Tip of the Iceberg, Part 1: Choosing What Shows

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Tip of the Iceberg, Part 1: Choosing What Shows

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Abstract

In the summer of 2019, Temple University's main library relocated to a new building, in which most of the 1.3 million-item main stacks collection resides in an automated storage and retrieval system (ASRS), and a small portion in open stacks. The open stacks, or browsing collection, includes highly circulating items, new books, and materials with a particular need for browsing. Highly circulating items were identified by dividing the total number of loans by the number of years the library had owned the book. Materials with a particular need for browsing, generally those with significant visual components such as art and music scores, were also selected by formula, though a lower number of loans was required in order for the book to be added to the browsing title list. The Collections Analysis librarian merged the lists of highly circulating items and highly visual items and presented the preliminary title list to subject specialists. These librarians then suggested categories of books that they felt should be browsable, such as maps and language dictionaries. Identifying new books was more complicated than expected, as the list needed to exclude certain categories of purchases, such as replacements or continuations, that did not belong in the open stacks. All items destined for browsing were marked with bright green stickers near the call number, which served as an effective way for the staff who packed the books to separate them from those going to the ASRS.

This presentation was Part 1 of a session that was offered in combination with a presentation from the University of Central Florida (UCF). Both Temple University and UCF have an automated storage and retrieval system (ASRS) that houses the bulk of our general collections in the main library, with a small percentage in open stacks. This piece focuses on the process for selecting which titles would go in the browsing collection at Temple University's Charles Library.

Charles Library opened to the Temple community in late August 2019, replacing the previous main library, Paley. While Paley's general collections contained about 2 million physical items, 700,000 of these had been in remote storage for over a decade by the time that Charles was built. The remaining 1.3 million items were moved to Charles, in three streams. The largest portion was loaded into metal bins housed in the ASRS, which has a total capacity of 1.8 million. A smaller subset of the collections, sometimes called the browsing collection, was placed in open stacks. These shelves have a total capacity of 180,000. In addition, Charles Library has a small juvenile collection, made up of books that had previously been intershelved with the general collections. When a Collections Analysis librarian, that is, the author, was hired in 2015, one of her first significant projects was creating a list of which books would go in the browsing collection, representing the "tip of the iceberg" of the library's general collections.

Several internal discussions generated a few principles for the browsing collection. It should look like a cohesive collection, one that might make sense if it was the entire collection of a smaller institution. There should be a relatively simple explanation that staff could share with patrons as to what kinds of materials were in browsing. Books would be selected with the intent to minimize retrieval demands on the ASRS and with consideration for how different kinds of materials are used. In practice, it helped to think of the books in terms of three categories: high-demand books, new books, and materials with a particular need for browsing (generally those with a heavy visual component). Each of these three categories supported the general principles in different but overlapping ways.

Because Temple was planning for a higher percentage of our collection in the ASRS than any other library we had spoken to, we had concerns that the large number of requests might cause a bottleneck and delay retrieval. (UCF was in the process of moving when we spoke to them in the fall of 2018, so they were not yet able to share their experiences with circulation.) Putting high-circulation titles in the open stacks was intended to decrease demands on the retrieval system. In addition, using a formula to identify high-demand books provided a simple algorithmic way to create a title list that was spread across disciplines, presumably including some of the most important titles within each discipline. We sometimes

conceptualized the browsing collection as a showcase collection and wanted users to be able to see at a glance that the library owns the classics that one would expect. High-demand books were defined as those with an average of one or more checkouts per year, and a last checkout within the last five years.

New books also had several reasons for being included in the browsing collection. They are more likely to circulate than older books, yet with no circulation history they would not meet the criteria for high-demand books. Additionally, recent purchases tend to be newly published and in good condition, which creates a positive impression on the shelves. The intent was to have three years' worth of new books on the shelves. This would include the two years prior to the move and the first year of operations. The committee that was planning the move of the physical collections decided to begin marking books on arrival starting in September 2016, based on the expectation of moving in August 2018. Since construction was delayed by a year, there were actually three years of new books on the shelves on opening day in August 2019, and books added during the 19/20 academic year will constitute a fourth year of new books.

The third category, materials with a particular need for browsing, has an intrinsic rationale, but identifying the titles was more complicated. We knew at the outset that this would include art books, music scores, and math books. Art and music were identified because of the visual nature of the materials, and math was treated similarly because faculty had previously emphasized their reliance on viewing physical materials in the stacks. Not every book from these disciplines could go into browsing. Art, music, and math materials were selected using broader formulas that required less circulation history in order for an item to make the cut. In the early planning stages, an associate university librarian had chosen target numbers of items, so the Collections Analysis librarian developed criteria for each discipline that would yield the correct number of books to meet these targets.

After creating separate title lists for art books, music scores, and math books, the author merged these with the list of highly circulating items to create a preliminary title list. No new books were included in the list at first, since the move was still far enough in the future that books that would be new on opening day had not yet been received. Subject specialists then had the opportunity to view this preliminary

list. This review was important partly to build awareness of what types of materials were going to browsing and partly to gather input from selectors about additional types of books to include. Subject specialists had several suggestions of other types of books that would have a highly visual component or a particular need for browsing, such as graphic novels, language dictionaries, and atlases. Some also mentioned items that fell under the concept of the open stacks as a showcase collection, such as local history, or works created by underrepresented groups such as African American and female composers. One selector also provided call number ranges within her discipline that referred to dictionaries and encyclopedias.

Happily, there was room to incorporate all of the suggested categories of books into the browsing title list. In some cases, such as graphic novels, a category was small enough that every item could be included. For other categories, such as Philadelphia history and language dictionaries, the author created a list of all the holdings within the main library and asked a subject specialist to select titles to put in the browsing collection.

The process of creating a title list involved managing many smaller lists. An Excel spreadsheet proved useful for keeping track of all the different lists that the author created and then merged. The spreadsheet contained columns to note a description of the category (e.g., music scores), the criteria used to select items within that category, whether a subject specialist had been or needed to be consulted about the list, and the filename. The full working title list was maintained using the Power BI software. Power BI is a business intelligence (BI) tool from Microsoft. It can handle larger tables than Excel and also allows users to create interactive data visualizations. The software contains an option for appending one table to another, which allowed each of the separate title lists to be added to the full list.

Once the initial title list was created from the various merged lists, attention turned to items that needed to be excluded from the browsing collection. One such class of books was those going into the juvenile section. As juvenile books had previously been intershelved with the general collections, some had ended up on the list of highly circulating items or one of the other specialized lists. Another category to exclude was items that were part of a multivolume set, if the majority of the set was not on the browsing list. If more than half of a set was

on the browsing list, the rest was added, and if less than half was on the browsing list, the full set was excluded from browsing. Power BI's ability to create relationships between tables was useful in excluding desired items from the full title list. The software allows users to build a relationship based on a common field in both tables. The full title list and the exclusions list each contained a field called Item Control Number, so the tables were connected via this column. This allowed the full list to be filtered to show only items not on the exclusions list. The Power BI document became the master list of what was going to go in the browsing collection.

The title list in Power BI did not include new books. In the early stages of the planning process a committee had decided to begin marking new books upon receipt with bright green dots stuck to the spines of the books. Rather than physically separating these books before packing up the collections, the dots allowed us to keep the general collections intact until packing began and focus on other move preparations. The dots provided a clear visual cue so that books going to browsing could be packed separately from those going to the ASRS.

When staff started the dotting, we were three years out from the move and had not yet started a plan for making location changes in the catalog. We did not add catalog notes indicating that a book was new and had been dotted, as we were thinking of the dots primarily as a visual marker for the movers. As the move drew closer, however, it became clear that we needed a list of items with green dots. Items being loaded into the ASRS need to have a catalog location of ASRS in order for the storage and retrieval software to accept them. This meant a cataloger needed a list of which books were going into the ASRS before the load process began, and this list needed to exclude any books that were not going into the ASRS. While it ultimately turned out to be possible to create such a list, and the move went quite smoothly, the decision to label new books with a visual marker only and no note in the catalog did create some difficulty.

Creating a retroactive list of which new books had gotten green dot stickers was much more complicated than expected. As Temple University Libraries had migrated to a new ILS in 2017, it was not possible to simply run a report of items received after September 2016, when the dotting began. In addition, some categories of books received after that date did not get dots, such as replacements and

continuations. There were also standing orders that got dotted but had no order record in the catalog and hence no receiving date.

The list of new books with dots was the merged product of three lists: books received after September 2016 but pre-ILS migration, books received post-migration, and a list provided by one particular vendor of standing orders they had sent since September 2016. Exclusions from this list included replacements, books that had been sent directly to the bindery upon receipt, Arabic-language books, and others. The list went through many iterations before getting close to accuracy. After doing shelf-checks in several areas of the stacks, the author would note which books were on the list but had no dot or had dots but were not on the list and would try to determine if these belonged to a new category of books that needed to be included or excluded. After at least four rounds of shelf-checking and revising, the list achieved an estimated 98% accuracy.

Notwithstanding this one challenge, the process of creating the browsing collection generally went very well. It appears that the high-circulation formula did surface classics, and there was room to incorporate all the subject specialists' feedback while staying within the shelving capacity. The shelves were estimated to be 75% full on opening day, so there is room to continue to add new books over the first year of operations. After the first full year, we will begin a process of rotating books off the shelf.

Some calculations provide a snapshot of what the collection looked like on opening day. By design, the N and M classes made up large pieces of the collection, at 27.87% and 13.68% respectively. P was also a large class, making up 15.15% of the collection, due to high circulation in this discipline. Math, followed by history and social sciences, were the next largest portions of the browsing collection. There had been some concern that, due to seeking out books with heavy circulation for the browsing collection, a large percentage of the collection would be checked out at any given time, and the shelves would look empty. This did not turn out to be an issue. On day one, 92% of books were presumed to be on the shelf, with only 5% on loan.

Within the next year, the library will make a plan for rotating books off the open stacks and into the ASRS, to make room for new books. In identifying which books to take off the shelves, it is necessary to have a record of how they were initially selected. If a book

was included because of its newness, it will remain on the shelf until it is more than three years old. At this point it needs to be evaluated using the circulation algorithm, or one of the special formulas for materials that have a particular need to be browseable. Books that were specially selected due to a subject specialist's feedback will stay in the browsing collection until they become outdated.

While there is some work to do as the Charles Library staff settles into our new building, it seems safe to say that the project of creating the open stacks

browsing collection met its goals. The collection looks like a cohesive core collection that contains important works and is balanced across disciplines. Next steps for the browsing collection are dispersed among various departments within the library. These include an inventory and shifting, as well as providing signage including call number ranges. There is also a team studying the user experience of Charles Library, with a subgroup focusing on access to collections. The future findings of this group will likely influence the open stacks in some way, but research is still in the information-gathering stages at this point.