2014

Collaborative (de)selection: Re-evaluating the FMHI Research Library's print collections to improve access to services and resources

Tomaro I. Taylor
University of South Florida, tomaro@usf.edu

Collaborative (de)selection: Re-evaluating the FMHI Research Library's print collections to improve access to services and resources

Tomaro I. Taylor
University of South Florida Libraries
tomaro@usf.edu
13301 Bruce B. Downs Blvd. | MHC 1737
Tampa, FL 33612

Collaborative (de)selection: Re-evaluating the FMHI Research Library's Print Collections to Improve Access to Services and Resources

Abstract

Weeding is a common theme in library literature. But, while librarians often use circulation statistics or other data as general guidelines for weeding print collections, few consider the value of actively engaging affected populations during the weeding lifecycle, particularly in the early stages of selecting material for retention. This paper describes a collaborative project between librarians and non-library faculty and staff to identify and retain the materials that would establish a core library collection, increase collection and resource accessibility, and aid in a library's transformation into a more student-centered space. The paper concludes with an overview of outcomes and describes how the weeding project contributed to the library's ablity to function within a more contemporary framework of service while also shifting expectations of the library's role within the greater university.

Keywords: collection management, collaborative selection, active selection, weeding, mental health libraries

Collaborative (de)selection: Partnering with Non-Library Faculty and Staff to Transform a

Mental Health Library

Introduction

When the Florida Mental Health Institute (FMHI) Research Library opened in 1974, it

served as a Learning Resource Center to support staff and clients affiliated with the Louis de la

Parte Florida Mental Health Institute,[1] a mental health care service and research facility located

on the University of South Florida (USF) Tampa Campus. Initially occupying a small space

primarily accessible by Institute staff and clients, the Library eventually moved to its current

location—a former residential facility, within the FMHI complex, that has been reconfigured to

support a traditional research library and library collection. Even though the residential unit was

successfully transformed into a full-service research library some years ago, the areas most

conducive to active library engagement—the common areas—were engulfed by a rather large

and unwieldy print collection that spanned nearly 60% of the library's 6,328 square feet of space.

With such a large collection of monographs and serials, it was difficult for librarians to

encourage faculty or students to use the space for anything beyond basic library services, such as

circulation and computing. However, as the Institute transitioned from a regional mental health

facility originally "designed as a 300-bed hospital with 700 staff" (Zusman n.d.) to a fully

integrated degree-granting program on the USF Tampa Campus, it became clear that the FMHI

Research Library would also need to change. Nearly forty years after the library's establishment,

it was time to reevaluate its role and determine its positionality within the Institute, the Institute's

parent college, Behavioral and Community Sciences[2], and the USF library system. Over time,

---

[1] To avoid confusion between the Florida Mental Health Institute Research Library and the Louis de la Parte Florida
Mental Health Institute, FMHI will only be used in reference to the Library. The Institute will be referred to as such.
[2] The USF College of Behavioral and Community Sciences will be referred to as the College or CBCS.

the FMHI Research Library would begin moving towards greater alignment with the USF

Libraries by offering many of the same services main campus patrons received, such as

interlibrary loan, course reserves, and bibliographic instruction. These enhancements would be

introduced while also responding to changes in the Institute. Thus, it became apparent that

certain, other library and library service advancements were being hindered by the inefficient and

ineffective use of the library's space and that it would be difficult to increase the FMHI Research

Library's student research support without effecting major changes to the library itself. The

library's first step towards increased relevancy among the student population would include a

major weeding project centered on the library's print collections. The objectives of the project

were two-fold: reduce collection volume and increase configurable floor space. As part of this

initiative, the FMHI and Tampa libraries partnered with the Institute and College to engage

faculty and staff in collaborative efforts that would reposition the FMHI Research Library as a

more accessible, more engaging space for student research and study. The joint project, which

spanned just a few short months in 2011, served as the catalyst for further library renovations,

including the development of a library learning commons, instruction lab, and group study room,

and that—ultimately—resulted in increased student use. The weeding project also facilitated

development of a core collection of serials and monographs that would support the research,

teaching, and educational efforts of the Institute and CBCS. This article describes the

collaborative efforts of library, Institute, and College partners to not only ensure the continued

viability of the FMHI Research Library within the changing paradigm of library spaces and

services but also to demonstrate the impact collaborative partnerships have in helping libraries

effectively transform into facilities that emphasize student-centered services.

Literature Review

The scholarly literature is replete with articles about weeding, discarding, or "deselecting" library materials and collections. While many articles discuss the importance of weeding within the context of increasing available shelf or floor space, removing outdated or unused items, and eliminating duplication within and across collections, few address the issue of removing items to highlight or increase the prominence of retained materials. Consequently, there is a small but noticeable gap in the literature regarding materials actively selected for retention. While many librarians choose to focus on collection use and relevancy when weeding, few describe their retention methods beyond the rather passive exercise of retaining materials by default. In libraries, especially those with specialized collecting areas, the materials that remain after a weed can be just as important—if not more so—than the materials systematically selected for withdrawal.

Libraries specializing in health sciences and related disciplines have a responsibility to ensure the timeliness and relevance of extant collections. Outdated materials, or materials that feature outmoded therapies, treatments, and protocols, pose a severe risk to health practitioners and consumers. Andrew Booth addresses these points rather clearly in "Fahrenheit 451?: A 'Burning Question' on the Evidence for Book Withdrawal" (2009), in which he states, "It is not exaggerating to say that outdated health information can kill, although fortunately the frequency with which such instances are *reported* (note, I do not say *occur!*) is low enough not to require our taking out indemnity insurance" (161). Although Booth adds a bit of lighthearted sentimentality to this rather dire truth, his point is well placed. Libraries that collect and make accessible health care information should provide resources that are in line with standard practices and that support the educational and research needs of both library and health

constituents. Libraries that do not consistently review and deselect health materials unwittingly contribute to the promotion of medical misinformation. By engaging in active selection and deselection, health science and related libraries are better able to develop collections that support contemporary practice.

In "A Dental Library Book Collection Intervention: From Diagnosis to Cure," Cox and Gushrowski (2008) briefly discuss the imperativeness of maintaining contemporary collections in health science and related settings. They state: "Quality of the collection as opposed to quantity is the gold standard for a health sciences library. Providing up-to-date resources and eliminating outdated materials are essential activities to assure the health, well-being, and success of the library and to promote patient health and safety" (356). While Cox and Gushrowski also note the general importance of weeding content that falls outside of the health sciences or related library's parameters, they specifically address the need to "rebalance the collection" (353) as part of the weeding process. Although overall collection volume may differ from that of larger libraries, special and specialized libraries are not exempt from the tradition of collecting and retaining large print collections. In these settings, however, it is important to maintain collections that reflect current practices and that effectively serve constituent needs rather than provide general exposure to a range of topics that *might* be used by the library's clientele. When weeding projects are conducted in these settings, reconciling the library's collections according to these specifications allows the library to refocus collection strategies while ensuring alignment with the field or discipline the collection supports. Although this practice reduces the "immediacy" afforded by browsing legacy collections, it allows libraries to horn in on the subject areas most relevant to their constituents' needs.

When developing weeding plans, health sciences and related libraries must also contend with determining whether materials are "old" or of a "historical" nature. While some librarians may base their evaluation of a book's inherent value on its age, it is not always that simple in health sciences settings. Rajia Tobia (2002) notes that when identifying specific subject classifications to weed at the Briscoe Library, the "history of medicine was a logical class requiring little weeding, because the materials in this area were historical by nature and thus did not become dated as did books and AVs intended to describe current practice" (96). Thus, as many of these materials provided the historical context necessary for understanding both contemporary and modern practice in the health sciences, their relevance was not contingent upon publication dates. In concert, certain theoretical models, such as those in the psychological sciences, have also withstood the passage of time and continue to inform current approaches to mental health. As such, actively retaining these materials becomes just as much of the weeding process as determining which materials to let go.

If discussions surrounding selection and deselection of library materials shift slightly from libraries in the health sciences to those of a general academic nature, the conversation expands considerably.[3] Worthy of mention are projects that incorporate non-library faculty and staff when determining which materials to keep or discard. In the current literature, librarians who recruit non-library assistance during the weeding process have a slight tendency to utilize these individuals as part of a secondary level of deselection. Typically, this is a three-step process: librarians engage in procedures that help them determine which materials to weed; the librarians provide lists or book carts to non-library professionals knowledgeable in specific

---

[3] No longer limited to staid discussions of item removal, the weeding conversation now includes considerations of collection assessment, evaluation, and mapping, with contemporary emphasis on the transition from print to digital.

subject areas; non-library faculty and staff engaged in the secondary analysis provide the final

yay or nay regarding retention (Dew and Crumpton, 2010; Smith 2012; Soma and Sjoberg,

2011). In other instances, librarians may engage faculty and staff in the weeding project through

more sustained collaborative efforts, such as spreading the activity out over a period of time and

merging the seemingly mundane process with something as stress free as a social engagement

(Koveleskie, 2014). But, if Soma and Sjoberg (2011) are correct that "faculty who do review the

deselected materials rarely disagree with the librarians' choices" (21), how do librarians ensure

that non-library staff are effectively engaged in reviewing the deselected materials? Existing

literature would suggest that it is the ultimate responsibility of library staff to guide the weeding

process and determine the overall impact on the library's constituency, regardless of how or

whether non-library professionals are involved (Poole 2009, Snyder 2013). But, if the library is

attuned to engaging non-library faculty and staff in the weeding process, how can this be

accomplished satisfactorily to not only complete the primary goal of weeding a collection but the

ultimate goal of maintaining collaborative engagement throughout the process? This is what the

FMHI and Tampa libraries sought to address when embarking on the FMHI Research Library's

overall transformation, beginning with collection (de)election.

Project Discussion

In 2011, University of South Florida administrators from the Tampa Library and College

of Behavioral and Community Sciences initiated discussions that would eventually lead to a

major overhaul of the Florida Mental Health Institute Research Library. In September of said

year, the Deans of both units authorized what would become known as the "FMHI Collection

Shift." The shift, initiated to streamline library collections and services while also improving the

library's physical space, was broken into four distinct phases, each of which were expected to be

completed by year's end. The four phases were as follows, beginning with the FMHI Research

Library's serials collection and ending with monographs:

1. Identify and remove duplicate serials, serials with incomplete runs, and serials with
   runs not needed to complete titles held at the Tampa Library;

2. Identify and move to Tampa Library all "unique" titles held at FMHI, with the
   exception of those received via donation and not held as part of a core collection;

3. Move to the Tampa Library all FMHI serials filling gaps or completing runs in
   existing holdings;

4. Shift retained monographs to stacks area previously designated for serials. Transfer
   non- or un-selected monographs to the Tampa Library.

As the initial part of the shift, both librarians and library staff would be engaged in

compiling general collection data and preparing the collection for review. From the outset, it had

been determined that the collection shift would be managed by the main library's technical

services unit. While a librarian on-site would manage much of the general data collection and

help coordinate the physical review, technical services staff would be charged with the actual

removal of library materials and the completion of any corresponding changes required in the

library's catalogue. It should be reiterated that, even before the disposition of many items would

be determined, the decision had been made to "shift" parts of the collection in one of three

ways—materials at FMHI Research Library would be retained onsite, discarded, or moved to the

Tampa Library. Because of the size and age of the collection, it was necessary that the project

proceed strategically. As a result of the weed, the FMHI Research Library's additional space

could adversely impact existing space in the larger Tampa Library; therefore, although it was

anticipated that the weeding project would be aggressive, it was important to counterbalance the spatial needs and constraints of both libraries when determining what to retain, discard, or move.

From the outset, it was easy to select a small but significant set of materials that could be discarded. Although a significant portion of the collection centered on mental and behavioral health, items from the long-defunct client library persisted, as well as materials previously collected to support or complement the Institute's earlier research and practice efforts. A quick review of collection holdings found textbooks, outdated computer and technology books and programs, general literature collections, and roughly 8,000 materials that duplicated holdings in the Tampa Library. These materials were identified and discarded prior to the active selection process. The difficulty, however, came in determining what would be retained.

Prior to the collection shift, faculty and staff in both the Institute and the College of Behavioral and Community Sciences had been asked to select for retention the FMHI Research Library's 10 journal titles most imperative for their research. These 10 titles would be retained onsite, in print; remaining titles would be moved to the Tampa Library or discarded according to the parameters outlined previously. As a continuation of this process, faculty and staff would subsequently be asked to contribute to the shift by selecting monographic (print) materials to retain. By framing both weeding projects as active selection processes instead of *de*-selection plans, collaborators were empowered with the decision to, in many ways, create a new FMHI Research Library. Their decisions would effectively determine the collection's scope and, it was hoped, afford a sense of ownership and professional responsibility throughout the process. It also was hoped that collaborators' areas of expertise would help in the creation of a more focused collection, one that spoke to the immediate needs of instructors, researchers, and students affiliated with both the College and the Institute.

To streamline the materials selection process, an Ad Hoc Advisory Group was comprised of Institute and College faculty and staff. Led by the Florida Mental Health Institute's Interim Executive Director, the Advisory Group was charged with identifying individuals to serve as lead reviewers and working with onsite staff to properly review and select materials for retention. It should be noted that Advisory Group members were not provided book lists or book carts of preselected materials. Instead, the lead librarian distributed a breakdown of Library of Congress (LC) Subject Heading classes and subclasses that comprised the library's collection. Individuals either self-selected or were volunteered to review collection materials and were then tasked with walking the library's stacks and actively choosing items for retention. Although it is difficult to say how many people actively reviewed the library's collection, 29 individuals (not including the two librarians onsite) were identified to lead the process. Individual participation was noted by green "keep" stickers pencil marked with the faculty or staff member's initials. One sticker would be placed on the spine of each book that an individual, or their delegate, wished to retain. Upon faculty and staff review, the lead project librarian and the FMHI Research Library's student employees systematically searched the stacks for evidence of green stickers and relocated stickered items to the area freed by the serials removal. This process helped eliminate any lingering questions faculty or staff might have had regarding the actual retention of items while also eliminating any potential problems caused by the seeming inability of the green stickers to properly adhere to the books' spines. It also helped reduce the potential of any one collaborator removing stickers from items they disagreed with and thought should be discarded.

Although the review and relocation process was somewhat time consuming, it was interesting to note the shift in attitudes projected by project participants. Some individuals had expressed concerns regarding myriad aspects of the collections shift—the supposed "destruction"

of the FMHI Research Library and its collections and the apparent "conspiracy" to usurp existing

holdings, especially in select subject areas, and build distinct collections at the Tampa Library.

Others' emotions, or lack thereof, ranged from anger to apathy. Over the course of the project,

there was a marked change in how Advisory Group members and their affiliates regarded the

collection. As they worked through the selection process, they were face-to-face with not only

the sheer volume of materials held by the rather small library but also the fact that certain items

with which they were familiar had been superseded by either content or practice only to find that

newer editions were not included among the library's holdings. Participants also seemed

surprised that the lead librarian had taken the initiative to retain certain sub-collections within the

general print collection. It had been determined that materials supporting two prominent CBCS

initiatives would be retained without review—collection materials centered on the objectives of

the now-former USF Center for HIV Education and Research, and items donated by the Center

for Autism & Related Disabilities (CARD). Additionally, non-circulating and uncatalogued

materials known to have high-volume use were retained, as well as all publications written,

produced, or published by the Institute or College or by affiliated faculty and staff. This small

step confirmed that the libraries and librarians were also actively engaged in developing a more

viable collection that would more accurately represent the mission and goals of both the Institute

and the College. Although the weed initially may have been viewed as a ruse for reducing or

eliminating a seemingly robust collection, Institute faculty and staff were able to see that the

library's collection would, in fact, be *more* robust following a systematic selection of materials

that more appropriately represented their objectives as researchers, instructors, and practitioners.

By working together, library, Institute, and College collaborators were better able to understand

the needs of each individual unit as related to the FMHI Research Library's collections. With the

library's collections as the central focus, each partner could actively participate in open

discussions centered on current departmental objectives and goals for future progress. The

project helped frame these discussions by allowing collaborators to shape the collection

according to existing and potential initiatives as related to the research and education goals of the

Institute and College. Thus, the resulting outcomes were significant: the collaborative selection

process not only helped shape the library's collections in the immediate but also helped

determine the library's future directions in terms of access to services and resources.

Limitations

Given the number of people involved and the relative time constraints under which the

project was performed, the active selection project worked fairly well. It was not without its

limitations, however. In reality, most faculty and staff participants devoted minimal time to the

project. Once they were assigned specific subject areas to review, they primarily relied on the LC

classifications provided to guide their evaluations, instead of proactively reviewing additional

subject areas with which they may have had familiarity or expertise. A select few

individuals—mostly those intimately familiar with the library and its holdings and those

understanding the complexity of library classification and the possibility of cross- or

interdisciplinary categorization of materials—opted to review materials outside of their

designated areas. Because of the relatively small number of materials retained—approximately

338 linear feet, or 2.7% of the library's total square footage— it is possible to surmise that the

library's current holdings may have been influenced more positively by greater browsing on

behalf of faculty and staff participants. By staying within their designated subject classifications,

it is possible that some smaller collection areas were overlooked or ignored due to the relatively

low number of materials from those ranges.

For a number of reasons, it was difficult to extend the review process to other library constituents, such as students. As the Institute changed focus and the College, established in 2008, had continued to grow, students had become the primary consumers of FMHI Research Library collections. Although detailed circulation records would have provided the necessary information for determining how often students used which materials, it would have been interesting to incorporate students into the selection process in order to garner their feedback on the library's collections as a whole. While it was no surprise that students reveled in the library's improved space once the collection volume shrunk and the commons area was fully installed, it was surprising that some students seemed to miss the experience of interacting with a traditional library collection. Other students were concerned about traveling between libraries to secure the materials needed for their class projects and papers. These concerns were addressed once the shift was complete, the materials integrated into the Tampa Library's collections, and FMHI/CBCS student accounts assumed into the intra-library loan settings previously established between the Tampa and FMHI libraries for Institute and College faculty and staff. What students had perceived as an unnecessarily time-consuming process that was potentially problematic due to their campus location was resolved as a minor hiccup in access and a major change to library services.

The final project limitation was, indeed, the amount of time allotted to weeding, selecting, removing, and reshelving the FMHI Research Library's collections. Because of the project's rapid pace, some collections were not included as part of the initial weed. The Library's audiovisual collection, kits, tests and measures, and vertical files were not included as part of the initial review. Once the collection shift was completed, the lead librarian evaluated these materials on the basis of circulation statistics and availability and accessibility via other

institutions. Historically, these had been low-volume use collections; the librarian chose to retain items that had circulated at least once in a five-year period. This led to a significant reduction of materials, with remaining items more closely mirroring the contemporary initiatives of both the Institute and College.

Discussion

A few months prior to the shift, FMHI librarians were asked to begin collecting library use data. As part of this request, librarians implemented a simple head count system that tracked the number of patrons entering the library in one- or two-hour time blocks. In the first year, beginning mid-February and ending with the University's Winter Break closure, the library logged 5,989 customers—a respectable number of patrons for a small, special library. Following the collection shift, and using the same method of data collection but spanning January to December, 9,284 patrons were observed in 2012, for a 55% increase in traffic. The upward trend continued in 2013, with a 25% increase in traffic over 2012 and a total patron head count of 11,672. In 2014, the number of patrons began to level off with 10,258 patrons by the end of November.

The FMHI Collection Shift opened more than 6,000 square feet of space, which was subsequently converted into the library's learning commons and a group study room. Additionally, a small portion of space is being used to house the CARD resource library, a separate collection of materials used by CARD staff and not included as part of the USF Library's holdings. These basic changes have contributed to the marked increase in patron traffic. Additionally, the libraries and CBCS partnered to create a multimedia instruction lab that could be used by librarians or Institute and College faculty to conduct training sessions,

workshops, and seminars. With a decreased focus on print collections management, FMHI librarians were able to devote more time and energy to providing research and instruction assistance to students enrolled in Institute and College programs. In some ways, working with Institute and College faculty and instructors afforded opportunities to reintroduce the library and its service potential to external constituents. And, when coupled with a redefined job assignment and a new teaching lab, this shift facilitated the newly minted Instruction Librarian's outreach efforts to teaching faculty and staff.

When compared to overall library use, instruction lab usage reports were statistically insignificant; librarians were able to note trends among faculty requesting the new space for use with their classes —regardless of whether they requested a librarian's presence for bibliographic instruction. By bringing their classrooms to the FMHI Research Library, their students developed a basic familiarity with the library and the services the librarians could provide. In turn, the "new" library was realized as more student-oriented, contributing to the overall reconceptualization of the FMHI Research Library and its role on campus.

Conclusion

What began as a relatively simple project to align the FMHI Research Library's services and collections with the main campus library led to significant changes for both the library and its users. A weeding plan, reframed as a collaborative selection project, served as the catalyst for more substantive changes to the FMHI Research Library's working environment. Throughout the process, project partners and collaborators at the Institute and College levels developed a clearer picture of the library and a better understanding of the need for change being promoted by upper administration. It also became clear that these changes were needed to support programmatic,

research, and educational changes in both CBCS and FMHI. While the collaborative selection

project allowed FMHI to "clean house" of outdated and duplicate materials and materials that no

longer supported the efforts and initiatives of the Florida Mental Health Institute or the College,

it also allowed the libraries to work with College administration in other ways that would lead to

the FMHI Library's revitalization. The new library is a more contemporary space that better suits

the needs of a large and growing student body population in the College of Behavioral and

Community Sciences. In addition to the more functional library space, the FMHI Library is

better able to provide students, staff, and faculty services that are in line with 21st Century

librarianship. The collaborative project not only helped move the library into a contemporary

framework but also helped shift perceptions among Institute and College faculty, staff, and

students regarding their expectations of what the library could or should be. By engaging

colleagues from the Institute and College to actively participate in this process, we not only

uncovered and released the dust from our collections, we also brought the library and its

partnerships back to life.

Works Cited

Booth, A. 2009. Fahrenheit 451?: A 'burning question' on the evidence for book withdrawal."

    Health Information & Libraries Journal 26:2, 161-5. doi: 10.1111/j.1471-

    1842.2009.00844.x

Cox, J.E. & B.A. Gushrowski. 2008. A dental library book collection intervention: From

    diagnosis to cure. *Journal of Hospital Librarianship* 8:3, 352-7. doi:

    10.1080/15323260802209534

Dew, S. & M. Crumpton. 2010. Taking a step back, to move forward. *Proceedings of the*

    Charleston Library Conference. http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284314821. Accessed 15

    December 2014.

Koveleskie, J.A. 2014. Weeding, wine, and cheese: Enticing faculty to cull a collection.

    Pennsylvania Libraries: Research and Practice 2:2, 171-8. doi: 10.5195/palrap.2014.77

Poole, J. 2009. Academic branch libraries: Assessment and collection development. *Journal of*

    *Library & Information Services in Distance Learning.*3:3-4, 192-205. doi:

    10.1080/15332900903182655

Soma, A.K. & L.M. Sjoberg. 2010. More than just low-hanging fruit: A collaborative approach

    to weeding in academic libraries. *Collection Management* 36:1, 17-28. doi:

    10.1080/01462679.2011.529241

Smith, S. L. 2012. Weeding considerations for an academic music collection. *Music Reference*

Services Quarterly 15:1, 22-33. doi: 10.1080/10588167.2012.647601

Snyder, C.E. 2013. Data-driven deselection: Multiple point data using a decision support tool in

an academic library. *Collection Management* 39:1, 17-31. doi:

10.1080/01462679.2013.866607

Tobia, R. 2002. Comprehensive weeding of an academic health sciences collection: The Briscoe

Library experience. *Journal of the Medical Library Association* 90:1, 94-8.

Zusman, J. No date. The Florida Mental Health Institute and state mental health services. FMHI

Institute Archives. College of Behavioral and Community Sciences, University of South

Florida, Tampa, FL. 15 December 2014.