Establishing a library publications program

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How to orchestrate the publication of your library’s guides and brochures.

True or false? There is nothing new about library publications.

True or false? As soon as you finish a handout you always acquire an absolutely essential encyclopedia and have to type the whole thing over again.

True or false? Everyone in your library writes in a completely unique style, and all your guides look totally different, and that’s just the way life is.

The answer to all of the above is: not necessarily. This article describes a successful attempt to manage the production of high-quality publications in a painless and even enjoyable way.

Carnegie-Mellon University Libraries’ Publications Program was created in the fall of 1983. The primary purpose of a formalized program was “to ensure a uniform approach to writing, editing, producing, and distributing several types of public-use documents...to reinforce the image of the Libraries as a dynamic, professional organization within an equally dynamic university community.” I had recently joined the reference staff, and was asked by Tom Michalak, the director, to assume the role of Publications Coordinator.

With a few exceptions recent literature on the subject of library publications is nonexistent. I therefore turned to the resources at hand in my attempt to structure the program. These can be seen as falling into two categories—technical resources and people resources.

Technical resources. Not every student at Carnegie-Mellon University owns a computer, but every student has access to one on campus. Students are as likely to ask the reference librarian for the use of a PC as they are for a piece of paper. The technical resources available at CMU include a number of mainframe computers which offer strong and flexible text editing and text formatting programs called, respectively, EMACS and SCRIBE. The SCRIBE program uses commands that are entered with the text. These commands specify the typeface, margins, tabs, and so on that the program should implement. Documents can be typed into files, edited, formatted on the University DEC-20s and produced on a Xerox X9700 printer. Documents can also be typed and edited library Guide,” C&RL News 45 (October 1984):468–71.

on an IBM PC microcomputer and uploaded to the
mainframe for formatting.

People resources. The "people resources" avail­
able to me included a group of creative librarians
who are subject specialists, all of whom had writ­
ten handouts and guides in their subject areas. A
number of service and policy announcements al­
ready existed. Furthermore, the library director

Every aspect of production
is accomplished within the
library.

saw the development of the program as a high pri­
ority, and was ready to allocate time and money as
needed. An Editorial Board was appointed, con­
sisting of library professional and non-professional
staff members from both public and technical ser­
vices. In addition to the resources present within
the library, the university was replete with expert
consultants, from computer analysts to public rela­
tions personnel and an English department whose
programs focus on rhetoric and written composi­
tion.

Structuring the program

A Publications Ad Hoc Committee was estab­
lished 1) to write publications guidelines to be used
by authors and editors and 2) to decide upon an at­
tractive publication design. The first steps taken by
the Committee can again be seen in terms of tech­
nical aspects and people aspects.

Technical aspects. The Publications Committee
worked out the document design in a way that
would take advantage of SCRIBE options. After
consultations with the University Computation
Center, a sans serif typeface font, Univers 10, was
chosen and a SCRIBE format was selected. The
format specified such details as use of bold type or
italics, amount of space following a subheading,

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and placement of the author's name.

A graphic design student was commissioned to
design the library logo—a book, the pages of which
resemble a bar code. This simple linear design was
selected in part because of its suitability for digitiz­
ing. This allows the image to be read by the com­
puter and translated into the printed equivalent on
a Xerox laser printer, thus enabling CMU Libraries
to produce the final document in one step, without
photostatting, pasting, or waiting for campus
printers to complete the job.

People aspects. The usefulness of EMACS and
SCRIBE in the production of the documents
seemed obvious. The delineation of an editing
mechanism seemed less so. After a lot of brain­
storming, supplemented by consultations with other librarians, with faculty members in the En­
lish Department, and with the Chicago Manual
of Style, the Publications Committee composed the
eleven-page Publications Guidelines. Library pro­
fessionals can obtain copies of the guidelines by
writing to Rachael Naismith, Publications Coordi­
nator, Carnegie-Mellon University Libraries,
Pittsburgh, PA 15207.

Content of the Guidelines

The guidelines tell authors (almost) everything
they need to know about document style. The
guidelines begin by describing the need for library
publications. Publications overseen by the Edit­
orial Board are classified into these types: bibliogra­
phies, "how to" guides, service guides, special pub­
llications (e.g. a library handbook), online tutorials
and help systems. Bibliographies are generally an­
notated and focus on specific subject areas. "How
to" guides on the other hand are pathfinders or
"point of use" handouts. They serve as narrative
guides to research in a subject area, or as guides to
the use of complex reference sources, such as cita­
tion indexes. Service guides are brief descriptions
of library services, such as interlibrary loan. Projects
such as a library handbook or brochure fall into the
category of special publications. Finally, online tu­
torial and help systems are being printed. These
will require editorial decisions similar to print pub­
llications, and yet have specific contingencies re­
lated to their non-print nature.

The Publications Guidelines address document
content, discussing the introduction to the hand­
out, the arrangement of sections within the body,
and so on. The guidelines are not so specific that in­
dividual style is crimped. They do, however, pro­
vide authors with a set of standards which can be
extremely helpful in document design.

The guidelines also review CMU Libraries' edi­
torial procedure. They define the roles and respon­
sibilities of the Publications Coordinator, the Edi­
torial Board, and the authors. The authors, subject
specialists, and other members of the library staff
who are experienced in an area of library resources
are responsible for:
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research publications
providing accurate content, including correct citations, call numbers, and book locations;
• giving the manuscript to the Editorial Board within a reasonable amount of time and in a readable format—preferably on a diskette or as an EMACS file;
• adhering to these Publications Guidelines in the areas of procedure, content, and style.

The Publication Coordinator’s responsibilities include:
• chairing the Editorial Board;
• overseeing publications policies;
• coordinating production.

The Editorial Board is responsible for:
• editing publications for format and content;
• meeting with authors to suggest changes when needed;
• commissioning publications to fill gaps in the publications collection.

The last section of the guidelines deals with citation format. Authors are asked to follow the Chicago Manual of Style, unless they prefer a style specific to the discipline discussed in the handout.

The editorial procedure

The Publications Committee was disbanded when the publications guidelines and document design were completed. The Editorial Board took over and met weekly for several months, editing the core of handouts, mostly subject bibliographies, that already existed in typewritten form. The first handout that was edited, input on EMACS, and produced was a bibliography on artificial intelligence, a subject close to the hearts of CMU researchers. To date, sixteen guides have been produced and twelve others are in progress. Subject areas covered include census data, cognitive psychology, computer graphics, grants, musical theatre, and survival skills for the artist.

A special thanks to library newsletter editors

Many of the announcements that appear in C&RL News have come to my attention in newsletters published by various academic libraries. I wish to thank all of you for keeping C&RL News on the mailing list, and please be assured, I do read every one of them. I also appreciate the cartoons and humorous comments that enliven some of them (the University of Arizona and the University of California, Davis, among others).

If your library has a newsletter that contains notices of appointments, acquisitions, grants, awards, workshops, or other library activities that might be worth a mention in C&RL News, please add us to your mailing list. Send issues to: Editor, C&RL News, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611-2795.—George M. Eberhart, Editor.

The process of editing and production occurs in the following way. The author writes a handout for use in library instruction or perhaps written specifically for use in the Reference Area. The author or a work-study student enters the handout into a machine-readable file using the EMACS text editor or a similar program running on a personal computer. The author sends the file to me as Publications Coordinator and it is adapted to the designed Scribe format.

After the citations and book locations are verified on the online catalog (LS/2000), one member of the Editorial Board takes responsibility for the editing of the document. The editor marks up the copy, noting format and grammatical questions, and checking the form of the citation against the Chicago Manual of Style. She also makes comments about writing style. The editor then gives copies of the handout, complete with corrections, to the Editorial Board.

The Board reviews one or two handouts at a meeting, with the editor of each handout leading a discussion of her suggestions. Frequently, other members of the Editorial Board will pick up problems which the person responsible for the handout missed. The editor meets with the author and explains the suggestions of the Editorial Board. The author accepts or rejects the ideas, and the resulting document is usually the product of compromise.

A student assistant then re-edits the document, making the citation or content changes. The Scribe commands which produce the masthead (including the logo) are added. The document is produced on the Xerox printer and is shown to the author for final approval. The document is then copied on the libraries’ copiers. Copies of the handout are displayed in Reference, Circulation, or whatever area is helpful to the library user. Copies are also sent to Project LOEX in Michigan, for lending to other libraries. Finally, the document file is “migrated” offline, easily available for updating and reproduction.

Beyond the printed page

A recent development in the publications program has been the loading of the existing computer files into an information subsystem of the online catalog. When a student or professor calls up this subsystem, she will be presented with a menu of options, including library hours, announcements, online catalog tips, and library publications. Upon selecting “Library Publications,” the individual will be provided with a list of the available publications. By choosing one, the person can call up the document and page through it screen by screen. This system is now being tested and will be available in the spring of 1985.

Conclusion

The result of our efforts has been an increasingly diverse selection of attractive library publications
which are well-written and well-edited. The Li-

braries are making good use of the text processing
resources available at Carnegie-Mellon University,
and yet we are not spending a great deal of money
on our products. We are using our own copiers and
have work-study students doing the online editing,
the copying, and the collating. Publications are
printed on relatively inexpensive ivory bond paper.
Every aspect of production is accomplished within
the library. Best of all, revisions of publications can
be accomplished in minutes. While many universi-
ties do not have the centralized computer facilities
that we have available at CMU, microcomputers
do present alternatives for text editing. Aside from
the technical points to consider, any library can
benefit from the establishment of an editing proce-
dure in writing. Often library publications are the
byproduct of other library activities, such as a BI
session or a detailed assignment on census materi-
als. If a publication mechanism exists, even hand-
outs which arise from a hasty assignment or class-
room presentation can be of high quality. ■ ■

ACRL list of materials available

A complete checklist of ACRL publications in print.

S

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be ordered from ALA Publishing Services at the
same address.

Standards and guidelines

• Standards for University Libraries. (C&RL
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• Standards for College Libraries. (C&RL
• The Use and Effectiveness of the 1975 Stan-
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Guidelines, College Libraries Section, ACRL.
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