

Disappearing Deposits: Investigating the Retention of Canadian Federal Government Depository Publications at CARL Libraries

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The current project

- Builds on our [book chapter](#) that examined the status of federal, provincial, and territorial government depository programs across Canada
- Evaluates the persistence of federal government materials in former, full depository libraries to understand the landscape of access to historical federal government information
- Explores how print holdings have evolved in the years since the conclusion of the Depository Services Program (DSP) agreement - there is a lack of published information on this topic

The DSP: Depository Libraries

- The DSP distribution program ran between 1927 and 2013
- Official, print publications from federal government departments were produced, printed, and distributed for free, to any library registered as a selective or full depository
- Full depository libraries (FDLs) received all checklist items automatically (with some exceptions)
- Retention guidelines had been relaxed somewhat in the decade before the end of distribution, but FDLs were still expected to retain most items indefinitely

The DSP: The Checklist

- From 1928 onwards, a catalogue / checklist of titles was printed and distributed to depository libraries at varying frequencies, finally settling on weekly distribution from 1978 until the conclusion of the distribution program
- This checklist (for ordering) was replaced by the Weekly Acquisitions List (for information only) in April 2015

The DSP

“On December 31, 2013, the agreements between the DSP and the depositories expired. The DSP stopped distributing tangible-format publications and transitioned to an electronic-only model in April 2014.”

[About the DSP \(August 5, 2014\)](#)

Key questions

- Have former full depository libraries maintained their print, federal government holdings or are those collections being re-evaluated and weeded?
- Is it possible to locate materials distributed through the former program via public access catalogues?
- What do the results of this study reveal about access to federal government information in Canada more broadly?

Method

- Sample libraries primarily included former full depositories, with a focus on academic CARL members
- Sample publications came from issues of the federal DSP Weekly Checklist
 - Note: This work was completed before the deployment of provincial shared catalogue projects in Ontario (Omni) and Quebec (Sofia)
- Included libraries: UCalgary, UAlberta, Simon Fraser, UBC, UVIC, UManitoba, UNB, Memorial, Dalhousie, UGuelph, McMaster, Queen's, UWO, UOttawa, UToronto, UWaterloo, WLU*, York, UWindsor, UQAM, UdeM, Concordia, McGill, Laval, Sherbrooke, and USaskatchewan

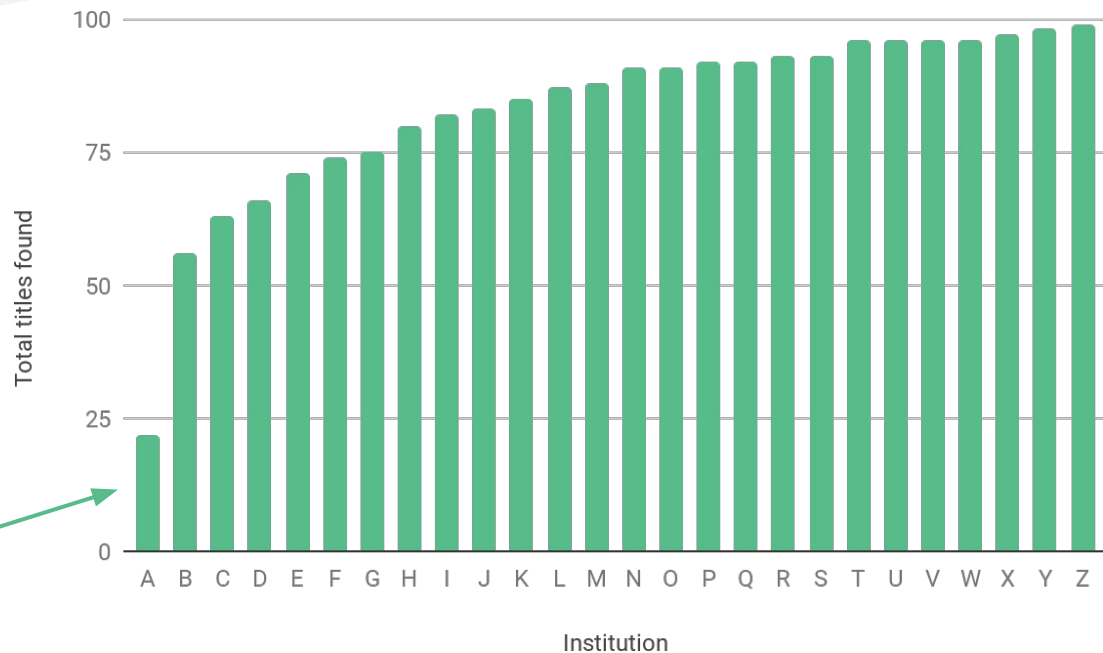
Method

- Key details from data collection:
 - Sample of 100 publications → English+French or bilingual monographs
 - 25 publications selected from each: 1979/80, 1989/90, 1999/2000, 2009
 - Over 2,600 searches performed
 - Over 18,200 data points collected
- Key exclusions:
 - Electronic formats, parliamentary publications, budget publications, non-monograph formats (CD-ROMS, kits, microforms, loose leaf, VHS, DVD, folder, pamphlets, and processed), serial publications (irregular, annual, quarterly, monthly, or bulletin), items distributed by mailing list

Analysis

A summary of what we discovered

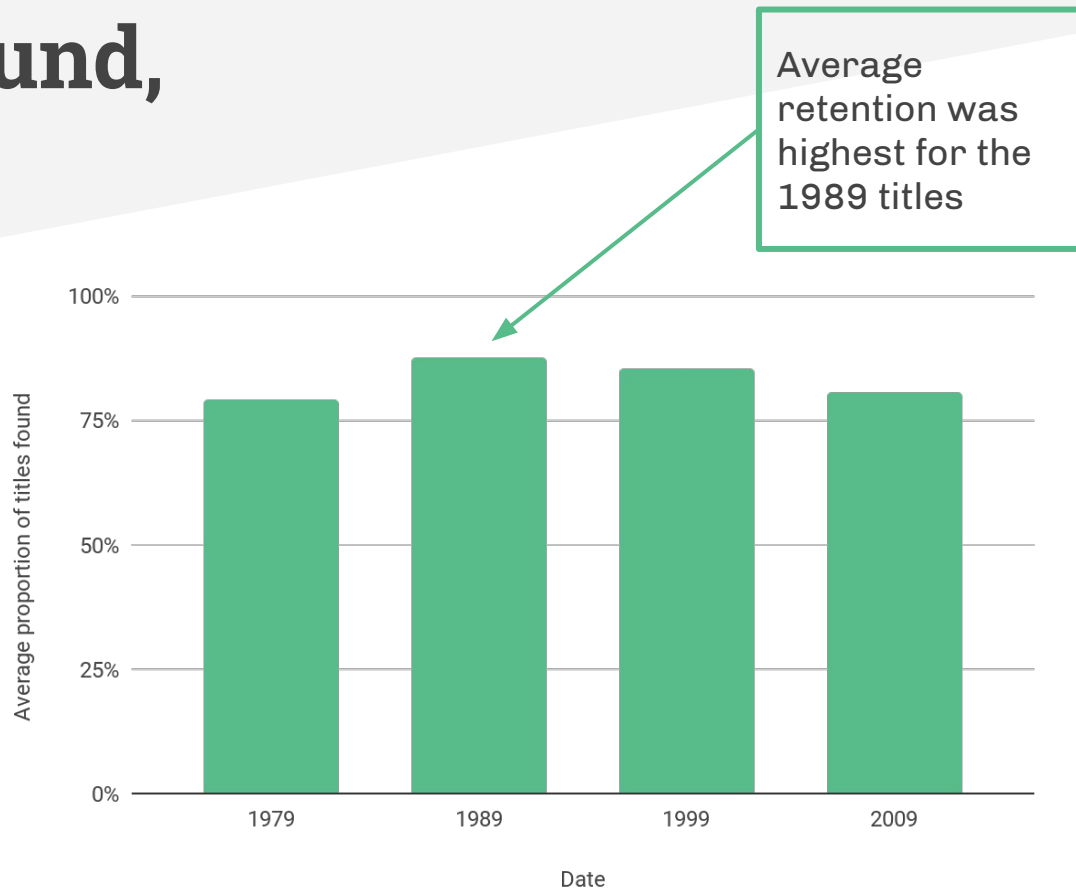
Titles found, by institution



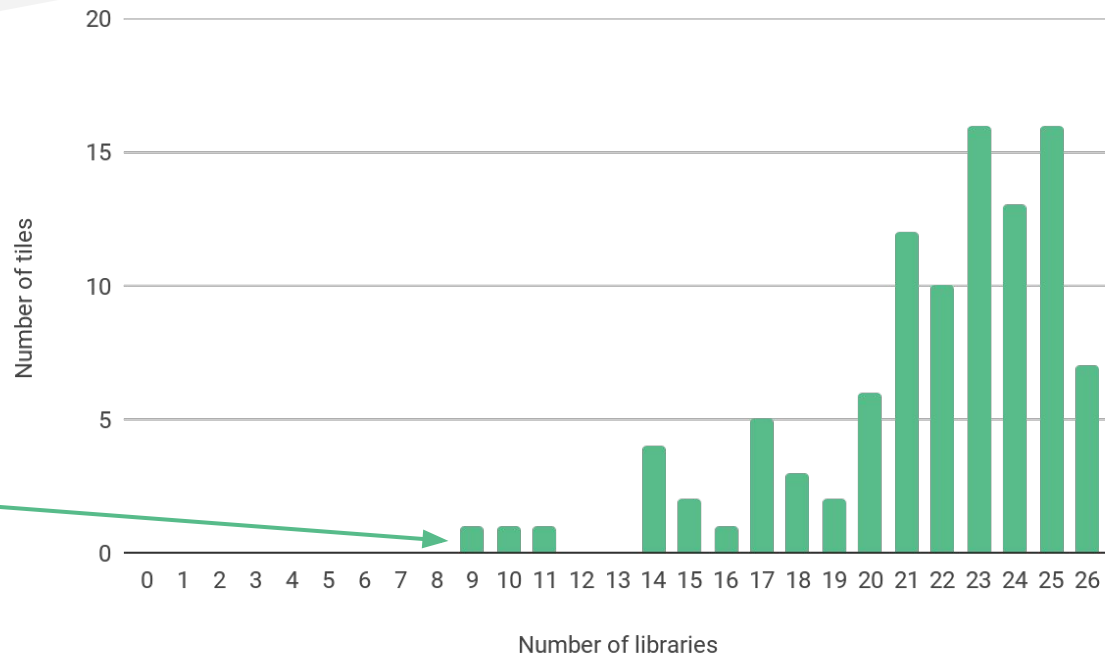
Institution A
held 22/100
titles

Institution Z
held 99/100
titles

Titles found, by year



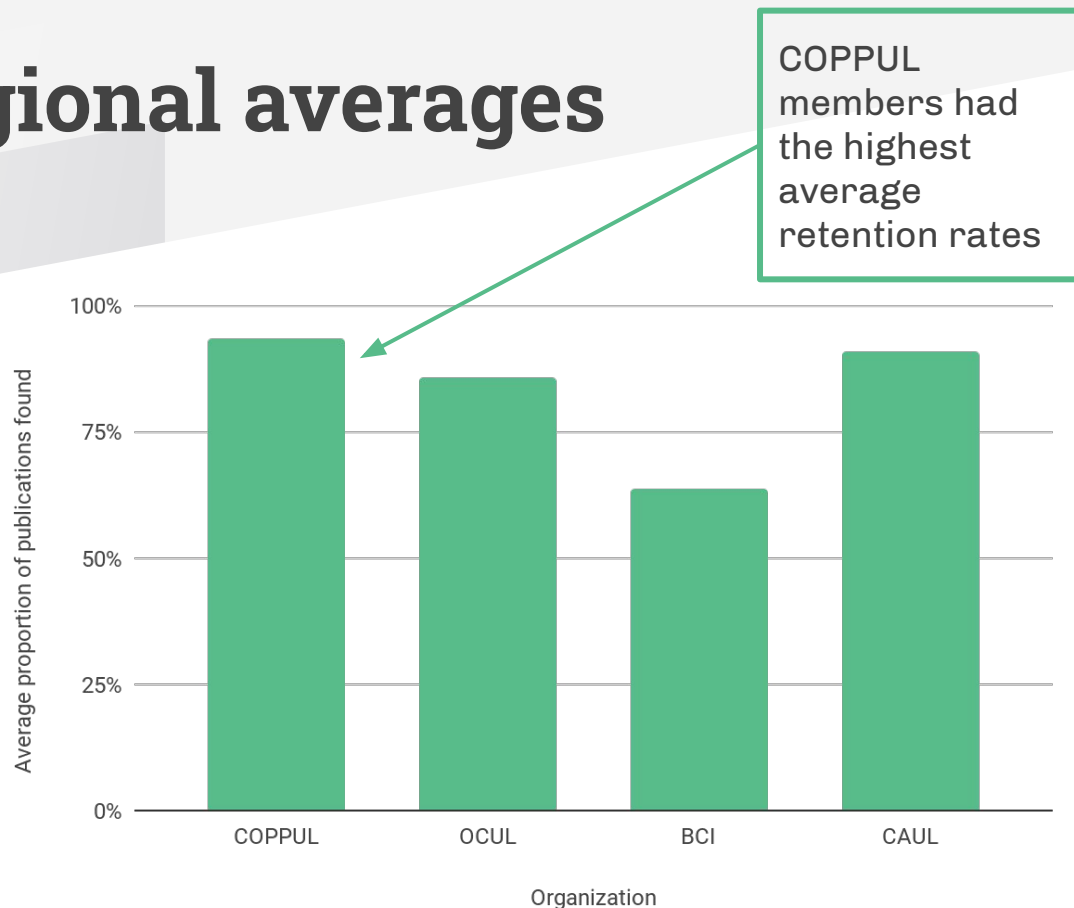
Title retention levels



Each title was found in at least 9 libraries

7 titles have been retained by all 26 libraries in our study

Regional averages



COPPUL: Council of
Prairie and Pacific
University Libraries

OCUL: Ontario Council
of University Libraries

BCI: Bureau de
coopération
interuniversitaire
(Québec)

CAUL: Council of
Atlantic University
Libraries

Library Partnerships



Titles in Library Partnerships

- At least one copy of each of the 100 titles in our sample was found in TUG, K@D, OCUL-CF, and COPPUL-SPAN
- BCI-QULP had at least one copy of 97 titles, but no copies of 3 titles

Titles in Library Partnerships

- The most secure grouping by number of copies was COPPUL-SPAN, with 98% of titles having copies in more than half of the libraries.
 - K@D 96%
 - OCUL-CF 93%
 - TUG 90%
 - BCI-QULP 62%
- For OCUL-CF & COPPUL-SPAN, each title was found in a minimum of two libraries

Conclusions

Have former full depository libraries maintained their print, federal government holdings or are those collections being re-evaluated and weeded?

- As a whole, there's more availability than we expected, though there are some regional gaps
- It's likely that there's been some weeding
 - 437 items (17% from the sample of 2600) were not found
- Partnerships and collaborations could be leveraged to secure the future of these collections before retention drops to problematic levels
- Canada-wide approach and dialogue is crucial

Conclusions

Is it possible to locate materials distributed through the former program via public access catalogues?

- Short answer: yes, as we found at least 9 copies of each title using OPACs
- However:
 - Our sample set of titles was designed to maximize the findability of the publications
 - The RA encountered challenges in finding items using different OPACs
 - The migration of over half of the libraries in our study to the OCUL-CF or BCI-QULP shared catalogues could have changed metadata in unpredictable ways

Conclusions

What do the results of this study reveal about access to federal government information in Canada more broadly?

- Academic libraries in Canada have significant government information collections
- It is likely that collectively, we still have a good deal of redundancy, for now
- Government publication print collections are vulnerable and difficult to assess
- Coordination & collaboration would help secure this collection into the future
- Now is the time to seek partnerships and make agreements to protect and preserve Canadian federal publications

Thanks!

Any questions?

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Further Reading

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