

Collection Evaluation

January 2002

Why Do It?

Librarians buy new materials for a variety of reasons and for a variety of clients. Some of those materials are considered “core”, will be used often, and will need to be retained and preserved permanently. Others types of materials will be used only occasionally and, while they retain their intellectual importance and their significance for research, may not need to be housed in prime stacks space. Some materials are best considered “consumables”, i.e. they are useful for a limited time and need to be replaced as their content becomes dated.

The Library conducts periodic, systematic evaluations to ensure that the collection keeps pace with the changing, growing needs of the University community. Subject Librarians regularly assess materials for retention, preservation, replacement, storage, or withdrawal in order to ensure the continued integrity and usefulness of the collection.

What to Do with the Materials being Evaluated

Options now available include the following:

1. **Keep It in the Circulating Collection:** Significant material that directly supports current teaching and research can and should be kept on the shelf in the most appropriate location. Doing this may require shifting of stacks material.
2. **Store It:** Material that is infrequently used but still of long-term research value may be considered for transfer to the storage facility in Hoskins Library. Materials in storage continue to circulate.
3. **Restrict Access to It:** Research material in severely deteriorated condition may be sent to the Preservation Collection, located in Hoskins Library. The Preservation Collection is a closed stack facility that contains books and periodicals whose condition has deteriorated to such an extent that their use must be limited. All titles assigned to the Preservation Collection will eventually be reformatted; therefore, any items with artifactual value should not be transferred to this collection. Access to the Preservation Collection is available through paging to the Special Collections reading room.
4. **Replace or Reformat It:** Deteriorated material can be replaced with a new copy of the same edition, a copy of a different edition, or an edition in a different physical format. The original may then be considered for withdrawal.
 - a) If a book has worn out from heavy use, buying a new copy can be a simple and cost-effective solution. The replacement may be the same or a later edition.

- b) Reformatting deteriorated material as either microfilm or photocopy is a standard preservation option. In-house digitization should soon be available.
 - c) The purchase of commercial microfilm may be a good “storage” solution for material that is intellectually important, but used only occasionally. Microfilm replacement represents, in effect, a second purchase decision, but may have advantages when space is a serious consideration. All microfilm purchases should be cataloged to ensure bibliographic access.
 - d) Electronic access is another alternative format that allows access while freeing up valuable stacks space. The technical and financial reliability of the vendor are important factors to considering in choosing to rely on an electronic format as a substitute for a print-on-paper product.
5. Share with the Consortium: A trial study has already been done to test the feasibility of sharing responsibility for the backfiles of low-use journals among members of the Information Alliance consortium. Under this arrangement, each of the participating libraries agrees to take permanent responsibility for the backfile of specified journals. The other participants would then be at liberty to withdraw their copies. The success of this arrangement depends on maintaining accurate bibliographic access and expedited document delivery for the shared journals.
 6. Withdraw It: Withdrawal is the permanent removal of outdated, superseded, damaged, or redundant material from the collection. Primary responsibility for withdrawal lies with the Subject Librarians, although advice can and should be sought from Library Representatives or other faculty. In some cases, the Subject Librarian may choose to replace a withdrawn title with a more appropriate one in the same or different format.

Factors to Consider When Reviewing Collections

The decisions made in reviewing a collection depend on a variety of factors: Who uses it? How is it used? Does the collection support graduate degree programs? Is the discipline monograph-dependent or journal-dependent? What parts of the collection support faculty research agendas? Are there other sources for the same material? Do other libraries in the Information Alliance own the same or similar titles?

While there is no one correct approach to reviewing a collection, decisions can generally be made by a comparison of levels of use with relevance of the material to the goals of the collection.

These categories are advisory only—there can and will be exceptions in all of them.

	High Use	Low Use
High Relevance	Keep in main location	Send to Storage, or: Replace same title in new format
Low Relevance	Replace with more appropriate title. Consider withdrawing the original	Withdraw without replacing

Examples:

High Relevance—High Use: A book or journal that is considered “core” material. A title that is essential to ongoing research or is directly related to current course curricula. Such titles should usually be retained in their primary location.

High Relevance—Low Use: Material needed to support research, but that is consulted only occasionally by a limited number of faculty or an occasional graduate student. This kind of material may be a candidate for storage or replacement in another format.

High Use-Low Relevance: These are titles that are still circulating, but whose contents are no longer reliable and may seriously mislead the user. Examples might include old computer application manuals or old foreign language phrase books.

Low Use-Low Relevance: This material is rarely or never used and is, in addition, outdated, superseded, redundant, or badly damaged and not worth preserving. Material in this category may be withdrawn and not replaced.

Consultation with Knowledgeable Faculty Members

While responsibility for collection maintenance rests with Subject Librarians, it is desirable to keep faculty members informed of major weeding, reformatting, or storage initiatives. Faculty advice may also be sought in difficult cases, or cases in which the Subject Librarian lacks necessary subject or language expertise.

Supporting Data

Various kinds of support data for collection review projects are available from the **Collection Development & Management Office**. Some possibilities are:

1. Horizon circulation data
2. Number of times a journal has been circulated from Storage
3. Holdings in other Information Alliance Libraries
4. Availability and price of microfilm
5. Journal volumes available from aggregators and full-text services (ProQuest, JSTOR, et al.)
6. Collection growth statistics by LC class

For assistance in planning and carrying out a collection review, please contact

Collection Development & Management

552 Hodges Library

(865) 974-4360