

**FJC Bankruptcy Courtroom Use Study
Report to the CACM Committee**

**Technical Appendix 9
The Quality Control Process**

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Bankruptcy Courtroom Use Study

The Quality Control Process

The quality control process for the study of bankruptcy courtroom use had four elements:

- constraints built into the data collection application;
- court-level review of anomalous records;
- Center screening of records from the study database for inconsistencies and unusual patterns; and
- comparison of information from the study database with that from other court data systems and external observers.

Technical Appendix 7 provides a detailed description of the data collection application, DISCUS-B, and the reports it generated for court-level review. Technical Appendix 10 describes the independent observer study. This appendix describes the process used at the Center for screening data records.

Data Extract

Information on courtroom scheduling and use was provided by court staff using a Lotus Notes application developed specifically for the study. The application, Data Input System for the Courtroom Use Study-Bankruptcy (DISCUS-B), had built-in quality control features that required information in key fields, constrained the values allowed in the fields, and enforced internal consistency across certain fields. (See Technical Appendix 7.)

Data from each study court's DISCUS-B database were exported to a central file weekly and processed through a series of SPSS programs to restructure the data for analysis and to identify anomalous records. A quality control analyst, contracted exclusively for the bankruptcy courtroom use study, generated reports in Microsoft Access for review by the six Center staff members serving as liaisons to the study courts.

Review of Anomalous Records

The SPSS processing first eliminated practice and straightforward error records (e.g., events scheduled or held before the start of the study) and those for events that did not meet the criteria for inclusion in the study (e.g., maintenance events before 8:00 a.m. or on weekends). The quality control analyst then screened the data extract for data values that were inconsistent and data values that were expected to be rare. The processing then flagged records with other anomalies, which included scheduled events unresolved after the date for the event had passed,¹ starting and/or ending times outside the window de-

1. Scheduled events were resolved by holding, rescheduling, or cancelling the event. Unresolved events were those that remained on the scheduling calendar after the event date had passed without being linked to a held event.

fined by the study,² unexpected event dates (e.g., on weekends or holidays), and “Judge Away” events in a courtroom to which the judge was not assigned or whose duration was less than six hours.³

Each week, a report was generated for each study court and reviewed by the Center liaisons. The liaisons reviewed each anomalous record and, in consultation with the study courts as necessary, determined if a record should be changed and, if so, how and by whom. Court staff were asked to make the changes in the DISCUS-B application when a new record was required—for example, adding an “Actual Use” record to resolve a scheduled event. Some other kinds of changes—for example, deleting records entered in error—were made by the quality control analyst in the central data extract.

Review of “Other” Event Types

The Center liaisons reviewed all events that were coded as “Other Use” or where “Other” was used instead of a specific option. The liaisons determined whether it was possible to re-categorize the event using a specific coding option instead.⁴ The purpose was to describe as meaningfully as possible the nature of the activities scheduled and taking place in courtrooms.

Any necessary change to event category or type was made in DISCUS-B when either it affected the other information collected for the event (e.g., more data were collected for “Judge Matters” than for other types of events) or there was a need to preserve the data linkages provided by the application (e.g., to associate “Set-Up” time with the event).⁵ Otherwise, individual record updates were programmed to the central data extract.

In addition to making the individual record updates, the quality control analyst implemented guidelines adopted by the project team after review of an early set of test reports to recode “security sweeps” to “Set-Up” events and to recode judge-conducted mediations to “Conferences.” These changes were programmed to the central data extract.

Review of “Other” Courtroom Users

After reviewing test reports on early data, Center project staff adopted guidelines to recode most of the courtroom users categorized by the courts as “Other” into specific categories. For example, court security, marshals, probation officers, and judges’ law clerks were categorized as “Court Staff.” Family, media, friends, and other such users were categorized as “Public.”

2. Data recorders were instructed to record all events for their exact time, even if the events occurred very early or very late, except for maintenance and Judge-Away events, which were recorded only between 8:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.

3. Data recorders were instructed to report these events only when the judge was away for at least six hours between 8:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. (which were defined as “normal court hours” by the study).

4. It was determined early in the quality control planning process to defer to the superior knowledge of court staff as to the non-Other options they selected.

5. Courts were asked to make these changes unless they were cumbersome, in which case Center project staff made the changes based on information provided by the court. For example, DISCUS-B blocked edit access to linked scheduling records, so Center project staff did the required unlinking, record modification, and re-linking.

The quality control analyst prepared a list of proposed updates based on these guidelines for review by two members of the project team and programmed the resulting decisions to the central data extract.

Review of “Other” Reasons for Changing Scheduling Records

Whenever a data recorder changed a DISCUS-B record, DISCUS-B asked the recorder to identify the nature of and reason for the modification. This information was needed to distinguish record updates that reflected actual changes to the *event* (e.g., a cancellation or modification of its date, time, or location) from those that corrected an error. Records that were identified as erroneous and subsequently superseded by a corrected record were excluded from the analysis database.

The quality control analyst reviewed all “Other” reasons for changing scheduling records, with a particular focus on whether the reason matched the nature of the modification, and prepared a list of proposed updates for review by two members of the project team. The resulting decisions were programmed to the central data extract. This review was also used to develop an expanded scheme for capturing the essence of “Other Reasons” for changing and cancelling records.

Review of Cross-Court Comparisons and In-Court Statistical Reports

In addition to the individual record listings, the weekly quality control reports for the Center liaisons included reports designed to identify court staff who might be having problems using the DISCUS-B application, any unusual patterns across courts, and any district-level location or timing anomalies. Some of these reports summarized information across courts and courtrooms as to the number of hours and timing of courtroom use and the frequency with which various types of events were scheduled and held. Others provided information at the data recorder level about the frequency of anomalous records and how long it was taking to enter data.

Center liaisons discussed any unusual patterns with their court contacts as necessary to assess the accuracy of the information and assist in resolving any systematic problems.