

UPC system adopted for future use in library

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The sticker on the back of your ID looks a lot like the UPC bar code you see on food products in a grocery store—the same mysterious black lines sitting atop an array of numbers.

And although it won't buy you groceries at Kroger, within a year and a half the new sticker will be your ticket to checking out books from Collier Library.

The new system will convert the library's present one to an automated circulation system, an idea which incidentally isn't a new one, said Associate Librarian Glenda Griggs.

"We've been working on this as long as three years—it took us a year and a half before we got the funding," she said.

The system, known as CSLI, operates basically like a card cata-

log, said Griggs. Every title in the library will be transferred into readable machine form onto a file. A bar code will be placed on every ID and book, and checking out materials will be done by running a light pen across each bar code.

"This eliminates signing cards to check out books," Griggs said.

The library staff is already throwing away the old book cards and replacing them with bar codes, while new books simply receive the code as they are added, she said.

In addition to speeding up check outs, the system will take over the process of writing overdue notices, which is currently done by hand. Now it takes about 22 hours of student work per week to write the notices as well as a permanent worker to oversee the process. A computer print out will show the book title, student's

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name and address, and amount due.

"All we'll have to do is put it in an envelope and mail it," Griggs said.

Although the bar code system has been around since the mid 70s, the UNA system itself is unique in two ways, Griggs said.

No library in Alabama is using the same type system yet, although several are getting ready, including the University of Alabama, Auburn University,

and the University of South Alabama.

Secondly, UNA was chosen to participate in a "sharing system" designed for smaller universities with lacking funds.

"We're in with a group of public libraries, two junior colleges, and high school libraries in Northwest Alabama that share a computer base in Huntsville," Griggs said.

Because of this program, the UNA system was almost com-

pletely funded by outside sources, Griggs said.

"The Alabama Public Library Service provided major funds for equipment and hardware—they wanted an academic library on the shared system. They approached us," she said.

The conversion cost was funded by the Network of Alabama Academic Libraries, a senior four-year institution network UNA belongs to. "If it weren't for this network, we couldn't have installed it," Griggs said. "We provide the maintenance fee yearly."

The CLSI system runs through the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), which serves some 6,200 to 6,300 member libraries across the country, including Auburn University.

OCLC is responsible for producing card catalogs for UNA

and keeping tapes of Collier's holdings. Griggs said the library is almost ready to load the first tape of about 90,000 items into the Huntsville computer, and said there are plans in the future to eventually tie the UNA system together with others across the state.

While the new system will save time and provide an unlimited source of information for UNA students and faculty in the future, Griggs said there is one draw back.

"You can only use a bar code one time. If an ID is lost, stolen, or damaged, we have to assign a new number," she said.

She said it isn't expensive, but it is time consuming—one reason for starting so far ahead in issuing the codes to students.

The next step is to issue bar codes to all faculty members, she said.