

Geac at the University of Maryland Law Library: Commentary on Fishlyn*

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The Geac automated circulation system has been in use since August 1983 at the University of Maryland Marshall Law Library. Although Marshall Law Library is autonomous, we agreed to be part of the cooperative venture among University of Maryland libraries on several campuses to implement Geac. Circulation was the first to be automated of several functions including an on-line catalog, acquisitions, and serials control. With that experience in mind, I have these comments in response to the specific questions raised by Ms. Fishlyn.

1. *How would the data base be built?*

Having machine-readable records to load into the system is the ideal; most law libraries do not have a complete machine-readable data base. Therefore, the first step in creating a data base normally involves deciding whether to undertake retrospective conversion for all or part of the library's collection. If the objective is to use only a circulation system, creation of brief records is a possibility. It may not be desirable to do that, however, if the ultimate objective is an on-line catalog and full MARC records will be needed. Because the University of Maryland Law Library has been an OCLC member only since 1980, we faced this decision. We created a complete MARC data base of all holdings by contracting (as the result of a bidding process) with the OCLC retrospective conversion unit. The project took approximately six months, and the circulation system was started with all of the library's bibliographic records in the system.

The second phase of creating a data base involves linking item level information to the bibliographic record to establish call number, location, and copy information. Because the University of Maryland libraries' data base is a unified one, and only one record was established in the data base for a book regardless of how many libraries owned it, the linking phase was especially important. We again decided to contract out for a project in which the following was accomplished: bar code labels were affixed to all volumes in the treatise collection and to one volume of each serial owned by the law library (the latter was done not for circulation purposes but to establish some form of ownership link to serial records in the on-line catalog data base pending implementation of the serials control system); a second copy of the bar

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code label was attached to the appropriate shelf list card; and the item level information was entered into the Geac system. This project was accomplished over a period of twelve weeks by Harris Hess Associates, a Washington, D.C. firm. Bar code assignment and linking of specific volumes of serials is performed at the circulation desk as volumes are charged out on the system to library carrels or faculty offices. If possible, the serial linking is done while the user is at the desk; if patron lines become too long, a form is filled out and the linking is done at a time when there is less activity.

2. *How long would it take to set up a system?*

Terminals were installed in the University of Maryland Law Library in February 1983; use of the circulation system began in August. Most of that time was spent in training sessions and in setting up parameter tables that would determine loan policies.

3. *How does computerization affect autonomy?*

Because the law library has been set up as a separate agency in the Geac system, we have been able to accommodate varying loan periods and borrower privileges. We have found no need to have a separate collection data base or separate patron records. An on-site printer allows us to control the printing and mailing of notices to law library users. It is definitely possible to retain autonomy, although a great deal of time necessarily is spent in meetings and in dealing with the various problems associated with any joint project of this magnitude.

Some advantages of joining a university-wide effort include sharing of costs of the mainframe computer, being able to rely upon main library staff knowledgeable in automated systems, and having minimal contacts with the vendor (assuming that the central site hardware is not located in the law library). Disadvantages include the critical necessity of having sympathetic personnel at the central site, loss of direct control over the central site equipment, and the fact that software requests must go into a queue with other university needs prior to being placed in a queue with Geac.

4. *Are there personnel problems encountered in the changeover?*

There is a natural apprehension toward automation on the part of library staff who have not worked previously with automated systems. While accuracy is important, it also is necessary that the staff understand that mistakes can be corrected in order to help alleviate their concerns about using the system. The law library has discontinued using student assistants at the circulation desk due to the amount of training involved. Students had been working evenings and weekends—precisely when more highly trained staff were needed to do linking that could not be handled during the busier weekday hours.

Using student workers is not out of the question, but the Geac system is fairly complex and requires more staff training than was true with the manual system.

5. *Has Geac lived up to expectations?*

Implementation has not been problem-free; however, on the whole we have a positive attitude toward Geac as a company and toward the system. Considerable downtime has been experienced, but this was a result of frequent loading of additional software as the various modules were installed, rather than problems with the circulation system.

6. *Are the advantages of computerization so great that the size of a library's circulation does not matter?*

The decision to implement a circulation system in a law library should be considered carefully. While there are advantages (e.g., control of records and eliminating manual preparation of overdue notices), overall workload at our circulation desk has not decreased. Different types of problems have been introduced, and, while these have not been insurmountable, it may not be worthwhile to make the transition in a library where circulation volume is low and manual systems can be designed to handle the load effectively. Because all functions of the Geac library system are being installed at the University of Maryland, we thought that automating circulation as part of an integrated system was worthwhile; a different decision most likely would have been made if only circulation had been involved.

At Maryland, serials *do* circulate to library carrels and to faculty offices, and we have been using the Geac system to record these transactions. One problem is that item level information is presently limited to ninety-nine volumes or copies of volumes for each bibliographic record. At this point, after approximately nine months of system use, we have not yet approached the limit on any one title. We hope that Geac will solve this problem before it becomes important.

As a result of our decision to implement automated circulation, we have learned several important lessons involving the special problems of introducing automation in a law school environment. Whether or not librarians approve, law faculty are specially privileged patrons in most law libraries. While it is tempting to use the computer as an excuse for tightening controls over faculty loans, it is inadvisable to do so. After all, it is not the computer making those decisions, and faculty acceptance of the system is too important to allow blame to be placed there. A better approach is to leave policies as is, at least during the initial implementation phase. One of our goals has been to implement the system with as little impact on the faculty as possible. For example, recall notices for items in faculty offices initially were generated

using Geac, but we discontinued that practice and returned to the old system of telephoning, rather than risk having "stops" placed on faculty borrowing. Faculty members periodically do receive lists of items charged to them that they are asked to check for accuracy; however, after a certain time period, all books on faculty loan are renewed automatically, even if the lists have not been returned.

After making the decision to automate, we found that circulation systems are fairly well developed and operational; other functions are not. When deciding on Geac, we took little risk on their circulation system because we could visit several sites where it was operational. We were committing ourselves, however, to future modules (on-line catalog, acquisitions, and serials control) that were not yet in use by other libraries. At this writing, our on-line catalog has been in use for four months and appears to meet our needs; acquisitions and serials control also have been installed but are not yet fully operational. While we are pleased with the circulation system and feel it has been implemented successfully, we have a long way to go to accomplish our automation goals. Time alone will tell whether we made the correct decision.