Getting a handle on library publications

Balancing creativity and consistency—the University of Iowa Libraries' publication guidelines

by Hope Barton and Michael Levine-Clark

L ibraries regularly publish a wide range of materials for a variety of reasons: to instruct about the use of particular resources, to inform about library services, to announce programs, and to report on goals and activities. Because such publications are vital tools for reaching and informing users, it is important that they be readily identifiable and reflect well upon the library system.

The University of Iowa Libraries' Executive Committee, along with an ad hoc committee formed to investigate the libraries' publications, determined that the publications created by the various units of the Libraries had developed disparate styles and were often not distinguishable as being issued by the same overarching organization. Because the number of these publications was increasing in step with the libraries' growing library instruction, outreach, and electronic initiatives, this became a matter of concern.

With this problem in mind, the Publications Review Advisory Committee (PRAC) was established to develop a formal set of publications guidelines for materials produced by

the libraries. (PRAC is currently being reconstituted to become the Public Relations Advisory Committee and will have a subcommittee for maintaining the guidelines.)

Goals of publication guidelines
From the beginning, PRAC wanted to ensure consistency across all of the libraries' publications without sacrificing authors' flexibility or creativity. While it would be necessary for the guidelines to include requirements, the group wanted the guidelines to provide staff with a "toolkit" to assist them in creating and revising publications. In addition, it was important that publications, especially those produced on short notice for upcoming classes, not need approval prior to production. PRAC members emphatically did not want to police publications. However, to monitor the guidelines' success and to revise them accordingly, PRAC did decide that all publications should be submitted to PRAC after they had been written and distributed.

Developing publication levels
The first step in developing guidelines was

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to review the literature and publication guidelines developed by other institutions. This was helpful but still left the group without a model that embraced the high level of flexibility it felt was crucial given the wide range of publications produced within the library system. PRAC then looked at the model that had unofficially come to govern the University of Iowa Libraries Web site.

Web oriented though it was, this model met the goals PRAC was striving for. The basic scheme was hierarchical but allowed a great deal of flexibility in terms of style and content. The top level (that is, the topmost pages of the site) was the most stringent in terms of requirements (though still not very), with the stringency decreasing rapidly as one moved toward "lower" levels.

Realizing it would be difficult to define levels without first examining the libraries' publishing output, PRAC gathered about 100 publications of various types from all units. These publications were reviewed in light of both style and content and grouped into categories (e.g., class handouts, announcements of events or services, guides, official policies). Ultimately more than 20 categories were identified.

Although the categories were very useful in helping the group focus on what was needed to cover all situations, they were not precise enough to differentiate the variations and combinations of document types.

After much brainstorming, two variables were identified to help differentiate the publications into levels: the intended magnitude of distribution; and the degree of permanence. Using these criteria, a grid was created plotting degree of permanence on the y-axis and intended magnitude of distribution on the x-axis. All publication categories were then mapped on the grid.

When the categories had been plotted, the levels became obvious. Four levels emerged, as follows:

• **Level 1:** Publications that tended to be ephemeral in nature and that were generally not for wide distribution. Included were print and electronic internal policies, class handouts, and handouts for conference sessions created by individual staff members.

• **Level 2:** Publications that were somewhat permanent in nature, with a wide distribution beyond the libraries on campus or else external to the campus. Included were print and electronic service forms, announcements of events and programs, and conference handouts created by the libraries' units.

• **Level 3:** Publications that were rather permanent in nature, with generally campus-wide or wide off-campus distribution. Included were print and electronic guides to bibliographic and nonbibliographic tools, service guides, maps, and announcements aimed primarily off-campus.

• **Level 4:** Publications having a high level of permanence, with wide off-campus distribution. Included were print and electronic official policies and guidelines (e.g., collection development policies, information for donors of gifts-in-kind, circulation policies), promotional publications with an emphasis on services, publicity for recurring events (e.g., exhibitions), and the libraries home-page.

Guideline elements

With the levels established, PRAC began to identify required and optional elements (e.g., the libraries' full name and logo) to be included on publications in each level. Depending on the level, these elements would be required (generally the case for the higher levels); optional (generally the case for the lowest level); or "as appropriate." The guidelines do not specify where the elements are to be placed in the publication, allowing authors to tailor the format of the document to its content and audience. The elements that were defined are:

• University of Iowa Libraries name
• Contact information
• Date
• Author
• Unit name
• Libraries' logo
• URL (for electronic publications)

Documentation and presentation to staff

With the guidelines created, PRAC's next challenge was to develop documentation that would incorporate the levels, defined

Glossary of terms

A. Column Headings

1. "UI Libs' name": This should appear on the first page of a print publication or near the top of an electronic publication as a heading, or a label, or in some other way that clearly indicated the UI Libraries' provenance.

2. "Contact info": Provide the means by which the creator (or another person or unit, if appropriate) can be contacted.

3. "Date": Date of creation, revision, or modification as most appropriate.

4. "Author": Person, department, or unit responsible for creating the document.

5. "Unit name": Branch library, department, and/or unit within a branch library or department.

6. "Logo": The logo will be provided on stationery and templates, and in electronic format. The logo consists of a graphic and text.

7. "Refer to style sheet": A style sheet is provided to assist with preferred formats for citations, locations with call numbers, typ-ing instructions, and use of branch libraries names.

B. Levels

1. "Levels": Refers to extent that specific formats and/or information are required. The "level" is ordinarily predicated on the magnitude of distribution and the degree of permanence of the publication.

2. "Scale": Level 1 (lowest) = fewest number of requirements; Level 4 (highest) = greatest number of requirements.

C. Key to Quick Guide Table

1. "Required": Must be used unless there are special circumstances (in purpose or design) as determined by the author's supervisor with approval from Libraries administration (director's level).

2. "Optional": At the discretion of the author and/or supervisor of the publication.

3. "As Appropriate": To be determined by the author and/or supervisor of the publication.

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elements, and permanence/distribution concept, and also be user-friendly and accommodate a variety of learning styles. The guidelines would be successful only if they could be used efficiently and effectively.

As the group discussed how to present this information clearly and logically, it became apparent that several supporting pieces of information were needed to convey the various aspects of the guidelines. As a result, a sectional approach was chosen for the documentation.

- **Introduction:** The introduction explains the purpose of the guidelines and how they are to be used, emphasizing their dynamic nature and "unpoliced" nature and also encouraging questions and suggestions.

- **Quick Guide:** In table format, the quick guide maps the type of publication by level and the defined elements (UI Libraries name, contact info, date, etc.). Each cell in the table contains a code indicating whether the element is required (R), optional (O), or used "as appropriate" (A).

- **Glossary of Terms:** This section defines the elements, levels, and other terms contained in the documentation (see sidebar above).

- **Style Sheet:** The style sheet contains requirements for levels two through four as well as conventions for citation formation, call numbers, keyboard conventions, and names of the libraries' units (see sidebar on page 985).

- **Detailed Help Chart:** This chart consists of the original grid used to chart all publication types and to define publication levels. It maps publication types/levels by degree of permanence and magnitude of distribution/readership.

- **Detailed Help Examples:** The examples contained here show the libraries' common publication types, mapping them into the four publication levels.

The documentation, still considered a draft, was developed in both print and electronic versions. The print version was distributed to managers of all of the libraries' units and the electronic version was posted on the Web.

After the guidelines were announced and distributed, PRAC conducted a library forum at which the guidelines were discussed. At the forum, a number of questions and comments arose, and some of this feedback was incorporated into the guidelines and documentation. Print and electronic (http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/prac/guidelines.pdf) versions of the finalized guidelines were then made available.

The guidelines in action

Since the guidelines were developed, a section on incorporating university and federal guidelines on nondiscrimination and accommodations statements into publications has been added. Also, the guidelines have undergone some fine-tuning in response to questions and comments received from publication authors. As a result, a FAQ section has been added to the Web site (http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/prac/faq.html). Additionally, several versions of the libraries' logo and a template, both in downloadable form, have been added to the site. PRAC hopes to develop more templates to assist authors with their publication efforts.

As mentioned earlier, it was not PRAC's intent to police the guidelines. Units within the libraries are not expected to rewrite existing publications in order to bring them into line with the guidelines. Instead, the guidelines are to be used when revising or updating publications in the normal course of events. Because staff sometimes forget about the guidelines, PRAC periodically sends out a call via e-mail asking individuals and units to submit a copy of updated and new publications. It is hoped this will also create an opportunity for authors to share questions and comments with others and help PRAC further fine-tune the guidelines.

Conclusion

Thus far, the "Publications Guidelines for Print and Electronic Publications" created by PRAC appear to be meeting the committee's goal of combining flexibility with consistency. Authors have been able to create publications without having their creativity stifled. The requirements can be fit into publications in many different ways and are beginning to imbue the entire range of publications with a sufficiently consistent appearance.

Users can now recognize University of Iowa Libraries publications for what they are and determine whom to contact for more information. The guidelines, while not being burdensome for authors (and in some cases, making their work easier) have clarified the provenance of library publications and thus benefited both the University of Iowa Libraries and its community of users. ∎
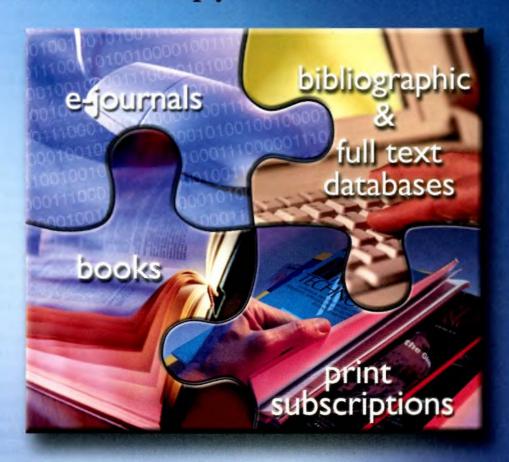
Style sheet

1. Citation format: When providing full citations for information sources, follow a style manual appropriate for the field, e.g., Chicago/Turabian, MLA, APA.

2. Citation for electronic sources: Make the format of full citations to electronic sources consistent within a publication, and follow either 1) formats offered by field-specific style manual for electronic sources or 2) a widely accepted style manual for electronic sources.

3. Call numbers: When spelling out locations with call number of cataloged items, first give the location, as it is phrased (or would be phrased) in LCAT. Then provide the call number as it is spelled out (or would be spelled out) in LCAT. Example: MAIN E 445 .S7 S39 1997. If this information is provided after the title of the item (or its full citation) has been provided, enclose the information in parentheses.

4. Keyboard conventions: In instructional publications, when indicating exactly what a library user is to type, use lowercase and bold, e.g., **k=apes and (sign adj language).** But where uppercase in necessary, use uppercase. Some other examples of usage in indicating what the user is to type: 1) **type exp k <ENTER>** 2) **type k=<title word>.ti.**

5. Names of libraries' units: When using names of branch libraries or other University Libraries units, employ the full, proper name of the unit when the name is first used.