

## Evaluated, Removed, and Recycled—The Tale of Two Deaccession Projects Across the Disciplines

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# Evaluated, Removed, and Recycled—The Tale of Two Deaccession Projects Across the Disciplines

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## Abstract

How have two midsized public university libraries approached large-scale weeding projects in their monograph and bound periodical collections? Space is at a premium in academic libraries as new roles combine and compete with traditional ones. How can the collection be refreshed to promote more use? Where will more collaboration and creative spaces be housed? How does a midsized library refine the collection to bring better campus alignment? How should the project begin? Who should be involved in planning? How can campus faculty be included in the deaccessioning process? How is the campus perception of the project handled? What should be kept, what sent off-site, and what discarded? What do you do with all of those discarded books and journals? How can the libraries work with campus sustainability goals? Do e-books play a part in what you keep and discard? How are different discipline areas handled when the book is valued differently? Are there useful guidelines like CREW (Continuous Review Evaluation and Weeding) that are applicable?

## College of William and Mary

How does a medium-sized Carnegie-level institution with 8 PhD and 15 master's programs weed their collections? Very differently across the disciplines. Should the library do a massive weed all at once, or try a more piecemeal approach? Is there one right answer for all libraries? As space in the main library and the branch libraries, and even the off-site storage facility, is at a premium, similar to many libraries around the country, librarians were tasked with weeding our collections.

Two years ago, the reference department was tasked with weeding our reference area to create more space for students, and another possible open teaching area. I asked for help from all of the liaisons to pare down their subject areas within the reference collection. After several months of very slow progress, we were suddenly given a deadline, and a much bigger number to weed—now it was 50% to be removed from the areas. This was not received well by many of the librarians, as we also have a large genealogy

collection within the reference area. Most new reference titles are being purchased electronically, but there are still many “standards” that are only in print. With a deadline looming, we needed to get serious about the weeding—what to send to the stacks, what to send to our off-site storage, and what to get rid of completely. After much negotiating and deliberating (and some arm twisting), the reference area was whittled down to 50% of the previous area, with new study spaces and a new teaching area now available.

The problem was what to do with those books we were weeding from reference? Weeding a reference area can be more complicated than you would first imagine: the enormous set of 1972 Italian encyclopedias—we *should* keep them because they are the definitive set and are not available in electronic form, but they have not been used in years. Okay, you think, send them up to the stacks . . . but wait, wait, there is no room in the stacks. Will anyone seriously ever ask that we bring over an encyclopedia from off-site? In total, more than 4,000 titles with almost 7,000 volumes were removed from the reference area.

Of these, 25 guides were moved to the microfilm area, 25 large sets were moved off-site, 770 were “final exchanged”—our nice words for weeded—and the rest were sent to the stacks. In total, 444 Shelves were removed at 35” each equaling 1,295 linear feet. A major renovation of our microfilm area was also undertaken at this time, with more than 30,000 film, fiche, and cards being removed and the cabinets that held them, to make room for recording studios.

VIVA, the Virginia higher education library consortium also was conducting a shared collections project during this time, with VIVA members working on collaborative weeding, setting retention and purchasing thresholds, and distributing monographic subject collections across the Commonwealth. Liaisons were given “unique title” lists in each of our areas—these were titles that were held by only one library in the state, and by fewer than 10 in the country. One interesting statistic that was given to Swem Library during this project was that overall, out of more than 762,000 print items that this project looked at, 89% of our collections have been used or circulated at least once—this is a very high percentage for an academic library. During this project, many titles were sent to our rare books, or “medium rare” at our off-site stacks, or were discarded. But wait, why would we discard a rare book? Once we started actually looking at the materials, some were gold, and some were pyrite. Some examples of this were older articles from various journals that had been bound separately and cataloged, as well as dissertations (not done by William and Mary students) that had been purchased, but were now electronically available through ProQuest. There were also a lot of local history booklets, pamphlets, and items that were kept and put into medium rare.

Swem Library still does collect print books; in the 2014–2015 fiscal year we added 9,777 print titles. This was down from 2012–2013, in which 10,917 print titles were added. Swem subscribes to several DDA programs, as well as the EBSCO academic e-book package. Many of our faculty, especially in the humanities and social sciences still strongly prefer print books. Between the weeding of reference, and the continued

purchasing of print titles with years of accumulation, many areas of the stacks were *full*, so full that the student shelvees would just shove the additional books on top and report that the shelf was full.

What is the easiest and fastest way to remove thousands of volumes from your shelves? Perform a JSTOR project. With JSTOR being a stable platform that nothing can be removed from, Swem thought this would be a safe option, and would not rile the faculty. Appalachian State did an enormous weeding of journals project last year, and it was very well received. We chose not to remove other vendors as our big packages are constantly changing. The discussions with faculty concerning this varied: some liaisons did mention it at faculty department meetings, while others trusted their judgment but assured faculty of the safety of their journals being accessible, and a LibGuide was created explaining the rationale of the weeding project with a link to appeal for retention of specific journals. There were several journals that were requested to keep in print because of the images and maps. Librarians checked, and double checked the JSTOR holdings with our print holdings, and all volumes not covered by JSTOR were retained. From the call number ranges C, D, E, and F, more than 6,700 bound journals were removed, and more than 13,000 from the entire collection. Students from the circulation department pulled the volumes, and a room was set aside to dissect the bindings and recycle the paper. The JSTOR project freed up more than 1,700 linear feet of shelf space, with large shifting projects that will be ongoing.

For several summers, various liaisons have conducted little weeding projects here and there when the stacks manager would point out the fact that no more books could fit into certain call number ranges, but something needed to be done on a larger scale. At a previous institution, with a colleague, we had done an extensive collection analysis weeding project that was based more strictly on circulation statistics and age. Looking back, some mistakes were definitely made on this project, and I did not want to repeat them. William and Mary offers a PhD in History, and is the home of the Institute for Early American

History and Culture, so having a strong history collection is extremely important. From previous weeding adventures, some necessary tidbits had been gleaned, first and foremost being to not rely strictly on reports produced from your ILS—actually going into the stacks shelf by shelf is a necessity. Yes, it is extremely time-consuming, but very worthwhile. There are so many cataloging questions and problems that arise, e.g., books that are not in the catalog but are on the shelves; over 100 books were found this way, and this was just by random chance, missing volumes, books with wrong call numbers, outdated formats, and other oddities including finding 14 copies of a 2-volume set on the shelves that were not all in the catalog. Don't let the judgments be left to working students just reading from lists—spend the time up in the stacks. There are so many things that you can learn: getting to know your collection so much better, what is up there, and what areas you really need to do some more intensive collection development in.

In History, you can't always judge the worth of a book by the newness or the number of checkouts—a lot of valuable material is *old*. Our circulation students are supposed to be recording in-house usage, but we know this is not always the case. Do we discard books because they are written by racists or during a time period that was not politically correct? We cannot erase history—these books are still part of the historiography, and should be kept. This is not the same in other disciplines, and each discipline needs to be treated differently when conducting library-wide weeding projects. Using a source such as the Resources for College Libraries, and following general guidelines like MUSTIE (Misleading, Ugly, Superseded, Trivial, Irrelevant, E for may be obtained elsewhere) are always good places to start. For the most part, what was weeded were copy 2's, (3's, 4's, and 5's) previous editions (keeping first editions of "classics"), alternate printings, and books in poor condition. Yes, people might want older travel books—several historical fiction writers ask for them regularly, so don't be so quick to throw those guides away. Balancing this out with the fact that we are not a Research One library, and do have limited space, is where the rock and hard place come in. This

weeding project is continuing, and in total, over 3,000 items have been deselected in the D, E, and F call numbers.

The English liaison had different criteria, in comparison to disciplines where knowledge is more cumulative, the older materials retain their value better. Using "Selected Bibliographies" from the Norton Anthologies of English and American Literature, when working in the stacks, he checks to see if we have the standard edition, whether there is a newer scholarly edition in progress, and which are the highlighted critical works, the best biography, and so forth. These lists also tip him off to sets which may not have been purchased back in the 1980s or 1990s when less private money was available, or the state was pulling back library funds from the college, and he tries to fill in major titles.

The English liaison also shelf read at the same time and pulled out items out of place, took them to circulation to see if they were on a lost or missing list, and took items to cataloging that may have been miscataloged. And he pulled copy 2's of lightly circulated titles, damaged copies, and older materials which have been superseded by later revised editions where the editors have corrected errors, added to bibliographies, or just added new material. All of this takes far more time, but it is worth it for a better collection. Of course in literature, copy 2's are much desired for certain authors—especially the critical editions, so you must know what courses are being taught currently, and might be in the near future, so working with and knowing your faculty is a key component.

In Philosophy and Religion, the liaison was very careful to keep classic editions of certain works, so knowing your subjects is key. There are always preferred translations of classic works such as Plato or Aristotle or Nietzsche, as well as standard and new editions of the Bhagavad Gita, the Quran, and other religious works. Philosophy and Religion do not always have huge changes, and very few titles go "out of date." Sometimes, it usually comes down to experience: knowing which editions are often mentioned, or have been requested by faculty members and are used in classes is very helpful.

Weeding the Q's can be a much easier process than other call ranges. Science is quickly outdated and new materials on a given topic often supersede previous works. While it is important to retain foundational works as well as a small number of representative titles to maintain the historical perspectives, often older materials can be moved out or replaced. To determine if a work should be kept, it is searched in Worldcat, to ensure a rare piece is not discarded and confirm that the item is owned by one or more research institutions. If there is still a question, searching for information on the author can help make decisions easier.

The Chemistry Reading Room is one of two science branch libraries on W&M's main campus. The space is small, consisting of 450 linear feet and 4,932 volumes. Circulation in the collection is low, only 49 circulations (0.99% of the collection) for FY 2015, and faculty have referred to it as a "cute archive." The space is consistently used for students taking tests and studying; with academic space at a premium, the consolidation of materials into the main branch should be anticipated. In the summer 2015, the science librarian began an inventory of the collection. As a part of the inventory, duplicate copies, previous editions, damaged items, and outdated items not cataloged were removed from the collection.

A total of 92 items were deselected from the chemistry library, leaving a large portion of the collection remaining. A comprehensive weed will be required if and when the collection is moved into the main library. The inventory of the collection revealed that 757 items are "missing," defined as identified in the catalog as available in the chemistry stacks but not scanned during the inventory process. The number of missing items is 15.4% of the entire chemistry collection; judging from the lack of requests to locate missing materials, many items are simply no longer in demand. Collection usage will be a factor to consider in future weeding activities.

The Physics Library is the second science branch library. It is a much larger collection, containing 21,507 volumes over 2,000 linear feet. The collection is well loved by the faculty and students in physics and applied sciences. New book displays

are popular, and a healthy monograph budget ensures that at least 6 linear feet of new materials are cataloged annually. Some areas of the collection were very tight in the shelves despite a weed during a 2011 renovation of the space. When shelving items the stacks would sway and sometimes books would have to be placed on top of other books.

Fearing for public safety, tired of breaking finger nails, observing students love of the space, and fantasizing over awesome programming opportunities, the science librarian proposed another weeding of materials at a faculty meeting. Physics is a scientific discipline which still values books and apparently weeding is a bad word, even if the weeds were dusty old duplicate copies of 1970s imprints. The idea for a comprehensive weed was rejected. The librarian made the executive decision to remove previous editions and duplicate copies of materials, with the exception of materials which were in high demand. To determine high demand, each item was checked for date last circulated and the total number of circulations. Generously, if each copy of an item had circulated in the last five years, both were allowed to stay. More than once, a previous edition had circulated recently, but the new edition had not, in those cases the previous edition was pulled to steer users toward the updated material. In all, 192 items were removed.

The branch libraries provide a unique opportunity for ongoing collection maintenance. The science librarian and a student assistant for the physics branch are the only library employees who check in and shelve materials. This is helpful because when shelving items, the surrounding items can be quickly evaluated and items which are duplicates or appear damaged can be pulled for evaluation. Tight areas can be cleared out before books start piling up.

Three years ago, our Geology department needed to reclaim the space occupied by their branch library to create needed lab space. Swem had to absorb the contents. This required a large amount of space, so there was serious weeding in the Q's and G's before the books and copious amounts of maps could be transferred. Over 1,900 volumes were removed from Swem in a 3-month time

period, to make room for the books and clean up the collection. While the geology books should be in good order, there are still other areas in the main collection of Q's awaiting an evaluation. During the end of the spring 2015 semester, while participating in a shelving help project, 43 copy 2's and previous editions were pulled, just from a quick evaluation in areas where items were returned to shelves.

There are many opportunities for weeding in the future for the science collections. Future weeding projects will possibly require input from faculty members, and new backfile purchases will allow for the removal of additional journal runs which will free large shelving areas in the branch libraries as well as the main library.

With any weeding project, librarians run the risk of discarding material from the collections that may become useful in the future for historical reasons. This needs to be balanced against the current needs for space, and keeping current materials readily available. Checking the items' rarity in Worldcat when in doubt can help questions of what would be a tragedy to discard. Weeding can vary widely by discipline, type of library, and the reasons it is being done, but for each discipline, it should be conducted carefully and thoughtfully, and not rushed and done strictly by the numbers: it is about the journey as well as the destination.

### **Appalachian State University**

Appalachian State University is a Carnegie-classified Master's/L institution located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina, and is one of 17 schools within the University of North Carolina System. Appalachian enrolls 18,000 students in 150+ degree programs at the undergraduate and graduate level, including one doctorate in education (EdD). A new campus library, The Belk Library and Information Commons, opened in 2005 with space for nine years of physical collections growth. Currently, the library's main book stacks house approximately 530,000 circulating items.

The library began an extensive review of collections and services in 2013. Under the

guidance of the new dean, the library benchmarked against current and emerging visions of academic library collections and services. Though seemingly new, the now 10-year old building was designed with late 20<sup>th</sup> century conceptions because that was all we could understand at the time. It was clear the future of information resources would be different, but how, when, and with what price would these changes occur? Now it is clear that in those ten years much had changed for collections offerings, in technology related to patron use of information resources, and in patron's habits and needs.

The library retained an architectural firm in 2014 to assist in planning a renewal of the library. It was clear early on that transitions were underway in the use of collections and in the demand for new services. With those trends in mind, the library began thinking about an extensive review of collections to understand where space might be opened to grow into these changes. Several projects were outlined. Reference, A/V, bound journals, and main stacks were the first collections identified for evaluation.

Before the reviews were begun, the library reached out to the groups on campus to communicate the developing plans for the library renewal project; what the project's impetus was; and how the plan would be accomplished in space, time, and expense. Constituencies consulted included the provost, Faculty Library Committee, Deans Council, Council of Chairs, and campus physical plant. These presentations were met with interest and few questions. It would later become clear that back and forth communication between these groups and the general faculty could not always be relied upon.

### *Recent History of Collection Reduction at Appalachian*

In 2012 and 2013, the library reduced the size of the reference collection by 80%; discarding 40% and transferring 40% to the circulating main stacks. The paper reference collection was little used by patrons or librarians. Twenty percent of the collection was retained. Similar projects were undertaken in the 16mm, VHS, and microfilm collections. There was no noticeable negative

feedback following these projects, many of which freed space to move and expand the library's Digital Media Studio, a heavily used service.

In 2013 and 2014, the library examined the bound journal collection in comparison to our owned backfiles from major journal publishers, e.g., Elsevier, Springer, Wiley/Blackwell, etc., and from JSTOR. Bound volumes were shelved together in alphabetical order away from the main book stacks. The process was open and publicized to campus. A LibGuide was created explaining the plans to remove these journal volumes that were also included in the library's owned journal backfiles. An online form was available for campus patrons to recommend titles to be exempted from removal. Fewer than 30 titles were appealed and the reasons were most often related to format or illustrations. Almost 100,000 bound volumes were removed and routed into the recycling stream. Thousands of linear feet of compact shelving were freed to eventually be relocated to provide more shelving in the main stacks. One thing we did anticipate was the need for compact shelving in the main stacks, and areas of the stack floors were built to anticipate the relocation of compact shelves and the increased load associated with its shelving. The space opened by removing these bound journals will be used for more archives closed storage and for additional digital classrooms and services. There was little negative feedback during and following the project. We even received a few comments that it was about time the library performed this review and discarded these titles.

### *The Ongoing Main Stacks Review Project*

*Creation of the review list.* In 2015, criteria were developed to evaluate low-use items in the main stacks. Using Innovative Interfaces' Create Lists function, straightforward criteria were applied against the main stacks holdings location: (1) The item was added to the collection prior to 1995, and (2) the item has no recorded use after 1995. The library had adopted the Innovative ILS in 1994, and the generated report reached back to the beginning of our collection use data. Recorded use included both checkouts and reshelvings. All in-house reshelved items were scanned before shelving and that internal copy use was recorded.

If a patron consulted a volume and reshelved it themselves, that use would not be captured, but across 20 years the likelihood of a consulted volume always being reshelved by a patron was slim. We believed that there would be at least one captured use if an item was even marginally popular.

The criteria yielded a first list of approximately 90,000 items added more than 20 years ago and having seen no apparent use in the last 20 years. From date-due slips examined, some items on the list appeared to have had no use from the 1970s or earlier. The list became known as the zero list and was approximately 2,500 pages if printed out with 40 items per page in Excel. This first pass report represented 17% of the main stacks collection. Identification of these items was a first step to allow further review of these holdings' potential for retention or discard. We decided upon a three-part review process.

### *Three Levels of the Review*

*Level 1. Subject librarian review.* The first review was a line-by-line examination by subject librarians searching for items that appeared somewhat foundational or canonical. Collection management at Appalachian is handled by a group of a dozen subject librarians with CM responsibilities divided in broad discipline categories: humanities, social sciences, business, education, and some narrower areas where a librarian has a particular disciplinary understanding. Before this line-by-line review began, the zero list's many imperfections were minimized via a thorough inspection overseen by the collection management technician, Mary Jordan. Mary identified and removed items that relate to unique areas of collection strength, e.g., Contract Bridge collection and books that had previously been identified by librarians for retention.

With the clean-up step accomplished, the resulting zero list was divided by appropriate two-letter LC classes, printed, and distributed to the appropriate subject librarians for the title-by-title review. Using a pink highlighter, subject librarians identified items that merited retention even if unused in 20 years. Each librarian applied their

knowledge of the campus's curriculum and research to make these retention selections. Frequent trips to the stacks were essential. This process lasted six weeks. Approximately 10,000 items were removed from the zero list by these librarian reviews.

The resulting list of 80,000 was examined for patterns, and Table 1 summarizes those:

**Table 1. Patterns in main stacks holdings versus the zero list items.**

Broad Subject	Total in Main Stacks	% of Main Stacks	Total on Zero List	% of Subject on Zero List	% of Total Zero List
Humanities	296,082	56%	44,684	15%	56%
Social Sciences	90,929	17%	12,735	14%	16%
Hard Sciences	79,845	15%	12,591	16%	16%
Education	20,070	4%	1,479	7%	2%
Business	41,364	8%	7,969	19%	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>528,290</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>79,458</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>100%</b>

We were surprised that the percentages on the zero list very closely matched those of the main stacks, i.e., social sciences LC classes accounted 16% of the zero list count and for 17% of the main stacks count. Interesting too was the apparent lack of use was spread somewhat evenly across the LC classes. That business had the largest percentage on the zero list was not surprising because of the fast-moving trends in that area make books obsolete more quickly. Education's small percentage on the zero list was likely the result of a very thorough weeding review of the "L" class in 2012. Overall, the lack of use was near 15% across the collection.

What stood out was the overall number of items in the broad humanities classes: 56% in the main stacks and on the zero list. Half of the library main stacks holds collections in literature, language, history, philosophy, religion, and fine and applied arts. The music collection is entirely held in the separate music library, was examined separately, and was not included in these main library review projects. Similarly, the Dewey-classed Instructional Media Center collection was not included in this review.

We wondered about the presence of rarer items on the zero list. To estimate the number of nominally rare books, which we defined as being held by fewer than five libraries in WorldCat, we hired two mathematics students to generate 2000 random numbers between 1 and 80,000, identify those selections on the zero list, and search those items in WorldCat. No more than 2% of the zero

list was held by fewer than 5 WorldCat libraries. This 2% will receive additional attention in the Level 3 review process.

*Level 2. Campus review of the list (ongoing in fall 2015).* A LibGuide was created to inform about and include the campus in the main stacks review. The guide format was similar to that used successfully in the bound periodicals review project. The project background was covered; anticipated questions were answered; the review list was divided into narrow LC categories to facilitate faculty review of items in their areas of interest; and a comment form was created in SurveyMonkey for the input of titles suggested for retention. An e-mail was sent to campus about the project and included a link to the LibGuide. Three weeks were provided in early midsemester to examine the list and provide input.

*Level 3. Item-by-item physical review by subject librarians (in 2016).* After the appealed items are removed from the zero list, the lists will be divided between the two main stacks floors. The early library renewal construction is planned for the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor containing LC classes A through J. The 3<sup>rd</sup> floor contains K through Z. This lends an



alphabetical approach; a comfortable fit for librarians. The recycling operation can handle the equivalent of 22 book trucks per week or roughly 2,000 books per week. The 2<sup>nd</sup> floor is anticipated to have 30,000 items to be removed, taking 15 weeks or one semester. To accomplish this, student workers pull items from the main stacks using the final zero list and deliver these on book trucks to the subject librarians. The subject librarians will examine each item for a third retain or recycle decision looking at the items in the university and library context.

Items not retained must then move through the library deaccessioning process to remove them from the catalog. There are considerable downstream effects on technical services and processing units receiving trucks of additional books each week to withdraw. This effect is repeated when the deaccessioned items arrive at the loading dock and campus physical plant's reception of tons of additional paper for recycling.

### *Interesting Aspects*

*Communication.* We were strongly reminded that books possess a singular cultural meaning, particularly to those in academe. While the reference and the bound periodical reviews proceeded with ease, the main stacks review precipitated a much different and prolonged campus response. We learned that it is essential when beginning a stacks review project to understand how for many the book has iconic value that bound journals and other formats do not possess. This iconic value transcends perceived utility. 100,000 bound volumes were routed into recycling with little comment. The proposal that a smaller number of books join those journals in the recycling stream was unacceptable to a number of vocal faculty, most commonly from the core humanities departments. The STEM and social sciences departments offered few comments. Library representatives were called to faculty senate and to departmental meetings to explain and defend the library renewal. Clearly, the communication we expected to happen between the campus academic management groups and the faculty had not always happened. The early news of the renewal project may not have been

communicated or it may not have been heard when it was communicated.

Faculty concerns centered on the loss of the books they might need in the future or on concerns that the removed books should find a home somewhere else after being withdrawn from our library. The iconic value lends itself to an attachment to books that is very strong and not to be underestimated.

For some concerned faculty, our reassurances were not convincing when provided an evidence that the books proposed for withdrawal were not rare and could be readily interlibrary loaned from nearby R-1 libraries committed to huge off-site storage facilities for low-use items. Giving up something (the books) the campus already owns and they might need someday was often not compensated for by the proposed opportunities for more creative and collaborative space or alternate delivery or substitution (e-book) options.

For those concerned that the withdrawn books still must have value and they should be sent somewhere to someone rather than be recycled, the options available are guided by the rules and regulations regarding disposal of state/institutional property. In our case, a few departments have requested the ability to review discards and move selected items to their departments. In a process handling tens of thousands of books through multiple steps for each item, having custom arrangements for some constituencies about some items may disrupt or fragment library workflows. Not accommodating some of those requests for custom arrangements can also have consequences.

One response to these concerns was that the review period for faculty was extended from three weeks to 2.5 months. At this writing we are halfway through that review period, and a few thousand books have been appealed through the LibGuide form. The overall lessons learned in a book stacks review center on the need for very broad communication from the beginning; the significant disciplinary differences in the perception of books; and the very special place the physical book holds in academe.