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The Other Side of the Coin: De-Selecting Material from a Research Library's Storage Facility

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THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN: DE-SELECTING MATERIAL FROM A RESEARCH LIBRARY'S STORAGE FACILITY

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ABSTRACT

Most large research libraries maintain storage facilities containing low-use material. Many of these facilities are filling rapidly as libraries repurpose space on central campuses and rely more heavily on digital collections. Many of the same low-use titles are being stored in multiple storage facilities, but in the current environment of rapid delivery via resource sharing networks, it may no longer be as necessary to maintain all low-use print material locally since libraries can rely on partners to supply occasionally-needed material if it is not already available digitally. The paper summarizes successful projects at the Purdue University Libraries that withdrew low-use serial titles from a storage facility, and covers a current project that identifies monographs as candidates for de-selection. Using the WorldCat Collection Analysis, circulation statistics, and selector input, these projects sought to reduce the amount of material in storage. Building library collections to meet user needs has long been a cornerstone of effective library service; learning what to discard from physical collections may soon be equally important.

WHY DE-SELECT?

Research libraries have not always been very good at weeding their collections. The collections were built on the just-in-case principle despite studies that suggested that the lion's share of the material was seldom or never used (Trueswell 1969; Kent 1979) and on that same principle have been maintained for decades, first in main and branch libraries, and now in huge storage facilities. Perhaps librarians removed a few older editions of reference sets or textbooks, but in general relatively little material is de-selected from large academic libraries.

However, de-selection is a topic that administrators are starting to raise as the pressure for space on central campuses increases. Not only are academic programs and departments looking for more space, but libraries wish to realign current space to meet changing needs, such as areas for scholarly communication, group study, information literacy, and more. The explosion of electronic resources means that fewer patrons now refer to print volumes if a digital version is available. The trend towards acquiring electronic resources also means that an increasing amount of new content is purchased in digital format only. The answer to the question "why de-select" is usually that librarians want to recover the space to use for purposes other than housing print collections. This is the easy and obvious answer, but there are other underlying reasons.

First, local collection assessment should be an ongoing part of general collection management. Part of periodic assessment should be identifying the often huge numbers of items that receive very low use or no use. In the past, local collection assessment typically meant that research libraries identified the low- and no-use materials and then shipped them off to a remote storage facility.

Second, digital copies are becoming increasingly available. Large academic libraries often buy large packages of e-books, including publisher backfiles. Patron preference for electronic versions suggests that they will in most cases choose the electronic version even if the print equivalent is locally available. Libraries also buy an increasing amount of electronic content outside of packages; they offer more and more titles to local users in electronic format only. Projects like Google Books and HathiTrust provide full text access to certain groups of titles, such as pre-1923 imprints and U.S. government documents. Libraries are experimenting with putting records for these items into their OPACs or discovery layers to provide easy access to them.

Third, on a national scale aggregate demand can be met with a reduced inventory (Malpas 2010). There are thousands of low-use journal titles and millions of book titles that no longer need to be maintained in print in each of hundreds of libraries' storage facilities. Efficient resource sharing networks provide rapid access to obscure journal articles and book chapters via electronic delivery methods; physical delivery of books often takes only a few days within a consortial group. There is no longer the need to maintain everything locally on a just-in-case basis when just-in-time delivery meets most patrons' needs.

Why de-select from a storage facility? The easy answers are similar: to recover space and, in some instances, to avoid construction costs. But the real answers are the same as the three points above, with a special emphasis on the third point: many, many of the same low use titles are being maintained in storage facilities all over the country. At some point, perhaps 15 to 30 copies of a low-use 1965 book scattered across the country would more than meet total aggregate demand. Perhaps 300 other academic libraries holding that same book could then consider de-selecting their unused copies.

THE PURDUE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES' DE-SELECTION EXPERIENCE

Purdue University is a publicly supported institution in West Lafayette, Indiana. Enrollment stands at about 40,000 students. The library system consists of 12 school and departmental libraries, plus two storage facilities.

The main storage facility is called the Hicks Repository and is located in the basement of the Undergraduate Library in the heart of the campus. This repository opened with the new building in 1982. It has about 20 miles (104,000 linear feet) of SpaceSaver compact shelving. Current staffing consists of three full-time staff plus a supervisor who divides her time between the repository and other responsibilities. There are also student assistants. Twenty miles of shelving might have seemed inexhaustible when the facility opened, but by 2006 it contained about 800,000 volumes and had only about two percent of open shelving, some of it scattered throughout the area. Administrators declared the repository full and instituted a moratorium on new transfers except in unusual circumstances.

Librarians undertook several short-tem solutions. Duplicates were identified and removed. Two unsuccessful attempts were made to involve the subject specialists in weeding activities, but both of these efforts soon fizzled out largely due to a lack of central coordination and to many other competing responsibilities.

Library administrators and campus facilities planners discussed possible off-campus storage facilities, but none of these came to fruition. Space was assigned to the Libraries in the basement of an academic building, but this area, while helpful for housing some overflow older materials, consists of old shelving in a darkened, non-climate controlled area surrounded by wire fencing.

Over several years, the author proposed and coordinated three different storage de-selection projects, first in her role as Head, Access Services and later, after a reorganization, as Head, Collection Management.

SERIALS DE-SELECTION PROJECT, 2006-2008

The Hicks Repository contained many short and/or incomplete serial runs that were held in their entirety in that facility (not split between the repository and an active collection). The Libraries administration hired special project staff (a full-time librarian and a half-time clerk) for a two-year period. The project librarian used OCLC's WorldCat Collection Analysis (WCA) to develop lists of the short-run repository serials by broad subject area and applying de-selection criteria that included more or less complete runs held by at least two of four benchmark libraries (three consortial partners within the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC), plus the Center for Research Libraries). The titles had to be held by at least 25 OCLC libraries; if fewer libraries held a title, Purdue kept its run, no matter how scattered the holdings. Other exclusions included in-state publications and government documents.

List development and management required fairly sophisticated use of Excel, close attention to detail, and the ability to juggle simultaneously the progress of different lists in various processing stages. Subject specialists thus reviewed lists that only contained titles that were good de-selection candidates, divided into three tiers by language groups (English; French, German, Spanish; and other languages) and ranked depending on whether they met all, most, or some of the criteria.

The final outcome of the two-year project was that 36,571 journal volumes were withdrawn, freeing up 4,892 linear feet (4.7%) in the Hick Repository.

The details of the pilot project phase of this de-selection project can be found in the literature (Ward and Aagard 2008).

JSTOR & PUBLISHER'S JOURNAL DE-SELECTION PROJECTS, 2008

A project that overlapped with the serials de-selection project was one that involved moving most of the print volumes corresponding to the Purdue Libraries' JSTOR holdings and to the holdings of a major publisher for which backfiles to volume 1 had been purchased. The volumes for these titles resided in some cases entirely within a campus library, in other cases entirely within the Hicks Repository, and in yet other cases were split between an active collection and the repository. A vital aspect of the licensing agreements of both the JSTOR titles and the publisher's titles was that resource sharing was allowed from the electronic versions. The plan was to move all print volumes up to the most recent five years in the case of currently published titles to the secondary storage facility in a campus building's basement

where they would be kept in a dark archive. Library heads reviewed the lists in advance and, at their requests, longer runs of a few titles were retained in print in the active collections. The print records were suppressed from the OPAC on the assumption that in almost all cases patrons would prefer to access the articles electronically. Administrators did not want to withdraw these volumes because they anticipated that at some point in the relatively short term, the Purdue Libraries would collaborate with statewide or consortial partners in legacy print retention plans; it would be important for the Purdue Libraries to have some of these titles to contribute towards these efforts.

The JSTOR project started first on an as-time-permits basis and took months to complete. To avoid the same lengthy process with the publisher's titles, the author worked to have it assigned as a high-priority summer project. A staff member was temporarily assigned to spend 90% of her time on the project and under her supervision; all the publisher volumes were moved in an astonishingly short eight-week period. The total number of volumes moved to the dark archive repository during both these projects was 52,224.

For various reasons, it has not been possible to continue both of these projects on an ongoing basis as the Libraries adds new electronic backfiles of JSTOR titles and other publishers' titles.

MONOGRAPH DE-SELECTION PROJECT, 2009-PRESENT

The author next turned her attention to monographs in the Hicks Repository. Tens of thousands, if not several hundred thousand, low- or no-use monographs are shelved there. Any books transferred there since the Libraries installed its Voyager ILS about 1998 are barcoded, and there has been an ongoing project for some years to barcode to older material in the repository. Barcodes mean that there is circulation and browsing information for many titles.

Working together with the library division heads, the author developed monograph de-selection criteria that everyone felt comfortable with: books published between 1920 and 1979; held by five or more consortial partners; and held by 50 or more OCLC libraries. As with the serials de-selection project, WorldCat Collection Analysis was used to develop the basic lists on a subject by subject basis.   Titles are removed from the list if they concern the state of Indiana or if they are government documents. The lists are then sent to the Libraries' information technology department to add local information: call number, location, number of circulations, number of browses, barcode number, repository shelf location information, and the most recent date that the barcode had been subject to any activity. After a little more editing, each list is sent to the appropriate subject specialist for review, with instructions to mark any titles that the Libraries should retain. Depending on the subject, the lists vary from under 1,000 titles to over 10,000. When a selector returns a list, the author deletes any titles marked for retention and then sends the edited list to staff in Archives and Special Collections for one last review in case some titles should be retained for local interest or for other reasons. Finally, after this review, the list goes to the repository for staff to remove books from the shelves, after which technical services staff withdraw records from the OPAC and OCLC.

This explanation has been simplified for clarity and to avoid digressions into topics such as handling duplicate copies, etc.

After about one year, 29,865 books have been withdrawn as a result of this project. About half the subject areas have been completed. Progress seems slow because the author must fit in list generation, editing, and management among other tasks. It is the author's opinion that the criteria of holdings at five or more consortial partners and 50 or more OCLC libraries is too conservative; three or more consortial partners and 25 or more OCLC libraries might provide better criteria. Still, it is important to finish the project using the current criteria and then approach colleagues about a second round with more stringent criteria.

REASONS FOR SUCCESS

There are several reasons why these projects were successful when earlier attempts failed. The major reason was central coordination. The Libraries administrators and division heads supported the projects. De-selection candidate criteria were developed jointly with division heads and other stakeholders. Subject specialists made the final call about whether to retain titles based on their knowledge of the curriculum and faculty research interests. The selectors only reviewed titles that met the criteria; they did not have to spend time looking at titles that were obvious "keepers." Another important reason for success in the serials and publisher de-selection projects was the availability of staff assigned specifically to that work, rather than the usual case of busy staff trying to carve out time from an already-full schedule to fit in this time-consuming and detail-oriented task. Staff in many different departments cooperated to make these projects work: campus library staff who helped box journal volumes, JSTOR, and publisher projects; technical services staff who updated OPAC and OCLC records as titles moved or were withdrawn; the auxiliary services staff who moved tons of material around campus.

NEXT STEPS IN PRINT RETENTION

There are at least two large and obvious next steps in print retention decision making.

First, there are several large collections of digitized books that grow larger by the day, such as Google Books and HathiTrust. Many of the titles in these collections are in the public domain. A library could match its own public domain titles against those held in full text in one of these digitized collections and, allowing for retention of certain material such as in-state publications, withdraw the locally held low-use print-equivalents.

De-selection projects at a single institution, while often necessary and laudable, are no substitute for the second big change, that of print retention decisions made on a consortial, statewide, or larger level. There are many different ways that these larger programs are evolving. One example involves a central location or partner agreeing to keep a certain type or amount of material so that other partners or members can choose to discard theirs. An example of this type is the effort by the Center for Research Libraries (CRL) to collect and maintain a complete run of bound volumes of all the JSTOR titles so that member libraries that subscribe to the electronic content could discard their print volumes secure in the knowledge that in those rare instances when a patron wants to consult the print, CRL can supply it. Another model is that in which a state or a library system or consortium builds and designates massive storage facilities to hold "last copy" print of books and/or journals.   Other members can deposit low-use

unique titles there and also choose to discard local duplicates, knowing that the last copy can be borrowed if needed. A third option is the distributed print retention collaborative model, in which a group of libraries holding the same low-use material devises an equitable way to divide the title lists amongst themselves so that each institutions is responsible for maintaining a fraction of the whole, rather than each institution keeping all of it. The Indiana Light Archive provides an example of this arrangement; each of four large institutions agreed to maintain a different 25% of U.S. federal depository print government documents. In these examples, members of each group are usually able to borrow print material or arrange for scanned articles or chapters at no direct cost; other libraries may request material for a fee. However, when one or two members agree to hold unique titles for a large group, other group members should be willing to pay to help house, maintain, and share titles; it is still less expensive for a consortial partner to hold these items than for each member to manage duplicates indefinitely. A recent Ithaka report addresses multi-institutional print retention (Schonfeld and Housewright 2009).

As libraries and library groups or consortia apply these models, especially to material that has not yet been digitized or, if digitized, is not available in full text for copyright reasons, safeguards must be put in place to ensure that titles held by only a few libraries are not inadvertently discarded. Libraries can downsize their print collections considerably by participating in collaborative models, by implementing solo projects, or by a combination of both, but each library must accept responsibility to the community at large to maintain some unique or rarely held items for the greater good, even if there is little or no interest in them locally.

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