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It Can Be Done! Planning and Process for Successful Collection Management Projects

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Abstract

Many academic libraries face the challenge of decreasing the size of print collections. This paper offers perspectives on a range of activities for successful projects. At Connecticut College, W. Lee Hisle found that, with proper planning and execution, a successful Collection Management Project can be completed without substantial campus turmoil. Hisle discusses project principles, communications strategy used, data used to “sell” the project, and lessons learned. This project allowed the bookstack footprint to be reduced by one-third without loss of access of any item. Pat Tully, from Wesleyan University Library, presents some lessons learned from a last-copy weeding project that was carried out in 2011 to create space for new books and for a substantial art book collection. The project was controversial and led to a series of difficult campus discussions, but inviting faculty input into weeding decisions ultimately strengthened the understanding and trust between the faculty and the library. Pamela Grudzien and Fran Rosen discuss organizational challenges and workflow changes in Technical Services as libraries engage in large collaborative weeding and retention projects. Their libraries are part of the Michigan Shared Print Initiative (MI-SPI), a collaborative project to identify and manage a shared collection of widely held low-use monograph titles. Grudzien, from Central Michigan University, shares new workflows that incorporate retention responsibilities and discusses the development of a tool that facilitates member communication about volumes that are missing or in poor condition. Rosen shares details about a comprehensive project using MI-SPI weeding lists at Ferris State University.

A Collection Management Project: It Can Be Done, W. Lee Hisle

Based on our experiences over the past 2 years at Connecticut College, a successful Collection Management Project can be completed without substantial campus turmoil or disagreement. The phrase “Collection Management Project” (CMP) was intentionally chosen to avoid the word weeding, a loaded term we tried never to use even among ourselves. CMP also better represents the many activities that made up the project.

The CMP started early in fall 2012 and is currently nearing its end. I will describe some of the planning behind our efforts, the principles of the project, our communications strategy, and the data we used to “sell” the project to our campus. Finally, I will conclude with some lessons learned.

It is important to have a good reason for initiating a collection management project, preferably a reason that will resonate with the college community. In our case, the Campaign for Connecticut College was nearing its end, and the Charles E. Shain Renovation Project was green-lit for fundraising and project initiation. The renovation is a \$9.2 million project and will improve the library in many ways, but with only a very small increase in square feet.

In order to accomplish the goals of the building project, we needed to repurpose space within the current building. The only flexible area, without reducing services, student seating, or programs, was the book stack area. We determined that reducing the bookstack footprint by about one-third would allow for much more seating, more collaboration rooms, more technology resources, more natural light in study areas, a new café and 24-hour study space, and an outdoor plaza

connecting the renovated building to the campus more effectively.

We did look at other options of course, such as off-site long-term storage, as well as the possibility of building a storage facility on campus, part of which might be leased to other colleges. But any expense for these solutions would have increased the project cost, reducing the changes possible to the library in the renovation.

As a first step, project principles were articulated that we hoped would resonate with the campus and satisfy our faculty that the project was appropriately planned:

- Avoid loss of access to any item
- Make best use of space in Shain Library
- Control cost of renovation
- Retain key collection materials, based on established deselection criteria
- Involve faculty in decisions about retention
- Provide robust and intuitive selection tool for faculty use

It is important to note that we emphasized the faculty role as deciding what to retain, not what to deselect.

An important aspect of our communications strategy was to build campus support before any general announcement was made to the campus. Staff visited with key groups including:

- Library and Information Services Staff,
- Administrators and Key Senior Directors,
- Student Leadership,
- Faculty Leadership, and
- Key *Prickly* Faculty with one-on-one meetings.

While we had good support among these groups, the prickly faculty members were not necessarily convinced a “weeding” project was desirable, regardless of reasons or benefits. However, to a person, they appreciated the attention and the

opportunity to express their reservations before final decisions had been made.

Subsequent to these efforts, a general announcement of the project was released, including the benefits to be derived from the project (relative to the renovation project), the planning principles, the key data supporting deselection of certain items, and the timeline. It was important that the timeline include a substantial interval for faculty to consider their retention decisions. We also held several open forums for campus members to voice concerns. Apparently we had done a good job selling the project as only one faculty member attended the forums.

One of the key messages to the campus was that the nature of information access was changing. We were able to show a 28% decline over the preceding 6 years in the use of print scholarly monographic. At the same time, we could point to a 180% increase in e-book usage and a substantially higher increase in full-text database downloads.

To meet our goal and reduce the bookstack footprint by one-third, we needed to cull the scholarly print collection of 35,000–38,000 items. Using the following criteria, the staff at Sustainable Collection Services, Inc. manipulated the bibliographic databases of the CTW Consortium members, OCLC members, and circulation statistics at Connecticut College to produce a candidate list for deselection of 45,000 items:

- Item available at Trinity or Wesleyan, sometimes both (the Consortium has a “last copy policy” in place)
- Item also available at 30 other academic libraries in the US
- Published prior to 1993 (20 years ago)
- Purchased prior to 2003 (10 years ago)
- No more than two circulations, ever
- No circulations at all after 2002

Over an 8-month period, faculty members selected almost exactly 7,000 items to be retained so we were able to meet our goal.

In summary, the lessons we learned include:

- Importance of Larger Goal: Renovation Project
- Importance of One-on-One Conversations
- Importance of Data to Support Arguments
- Importance of Consultant Expertise for Data Manipulation
- Importance of Convenient, Well-Designed Retention Tool
 - Online and Intuitive
 - Pilot-Tested by Faculty
- Importance of Working with CTW Partners
- Importance of Patience

Wesleyan University Weeding Project, Patricia A. Tully

Until 2011, Wesleyan University Library had not undertaken a last-copy weeding project for at least half a century. The collection contained many books that had been out of scope for decades, had not been checked out, and were commonly held by other libraries. Olin Library, Wesleyan's central library, was running out of space, and a 25,000-volume Art Library was scheduled to move into Olin. All this made the decision to undertake a weeding project of 60,000 volumes easy and noncontroversial. But the project itself was not easy, and it was very controversial. This is the story of that controversy and how the library, faculty, and students worked through it to a successful conclusion.

In 2010, the decision was made to move the Art Library into Olin, and the library began planning a weeding project to prepare for the move. Sustainable Collection Services (SCS) conducted a collection analysis to identify candidates for withdrawal. Withdrawal candidates had to meet all these criteria:

- Published before 1990 and acquired before 2003 (the year of our last system migration);
- In the circulating collection, but checked out two or fewer times since 1996;
- Held by 30 or more libraries in the US, and by at least two partner libraries in Connecticut (Connecticut College, Trinity College, and University of Connecticut at Storrs).

About 90,000 out of over 800,000 circulating books met those criteria.

In spring 2011, the library informed the faculty of the impending project via presentations, informal conversations, and the University Librarian's blog. Some faculty members expressed concern, but not many—probably because with all of their other responsibilities most faculty members were not paying attention to library matters. Despite this muted response, the library was determined to involve the faculty in the review of withdrawal candidates.

In September 2011, the library formally announced the project and made the first set of withdrawal candidate lists available to faculty. The campus response was immediate and very negative. Student concerns focused on the loss of the Art Library, a small but much-beloved study space. Faculty concerns focused on the weeding project itself, with questions and comments such as:

- Why not create a storage space for books instead of weeding them, or expand the library?
- What about candidates in subject areas for which Wesleyan does not currently have a faculty specialist?
- Why focus only on books published before 1990, thus penalizing history and other historically based subjects?
- What if the other libraries which held copies of a book decided to weed them?
- Older, unused books do periodically get rediscovered by scholars—weeding these

would reduce the chances of their being rediscovered.

To address these concerns, the weeding project was suspended for a semester, and a series of conversations were held with students and faculty. The difference between these conversations and the ones held earlier was that in the later conversations the project had their full attention. Faculty perceived a threat to a resource they valued, and they wanted answers. These highly charged conversations became an opportunity to talk about how the library is changing and how faculty and students use resources differently. The library had to acknowledge that not all of these changes were for the better, at least not in the short run. Acknowledging this was important in retaining (or regaining) the trust of faculty members and students.

The library did a number of things to address faculty and student concerns, including extending the time for faculty to review the lists, offering withdrawn books to faculty to take for their office collections, and signing a memorandum of agreement with CTW Consortium partners Connecticut College and Trinity College to review as a consortium any last copy that was considered for withdrawal.

These conversations have continued with individual faculty members, and we have by no means convinced every one of the project's necessity or wisdom. In some (mercifully few) subject areas, faculty members marked to retain every withdrawal candidate. But as of December 2013, the library has met the 60,000-volume withdrawal target, and the Art Library will be moved into Olin in summer 2014. And for the most part, the working relationships between faculty and librarians have been strengthened through the transparency and openness of the process.

Central Michigan University Libraries' Workflow Adjustments, Pamela Grudzien

Central Michigan University Libraries is a member of the Michigan Shared Print Initiative (MI-SPI). This project created a "collective collection" by

bringing together the bibliographic records for the circulating books collection in seven state-supported university libraries. Facilitated by the Midwest Collaborative for Library Services (MCLS) and Sustainable Collection Services (SCS), the project provided each member with three lists: a list of little used monographs for possible deselection, a list of unique titles held by each library for review, and a list of retention titles. The members agreed to retain two copies of mutually held titles on behalf of the whole group. Central Michigan University (CMU) was in a unique position in the group in that the library building has no shelving space difficulties. CMU offered a portion of their deselection list to other members to help resolve urgent space problems. As a result, CMU Libraries has the largest retention list of the seven members—over 204,000 titles.

Within a year of the retention assignments, CMU acquisitions staff encountered new circumstances while following routine workflows. Three processes were interrupted due to additional tasks arising from the retention responsibility: the annual Lost Book/Replace/Withdraw process, the weekly Mending process, and the occasional Damaged Material process. In each of these processes, subject librarian review of titles frequently lead to withdrawal decisions. Acquisitions staff now consulted the retention list first to see if withdrawal candidates were there. Due to the large number of retention titles on CMU's list, staff began to find "hits" very early on. In the first batch of 29 retention titles identified through these three processes, staff searched the out-of-print market for replacements. The cost to replace these little used items was nearly \$1,400.00. One tattered paperback that came through the mending process had a price tag of almost \$500.

These findings were brought to the next MI-SPI meeting. There was discussion of ways to inform the members about the status of retention items and possibly to transfer retention assignments on a title-by-title basis. MCLS staff indicated they were creating an interactive database with the bibliographic files received from SCS. The database presented the opportunity to notify members of title status and retention transfer.

Shortly after this meeting, MI-SPI members could access this tool and CMU acquisitions staff began to test it.

The adjusted workflow for withdrawal candidates on the retention list had these steps added:

- Check the MI-SPI Database
- Is the item on CMU's retention list? If yes, several options are considered:
 - Can the item be repaired so it can return to the shelf?
 - Is the item still in print? Buy a replacement—cost can be a factor.
 - Is the item out of print? Buy a reasonably priced replacement—cost can be a factor.
 - If unavailable, put a note in the MI-SPI database.
 - If the replacement is a newer edition, put a note in the MI-SPI database.

The added steps in the workflow had consequences related to staff time. CMU acquisitions staff spends 10–15 minutes more on each MI-SPI retention withdrawal piece. There are six items per week on average which adds 60–90 minutes to the procedure each week. Currently, this added time does not interfere with daily duties and operations, but this could be a factor in the future.

Testing also generated more questions for the MI-SPI members to consider:

- How far does retention responsibility extend? How much time and how much money should be expended on replacing these little-used titles?
- Is one copy (rather than the agreed upon two copies) held in the “collective collection” acceptable if other holdings exist in Michigan and beyond?
- There are plans to add new members to the group to then refresh the collective data and redistribute retention

assignments. How much effort should be put into tracking the current status of items?

As the MI-SPI membership expands, these questions will undoubtedly be addressed. Innovative and collaborative solutions will be tried, adjusted, and implemented as the project grows in scope.

Weeding with MI-SPI Weeding Lists, Fran Rosen

After the initial MI-SPI analysis was finished and retention lists had been created, libraries from other state-supported institutions were invited to join the project. So far, two new libraries have made the commitment, and others are in process of doing so. My library is one of the new libraries that have joined MI-SPI.

When we joined MI-SPI, our data were analyzed, and we received lists of withdrawal candidates. New retention lists, including titles assigned to us, will be created after the next data refresh which we expect to happen in late 2014 or early 2015.

We had carried out a major weeding project on our own in summer 2011. In that project, each liaison librarian was responsible for certain call number ranges. The results were inconsistent, with some sections heavily weeded and others barely touched. The MI-SPI withdrawal lists gave us the opportunity to do another major weeding project in summer 2013, and this time the weeding was much more consistent. We used a list of criteria, including faculty input, to decide what books to retain and the others were withdrawn.

The withdrawal lists were loaded into our ILS. For some of our criteria we could search the withdrawal lists and use global update to mark the books to retain. Books that were retained were marked with notes in the 912 field which does not display to the public. The note included the words “MI-SPI 2013” and the reason for retention. Since the 912 field is in the bibliographic record, we ended up retaining all volumes attached to a bibliographic record if at least one of those volumes met the retention criteria.

The actual weeding was carried out by Technical Services staff. They printed out lists of volumes to withdraw, automatically omitting any title with a 912 field in the bibliographic record. Student employees pulled the books. Lists included the call number, barcode, and the beginning of the Statement of Responsibility. The lists were printed with page numbers of the form "page x of y" so that we would not accidentally miss a page. When students pulled books, they stopped at the end of a page even if the truck was not full, and the pages stayed with the truck. We talked about using iPads or laptops in the stacks rather than printing the lists, but we felt it would be easier to do the work if we had printed lists.

The two staff members who do the Technical Services work with monographs handled the processing. They made sure the right book had been pulled and checked the bibliographic record to make sure nothing had been missed that might be a reason to retain the book and that the item record and the bibliographic record matched. If it all matched, they withdrew the book following our regular procedure. They also verified when books could not be found, Those books were marked missing with a note to withdraw them if found. Withdrawn books were sent either to Better World Books or to recycling.

If staff found that we should retain the book, they manually entered a 912 field with the reason for retention.

We did not do any extra checking to make sure that the libraries that were assigned retention responsibility for a book actually had the book in decent condition. We just trusted the process.

Some of the conclusions of the staff who carried out this project are:

- They liked working from lists and they felt that made it more of their own project and under their own control; they could set their own time-frame.
- Students made mistakes, so it was important that staff checked each book. They also found a few cases where the item was attached to the wrong record.
- Looking at the bibliographic record was useful for catching particular types of books that the Special Collections librarian had asked to see; otherwise, it probably was not necessary.
- There were some requests to retain all books in a specific monographic series, and we found that our catalog records were inconsistent about recording series information, so extra time was spent tracking down those books and marking them to be retained.
- Staff reported they spent the most time on documenting missing books.