

## Deselecting the Monographs Collection: One Library's Adventure in Weeding

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## **DESELECTING THE MONOGRAPHS COLLECTION: ONE LIBRARY'S ADVENTURE IN WEEDING**

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Weeding a collection can be a daunting prospect, and one that is easily brushed to one side when there are many other responsibilities at hand: library instruction for students, balancing budgets, training staff. In Eastern Kentucky University Libraries a combination of factors – space issues, an increasingly outdated and little used print collection, and a mold outbreak – led us to realize that weeding our monographs collection was inevitable.

### **BACKGROUND: EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY LIBRARY**

Eastern Kentucky University, founded in 1906 as a teacher's college, serves the needs of state citizens with an emphasis on a sixteen county region in southeastern Kentucky. Teacher education remains the University's core mission. Other important programs include nursing and law enforcement. The ECU Libraries comprises a main library that houses the education library, plus several branches: a music library, a justice and safety library, and a newly opened business and technology commons. In the spring of 2010 the University conferred its first degree in a new doctoral program in Higher Education, and there is a good possibility additional doctoral programs will be added in the next few years. The University is also placing greater emphasis on online classes. As print resources have given way to electronic resources, our unique print collections have become more important when there is no electronic match. How do we decide what is important to preserve and protect as resources and students compete for space? What will the future hold? The library needs to support that future with current resources and respond to the students who need and want our space. Finally, we want to adhere to our vision statement that "EKU Libraries will be a leader among academic libraries by providing excellent services and resources that embrace the digital age, by stewarding ECU collections and scholarship for a global audience, and by cultivating environments that inspire learning and creativity." For these reasons, we have embarked on a comprehensive deselection project.

### **THE IMPETUS: LEADING UP TO THE WEED**

A major mold outbreak in the bound periodicals shelving was discovered in the spring of 2007. The outbreak was severe enough that an outside firm was contracted for remediation. Some volumes were beyond salvage and had to be discarded. This section is in the basement near an exterior wall. Humidity readings were well above recommended level nearly all the time. In order to keep the mold at bay, five dehumidifiers now run constantly and are emptied on a steady cycle. The decision was made to move the bound collection to another floor of the Library. Once the remediation was complete, a heavy weed of the collection reduced the overall size a bit. Unique titles remained and needed to be moved to be saved. In order to fit

the collection of bound periodicals on another floor, the print monographs became an obvious place to start.

Initially, the thought was that removing duplicate copies, a project that was already underway, would free up enough space. However, this did not prove effective. At the same time, the Music Library and Justice and Safety Libraries, both branches, were feeling external pressure to reduce their print collections to accommodate needs of students. Underlying all of this need was the requirements of accrediting bodies. In particular, faculty of the nursing program asked that most of the print titles be considered for deselection.

There are two schools of thought about deselection that co-exist nicely within the Library. One school holds that in order to remain relevant and to promote the print holding we have, we should deselect the undesirable titles so that what we do offer is current and a catalog search will not give users undesirable publication dates. The other school believes the Library should hold on to the print, only weeding those items that are beyond repair or are duplicates. Both have valid points and, luckily, each school resides in proper subject areas – librarians whose subject area is the humanities maintain many of their titles; those in the hard sciences deselect more aggressively with the social sciences in between.

The subject librarians, then, adopted a “not one size fits all” philosophy as a result and have shifted the focus from how each liaison *should* weed to trusting the liaison to know their departmental faculty, to understand accreditation requirements, and to have a good knowledge of the courses being offered at the university. Giving control of decision making over to the subject librarians entirely was a shift in the way of thinking at ECU Libraries. Instead of having the collection development librarian bless each discard, the librarians are expected to check in with cohort groups that were developed to be sounding boards and a second set of eyes if needed. The cohort groups are librarians placed together based on parallels drawn between academic departments and LC call ranges. This arrangement, while a significant shift away from previous smaller weeds, seems to satisfy most from either school of weeding thought.

In order to explain this newly adopted attitude toward weeding, the Coordinators of Collection and Public Services and of Technology and Data Services held a Weeding Kick-Off Meeting. At this meeting, a LibGuide, a product with functionality similar to a wiki, was revealed. The LibGuide’s purpose is to give librarians guidelines and expectations. For example, data on class enrollment at the college and department level was linked from the guide, suggestions for engaging faculty in collection discussions were given, sample reports from the catalog were presented and so forth. The guide also serves as place where librarians can post tidbits of information for their colleagues about the weeding process. At the end of the meeting, we asked for volunteers and were surprised by the number who wanted to participate. The only requirement was that each librarian writes a very brief collection statement designed after researching the university data on class enrollment, graduation information, and after talking with faculty. This idea behind the collection statement is that liaisons would develop a solid understanding of user needs based on the research components of the process.

## **HOW TO MAKE THE DESELECTION PROCESS WORK FOR EVERYONE**

The scope of the weed and the number of initial volunteers meant that many hands would be in the stacks at one time. It was important from the beginning to outline the expectations in terms of dates. In establishing a timeline in the beginning, librarians were empowered to work at a pace that complemented their other responsibilities. Most have instruction responsibilities that peak during parts of the semester, while other librarians have a steadier, more predictable pattern to their work.

A simple set of procedures was devised for the weeding process. The librarian, after weighing information about a title and deciding that title is no longer relevant to the collection, simply marks the call number label with a red X. The Shelving Office then removes the “red X” books and sends them to the copy catalogers. The copy catalogers, in turn, withdraw the books from the collection.

## **OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS**

The process is ongoing. The generous timeline adopted at the beginning allows for another full year before a shift of the bound periodicals happens. The intellectual content of the collection, particularly in the sciences and social sciences, is now closer to meeting the academic needs of the ECU community of students, faculty, staff, and others. While more volumes will need to be deselected before the major shift, what seemed overwhelming and insurmountable now seems possible. While deselection a substantial portion of the collection has brought mixed emotions in the hearts of many of our librarians we are behaving as stewards as our vision states. We will continue review collection content on a regular basis in the future to maintain its quality and viability for the university’s teaching and scholarship.