

Speed Weed: How We Weeded More Than 70,000 Items in Three Months

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Speed Weed: How We Weeded More Than 70,000 Items in Three Months

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Abstract:

Texas A&M University-Commerce was founded in 1889 as East Texas Normal College, and since that time has gone through five name changes. Each name change brought about a change in focus for the university. Since the university's founding, an intensive weeding of the James G. Gee Library print monographs collection has never been undertaken. A January 2011 age of collection report from the ILS showed that the greatest growth in the collection took place in the years between 1970 and 1990. Many of the monographs contained obsolete information and/or supported programs and courses that are no longer offered by the university. While librarians were in the midst of completing a literature review of best practices for weeding and constructing weeding policies and procedures, a major event changed the entire direction of the library's weeding goals. The Director of Libraries received word that a United States senator was considering donating his congressional papers to the library, and an entire floor of the library must be cleared to receive the documents. This paper outlines how the library weeded more than 70,000 items between June 1, 2011 and August 31, 2011.

Introduction

Libraries can identify the need to weed by simply walking through the stacks and taking a look at the titles and conditions of print monographs. The James G. Gee Library at Texas A&M University-Commerce walkthrough revealed titles such as *Using the Radio in the Classroom*, *How to Use a Slide Rule*, and *Any Girl Can Be Good Looking*. Previous librarians did not embrace weeding because the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) formerly used volume count as a measure of a library's compliance with accreditation standards. Volume count is no longer considered in a SACS accreditation. The current standards simply require a library to "...through ownership or formal arrangements or agreements, provide and support student and faculty access and user privileges to adequate library collections and services... consistent with the degrees offered." A look at our resources showed that we could easily comply with SACS standards, and actually enhance our support of current university programs, by weeding titles that supported programs no longer offered by the university or that contained outdated information.

Goals of Project

The initial goal of the project was to clear books and stacks from an entire floor of the library during the summer of 2011. A committee was formed and given the task of facilitating the project. Four important considerations emerged:

- "Green" disposal – Librarians are by nature an environmentally-conscious group. It was crucial for the discarded items to be recycled, not simply put in the trash.
- Time – A plan for completing the project in a timely manner required a change in staff and workflow.
- Staff – The library needed additional staff in order to complete the project.
- Workflow – The regular staff workflow must be evaluated and modified to allow as much attention to the weeding project as possible. A workflow for executing the weeding and associated ILS modifications must also be created.

Project Execution

- Disposal – The library contracted with a local area recycler to turn the discarded items into pulp to be used for creating new paper. The library director received permission from the university president to park a tractor trailer on the university grounds for the summer months. Wooden pallets and four-foot-square boxes were set up in the library in every available space that could be accessed by a forklift. Each time we had enough boxes ready to load the truck, which was about once a week during the summer months, we coordinated with our campus facilities crew to load the pallets and boxes into the truck. We then coordi-

nated with the recycler to have a driver bring more boxes and pallets in an empty trailer. The driver hauled the full trailer back to the recycling center.

- Time – Every staff member spent as many hours a day as possible on the project. Reference librarians were given the sole task of weeding for the summer months.
- Staff – The project required “all hands on deck”. In addition, the library hired three part-time temp workers who were dedicated to moving book carts between the various stations that were set up for the processes.
- Workflow – Every employee in the Technical Services Department, paraprofessionals as well as professionals, was trained to mark an item as discarded in the ILS. When a cart was full, it was wheeled into the queue for marking the ILS record. When a cart had been marked in the ILS it was put into a queue to be loaded into the recycling boxes.
- Weeding guidelines – The following guidelines were used to select items for weeding.
 - Duplicates
 - Earlier editions of multiple-edition titles
 - Outdated information in subjects such as computer science and nursing
 - Obsolete formats – cassettes, floppy discs, etc.

- Titles that support programs the university no longer offers such as home economics
- Items that were unusable for reasons such as being tattered, yellowed, or moldy

Results

So how did we do? We were amazing! With a staff of eleven paraprofessionals, ten professional librarians, and three part-time temps who worked only nineteen hours per week each, we discarded more than 70,000 items. It took seven tractor trailer loads, which were measured by the recycler in pounds. Our discarded items equaled the weight of seventy-two elephants.

Conclusion

We are currently finishing shifting on the third and fifth floors and moving items from the fourth floor. The shelving will be down on the fourth floor within the month. Fortunately, we haven't yet received the senator's papers, so we will be ready well before we need the space.

As we walk through the stacks we still see more items that need to be weeded, and we will catch those as we embark upon our next weeding project that will evaluate the collection more closely for content. The Provost and Director of Libraries have dedicated more funds to rebuild our library collection into what it should be so that we can leave a legacy of a premier library for the next generation of librarians and students.