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Outdated books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**
Judging 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”