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Today's Changing Library: Pressures and Realities for Weeding the Collection

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Today’s Changing Library: Pressures and Realities for Weeding the Collection

Why weeding is needed:

Unused books take up space
   Less room for variety of materials to support patron needs
   Too many books make collection difficult to use
Collection becomes overwhelming
   Users don't find what they need
   Useful books are less accessible
Crowded Shelves/space problems
   Difficult to maintain orderly collection
   Re-shelving takes longer
   Books get lost more easily
   Extra time to constantly shift books
Outdated books
   Information not up-to-date
   Information erroneous
   Unattractive collection discourages use
   Unappealing books don't circulate
   Books in disrepair difficult to use

Why weeding isn't done:

Reported statistics emphasize number of volumes library holds
Staff time limited
   Collection decisions need professional evaluation
   Staff time needed to process deleted materials
“Sacredness” of books
   Public image
      People revere books and expect libraries to “have everything”
      Discarding books gets bad press for the library
Librarians are by nature collectors and preservers, not discarders
Practical Problems
   Weeding requires knowledge of clientele
   Weeding requires knowledge of the subject area and collection
   Weeding is time-consuming
   Weeding is not fun
   Weeding is easy to ignore
   Weeding is crystal ball gazing
   Weeding is subjective

To keep or not to keep: Aids to judgment

   Clear collection policy
   Agreement on library’s role and purpose
   Standards for subject area
      Age of information acceptable
      Authority of author/publisher
      Depth of resources needed
   Lending to the Wider Community
   Collection agreements among libraries/Interlibrary lending
      How many other libraries hold the item
Common weeding criteria

Condition/ Appearance
Preservation decision
  - How much use?
  - Does book still have valuable information?
  - Is book unique in some way?
  - Is book held widely
The most tattered books are usually the most used and need repaired, not weeded.

Duplicate copies
Easiest criteria to use with some exceptions
  - Some works of fiction/literature, philosophy, classics
  - Heavily used works
Need to consider periodicals/books replaced with electronic access
  - Keep hardcopy in storage
  - Depend on state repositories and large research libraries for print

Older editions
Can be easy decisions:
  - Textbooks in nursing, business, or engineering updated every 2-3 years
  - Ready-reference sources—directories, career books, etc.
Can be tricky decisions:
  - First edition written by “an expert in the field”/a “classic” but subsequent editions revised by others
  - What looks like an older edition may be
    - A run of serials, annual reviews, conference proceedings, etc.
    - A different book, written or compiled by someone else
    - An edited literary work by a different editor
    - A work with different illustrations
    - Art book containing different pieces of art
    - Collected essays containing different essays in each edition

Outdated or erroneous information
Judge a book's erroneous information may take time and research
In some areas obvious-- outdated methods of analysis, equipment that is no longer used, outdated medical procedures and treatments, etc.
In some fields may not have “outdated” information—old theories remain with new ones

Date of Publication
Method driven by accreditation standards and faculty
Wholesale weeding by date of publication is a tempting time-saver, but a poor indicator of quality
  - lasting value of the information
  - Needs of the discipline and use by related fields of study

Use/circulation statistics
Seems to be easy criteria --“If it’s not used, pitch it”
Caveats--
  - Agreements/obligation as part of the larger library community
  - Specialized collection areas/strengths to be maintained
  - Donations accepted with “strings”