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Let's Get Technical — What To Do With All Those Damaged Books?

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Column Editor's Note: In our previous article, "Let's Get Technical: Working Together to Move Titles to Off-Site Storage" ATG v.27#2, April 2015, Alayne and I detailed how we worked together in moving titles to our consortia storage. In this article, we describe how Acquisitions and Cataloging worked on a project to eliminate the backlog of damaged books. — SM

The Situation

For years, **American University Library** had shelves and shelves of damaged books that sat and languished. In 2011, I (the Acquisitions Librarian) decided that these books needed to be cleared out and a more vigorous system devised to assess damaged books in a timely manner for preservation, replacement, or withdrawal. In order to complete this project, more money from within the materials budget would need to be allocated for damaged books. In FY 2010/2011, \$5,000 was spent to replace damaged books. During the FY 2011-2013, \$20,500 and \$16,500 were spent respectively in eliminating the backlog of damaged books. Since then, we have gone back to spending about \$5,000 each year on replacing damaged books.

The Problem

The backlog of damaged books existed because the system in place to evaluate those titles was cumbersome and slow. Credit card purchasing had also been discouraged, which made it practically impossible to order out-of-print books. Originally, the Collection Management Librarian was the sole person who reviewed all the damaged books. There was a form in place he would fill out with information to better inform his decision, but he was just too overwhelmed with the number of books to review and the time it took to research each book. I decided to enlist the help of all the other collection managers and to make the decision process easier by having the Acquisitions Staff do some of the research ahead of time. I started by presenting the problem to the collection managers at their biweekly meeting in order to get buy-in from them to help with the project. With the idea of revising the existing form, I asked them what kind of information they needed in order to make a decision about the damaged book. Their input was taken, and the Preservation Slip was revised to reflect their suggestions. The Acquisitions staff and specifically, student workers within Processing, would now fill in most of the information on the form.

The Information

The Preservation Slip was a two-sided form that contained the following information:

- Date
 - Date the form was filled out
- Problem with the book
 - Mold, water damage, brittle, etc.
- Can the title be rebound?
 - Is there enough margin for the book to be rebound? Is the paper sturdy enough?
- Call #
- Author/Editor
- Title
- Publisher
- Date of Publication
- Is it part of a Multi-volume set?
 - A vol in a multi-vol set would most likely be replaced.
- # of circulations
 - How many times had it been circulated since 1997 (when our ILS was installed)?



- Date the title last circulated
- Are there other exact copies at AU? Are there other exact copies at our Consortium schools? Are there other exact copies at our WRLC off-site storage?
- Other editions or years at our Consortium schools, or at off-site storage
- What is the Amazon price for a replacement (New, Used), Year/Edition and Publisher

After filling out one form per book, the processing student would separate the books based on call # and put them on different shelves for each collection manager to review. Once the books were reviewed, the collection manager would indicate on the form:

- Preserve? (Bind, Box, Repair).
 - Once preserved, send back to stacks or send to off-site storage
- Replace?
 - Once replaced, send back to stacks or send to off-site storage
- Discard?

There is also a section for notes so the collection manager may write in instructions such as order a new edition.

The Process

Once the books were reviewed and a decision made, the Processing student would move the books to other shelves. Those that were going to be preserved went to one section, those that were to be replaced were put in another section, and those that were going to be discarded were set on shelves for the Cataloging unit.

The bulk of the books landed on the replacement shelves. For the first two years of this project, the Acquisitions Staff devoted a considerable amount of time each week working with these books. The books were taken off the shelf and researched for the best replacement. Sometimes the book was still in print and easily available on **Coutts Oasis** or **Amazon**, or the collection manager would have indicated they wanted the book replaced with the most recent edition. Those were the easy ones to order. More often than not, the book would be out-of-print which took more time to locate. The sites most often used for out-of-print books were **Amazon** (U.S., UK, DE, FR), **ABE Books**, and **Alibris**. As a default, only replacement copies that were New, Like New, or Very Good condition were ordered. If a replacement copy could not be found or was in poor condition, the book would be set aside for a period of time and then searched again. If an excellent replacement copy could not be found after multiple searches, the collection manager was consulted on what to do. Usually, the book was then designated for withdrawal, but sometimes we were asked to keep searching or to preserve it in a custom sized box.

If the book was available and in stock on **Oasis**, then the Acquisitions Staff person would follow the workflow for placing orders for non-shelf ready books. If the book was not in stock on **Oasis**, the Acquisitions Staff would prepare a Purchase Order for a credit card purchase and give the order to the Acquisitions Librarian or the Acquisitions Coordinator. The Acquisitions Librarian would place the order, file the paperwork, and place the damaged book on special shelving, sorted by Call #. When the replacement copy came into the library, it was matched with the paperwork and put together with the damaged book and routed to Circulation.

Circulation removed any fines attached to the lost or damaged book. The books are then routed back to Cataloging for any related cataloging work.

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In Cataloging, if the book being replaced is an exact copy, Cataloging staff evaluates the existing bibliographic record and makes updates or enhancements to the existing record, or overlays an updated **OCLC** record as necessary, and then replaces the barcode in the item record with the barcode attached to the new book. This ensures that circulation history is retained. If we have been unable to replace a lost or damaged book with an exact copy, Cataloging staff catalogs the new book using our existing standards, but also moves the item record from the book being replaced onto the new book's holdings record in order to retain circulation history.

For books that are going to be discarded, we delete or suppress bibliographic records, and remove our holdings in **OCLC**.

Cataloging's procedures are slightly different based on whether the book being replaced is still checked out to a patron. In order for Circulation to retain necessary information for lost books that are still checked out to a patron account, there are some instances where existing record information is suppressed rather than replaced, in order to be evaluated at a later date.

The Results

For two years, we slowly and steadily eliminated the backlog. One problem encountered was that some collection managers did not review their books in a timely manner. We ended up setting a monthly deadline. Twice monthly notices were sent to the collection managers reminding them of the deadline. Some were very good at meeting the deadlines, some were not. In order to keep the process moving along, if monthly deadlines were not met, then the Acquisitions Librarian reviewed the books and made the decision.

After the backlog was eliminated, it was easy to incorporate the

process for replacement into the daily workflow of the staff. There was still the problem of the collection managers not reviewing the books, even though the amount they needed to review each month was only a handful. I presented another option to them in order to speed up the wait time and make the workflow more efficient. Since the Processing Student was already doing the research on how many times the book had circulated, the collection managers agreed to a criteria that would automatically be applied to each book.

- If a book has at least ten circulations or is five years old or newer, then we automatically rebind, repair, or replace. Ditto for anything of any age that is part of a multi-volume set.
- If it's a textbook, it automatically goes for CMT review regardless of age or circs.

This project was deemed a great success, and the workflow for handling damaged books is very seamless. As of the date this article was submitted, there are only 40 damaged books awaiting replacement. 🐼

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donate. As a member, users will receive information regarding events and makerspace resources. The site also has a resource section that includes links to other makerspace organizations. The **Freeside Atlanta** is a non-profit organization that is operated by volunteers. According to the Website the organization is "a community of makers, tinkerers, engineers, programmers, artist, teachers, and lunatics." The wiki Webpage has links to events, resources, classes, calendars, blogs, and projects. Both organizations offer resources for creating, organizing, and establishing makerspaces and makerspace projects. 🐼