

Weeding the Reference Collection: Adapting Current Spaces to Address User Expectations

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Abstract

A major review of the print Watson Library Reference Collection at the University of Kansas Libraries was conducted over the 2008 Spring and Fall semesters. As part of a major renovation of Watson Library's main floor, the Libraries' Administration had mandated a 50% reduction of this collection in order to increase public user and collaborative spaces. The planning process, the criteria used for weeding, the implementation of this project, and its outcomes are described in this poster session. Consideration was given to changes in technologies and formats, and the expectations of today's and future library users.

Philosophy

In her announcement of the reconfiguration of the new service desk in Watson Library, Dean of Libraries Lorraine J. Haricombe, stated: "Time and time again, research has shown a strong correlation between a positive change in the physical environment of a library and a dramatic increase in library use. The more comfortable our patrons are, the more likely they are to interact with our librarians and utilize our collections." (Haricombe, *Innovations*, 2008)

To that end, the Head of Reference (Devlin) and the Reference Collection Bibliographer (Gibbs) were charged with identifying Watson Library reference collection titles for transfer to either Watson Library Stacks or Annex storage.

Background Information

Characteristics of Watson Library Reference Collection, 2008:

- 8,645 monographs and 1,176 serial titles
- Many old, outdated, infrequently used volumes
- Some previously identified to be moved to regular stacks, but no room
- Print rarely consulted – internet used for "ready-ref" information
- Some print resources no longer relevant or important due to changes in teaching and research focuses on campus

KU Libraries' Annex, opened spring 2006:

- Finally, space available to move thousands of volumes from stacks
- Following these transfers, reference volumes could be moved to stacks (or Annex)

New Watson Service Desk configuration, summer 2008:

- Consolidated service point for Circulation & Business Office, Reserves, and Reference; consumed large "footprint" on main floor
- New service area + large extant reference collection = too little space to create the new public user and collaborative spaces needed to meet increasing demand



Weeding Principles and Evaluation Criteria

Criteria for weeding reference collections are noted in the literature as far back as 1977. Such criteria include the "importance of the source, comprehensiveness of the information, importance of the subject area, language, use, availability of a newer edition, serial nature of the publication, duplication of information in other reference materials, number of copies available, and condition of the book." (Singer 2008)

Additional criteria used in our evaluation of the reference collection were:

- Availability of full-text electronically / Library database or e-book
- Date of publication / Currency of information
- Publisher / Academic or popular
- Audience level / Appropriate for academic users
- Evidence of scholarship / Bibliographies, references, or signed entries
- Coverage / Scope and depth of material
- Frequency of use / Did users consult print or was information easily found online?
- Duplication / Material covered in several sources

Procedures

1. Cataloging staff created a report from Access database with all titles in reference collection (standing orders, serials, monographs)
2. Reviewers (Gibbs & Devlin) looked at each physical item, using evaluation criteria (conducted in several one-hour time slots over May & June 2008)
3. Recommended whether items remained in collection, or moved to stacks or Annex
4. Also enlisted expertise from subject specialists in decision-making
5. List of items proposed to be moved was made available on the Libraries' web site
6. Library subject specialists and faculty were invited to review list and identify items that they did not want moved from reference collection (selections could be made online or through subject specialist)
7. Faculty review was conducted July & August 2008
8. If requested by faculty, items were kept in reference (some exceptions)

Outcomes and Benefits

1. Titles identified to be moved, still in the process of being transferred:
 - 25% monographs and 70% serial titles
2. Remaining reference collection will be:
 - Smaller and more relevant to user needs
 - Current, with up-to-date information
 - Easier to access needed volumes without extraneous materials
3. Create more space for users, computers, and collaborative group study
 - Planning and implementation in process (Summer/Fall 2009)

Future Directions

1. Complete process of moving materials - scheduled for May 2009
2. Review current subscriptions and standing orders to identify gaps, potential cancellations, and cost-savings
3. Update and review reference collection development policy
4. Migrate to electronic reference sources – accessible to more users

Literature Review

Devlin, Frances A. and Nancy J. Burich. (2005) The Fox is in the Chicken Coop: Refocusing Reference for All Users. *Brick and Click Libraries: Proceedings of an Academic Library Symposium, Maryville, MO, October 14, 2005*. Eds. C. Ury & F. Baudino. Maryville: Northwest Missouri State University, 2005. 45-52.

Fernandes, Maria Isabel. (2008) Ready Reference Collections: Thoughts on Trends. *Community & Junior College Libraries* 14(3):201-210.

Singer, Carol A. (2008) Weeding Gone Wild: Planning and Implementing a Review of the Reference Collection. *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 47(3): 256-264.

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