

MULS 2001:
Survey of MINITEX Participating
Libraries
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<u>Executive Summary</u>	1
<u>Background</u>	2
<u>Survey Content</u>	2
<u>Survey Responses</u>	3
ILL Responses	
Reference Responses	
Collection Development Responses	
<u>Questions & Comments</u>	8
Electronic Journals – Holdings & Links to Content	
MULS Updating – An Automated Option & MULS Updating Service	
Has Technology Provided a Silver Bullet?	
<u>So, a Temporary Conclusion</u>	10

Executive Summary

After 30 years of providing vital service to staffs of libraries in the three-state MINITEX region, MULS has reached yet another major decision point:

- Should it continue as a separate database containing summary level serials holdings information and bibliographic records for the full mix of academic, public, state government, and special libraries that have made up the list in the past?
- What will MULS' role be in an information environment influenced strongly by the Minnesota Library Information Network (MnLINK); successors to the current South Dakota Library Network (SDLN) and Online Dakota Information Network (ODIN) in North Dakota; and other group catalogs throughout the region?
- Does technology now offer alternatives sufficient to fill MULS' primary role as the source for holdings information about the serials owned by libraries in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota?

To answer these questions, the MINITEX/MULS staff has undertaken a study of:

- the current and projected uses of MULS,
- the continuing value of its combination of bibliographic records for serials and summary holdings information¹,
- the alternatives that technology offers now and will in the near future to provide access to information about the serial holdings of libraries in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

As a first step in this study, MINITEX/MULS staff conducted a survey in Fall 2001 to develop a snapshot of current MULS usage and provide baseline information for planning for serials ILL in the future. The surveys, which were developed to solicit input from interlibrary loan, reference, and collection development staff, were mailed to approximately 300 libraries in the three-state region. Responses were received from 111 libraries from throughout the region.

The following report summarizes the responses received, illustrating the current level of dependence on the MULS database and concerns about continuing access to the information it provides. On the basis of these responses and our understanding of current technological options, MINITEX plans to continue support for and operation of a separate MULS database until the MnLINK Integrated Library System and Gateway and successors to SDLN and ODIN have been implemented, and we can evaluate whether these systems -- or other technological alternatives -- provide tools sufficient to help users gain access to serial publications.

To make continued MULS maintenance more feasible and more useful, MINITEX will work:

- with OCLC to support the Local Data Record Updating Service (LDRUS), which provides union list libraries with an automated option for updating their union list holdings. MULS holdings for Minnesota State University, Mankato, and St. Cloud State University were updated successfully via LDRUS in late Dec. 2001.

¹Summary holdings are those at the first (or, highest) level of enumeration and chronology -- for example, v. 1- 1960- . This level of information has been judged to be the most effective to support interlibrary loan activity, as opposed to detailed or item level records, frequently maintained in a library's online catalog. The vocabulary and information included in these holdings is governed by *ANSI/NISO Z39.71-1999, Holdings Statements for Bibliographic Items*.

- with staffs of libraries, OCLC, vendors, and others to facilitate inclusion in MULS of information about libraries' holdings of electronic serials.
- with vendors, the staff of MnLINK, and others to facilitate linking to electronic serial publications and electronic database content through MULS.

The next step in the MULS review process will include working with Minnesota's public library systems and Fretwell-Downing Inc. (the company selected to provide the software to support interlibrary loan through the MnLINK Gateway) to determine whether serials holdings information included in the library system catalogs can support ILL via the Gateway. A report on this activity will be issued in Spring 2002.

Background

The survey of MINITEX participating libraries shows that *MULS: the MINITEX Union List of Serials* continues to be the primary tool used to identify potential sources for interlibrary loan (ILL) requests for the content of serials publications. The second-oldest program of the MINITEX Library Information Network, MULS was published first in 1972 to provide serials location information to support MINITEX's fast-growing ILL program. That MULS (entitled the *Minnesota Union List of Serials*) was limited to the serial holdings of the libraries of the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities Campus. By the end of the decade, holdings for libraries throughout Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota had been added. MULS began as a locally maintained, mainframe computer-based database, which was transferred to the OCLC Union List service in 1987-1988. Over the past 30 years, MULS has provided vital support for MINITEX resource sharing programs.²

Survey Content

The Fall 2001 survey sought information about the use of MULS by interlibrary loan, reference, and collection development staff of MINITEX participating libraries. The survey asked staff whether they used MULS in their work, how it fit into their workflow, what other sources of information were used in addition to MULS, and whether they had suggestions or concerns about either MULS' current status or its future role for MINITEX libraries.

Also, to indicate which forms of MULS are considered most useful by library staff, the survey asked responders how they access the MULS database and which of the seven alternatives is their preferred method of access. The access options include:

- the OCLC Union List service
- the OCLC ILL service
- the MnLINK Gateway
- Web PALS
- Classic PALS
- the microfiche edition
- printed lists (or other offline products) for individual libraries or groups of libraries

Each of these access methods has unique advantages:

² The MULS database also provided some of the bibliographic records used as start-up files for the CONSER database in OCLC, and MINITEX/MULS staff undertook special projects that created union list holdings for libraries in Montana, Wisconsin, and Iowa.

- OCLC Union List or OCLC ILL provides access to the most current MULS information; MULS is hosted by OCLC's Union List service and holdings are created, updated, and deleted in the service.
- MULS information available via the MnLINK Gateway, Web and Classic PALS, and the microfiche edition is identical and is updated each year in early Fall.

The Gateway's presentation of MULS data is unique in that it features a fuller version of the holding libraries' names – rather than the 3-, 6-, or 7-character codes used to identify libraries in OCLC or the PALS versions of the database. The Gateway version has the disadvantage for libraries in North and South Dakota that these fuller names require more characters, so Dakota libraries' holdings may not appear on commonly held titles due to limits imposed by maximum record size.

The PALS access options fit well with the workflow of MnSCU/PALS libraries and offer either command-driven or web-based options for access to the data. The PALS and Gateway options allow searching of the MULS database without the searching and transaction fees required for searching MULS online in OCLC.

The microfiche provides for easy scanning of bibliographic records as well as group displays, which show holdings for all MULS libraries that have reported holdings for a title.

- Individual libraries or groups of libraries may order offline products -- in the form of printed lists, microfiche, magnetic tape, tape cartridge, or as an electronic data file -- twice a year. Many libraries use these offline products as holdings lists for an individual library or group of libraries.

Survey Responses

All types of MINITEX libraries responded to the survey:

Table 1: Libraries responding to survey

Library Type	Minnesota (78 libraries)	North Dakota (20 libraries)	South Dakota (13 libraries)	Total libraries (111 libraries)
Academic	45	9	7	61
Public	20	4	5	29
Medical	2	4	1	7
Special	5	1	0	6
State Government	6	2	0	8

ILL Responses

The responses showed that MULS' traditional role as a source for serials holdings information continues to be its most important function. Three-fourths of Minnesota respondents said they considered MULS to be their primary serials locations tool. For the region, as a whole, approximately two-thirds reported it as their primary tool:

Table 2: Use of MULS to locate resources for ILL

	Primary Tool	One among others
Minnesota	52	18
North Dakota	9	9
South Dakota	<u>2</u>	<u>4</u>
Overall	70	31

ILL staff reported using all seven forms of MULS access, but when asked to identify their preferred method, the majority showed strong preferences for the two MnSCU/PALS access methods or the MnLINK Gateway:

Table 3: Methods used to Access MULS holdings data

Access Methods Used:	Minnesota (78 libraries)	North Dakota (20 libraries)	South Dakota (13 libraries)
OCLC Union List	23	7	4
OCLC Interlibrary Loan	24	11	5
MnLINK Gateway	30	1	2
Web PALS	29	6	7
Classic PALS	37	13	7
Microfiche	14	7	2
Printed Lists	14	3	2

Table 4: Preferred method of Access to MULS holdings data*

Preferred Access Method:	Minnesota	North Dakota	South Dakota
OCLC Union List	5	0	0
OCLC Interlibrary Loan	2	2	0
MnLINK Gateway	9	0	0
Web PALS	16	0	6
Classic PALS	22	7	4
Microfiche	4	3	1
Print	0	0	0

(*Not all libraries indicated a preferred access method.)

The PALS access options were used by MnSCU/PALS libraries (which made up slightly less than half of the Minnesota respondents) and non-PALS libraries, alike. The Web PALS option was preferred by a combination of PALS and non-PALS academic libraries, while Classic PALS was preferred by a number of public library systems (both PALS and non-PALS), academic, and state government libraries. Non-PALS public library systems made up the majority of those preferring access via the MnLINK Gateway.

ILL staff were asked to describe the role of MULS in their ILL operations, to identify other sources they use for holding information and why, and to offer their suggestions and concerns about the current status and future of MULS. Many respondents said that they used MULS in combination with the University of Minnesota Twin Cities MnCAT, MnSCU/PALS, CLICnet, SDLN, or ODIN as their first resort for location information. Minnesota public library staff members outlined basic procedures that are recommended by MINITEX document delivery staff:

-- "My understanding for MULS locations to request from are: MDH, MLL, MNP, MNU, MPI, UMM. If location of serial is one of these I would list under verified. If not found, I put 0. If patron gives other information, I would type that also."

-- "The first step we take with a periodical request is to check it against MULS. We use it to verify periodical holdings, titles, histories before turning to the OCLC ILL service (non-MULS holdings) to search farther a field."

Staff at a Minnesota academic library described how they bring MnCAT and other catalogs into the mix: "We check the UM catalog first for serials holdings, then we check MULS. Even if MULS does not give us a location with holdings, from which to borrow, we still use MULS as verification when sending requests to MINITEX."

Staff in North Dakota noted that MULS is useful “especially since we can determine holdings of non-ODIN libraries in ND on that database.” (MULS includes holdings for ODIN libraries as well as those in the Bismarck-based Central Dakota Library Network and other North Dakota libraries.) In South Dakota, MULS is also considered valuable because of its broader reach: “MULS is used to verify MN and/or ND holdings as they are not items held within South Dakota.”

An interesting array of other resources for serials location information and serials content was mentioned, among them: OCLC FirstSearch & WorldCat; InfoTrac, ProQuest, EBSCO, CARL Uncover, Amazon.com, Ingenta, askERIC, Digital Dissertations, DOCLINE, SERHOLD, ATLA religion database, and other online resources; library OPACs and printed libraries’ serials lists; CISTI; Google; *Gregory’s American Newspapers, 1821-1936*; *Ulrich’s Periodical Directory*; Gale directories; and the Library of Congress’ *Union List of Serials*, *New Serial Titles*, and *Newspapers on microform*.

Opinions about the continuing need for MULS, or a source for serials holdings information like it, varied, but the majority favored its continuation:

-- “From what I saw at the NODES meeting [an MINITEX/LDS meeting with librarians from Minnesota public library system nodes held in Oct. 2001], the MnLINK Gateway will not be a substitute for the MULS union list any time soon, for ILL purposes anyway. The summary information of a union list is most efficient for ILL work. If you could mount MULS on MnLINK with a more efficient interface and have a link from the MULS record to a MnLINK search for that title, that might be the best of both worlds.”

-- “MULS is not kept up-to-date.”

“I am constantly hearing that it’s not updated. Either have it updated or do away with it. Otherwise I am making more work for MINITEX and myself.”

(NB: Maintaining the currency of their MULS data is one of the basic responsibilities of MULS participating libraries and is one of the specific obligations stated in the MINITEX Criteria for Participation.

As mentioned earlier, MULS online in OCLC is updated constantly; MULS in PALS and the MnLINK Gateway and the MULS microfiche edition are updated annually. Annual updates have been judged sufficiently frequent considering the number of updates made to the database, the \$20,000 cost of the microfiche edition, and the \$17,000 cost of the tape used to update the PALS and MnLINK access options.

OCLC’s Local Data Record Updating service is expected to provide a batchload updating option for MULS libraries. See pp. 8-9 for more information.)

-- “MULS is a wonderful tool for verifying locations for serials, and I hope it will continue in the future.”

-- “I do see it [MULS] playing an important role still in the future especially as a verification tool for state holdings.”

-- “I would love to see an online version of MULS that showed me the holdings of all libraries at a glance – like the microfiche does. This would combine the searching capabilities of the online version with the efficiency in determining holdings of the fiche version.”

Reference Responses

Responses from reference staff indicated that more than two-thirds reported using MULS as one of their reference tools (65 “yes,” 30 “no”). Reference staff also stated preferences for each of the MULS access methods:

Table 5: Preferred method of Access to MULS holdings data*

Preferred Access Method:	Minnesota	North Dakota	South Dakota
OCLC Union List	2	1	0
OCLC Interlibrary Loan	1	0	1
MnLINK Gateway	14	0	0
Web PALS	15	2	2
Classic PALS	6	4	3
Microfiche	1	2	0
Print	3	1	1

(*Not all libraries indicated a preferred access method.)

Asked to describe their uses of MULS, respondents cited a variety of uses – some creative!

-- “It is sometimes used when a patron says he has read something about the subject in a magazine; this verifies the exact title of [the] serial and, occasionally, there is a direct web link to that serial’s website for further searching. Sometimes there is a regional location where it can be accessed.”

-- “Printed works great with students who want to check against a list in a database and have problems with multiple window use on the computer. (Also browsing and checking [Fargo/Moorhead] holdings.)”

-- “Sometimes we use it to find out about our own holdings. For example, we use the printed version for call numbers. Some of our older periodicals are not yet cataloged on PALS but are on MULS.”

-- “We use the printouts when updating our holdings.”

-- “Sometimes consult it to see where a journal might be indexed.”

-- “The only way I can remember using it in Reference is when a student wanted to use a resource & was willing to travel to get access on the weekend. We’d first check MULS, then check that library’s catalog (thinking the catalog would be more exact/accurate).”

-- “Check to see if a serial is available from a MULS library and which library. Check vols. Available. Get ISSN for request before it goes to ILL.”

Opinions differed on the need for continuation of MULS, particularly the MULS microfiche edition:

-- “With the advent of online catalogs, it is easier to check holdings there since they are item specific. MULS data is not detailed enough for most reference requests.”

-- “It would be great to link quickly to actual library holdings at the piece level. Still, it is useful.”

-- “It is critical to have it available in at least two web sites that are available (free) to access, as sometimes one website is down.”

-- “It is essential that we continue to have access to MULS as a way of tracking regional periodical holdings for our student (& staff & public) clientele.”

-- “Hope MULS will NOT go away. Very useful service.”

-- “We used to use it, but now we do not.”

-- "I would hope MINITEX would continue to maintain MULS as a separate database. It is much clearer that searching a general catalog for periodical information. Very efficient to search."

Collection Development Responses

The access method preferences among collection development staff mirrored that for interlibrary loan and reference – with the majority favoring the PALS access methods or the MnLINK Gateway:

Table 6: Preferred method of Access to MULS holdings data*

Preferred Access Method*:	Minnesota	North Dakota	South Dakota
OCLC Union List	3	1	1
OCLC Interlibrary Loan	1	0	1
MnLINK Gateway	11	0	0
Web PALS	13	2	1
Classic PALS	10	2	2
Microfiche	2	1	0
Print	0	2	1

(*Not all libraries indicated a preferred access method.)

Collection development staff provided a number of interesting comments about their access method preferences:

- "I like microfiche because you can scan it if you aren't quite sure of the title. Secondly, I like (it's a tie between) the MnLINK Gateway file and the MnSCU/PALS web interface."
- "Yes, the file on the MnLINK Gateway is easier to use than the fiche."
- "Printed is nice – handy to have at hand while checking against other lists that might be online."
- "MnLINK is easiest to access and to determine holdings without knowledge of symbols. Fewer steps to get to descriptions."
- "For quick checks – [OCLC] Union List. For holdings checks fiche are sometimes easier/clearer."
- "Prefer online for most things, but do use the printed list occasionally also."
- "Web interface is easier to use and becoming better know by others. Also easier for new staff."
- "[Classic PALS] = quick, easy, understand the commands to get there."

The majority of collection development staff responding said MULS holdings information did not influence their libraries' collection development decisions ("Yes" 44, "No" 48), but a greater number report consulting MULS to determine whether a title held in their library is the MINITEX region's only copy ("Yes" 52, "No" 35). Collection development staff cited use for ILL, inventory of local holdings, and as a holdings aid when dealing with their users as their most frequent uses of the MULS database.

Comments and suggestions about MULS and its future also resembled those of interlibrary loan and reference staff:

- "An indispensable tool – most convenient and comprehensive for knowledge of regional holdings."
- "I think it will continue to be a useful database – people are often willing to travel in the Metro area to find the title they need."

-- “Microfiche does not seem to be used anymore.”

-- “I suppose that holdings info could be obtained through other mechanisms. As long as it is – utility is less but without that it is vital.”

Questions & Comments

The responses included questions and comments about a number of topics related to MULS and union listing in general:

Electronic Journals – Holdings & Links to Content

A number of responses raised the issue of including holdings for electronic journals in MULS. There are two developments that we’d like to highlight on this topic.

- OCLC has issued a new document, “OCLC Union List Guidelines for Electronic Serials” (<http://www.oclc.org/oclc/union/eserials.shtm>), which provides guidance to library staff charged with manual input of holdings for their libraries’ electronic staff into MULS or other OCLC-based union lists of serials. In addition to providing “how-to” instructions on creating union list holdings for electronic serials, the Guidelines also present information about topics that library staff should consider in making the decision whether to union list their e-serials.
- Some publishers of electronic serials and database aggregators now provide MARC bibliographic records for their serials and titles included in their aggregated databases – and more publishers and vendors are expected to provide this service in the future. There have also been discussions of the value of vendor-provided holdings information for these products; if these holdings packages are offered in the future, exploration will be given to their incorporation into union lists of serials.

Another exciting topic related to e-serials and union lists is linking from union list records directly to the content of an electronic serial or database. This feature is already available for some titles through MULS on the MnLINK Gateway. The bibliographic records for MULS on the Gateway are the master OCLC bibliographic records to which MULS holdings have been attached; catalogers have added URIs in 856 MARC fields to some of these records. These links are included in the Gateway MULS record, and the searcher is provided with appropriate options (based on his/her authentication) for links to content of electronic serials available through JSTOR, OCLC FirstSearch, Project MUSE, open access sites, and other electronic sources. While users lacking appropriate authentication will not be able to access these resources, the 856 URI links are an important step forward. Vendors of large aggregator databases are also beginning to facilitate this kind of linking to the content of their databases, and MINITEX will be exploring these possibilities for MULS.

MULS Updating – An Automated Option & MULS Updating Service

Questions and concerns about the currency of MULS holdings information came up often in the survey responses. As noted earlier, MULS participating libraries have the responsibility to keep their holdings up-to-date. We’re happy that OCLC has reimplemented the Local Data Record Updating Service (LDRUS) to provide an automated union list updating option. Also, the MINITEX/MULS staff continues to provide training sessions and telephone support for staff of MULS libraries charged with updating their libraries’ MULS holdings. We also offer the MULS Updating Service, a fee-for-service option for full member MULS/OCLC libraries that lack the staff time or expertise to keep their MULS holdings current.

Through LDRUS, OCLC can accept serials holdings information output by a library's automated system and use that to update the library's union list holdings. To use LDRUS, libraries must:

- be able to output their serials holdings information in MARC 21 Format for Holdings Data and in compliance with NISO holdings standards (currently *ANSI/NISO Z39.71-1999, Holding Statement Standards for Bibliographic Items*).
- have already set holdings for their serials in OCLC WorldCat.
- be able to include the OCLC bibliographic record control in their holdings records.

More information about the requirements for LDRUS is available at the OCLC website:

<http://www.oclc.org/oclc/union/ldrus.pdf>

MnSCU/PALS was the first automated system to be able to meet OCLC's specifications for LDRUS updating. SDLN, with its PALS based system, may be the second automated system in the MINITEX region to provide its participants with the LDRUS option. We will be working with other system vendors that have client libraries in the region to encourage them to implement this capability.

The MULS Updating Service is a continuing option available through the MINITEX/MULS Office. Libraries may provide their serials holdings information in a variety of forms, and MULS staff performs the updating online for a limited fee. (More information about the Service is available by contacting Dave Linton in the MINITEX/MULS Office, 612-624-3360, 800-462-5348, linto001@umn.edu.) The MINITEX/MULS staff continues to update the MULS holdings of MULS participating libraries without direct access to OCLC Union Listing without charge.

MINITEX/MULS staff have reviewed statistics of update activity by MULS libraries and will be contacting libraries with limited activity to offer support and assistance for their updating efforts.

Has Technology Provided a Silver Bullet?

As shown by some of the comments included in earlier sections of this report, respondents to the Fall 2001 MULS survey asked whether technology currently provides options that would fill the same role as MULS for providing information about serial holdings of MINITEX libraries. There are growing numbers of options, including:

- Broadcast searching via Z39.50 can provide information about the serial holdings of specified libraries. The success of these searches depends, however, on factors ranging from the Z39.50 implementation and OPAC indexing structure of the target libraries to Internet response time and staff's knowledge and ability to predict the most appropriate potential lenders.
- Automated routing of ILL requests for serials can successfully locate potential lenders. At this point, however, the majority of automated routing systems of which we are aware provide only title-level verification of whether a potential lender holds an item. (In other words, they are not able to "read" the holdings statement to determine how many issues -- or how long a time span -- of the title is owned by the library.) Routing at the title level -- without reference to summary holdings information -- can lead to /inappropriate requests and time lost for library staff and patrons alike.

The current exception to the lack of holdings-level routing functionality is MnSCU/PALS, which provides automated routing of ILL requests for serials based on the chronology information in MULS holding statements. Also, Fretwell-Downing has pledged that the VDX version that will be available for

implementation for MnLINK Gateway ILL will be able to parse volume and issue information. We will be exploring what this will mean for automated routing of ILL requests for serials.

OCLC plans to develop functionality so its Interlibrary Loan service can “read” MULS and other OCLC-based union list holdings to direct automated routing, but a timeline has not be set for this development work.

At this point, technology has not provided a sufficient alternative to replace MULS as a primary verification tool for serials interlibrary loan requests for MINITEX libraries.

So, a Temporary Conclusion

As with all the resources used to accomplish interlibrary loan, MULS is a means to an end (namely, provision of information to the library user), not “the end,” itself. As we said at the beginning, MULS has reached another decision point in its 30-year-history. As shown in the responses to the Fall 2001 MULS survey and by the lack of a readily available, adequate alternative, MULS continues to be needed and will continue to be for sometime to come.

We thank everyone who took time to respond to the survey – and all those who help maintain MULS and use it to support their work. The next 5-6 years will bring significant changes for libraries in the MINITEX region. MULS will continue to play a part in these changes.

Cecelia N. Boone, Assistant to the Director for MULS & Communications

(with much credit to Dave Linton, MULS unit assistant, for helping to prepare the survey and for tabulating responses and compiling statistics)