

LESSON 5: LIBRARY HOUSE KEEPING ROUTINES: SERIAL CONTROL

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5.0. Objectives

In this unit you will be introduced to the concept of ordering and procurement of serial publications with the aid of computer; major functions involved; type of files to be maintained etc. After reading this unit, you will be able to

- Explain the functions of ordering and procuring serials in automated environment;
- Identify various files to maintained for effective acquisition system;
- Benefits to be reaped from automation of library serial control process.

5.1. Introduction

Let us discuss first what constitutes serial publications. The AACR2 defines serial “as a publication in any medium issued in successive parts bearing numerical or chronological designations and intended to be continued indefinitely. Serials include periodicals; newspapers; annuals (reports, year books etc.); the journals, memoirs, proceedings, transactions etc. of societies; and numbered monographic series”. The serials control has certain inherent problems such as:

- They are being published by various organizations and societies and not just by publishers;
- The name, sponsoring body may change and the journal may split into two or merge with another journal;
- The appearance of supplements, special issues;
- Unlike books, they require to pay the amount in advance;
- A problem of missing issues i.e. difficulties in being aware of which issues have not yet been received although published, and whether to make a claim to supplier or distributor;
- Need to make more correspondence and maintain more records.

These problems necessitate having an effective serial control system. As a result the libraries tend to computerize their serial procurement activity. Computers were first used in the control of serial in the 1960s with most systems depending on punched cards and batch processed. However there are many developments currently in this area and now the integrated library software supports all the modules of house keeping operations.

5.2. Need for automation of serial control system

Libraries have automated their circulation control activities for a variety of reasons:

- To accrue the advantages of integrated system as serial module is one among the integrated library software package;
- Improving service to users as current journals lists and index files can be created automatically;
- Speeding the ordering process by avoiding drudgery or repetitive works;
- To have efficient subscription control;
- To facilitate efficient generation of reports and record keeping;
- Linking with other systems both inside and outside the library.

5.3. Design features of serial control system

Potter and Sirkin define the major design features of serial control system as:

- A MARC-like record structure with fields for check-in, claiming and binding information;
- The ability to search online using keywords from titles linked by Boolean operators or by subject, language, country, or ISSN;
- The ability to produce alphabetically ordered lists;
- The ability to carry out check-in, claiming, updating and binding operations online.

5.4. Basic serial control system

The basic requirements of a serial system are similar to that of book control but are more complex because of their special features. The special features include:

- **Selection or renewal:** In case of books selection is the only process while majority of serials are renewals.
- **Generating purchase orders:** In case of books amounts will be paid after receipt of the documents where as for serial publications advance payment is necessary. This makes the financial matters more complex.
- **Missing issues:** A constant check is required to find out whether the issues are received on time or not. Hence regular correspondence to track missing issues is necessary, besides maintaining details of current holdings.
- **Organization of completed volumes:** Books once purchased will be placed on stacks and put to use. However serials will be received as loose issues and all the issues have to be bound after completion of a volume and then only can be accessed. This again adds complexity.

5.5. Functions of Serial control system

The basic requirements of serial control system are similar to, but more complex than, the book acquisition system. Any serial control system has fewer titles to handle but must record more details for each title and can expect a greater number of transactions per title. It is one of the more complex and expensive procedures due to cost, ordering, checking in of serials, missing issues and the related paper work. An automated serial control system has to fulfill the following functions:

- Ordering of serials;
- Receipt of and updating of the record file
- Reminders to vendors / publishers;
- List of holdings;
- Preparing list of additions;
- Allowing access to details of current holdings;
- Circulation of issues and borrowing;
- Producing management information;
- Organizing for completed volumes and preparing list for binding.

These functions can be grouped into serials subscription, cataloguing, and circulation. **Subscription** involves controlling selection, ordering, checking-in of serials, payment and claims for missing issues. **Cataloguing** is to keep records of stock to provide access. **Circulation** is to keep records of the availability of serials, to include circulation and binding.

In order to perform the above functions the serial control system has to maintain a number of files.

The **core files** to be maintained in an automated serial control system include

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- Master file with complete bibliographic description of all titles held in the library, current, cancelled, stopped etc.; The records may be MARC based or simple fixed field;
- Order file (including renewal dates, and subscription costs);
- Fund files;
- Supplier file (including names and addresses of publishers and vendors);
- Receipt file (data on receiving issues, such as frequency of publication, irregularities and claiming criteria for issues not received);
- Exchange file;
- Holding / Record file (recording current holdings and allowing access to such lists);
- Index file for fast searching by elements like subject or key terms, title, ISSN etc.;
- Circulation files (names and addresses of locations for circulation).

Hence a separate program is needed for serials data input, modification, order processing, reminder processing, receipt of serials, query and report generation.

5.5.1 Subscription

5.5.1.1 Ordering and Procurement: The periodical order must encompass process of request for the title, approval from competent authority. Depending on financial position and reallocation to different subjects, the order will be prepared.

The **selection** procedure involves collection of recommendations of subject experts and maintaining a user file and source file. For source file there are a number of periodical directories in machine-readable form. For e.g. CONSER file available through OCLC and SERLINE on MEDLINE.

The **ordering** function involves a number of sub functions such as

- Pre order searching to check for title on file;
- Creation of order using formatted screen;
- Generation of order number, date etc.;
- Provision of supplier data;
- Checking the fund position;
- Renewal of order, wherever necessary.

The important aspect of ordering is the continuing nature of subscriptions to serials. **Renewals** must be created and dispatched at the appropriate time. Hence the ordering must contain records of renewal dates and subscription levels and processing must include the capacity for scanning records to check for renewal dates. Further sufficient data to facilitate the identification of the vendor or society, from whom the serial is to be ordered, must be included.

5.5.1.2. Checking-in (Receiving): As issues appear regularly, checking-in is one of the important functions of serials control system. Receiving involves a large volume of checking. When an issue arrives it must be checked to ensure that it is the correct item and then the master records must be amended to reflect the new receipts. Hence in a computerized system the module should be able to:

- Identify and access the receiving issues with ISSN or first few letters of the journal;
- Check-in new receipts by a single keystroke, i.e. all required data like volume no, issue no., date should be displayed;

- Provide checking-in of multiple copies on single screen;
- Display the expected issues based on renewal date;
- To enter additional issues like supplements;
- Provide lists of checked in titles for notification of or routing to users.

5.5.1.3. Claiming: It is a small but complex activity. The periodical subscriptions involve advanced payment and issues may not be supplied even after payment. The librarian has to pursue the matter by making claims within the stipulated time period. The computer can help by providing lists of subscriptions and related information, so that librarian can make claims at appropriate time. The program should support:

- Identification of missing or overdue issues automatically within the claim period;
- Notifying of over dues or missing issues for claiming by library;
- To maintain library defined frequency of claims;
- Generate reminder letters for issues not received.

5.5.1.4. Subscription control: Subscriptions are to be renewed every year. Some times some titles that are not on demand may be dropped and some new titles may be added. The master file should provide the details of these changes. Further, the software program should generate automatic renewal notices to be dispatched to suppliers.

5.5.1.5. Fund control: In general practice a proper allocation of budget will be made department wise or section wise. The system has to keep the accounts and print them when necessary. The serial accounting system should be able to generate lists by fund, supplier, and currency etc. According to Deshpande, the data required for this can be customized as follows:

- Provision of funds / cost centers for allocation of total funds and committed funds and actual expenditure;
- Provision for currency conversion;
- Invoice processing and payment authorization;

5.5.1.6. Report Generation and Record Keeping: Report generation is one of the important activities of library house keeping operations and serial control also generates a number of reports. The computerized serial control system supports automatic report generation of vital statistics either as print or digital data. Standard reports in serial control system include:

Alphabetical list of serials;

New additions or current issues;

Missing / overdue issues;

Subscription lists for renewals;

Financial reports;

Supplier performance;

Bindery performance;

Check out lists (user wise or serial wise);

Different forms and notices;

Currency information, etc.

5.5.2. Cataloguing or Holdings file

The catalogue formats and processes etc are similar to books and serials. After the volumes are completed and bound, the document has to be processed for cataloguing. This could be made available to users through OPAC of the concerned library. Once the master holdings file is updated, listings can be generated in several orders such as title, subject, location, supplier. The holdings file should provide complete bibliographic details of the title, location, whether bounded or not and details of the holding. The program should possess more search capabilities through Boolean searches. The steps include:

- Scanning the articles;
- Identifying fields or entry elements or access points (Consult expert if necessary);
- Update and keep accessible on OPAC.

5.5.3. Routing or circulation

The routing of current serials is very important in libraries, which serves users on different sites. The routing at present is being carried out in two ways, (i) manual access to print and (ii) electronic access through campus networks. The second method is gaining popularity with the introduction of electronic journals and e-consortia using the Internet. The following sub functions can be identified while routing the serials:

- Creation and maintenance of routing lists for specific copies of serials;
 - Online access to lists by title or keyword;
 - Fix up the routing status and circulate among users;
 - Priority levels for individuals on routing list;
 - Monitor the issue status and recall whenever necessary;
 - Facility to merge routing lists or change routing list.
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5.6. Selection Criteria for Serial control module

The automated serial control system must possess the following basic features:

- Selecting suitable title for library;
- Generating purchase orders or renewal orders as the case may be;
- Organizing financial matters and changing the appropriate accounts;
- Receiving and entering into the kardex or appropriate index file for each issue of the title;
- Keep current and accurate details of serials holdings;
- Allow the access to holdings as per user's choice;
- Producing various types of management information on request.

5.7. Summary

The serial control system is opted by libraries to avoid drudgery operations in subscription procedures and index maintenance. It is based on various functions and in this unit the basic functions are discussed. The serial control differs from book acquisition mainly due to the special nature of periodical publications and the nature of payment required. Hence the tracking of issues, identifying the missing ones and fund control are unique to serials. This makes it more complex compared to other house keeping operations.

5.8. Further reading

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5.9. Unit-end-questions

1. What are functional points to be considered in serial control?
2. Explain the workflow in serial ordering.

5.10 Answers to unit-end-questions

1. An automated serial control system has to fulfill the basic functions such as: Ordering of serials; Receipt of and updating of the record file; Reminders to vendors / publishers; List of holdings; Preparing list of additions; Allowing access to details of current holdings; Circulation of issues and borrowing; Producing management information; Organizing for completed volumes and preparing list for binding.

2. The ordering work flow of serial control system involves receiving recommendations, duplicate checking, order placing, invoice payment, tracking the issues, identifying missing issues or over dues, claiming, subscription control, indexing, report generation, routing etc.