

The Library of Congress
Office of the Inspector General



Library Services

*Survey of Collections Access, Loan,
and Management Division Service*

Audit Survey Report No. 2007-PA-101/March 2007



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▶▶ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Collections, Access, Loan, and Management Division (CALM) of Library Services is the Library's primary retrieval service for books and other library materials from the general collections. CALM responds to approximately 2,000 retrieval requests each workday, providing this service to users of seven reading rooms in the Jefferson and Adams Buildings and staff members throughout the Library. In addition, CALM shelves approximately 2,000 items each day, of which about half are new additions to the collections.

We performed a survey of the material retrieval service provided by CALM. A survey consists of preliminary inquiries and data collection and analysis. An audit ordinarily follows a survey if sufficient evidence indicates breakdowns in process or weakness in internal control structures. In many cases however, a survey provides satisfactory evidence to the Office of the Inspector General that indicates it is not necessary to proceed with an audit.

Our survey testing included a sufficient number of transactions to provide us with an understanding of the division's workflow and assurance that the internal controls were properly designed. However, since a survey is substantially less in scope than an audit, we do not express an opinion on the accuracy of CALM's data or attest to the effectiveness of CALM's internal control system.

We initiated this project to determine if CALM efficiently and effectively responds to requests to retrieve collection items. We focused on the timeliness and accuracy of CALM's response to requests and the management controls it employs to ensure its service goals and objectives are achieved.

We did not become aware of any material weaknesses in CALM's operations during our survey and concluded that further audit work on this project is not necessary at this time. Our survey assessment indicated that CALM is providing timely and accurate retrieval service, especially considering the volume of material it handles and the size of the Library's

general collections. Although our survey indicated that about 17 percent of materials requested could not be found,¹ most of these instances did not appear to be attributable to process or internal control failures. Further, we noted that CALM is taking several actions to address its goals and objectives and to improve its service, such as outsourcing certain functions, enhancing its quality assurance procedures, shifting less-used materials to offsite storage, and continuing the Baseline Inventory Program.

Notwithstanding these positive steps, we identified two issues which, if addressed, would improve CALM's service.

The first issue relates to performance management. The CALM division does not currently generate, compile, and analyze statistics, primarily because it does not employ automation. Using such statistics may help CALM better manage its workforce. We recommend that CALM collect and make use of statistics to better manage its staff. See page 8.

The second issue relates to paper call slips. Whereas Library staff request materials using an automated system (which checks for availability and validates the spelling of the title), the public must use handwritten paper call slips to request items. This manual process is, by default, slower than the automated system, and prone to errors of both spelling (by the requestor) and interpretation (by the deck attendant attempting to read the call slip). Library Services management advised us that it is in the process of attempting to resolve issues preventing the public from using online call slips. We recommend that Library Services management place a high priority on resolving these issues. See page 9.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies extended by CALM division chief Steven J. Herman and the division's staff during our survey.

¹ When an item cannot be located, a "not-on-shelf" (NOS) report is generated.

▶▶ INTRODUCTION

CALM’s mission directly relates to the Library’s Strategic Goal 2 – to provide maximum access and facilitate effective use of the collections by the Congress and other customers – and its corresponding planned outcome – high-quality and timely fulfillment of research and information requests from an increasingly diverse and distributed customer population. The division is responsible for retrieving, shelving, shelf reading², and performing minor shifts in the general collections. Over the past five years, CALM management has intentionally downsized its permanent staff in anticipation of using contract staff for the shelving of materials.

CALM Division Permanent Staff Levels		
Section	FY 2000	FY 2006
Office/Managers/Supervisors	10	17
Book Service Team Leaders	9	6
Collections Control Center/Reader Registration Room	10	8
Book Service Section	121	73
Inventory Management/Document Fulfillment Section	40	25
Reference & Collections Support Section	13	8
Collections Maintenance & Off-Site Storage Section	32	25
TOTALS	235	162

CALM receives approximately 2,000 requests for collections items every workday and retrieves and delivers most books in thirty to ninety minutes. The NOS rate is currently about 17 percent.

Members of the public normally request books by submitting paper call slips. Library staff typically use the automated ILS call slip module to submit their book requests.

Library patrons manually complete and submit paper slips

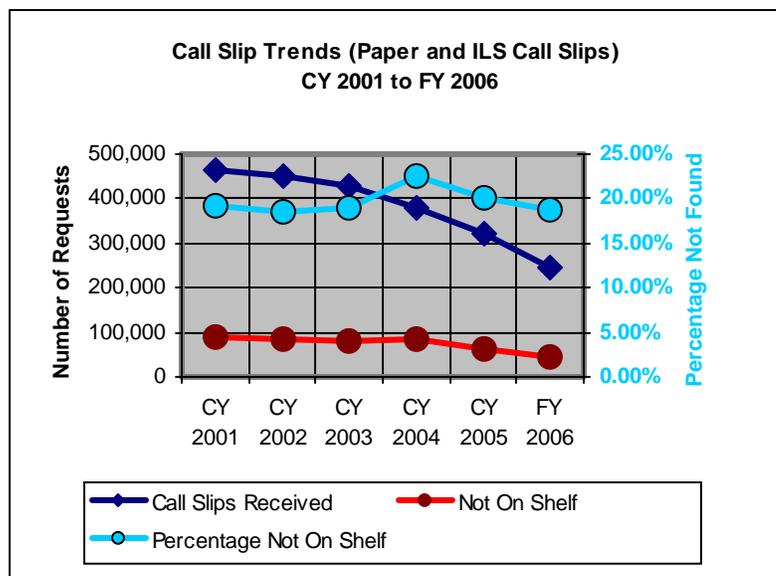
to the circulation desk to request an item. The paper call slip process is outdated and inefficient. Requesting items using the ILS call slip module – the procedure normally followed by Library staff – would greatly improve efficiency and control for collection items by (1) tracking all items requested as well as those that are charged-out, (2) ensuring requested call numbers are accurately recorded, and (3) providing automated statistics for management oversight on request processing times and fulfillment rates.

² Periodically examining the arrangement of books and other materials in the stacks to ensure that items are in correct call number sequence on the shelves.

When a deck attendant cannot find an item, two additional searches may occur. The first one occurs automatically for retrieval requests submitted via the ILS, and is performed by CALM's Quality Assurance (QA) team. This search procedure is generally conducted the day after the initial request, requires no action from the item requester, and includes searching in-processing³ areas in addition to the stacks. If the QA team search is unsuccessful, the team will attempt to locate an item as close to the original request as possible as a substitute. This search procedure is not performed for retrieval requests submitted via paper call slips.

The original requestor must initiate the second type of search, referred to as the "Special Search." Unlike the previously described search procedure, Special Searches are conducted for requests that were originally made using either paper call slips or the ILS call slip module. The Special Search Unit searches once a week for up to a month to determine if the item becomes available, and the requester is notified if the item is found within that period.

After an item is returned from use in a reading room, it may take up to four days for it to be re-shelved and available again for retrieval. The ILS automatically accounts for this lag time by preventing requests to retrieve an item for four days after it is returned.



At the time of our fieldwork, CALM was in the process of taking action to improve service to its customers. These included:

- transferring the shelving function to contractors; this allows deck attendants to exclusively focus on serving the Library's customers;

³ In-processing areas include temporary holding spaces where materials are stored until being re-shelved. For example, returned items may be in CALM's central processing area on book trucks waiting to be arranged by classification or held on trucks in the decks waiting for re-shelving.

- enhancing its quality assurance procedures to include an immediate, more intensive second search for all retrieval requests that initially result in “not-on-shelf” (NOS) reports;
- shifting second copies and infrequently requested items to off-site storage modules to reduce overcrowded shelf conditions in the Jefferson Building and facilitate finding requested items; and
- engaging in the Baseline Inventory Program (BIP) to ensure book labels are accurate, legible, and in agreement with the Library’s automated Voyager Integrated Library System (ILS).

We believe the actions CALM is taking to improve its service will yield positive results. However, we have identified two issues that, if addressed, should yield further improvements. First, CALM should use the ILS automated system to generate statistics on the accuracy and timeliness of service; in short, making use of metrics to assess the performance of its staff and contractors. Second, Library Services management should place a high priority on resolving the issues preventing the implementation of the automated call slip module for the general public. This should greatly improve the accuracy and timeliness of the retrieval service.

This survey report comments on ongoing efforts and explores these issues.

►► OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

We initiated this project to determine if CALM efficiently and effectively responds to requests to retrieve collection items. We focused on the timeliness and accuracy of CALM's response to requests and the management controls it employs to ensure its service goals and objectives are achieved. To accomplish this, we interviewed key staff, identified CALM's objectives, goals, and standards, reviewed policies and procedures, conducted walk-throughs, identified potential risks, and tested key control points. To assess customer satisfaction, we interviewed officials from the Main Reading Room, the Office of Scholarly Programs, and the Congressional Research Service.

Our survey testing was limited to sufficient transactions to provide us with an understanding of the workflow and assurance that the internal controls were working as intended.

We conducted our audit survey in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards issued by the Comptroller General of the United States (the "Yellow Book"), LCR 1519.1, *Audits And Reviews By The Office Of The Inspector General*, and audit standards established by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants.

►► FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We did not become aware of any material weaknesses in our survey of CALM's operations and concluded that further audit work on this project is not necessary at this time. Our survey testing included a sufficient number of transactions to provide us with an understanding of the division's workflow and assurance that the internal controls were properly designed. However, since a survey is substantially less in scope than an audit, we do not express an opinion on the accuracy of CALM's data or attest to the effectiveness of CALM's internal control system. However, we believe our survey produced a considerable amount of information useful to senior management.

Our survey assessment indicated that CALM is providing timely and accurate retrieval service, especially considering the volume of material it handles and the size of the Library's general collections. Our specific findings and recommendations are:

I. Timeliness of the Retrieval Service

CALM's goal for responding to a retrieval request is 30 to 90 minutes, depending on whether the item and the requester are in the same building. CALM does not keep detailed performance statistics on meeting this goal. However, based on our observation of this activity over several days, it appears that the division is meeting the goal. Moreover, staff from various Library organizations told us they are very satisfied with CALM's retrieval service. One respondent stated that "[c]onsidering the number of books that are processed, I think [CALM's] service is excellent."

While CALM may be retrieving requested items in a timely manner, it could use automated statistics available through ILS to oversee and manage this activity. Presently, supervisors check retrieval times by randomly inspecting a sample of completed call slips.

Performance management is increasingly becoming part of the lexicon of business. The Library is no exception. We believe that the materials retrieval service is an excellent candidate for the use of metrics in managing staff and contractor performance. At present, CALM supervisors rely on observations and feedback

from readers to evaluate deck attendants' timeliness and accuracy. When an automated request is placed, the ILS records the elapsed time to fulfill a request. CALM supervisors are not, however, using this information. Further, when an item is requested using a paper call slip, no objective and quantifiable measure of performance can be made. With some adjustments, the ILS data could provide a useful starting point to objectively evaluate this activity.

The federal government is faced with establishing performance measures intended to balance priorities such as quality, timeliness, customer satisfaction, and employee satisfaction. The Library, and by extension, CALM, are no exception.

Recommendation

We recommend that management explore ways to use ILS statistics to improve its oversight of this activity.

II. The ILS as a Tool

The use of paper call slips has a negative impact on CALM's efficiency. When a paper call slip is used to charge out an item, the item is not shown as "charged-out" in the ILS – the automated system. As a result, although charged out, the item can be repeatedly requested. As our testing illustrated, this can result in multiple fruitless searches by CALM staff. For three of the eight NOS paper call slip requests we tested, the ILS record showed that either the copy was charged out, at Fort Meade, or still in the cataloging process. Consequently, CALM staff spent unnecessary time searching for these items and the NOS rate was affected. Using the ILS call slip module for all requests would prevent this inefficiency,⁴ and would provide assurance that the right item was requested, or at least eliminate errors due to misinterpretations of handwriting on a call slip. The module would also provide

⁴ CALM management added a caveat to our finding. The ILS does not contain a complete inventory of the Library's holding. Therefore, CALM believes it is still desirable to search for an item even though it is shown in the ILS as "charged out," because there may be multiple copies of the same item, of which only one may, in fact, be charged out. When the BIP completes its inventory and every item in the collection is represented by an item record in the ILS, this issue will be eliminated.

statistics for management oversight of request processing times and fulfillment rates.

Eliminating paper call slips and channeling all retrieval requests through the ILS is the solution for several issues facing CALM. Before this solution can be implemented, however, issues involving ILS' security and interfaces with the Reader Registration System must be addressed. The ILS office believes it will take at least two years to resolve these issues. A possible short-term solution for this situation would require members of CALM to search the ILS module for incoming paper call slips prior to forwarding the requests to the deck attendants for retrieval. This would improve assurance that the requested item is not charged out and the handwritten call number is accurate. However, CALM management informed us that it does not have the resources to perform this task at the present time.

Recommendation

We recommend that Library Services management place a high priority on resolving the issues preventing the public from using the ILS to request items.

III. Accuracy of the Retrieval Service

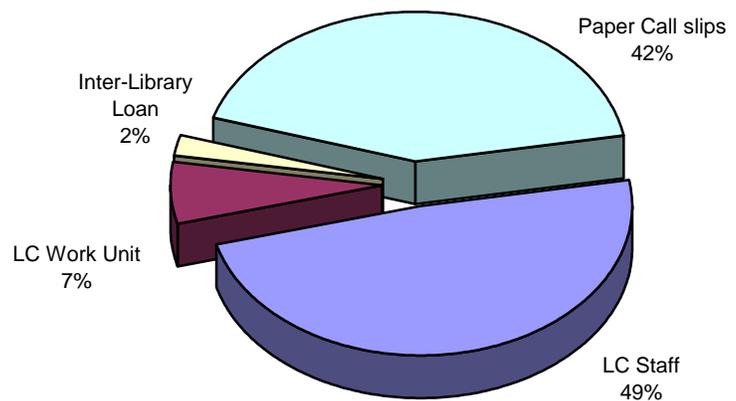
Manual statistics maintained by CALM's QA team indicate that the team finds 2.3 % of the requested books (5,615 found out of 244,093 requested in FY 2006⁵) in the exact or nearby their proper locations (within 20 books on either side). This means that the deck attendant did not conduct an effective search for an item subsequently located by the QA team in these cases. Considering the volume of requests and the decline in staff, we believe a first search accuracy rate of 97.7% is reasonable. CALM, however, is taking actions to further reduce the NOS rate, as follows:

- *Transferring Responsibility for Shelving Books to Contractors*

CALM is transferring the responsibility for shelving books from deck attendants to contractors. Each day deck attendants shelve approximately 2,000 items: 1,000 new and 1,000 returned items – in addition to retrieving about 1,000 items. Transferring the shelving responsibility to contractors should reduce the NOS rate in two ways. First, a staff of contractors will be exclusively devoted to the shelving task, thus reducing the time it takes to return books that were checked out. This should increase the books' availability for circulation. Second, relieving deck attendants of the shelving responsibility will provide them time to more carefully search for requested items. Deck attendants have been specially trained and are more familiar with the collections. As a result, their error rate should decline and the NOS rate should decrease accordingly.

In anticipation of transferring the shelving responsibilities, CALM management downsized its staff through attrition over the past several years. The contract does not provide CALM with additional staffing resources; the division expects a more-or-less one to one replacement of government FTEs with contractors.

Breakdown of FY2006 Requests by Type



⁵ Detail: Requests by Type:

Nonetheless, CALM management believes that separating the shelving and retrieving tasks will result in efficiencies by permitting deck attendants to focus exclusively on serving the Library's readers.

- *Conducting Immediate Second Searches*

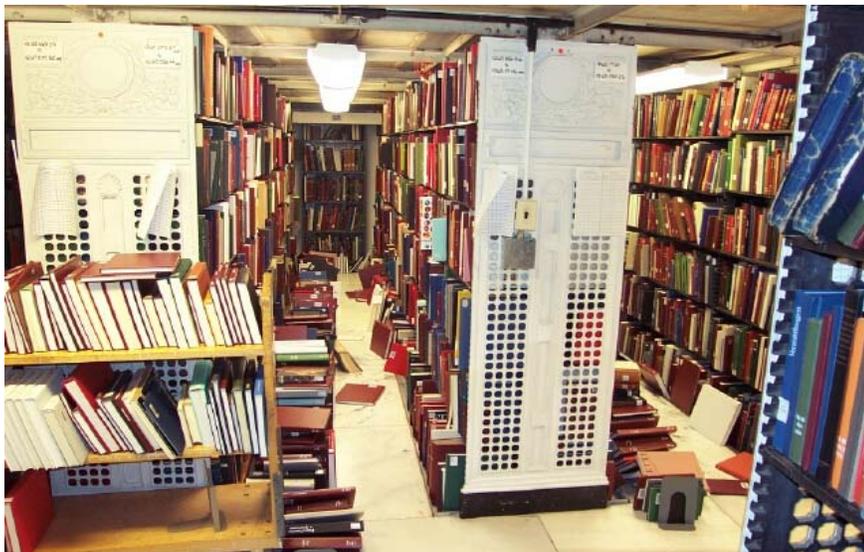
CALM has begun performing second searches immediately after all NOS reports yielded by both the ILS call slip module and paper call slips. This procedure is not expected to be as comprehensive as ones conducted by the QA team or Special Search Unit. For example, it will not include searching for the title in distribution (books returned for re-shelving) or asking the

requestor if they would like a substitute title if the exact item is not found. However, we expect this second immediate search to improve the deck attendants' error rate and yield corresponding improvements to the NOS rate.

- *Reducing Overcrowded Conditions*

CALM is shifting multiple copies and infrequently requested materials to the Library's high-density book storage facility at Fort Meade. This will reduce overcrowded shelf conditions

in the Jefferson Building (as shown in the picture below) and permit CALM to better organize and store collection items. As a result, finding requested items should become easier for deck attendants, which should also reduce the NOS rate.



Jefferson Building Stacks, Deck 15

Breakdown of the Not-On-Shelf Rate (five year trend)			
Category	Subcategory	Est. Number of Requests (ILS and Paper Call Slips)	%
Possible Deck Attendant Error	Found in exact location or within 20 books	4,160	1.7%
	Found in the vicinity (mis-shelved)	1,497	0.6%
Subtotal: Possible Deck Attendant Error		5,657	2.3%
QA Team located	Checked out	1,987	0.8%
	In process of being checked back in from charge out or from cataloging	1005	0.4%
	Found in distribution	862	0.4%
	Wrong call number, incorrect ILS, incorrect label on book	411	0.2%
	Misc. including alternate location	586	0.2%
Subtotal: Other Categories		4,851	2.0%
Unaccounted for by QA Team	Unaccounted for with QA search and no substitute found ⁶	29,548	12.1%
	Unaccounted for but substituted another year, call number, title, or author	1,473	0.6%
Subtotal: Unaccounted for by Quality Assurance		31,021	12.7%
TOTAL		41,529*	17.0%*
* Figures and percentages may not agree due to rounding			

- *Increasing the Accuracy of ILS Records Through the BIP*

CALM is taking action to reduce the NOS rate through its Baseline Inventory Program (BIP).

The division believes that the majority of NOS reports (the 12% unaccounted for with QA investigation) are caused by bibliographic errors and lack of inventory control. Materials cannot be located either because they are (1) mislabeled or have

⁶ If the QA search can not locate the exact book requested, then the searcher will ask the requestor if they would like a similar book by (1) the same author or (2) with the same title but different publication year or (3) in the same call number series, if available.

labels that are illegible or incomplete, (2) mis-shelved, or (3) converted to other formats or moved to an alternate location without a corresponding correction to the inventory record. Work on BIP includes a concerted effort to ensure the ILS inventory record agrees with a book's call number, location, and format. For the three-month period August 2006 to October 2006,⁷ BIP management estimated that about 2 percent of the books inventoried had a call number discrepancy (difference between book label and ILS record) or an illegible call number label. Additionally, 1.25 percent of the books inventoried did not have a corresponding ILS Mono Bibliographic record; in other words, the ILS was not aware of the item's existence. We believe the BIP should improve the Library's service to its patrons and improve CALM's effectiveness in retrieving items. The BIP will also yield improvements in the control over the collections.

Recommendation

None

⁷ FY 2006 statistics were not available at the time of our fieldwork.

▶▶ CONCLUSION

Our preliminary testing indicated that CALM is providing timely and accurate retrieval service, especially considering the volume of materials handled and the size of the Library's General Collections. We also concluded that CALM has an adequate internal control system and has a competent management team that effectively monitors the division's activities. Moreover, CALM has initiated actions that should improve its service. We plan to periodically perform testing in CALM in the future to monitor its service.

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