

Weeding with a Repurpose

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WEEDING WITH A REPURPOSE

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ABSTRACT:

As academic library collections grow so do the space needs of other activities and purposes. Traditional uses of space are changing and the library as an organization must prioritize and promote re-purposing space as needed. These conflicting space demands can lead to a tipping point of needing more space for users to engage in active learning versus housing a collection that has filled its finite space. The University Libraries at The University of North Carolina in Greensboro has undergone an extensive weeding project in order to re-purpose existing space that currently houses print materials in order to create user focused learning spaces. This weeding project has raised many complex issues and involved various groups, both internally and externally, in an effort to address space issues while also making informed and democratic decisions. UNCG Libraries' plans include addressing concerns about the best possible use of space for both users and collections and creating transparency in the weeding process by using Blackboard and other communication channels to share information equitably for everyone involved

During the past few years, new models have clearly emerged for collection management. University and college libraries are relying increasingly on electronic resources, and collection sharing has progressed beyond traditional interlibrary loan to include arrangements for databases and other electronic resources shared in a variety of consortiums and partnerships. To house collections, offsite storage, including collaborative facilities, has become common. Gradually, the library profession is acknowledging that previous measures of excellence, which relied heavily on quantitative volume counts, are increasingly less relevant. Libraries are no longer wedded to the idea that the best library has the largest number of books, but are instead realizing that new models will allow us to still provide what our patrons need.

Some of the change in philosophy stems from the campus climate of assessment, which makes it essential that libraries demonstrate what they contribute to student learning. Assessment based on student outcomes does not depend on how many volumes the library holds, but on how well it contributes to student learning needs. Library support of faculty research is also becoming less dependent on large collections, as long as libraries can provide needed materials quickly.

The current university or college library can no longer be considered a book warehouse. Books share space with users, who are no longer squeezed in as an afterthought, with isolated carrels and study tables tucked away behind rows of stacks, but who instead occupy visible spaces, working with technology in groups and as individuals. Clearly, a new paradigm of the library as learning space has been established, and libraries are transforming our spaces and services to deal with the new demands of this role.

Collections vs. User Needs

As part of the transition to new models, libraries must consider carefully the differences between collections based space and learner based space. Collections based space has the following attributes:

- All materials warehoused locally and available quickly
- Collection selected and endorsed by faculty as extension of classroom resources
- Collection built to support research with primary sources
- Significant financial investment made to process, deliver and maintain collection

User based space has very different qualities:

- Dedicated space to support learning needs
- Technology driven attributes to access needed resources
- Group space to meet and work collaboratively with classmates
- Individual study space with tools/conveniences to support technology

While collections based space might only provide for a minimal level of human needs with enough space and comfort to retrieve and use materials, learner based space must provide a higher level of physical comfort. Learners who are physically uncomfortable or in an uninviting atmosphere will find more attractive spaces that are conducive to enhancing the learning experience even if they have to go outside the library.

So what do users want and need from our library spaces? Assessment tools such as LibQUAL+ and data gathered through library focus groups clearly indicates that libraries need comfortable and inviting space that inspires study and learning. Libraries need both quiet space for individual contemplation and community space for collaborative learning, group study and related activities. Thus, the modern library should have distinct areas that are configured for different purposes and should serve as a gateway providing accessibility for study, learning, research and related resources (Wakaruk, 2009).

A 2006 Educause report (Oblinger, 2006) on learning spaces detailed the needs and desires of students as follows:

- Small group work spaces
- Access to tutors, experts, and faculty in the learning space
- Table space for a variety of tools
- IT highly integrated into all aspects of learning spaces
- Availability of integrated lab facilities, equipment, and access to primary resources
- Accessible facilities, open long hours
- Shared screens (either projector or LCD)
- Workgroup facilitation
- Printing services easily available

This report also discussed common assumptions about how students learn that must be abandoned. Concepts that should be discarded include:

- Learning only happens in classrooms
- Learning only happens at fixed times
- Learning is an individual activity
- Learning demands privacy
- Students aren't responsible with property
- More (crowded) is better

The concept of third place space as defined by Ray Oldenburg in *The Great Good Place* is one that is particularly critical to understanding the role of the modern academic library. The third place concept is space adopted by many individuals as someplace outside of the home and work environment that becomes a vital part of everyday life. A third place space might be a coffee shop, a local park, or a library. The critical attribute of such spaces is that people have a feeling of ownership for spaces that are inviting, comfortable and allow them to extend their environment. Such spaces contribute to a feeling of community and involvement. In an academic library a third place space can foster collaborative learning and group gathering that can influence creative interaction.

Finding the Space You Need

Based on common principles, academic libraries nationally are devising solutions to their space dilemmas. Each institution must consider a number of factors – available space, configuration of current space, mission of the campus and its programs and their particular needs, existing resource sharing arrangements and a variety of other factors in deciding how best to utilize space and plan for the future.

One of the challenges of this new paradigm is the need to renovate older library buildings. Aged space is unappealing – users don't feel welcome in areas that house books efficiently in warehouse-like spaces, but instead want space that is inviting and comfortable. Libraries should also have space for fun – cafés or coffee houses, and space for events such as game night, or lectures, or other programs. Such needs require versatile space that can easily be reconfigured, which is not possible in areas devoted to book stacks or shelving for journals. Of course, the idea of new buildings, equipped for modern uses, is overwhelmingly appealing, but waiting for new facilities to be funded, and delaying improvements to existing space, creates a negative impact on the entire organization.

Building additions, expansions and remodels compete with other projects, and often library buildings are overlooked as faculty lobby for more office and classroom space, and students express their desire for updated residence halls. Thus, the alternative is for existing library space to be repurposed for development of new models for collections and services. Financial pressure is increased by infrastructure needs such as updated furnishings and routine maintenance as well as the need to update older buildings to meet new safety standards. In viewing buildings and collections, funding limitations force libraries to make choices based on financial abilities.

In the current fiscal environment of reduced budgets, the financial realities of maintaining print collections are being examined closely. In addition to the expense of acquiring new volumes, libraries have been looking at costs of processing, accessing and delivery. Older volumes also have costs associated with shelving and repair. If space outside the library is used, then storage and retrieval costs must also be factored into any analysis. In difficult financial times, the costs of maintaining materials just on the chance that they might be useful at some point in the future, have become increasingly difficult to justify, both within libraries and to administrators outside the library.

The need for maintaining these materials has also been affected by new technologies. Duplicating serials in electronic and print formats is sometimes justified by the fear that we might be forced to cancel electronic products. While some electronic products can be purchased on a permanent basis, in other cases, libraries have moved from an ownership model to that of renters, dependent for access on whether or not aggregators continue to offer particular titles or whether budget cuts might force the cancellation of electronic products. But while some view electronic access with suspicion as to permanence, certainly there is no guarantee that physical volumes will not be lost or damaged. Many libraries have faced the loss of most or all of their collections due to fires or floods.

One of the solutions for many large research universities has been the use of off-site storage, and for some research collections this is an attractive alternative. However, for a smaller university, offsite storage, particularly of items duplicated by larger libraries in the region, is less attractive. Temperature controlled storage suitable for library materials is expensive, and difficult to fund in tight budget times. Storage buildings generally aren't attractive and certainly aren't visible, and thus are usually not appealing to donors. For both donors and institutional funding, other priorities tend to win out.

Thus, libraries are moving from a “just in case” model to “just in time” model. Keeping materials that MIGHT be useful can no longer be considered essential. Streamlining resource sharing can allow us to reduce the size of individual collections, while still meeting the research needs of our users.

Ultimately, academic libraries are faced with the reality that funding may not be available and that our buildings are full. We must find more space or develop plans that make better use of existing space. Sometimes the best solution is to look carefully at collections to determine if all materials are still needed to fulfill the mission of the library and the needs of users. In many cases, a combination of approaches is feasible, with some reorganization of space, some storage, and some reduction in the size of collections. This three pronged approach was ultimately the one chosen by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG).

The UNCG Challenge

At UNCG, we have been very aware of national trends and have been gradually converting space to make it more learner-centered. The main library building, Jackson Library, is in the center of our medium sized campus. Jackson Library is near a major transit hub and is also connected to the student center by a convenient connector between the buildings that is completely enclosed and temperature controlled and that gives the two large buildings the feeling of being one space. Thus, this is a very attractive location for student users.

In Jackson Library, we have created several areas called collaboratories of varying sizes and equipped with large monitors and computers that allow groups to work together comfortably and collaboratively. Some of these areas are in open spaces and others are in enclosed rooms that can be reserved by users. However, we have recently been at a standstill in terms of creating new learning spaces because our building is FULL! We can no longer convert space without reducing the size of the collection.

The UNCG Campus long range plans include plans for a new building UNCG has identified the expansion of Jackson Library as one of its top priorities. The proposed design includes:

- Expanding the tower for book stacks.
- Creating a new center of academic and student life.
- Reinforcing the critical role of the building to the life of the campus by locating public spaces of the library in conjunction with a secondary transit hub

However, our relatively high position on the list of needed buildings on the long range plan was endangered when North Carolina experienced the budget problems that are plaguing state supported institutions nationally. Our hopes for a new building appeared remote especially given the need for additional classrooms for our growing student body. Hopes for general library expansion and remodeling that has been carefully planned with the aid of building consultants were also high, but the reality of reduced budgets has also reduced the scope of planned remodeling. So at UNCG, we faced the question: How can we create needed space?

In examining space needs, UNCG Libraries had to consider the Jackson Library physical plant, and deal with the reality that we will most likely be spending many years in this original building from the 1950s, plus an addition built in the 1970s. One of our major considerations in all planning is that the architecture of these aged buildings has been hard to adapt to modern space concepts. Lighting, electrical outlets, accessibility for disabled users, and safety concerns were all major problems in the old building, and in renovating any space, the need to update to current building codes made the process more expensive and labor intensive. To create additional user space, compact shelving was considered, but because of expense and difficulty of installation, this option was rejected

As space needs were analyzed, one of the considerations has been the prevalence of ebooks and ejournals in our collection. Faculty and students have expressed strong preferences in most cases for the availability of electronic formats. UNCG Libraries has been aggressive in acquiring electronic formats, and many electronic resources have been purchased, ensuring permanent access. Membership in the Carolina Consortium has been instrumental in increasing our purchasing power, and collection sharing agreements with larger institutions in North Carolina, particularly UNC Chapel Hill and NC State, have established ready access to larger research collections. Current trends at UNCG Libraries include the fact that Reference collections are shifting from “building use only” to a very strong preference for electronic resources available 24/7. There is little need to retain copies of items related to technology and other subjects that date quickly, such as test manuals. And while UNCG is a research institution, UNCG Libraries is not an ARL library, reducing the pressure to increase collection size.

As we analyzed the situation at UNCG, it became clear that weeding was needed to reduce the number of materials that were no longer relevant to the university mission and which were seldom used. Research regarding collection use in large academic libraries certainly supports the idea that we are housing numerous materials that are not being used. The rule of thumb that 20% of the collection accounts for 80% of use has been indicated even prior to the availability of electronic resources. This level of usage is supported by the study done by Allen Kent, *Use of Library Materials: the University of Pittsburgh Study*, published in 1975, and other smaller studies conducted more recently indicate that high number of books, even those recently purchased, are never used.

Recent studies such as Roger C. Schonfeld and Ross Housewright’s “What to Withdraw? Print Collections Management in the Wake of Digitization,” published in September 2009, address the issues involved with retaining print materials. Research on faculty needs indicates a relatively low interest in preserving print when acceptable electronic formats are available. Schonfeld and Housewright formulate a model for decision making based on factors that should be considered in making decisions on retaining print when electronic is available. They conclude that with cooperation in the library community, substantial withdrawal of print resources is a reasonable solution.

The classic study on weeding, by Stanley Slote, was issued in a fourth edition in 1999, relatively early in the availability of electronic resources. Slote indicates a variety of sound reasons to weed, primarily increased book usage and user satisfaction and savings of staff time. Another major reason in 1999, creating room for new technologies, has increased in importance during the past 10 years. Slote counters his justifications for weeding with typical reasons given in opposition to weeding, including the emphasis

on numbers, the idea that bigger is better. Other reasons such as lack of time and fear of public displeasure are also important. One of the most important elements, however, is what he calls the “sacredness of the collection,” which can also be interpreted as pride by librarians who have diligently built collections over a period of many years. Conflicting criteria, both generational and between disciplines, can be a source of conflict and differences in acceptance of weeding decisions.

The decision to weed, in a research collection, is generally a painful and controversial topic (Dubicki, 2008). Librarians are justifiably proud of collections that they have worked to create, and reference librarians can provide numerous anecdotal examples of old, seldom used books that have been invaluable in answering a reference question. But those same librarians, faced with usage statistics and battered and outdated volumes, can also admit that there are materials that are no longer needed. UNCG librarians were no exception – acceptance of the weeding plan was gradual and varied by person and discipline.

Where to Begin?

One of the UNCG models used in beginning to discuss extensive collection weeding was a 2007 weeding project of the government documents collection. UNCG Libraries is a selective depository, and the large collection of documents was used relatively little compared to the relative size of the collection. One of the early phases of a planned renovation project was a plan to clear out the third floor of the older portion of the building housing documents to create additional space for Special Collections. Before government documents were moved, the decision was made to do a rigorous weeding, relying on departmental liaisons who would assume responsibility for their particular subject areas. Of course, all withdrawals had to be approved by the regional depository and materials offered to other depository libraries before they could be discarded, but this year long project resulted in the discarding of over 40,000 documents. The existence of huge numbers of documents online made the process much easier to justify.

The next step was an analysis of how space was being used. Jackson Library is UNCG’s main library and consists of a main library building and a nine story book tower build as the primary facility for the library’s monograph collection. Available space, not counting inaccessible areas, areas housing physical plant equipment, or other non-library directed space and how that space is used is estimated in table below:

Floor space available	Sq. Ft	How space is used	Sq. Ft
Tower stacks	55,980	Book Shelving	57680
Tower Lobbies	4,116	Staff/offices	16500
Main – B,1 and 2	77592	Specialty areas*	46632
Main – 3 rd Floor	8772	SCUA	11000
Total usable space	146,460	Common user spaces	14648
		Total	146,460
		*this includes Reference Dept., Reading Room, Jarrell Lecture Hall, Gov Docs	

The focus of space concerns within the Jackson Library is related to changes in user needs and growth of student population. The analysis shows that we are using only 10% of available space directly for user activities. All other available or usable space houses staff, materials, material related fixtures and equipment.

Space History

Since 1995 when the tower reached its peak capacity of materials for which it was built, an additional 12,000 linear square feet of shelving was added to tower floors and a remote storage facility at the Ferguson Building was obtained and is currently at capacity. The Special Collections Department is also at capacity and cannot hold another major gift from a potential donor. All of this has had the effect of reducing the seating capacity for students and limiting available group study spaces and labs. Since 1995, seating capacity in Jackson Library has been reduced by 50%, while student traffic has increased by 42%. The 14,648 square feet of common user space, includes lobbies, foyers and hallways. Student study options and, in particular, group student space are limited.

Changing Demographics

The student population has increased at a faster pace than originally predicted and this includes residential housing, creating additional pressures on space for the entire campus. The library initiated an interior upgrade project over the last few years and has once again become an inviting place for students to study and spend time for a variety of reasons. Since 1995 traffic in the library has increased immensely both due to the growth of student population and the opening of the connector linking the library to the student center. Another measure of change is the library's instruction lab, known as the CITI Lab. This lab is used for library instruction classes and seats 20 with computers, for hands on work. Average class sizes are now closer to 40 so this lab needs double its current space.

What is Needed?

With existing floor space in the two library buildings, several needs are becoming critical. First, from a student perspective, more student space and service points are needed to house additional seating, collaboratories, a larger lab, group study, and service points related to government documents, digitization and microforms. From a collection perspective, Special Collections and Archives are now at capacity and need additional in-house space. The following table represents how reallocation of space would better suit user needs.

Proposed use of space	Sq. Ft	
Book Shelving	43680	All materials in tower
Staff/offices	16500	
Specialty areas*	37860	
SCUA	18000	Acquire 3 rd floor main
Common user spaces	30420	User service pts in basement including Gov docs and larger CITI lab
Total	146,460	
*this includes Reference, Reading Room, Jarrell Lecture Hall		

This reallocation provides for all books and bound serials, which are not in storage, to be housed in the tower. This allows for space in the main building to be used for additional user space and expansion of Special Collections and Archives materials, which should not be stored. A space consultant has been hired to advise library administration on this use of this space in further detail.

As UNCG Libraries faced problems with space, it was clear we could arrive at solutions that offered space savings for all. In moving toward a weeding of the general collection, our experience with the government documents project helped to set the stage. As we moved toward some solutions of space dilemmas, the process included:

- 1) Outlining problem
- 2) Proposing solutions
- 3) Setting up workgroups
- 4) Establishing procedures and timelines

While renovations made it critical to clear space in our building, we also had an already established and long used on-campus storage facility, which could be used with relatively little additional expense but which had a relatively small amount of available space.

In initial discussions, many of the issues involved were raised and discussed in the Collection Management Committee, a long standing group of liaisons to academic departments which deals with collection development issues. In developing a work plan, we clearly needed a new Committee to deal with all aspects, so the Space Planning Committee was formed with representation from all library groups affected. This group was multi-functional in planning attributes, covering logistical and data gathering functions. The role has expanded over time, and the Committee reports individually to departments and overall to Administrative Advisory Group, the group of department heads and other administrators which serves in an advisory role to the Dean and also serves as a conduit of information and decision making.

In beginning the weeding process, it was critical to tie the initial steps to definite space needs. The weeded government documents collection had to be relocated to create Special Collections space. The basement, which was full and was also a confusing and unattractive space, was the space chosen for documents, and thus the weeding project for the general collection started with the basement collections with deadlines and priorities established. A careful process of information sharing was

expedited by creating a group using Blackboard. Aids to the weeding process were many and varied – a list of low use duplicate monographs and circulation statistics for each item was made available, a list of journal back files to which permanent access had been purchased was compiled, and careful measurements were taken and made available. We identified specific call number ranges to be considered and then identified subject liaisons for each area.

Basement Space Calculations (all numbers are in inches)

	total occupied space	duplicated journals to be removed	Space needed after dup journals	space available for 5th floor relocations	weed or relocate to Ferg
5th floor				73628 - *average of range	
R-Z	147788	9640	138148	73628	-64520
Q	104267	30439	73828	73628	-200

As we began to make specific decisions about which areas must be weeded first, we realized that weeding or transferring large runs of serials would make better use of time and energy and would gain space more quickly than time consuming weeding of individual monograph titles. Weeding monographs was far more labor intensive for both decision making and modifying records and even for pulling volumes. Many hundreds of monographs were withdrawn, particularly outdated editions and most intensively in areas such as computer science. For serials, on the other hand, a single decision and single change in location could potentially free up many feet of space. Thus information was gathered on what serials were duplicated by electronic formats, and whether or not the titles were purchased or were available through aggregators with whom we had subscription arrangements.

In making these decisions and communicating with faculty, some disciplines demonstrated a stronger need to keep paper copies; for example, art materials were generally considered carefully and in general would be kept, since some online products do a poor job of duplicating illustrations. We also considered attempting to keep materials based on scarcity within our region by using an ASERL (Association of Southeastern Research Libraries) list of monographs unique to that group of libraries, and excluding those titles from consideration for withdrawal.

Throughout the process, solutions that were obvious to some were not so clear to others. During the process, communication was essential and all groups needed to be involved in decisions. A liaison or subject department decision to pull a title must be shared with other liaisons because of interdisciplinary needs. While monographs were most often put on carts by liaisons and taken directly to Technical Services, large serials runs were more complex. A decision to pull a title by a liaison must be communicated to

Technical Services so that records could be changed and also involved Access Services who had to shift and move materials and was responsible for insuring that staffing levels were adequate to the added tasks. We quickly realized that the level of detail for weeding varies by person doing the weeding, i.e. a reference librarian looks holistically at the collection while technical service personnel look at the accuracy of records representing holdings. The key to keeping the process civil and focused has been constant communication and cooperation between all groups involved. When problems arose, quick resolution and information sharing were particularly essential.

The ultimate goals of weeding activities should remain in full view of all involved. The use of gained space with descriptions and justifications should be promoted to demonstrate that the effort made a difference. In our case not all areas that gained or will gain from our weeding activities are visible. For example, Special Collections and Archives are typically closed stack environments that aren't noticed by all as being improved. This type of activity takes some marketing activities to promote gains and benefits, one of which is the justification of providing the unique signature of history and interest to the institution.

Technology is another space gainer that can be assumed to be of major importance. The modern student takes technology and the support for technology for granted. They miss it when it's not there, but don't always recognize the effort needed to get spaces "technology friendly", especially in older buildings, where such matters as the availability of electrical outlets can be a major concern. Once again, marketing and in particular signage could help convey the message that space has been repurposed to address the needs of the students.

Other gains from space repurposing can come from the perceived quality improvement to study spaces, and/or response to assessment data that drives the need for space dedicated to quiet study and reflection. Staff should also be coached on how to respond to inquiries about moving books, or clearing out large areas of stacks, with an understanding of the need for users to have the space needed for solitude and critical thinking attributes.

The overall community of users gains from having space available to foster communal living and interaction. A campus library carries a certain expectation that space will exist to become that "third place" in terms allowing people to gather and having the attributes to encourage the social environment of learning.

As the project progressed, the need for good public relations remained paramount. Even with excellent communication, not everyone will be pleased when materials are discarded. Clear lines of communication and venues for discussion were created by using the Space Planning Committee as an oversight group, including wide representation from many departments, and also employing the already existing Collection Management Committee made up of Subject Liaisons.

In the actual process of weeding, some volumes were permanently discarded. Based on other public relations experiences and advice from other libraries with weeding projects (Metz and Gray, 2005), we were committed to avoiding the dumpster. The Library has a very strong commitment to sustainability. In order to make this project as green as possible, before beginning we established connections with the campus Recycling Office and we consulted accounts from other libraries (Penniman and McColl,

2008). We also worked with Better World Books, a nonprofit agency which would take any monographs that might be potentially useful, sell these and use any income to support worldwide literacy efforts.

Like most problems with space, UNCG is facing a situation that developed as materials were acquired in the anticipation that they would fulfill a current or future need of students and faculty, and with the underlying assumption that “growth is good.” We are no longer in an era where unlimited growth is desirable, or even expected. The solutions to this problem are also being developed gradually, and we are still in the early stages of solving this ongoing dilemma. By breaking down the current weeding and repurposing project into manageable stages, we are beginning to develop solutions that will carry us into the future and ultimately make our collection stronger.

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