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SIGNIFICANCE OF WEEDING LIBRARY MATERIALS IN THE CONTEXT OF COLLECTION MANAGEMENT IN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

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Abstract

This paper discusses about the importance of weeding library material in University Libraries. It mentions standard practices of weeding in some important libraries. Necessity of weeding is highlighted in order to keep the collection up to date thereby facilitating the users in easily locating the books of their interest. Recommendations of the National Knowledge commission about weeding are also specified. Finally some tips are provided for libraries to weed out older and obsolete items of the library to keep the collection intact and avoid spacing problems in accommodating new collection.

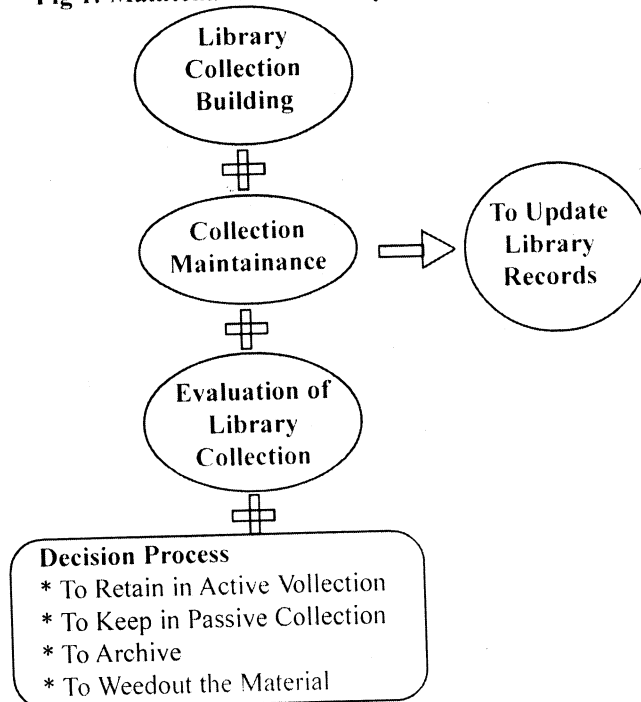
Key words: Collection Development - Weeding policies. Weeding policies -University Libraries

1. Introduction

Weeding of documents and other material is considered as one of the important functions of libraries in a view to maintain their collection up to date by discarding obsolete, damaged, and unused books from the stacks. The collection of any university library in modern times comprise of monographs, text books, theses/dissertations, books, reference books, journals or magazines, serial publications etc. in print, microform or in the form of electronic disks (e.g. CD-ROM or DVDs) or online as individual titles or databases.

1.1 Research Problem

Collection building and management in academic libraries especially at university level is a continuous and cyclic process of getting the volumes added on shelves, which includes selection of reading materials, acquisition, processing, shelf arrangement and their maintenance viz. preservation, repair and weeding out as they require stack space; additional stack rooms in library building, finances and staff for maintaining them.

Fig 1: Maintenance of Library Collection

So the weeding forms a periodic and continual process of withdrawing unused, obsolete and physically damaged documents from the library stacks to ensure users with easy access to the highly used documents and latest additions that library acquires from time to time.

1.2 Objectives

- * To find out the requisite reading material that needs to be removed from the collection.
- * To find solutions to accommodate the live collection in addition to newly acquired material and to provide the users with the books of their interest in the least possible time.
- * To observe the practices and policies existing in standard academic libraries.

1.3. Scope & Limitations of the Study

Only academic libraries are studied. The study is limited only to the weeding policies of the academic libraries as it is posing a serious problem to the collection development policies of the libraries.

1.4. Methodology

The information was collected from few case studies of academic libraries available in text books and websites of standard libraries and their manuals. Practical experiences of IGM library weeding procedures are also used as methods of study.

2. Weeding Library Materials

In order to maintain library collection up to date as per the organizational priorities and users requirements, it is necessary to weed out certain material to get stack space for new additions and to avoid clogging in the services. Thus, the library collection is needs to be evaluated in terms of its significance, use and the current nature of content drawing criteria for weeding the library material.

It is essential to frame clear cut policies for evaluating, weeding the library material and also documenting the policies by developing manuals. Further the acquisition and catalogue records of the library are to be updated with necessary information required for users and administration regarding the changes made in collection

2.1. Need for Weeding the Library Materials

Certain types of library material is getting obsolete over the period and not required to be in the library any more. These outdated and unused books are incurring heavy costs of maintenance to libraries and slowdown or even obstructing the workflow of library management in many ways.

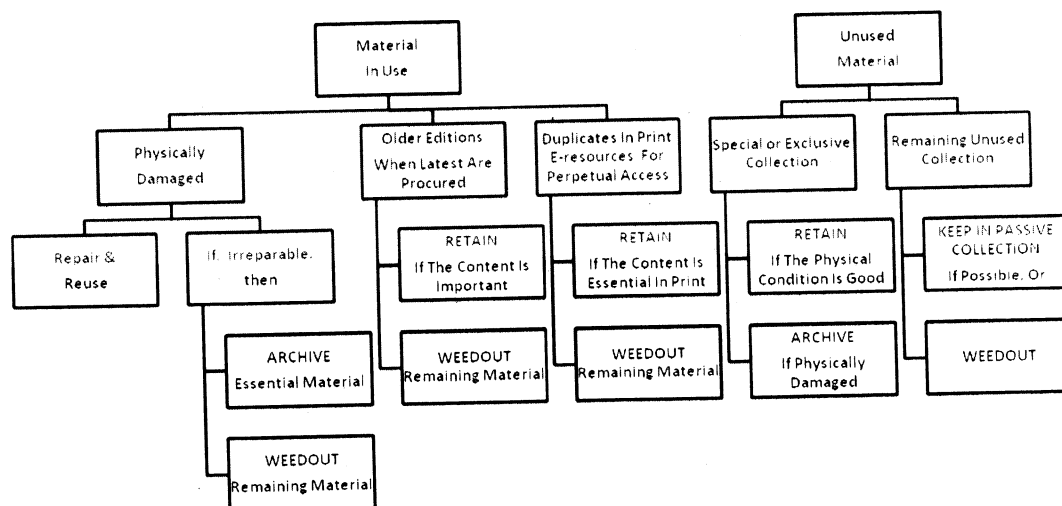
- * Shortage of shelf-space: every library whether small or big has limited shelf space and must therefore clear out books to make the best use of the available space creating room for new books and future collection.
- * De-duplication of material: libraries may acquire multiple copies of books when they are first released or at the initial stages of introducing new courses as per meet the requirements of patrons. But at a later date these books become less popular when the structure of the courses get changed or latest editions are occupying prominent place in their course requirements. Thus it is necessary to see that the collection is relevant to the student's needs curriculum and other irrelevant subject books may be weeded out if it is of no use to the students, retaining one or two reference copies.
- * In view of increasing use of electronic resources through library subscriptions or consortia or open access the use of print is slowly decreasing in higher educational institutions. Thus the duplicate print can be kept aside either in passive collection or even can be weeded out if e-resources are purchased on perpetual (permanent) access basis.
- * The costs of maintaining the books on open shelves (shelving), preservation against the insects dust, humidity in the environment, binding or repairs, archiving for posterity have been continuously increasing and so the cost and valuable time of human resources are getting wasted.
- * However, some books remain on the shelves for years without being checked out. While a book should not necessarily be weeded out solely because of low circulation but it is certainly a factor that help librarians to choose books to weed.
- * Further maintaining heavily damaged library material in normal environmental conditions is highly time consuming involving high costs and also man hours. Moreover these torn and damaged old books are not appealing to patrons.
- * Building construction or extension cost is also very high to accommodate future collections, unless the above kinds of material are weeded out.
- * Once this collection is weeded out patrons have an easier time in locating the books they want and also new books of their interest. The active collection would be then properly made visible if the outdated and unused books are weeded out.

2.2. Criteria for Weeding Library Materials

The most important part of collection management of the library is to draw the criteria for weeding library material after evaluating in terms of its significance, use and current nature of content. The objective criteria would help to make the weeding decisions easier. The criteria for weeding the documents could be the relevance of the content; its currency; physical condition to decide for weeding or a replacement; whether it is the single copy for reference and the circulation history etc.

- * The first step is to identify the "core collection" to exclude them from weeding which accounts for permanent use by their students, research scholars and faculty and also the special or exclusive collection, rare books those brings identity to the library
- * The earlier editions of reference books when the latest editions are replaced, back volumes of journals and newspapers, unless otherwise they are recommended for retaining in the collection for reference purpose or historical data.
- * Though documents were purchased by libraries and they are found no more useful when departments' curriculum are changed and completed the research projects.
- * Completely damaged or mutilated books those can no longer sustain in any physical shelf space or bindery repairs.
- * Print volumes of reference sets, serial publications and back volumes of journals, longer stack runs of abstracts, yearbooks, directories, older book selection tools can be considered for weeding when they are replaced with latest editions in print or online.

Fig 2: Weeding the Library Material - Work Flow of Decision Process



The usefulness of the library material is usually assessed from daily shelving and during stock verification or shelf rectification processes. Additionally the utility of library material can be identified through circulation records or metrics, table counts and bindery status of the physically damaged or mutilated material.

2.3 Barriers

Though the situation of space constraints in the library often pressing for weeding the library materials, many libraries are not coming forward to perform this important task of the library management due to following reasons.

- * Obviously it is the sense of assigning importance to library material and emotional attachment with their collection does not allow librarians to disown their material.
- * Unable to discriminate the unused material
- * The most important aspect is unable to draw the criteria for weeding the material objectively
- * Not able to approach academic departments, authorities or audit for making proposals for weeding of library material those that were once purchased incurring heavy expenditure.

- * Noncooperation or coordination from academic departments, lethargic attitude of higher authorities and audit objections.
- * Lack of attention and time to isolate unused books in the library.

3. Standard Policies and Practices of Weeding

Collection building in university libraries is a continuous process getting the volumes added on shelves which require space; additional stack rooms in buildings, finances and staff for maintain them. Thus occasional weeding of library material enable library to update the useful stock with fresh and make it visible to their users.

3.1 Southeast Missouri State University

Emphasizing the necessity of weeding library material, Julie (2002) stated that the weeding project at Southeast Missouri State University presented an opportunity to identify different variables i.e. shelf level, book jackets, added entries and untraced series that impacted a books circulation behavior and to consider relationship between circulation and the internet, online database activity. From political science collection the investigator found that shelf level has the strongest impact on circulation among the variables studied. But the internet and electronic reference databases have an even greater influence on circulation. It was observed that 61% of collection is circulated only once or never circulated.

3.2 Monash University Library, Australia

The Monash university library, Australia is a joint owner of the CARM centre (CAVAL Archival and Research Materials). The weeding of this library was undertaken keeping in view following compelling reasons such as - overcrowded shelves with low use material obstructs access to potentially high use material, because large number of outdated books are confusing to the users when new editions are also stacked. All but the last copy of any published work may be weeded out if the following conditions are met.

- * If the material has no usage or very low in recent years.
- * There is no evidence or anticipation of demand for the material at any branch or other libraries.
- * The reading material is not likely to be of any significant value and in consultation with the collection management librarian regarding valuable works.

Such copies are relocated to the other branch libraries or to the rare books collection so that this can provide a way of monitoring demand for items before a decision is made to relocate them to the CARM shared collection. Accordingly the less used or no longer in use material is relocated to a storage facility with the Monash University Library retaining ownership of the items and the copies are relocated when demanded updating the catalogue holdings. The library has also a policy of donating unwanted materials to other academic and hospital libraries in Australia and overseas.

3.3 Catholic University of Eastern Africa library in Nairobi, Kenya

Catholic University of Eastern Africa library in Nairobi, Kenya, the weeding policy is done from time to time to guarantee the relevance of the collection, promote use, create space for new material etc. The reading materials that to are to be weeded out are selected by the library staff in consultation with the respective departments and brought to the notice of the library committee for approval. The following criteria are applied for weeding out library material: Superseded editions whose contents are no longer relevant; physically damaged or mutilated information sources; duplicate copies of less used titles; materials that contain outdated information; and single copies of materials that have not circulated within last five years. However, a decision will be made whether to go to the archives or to be disposed off.

3.4 Sir Dorabji Tata Memorial Library, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

Sir Dorabji Tata Memorial Library, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai made a policy for weeding out following categories of materials, in order to provide better access to the frequently consulted literature.

- * Ephemeral material (e.g. newsletters, progress reports, pamphlets) including those materials that lose value after a certain period of time such as: annual reports, directories, yearbooks, etc. These are weeded out annually.
- * Duplicate issues of the journals may not necessarily be weeded out even the volumes are bound. They can be passed on to the Rural Campus or any institute/organization's Library to seek the prospect readers.

Though the library gets access to the back volumes online from the publisher's websites, etc., the print volumes of these journals also be considered for archiving in less active storage area. Thus back volumes are archived in a less active storage area. The policy suggests that adequate space should be provided for archival storage to library if not available.

3.5 IGM Library, University of Hyderabad

In University of Hyderabad Library (named as Indira Gandhi Memorial Library) the weeding of certain material done annually and other documents as and when the need arises. The following practices being followed by IGM Library emphasize the regular need of weeding documents in university library for the effective space management, staff and to enhance the visibility of fresh arrivals that are acquired from time to time.

- * Newspapers, general magazines, other material of ephemeral nature and duplicate as well as complimentary issues of journals are weeded out regularly after displaying for a year as per the library committee decisions.
- * Older editions of reference collections such as - encyclopedia series, dictionaries, guide books, yearbooks, etc. and children fiction were transferred to the school library on campus, when the fresh or new editions were acquired for the university library.
- * The language and other books donated by different organizations are weeded out as they are not found relevant to the existing courses or projects conducted by the academic departments. Older editions of book selection tools, directories, year book and reference books are also regularly set aside to include them during weeding process.
- * As a part of space management within the existing stacks provisions, library adapted the system of maintaining passive collections of back volumes of journals, serial publications and books in compact shelving system.
 - # Initially library compacted all prior 1976 back volumes of journals /serial publications to shelve them alphabetically in a separate sequence.
 - # At a later date another compact sequence (without disturbing pre-1976) of back volumes/serial publications was created up to 1990 to manage some more space for new additions.
 - # Older books not even referred/borrowed even once are being separated from the passive collection to ease the shelve space for heavily used books and facilitating the visibility of new additions to users.
- * As a further step the physically damaged but irreparable books and other documents are placed separately for archiving or weeding depending on the copyright permissions and experts committee's decisions. The experts committee consists of librarian subject experts

from different disciplines of the university. The records of the weeded out material is updated in the library acquisition records and also shown in catalogue. The implementation of the experts committee's decisions are placed before the library committee for the necessary ratification.

Similarly libraries are taking different measures to weed out their collection for accommodating new additions and future collections.

4. Analysis and Discussion

From the above cases of academic institutions, it is found that weeding of library material is important aspect for any institution with regard to making space provision for the newly added material. However the weeding practices vary according to their collection development and storage requirements and policies. The practices followed by few standard foreign and Indian academic institutions are summarized in tabular form.

Table 1: Weeding Practices

Academic Institutions	Policies and Practices
Southeast Missouri State University, USA	61% of collection is circulated only once or never circulated.
Monash university library, Australia	The less used or never used material is relocated to a storage facility with the Monash University Library retaining ownership. Such less used copies are relocated to the other branch libraries or before a decision are made to relocate them to the CARM shared collection. The library donates unwanted materials to other academic and hospital libraries in Australia and overseas.
Catholic University of Eastern Africa library, Nairobi, Kenya	The reading materials that to be weeded out in consultation with the respective departments on the approval of the library committee criteria: Superseded editions whose contents are no longer relevant; physically damaged or mutilated information sources; duplicate copies of less used titles; materials that contain outdated information; and single copies of materials that have not circulated within last five years.
Sir Dorabji Tata Memorial Library, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai	Ephemeral material (e.g. newsletters, progress reports, pamphlets, annual reports, directories, yearbooks, etc. are weeded out annually. Duplicate issues of the journals are considered for archiving in less active storage area. The policy suggests that adequate space should be provided.
IGM Library, University, Hyderabad	Newspapers, general magazines, other material of ephemeral nature and duplicate as well as complimentary issues of journals are weeded out regularly after displaying for a year as per the library committee decisions. Older editions of reference collections, book selection tools when the fresh or new editions were acquired for the university library. The language and other books donated are not found relevant. Library maintains passive collections of back volumes of journals, serial publications and books <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All prior 1976 and 1976 to 1990 • Older books not even referred/borrowed even once As a further step the physically damaged records placed before the library committee for the necessary ratification.

In India, libraries are implementing this weeding program by framing clear policy or following some practices depending on the objectives of their organization, space constraints, user's requirements and the type of collection etc. UGC committee in 1957 with eminent personalities under the chairmanship of Dr. S.R. Ranganathan made comprehensive recommendations for the sources of library funds, per-capita expenditure on books and other reading material, maintenance of accounts, norms for expenditure, book selection authority, book ordering procedure, promotion of reading habits through open access to stacks, norms for loss of books, weeding out unwanted or unserviceable documents etc. and worked out measures for staff, building, infrastructure, workflows after surveying the libraries. The committee published a document on "development of university and college libraries in 1965 forming guidelines for effective library management.

Recently, in view of the latest ICT applications in libraries, National Knowledge Commission issued guidelines in 2007 to the libraries regarding for collection development, monitoring or evaluation of collection and services as follows -

- * All libraries must maintain a well-rounded core collection, including reference material to satisfy the regular needs of its user community. These may be supplemented through networks, and e-resources, to achieve better qualitative and quantitative standards.
- * Library collections are dynamic resources and there should be, therefore, constant renewal of materials to ensure that the collection remains relevant to the user communities.
- * Except in the case of national repositories, the weeding out of books should be a regular process. Each library should evolve a weeding out policy, approved by the competent authority.
- * The criteria for categorizing libraries in government and public libraries and grading of librarians should be reviewed keeping in mind factors such as size of collection, immediacy index (ratio of current books to total books), users, services and access to electronic resources

Further the commission made recommendation to collect statistics on 12 topics for monitoring and evaluation of library collection, which includes Number of books withdrawn from collection per year.

5. Suggestions and Conclusion

As such there are no prevailing standards or procedures for weeding out the unused books. Every library should form their own policy for weeding out the materials in consultation with the subject experts and document it so that it will form a policy guideline for future operations. Varalakshmi (2003) while evaluating the standards for enhancing the university and college libraries in USA and India suggested the following related to weeding for the efficient maintenance of libraries-

- * The weeding policy should be developed to discard pedestrian, outdated, and worn out books every 5 years.
- * The college library affiliated with a university has to maintain a dormitory library for reference purposes, with the coordination of the university library.

The popular saying 'prevention is better than cure' can also be applied here as - libraries should always care for selecting books, journals and other material appropriate to the requirements of university's departments to avoid useless or junk to accumulate in the collection.

- * Faculty should be suggested by the library to select books from publisher's latest catalogs as per their course requirements rather than choosing from supplier's lists to please them.

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