related titles. Select the one that matches your citation (the date typically ends in 9999) and open that entry. Once a title is open on the screen, scroll down to a classification number, holdings, and current issues listing. Missing issues, serials shipped out to the bindery, and other useful data are included there. Guides to location of the various Library of Congress classifications are found throughout Waldo and the branch libraries.

The periodical is not found in the University Libraries, you can also place an interlibrary loan request online or fill out a card at any reference desk.

Where Are the Periodicals: A Brief Guide to Locating

By Laurel Grotzinger

The Friends of the University Libraries held their fall meeting on Tuesday, November 16, 1999, in the Stewart Clock Tower Room. The speaker was Michael McDonnell, WMU Government Documents Librarian. His presentation of "Hidden Treasures: Government Information in University Libraries" outlined the resources found in the depository library found on the second floor of Waldo Library. He described the difficulties of locating the documents since, until 1998, bibliographic records for government publications had not, in general, been incorporated in WestCat, the online catalog. As a result, depository material was hidden from patrons using the catalog. Even though many government publications were incorporated in the catalog in 1998, books acquired before 1976 are still missing. Today, another trend is limiting the ability of WestCat to be a primary searching tool. Many agencies, due to budgetary pressures and Vice-President Gore's project to reinvent government, are turning to the Web as the method of publication. WestCat has again lost its comprehensive searching power and will not be as useful until we create catalog records that contain Internet links to the major Web sources. At the present time, patrons should search: http://www.yahoo.com/Government, or http://usgovsearch.northernlight.com/publibaccess/

McDonnell concluded his presentation by pointing out that when a new administration is in place in 2001, there will be a crucial decision as to how much the current Web sites are maintained. Will archival material simply be deleted by individuals with differing political agendas? Will the historical record be hidden forever? Librarians are looking for means to create "snapshots" before anything happens to the sites. How that record will be accessed is unknown!

The Friends' meeting concluded with a reception and an informal discussion.