Local Expert Participation in National Processes and Policy Development

The purpose of this exploratory project is primarily to gain experience in capturing, preserving, and creating convenient access to University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) faculty's U.S. congressional testimony and to create an electronic, searchable record of their involvement in national-level public law and policy development. It is anticipated that the project will be the basis upon which to build an ongoing information service to the Library and the campus. Also, it holds promise as a possible public engagement tool. As has been made clear in the Campus Strategic Plan, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, March 2007, "strategic strengthening" of connections with Washington, D.C., will be emphasized in the future. This appears as an initiative in Goal III: Breakthrough Knowledge and Innovation, "Increase the Illinois presence in Washington, DC..." It can be inferred in one of the plan's progress indicators for Goal III, "Impact on societal needs (illustrated by examples)," and implied by another progress indicator of Goal V: Access to the Illinois Experience, "% of faculty involved in civic engagement."

A fairly basic search of one pertinent resource indicates that in the past ten years only fifty-two known UIUC affiliates have appeared as expert witnesses before congressional committees. In next generation campus strategic plans, national participation as implied in this proposal could appear as a more explicit progress indicator and serve as a catalyst for a larger number of such expert contributions. These "events" will also lead to further contacts with other experts and government agency policy-makers, scientists, and officials. The importance of establishing and maintaining these types of ties is becoming more and more obvious and will only serve to benefit the campus, its faculty, staff, and students, and the citizens of Illinois. This "expert" information service will be a convenient, permanent means for obtaining who has done what in significant policy areas with members of Congress and others.

Expert testimony is a particular type of grey literature that is embedded into a larger document (the hearing itself), but the testimony itself can often stand alone. An important role of institutional repositories is collecting and preserving grey literature produced by campus affiliates; yet, we are not aware of another institution who has attempted to gather testimonies in an institutional repository (or in other systems). This service and research project will quantify the effort needed to identify, collect, describe, and deposit the testimony from UIUC faculty over the past ten years. We will examine the manual effort needed as well as the potential for automating portions of the citation gathering.

This project would consist of four primary activities and a follow-up resource analysis:

1. Quantifying the time necessary to gather citations and text of testimony from the past 10 years. This would be done through searches in the web-based databases including LexisNexis Congressional, a commercial resource, and GPO Access. As necessary, other electronic files of congressional hearings and possibly copies of congressional hearings in print format available in the Government Documents Library's depository collection will be utilized. (work to be completed by graduate hourly student under direction of Mary Mallory).

2. Understanding the options available to automate these types of searches whether through an Application Programming Interface (API), if available, or through other means. A cost - benefit
analysis will be conducted on automated citation gathering versus manual gathering. Actual implementation of automated citation gathering will be subject to the outcome of this analysis. (work to be completed by graduate hourly student under direction of Tim Donohue and Sarah Shreeves).

3. Analysis and preparation of metadata required for adequately describing the expert testimony and its context. (Sarah Shreeves and Mary Mallory).

4. Deposit of expert testimony into a designated collection in IDEALS where it would have full text indexing, full exposure to search engines such as Google, Yahoo!, and Microsoft Live, and a commitment to long term preservation of the content. (work to be completed by graduate hourly student under direction of Sarah Shreeves).

5. A full analysis of the resources expended for this work. (Mary Mallory and Sarah Shreeves).

The hope is that the results of this investigation will illustrate the time needed to aggregate this particular type of grey literature and the challenges to this type of work. At the completion of the project, we will look at whether and how we can sustain this work as a specialized information service. If viable, the information service could be expanded to include, for example, Illinois General Assembly Senate and House committee testimony by faculty experts, or serve as a model for other public academic institutions. More substantial sources of funding may include CARLI, IMLS, or the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, depending upon the outcome and direction this work may take.

The results of this research will be disseminated in appropriate publications/conferences related to government documents and institutional repositories.

Request for resources include the following:

Hourly graduate student @ 5 hours per week for one semester (16 weeks): to develop search strategies, collect citations and content, deposit material into IDEALS - $1333.60

Hourly graduate student @ 3 hours per week for one semester (16 weeks): to analyze possibilities for automating citation gathering - $800.16

Total amount requested: $2133.76

Submitted by Mary Mallory and Sarah Shreeves
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