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Weeding Out in the Open: What Will the Neighbors Think?

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Abstract

Weeding is often an emotionally charged topic for both librarians and faculty. A healthy print collection needs weeding, but the campus community is often nervous and concerned about this practice. In preparing for a large scale monograph deselection project at California State University, Fullerton's (CSUF) Pollak Library, library faculty and administration grappled with how to productively and efficiently involve the large CSUF teaching faculty in the weeding process. Library systems staff developed an innovative web-based tool that enables faculty to easily provide feedback on deselection candidates on a title by title basis. This paper explains the thoughts behind the project, the creation of the deselection database and user interface, how the weeding project was received by teaching faculty, and the results of an initial pilot.

Introduction

Like many libraries, California State University, Fullerton's Pollak Library has been actively engaged in transforming its collections and physical space. Pollak Library proactively collects in electronic formats when possible and aims to provide spaces for student collaboration, study, and teaching. This transition has naturally led to a desire to deselect print materials that are unlikely to be needed in the future. While deselection projects for print journals and audio-visual materials on older formats have progressed smoothly, the campus expressed significant concerns about weeding the monograph collection. Library administration sought a method for campus teaching faculty to be engaged in the weeding process, while still moving forward with necessary deselection. In order to provide a streamlined approach to accepting feedback, library systems faculty and staff developed a custom online interface, in which teaching faculty could review titles slated for weeding on a title by title basis if desired. This paper describes the reasons behind the creation of the interface, the results of an initial pilot, and plans for ongoing weeding at Pollak Library.

Deselection Preparation

With over 38,000 students, California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) is one of the largest campuses in the 23-campus California State

University (CSU) system. CSUF is a predominantly undergraduate and master's level institution, and Pollak Library's collecting focus is curriculum-driven. As a whole, the CSU system has been analyzing the future of print collections and library spaces as a part of the Library of the Future (LOF) initiative. LOF, along with an upcoming renovation of the library building, prompted Pollak Library to actively approach deselection. Historically, Pollak Library had not proactively weeded, and as a result, numerous editions of the same titles, outdated content, and unnecessary duplication existed in the monograph collection.

To embark on a large-scale weeding of the monograph collection, CSUF worked with Sustainable Collections Services (SCS) to enable more robust data-driven decisions. In summer 2014, Pollak Library loaded its monograph data into SCS's GreenGlass online tool, which allowed librarians to analyze the collection using our circulation data alongside WorldCat holdings, availability in HathiTrust, and multiple other data points. Subject librarians were each assigned appropriate sections of the collection to weed. The majority of librarians were philosophically ready for the task but had workload concerns, while a few were opposed to large-scale weeding. The collection development librarian held multiple meetings to discuss weeding strategies and practices as well as training sessions on the use of GreenGlass.

Pollak Library

PROGRAM SETUP

Departments

Class

Level 1

Level 2

REPORTS

Reports

Level 2 Setup

G-GEOGRAPHY, ANTHROPOLOGY, REI

GV-Recreation, Leisure

List of Sub Level

Create A Sub Level

Recreation and Outdoor Sports

Physical Education and Training

Sports, General

Water Sports & Winter Sports

Ball Games

Automobiles, Track and Field, Boxing

Games and Amusements

Dancing

Delete

Sub Level Name:

Physical Education and Training

Description:

School and Collegiate Athletics,

Starts With:

201

Ends With:

555

Activate: ☒

Update

Figure 1. Administrative interface for librarians to separate lists by call number.

Change in Leadership and Approach

Shortly after the data load to GreenGlass occurred and initial weeding assignments were made, a new interim university librarian was appointed. As a member of the teaching faculty and a former chair of the academic senate, the new interim university librarian was especially interested in involving the teaching faculty in the weeding process. In addition, at an academic senate meeting, the Provost had assured faculty that they would have some involvement.

Prior to the start of the weeding process, faculty were surveyed on their opinions and perceptions of a number of library services and initiatives. On the topic of the upcoming weeding project, free text responses ranged from "I'm extremely supportive" to "I think this is a disaster!!!!!!!!!!" While there had always been a plan to make the list of deselection candidates available for comment in some form, such as via an Excel file posted on a LibGuide or moving the books to a specific area of the library for perusal, the new leadership wanted the process to be as transparent as possible, and very easy for faculty to provide feedback. Library systems faculty and staff were charged with creating an online system

in which faculty could browse or search the list of deselection candidates, review necessary data points from GreenGlass (such as total checkouts and WorldCat holdings), and request that titles be retained or sent to their departments if weeded. Each department would have a single login and password, and only one "vote" per department.

In order to make the navigation as simple as possible for faculty, Library Administration requested that large lists of weeding candidates be broken

down into smaller lists of approximately 200 books. Librarians created descriptive headings for each list, and library systems staff developed an administrative interface for librarians to create the headings and descriptions based on the call number ranges, as shown in figure 1.

Theoretically, this allowed departments to divide the list among colleagues by their areas of expertise. While each department had only one login name, faculty also entered their e-mail addresses as they logged in. The addition of e-mail addresses at login enabled the library to identify if individual faculty members were making numerous retention selections. Figure 2 shows this breakdown and description as viewed by a faculty member, and figure 3 shows a sample of

Initial Pilot

After the interface was fully developed and librarians were trained to break down their lists into smaller portions, an initial pilot was conducted in the spring 2015 semester. Systems staff loaded a list of 1,744 low-use items in the GV (recreation and leisure) classification range to the weeding interface. Librarians expected that the kinesiology faculty would be most interested in

Figure 2. Browsing by classification in the weeding interface for faculty feedback.

this subject area, and so the liaison librarian attended a department meeting to describe the process, show examples of items on the weeding list, and answer questions. The department faculty members were receptive and agreed to participate in the process. Faculty in other departments were informed via e-mail messages, online announcements, and a presentation at the academic senate by the interim university librarian. While it was expected that kinesiology faculty would be most interested in the titles on the pilot list, all departments were given the opportunity to use the interface and provide

feedback. The associate university librarian sent all department chairs e-mails including login information, details on the project, and instructions for using the interface.

Results of the Pilot

CSUF has over 2,100 faculty across 67 departments. Since most departments would not have a strong need for the books in the GV section, the library expected a small number of departments to participate in the pilot. Nine departments made retention requests, as entered by 20 faculty members. Four of the departments did not comply with the “one vote per department” rule, as multiple faculty made entries on the same title in some cases. One faculty member requested that 1,716 of the 1,744 books be retained in the collection, and so if all requests were honored, then only 23 books would be withdrawn, representing only 1% of the list presented. If this single faculty member’s requests are ignored, then 1,095 books (63% of the list)

TITLE & AUTHOR	CALL NUMBER	TITLE CIRCULATION	Retain in Collection	Send to Department
The environmentalist's bookshelf : a guide to the ... By- Merideth, Robert W Published- 1993	GF 41z M45 1993 US Holding=200	Recorded Checkouts= 0 Last Checked Out= Never	☐	☐
Human development and the environment : challenges... By- Not Available Published- 2002	GF3 .H75 2002 US Holding=200	Recorded Checkouts= 0 Last Checked Out= Never	☐	☐
Interactions of the major biogeochemical cycles : ... By- Not Available Published- 2003	GF3 .J28 2003 US Holding=200	Recorded Checkouts= 0 Last Checked Out= Never	☐	☐
The environmental future: proceedings. Edited by N... By- International Conference on Environmental Future (1st : 1971 : Jyväskylä, Finland) mn Published- 1972	GF3 .J37 1971b US Holding=200	Recorded Checkouts= 0 Last Checked Out= Never	☐	☐
The human habitat; contemporary readings [compiled... By- Wheeler, David L Published- 1971	GF8 .W45 US Holding=179	Recorded Checkouts= 0 Last Checked Out= Never	☐	☐

Figure 3. Titles listed in the weeding interface for faculty feedback.

Figure 4. Required comment box for retention requests.

would be weeded, and 649 books (37% of the list) would be retained based on the feedback from the other faculty. Of the 649 titles to retain, 306 of them had never circulated, and 221 of them had not circulated in twenty years. The interim university librarian requested a meeting with the faculty member who requested that nearly all the books be retained and her department chair. Both declined the meeting. Currently, none of the books from the pilot have been withdrawn. It is unlikely that they will all be retained permanently, but a long-term plan has not yet been established.

Future Directions

Ultimately, the pilot was a failure. The development and use of the interface enabled faculty participation, but also seriously hindered the weeding project. A significant amount of library staff time was invested in development, testing, and training for the interface. Subject librarians also spent considerable time separating their lists of weeding candidates into smaller lists. Some librarians also mentioned that after they put a lot of work into creating an appropriate list

of weeding candidates, they disliked that any faculty member, regardless of discipline, could veto the decision.

However, the library administration sought to continue using the method with some adaptation. In consultation with the academic senate executive committee, the online interface was adjusted to require that any faculty member who requests the retention of a title provide a reason. Previously, the intention had been to make retention as easy as possible, and it was quickly recognized that additional justification was necessary.

Currently, in the fall 2015 semester, a list of over 30,000 books across a wide range of disciplines has been input into the interface for faculty feedback. A reason for retention is now required. Users must provide written justification for their retention requests before they can continue reviewing titles, as figure 4 illustrates. Due to the increased number of titles and the additional labor on the faculty's part, the library does not expect the same result as the pilot.