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Microfiche Checking and Refilming at the University of Michigan Law Library

The University of Michigan Law Library (UMLL) is more than 90 percent full and has long purchased microfiche in order to conserve its precious shelf-space. Fortunately, microfiche not only conserves space, but it also lasts longer than paper—an added bonus for a research library that wants to keep important legal materials in its collections in perpetuity. Some of this microfiche ends up being a second or third copy of a title. In other cases, we purchase microfiche to replace our paper holdings. The holdings are then discarded if they are not shipped to another library. It is this second case that needs to be attended to—to conserve space, we and other libraries throw out paper copies of materials and replace them with microfiche.

But after going through this process of buying microfiche and sending books to the landfill, we have discovered some problems with the microfiche. These microfiche problems include fuzzy text, light and illegible text, cut-off text on the interior margin, the top third of some pages missing, crossed-out text, squashed bugs covering text, spots and bleed-through, and missing pages and sections. Illegible text is especially widespread in the smaller print of footnotes. This problem is not specific to microfiche; we recently replaced some tattered *United States Reports* volumes with reprinted paper volumes and found that some text, and a good deal of footnotes, were illegible.

On the one hand, some of these problems—especially bleed-through, water spots, and light text—will exist by the very nature of filming old materials. And most of these problems are confined to pages here and there in scattered volumes. On the other hand, if you are looking for an old three-page case and all you have is the microfiche and one page is illegible, then you will still need to interlibrary loan the case for your patron. The problem is that when libraries replace paper titles with microfiche titles available from single vendors, some important legal material is lost. It is not just text and footnotes that are lost, but microform versions also often excise indexes, advertisements, front-matter, notes, and/or corrections that were in the original paper. This problem will only increase as paper, even if originally kept by a library that purchased the same title in microfiche, disintegrates with time and is discarded in reliance on the microfiche.

In an effort to combat this loss of important legal information, UMLL instituted a fiche-checking process where, to the best of our ability, we check the fiche not just for bibliographic accuracy, but also for readability, cut-off text, and omissions. When we discover problems, we ask the publisher to refile the problematic volumes, offering UMLL paper volumes for the job. The following is the process UMLL has instituted wherein we try to discover and remedy problems with purchased microfiche.

How are the fiche checked?

We check fiche volumes, page-by-page, for readability problems and omissions, making comparisons side-by-side with paper volumes from the collection.

Are all volumes checked?

All volumes are not checked. If the microfiche set is fewer than 10 volumes, we check each volume. If the microfiche set is more than 10 volumes, we check the first and last volumes—either the last volume of the title or the last volume received in an ongoing serial—and 20 percent of the volumes in between. If there are widespread problems with the first 20 percent of volumes checked, we will check another 20 percent before making any final decisions. Even after our quality checking process, problem volumes will be missed. We aim to have the problem volumes we find refilmed, but we also look at the larger picture where widespread problems with a particular fiche set will cause us to retain paper we originally planned to replace.

Are all fiche sets checked?

Not all sets are checked. Because of the time required to check microfiche volumes, we have limited our fiche-checking process to instances where we are going to discard paper holdings. That way if problems do appear, we can offer our paper volumes to the vendor for refilming prior to discarding the volumes. For titles where we are not going to withdraw the paper—and not send the fiche through the fiche-checking process—we add a private note to the title's bibliographic record stating that the fiche should be checked for quality before the paper is withdrawn. We also do not check the microfiche of new titles for the collection in the page-by-page manner because we have no paper volumes to offer for refilming.

What do you look for?

The two types of problems we look for are content and quality issues. Content issues are mainly materials that may have been eliminated in the jump from paper to microfiche. Generally these materials are indexes, advertisements, and front matter. The quality issues with the fiche are any problems that result in lost content: spots, cut-off pages, faintness of text, or blurriness. Not every little spot is taken into account; we look for problems large enough to make portions of a fiche volume unusable for research purposes. Little spots, lines, and smudges come with the territory of filming aging paper texts and are not what we focus on.

Who checks the microfiche for quality?

Due to the monotonous and rote nature of fiche checking, we hire students to perform the actual fiche checking itself. Students hired to check the microfiche for quality purposes are trained in the process and in

what to look for. The students are given a list of things to look for on the fiche itself as well as in comparison to the paper volumes the library holds; they then print problem pages from the microfiche. If problems are widespread with a given title, example pages only are printed with notes of other volumes, microfiche cards, or pages where the same problems occur.

Which vendors have refilmed problem microfiche for UMLL?

The William S. Hein Company has refilmed some problem volumes of the *Boston University Law Review*, *Michigan Law Review*, and *Indiana Law Journal*. The Law Library Microform Consortium (LLMC) has refilmed some state and federal court reports, including *Dallas' Reports*. We also notify LLMC when its fiche sets lack later volumes that we hold, and we lend our volumes to LLMC to complete the filming of the set.

How did you make arrangements with the vendors?

Because of the library's informal relationship with LLMC and Jerry Dupont, LLMC executive director, we set up the refilming arrangements with LLMC first. During one of his visits to the library, we met with Dupont, explained what we were doing, and arranged to let LLMC know of our refilming requests through either a conversation with Dupont or via a letter to LLMC in Hawaii. For our arrangement with Hein, the library director sent a formal letter to Hein listing the volumes that would need to be refilmed. Hein then followed up with the request, and we went from there.

Do all vendors need to have the volumes sent to them?

Not all vendors need to have the volumes sent to them for refilming. Hein did not need volumes sent from UMLL because it has extensive law review holdings. For LLMC titles, we send the volumes to be refilmed at the time of discovery, charging them to LLMC, much as we do for interlibrary loan purposes.

Have vendors been receptive to requests for refilming?

Both Hein and LLMC have been receptive to refilming requests. It is good customer service practice for the vendors to remedy problematic microfiche volumes, especially when they will be able to upgrade the quality of their microfiche stock for future purchasing libraries. When we contact the vendors regarding problem volumes, we include printed pages showing examples of the problems we encounter. When we mentioned our process to Dupont, he expressed that he hoped all libraries would check LLMC microfiche for quality because his staff was too small to be able to check the fiche in the exacting way necessary to protect against lost legal information.

How long does the process take?

The length of process varies depending on the

fluctuation of other ongoing projects at UMLL. From the date we mail the letter—and volumes in the case of LLMC titles—we give the vendor four months to send out the refilmed fiche. After four months, we claim the replacement microfiche from the vendor.

Thus far, we have tackled smaller sets and the larger sets where only a few volumes needed refilming. It is possible that we will need to allow more time in the future where large numbers of volumes need to be refilmed.