

Rules of Thumb for Deselecting, Relocating, and Retaining Bound Journals

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Abstract:

Purpose: Like many other academic libraries, Joyner Library at East Carolina University has experienced pressure in recent years to convert stacks space to other uses. The rise of electronic collections coupled with the changing perception of libraries from book warehouses to service points forces librarians to rethink their collection management strategies, concomitantly reducing print collections. The purpose of this article is to recommend specific strategies that will assist librarians engaged in a large scale deselection project.

Design/methodology/approach: First, librarians, staff, and graduate assistants developed a workflow to examine print journals for which the library has online archival holdings in order to de-duplicate the collection. Librarians also determined which titles might be stored based on some online availability and length of print run. Thirdly, librarians led a subject-based review to determine which titles should be retained in the general circulating collections.

Findings: Examination proved that most online journals archives, including publisher packages, are adequate replacements for print serials volumes. Many other journal titles can safely be sent to storage rather than retained in the general circulating collections.

Practical implications: Libraries must manage their print collections differently in light of space issues and the conversion of scholarship from print to electronic format.

Originality/value: This article establishes clear principles to guide libraries' decisions on deselecting, storing, and retaining print serials volumes.

Keywords: deselection, print serials, weeding, collection management, online archival packages

Article Type: case study

Introduction

Libraries have traditionally had two primary reasons for weeding their collections: to create space for new holdings, and to create a more usable, up-to-date, and attractive

collection. Many libraries have had to embark on large-scale deselection projects in recent years because of two other conditions: one is the changing perception of libraries from book warehouses to service points, and the other is the radical shift from print use to electronic use of scholarly content.

Joyner Library at East Carolina University recently undertook a large-scale deselection project of its own in order to make space for a new campus partner within the library building. Already home to the University Writing Center and a tutoring service, the library building had been targeted by the Provost to host Project STEPP. Project STEPP, which stands for “Supporting Transition and Education through Planning and Partnerships,” is a program designed to offer support to students with identified learning disabilities. When administration identified space needs for construction of offices and group study rooms to house Project STEPP, librarians realized that approximately 90,000 volumes would have to be displaced, nearly 10% of Joyner’s print collection.

The Dean was told construction would begin in less than a year. Further complicating this project, the library was concerned about growth space and had limited compact storage. The primary solution to both time pressures and space restraints was to examine serials volumes for withdrawal or storage, based largely on duplication with online archival packages. Joyner Library already owned some of these packages, such as JSTOR, Periodicals Archive Online, the Springer Online Journal Archive, and some of Elsevier’s ScienceDirect backfiles. For the STEPP project, University administration provided additional funds to purchase more journal archives. During this project, under these particular circumstances, the authors created

a set of criteria to guide our decision-making. These criteria, however, are generalizable, and may provide a useful model to other libraries considering large-scale deselection projects.

Literature Review

Librarians have sought advice on the most responsible ways to reduce library collections for a long time. Writings by Stanley Slote, and by Rick Lugg and Ruth Fischer provide important background for embarking on deselection projects. Slote's *Weeding Library Collections* (1997) is a standard text, and has reached its fourth edition. Although Slote presents a variety of compelling reasons to weed, his focus is monographs. About serials, he suggests removing incomplete serials runs, early volumes of long runs, and non-indexed titles, and eventually states plainly, "There is no simple overall solution to the problem of serials" (pp. 26, 223). In a tripartite series of articles called "Future Tense," Lugg and Fischer (2008, 2008, and 2009) appeal to librarians to create a "Golden Age of Weeding," by which they mean primarily deduplication of low-use holdings at a system level. Their article suggests a rules-based approach to weeding monographs, which inspired the authors to create their own "rules of thumb" for identifying journals eligible for withdrawal here at Joyner Library.

Articles by Handis (2007) and by Soma and Sjoberg (2011) provide general advice on weeding in small academic libraries. Handis urges librarians not to avoid this "essential part of collection management," for fear of making mistakes. Soma and Sjoberg focus on monographs, but do have important advice to offer: plan carefully, use quantitative measures when possible, and involve library teammates and faculty collaboratively. Liu (2007) goes into additional details for weeding at a medium-sized university library. She lists some situations that can force

libraries into weeding serials, including limited shelf space, lack of on-site or off-site storage, budget constraints, study priorities, and shortage of staff. Of course, these situations are not limited to medium-sized libraries. Although each library will create deselection criteria based on local circumstances, all must navigate conflicts between “keeping the valuable historical collections to support current academic studies and accepting new technologies to replace traditional print collections so as to alleviate the shelf and budget restraints.” These authors encourage librarians to dive into a necessary part of the collection life cycle, and be unafraid of making mistakes.

Although additional resources focus on specific library circumstances, they do provide advice that was beneficial to the project described below. Ward and Aagard (2008) developed local criteria guiding their deselection of commonly-held serials with the assistance of WorldCat Collection Analysis. Carey, Simonsen, and Vogh (2009) created guidelines for the deselection of periodical volumes based on several factors, including duplication, low number of volumes held, reshelving statistics, online access, and faculty input. These articles suggest, therefore, that librarians should consider weeding based not only on duplication at a system level but also from one format to another. Further, online access reduces a library’s need to keep the print copies in browseable stacks.

In recent years, radical space pressures have forced libraries across the country to step up their weeding activities. The amount of space lost, often with short turn-around times, is forcing librarians to turn to models focusing primarily on weeding journals. Ithaka, parent both of JSTOR and Portico, has published the influential report *What to Withdraw* (2009) and its

related *Print Collections Decision-Support Tool* (2010), both of which were designed specifically to aid librarians considering withdrawing print for titles found in JSTOR.

These space issues started in medical libraries before moving to science branch libraries, such as the Life Sciences Library at Indiana University and the Science-Engineering Library at the University of Arizona. See Thibodeau (2010) and Tooley (2010) for medical libraries' downsizing their stacks space, and Winterman and Hill (2010) for Indiana University's experience. Within the last few years, these space pressures have begun extending to general academic libraries, as well. Bracke and Martin (2005) concentrated their space conversion on printed journals found in Elsevier's Science Direct Backfile packages, an approach the authors took and broadened to include other publisher packages. In sum, the literature suggests that librarians should plan their large-scale deselection projects carefully, focusing on serial runs in order to realize large space savings with a short turn-around time, and to consider those titles that are duplicated in some fashion, whether by a multiplicity of holdings at a system level or by format (print and online).

Project Planning

Early in the spring semester of 2010, university administration approached the Dean of the Library about providing space in the library for another university program. The Dean asked librarians in Collections and Technical Services to prepare a list of needs and concerns. In response, the authors drafted a document detailing staffing needs and funding required for purchases of archival journal packages that would permit the withdrawal of bound journals. The work plan and staffing needs document outlined goals and procedures with along with duty

assignments. Three main goals were identified. One goal was for the immediate need to free up space for the STEPP project construction, and the other two goals were future-oriented, pertaining to print collection management and the substitution of online journals for print.

University administration agreed to provide the temporary contracts for one professional librarian, three full-time staff members, and two full-time graduate assistants to accomplish the work outlined in the library's proposal. The Dean of the Library negotiated total space needs in order to provide not only offices for the program coming into the library, but also to provide additional group and individual studies that would be used by library patrons after STEPP offices were closed.

The total timeframe allotted for this project was less than twelve months. After the temporary staff members were hired and roles were established, team members agreed to meet every few weeks to assess progress, to change work patterns when necessary, and to address any problems that arose. The project manager clarified up front the need to produce monthly reports to communicate ~~our~~ progress with library administration. Plans were also developed for shifting the general collection and for recycling the withdrawn bound journals.

As part of their negotiation with the library, university administration had also agreed to fund online backfile purchases. The project manager worked with the serials librarian to determine which packages to buy so that print volumes could be removed in their stead. The library had previously done some weeding of JSTOR titles and ScienceDirect backfile collections to help maintain growth space, and had already acquired the Springer Online Journal Archive and the Oxford Archive. Acquiring the remainder of the ScienceDirect backfiles was a priority, as well as identifying offerings from publishers who were further along in their digitization

efforts. The first purchases were focused on science-oriented journals: IOP Science, American Chemical Society, and the rest of the ScienceDirect collections. The library was later able to acquire archives from Sage, Cambridge University Press, Emerald, Taylor & Francis, Wiley-Blackwell, and additional JSTOR collections, among other packages. Once these acquisitions were finalized, project team members could begin using them for evaluation of the print volumes to consider for withdrawal.

Project Work

Librarians needed to know how many shelves would have to be taken down for construction in order to estimate the number of volumes that would have to be weeded or stored elsewhere. The resulting total of 90,000 volumes to be displaced constituted nearly 10% of the circulating collection. The construction area was at the beginning of the general stacks collection (~~A—D~~) on the second floor. Since the authors obviously could not just weed all materials with call numbers A through D, Project STEPP construction would require shifting the entire general circulating collection across the second and third floors. The project team decided to focus its efforts on journals, ~~and~~ not only to weed, but also to store them in order to help clear the necessary construction space. The project team adopted a three-pronged approach designed to create storage space, begin evaluating and withdrawing print journals from selected archival packages, and to create a model that would guide the decisions to store, withdraw, or retain titles in the stacks.

The only storage space available was in compact shelving located in the basement of the library, and half of that was to be given to the Special Collections Department. Originally,

compact shelving held some monographs, some reference materials, and the Oversize collection, as well as some of the journal runs. Since it was decided to use compact shelving only for storing retained journal runs, librarians had to weed in the basement, choose where to move the Oversize collection, and transfer to the stacks the few monographs that were being kept. Staff and students then shifted the entire basement, integrating relocated journals as they went. Because Special Collections materials were going to share the basement, this would have to become a closed stacks collection. The change meant that it was necessary to store only low-use titles, since each volume would have to be retrieved by staff.

Another precondition for storage in compact was that these were journals not currently received in print. Often those titles that were selected had end dates (or last received volumes) preceding 2000, on the premise that older materials were less likely to be paged. The intention was to pack the shelving completely, leaving no room for growth. By the end of the project, compact storage held roughly 60,000 journal volumes.

The location chosen for the Oversize collection was the end of the general stacks (after the Z call numbers) on the library's third floor. The project team created room for a backshift by "punching a hole" in the sciences section, targeting science journals in archival packages for evaluation and immediate withdrawal. Once the backshift made space, the team then was able to move the Oversize collection to the third floor and shift forward to tighten up that section of the stacks. Shifting then continued forward through the rest of the general stacks, in coordination with the weeding that was occurring in various sections of the collection. Team leaders decided to reduce growth space on each shelf during this shift to meet both the

library's immediate need to make space for Project STEPP and for future planning for collection management since fewer physical volumes are now coming in to the collection.

It was necessary to kickstart the weeding for this project with a fast process for identifying withdrawal candidates; de-duplicating print holdings from the library's online journal archives provided the opportunity to do so. Librarians examined the licenses of archival journal packages to verify ownership and access conditions, then had graduate assistants (GA's) hired for this project download title lists from these archives and add information about the library's print holdings. The GA's were instructed to evaluate these print titles for immediate withdrawal. Evaluations are necessary, since retrospective digitization efforts have been somewhat unevenly carried out.

Sample volumes were selected for the evaluation; one from the beginning of the run, one from the middle, and the last one in the archival package (this was often not the last volume held). The evaluation procedure started with the students checking tables of contents for all issues in the bound volume to look for completeness of coverage online. Next, the GA's picked sample articles from each issue by thumbing through the print to look for articles that included graphs, charts, images, foldouts—anything other than just text. If the online version was complete and had adequate digitized versions of the articles, the GA's pulled all volumes from the archival years, put on a withdrawal truck, and filled out a slip to hand off to cataloging. [Insert Figure 1.] The print volumes could be sent to recycling immediately, and the cataloging staff updated the library's holdings using the information on the slip. If the quality was not good, or if the content was incomplete, the GA's would note this on the slip as well. The GA's

did not make final decisions as to what to do with these imperfectly-scanned print titles. They sent these slips to the librarians for decisions on retention or withdrawal. [Insert Table 1.]

While the GA's were conducting package-based weeding, the authors were developing a more comprehensive approach to guide their decisions for storing, withdrawing, or retaining print periodicals in the stacks. We began with a small section of the collection, in a low-risk subject area for this library. This subject area was medicine, and was low-risk for Joyner Library because there is a Health Sciences Library elsewhere on campus. This small section was chosen in order to refine ~~our~~ procedures and develop a consistent decision-making method.

Over time, we developed the "rules of thumb" to help in deciding on one of three options to take: retain the volumes in the stacks, withdraw some or all volumes, or send the journal to storage. The information ~~we~~ needed for decision-making was partially found in call number lists created by one of the authors. These call number lists included basic identifying information and print holdings, visually verified in the stacks, and were augmented with additional information such as online availability and notes. Some decisions proved to be especially difficult, and required consultation with other subject librarians. Some journals that were core in their fields or that had unique value to our university's programs were retained in the stacks where otherwise they would have been withdrawn or sent to storage.

After this test area, the authors went in reverse call number order to make decisions on each journal. GA's were directed on a title-by-title level via notes in the call number lists about which journals to leave in the stacks, withdraw, or transfer to compact. Eventually, space in the compact storage area ran out, so the GA's were left with only two available actions. The authors kept a list of those titles marked for storage that did not fit, so that they could be

transferred in the future if additional deselection projects should occur. Forming the rules of thumb and applying them to non-package titles in the circulating collections was by far the most time-consuming part of this large-scale deselection project. There were, of course, considerations about when to apply and not apply these rules, and these considerations sometimes led to changing the decision on a title. Librarians conducting any large project like this should take notes: you won't remember why you wanted to keep a certain title or whether it failed an evaluation.

Rules of Thumb

So what were these rules of thumb, and what additional considerations were there?

[Insert Table 2.] The first group of rules deals with withdrawals, the second group with sending journals to storage, and the third group of rules relates to titles the library kept in the general circulating collection.

Rule One: withdraw bound volumes of journals that are adequately represented in online archival packages. Because publishers' archival packages normally have a set end date, libraries often own bound volumes for years after the end date of the archival ownership. These package "leftovers" are dealt with in Rules Two and Five. Withdrawals following Rule One create drastic reductions in the footprint of the physical collections—libraries can gain a lot of space this way. **Rule Two:** withdraw short or incomplete runs of titles no longer received in print, especially if they meet one or more of the following conditions: the last volume received was 1999 or earlier (date may vary by subject area), there are 10 volumes or fewer, and/or the

title is not indexed. This rule also governs package “leftovers” no longer received in print. **Rule Three:** withdraw journals no longer relevant for university curricula.

Rules Four and Five relate to keeping journals in print, in storage. Rules Six through Nine govern conditions for keeping print journals in the general collection. **Rule Four:** Store long runs of journals no longer received in print, especially if they meet one or more of the following conditions: online access is available (from any provider), the title has significant subject area status, and/or there is continuing value for local collections. **Rule Five:** Store poorly scanned or leftover volumes from titles in archival packages, if there are 10 or more volumes, if the title is no longer received in print, and if online access is available. **Rule Six:** Keep journals that are current print subscriptions in the general collection. **Rule Seven:** Keep journals in the stacks if they are long runs (30 volumes or more), last received fewer than ten years ago, with no electronic access. **Rule Eight:** Keep journals of particular importance to their subject areas in the stacks. **Rule Nine:** Keep journals in the stacks if they have significant value for local collections.

There are, of course, exceptions to every rule. Exceptions generally include titles which are significant for local collections or which have particular subject area considerations (eg., art images or humanities journals having longer cited half-lives). Each library will address its own application of the rules to meet local circumstances. In fact, some days so many exceptions were permitted that it was difficult to determine the rule. The point is that consistency and the lack thereof often go together.

There were also some underlying principles that the authors followed: first, for retained journals, we tried to keep all title changes together, rather than sending some to storage and

others to the stacks. Second, microfilm was not a focus, so long unbroken runs of microfilm volumes were kept, even when the title was in an archival online package. However, we were willing to deselect broken or short microfilm runs for withdrawn titles. Third, whether or not a title was currently received in print had a big impact on ~~our~~ decision-making, so this was an opportunity to rethink print subscriptions. Some subscriptions were converted from print to electronic format when the cost difference was reasonable and/or the title was not available in multiple aggregators. Other print subscriptions were canceled for titles that were available in multiple aggregators, especially for those that were not significant for their disciplines. We also chose to suppress the delivery of some print titles for which the publisher was granting online access, and to stop binding other journals. These suppressions reduced staff time, shelf space, and binding costs.

Nine months after hiring temporary staff, all necessary withdrawals, transfers, and shifting had been completed. Not counting the necessity of shifting all books in the general circulating collection, project staff and GA's handled more than 110,000 volumes – 60,000 volumes transferred to storage, and nearly 50,000 volumes withdrawn. The fact that we exceeded the goal of 90,000 volumes to make room for construction meant that the library has preserved growth space for at least a little longer.

Additional accomplishments during the time period included an inventory of the Oversize collection and the creation of item records for journal volumes that did not previously have them. Making radical changes to the library's physical collections in such a short time frame requires courage and a willingness to let mistakes go. Handis (2007, p. 87) stated bluntly that "Mistakes will be made" an observation that may be pointed out in Joyner Library in the

future. These authors believe, though, that the likelihood we will need to re-purchase any mistakenly-withdrawn materials is low, because there has been little loss in content—in fact, Joyner Library now enjoys a net increase in content and access to that content.

Conclusion

The Project STEPP planning document detailed three goals. The first goal was focused on making room in the library for this new campus partner. The other two goals are ongoing and pertain to print collection management and the substitution of online journals for print. The rules of thumb described above not only helped accomplish the first goal, but also showed a way to manage print collections more effectively in the future. Additional backfiles will be considered for purchase as they become available, and titles that failed examination earlier will be re-evaluated (in the event the publisher rescanned). Also, large-scale deselection projects like this do not mean that libraries can give up continued weeding for the health of the collection, particularly considering the need for continued relevance of content for the university's current and evolving curriculum.

Collection management is not dying; in fact, it is becoming more complicated as two interrelated pressures increase. First, the changing natures of libraries from warehouses to service points puts pressure on libraries to give up stacks space for user space. Second, the transition from print to electronic resources has been a major theme in academic libraries for several years. In some cases, libraries decided that they would support user preferences for the electronic format for their serials instead of using print. In other cases, including Joyner Library's, it was necessary to make this change from print to electronic in order to create more

user space in the library building. The combined effect of smaller spaces for physical collections, with the increasing preference for online resources, makes collection management decision-making and planning difficult but important.

Attachments

Figure 1: Slip for withdrawing print vols.

Student Name:			Date:	
Title:			Total Print Holdings:	
Call Number:			Total Microfilm Holdings:	
Spot Check Notes:				
Withdrawn Status	Full Partial		Physical Count of Withdrawn Items:	Print: _____ Microfilm: _____
Remaining Vols & Years:			Checked:	
Signatures	GA Spot Check:		CDV Librarian:	
	GA Cataloging:			

Table 1: Workflow for package-based weeding:

1. Examine license for post-cancellation rights
2. Search title lists for print holdings
3. Verify online coverage
4. Verify completeness of 3 sample volumes and evaluate quality of digital copy
5. If complete and adequate, withdraw all volumes in archive
6. If not complete or inadequate scan quality, consult librarian for decision to retain or withdraw anyway.
7. Move retained volumes to basement (unless currently received in print)
8. Librarian makes decision on microfilm retention.

Table 2: Rules of Thumb for Large-Scale Weeding Projects: Bulleted list

- Withdraw:
 - Bound volumes in archival packages
 - Dead runs or those incomplete runs no longer received in print, especially if:
 - Last volume 1999 or earlier
 - Fewer than 10 volumes
 - Not indexed
 - Journals no longer relevant for university curricula
- Send to storage:
 - Long runs of titles no longer received in print, especially if:
 - Online access is available (from any provider)
 - Subject area importance
 - Other local reason to retain
 - Poorly scanned or leftover volumes from titles in archival package (if greater than 10), if accessible online
- Keep in stacks:
 - Current print subscriptions
 - Recent long runs (30 vols or more) with no electronic access
 - Subject area importance
 - Significant value to local collections

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