To: Selection Committee  
From: BT  
Date: June 18, 2004  

Re: Proposals to Streamline and Improve Italian Collection Development

The Problem

Italy publishes an enormous number of books on law-related topics. According to Tom Reynolds, Italy puts out more law books per capita than any other jurisdiction. (After working with our Italian collection for some time now, I have to agree!) There are three main Italian law publishers – who publish titles that are essentially equivalent – as well as numerous smaller publishers that produce their own versions of these titles. Thus, it is necessary to be extremely selective when collecting Italian materials in order to maintain appropriate collecting levels for legal topics and avoid duplication of intellectual content.

To complicate matters, a high percentage of law books appear as part of numbered monographic series. We currently hold standing orders to approximately 50 such series. Many of these series do not appear on a regular basis; it is not unusual for a series to produce a flurry of books over a two- or three-year period and then disappear for five or more years. This causes problems for OCP with respect to claiming. Furthermore, a majority of these series are produced by the faculties of Italian law schools and have no specific subject focus; the individual titles discuss a broad and random range of legal and occasionally non-legal topics, such as political science and economics. The subject-focused series tend to include titles that examine narrower aspects of such topics as criminal law and commercial law. This causes problems for collection development, since we have no ability to control the type and level of subject coverage provided by a series standing order. Accordingly, our Italian collection reflects over-collection in some areas and large gaps in others.

In February 2004, we began receiving books on our approval plan with Casalini libri. Although we blocked all series to which we hold a standing order, we nevertheless receive a large number of in-scope books in each WEEKLY shipment. When our approval plan books are added to our series standing orders, it is clear that we are currently receiving far too many Italian law books. This situation has a negative impact on budget, staff resources, shelf space, and the intellectual integrity of the collection.

Proposed Solutions

In order to streamline and improve the process of Italian collection development, I recommend making changes to our standing orders of Italian series and to our Casalini libri profile.
I recommend that we cancel our standing orders to all but 11 of our Italian law series and unblock these series on our approval plan. The proposed cancellations target the general law series and series involving specific Italian law subjects. (For details, see attached chart and summary.) Canceling and unblocking these series will allow the approval plan to select series titles based upon our profile, thus maintaining appropriate collection levels and minimizing the risk of adding out-of-scope materials to the collection. These series cancellations will also lead to reductions in staff time spent on check-in, claiming, and other procedures. It will lead to a cost savings over the approximately $75.00 per volume (as a very rough estimate, this translates into about $2,500 per year) that we spend on Italian monographic series titles. Although some titles from each series will come on approval, we will certainly not be acquiring as many titles as we would on standing order, thereby resulting in a net savings. Because we will be receiving fewer books, Cataloging will also experience a reduced Italian workload along with a slower-growing Italian backlog. (I realize that canceling monographic series raises some issues regarding record-keeping and classification of individual volumes. However, I assume these issues can be resolved internally and, given the overall benefits of this proposal, this doesn’t alter my recommendations.)

I recommend that we retain standing orders to series involving topics of transnational law and canon law. (For details, see attached chart and summary.) With respect to transnational law, there is not an overwhelming number of Italian books published on these topics and these 9 series do not individually produce large numbers of titles. Jenny and I both feel that our collection will continue to be appropriately enhanced by retaining these series. I also recommend retaining our standing orders to the 2 Italian series on canon law. There are comparatively few regular sources of scholarship on canon law, and Italy is an important source of canon law jurisprudence. Also, these series do not produce an overwhelming number of titles.

Finally, I recommend that we adjust our Casalini libri approval profile to increase the selectivity levels for most subjects. (For details, see attached chart.) The goal of these changes is to decrease the number of Italian approval books we receive, while maintaining appropriate collecting levels in the various subjects. Having worked with Casalini’s approval books, I feel Casalini is doing a very capable job of selection and I am confident that they have the ability to apply higher levels of selectivity with good results. The shipments will still need to be monitored to ascertain whether these changes are sufficient to meet our goals.