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MESSENGER

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Thirty Years of MINITEX

In 1969, a group of librarians and library paraprofessionals at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities Libraries initiated a pilot service for Minnesota library patrons that would permanently and fundamentally change how libraries would do business together. The Minnesota Interlibrary Teletype Experiment, or MINITEX, was funded with a grant from the Louis and Maud Hill Foundation and state and federal monies. The MINITEX staff, drawn from University of Minnesota Libraries and led by Alice Wilcox, retrieved and lent materials from the University Libraries in Minneapolis and St. Paul to patrons of 11 out-state academic and public libraries. Initial participating libraries, in addition to the University's Twin Cities Campus, were Bemidji State College, Duluth Public Library, Mankato State College, Rochester Public Library, Rochester State Junior College, St. Cloud State College, St. John's University, St. Mary's College, Southwest State College, and the University of Minnesota campuses in Duluth and Morris.

The pilot project was successful beyond all expectations, and by 1975, the annual total of requests of book loans had grown from 1969's figure of 20,000 to 250,000 requests for book loans and photocopies of articles. Today MINITEX (officially, the MINITEX Library Information Network) includes Minnesota, South Dakota, and North Dakota, although library cooperation in many MINITEX programs extends beyond the three-state region. Tradition and technological innovations, along with hard work and forward thinking on the part of library staff across our region, have merged to create a system of access to library services that is unique among library networks.

One of the original MINITEX staff members, Mary Rae Oxborrow, now of Plum Creek Library System in Worthington, MN, remembers: "The pilot project staff knew their performance could make or break MINITEX during the initial 18 months, so everyone hustled to make it work. . . .I remember a request coming in late one afternoon for a book in the Architecture Library (on the U of M East Bank Campus, across the river from the MINITEX office) when Alice (Wilcox, the director) and I were the only ones there. It was time to pack up the delivery, so Alice told me to start packing while she borrowed a bicycle and whipped over to the East Bank to get the book so it could go out that day."

A 1971 progress report offered a visual description of the "go-go" attitude that characterized the fledgling service: ". . . .A visitor to MINITEX headquarters in Wilson Library on the U of M Minneapolis campus (anyone is welcome) would see a beehive of activity. One would hear the constant receipt of requests on the TWX (Teletype machine), sometimes more than 500 a day! There is a bevy of student assistants fetching materials from nearly two-dozen library units of the University Library System. Couriers from CLIC and MELSA come and go. In all, upwards of 80,000 items were sent out to MINITEX participants in 1971-1972." Today, requests for loans of books and photocopies processed by MINITEX exceed 311,000 a year.

In 1971, John Robson, then Director of Instructional Resources, Southwest Minnesota State College in Marshall, said: "Faculty and students are loyal supporters of MINITEX and were very much concerned for its future during the last legislative session. Many of them wrote or talked with legislators to indicate their concern and to gain support for continuation of the project. Our holdings are still far too small to support specialized research by advanced students or faculty and the availability of the vast holdings of the University of Minnesota to our college community out on the plains is invaluable. Use increases daily and once a patron has discovered the ease with which the system serves him, he becomes a loyal supporter and user."

Rudy Johnson, then Assistant Professor and Librarian at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, was quoted in a 1971 MINITEX publication, saying: "The entire card catalog of the University of Minnesota has been put on 16mm microfilm and packaged conveniently in cassettes so that library patrons on coordinate campuses need only plug in a cassette into a motorized viewer to browse through the main union catalog. . . . And the patron can now identify his need by library call number for faster service. We were extremely pleased to receive this 500 cassette catalog along with the motorized viewers; this is probably the greatest thing that ever happened to the UMD library." (Things HAVE changed: imagine being delighted by the receipt of a 500-cassette catalog and motorized reader!)

As MINITEX matured as an organization, the original vision broadened to include new types of cooperative endeavors. Units were created to address opportunities in resource delivery, cataloging, collection development/cooperative purchasing, reference services, and storage.

DOCUMENT DELIVERY and the MINITEX DELIVERY SYSTEM

MINITEX participating libraries send requests to MINITEX via the MnSCU/PALS ILL Subsystem, the OCLC ILL Subsystem, the MINITEX webform, or by e-mail. **MINITEX Document Delivery** staff locates and retrieves needed materials from the University of Minnesota Libraries and from Minneapolis Public Library. In fiscal year 2001, MINITEX filled over 166,000 requests for material from these collections. Requests that cannot be filled by staff are referred to the more than 225 participating MINITEX libraries, to out-of-region locations, and to four national libraries known to have the items. Materials are sent to the requesting library via the MINITEX Delivery System. We also transmit over 50,000 articles per year via the Internet using Ariel software. Since Sept. 2000, MINITEX has delivered more than 9,000 articles directly to patron desktops.

The institutional lending sources of materials also shifted with the years. During the 18 months of the "MINITEX Experiment" (Jan. 1969-June 1970), MINITEX received 32,000 requests and filled 25,000. The University's Twin Cities Campus collections provided 100% of the delivered items. By 1983, 35% of the filled items were obtained off campus, a percentage that remains consistent to this day. In fiscal year 2001, we received over 166,000 requests for items held at the campus libraries, and sent more than 90,000 referral requests to other libraries. MINITEX staff consistently fills over 90% of all requests received.

Crucial to MINITEX's early success was building an efficient and reliable delivery service, which has evolved over the years into the **MINITEX DELIVERY SYSTEM**. Initially, items were sent to libraries using Greyhound bus, UPS, and US Mail. By the mid-1980's, however, delivery options were expanding. MINITEX contracted with Data Dispatch for dedicated courier services to libraries that used the service most heavily. Fifteen courier stops serving 68 libraries were created, with 21 receiving overnight delivery. In 1990, overnight direct borrowing was added for the MnSCU/PALS libraries through which the libraries route materials to one another via the MINITEX Delivery System. Also, in the 90s, the volume of library materials traveling among St. Cloud, Mankato, and Moorhead increased to the point where a new, separate direct route for those cities became practical. This Triangle route continues to provide direct delivery for academics and publics in those cities. That same year, MINITEX began an overnight delivery run between MINITEX and the WILS office in Madison, WI. Today, there are 78 courier stops serving 145 libraries, with much of the material MINITEX ships moving through overnight courier service five days a week (Monday-Friday).

MULS, THE MINITEX UNION LIST OF SERIALS

In the summer of 1971, work began on the preliminary edition of the *Minnesota Union List of Serials*, which was designed to support the Document Delivery Program. The first raw computer printout of the union list was published in 1972, containing only the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities campus serial holdings. By 1974, MULS contained holdings for academic, public, state government, and special libraries throughout Minnesota. In 1980, the last print edition of MULS (then, *MULS, a Union List of Serials*) was issued, containing holdings for Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Iowa.

Several years elapsed before OCLC was chosen to house the MULS database. During this time, MULS updates received from libraries throughout the three-state area were kept in the MINITEX office on small sheets of paper in dozens of card-board files. Until 1988, library staff verifying serials could call MINITEX verification staff for MULS updates. Finally, a

contract was signed with OCLC, and a MULS microfiche edition was published 1989. It contained 302,499 holdings attached to 111,254 bibliographic records. In 1994, MULS became available on MnSCU/PALS with annual updates, and in 1999, on the MnLINK Gateway. The most recent edition of MULS, published in Aug. 2001, contained 375,734 holdings attached to 159,104 bibliographic records.

REFERENCE

In Oct. 1973, MINITEX Reference Services was funded as a one-year pilot project with a grant from what is now Library Development and Services (LDS), a division of the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning. For almost 30 years, MINITEX Reference Services has provided back-up reference services to Minnesota public library systems. During 2001, access to the Reference Services program has expanded to include academic and school libraries through federal funding received from LDS. In 1987, Minnesota Opportunities for Reference Excellence (MORE) was introduced to Minnesota libraries. MINITEX reference staff was active in developing the manuals and in training library staff throughout the state in reference techniques and interview skills. Since 2000, with the inception of Electronic Library for Minnesota (ELM), reference staff have been criss-crossing Minnesota, providing information and training to library staff on the ins and outs of searching the statewide databases.

SERIALS EXCHANGE

Serials Exchange began in 1974 as a cooperative program between MINITEX and the University Libraries Gift and Exchange unit. Libraries would send duplicates and withdrawn issues of serials to MINITEX, which would use them to fill requests for libraries needing to fill gaps in their collections. From 1974-1987, libraries and other donors sent approximately 2.8 million items to Serials Exchange. Of that number, 254,000 were sent to participating libraries that had requested the issues. In 1987, MINITEX assumed sole responsibility for Serials Exchange and began to operate it on a cost recovery basis. That same year, Serials Exchange began to offer reference and other library materials through its Special Sets service. The Special Sets service has grown substantially, expanding to the Internet in 2001 with a Serials Exchange website. Since 1987, Serials Exchange has received over 4.3 million issues and sent over 50,000 issues or volumes to participating libraries, allowing them to collectively save thousands of dollars in collection development funds every year.

CATALOGING and OCLC

1975 was an important year for MINITEX/OCLC libraries. That year, the Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board and MINITEX negotiated an agreement with OCLC to provide OCLC services to MINITEX area libraries. MINITEX received grants from the Bush and Kellogg Foundations to assist in making an online cataloging system available to MINITEX and to individual libraries to build a MINITEX database of library holdings. On Dec. 21, 1976, St. Cloud State University was the first to input an OCLC record in our region. At many MINITEX institutions, OCLC-dedicated terminals were the very first computer terminals to be used in the library.

OCLC grew and by 1979, 97 MINITEX libraries were OCLC members. That April, the OCLC Interlibrary Loan subsystem went online, with plans to add Serials Control, Acquisitions and Circulation systems in the future. In 1984, South Dakota libraries transferred their network membership from BCR to MINITEX. 1999 saw the removal of the last OCLC dedicated line in the MINITEX region, as libraries took advantage of the Internet and other technological / telecommunications innovations to save time and money. Since 2000, small libraries in schools, government agencies, and corporations have been able to make cost-effective use of OCLC cataloging services via a Web-based interface called CatExpress. MINITEX now has 196 full OCLC cataloging member and 130 CatExpress subscribers.

In 1996, responding to the need of the Minnesota Trade Office's International Library for help with their cataloging workload, MINITEX entered into a joint venture with the Minnesota State Law Library to provide part-time, temporary cataloging services. The demand throughout the region for similar supplementary cataloging services proved to be so great that, in 1997, MINITEX established its own **Contract Cataloging** program, which has grown to four full-time and several part-time catalogers. In FY2001, staff cataloged over 13,700 titles for 24 libraries — reducing backlogs, helping with foreign language materials and special formats and enhancing resource sharing.

COOPERATIVE PURCHASING PROGRAM

1989 was the year that MINITEX fiscal services began to offer 3M tattlepapes and a few online reference services, such as DIALOG, BRS, and DataStar, in an effort to help libraries leverage their collective buying power. The following year, in 1990, the first full-time staff member was hired to develop that service. Today, the Cooperative Purchasing (CPP) and Electronic Information Technologies (EIT) programs have grown far beyond what could have been envisioned at their inception. In 1999 alone, cooperative purchases provided over \$1 million in savings to 1200 libraries. MINITEX Cooperative Purchasing now serves over 1200 libraries each year, providing reduced price access to databases, 3M security, barcode, and other supplies; over 50 electronic resources and products are available through the CPP and EIT programs.

ELECTRONIC INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

The Electronic Information Technologies (EIT) program was created in the early 1990's as part of a Minnesota State legislative initiative that funded an entire first generation of Internet computer technologies and services. State dollars stimulated the creation of GOPHER, VERONICA, the LUMINA-800 number, and other modes for accessing (primarily) science, medical and technology information on behalf of the general public. MINITEX EIT has evolved as a service helping member libraries identify and collaboratively acquire electronic resources to meet user needs as well as providing scanning equipment and services and maintaining the technology infrastructure for the MINITEX Office.

The MINITEX Electronic Information Resources Task Force is an appointed group of academic public, and state government librarians and K-12 school media specialists from Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota. They are charged with assisting MINITEX in identifying, evaluating, and recommending electronic resources of interest to the types of institutions they represent. Their work was key to selection of the suite of electronic resources and databases available to all citizens of Minnesota through the Electronic Library for Minnesota (ELM).

DOCUMENTS TO U

DOCUMENTS TO U (DOCS TO U) is a part of the MINITEX Document Delivery program, which assumed responsibility for part of the interlibrary lending activity for the University of Minnesota Twin Cities Libraries in 1996. DOCS TO U supplies loans and photocopies from the Twin Cities Campus' humanities, social & educational sciences, general sciences, math, journalism and engineering collections to academic institutions beyond the MINITEX three-state region as part of the public service mission of the University of Minnesota. Requested materials are retrieved by MINITEX staff and delivered electronically or by mail, usually within 48 hours of receipt of the request. During FY2000-2001, DOCUMENTS TO U received approximately 48,000 requests with an average turnaround time of 1.5 days for non-returnables and 2.0 for returnables. Fees are charged to non-consortial libraries for using the service.

MINNESOTA LIBRARY ACCESS CENTER

MINITEX's newest program is the Minnesota Library Access Center (MLAC), which it operates through agreements with the University of Minnesota. MLAC opened its doors in Jan. 2000. MLAC is located 82 feet beneath MINITEX's home in Elmer L. Andersen Library, in one of two 600-foot long caverns excavated into the Mississippi River bluff. MLAC provides a secure, climate-controlled environment for high-density storage of important but less frequently used collections owned by the University of Minnesota and libraries throughout Minnesota. In the first two years of operation, MLAC staff has accessioned more than half a million volumes from a wide range of Minnesota libraries. Unlike a library, which shelves by subject, MLAC shelves by size to achieve the most efficient use of space. Materials in MLAC are available to all Minnesota residents and students through interlibrary or intralibrary borrowing.

MINITEX Moves to Elmer L. Andersen Library

From the mid-1990's to the present, MINITEX, like the library systems it serves, has undergone waves of change. Services have expanded and been streamlined. Technology has become a mainstay of almost every aspect of MINITEX activity. MINITEX maintains a technical staff that works on our in-house systems, including creating internal databases and maintaining our web page. Our Support Services Staff takes your calls and e-mails, and makes sure that hundreds of administrative details are seen to. Bill DeJohn, the current MINITEX Director, has lead the organization since 1984. In 1999, Bill and the MINITEX staff began preparing to move the primary MINITEX office to new space in Elmer L. Andersen Library on the University of Minnesota's West Bank, and the move was completed early in 2000. The new offices are light and spacious, a far cry from the "unfinished basement room with unpainted wall and pipes and ducts overhead" that housed the original MINITEX staff in Wilson Library.

MINITEX and the Future

As MINITEX staff look toward the future, the need to merge tradition and innovation remains an important tenet of the staff's approach to providing services to libraries in the three-state region. With new statewide automation systems to be implemented in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota over the next few years, resource sharing will take a quantum leap. More people will have access to more information and materials available through libraries as well as on the World Wide Web. Through the expertise that MINITEX staff have developed over the years, MINITEX is positioned to continue "... to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of participating libraries by expanding their access to local, state, regional, national and international information resources."

The goals set forth by the MINITEX Advisory Committee in Dec. 1999 continue to guide the staff as it strives to incorporate new technologies and work with libraries in new ways. These goals are as relevant today as they were when MINITEX began, and we close this brief look at MINITEX history by reminding the reader of the MINITEX mission and goals.

The mission of the MINITEX Library Information Network is to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of participating libraries by expanding their access to local, state, regional, national and international information resources

This is accomplished by promoting partnerships, effective delivery of needed information and by sharing library resources including collections and electronic resources, bibliographic records, and reference services through conventional, electronic, and innovative means. MINITEX pursues technological innovations to provide new opportunities for delivery of services.

The goal of the MINITEX staff is to facilitate resource-sharing activities of participating libraries by providing:

- *Access to electronic information resources through consortial purchase agreements;*
- *A system for delivering and sharing information and resources among participating libraries;*
- *Access to bibliographic records and technical support for cataloging services including identification of local holdings for all types of formats;*
- *Maintenance of a union list of serials for the region;*
- *Leadership and expertise to participating libraries and other public bodies to further interlibrary cooperation and innovation;*
- *Forums for ongoing planning of interlibrary activities and cooperation with groups and agencies with similar goals and activities (e.g. state, regional, national, and international);*
- *Training, continuing education, and professional development for library staff members relevant to the mission of MINITEX so libraries can serve their users more efficiently and effectively.*

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