

BASIC

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

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The Basic OBSCIS software package was developed by the SGI National Consortium for Justice Information and Statistics under Grant No. 78-SS-AX-0029 awarded to SEARCH Group, Inc., by the System Development Division, National Criminal Justice Information and Statistics Service, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, U.S. Department of Justice.

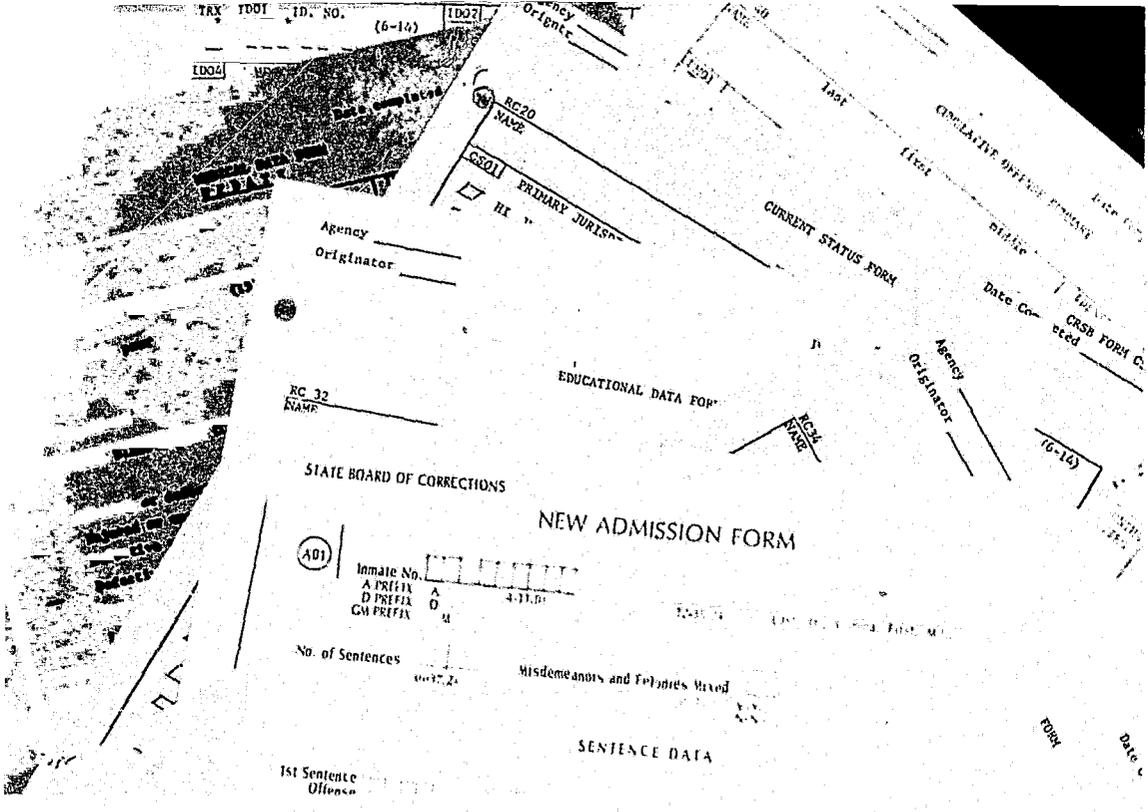
INTRODUCTION

This booklet outlines suggested steps for implementing Basic OBSCIS and is intended as a guide to the agencies installing the software package. The material included here is non-technical. The implementation steps arise from actual experiences in the states: notable among these is Iowa's implementation of Basic OBSCIS in 90 days.

Basic OBSCIS is a fully documented computer software package. The package, available to states without charge, has been designed to meet the fundamental need of corrections administrators for accurate and timely information about offender admissions and movement. It also can satisfy national reporting needs. Basic OBSCIS can be installed on a wide variety of computer systems. Technical assistance is provided by SEARCH Group, Inc., through funding from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration.

The steps outlined in this pamphlet are proven, positive activities developed through an exacting, often painful process in the states using Basic OBSCIS. Blazing trails can be fun, but it is also comforting to follow a well-marked path that circumvents the hazards.

No two states implementing Basic OBSCIS will have exactly the same experience. Hardware, operating systems, and personalities differ. Priorities change. Staff and administrators come and go. Meeting these challenges requires a dynamic, flexible system. Yet, if careful planning is translated into logical steps and detailed documentation, success is virtually assured.



Getting Started

The activities outlined below will vary in importance from state to state, for each state will place its emphasis in different areas. However, systematic installation of the software in the test and demonstration sites has included the following activities:

- Establishment of a User Group
- Comparative analysis of OBSCIS and state data elements
- Data Dictionary development
- Installation planning
- Conversion planning
- Output distribution
- Enhancement planning
- Documentation

The Importance of a User Group

One activity is common among the successful OBSCIS installations throughout the country: **a functioning user group**. A system may be successful without a user group, but the involvement of users is most important.

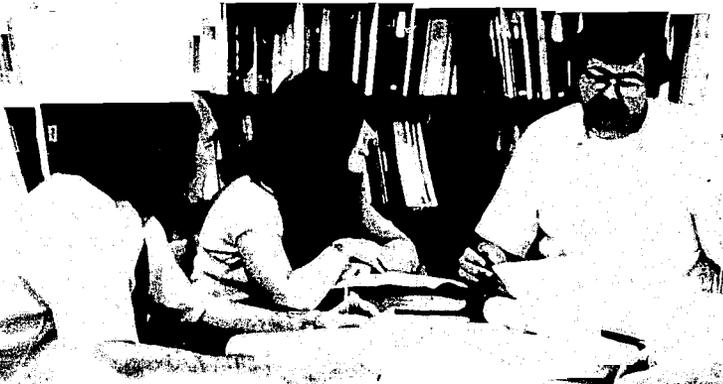
The structure, purpose, and authority of the user group will vary from state to state; in most cases it will serve in an advisory capacity to the administrator of the Department of Corrections. Two factors seem critical to the success of the user group concept in OBSCIS implementation. First, the group should have balanced representation. Since middle management and line personnel are important to the successful operation of the system, they should be adequately represented. In fact, the user groups that function best are those



which have achieved a mix of persons from all levels of authority and assignments within the corrections system.

The second important factor is timing. The interest of any group wanes if too long a time elapses between formation and activity. The user group should be involved throughout the process of implementation to facilitate the changes required by the new system. Resistance to change is common. During automation, such resistance often becomes acute.

For example, consider the effectiveness of the user group established in Iowa. As is often the case, implementation of a computerized system was viewed as being done for the benefit of data processing professionals. The Iowa users group effectively defused this misconception by having non-technical users take an active role in clarifying the needs to be served by automation. This user group developed such a strong relationship with the technical staff that exchange of information throughout the rest of the department was aided.



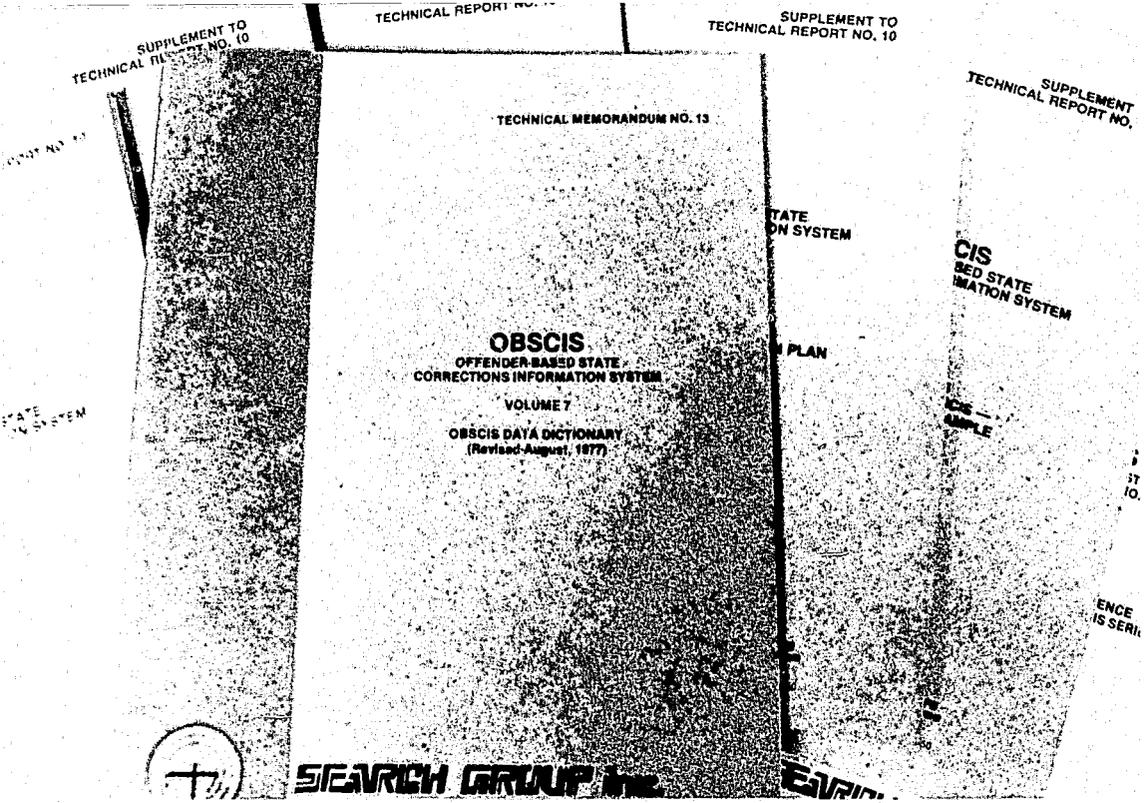
Obstacles that could have resulted in serious setbacks were avoided by using the Iowa users group as a testing ground for implementation ideas. The user group defined problems, answered questions, and rectified misunderstandings so that the installation process could proceed smoothly and efficiently. This coordinated approach made possible a ninety-day implementation cycle.

Performing a Comparative Analysis

The first technical step in system installation is to perform a comparison between the Basic OBSCIS data elements and the data items available and necessary to the state. Basic OBSCIS has a data dictionary and associated code structure provided in the system package. Project staff must perform a comparative analysis in order to align the data items and their definitions as follows:

- Identify Basic OBSCIS data elements that are an exact match to corresponding state data elements;
- List Basic OBSCIS data elements that differ from the corresponding state data elements;
- Note Basic OBSCIS data elements that have no corresponding state data elements;
- Note state data elements that have no corresponding Basic OBSCIS data elements.

Grouped this way, differences between the two data bases can be remedied. Before the system can function in any environment, several fine-tuning adjustments must be made both internally and externally. While some adjustments will be minor, major changes in forms design and process routes may require policy adjustments or establishment of policy guides where none exist. Such decisions can be identified through the analysis with the user group serving to guide the policy changes. Estimated time allowances for completion of this process range from one to three months.



Developing a Data Dictionary

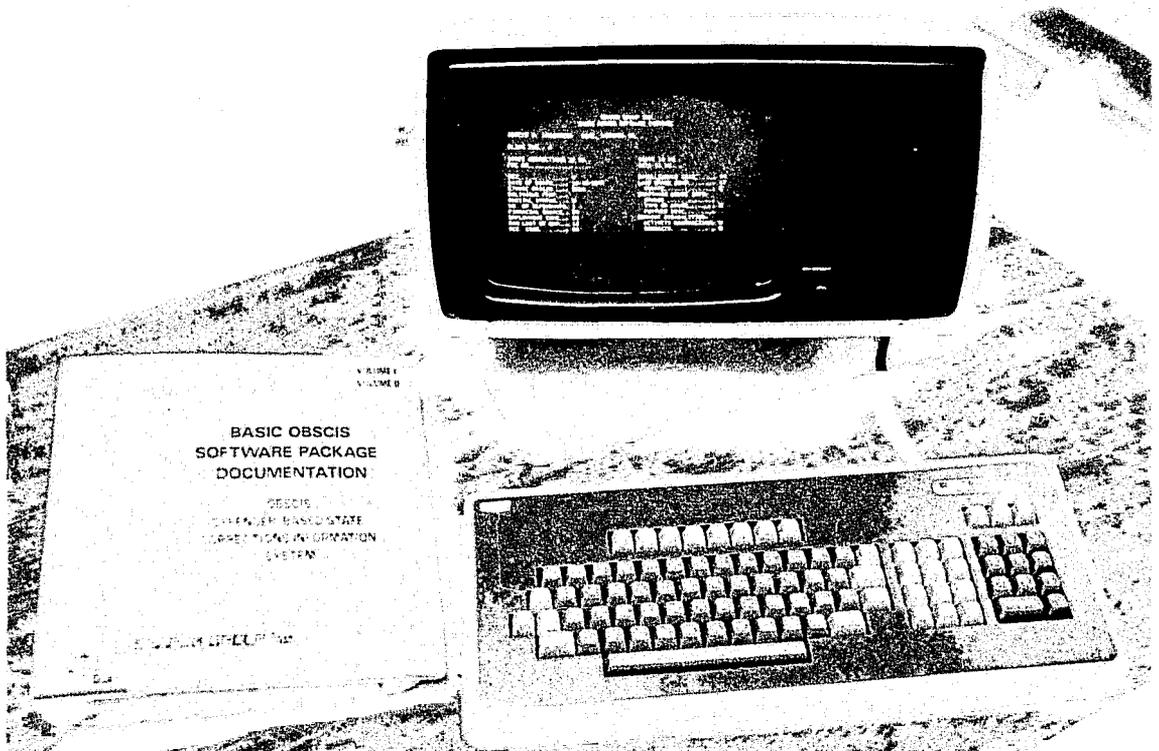
A state corrections system data dictionary is the product of the comparative analysis. The most important function of the dictionary is to standardize terminology among the several units within the department. User group participation and approval of this document is important to its acceptance in the department. The data dictionary should be published and distributed to all staff of the department as an aid in documenting procedures and to assist staff outside of data processing in understanding and using the new system.

Time frames for this activity can be estimated at from one to three months, depending upon the number of staff assigned to the OBSCIS project and the frequency of the user group meetings. Some states find it useful to convene the users group monthly during this and subsequent implementation steps until the system is up and running.

Planning for Installation

The installation plan, prepared by the technical personnel assigned to the project, reflects the tasks and schedule of the installation of the software package. It is the first technical document produced for the system and should conform to good documentation standards and techniques. This document need not be reviewed and approved by the user group since it is technical, but the installation schedule should be well known throughout the department.

The plan should include hardware, software, and personnel requirements, and anticipate vendor delivery dates. In preparing such a plan, it is important to be realistic; changes should be made as circumstances dictate. Regular review and modification where necessary is not indicative of a failure to properly plan, but is recognition of a changing environment. An estimated time of two months should be allotted for this activity.



Planning for Conversion to Basic OBSCIS

The conversion plan should be developed in harmony with the installation plan to insure that both sets of activities mesh and follow a master implementation schedule.

The conversion plan should be detailed. Every contingency must be covered and explained fully, even to the extent of including specific coding instructions. Forms flow to the computer system, keying and input instructions, and the error correction process should be described as well.

Acceptance and approval of the conversion plan by the user group is critical since these persons will be performing the conversion tasks. Estimated time frames for development and approval of the conversion plan is from one to three months, depending on the meeting frequency of the user group.

Distributing Operational and Administrative Reports

The development of an output distribution plan is to make sure that the installed system efficiently produces reports, and that the reports generated get to the right people in a timely manner. Problems typically encountered in operational information systems are in the area of production and distribution of reports. Some people get reports they do not want and cannot use, while others do not get sufficient information. Some institution staffs want to compare themselves with other institutions, so they request copies of reports containing data not necessary to their functions. Such problems can be prevented by developing and implementing an output distribution plan, and having the plan reviewed by the user group. Approximately one month should be allowed for this process.

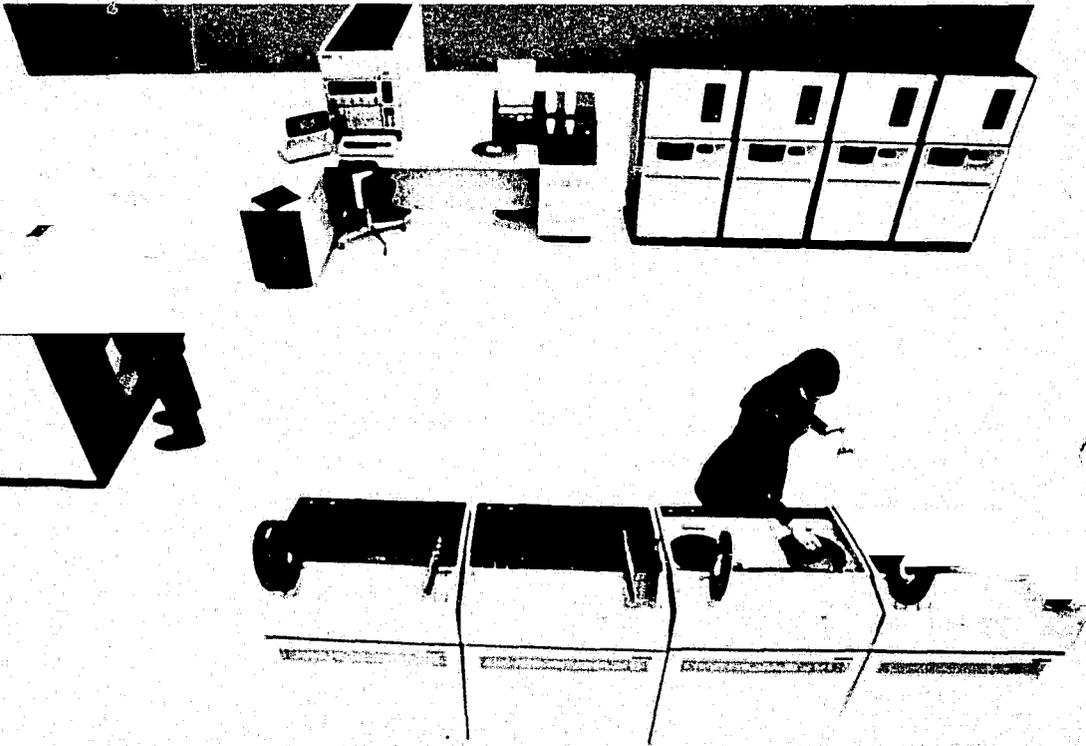
Upon completion of the output distribution plan, the conversion and installation can begin and continue to the end of the project.



Enhancing Basic OBSCIS

User group members can enhance the OBSCIS system to fit special, long-term needs and to establish the direction of future growth. Enhancement can be a most exciting part of the implementation process for users. The experience of contributing to and participating in this phase deepens commitment to the already established OBSCIS program.

Enhancement techniques are left to the discretion of the user group and staff of each state. Time should be set aside at every meeting of the user group to permit discussion about potential system enhancements and improvements. Staff should always be involved in this process and the administration should encourage such sessions as a valuable vehicle for departmental communications.



The Need for Documentation

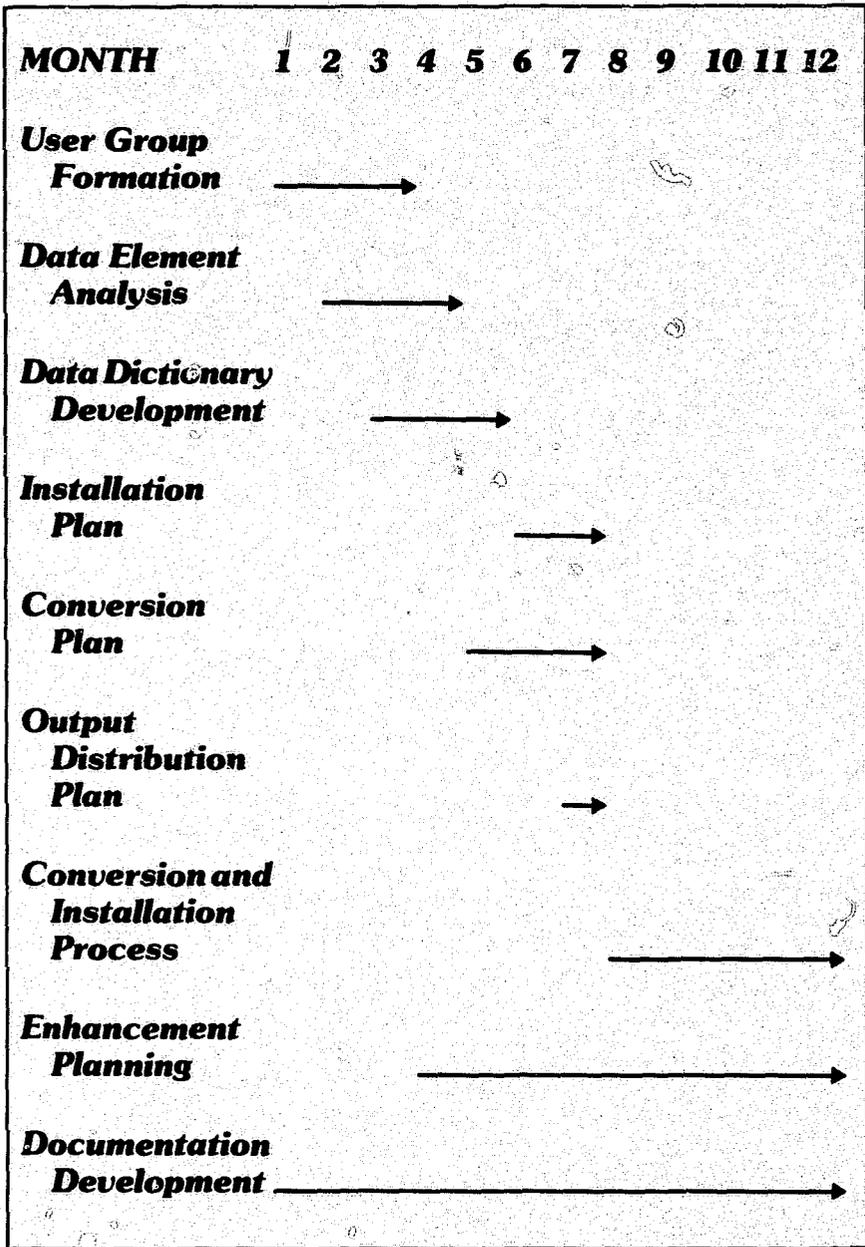
Several of the activities described produce written materials that should become part of the official project documentation. These materials are essential to the documentation process; however, they alone do not meet the requirements for thorough Basic OBS-CIS system documentation. Other written descriptions, including both technical and non-technical items, must be developed. Documentation should include, but is not limited to:

- User Manuals
- Operations Manual
- Program Maintenance Manual
- Functional Requirements Document
- Data Requirements Document
- System Specifications
- Program Specifications
- Data Base Specifications
- Test Plan
- Test Analysis Report

Remember that documentation should tell the complete story of the system's development and always **must** be in writing. Most states with central data processing units already have established detailed documentation standards. The Federal Information Processing Standards Publication 38 (FIPS PUB 38) is also a good source.

Clearly, the importance of documentation cannot be overstated. Documentation tells the story of the system and provides for continuity as staff people receive promotions or find employment outside the agency. Expending staff time and money developing a successful system without providing complete documentation is the mistake that often leads to failure of expectations.

IMPLEMENTING BASIC OBSCIS: Estimated Time Frames



OBSCIS PUBLICATIONS

Volume 1: *THE OBSCIS APPROACH*

Volume 2: *OBSCIS APPLICATION GUIDE*

Volume 3: *OBSCIS DATA DICTIONARY*

Volume 4: *OBSCIS IMPLEMENTATION PLAN*

Volume 5: *LAUNCHING OBSCIS: A COMPOSITE
EXAMPLE*

Volume 6: *THE OBSCIS EXPERIENCE: A PHASE II
SUMMARY*

Volume 7: *OBSCIS DATA DICTIONARY (Revised)*

BASIC OBSCIS SOFTWARE PACKAGE DOCUMENTATION

(Available to state departments of corrections in limited quantity.)

THE OBSCIS COMPENDIUM: PROCEEDINGS FROM THE OBSCIS SEMINAR

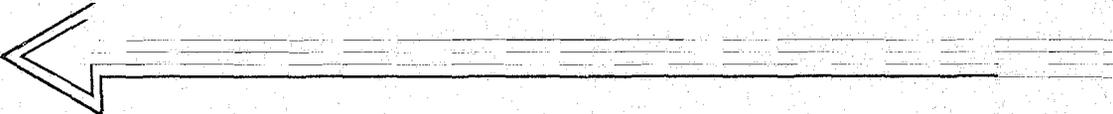
BASIC OBSCIS 1: ADMINISTRATOR'S GUIDE

BASIC OBSCIS 2: IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

BASIC OBSCIS 3: SMALL COMPUTER INSTALLATIONS

To request publications or additional information, contact:

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