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About That Big Donation

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About That Big Donation

Congratulations! We understand you are about to move to a new season of living. Whether that is retirement, a move across campus, or a better job at higher pay, we thank you for thinking about us and your office materials. In all of the myriad of decisions that come with life changes you may not have thought about the stuff in your office. Gathered here are a few important points to consider – preferably before you contact us. If the time is late, these represent the process a librarian will use when looking at your materials.



Spousal. Acceptance. Factor. This is the number one reason the Libraries will be called in late in the game. At some moment you mention to your spouse that X number of boxes of books are coming home when you close out your office. Their response is “No” or a nicer way of saying “No” (see also “Are you nuts?”, “Over my dead body”, et cetera). This is a very important decision point. If materials go to your home in boxes, the probability that your materials will have future utility approaches zero (more on this later).

Let’s take a moment to talk about what we call the “National Geographic” problem. Years ago, while working in a local public library, we would have patrons offer to donate multiple year runs of *National Geographic* magazine. They would not sell at the annual book sale (even at a few cents each) because they (at the time) were in such common circulation. Still folks kept offering them. The quality of printing and representation of content were such that people felt guilty simply tossing them in the recycling bin. There was no such hesitation with weekly news magazines or newspapers.

The same problem may exist with your office collection. Our view of its value and utility may substantially differ from the value to you or others. Let’s see why that might be the case.

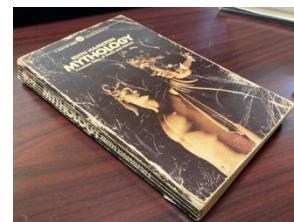
1. We already own the item



If you have been working with your subject librarian, you have likely already recommended that we purchase the item. If not, shame on you!

2. Duplicates

We do not generally purchase duplicate copies. We simply lack the space. Building built for 10,000 students serving 33,000. Do the math. I mean yes, we own multiple copies of *Harry Potter* (in multiple languages) but your book is not *Harry Potter* – it just isn’t.



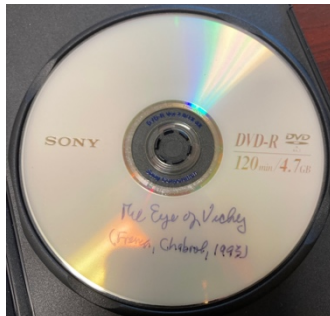
3. Age of Materials

You may regard the book you have as foundational to your field – and it may be. However, if you have a copy of the second edition and I have the eighth edition on the shelf and the ninth edition on order (a real event), I really cannot use your edition. Which also begs the question of when exactly did you last pull the item from your shelf?

4. Subject

Is anyone else on campus taking up the mantle of your study area? If the subject is not being taught after your exit (or is not being taught at all) I must consider the space to house and effort to process something that might not ever be used before I decide to accept an item.

5. Format/Copyright

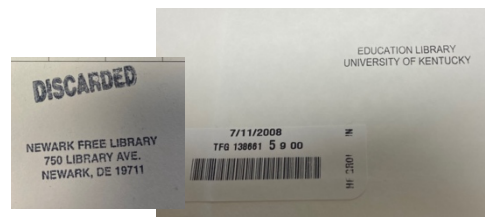


You do understand that the Libraries eliminated all VHS format tapes almost a decade ago, right? That a hand-written title on a one-off home burned DVD-ROM presents multiple ownership and copyright issues that cannot be successfully solved? That a CD-ROM of educational content is not as essential as you claim as your current computer has no CD drive and the accompanying print materials (with license codes and operator instructions) are not locatable?



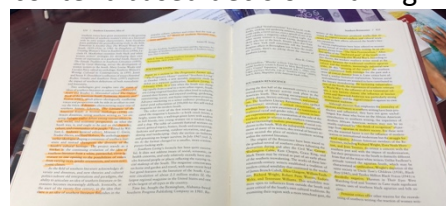
6. Previously withdrawn items and items from other libraries

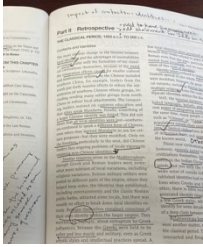
We are going out on a limb here to assume those items from other libraries were actually withdrawn and not, you know, stolen or anything. Also, if the previous library stamped “withdrawn” We’re going to have to go through a different process to see why we should add something another librarian did not want. It will, in all likelihood, be cheaper for us to buy a new copy than to process away old markings and labels.



7. Glossing/Stickers/Physical Condition

Until this moment we have been mostly philosophical and content-based decision making. Here is where it gets ugly – no actually ugly. If students write in our books we call it vandalism and make them replace the item or they do not graduate. While medieval monks diligently toiled to gloss ancient texts





to add value, your notes and highlights may be less historically valuable than you realize. Future students will not know that you highlighted half a page because it was revealed wisdom or useless prattle. A scrawled note “useful – next project” (an actual note) is not terribly useful to literally anyone else. Stickers? Even “removable” adhesive will degrade a book if left in place for extended periods of time.

8. Shelf Squeeze/Crowding

Extended periods of time. Entropy comes for all things but if you must literally peel a book from the next book over, A.) you have not used it in something short of forever, B.) you have too many items too close together, and C.) we need to think about the HVAC in your area.

9. HVAC in your area

Excess moisture begets mold. A very simple equation. One book with mold is enough to prevent anything in your office from being accepted. A contaminated book can contaminate whole sections of our shelving and simply is not worth the risk.

Some things we look for include: Single pane glass windows (prone to condensation); Portable air conditioning units without a moisture drain line (standing water); HVAC supply and delivery lines (another source of condensation). This is also the problem with boxed materials from home. Unless the items are stored in climate-controlled space (spoiler: We will know if they have not been, see also moisture damage; rat droppings) we must consider them unacceptably contaminated.

The picture on the right shows a real office. There is a roof drain pipe -uninsulated - in the upper left corner and the small white object is a portable air conditioner (with no drain).



10. Staffing

A few paragraphs back we mentioned being a 10,000 student building being used by a 33,000 student population. Our staffing levels are somewhere in between. More than enough to serve ten thousand students but not enough to serve thirty three thousand. The people we have had working to absorb gifts have been reassigned to more productive work. The infrequent and unpredictable nature of gifts as well as the issues outlined above make this service far less important than other activities with greater impact. Let’s be blunt. Much of the staff time was used carting moisture damaged boxes to the trash. You would not want to be that person considering the prevalence of rat droppings. Trust our experience here.

So you could get the idea that we aren't really interested in your stuff. We would never tell you that! We value the relationships we have built with you over the years. Still, if you cannot name your subject librarian, do not know on which floor any of your books would be shelved, have not had us by to discuss relevant electronic resources to your classes, or know where the elevator is in our building, there might be a better course of action than asking us.

Place selected items on a table in a well trafficked area of your department. Those most interested in the same subjects as you are likely in your building. Ask a trusted third party to clear the table off after a decent interval. This removes you from seeing what is and is not popular. And ask them to use a trash container away from your office area too.

Public libraries will take bulk donations for their book sales. Understand that no library that receives materials can offer a monetary valuation on the donation (IRS rules, those that benefit cannot also evaluate) and that most of your collection will go for \$.25, \$.50 or \$1 per item – or \$1 per bag at the end of the day.

That is also why no library will pay you for your materials. The actual market value of almost any item is fractionally above zero. Sorry. That part hurts. We know from experience that none of what you are reading here is fun. Imagine delivering this news in person (and being the same people to carry the rat droppings to the trash) they kinda like their reassignment.

After all of this, you have a fairly new, in good condition, relevant subject item you think we can use? Then let us know! Better yet, contact your subject librarian and tell them what one title best encapsulates your area of expertise that you would want us to add to the collection and let us buy a new copy on your behalf.

A note about the pictures in this document. A librarian was recently contacted by an outgoing professor. They were deeply concerned because their department was scheduled to clean out the office in just a few days (they had already left campus). There were 473 items for consideration. Of these, 73 merited further consideration – they were fairly new, relevant subjects, and in good condition. Of those 73, the Libraries already owned 66.