

# Pennsylvania Libraries: *Research & Practice*

Practice

## Weeding, Wine, and Cheese

### *Enticing Faculty to Cull a Collection*

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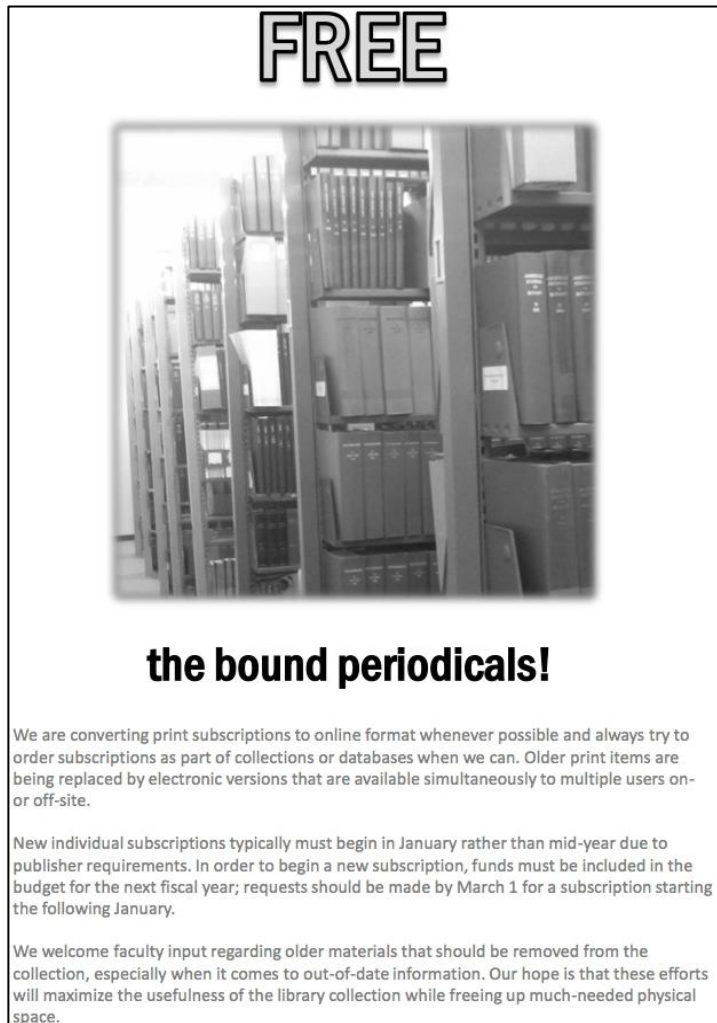
Remodeling of a building and decreased shelf space motivated faculty and staff to complete a long overdue weeding project in a small university library. Librarians used social media, internal communication, and personal contact to motivate faculty. Every effort was made to reuse and recycle discarded materials. The result was a streamlined collection and a much improved learning space.

As professional librarians, we know that weeding is an essential part of collection development. However, it is not always easy to convince academic faculty and administration that this is so. Having been through several accreditation reviews at Seton Hill University, our library staff often met with resistance when we proposed reducing the size of the collection. At one time, the only measure of a library's worth seemed to be the sheer number of print volumes and other physical materials. However, in our last accreditation review by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSACS), there was more emphasis on the quality of the collection than on the volume count. Also, in the last few years, we have greatly increased the online resources at our library so that there is less need for a physical collection. Thus, we encountered a greater openness to weeding, although the preferred term on our campus was "culling the collection," which somehow seemed less threatening to our faculty. This was the one requirement of our administration: Faculty must be involved in selecting items for deaccessioning.

For several years, we worked with individual departments to cull the collection, usually following an individual program review, but the going was slow. Culling was not a high priority for faculty, and even those who agreed that it must be done could rarely find the time to do it. However, our weeding project really took off when the decision was made to remodel our entire building into a learning commons. This was more than a cosmetic makeover. The building would be renovated and modernized with the latest technology.

As part of the remodeling, our entire collection was to be moved from one floor to another. The smaller the collection, the lower the cost would be to move it. In addition, most of the books were to be housed on mobile

shelving to save floor space. When we met with the architects in the early stages of planning, they asked for the number of volumes in our collection. Instead of measuring the amount of shelf space that these volumes actually occupied, they allowed only “an inch a book.” Despite our protests that most books were wider than an inch, they assured us that everything would fit. Needless to say, this greatly reduced the amount of available shelf space.



**Figure 1**  
*Flyer used to request faculty review of bound periodicals;  
created by Kelly Clever*

collection to cull, we began by reducing the collection of bound periodicals. Before we submitted a list of the print periodical collection for faculty review, we discarded anything that was available online, either by individual subscription or via aggregated databases. If we held current years of a title in print and had access to previous issues online, the older bound volumes for the title were weeded. Other items that were discarded had supported majors from the past that were no longer part of the curriculum. We did not cancel any subscriptions, either in print or online. We also discarded titles with short runs of five years or fewer. In most cases, these limited runs had either been donations to the collection or had ceased publication.

However, we looked upon this as an opportunity to reduce the size and increase the quality of the collection.

As a small library staff of 3.6 librarians, a director, and two administrative assistants, we meet regularly to stay in touch with what the others are doing and to discuss mutual concerns. During these meetings, we came up with strategies for decreasing the size of the collection. We knew that it was important to reduce faculty anxiety and put a positive spin on the entire venture.

Throughout the process, we used many methods to publicize what we were doing and increase faculty participation. Each librarian is a liaison to one of our academic divisions, so we presented our concerns about the collection and the upcoming remodeling at monthly division meetings. We used flyers, which were posted both in the library and on departmental bulletin boards. Division Liaisons e-mailed each faculty member individually with information on weeding events. Announcements were made on Griffin’s Lair (our intranet), Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, and our library blog ([shulibrary.blogspot.com](http://shulibrary.blogspot.com)). Our Public Services Librarian, Kelly Clever, designed the flyers and was responsible for our postings on social media. All of the librarians contributed to the blog.

Because it was an easier area of the

At this time, we also put a moratorium on random gifts to the collection. If someone had been willing to purchase an ongoing subscription that met our needs, we would have been willing to accept the gift. However, in the past, we had received older issues that were being discarded by an individual subscriber. Often these gifts were accepted as a good will gesture to an alumna or donor to the university, but they had little or no value in terms of collection development. We could no longer afford to take up shelf space with this type of gift.

Finally, we asked faculty to review the journal collections for their subject areas, using a flyer (see Figure 1) as an advertisement for the process. When we gave them lists to review and return to us, we provided faculty with the following guidelines for weeding:

- We value your opinion regarding what to keep and what to discard. If you think that older materials have significant value, they will be retained.
- Remember that an article in nearly any periodical that we discard can usually be obtained through Interlibrary Loan. However, Interlibrary Loan is not meant to substitute for current subscriptions that are heavily used. Royalties must be paid if you request more than five articles from the same title published within the last five years. Unless we have online access, everything we currently receive in print should be kept for at least five years.
- If there are titles to which we formerly subscribed in print and you do not see recent print issues of them, it probably means that the periodical has either ceased publication or that we now have online access to it. If you are concerned about this, you can verify the status by searching the title in EBSCO A to Z on the Library web page.
- With this in mind, please consider the following questions for the years of holdings information for each title on this list. You can make comments on the list, but please give us your name in case we have any other questions.
  1. Is it likely that this material is misleading or inaccurate due to its age?
  2. Is this material irrelevant to current needs? That is, did it support a major that we no longer offer?
  3. Is this a very short run of this title—less than ten years?
  4. Have you personally used anything from this periodical?
  5. Have you ever assigned anything for your classes from this periodical?
  6. Do you anticipate using this periodical in the future?
  7. Is there any other justification for retaining these years?

Some faculty members reviewed only the printed lists of titles, but most of those who authorized materials for withdrawal came to the library and reviewed the physical collection. In general, materials in the sciences become obsolete more quickly than those for the arts or humanities. Therefore, we expected the science departments to allow us to discard most of the older materials. The Education Division and our Dietetics and Nutrition Department faculty

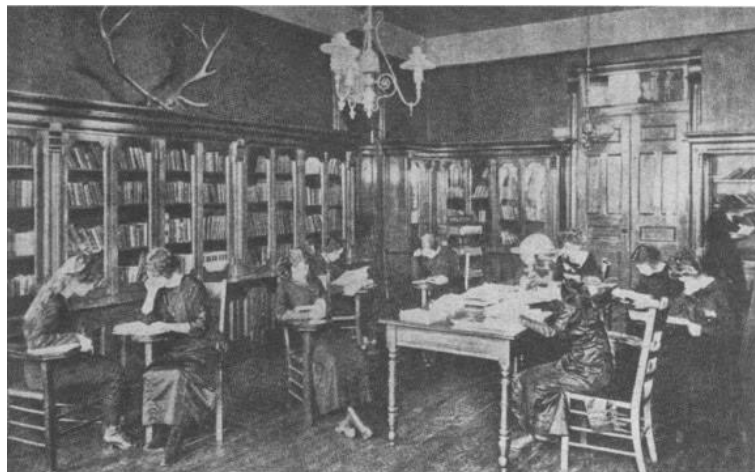


Figure 2  
*Academy Library in Admin 311, 1889-1896; from the Seton Hill University Archives*

be discarded without further review. A few departments selected some items for retention but most went along with our recommendations, and discards were completed by December 1, 2013. The collection was reduced from over 900 titles to 178, and from 160 sections of shelving to 32.

Reducing the size of the book collection was much more challenging. Although our university began in 1918, our collection is much older. The Sisters of Charity motherhouse was founded in 1882, and in 1883, a boarding school named St. Joseph's Academy for Girls was established.

There are items in the university collection that were acquired in those early days and were probably sitting on the shelves you see in Figure 2. Many of these original books were now obsolete, in poor condition, had not been checked out in over twenty years, or were available online. However, most faculty members seem to have a greater attachment to books than to printed journals. Therefore, we had to be more creative in persuading faculty to cull the book collection. We knew that if they simply viewed the shelves in person, they would realize that most of the items that we were asking them to remove added little value to the current collection.

Over the past few years, we have held several "Weeding, Wine, and Cheese" events. In addition to posting the flyers on bulletin boards to advertise these events (see Figure 3), the flyers were also sent to faculty as e-mail attachments. We also posted reminders through our social media channels (see Figure 4).

These weeding events were held on Friday afternoons or during breaks when faculty members were on campus but the students were not. We usually started around 2 p.m. and ended by 5 p.m. We served wine, cheese, crackers, veggies, fruit, and punch. On some of the days, we also had a morning session with coffee, tea, and cookies. We tried to create a festive atmosphere and played music. Even our interim president came over to join the party and weed her former subject area. We usually had 10 to 20 people at any given event, and a few people participated more than once. Some faculty told us that they were willing to weed, but they were waiting for the event because it would be more fun.

After socializing, we gave each person a cart and an adaptation of *CREW: A Weeding Manual for Modern Libraries*, developed by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission. All librarians were available to provide encouragement and answer questions. We emphasized the positive aspects of weeding and the fact that we were making room to acquire better materials in the future.

were very cooperative because they wanted their students to use information that was current and accurate. These professors selected a few volumes to keep in their departments for historical purposes but removed all other print prior to the year 2000. A few other departments wanted to keep everything, and, unfortunately, we do still have complete runs of some journals that are seldom used.

For departments that did not respond at all, we compiled lists of our recommendations for withdrawal. These lists were sent to the faculty in August with a response deadline of October 1. We stipulated that if we did not hear from them by that date, the recommended items would

When faculty members reached the shelves, we often heard comments such as, “I can’t believe you still have this in the collection.” Occasionally a professor would remove something obsolete from the collection but would ask us if they could have it for sentimental value, such as a book by a former professor or colleague. Those books were set aside to be picked up later, after they had been officially withdrawn. Once a cart was filled, we took it to a storage room and unloaded it for later processing and gave each person a new cart. We repeated this process until the faculty member was ready to quit. Even with this assistance and support, some people were reluctant to discard a book. I reminded them, “If the material in a book is obsolete, inaccurate, or misleading and you would not want a student to use it, it is not a book anymore—it’s simply a dead tree.”

Even after the weeding parties, we still had too many books to fit into the new space. Because we had accurate circulation statistics going back to 1994, librarians did additional weeding. We removed books that were in the public domain and available via *Project Gutenberg* and other online sources. Bibliographic records for these items have been added to our online catalog. We also withdrew duplicates and books that were falling apart in our hands as we removed them from the shelves. We selectively removed older books that had not circulated in the last 20 years. If a book seemed to be a classic in the field or was recently acquired, it was left on the shelf. In determining classics, we relied on our own expertise in a subject area. For example, I have a Master of Art’s degree in Theology, so I was well aware of Catholic theologians whose works should be retained, as opposed to popular writers on spirituality who pass in and out of fashion. If we had no librarian with knowledge of a particular subject, we deferred to the faculty. I would say that we always erred on the side of caution. We prepared lists of titles that we believed could be removed but for which we wanted confirmation. We used the same opt-in method that we had used with periodicals; that is, if the faculty did not respond by a certain deadline, the materials would be removed.

The library staff alone weeded the reference collection and discarded anything that was available online. We removed older materials, which were no longer being consulted due to the availability of online materials providing similar information. We decided that most of the remaining reference collection could be integrated into our circulating collection. In the past, some items were placed in the reference collection because of their monetary value; we no longer wanted to restrict usage this way. We also eliminated many older indices. As a primarily undergraduate institution, we decided that our online databases were sufficient for our needs in many subject areas. In the end, the entire collection was reduced from 112,000 to 76,000 volumes. To some librarians, our culling process may seem drastic. However, as I told one faculty member, “This is a library, not a museum. We want to keep things that people are actually using.”



Figure 3  
*Invitation flyer for the “Weeding, Wine, and Cheese” event;  
created by Kelly Clever*



Figure 4  
A reminder tweet to faculty about one of the library's  
"Weeding, Wine, and Cheese" events

In addition to books and periodicals, we also weeded the audiovisual collection. We decided to eliminate our VHS tape collection because there were no longer any VHS players on campus. VHS tapes were offered to faculty members, and the new owners of the few VHS tapes that had been used in the past for classes were tracked so that, if necessary, they could be contacted and asked to share the tape with other faculty

members. When possible, replacement DVDs were obtained. In the future, we are hoping to obtain a streaming video service to augment this collection. We have a small CD collection of mostly classical music; no items from this collection were withdrawn. This year, we began a subscription to the *NAXOS Music Library*, which should meet most of the needs of our music majors. Therefore, our CD collection will remain small. We eliminated all of our microfilm, except for *The New York Times*, which we hope to replace in the near future with an online version.

Because many people on campus are involved in recycling and the wise use of natural resources, they were concerned about the disposal of so many materials. We assured them that most of the items were recycled. When we first began discarding periodicals, we listed them on Backserv, an electronic mailing list for libraries wishing to exchange books and journals. However, as time went on, we realized that we were discarding what many other libraries were discarding. Thus, responses to our listings were low. The time and effort to list and then selectively ship items to other libraries did not seem to be worthwhile, even though the receiving library paid for the cost of shipping and we only had to provide the time for packing and mailing. Therefore, during the last year of the project, all the discarded bound periodicals went into a dumpster. We offered withdrawn books and videos to our students and faculty, and many people added these items to their personal collections. The remainder of the books—except for those in very poor condition—were sent to Better World Books. One word of caution: If you send things to Better World Books, be sure to use a DISCARD stamp. We had some materials returned to us by other libraries that thought the books had been stolen from us, when in fact they had been purchased as a used book online.

Our microfilm of the local Catholic newspaper, *The Catholic Accent*, was donated to the newspaper's headquarters. We had a few historical newspapers on microfilm, and these were donated to the Westmoreland County Historical Society, which was delighted to receive them. All other microfilm was discarded.

Once the weeding was completed, the entire collection was shifted within our existing space, with room allowed on each shelf for future growth. Everyone helped with the shifting, including our library aides, under the supervision of Eileen Moffa, one of our two administrative assistants. The older shelves were numbered and mapped to the location where the collections were to be housed on the mobile shelving. Helene Ciarochi, our other administrative assistant, created templates to measure large books so that we could identify those that would not fit on the mobile shelves. These oversized books were placed on a separate section of fixed shelving. We hired a moving company that had experience working with libraries. The company made a shelf-for-shelf move to the new space. The move was accomplished within three days.

The walls of the room with the mobile shelving also have fixed shelves, which house our periodicals collection. Older volumes are bound, but everything published since 2008 has been placed in Princeton files. Because of our strong commitment to online resources, a high volume of print has been discarded. We have discontinued binding because we have made the assumption that, eventually, we will no longer have any periodicals in print.



Figure 5  
*O'Hara Room, Reeves Memorial Library, Seton Hill University, 2014*

Dr. David Stanley, Library Director, had overall responsibility for this collective project. In addition to the aforementioned contributions of librarians and library aides, Cataloging and Acquisitions Librarian Adam Pellman managed the withdrawal of physical materials and catalog records. We were fortunate that Systems Librarian Dana Krydick had been the director of a public library that had moved from one building to another. Dana's experience was invaluable in selecting a moving company. Much additional credit must also be given to Helene Ciarochi, whose ability to envision and organize the shelf-to-shelf transfer made everything go very smoothly.

After the collection was moved, the building was renovated over the summer of 2014 to include not only the library but also four other departments—the Writing Center, the IT Solution Center, the Career & Professional Development Center, and the Center for Innovative Teaching. We have now moved into our beautiful new learning commons with a collection we can be proud of, with room for future growth (see Figure 5).

For additional information about our new facilities, see our blog post from August, 21, 2014, "State of the Learning Commons" ([shulibrary.blogspot.ca/2014/08/state-of-learning-commons.html](http://shulibrary.blogspot.ca/2014/08/state-of-learning-commons.html)).

## Further Reading

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