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The Academic Library Reference Collection: What's In, What's Out, What's Online

Monique Andrews

Wayne State University, ag3808@wayne.edu

Rhonda McGinnis

Wayne State University, aa4207@wayne.edu

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Monique Andrews &
Rhonda McGinnis

Before



After



Just an Ordinary Day at the Office

The Reference Collection Weeding Project

- Wanted to reduce the footprint of the collection by at least several (4-6) ranges
 - Improve traffic flow
 - Improve visibility to & from Reference Desk
- Wanted to create room for some continued growth
- Wanted to improve quality of collection
- Needed to be accomplished in ~4 months

Just-in-Case & Just-Because

The Purdy/Kresge Reference Collection:

- Typical for a Research Library
- ~25 shelving ranges and more than 13,500 items
- Lacking a single focus
 - Each selector bought for their fields
 - No dedicated funds → feast or famine
- Uncoordinated Mix:
 - Research materials & ready reference sources
 - Academic & public library sources
 - Up-to-date & sorely out-of date
- Weeded from time to time with mixed success

The Light Dawns

- The A's through the H's were as tight as they were going to get based on normal weeding practices & the present vision of the collection
- Just weeding J-Z to that level was not going to meet the allotted space
- Cutting deeper required a re-envisioning of the collection and its purpose
- Based on their experiences at Reference in various library setting & teaching in the LIS Program, the coordinators came to the realization that:

Research is not Reference!!!!

It's so easy to weed, weed, weed!

Realized the collection could easily be weeded by 50%

- **The location choices**
 - **Move to circulating collection (better access for patrons and ILL)**
 - **Move to stacks yet restrict access (mostly for multivolume sets)**
 - **Move to storage**
 - **Discard**

The Scholar & His Tower

Scholarly Research has changed over recent years:

- Fewer disciplines rely heavily on book or manuscripts
- More reliance on online indexes & full-text
- More research work done at home or in office
 - More copying of articles or book passages
 - Greater desire to check out books
 - More use of Interlibrary Loan/Document delivery
- Less need to visit distant libraries or special collections
- More self-reliance & less dependence on librarians

Phoenix from the Ashes

The Print Reference Collection of the 21st century

- Supports brief periods of focused information gathering
- Focused on compact background information
- Comprised of sources that are a step above the generic internet tools
- Used with active assistance by the librarian as well as self directed browsing by the patron
- Overseen by one librarian with dedicated funds

The beauty and bounty of the reference collection

What's in:

- High quality subject encyclopedias
- One subject specific dictionary per discipline
- One high quality bilingual dictionary for common languages
- Unique reference sources to answer factual questions
- Unique sources to answer unique questions
- Business information sources

Exciting reference sources

What's in:

- Encyclopedia of Social Work
- Who was who in American Art, 1564-1975
- Dictionary of Flavors
- Dictionary of Homophobia
- Underground Railroad: an encyclopedia...
- Encyclopedia of Race Riots in America
- U.S. pet ownership and demographics sourcebook
- Community sourcebook of ZIP code demographics

Old friends

Still in:

- World Almanac
- American Library Directory
- Encyclopedia of Psychology (APA)
- Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Routledge)
- Encyclopedia of African American culture and history
- New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians
- Oxford English Dictionary
- Historical Statistics of the United States

Reconsidered Reference Items

What's out:

- **Handbooks and Companions** – anything with chapters rather than encyclopedic entries – there will be no “visiting with the book”
- **Subject bibliographies** - these are research items, why restrict access if some one needs these items?
- **Historical atlases** – do they answer ready reference questions or support research?
- **Dictionaries and Desk References** - great study tools for students to use at home
- **Brief biographical sources** – in favor of comprehensive sets and encyclopedias and online sources
- **High demand items, textbooks, unique books** – no, no, no, no, no.
- **Online equivalents** – you never know what's in your netlibrary or ebrary package

Leaving the reference nest

What's out:

- The Who's Who series
- Paulys real-encyclopädie der classischen and Deutsches Wörterbuch
- Complete works for keyboard instruments
- Encyclopedia of New Foundland
- Handbook of Clinical Audiology
- Social Workers Desk Reference
- Children's Books in Print
- Various bi-lingual dictionaries

Reference lives: Cybersources

What's online:

- Paying for the classics
 - Encyclopedia of Latin American history and culture
 - Grzimek's Animal Life Encyclopedia
 - Encyclopedia of Religion
- Evolution of free resources
 - The Canadian Encyclopedia
 - Old Farmer's Almanac
 - Crime in the United States
- Uncovering your free "E's"
 - Encyclopedia of North American Indians (netlibrary),
 - Concise Dictionary of Psychology (ebrary)
 - Kings and Queens of Britain (Oxford Reference Online)

The Next Thorny Issue

Mishmash of electronic reference tools finding aides

- Reference Tools Pages
- Subject Guides
- Cataloged Resources
- Articles & Databases Pages
- E-Book Collections
- Free Government Information Sources—Some Cataloged but some not

This Is Not the End

Continuing efforts to market the e-Collection:

- Position information from e-Reference Guide on discipline-focused Subject Guides
- Encouraging selectors to consider purchasing e-versions of newly released reference tools or to address certain assignment needs
- Promoting these tools in library instruction sessions
- Training for Reference staff
- Teaching these tools in Library Science
- Continue dialogue with vendors of these tools