Let Go and Haul! A Square-Rigger's Guide to Weeding "Age of Sail" Collections in the 21st Century

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Let Go and Haul! A Square-Rigger's Guide to Weeding "Age of Sail" Collections in the 21st Century

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Abstract:

This nautically tinged talk explores what happens when two academic libraries begin reshaping their approach to collection evaluation and management by designing programs for large-scale, systematic collection review. At both libraries, methodical and comprehensive weeding had not taken place for decades, if ever. The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga restructured its collection practices by implementing a subject liaison program and creating a carefully phased review process in which discipline faculty were an integral part. Northern Michigan University set out to halve the size of its circulating collection within five years, as part of the library's response to a campus-wide strategic plan. Librarians, technical-services and systems staff, and student workers in circulation and technical services collaborated on workflows for large-scale review, withdrawal, and disposal of books, using patron input and careful analysis of acquisitions and circulation data. Both libraries developed new online avenues for soliciting active communicating with stakeholders and found common-ground solutions to the inevitable conflicts. This program presents each library's methods and early results, discusses the projects in the context of each respective library's development and growth, and explores some of the logistical, philosophical, and political lessons learned.

Position Fix: Introduction

We represent two academic libraries in institutions with roughly the same enrollment but different characteristics, undergoing similar large-scale collection reviews. We developed our projects independently but found that we were using many of the same tools and processes. In this session, we'll explore the similarities and the differences, with lessons drawn from our experiences, both respective and comparative.

Both the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC) and Northern Michigan University (NMU) are public Carnegie Master's L (larger programs) institutions, with UTC also granting some doctoral degrees in education, engineering, nursing, and physical therapy. UTC is a metropolitan institution with several other private and public institutions nearby, while NMU is a regional university in a geographically isolated location, historically a normal school with continuing strong programs in education, as well as business, psychology, nursing, and natural resources. It provides associate and vocational programs, as well as traditional four-year and master's degrees. Library holdings are roughly equivalent.

As part of campus strategic developments, each library encountered the need for a broad review of its circulating collections. At UTC, a new library building was part of the impetus for the review. At

NMU, the impossibility of a new library building helped drive the project. And here the stories diverge for the first time.

Setting a Course: Project Background

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

At the beginning of the Spring 2010 semester, the UTC Lupton Library (<http://www.lib.utc.edu>) began the first-ever evaluation of its circulating collection. We had weeded our Reference collection, but that resulted primarily in moving books from Reference into the circulating collection. Weeding is a natural process for most libraries; however, our circulating collection had not been reviewed since it was moved to the Lupton Library in 1974, and we aren't really sure that it was ever reviewed prior to that date, despite the University's 125th Anniversary this year (<http://www.utc.edu>).

UTC is in the process of building a brand new library. Moving our collection to a new building was a part of our preliminary discussions, and we wanted an accurate accounting of what we would be moving. As weeding is good information practice and a collection-development standard, we realized that it was quite unusual that a review had not taken place in—at the very least—35 years. The collection review would also be an inventory to determine what we actually own. The review process would

entail noting outdated editions, damaged and deteriorating volumes, duplicate copies, non-circulating items, aspects of the collection that need updating, aspects of the collection that need enhancing due to heavy circulation, and other collection-development issues. In addition, the use of our collections, compared to peer institutions, is very low and, in part, we believe that this is related to the accessibility issues that arise in a collection that has never been formally reviewed.

At the UTC Library, comprehensive collection-development efforts, which include the selection of journals, books, videos, and musical recordings for purchase, are a collaborative effort between the Library and academic departments. Librarians and discipline faculty work together to ensure materials meet research and teaching needs. We are currently undergoing changes in how collection development is handled, trying to put more control and oversight in the hands of our librarians, and moving away from academic department control. This is ongoing and we have received mostly very positive response from the academic faculty.

Each librarian at UTC acts as a subject liaison to at least one, but more likely two, academic departments. Librarians are responsible for coordinating the collection-development activities of those departments, which includes notifying the department of funds available for the academic year, notifying the department of deadlines for submitting recommendations to the Library, and submitting the department's requests to the Library's Materials Processing department via Ambassador OneSource. Each subject liaison is also responsible for the collection evaluation of their subject areas. The circulating collection of books numbers approximately 350,000 volumes. Each and every book is being reviewed individually.

For example, the Subject Specialist liaison for the Biological and Environmental Sciences Department and for the Physics, Geology, and Astronomy Department will perform the initial review, encompassing 22,056 books. That number is fairly average for each subject liaison; some have more, and some have less. As subject areas are completed, departments will be notified and the secondary review will be opened to university faculty.

Northern Michigan University

At NMU, the collection review grew out of the Olson Library's (<http://library.nmu.edu/>) response to a university strategic plan, which called for further development toward "the library of the future" (*Road Map*, 2008, p. 7). In early 2009, the library adopted a strategic-directions document based on Lewis' (2007) "A Strategy for Academic Libraries in the First Quarter of the 21st Century," including a major goal to "retire legacy print collections while maintaining discipline-based core titles" (Olson Library, 2010, p. 2). This particular weeding project plays a role in both shifting collections from print to electronic and repurposing some spaces currently used for stacks. With the broader strategic goals as the context, the library set an ambitious five-year objective: to reduce the size of its circulating print book collection by 50%.

Olson Library has long operated a subject-liaison program; with nine faculty librarians serving 33 departments and programs; everyone works with multiple programs. Selection has long been the province of the liaisons, under coordination of the Collection Development Librarian, with departmental-faculty syllabi and research interests given high priority. Acquisitions funds are allocated by discipline, and title requests are submitted to the Collection Development Librarian, who generally relies on the liaisons' subject expertise and long relationships with departmental faculty in their disciplines. Most ordering is handled through YBP's Gobi. Departmental faculty arrange most instruction directly with individual liaisons, including a rapidly growing program of embedding librarians in online and hybrid courses. The liaison program was developed over many years, with liaisons' subject areas defined by closely detailed LC ranges, and those LC maps have driven a great deal of our local approach to working with materials. They have also played a role in decentralizing a great deal of collection-development work, with individual librarians working independently to manage their "own" sections on their own timetables.

Over the years, weeding has been done lightly at best, focusing on discrete areas in the collection. Michigan has been hit particularly hard economically in the last 25 years—since long before the 2008 downturn—and University resources tentatively

identified for upgrading the library's facilities have always been shifted elsewhere in the end for more urgent priorities. With an aging building, a collection used no more than similar collections (50–65%), and increasingly strident calls to modernize and reinvigorate both our resources and our services, the library took a bold step to reclaim roughly half of the area devoted to stacks. The 50% figure was not scientifically identified; nobody really knew what would be feasible, so we selected an ambitious number with the full intention of revising it later if necessary. The ability to reallocate the space offers some exciting prospects, including making our Archives and Special Collections more visible and accessible, and providing more study rooms and other collaborative work spaces, of which we have far too few to meet demand.

In short, the library building itself seemed unlikely ever to rise to the top of the priority list, so we determined to approach the problem differently: We clear out individual spaces and offer them to the University for specific uses, and the University rehabilitates them. We don't get a new building or a total renovation, but if we can cobble together enough discrete spaces for separate updating, we'll have a mostly livable building with some real improvements, especially in spaces not currently well configured for any particular use at all. We'll also have a leaner, more effective collection that better reflects and supports current institutional priorities.

All Hands Aloft: General Strategy

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

UTC developed three phases to its collection evaluation process. Phase One is Library Review; Phase Two is Department and Campus Review; and Phase Three is Final Review and Removal. The phases have multiple time frames to give the librarians time for review. For example, Astronomy (QB) was submitted at the end of Spring 2010 semester, Agriculture (S) at the end of Summer 2010 semester, Physics (QC) at the end of Fall 2010 semester, and Geology (QE) at the end of Summer 2011 semester. Biology and Environmental Sciences (QH, QK, QL and TD) are scheduled to be completed by mid-January of Spring 2012 semester. The review was expected to take about two years to complete, and it appears

that each subject area will make it at least through Phase One by mid-January 2012.

In an effort to provide transparency to our academic community, both a project webpage and a wiki were created and mounted on the library's website. A button on the library's homepage leads to the Collection Review Project: <http://www.lib.utc.edu/Collection-Review-Project-2.html>. All project information can be accessed including the project calendar, a list of all books in the circulating collection, an overall project summary, a one-page summary of the evaluation process, a list of library department/subject liaisons, and ways to provide input. Probably the most important part of the page is the query button for subjects which are currently under review. This page also leads to the wiki which describes our procedures and criteria, thoughts on collection review, ALA guidelines, meeting summaries, and project statistics.

During Phase One, each subject specialist gets an Excel spreadsheet detailing every book in his or her subject area. This spreadsheet includes information such as title, publisher, year of publication, number of copies held, number of times the book has circulated since 2000, barcodes, call numbers, and other data. We are expected to physically examine each book on our lists, including checking the list against what's actually in the stacks, and that means spending time in the stacks. The spreadsheets were initially generated from our VTLS Virtua catalog, using the Virtua ad-hoc reporting functionality via Access. As we got more into the project we discovered that we needed a more robust way to generate tables and we now use MySQL.

If a book does not match what is on the spreadsheet, then the librarian sets that book aside and brings it to the Cataloging Coordinator to determine the cause. We have a short form for the librarian to fill out so we can keep statistics for the problems encountered. Sometimes the spine label is wrong, or the barcode does not match. Many times the book in hand is not on the list, but often this is because the book is new. Whatever the reason for the error, the Cataloging Coordinator fixes the problem and sends the book back to the stacks. If a book is significantly damaged, it is removed for repair or rebinding.

Librarians have the option of working from a laptop or printing out our lists. One of the tools available for evaluating the lists is Books for College Libraries, and some librarians mark the lists with the titles we hold. Sometime prior work on the collection can still be useful; for instance, in Astronomy, some nice reference librarian had already gone through the whole series and marked with a little red dot the ones that we held. These books would naturally be kept in the collection no matter the age.

Age is an important criterion especially in the sciences. We look for damage, outdated editions for which a more current edition is available, and duplicate copies. In addition, titles not circulated in more than 10 years are evaluated taking into account current research and pedagogical goals of the departments, along with the availability of other content. Librarians insert a blue flag into each book that they choose to mark for further review, which on the spreadsheet is a column called "Discard." There is also a column for "Not on Shelf" for missing books.

When working from printouts, once the stacks review is finished, the resulting data is transferred to the Excel spreadsheets. Various librarians take slightly varying approaches, but we all follow the same guidelines. Working in the early-morning stacks is peaceful. The only real problem is the dust. We have various specific criteria for evaluating books, but layers of dust are unfortunately not a measure we can use.

After the initial library review for each subject is completed, that subject area moves into Phase Two, which is Department and Campus Review. The list of flagged items is posted to the library wiki so that all UTC faculty members will have a chance to see titles under review. The library dean sends an email to the appropriate departments, as well as a campus-wide email notice to inform interested parties of the subject areas under review. A project calendar is on the wiki with a schedule for each subject area. The calendar shows the call number, subject area, projected completion date by semester, department, and liaison name. Subject liaisons also send emails to their department faculty members inviting them to review the flagged items.

Individuals and/or departments can select books they wish to keep in one of four ways: by using the Web form to submit titles to be retained, by using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to submit titles, by using a print list to submit titles, or by arranging to visit the stacks with a librarian. Individuals and/or departments can ask questions about why a particular book was chosen for review. If a faculty member asks that we retain a book, we remove the item from the review list. In the case of duplicate copies, we will ask if they were aware that they are asking to retain duplicates and ask whether they feel the need to keep multiple copies. Subject lists are available for a minimum of two months.

Phase Three is a multi-angle review, which includes 1) checking all titles for recent circulation, 2) checking all titles for internal use, 3) searching for holdings in OCLC WorldCat to ensure that all titles are physically held by at least 100 other libraries worldwide, 4) searching for online availability via Google Books, Project Gutenberg, HathiTrust, and other permanent online archives, 5) sending the remaining list of titles to interested faculty members for inclusion in departmental libraries, 6) offering remaining titles via a campus book sale, and 7) working with a not-for-profit agency to distribute remaining titles. Our statistics page indicates which subjects have been completed. Seven subject areas have gone through all three phases, with the exception of the book sale scheduled for mid-November 2011.

Northern Michigan University

NMU's premise was that focusing on low-use materials would yield the most space, so we focused on titles that showed no usage. Our Systems staff produced a list of items with zero circulation from Voyager, which had been brought online in 2001. What's now known as the "Zero-Use List" numbered 168,900 items, about 42.7% of the 375,000 circulating monographs. Given the initial goal of reducing the size of the circulating collection by half, that list appeared a reasonable start. Eliminating half the collection, projected over the five-year timeline, meant withdrawing an average of 37,500 items annually. We placed the list, along with other documents, on our internal staff wiki.

The list did have some limitations:

1. It didn't account for recent acquisitions.
2. It didn't account for core materials.
3. It didn't account for multiple copies, subsequent editions, or reprints.
4. Because Voyager records an historical charge only when an item is returned, the list didn't account for items that were checked out at the time the list was run.
5. It didn't even accurately account for circulation history; we haven't kept a count, but it's no longer unusual to find due dates stamped in the back of volumes supposedly not circulated since their acquisition

Campus culture and politics at Northern include very strong independence on the part of library faculty. Unlike UTC, we did not want to review every title or spend time discussing with users the many titles we had no intention of withdrawing (e.g., recent acquisitions and core materials). We developed a workflow that covered many of the same elements as UTC's, but in a different order, gathering all the bibliographic information first. For instance, one early check for a pre-1924 title is full-image availability online; if it's in Archive.org, Google Books, or HathiTrust and the volume has no unique physical value, no further review is necessary. By definition, a title is under review because it doesn't appear to have been used, so if it's reliably available elsewhere, including on the Web or via one of our licensed collections, it doesn't need to be in our stacks. We've found numbered and signed first editions, as well as holographic author correspondence tucked inside; those items go to Special Collections. So do things like a certain Finnish translation of *A Drop Of Ink* (recorded as Doyle, 1912, authorship questioned), unique because it was reportedly pirated from a Swedish version, or *Wuthering Heights* in Finnish. These materials are part of Upper Peninsula culture and history, so we retain them.

The procedure is complex and well-structured, but there's no central schedule. For this project, individual Web pages were developed for each liaison, which had not existed before; this development represented another step in the Library's growth, providing additional channels for communication

with users. In addition, new Web pages describing the weeding project and answering questions have been incorporated into the Library's Web site. On these pages are posted the title lists the liaisons are currently working on, along with their deadlines for faculty in those departments to let them know what's coming up for review and when. Also unlike UTC, review deadlines run no longer than three weeks, in order to keep the weeding visible as a normal, ongoing effort, rather than emphasizing its uniqueness and urgency as a one-time or even periodically recurring project.

The librarian makes a first pass through that list and eliminates the titles to be kept. Students pull the remaining items from stacks and search the Web and WorldCat for holdings, with the results noted on a slip for each volume. NMU participates in a very active statewide borrowing system called MelCat, so if a title is held by at least four Michigan libraries, we consider it readily available elsewhere. If there aren't four other Michigan holdings, the liaison librarian looks more closely at holdings outside the state to determine availability via interlibrary loan; usually, more than 20 or so is considered sufficient. NMU's availability thresholds are much lower than UTC's because we're focusing on low-use items to begin with. Withdrawal processing is automated via macro developed by Systems staff, which withdraws items and then deletes records and OCLC holdings with a single barcode scan. Volumes we withdraw are sent to Better World Books, which effectively outsources an ongoing book sale that we don't have the staff or the space to run ourselves.

The volumes we keep are identified in an 852x note as having been retained by a specific librarian on a specific date, creating records of what's been reviewed. That data can be used in several different ways to help shape ongoing review in the future. In addition to examining the materials in hand, we're reviewing each bibliographic and holding record for completeness and accuracy. We correct, update, or overlay new records, and add tables of contents or other information to improve access. Thus, the project comprises not only reviewing significant segments of our holdings, but also creating records useful for future collection management and improving the quality of our cataloging for current and future users. Weeding has long been accepted as one strat-

egy for making the ongoing collection more accessible. The usual image is of stacks no longer clogged by shabby, dusty volumes, and that's certainly accurate. But the image works in conceptual discovery space as well as in the stacks; in addition to clearing physical space to make the materials retained more visible and accessible, we're also improving patron access with better bibliographic records.

Position Fix: Early Results

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

UTC held its first book sale during the last week of April, 2011. None of the reviewed books were included in that sale. We cleared books off the shelves in our Materials Processing department to make room for all the books that would be coming out of the stacks. This first of several projected sales began with mostly gifts that we had chosen not to add to our collection. Most of the books we sold were either duplicates of books we already owned or that we had decided did not meet our curriculum needs. The book sale was held for four days on the portico of the library. We put books on carts so that they could easily be moved. We sold each book for one dollar, and some people found some good bargains. The only glitch sale was that the university closed on April 27 when four tornadoes hit our area and we had to evacuate the library.

Northern Michigan University

Since beginning its project in late 2009, and with a target completion date of June, 2015, NMU has removed 55,311 volumes from its circulating stacks, with 40,957 (74%) of those sent to Better World Books for resale. Those sales have returned to the Library an amount more than double our current year's allocation for English-language and literature print monographs, which is one of our larger subject funds. We've withdrawn 14.8% of the circulating collection, exceeding the 11% target for the end of FY12. However, we're still below the average annual target volume; we're averaging only about two-thirds of the necessary pace, so it's not clear that we can meet the overall 50% objective by our deadline. We allowed at the start for the possibility that we simply might not be able to process 48,000 withdrawals a year, and the original 50% target was no more than an estimate. Still, the progress is significant, and we're on the right tack with the wind

in the right quarter. More important, we've positioned ourselves to be in just the right place when an unexpected space crunch arose for next year; we've suddenly found ourselves able to step up to the plate with some space newly available to help alleviate a campus-wide classroom problem when a major building comes offline for repair at the end of this year. With careful planning and negotiation, we'll have some renovated spaces to show for it all, and later on in our five-year plan, we'll put the cumulative changes to new uses as well.

Checking the Wind: What Have We Learned?

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

A project of this nature is not without detractors. UTC's review made the front page of the *Chattanooga Times Free Press* (Trevizo, 2011), with concerns put forth by faculty that it was too aggressive. Some faculty members are under the misapprehension that we are a research library and need to keep everything. The review was also mentioned in the university's student newspaper, *The University Echo* (Kenwright, 2011), although student concerns seemed more in the nature of comparing UTC to our flagship institution. Even though the project is as inclusive, collaborative, and transparent as we can make it, some faculty members just don't care to hear it and willfully misinterpret the goals. One faculty member held up enlarged photos of our stacks (focused on the blue slips in the books) in a Faculty Senate meeting and actually yelled that such a project was completely unheard of and the antithesis of education. This outburst led one other faculty member to suggest that maybe we were being too transparent.

UTC built an extensive, transparent process with some really complicated information for this project. It is detailed, open to the public, and widely publicized. If anyone on campus has not seen it, then they have not been paying attention. The Library Dean presented the project at Faculty Senate meetings on two different occasions. We hosted several open campus meetings in the library (with coffee and muffins!) and sent liaisons to meet with departments if requested. We have the project featured prominently on our webpage and have posted numerous documents to the wiki. All the specifics are open and available.

As UTC's project progressed, we learned and adjusted. In the beginning we had no target numbers, but as concerns grew, we adjusted that and have looked a lot closer at the numbers and percentages of titles suggested for removal from the collection. The online submission form was tweaked several times, making it easier for faculty to retain books. Library liaisons also regularly invite faculty to be engaged in the process as each new set of subjects is reviewed. We may be up in the stacks reviewing books in the summer, but we will never schedule an open review when faculty are not on campus.

Then there are a couple of little things we learned not to ignore. At our first book sale, the number one request was to have books arranged by a general subject area. And we learned that books in UTC stacks are dirty, so it is always a must to have a handy supply of wet wipes at the ready.

Northern Michigan University

The public-relations challenges were similar at NMU. We didn't intend to do all this in secret, and we didn't think we were. The liaison librarians do keep in touch with the faculty in their subject areas, and we do have an Academic Information Services Advisory Committee, which reports to the faculty Senate, and the Dean of Academic Information Services reports to the Provost. Not to mention, there is public information out on the Web and embedded in the university's strategic-planning documents. But still, everyone on campus is subject to information overload, and even in the library we don't always register things that should be important. So when the Library had trucks and trucks of volumes double- and triple-parked in Technical Services (highly visible behind the public-services desk), patrons noticed and asked what was up. We took the initiative and invited the student newspaper (Hough, 2010) to come talk with us.

The dustup wasn't nearly as bad as it could have been, and only a few departments really got up in arms. Among the various political contexts for the negative reaction was increasing University emphasis in recent years on research and scholarship; it wasn't entirely surprising that some faculty perceived the weeding as eliminating the resources they needed in order to meet those new expectations. In addition to the critical emails were several

instances of entire shelves being cleared so the volumes could be browse-counted and therefore "used"—along with dozens of books being checked out and immediately returned. The news spread into the community, and we received several calls and emails from collectors and dealers wanting to go through our stacks and make offers on whatever interested them, which of course wasn't exactly the process we were using.

We worked hard to get communications organized and consistent, and we joined several academic department meetings to explain the process, answer questions, and assuage fears as best we could. Simply explaining our evaluation process in detail helped considerably, although other questions arose as well. Chief among those were faculty requests to:

1. Review volumes identified for weeding;
2. Review lists of volumes to be deselected; and/or
3. Review the Zero-Use List before implementation.

Librarians' reluctance to making volumes available for review arose from space and logistics problems, along with the pace of weeding; many department faculty are off campus for the summer, but library faculty continue our work year-round. We didn't have room to set aside multiple book trucks for the summer. More important, we didn't want to set a precedent for title-by-title negotiations or submit our daily work to external approval. This variant perspective between our two universities reflects differences in campus culture, good or bad. NMU's online lists can be reviewed anytime from anyplace, and faculty are encouraged to contact their liaison librarians at any time for discussion. In response, liaison librarians are free to modify their review schedules as needed to accommodate their department faculty.

As for a quasi-final list of volumes to be withdrawn, we didn't have one, and we felt the time and energy to create one would far outweigh its utility and value. The only point in the process where we could systematically record titles to be withdrawn lay beyond the point where it would be possible to reverse course without repeated disruption and confusion.

We had discovered early on that confusion in the processing workflow invariably led to errors like volumes physically withdrawn but records left in place, which resulted in items apparently missing. At least in that case, the errors have been readily identifiable and corrected. However, it's also possible that volumes intended to be retained have been withdrawn instead, and there's no ready way to determine whether that's happened--and if so, to identify the titles. The workflow's integral documentation makes inadvertent withdrawal a more difficult error to commit than incomplete withdrawal, but that disturbing potentiality does remain.

Our objections to making the Zero-Use List available for review arose from its limitations; especially for faculty outside the library, it was out of context. It showed only where we would start reviewing, without indicating what items we were excluding from the start by their currency or core relevance. A larger problem, though, was that the Zero-Use List didn't show what was *remaining* in the collection, especially since it showed things like the third copy of one of our eight editions of *Huckleberry Finn*, or the collected works of Alexander Pope in a reprint edition, of which we also had the original--which had been used and therefore wasn't on the list (and which we'd have retained even if it had been on the list).

To improve transparency without yielding control over our work, we found another way to provide the data in a form we could live with, which closely paralleled UTC's approach. We devised a method of running complete shelf lists for individual liaison areas, with the zero-use items highlighted so patrons could see those lists in the context of the full collection. Those are the lists the liaisons have posted on their discipline-specific Web pages.

We developed standard language for informing department faculty of upcoming weeding activity, in order to provide consistent information about our activities. The results of those changes have been positive, with some warm and grateful messages from department faculty members who had registered the most vocal objections. We haven't changed anything we're doing, but we are communicating differently about it and more explicitly demonstrating our understanding of departmental faculty concerns and our commitment to meeting

their needs. Not many of them are actively reviewing the lists, and even fewer come to the library to review physical volumes, but we've eased faculty fears about having their research resources yanked out from under them.

Despite NMU librarians' confidence that we knew our collection well, we discovered many interesting materials we didn't know we had--not for lack of accurate inventory, as inventory is kept continually, but for an unperceived lack of depth in our hands-on collection management over the decades. For instance, we found career-planning books from the 50s and 60s--valuable somewhere for advanced, nuanced study in gender issues and cultural history, but NMU isn't that institution. Seeing materials like this prompted some interesting discussions about the development of the institution and its curricula, and opened some new windows for librarians to consider our role in the institution's academic life.

NMU also had to make a number of adjustments to workflow and procedure, which is normal for any project so complex. To minimize potential error points and make best use of our staff and student efforts, we spent a lot of time on upfront procedure planning, and developing complex macros for one-step withdrawal, holdings deletion, and other data cleanup. We discovered also that our records omitted some important data points; when we calculated that we had withdrawn about 9% of the circulating collection, we belatedly realized that we didn't know how much of the Zero-Use List those withdrawals represented, so individual liaisons are now keeping track of their review volume as well. We know we'll have to revise our target, and we need to be able to explain that the reason we can't withdraw 50% of the collection is because less of the collection turned out to be dispensable--not because we didn't review enough of the collection to start with. The latter may turn out to be a factor, but we need additional tracking data in order to establish that.

The project has also illuminated opportunities for improved communication with NMU library users. Librarians frequently have trouble describing our work clearly and adequately to civilians, and this project has given us some openings for discussing how their work interacts with our work. Presenta-

tion isn't everything, but for many of our patrons, it is many things. It's an adage in public relations that in a conflict between objective reality and perception, perception wins out every time. Especially in a service profession, perceptions often are the only reality, so a big part of our job is to manage perceptions. Doing so doesn't have to mean deceptive or manipulative communications, or reflexive pandering to whatever our patrons say they want; it means only considering where patrons are in their understanding of what we do and how we do it, and meeting them on that ground in order to help them understand better—and to improve our understanding of how they perceive their needs and our efforts to meet them.

Steady as She Goes: Conclusion

In the end, we all want to provide our users with quality, strong, and accessible collections. A comprehensive collection review is good information practice that UTC will integrate into policy and procedures at regular intervals. NMU has taken a closer-focused approach to this particular collection realignment, and we hope to use this long-term project as a basis for constant, ongoing collection assessment, with current curricular needs the primary basis for shaping our ongoing decisions. At both institutions, we're finding increased clarity and renewal in these efforts to reform our collections and our approach to managing them. We've found that solid data, careful planning, and thoughtful communication can bring the community of users into closer contact with the library and its resources and services—which ultimately serves our users better, along with the library and our host institutions. That's what we're here for.

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