

## Against the Grain

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# The Weeding Planner--How a Research Library Weeded Approximately 2.76 Miles of Print Materials from the Shelves to Repurpose Library Space OR Much Ado About the New Normal

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more realistic timeline for the creation of our new shelving location.

Finally, we recommend being realistic about what is possible at your library. Most importantly, be flexible and willing to compromise. We began with the goal of creating a new graphic novel shelving location by the end of 2015. Now, though, it looks like our project will not be completed until the end of 2016, a full year later than what we had originally hoped for. We do not see this as a failure, however. Libraries, particularly academic libraries, are inherently political institutions and compromise is sometimes essential to accomplishing your goals. If we had chosen to stand our ground on the completion date, it would have

created considerable friction between us and the Technical Services department, possibly risking the entire project and doing a disservice to the community we serve. By being open to compromise, listening, and considering opposing views, we overcame a number of challenges that could otherwise have derailed our project completely. It is good to have vision, but you must sometimes compromise on the details if you are to make it a reality.

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## The Weeding Planner: How a Research Library Weeded Approximately 2.76 Miles of Print Materials from the Shelves to Repurpose Library Space OR Much Ado About the New Normal

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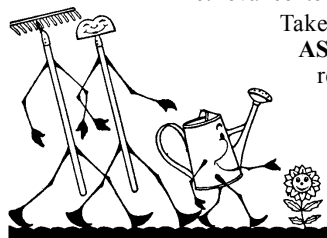
and **Andrea Hebert** (Human Sciences, Education, and Distance Learning Librarian, LSU Libraries) <ahebert@lsu.edu>

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In the past four decades, academic libraries have changed from print-collection focused spaces to resource and services-driven organizations that respond and adapt to the changing needs of users, the developing technologies that improve access to information sources, and the increasing costs of acquiring and providing access to those sources. In the immediate post-World War II years, academic libraries adopted the mission of purchasing vast print collections to support the expansion of the research focus of universities. As the internet developed into the World Wide Web in the 1990s, print indices gave way to electronically searchable indices, which in turn evolved into our current full-text academic databases. As more scholarly resources became available online full text, reliance on print collections decreased. The popular "Teens React to Encyclopedias" YouTube video is a simplistic and unscientific indication of our current college student's familiarity with using print resources.<sup>1</sup> It can be assumed that future academic library users will rely less and less on print, and that collection development decisions will focus more and more on acquiring electronic information sources.

The use of library space has shifted from a storage space for collections to a space for students to learn and to make. Multi-purpose digital classrooms, collaborative study spaces,

makerspaces, group meeting rooms, presentation rooms, meditation rooms, nap rooms, writing centers, academic success centers, information technology services, and other vital services, such as student advising offices, are common occupiers of library space, with print collections being weeded and then moved off site into remote storage or into automated retrieval centers.



Take a sampling of **ARL** or **ASERL** libraries and see the repurposing of space and offsite storage of print collections happening: the **University of Central Florida's** automated retrieval center (ARC) is under construction<sup>2</sup>;

the state of Florida has embarked on an ambitious shared low-use print collection storage facility among its academic libraries (FLARE)<sup>3</sup>; and the glorious new **Hunt Library at North Carolina State University** promotes use of its robotic book delivery system, bookBot.<sup>4</sup> At a recent conference meeting, a collections management department head commented that she foresees print collections focusing on the arts and humanities, since researchers in science and social science favor electronic access to information, an observation supported by the 2015 ITHAKA S+R Faculty Survey results.<sup>5</sup>

Collection development teams now focus on building robust electronic collections and

acquiring the best journal and eBook packages at the best price in an environment of decreased budget allocations for acquisition of print materials. The roles of the traditional reference librarian subject specialist have also changed. Subject specialists are encouraged to redirect focus to engagement, outreach, and instruction.<sup>6</sup> The new **ACRL Information Literacy Framework for Higher Education** is a document of its time: the frames focus on core concepts regarding how information is used and created, how students consume and create information, and how students as consumers and creators of information evaluate and contextualize information sources.<sup>7</sup>

#### Engaging the New Normal

**LSU Libraries** has responded to this trend of repurposing library space. Information Technology Services has been a resident in the Libraries for some time, as has the Center for Academic Success's (CAS) tutorial center. Both of these services occupy space on the Libraries' first floor, and the conversion of space into a large learning commons/computer lab area in the early 2000s required a removal of print indices to the stacks or to compact shelving. In late spring of 2015, university administration decided on the site for the move of the 8,415 square foot MATH Lab: the east wing of **Middleton Library's** third floor.

Clearing materials from the east wing in eight months was an enormous project. The

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project was managed by multiple members of the library staff, including the heads of Facilities, Collection Development, Collection Management, and Research and Instruction Services (RIS). Librarians cleared the equivalent of 5,000 shelves of materials, equaling approximately 2.76 miles of cleared shelving space. The areas weeded included **Library of Congress** call number ranges H through PN, with the exception of the M-Music and Books on Music range. Two of those ranges, N — Fine Arts and P — Language and Literature, covered subject areas whose publishing conventions favor print, making the weeding of items from these areas more of a challenge than economics (HB-HC) or finance (HG), where large serials runs duplicated in electronic resources were withdrawn to clear large swathes of shelf space. A contracted moving team shifted the remaining items around the building as shelves were emptied.

In addition to clearing space for the MATH Lab move, the Education Resources room was slated for conversion to a graduate student study and work space. Materials in the room included Louisiana state-approved textbooks for elementary and high schools, monographs on pedagogy and theory, a collection of board books and easy reader books, and collections of award winners. A large collection of historical young people's books was also housed in this room. The Education subject specialist librarian was tasked with weeding the Education Resources collections in addition to weeding the L call number range areas on the third floor.

## against the grain people profile

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### Cristina Caminita

**PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES:** I've been active in ACRL's Science and Technology Section and currently serve as one of six directors for the **United States Agricultural Information Network (USAIN)**. I was selected as an **ALA Emerging Leader** in 2013.

**FAMILY:** My husband **Kurt**, my five-year-old son **Thomas**, and Maggie, my dog.

**IN MY SPARE TIME:** I work out, I study languages, I hang out with my family, I walk my dog.

**FAVORITE BOOKS:** **Neal Stephenson's** *The Baroque Cycle*, **Hilary Mantel's** *A Place of Greater Safety* and her *Wolf Hall* novels, tons of nonfiction.

**Bill Bryson** is a favorite author.

**PHILOSOPHY:** Everyone else is making it up as they go along, too.

**HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS:** Continuing to change and innovate, and finding serendipitous victories among the challenges, particularly in academic library environments. The fast pace of technological change requires library entrepreneurs and innovators to keep up and take risks, and that is a challenge to the slower pace of decision making and risk taking in academia. 🌱



It would be safe to assume that **LSU Libraries** had its collective hands full of weeding projects, but another had been in progress for a year before the Education Resources and Math Lab projects were introduced: weeding

the reference collection located on the first floor and then transferring the retained items to the stacks. The reference collection had been weeded in part to accommodate the CAS Tutorial Center expansion. During 2015, plans were projected for increasing student study and work space in the area occupied by the reference stacks. The print reference collection had seen such little use that most items on the shelves sported a layer of dust, particularly after a number of years of investing collection development funds into online resources.

### Challenges, Simple and Profound

The major challenge in the project, despite the compressed project completion deadline, was a historical lack of regular weeding of the collections. Regularly scheduled weeding ensures that collections remain relevant and used. The Libraries had done some periodic weeding over the past twenty years, but there was no consistent weeding plan for print materials, even when long print serials back files had been acquired in electronic resources packages. The Libraries do not currently have off-site storage warehousing for low use materials, so print items, no matter how out of date or how low use, had remained on the shelves for years. It was not uncommon to find books that lacked barcodes — an indication that the book had not been used in the thirty years since the Libraries had migrated from a card catalog/computer punch card system to an automated ILS. It was also not uncommon to find books that had acquired layers upon layers of dust. Indeed, some layers of dust had started to organize themselves into dust bunnies. The dust on the books created

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### Andrea Hebert

**BORN AND LIVED:** Abbeville, LA; Baton Rouge, LA; Athens, GA; Farmville, VA; Charlottesville, VA; Baton Rouge, LA (again).

**FAMILY:** My partner **Rodrigo** and a large extended Cajun family.

**IN MY SPARE TIME:** I run, try to learn how to cook, and binge watch TV series.

**FAVORITE BOOKS:** Too variable for a definite answer, but **Mark Lawrence's** *Broken Empire* series has been my guilty pleasure lately.

**PHILOSOPHY:** You always have choices; you just may not like them. Also, almost all of **AI Swarengen's** philosophical musings on *Deadwood*.

**MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT:** The day I realized I had finally found the right career.

**HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS:** According to **AI Swarengen**, "Announcing your plans is a good way to hear God laugh." I think that holds true in this case as well, so I can only share hopes, not predictions. I would like the environment surrounding publishing and academic libraries to change enough in five years that academic libraries no longer feel constrained by their past services and feel emboldened to take risks. 🌱



allergy trigger situations for the librarians, staff members, and student workers involved in the project.

Weeding is a skill that requires practice for maintenance. Without the practice of regularly scheduled weeding, many librarians and staff members experienced anxiety about their decisions to withdraw items, and in some cases, entire collections. Second guessing the withdrawal of items occurred early in the weeding projects. For example, librarians initially selected two book carts full of materials to retain from a non-unique collection of older books. A few weeks later, that decision was reversed, and the entire collection — approximately 400 linear feet of materials — was to be retained and moved into compact shelving. As the project progressed, librarians and staff members became more comfortable with weeding tasks and felt more confident in their decision to deselect low-use or no-use titles that once supported long-shuttered academic programs.

Other challenges included equipment and human resource shortages. During the summer months when the project was in full swing, the student worker staff was reduced and librarians took vacations and attended conferences. The dumpsters that were used to dispose of books were frequently overloaded and could not be taken away to the landfill by the hauling trucks. A partial solution to this problem was to fill the dumpsters half way; the real issue was the disposal of the massive amount of items being withdrawn. There were no adequate physical means to dispose of the items efficiently. When dumpsters reached their capacity, withdrawn books could not be offloaded from book carts, leading to shortage of available carts, which slowed down the project. Some carts were damaged because they were overloaded with heavy books, which only made the shortage worse.

Partial serial runs also presented challenges: instead of pulling an entire serial title run and removing it from the ILS, each volume in the run had to be withdrawn individually. A number of historical collections had also been dispersed in the stacks over the years, including a rather important collection of economics books. Without records to show the scope and extent of these collections, librarians were instructed to check for book plates denoting a book's inclusion in one of these collections, adding another layer of complexity to these weeding projects.

### Change and Resistance

The weeding projects at LSU Libraries can serve as textbook case studies for change management practices. Resistance to large-scale weeding and repurposing projects largely originates in the lack of control that many feel when faced with sudden change. Change often requires staff to participate in projects that they may fundamentally oppose or do not understand.<sup>8</sup> As has been noted in a recent article published in *American Libraries*, library employees at all levels, from staff to administration, may not understand the rationale for

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### Dr. Eric Archambault

**BORN AND LIVED:** Montreal QC

**PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES:** PHD in Science and Technology Policy Studies from the Science Policy Research Unit of the U of Sussex, 25 years in research and development, worked as a university researcher and taught courses on scientometrics and the impacts of technology. Founder of **Science-Metrix** and **1science**.

**FAMILY:** Wife and 1 son, 11 years old.

**IN MY SPARE TIME:** Relax in the woods at my lake house and read.

**FAVORITE BOOKS:** *The World According to Garp* by John Irving and *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel.

**PET PEEVES:** Slow walkers.

**PHILOSOPHY:** Knowledge is power.

**MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT:** That my first company, **Science-Metrix**, is still thriving after almost 15 years in the business.

**GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW:** That **1science** is still a leader in the open access domain.

**HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS:** Thanks to the OA2020 initiative (and our work), the majority of scholarly publications will be open access and journal subscriptions will be a thing of the past! 🌱

weeding, even when it is a regularly scheduled activity.<sup>9</sup> It is also undeniable that weeding physical books is not just a library business practice but an emotional exercise for library employees and users alike: staff feel attached to the materials as part of their professional roles, and users feel that disposing of books, however old, outdated, and in disrepair, is the equivalent of a “modern-day book burning.”<sup>10</sup>

Despite these challenges, there were unexpected benefits of the project. Librarians

became more certain of their weeding skills. Their confidence was validated by the low number of complaints from users even though more than 100,000 items were removed from the collection. The project required units that normally had little interaction to work together closely, resulting in improved communication and relations between library departments and staff and an increased understanding and appreciation for each other's expertise and work. 🌱

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