

Collection Management Guidelines and Procedures

December 2013

The Washington University Libraries' collections are built to meet the research and teaching needs of the campus community. Library materials have traditionally been acquired in physical formats, but increasingly are being acquired in digital formats. The Libraries now acquire approximately 95% of journals and 75% of books in electronic format. In addition to selecting material to be added to the collections, librarians must, as a part of their curatorial responsibilities, de-accession items from the collections. This must be done for several reasons, including budget constraints and space pressures.

What is de-accessioning?

De-accessioning is the identification of materials which are no longer necessary for a library's general collections. This includes identifying items that are rare or unique and should move into special collections. De-accessioning is part of the curatorial responsibility of the subject librarians in the same way that they are responsible for acquiring materials.

What is the national approach to de-accession?

- In 2011, the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), which includes 126 research libraries in North America, collectively withdrew approximately 3,000,000 physical volumes from their collections. Notably, Harvard and Columbia withdrew the largest number of volumes.¹
- There is a general trend towards access versus ownership. Libraries become members of partnerships that allow users to access materials in ways that were previously impossible.
- Libraries are moving towards shared print repositories.

What are Washington University Libraries doing with regard to collection management?

- There is a shift from print to electronic in most disciplines (with some notable exceptions, such as art and art history). The Libraries are at shelving capacity and need to make decisions about what to keep. Although space is a concern, it is not the principal driver in the decisions about which items are selected to be withdrawn.
- We do continue to collect new print materials and need to make space for those materials, particularly in Special Collections.²
- Washington University has partnerships that allow access to materials in new, efficient ways which previously were unavailable (Center for Research Libraries, HathiTrust, MOBIUS, SHARES, etc.). The Libraries also contribute unique content to these groups. Washington University Libraries is currently an archive builder for Western Regional Storage Trust (WEST).

Process of de-accessioning³:

- A list of titles that meet the criteria for de-accession will be shared with all subject librarians.
- After candidates for de-accessioning have been identified, subject librarians and other librarians, in consultation with faculty, may choose to retain titles on the list.
- The WUSTL Community will be offered items that have been identified for de-accession.⁴ Items not taken will be offered to our used-book vendor Better World Books (a company that funds literacy projects in the United States and around the world) or other projects or vendors as identified by the bibliographers. Any remaining items will be recycled.

We recognize that the criteria for de-accessioning will be different among the disciplines due to the unique needs for each area. However, the general criteria below have been developed in consultation with Washington University faculty.

Criteria for de-accessioning may include any one or combination of these criteria:

- Journals and other materials for which we have perpetual electronic access (JSTOR, Project MUSE, direct purchase)⁵
- Government Documents for which we have electronic access or other access that is assured. (Washington University is a federal depository and adheres to strict guidelines pertaining to these items.)
- Items that can be readily obtained elsewhere. Duplicate copies of low use (circulation and in-house) items⁶
- Superseded editions/volumes (possible exceptions to be identified by subject librarians)
- Lesser-used reference works to which we have stable access through CRL
- Outdated professional directories and catalogs that are available in other ways
- Subject librarians may give additional consideration to material received as gifts, provided that the material itself continues to be of value to our community of users. For more information regarding gifts-in-kind (donated books) please see <http://library.wustl.edu/alumnifriends/inkind.html>.
- Physical condition (brittle, damaged, etc.) or format makes it unusable (e.g., some VHS tapes)

In addition to meeting one or more of the criteria above, the items identified for de-accession **must** meet the following:

- Low use items
- Readily available at other libraries with which we have a partnership, including libraries with which we have borrowing arrangements, such as MOBIUS, GWLA or SHARES.⁷

Items that will not be eligible for de-accessioning:

- Any original work printed before 1900 (not reprints) and rare or unique newer items—will be reviewed by the librarians⁸
- Items that are not held by many libraries

- Items authored by Washington University faculty members
- Seminal works in the field
- Gift items that we have agreed to hold in perpetuity, although this occurrence would be very rare. The Libraries' Gift Policy clearly states that the Libraries' will make decisions regarding retention, use and disposition of gifts.
- As materials in Special Collections require additional consideration for acquisition and disposal, this document is not meant to include those collections.

Addenda

- ¹ There are financial implications for print storage. The average cost to maintain one volume on the open shelf is \$4.26 per year.
Source: Courant, Paul and Matthew Nielsen, "On the Cost of Keeping a Book", *The Idea of Order: Transforming Research Collections for 21st Century Scholarship*. CLIR Pub#147. June 2010; Education Advisory Board interviews and analysis.
- ² Since July 2012 and by July 2014, the Libraries have acquired or repurposed more than 3.4 million dollars for new materials.
- ³ The Libraries will have a clear and open communication plan when items are being de-accessioned and will work with subject librarians who will facilitate the process.
- ⁴ The Washington University Community—faculty, students, staff, departments, student union, dormitories, etc.—are welcome to take any de-accessioned items. The Libraries will not be responsible for distributing de-accessioned items beyond what is outlined in the guidelines.
- ⁵ Digital and print formats are not always identical. The Libraries will acquire items solely in a digital format only when there is no loss of content.
- ⁶ The Libraries does not solely use circulation statistics to determine low use items. Librarians are aware that standards of what constitutes "low use" vary widely between disciplines. Under no circumstances will low use in itself be used as grounds for de-accession.
- ⁷ The Libraries already has and is developing more relationships to ensure the availability of library materials. The Libraries is a member of WEST, has borrowing arrangements with MOBIUS, GWLA, and SHARES, and is engaging in conversations regarding shared materials with the University of Illinois and Saint Louis University, specifically. The directors of ARL libraries are engaged in discussions about additional formal ways to safeguard copies of library materials. Generally speaking, the Libraries are comfortable with de-accessioning a book that 15 to 25 other libraries own, depending on how accessible we deem it should be. All large research libraries use a similar criterion, we rely on each other, so we are confident that copies will be kept and available.
- ⁸ Experts in Special Collections originally recommended 1860 because items printed before then are truly rare and generally valuable. Date changed to 1880 to include Coolidge collection books (Jefferson). After 1860, printing technology changed significantly making mass production easier; consequently fewer books are rare. The Libraries prefer a fixed date for this review, and this date (1900) will continue to be reviewed.