Basic Project Management for Weeding Government Documents Collections

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For as long as academic libraries have participated in the federal depository library program, there has been an inherent conflict between their academic and depository mandates. While state and public libraries are tasked with serving the greater public, academic libraries have an imperative to meet the specific needs of their institutions. As institutional priorities have evolved and new needs emerged, many academic depositories have come to face pressures of staffing and physical space that lead to the desire to downsize their physical government documents holdings in favor of digital surrogates. Because the government documents received through the federal depository library program are not the libraries' property, withdrawing these materials is a time consuming, labor intensive, costly, and complicated undertaking.

Selective depository libraries have a great deal of control over their collections: they can weed materials after five years, substitute electronic copies for print, and determine the amount of physical materials they wish to receive. In the last few years, an increasing number of depositories have elected to receive all electronic and receive no print materials. They still, however, must follow Government Printing Office (GPO) guidelines for disposing of unwanted materials, making any withdrawal of government documents a much more intensive process than it is to discard materials from the general collection.

In contrast, regional depository libraries have limited control over their collections. Before 2016, they could only discard duplicate and superseded materials.[1] Additionally, many regionals refrained from discarding some superseded materials that were deemed essential, such as superseded editions of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). As a result, many regional depository libraries have found themselves grappling with the conflict between their depository obligations and institutional priorities to maintain collections that make the best use of limited physical

space, as well as financial and labor resources. Facing these constraints, some libraries entered into shared housing agreements for their regional depository collections. Other libraries relinquished regional status altogether.

In October 2015, the GPO's announcement that the restrictions on regional libraries for withdrawing some types of items would be loosened led to a renewed hope for libraries wishing to retain their status as regional depositories while right-sizing their collections to fulfill institutional mandates. This article describes the planning and process one regional library, the University of Maryland (UMD) Libraries, undertook recently in weeding its federal government documents collection. While the UMD project began prior to the policy change, the lessons learned from it can help regionals and selectives as they plan for collection management projects under the new GPO policy.

The UMD Libraries are the regional federal depository library for fifty-nine selective depository libraries in Maryland, Delaware, and the District of Columbia. The UMD Libraries' mission is to "enable the intellectual inquiry and learning required to meet the education, research and community outreach mission of the university."[2] The UMD Libraries' primary users are the 38,140 students, 4,309 full-time faculty, and 5,429 full-time staff members of the UMD community.[3]

Subsequent to a 2011–12 ethnographic study of library users and a concurrent project to reenvision the physical design of McKeldin Library, the main library on the flagship College Park campus, the UMD Libraries began a long-term initiative to repurpose former collection space for new services and user-focused spaces. A key component of the UMD Libraries' ongoing transformation is a collection realignment project, which entails reducing the physical footprint of all collections by de-accessioning and relocating materials to offsite storage and substituting electronic holdings wherever possible. As part of the

collection realignment, the government documents collection in McKeldin Library was to be reviewed in order to reduce its physical footprint by 50 percent to make space for a research commons and more student workspaces.

In preparation for the main project, smaller individual de-accession and relocation projects were undertaken. Those projects lasted a month or two and focused on materials by location. For example, throughout September 2014 all materials were removed from government documents closed stacks to create swing space for another campus department needing temporary office space during a campus construction project.

When undertaking the mini-projects, rather than setting a target for the number of items to be withdrawn, the goal was to remove all materials from the space. During the early projects, it was decided to not try to identify superseded materials because of project time constraints.

Prior to the outset of the main project in 2015, it was important to establish the start and completion dates, scope, goal, and staff who would be involved in the project. The project was conceived as a five-year project; however, it was acknowledged that the dates might change because of the availability of funding and staffing.

Because the ultimate goal of this project is to reclaim space, estimates of the number of items to be withdrawn were necessarily broad. Regional government documents collections contain a lot of ephemera, resulting in the need to account for a much greater range of sizes than in traditional collections. Additionally, many pre-1976 materials are not in the UMD Libraries' electronic catalog. Therefore it cannot be used as a precise gauge of the number of items in a given range. For the sake of project planning, the goal was to withdraw between 250,000 to 500,000 items. These numbers were used to establish yearly project milestones, but it was recognized that they were only a rough estimate, as the project's success will ultimately be measured by the amount of space that can be acquired through the collection realignment process.

When establishing criteria for withdrawing depository materials, the UMD Libraries took the legal requirements for discarding depository materials and the libraries' role as regional into consideration. The UMD Libraries' are required to "retain at least one copy of all Government publications either in printed or microfacsimile form (except those authorized to be discarded by the Superintendent of Documents); and within the region served will provide interlibrary loan, reference service, and assistance for depository libraries."[4] At the outset of the project in 2015, regional libraries were still restricted to withdrawing only duplicate and superseded materials from the collection.

It was decided that all duplicate copies would be withdrawn from the collection, without exception. The UMD Libraries also decided that all superseded materials were eligible for withdrawal. In the past, many regional depositories, including the UMD, elected to retain some superseded titles such as statistical bulletins and legislative materials. Because the UMD Libraries' are not required to retain those materials, it was decided that the only superseded materials that would be retained would be those deemed essential to fulfilling the research needs of the primary user group. Superseded materials were identified using the FDLP criteria and the 2002 Superseded List.

During the planning phase of the realignment project, it was important to identify and work with key stakeholders and other library departments. At the UMD Libraries this meant consulting subject liaisons, Technical Services, Stacks Maintenance, User Services and Resource Sharing, and other departments on the university's campus at various points throughout the process to either provide or share information. Associate deans and department heads were consulted and follow-up meetings were scheduled to keep them apprised of the project's progress. Metadata Services was recognized as an essential partner because of their responsibility to maintain records in the ILS.

In addition to internal stakeholders, it was important to identify and consult with external stakeholders such as other campus departments and selective libraries during the planning and implementation of the realignment project. For example, in September 2014, the department moving into library space contributed additional student labor to assist in removing materials from the closed stacks space in order to meet the tight deadline for their planned move. During the same project, the UMD Libraries decided to withdraw more than 12,000 nondepository CD-ROMs only to discover they had been donated to the libraries by another campus department. To fulfill the legal requirements of the donation, the CD-ROMs had to be offered back to the original department prior to discard. Another key stakeholder group are selective libraries. During all government documents de-accessioning projects, withdrawn materials are offered to selectives prior to discard.

Because a large number of people must be consulted whenever it was possible, various tools and mechanisms for communicating to large groups were used. For example, materials are being offered via the Association of South Eastern Research Libraries (ASERL) Documents Disposition Database (DDB) prior to discard. Group meetings and emails have also been important ways to communicate.

It was essential in a project of this scope to understand what information needed to be tracked to answer questions people may have later. At the most basic, various stakeholders needed to

know how much space could be repurposed, the number of discarded items that were weeded and how much space had been freed, but it was important to track more. A significant amount of tracking was necessary to manage the daily workflow of the project. Multiple student assistants used printed copies of excel worksheets to identify and retrieve materials from the shelves. As a result, it was important to track assignments and progress. When students completed their assignments, they updated the electronic spreadsheets and exported data to csv files to be uploaded to the ASERL DDB. Through the pulling and offering process, spreadsheets were stored on a shared drive and the cloud.

Another key component of the plan was identifying the materials and resources needed for the successful completion of the project. During the September 2014 projects, financial non-labor-related expenditures included dumpster rentals, boxes, tape, and markers. Other materials that were necessary for the completion of the project, but that did not have to be purchased were extra carts for moving materials and pallets for the physical removal of some materials.

Early on in the process, it was important to establish communication channels to ensure that all parties were able to maintain the workflow and adapt to unforeseen issues. For the collection realignment and pre-projects, most communication was conducted via phone, email, and in-person meetings. For example, some of the nondepository reference materials were loose-leaf and were not housed in the UMD Libraries' general circulating collection. Metadata Services had to be consulted about how to treat these items. Other items for discard were determined to have active standing orders, requiring the librarian to communicate with Collections staff to process cancellations. Having well-established channels of communication made it possible to quickly resolve such issues.

Lessons

Since the start of the project a number of lessons have been learned and continue to be. Everything from the contents of the project plan to the processes used for the completion of the project have been revised and continue to be altered as new phases are undertaken. Consequently, the most important lesson has been that the plan is never really "complete." The plan is a living document that must be modified when necessary to meet project goals under changing circumstances. The initial plan can be very basic. As time goes on, project partners will add to the plan by asking questions and filling in information.

Another important take away is to be flexible to address unexpected questions or issues. For example, in May 2016, all microfiche technical reports at the Engineering and Physical

Sciences Library were evaluated for their ability to support institutional goals. The goal was to reduce the size of their microfiche collection in preparation for renovations. For this mini-project, depository materials were identified, relocated to McKeldin Library, and are currently in the process of being integrated into the collection. This project took precedence over the collection review project, resulting in delays in the main project timeline.

Staying informed of concurrent collections projects is essential to ensure adequate resources and prevent duplication of effort. For example, the ongoing collection review is directly tied to ongoing and planned building improvements such as the Research Commons. To ensure there is a smooth transition between withdrawing and relocating materials to building improvements it is important to know funding statuses, anticipated project start dates, and deadlines. As a basic example, it is important to coordinate removal of the collections materials and the beginning of the building project to avoid a lengthy period of unsightly empty shelves.

Between the mini-projects and the main project, government document materials have been withdrawn and relocated from the former government documents office space, closed stacks, and the microfilm/microfiche room. The exact number of items withdrawn is unknown; however, those rooms constituted approximately one-third of the space formerly used by the government documents collection. Early work focused on superseded materials and duplicate copies. Not all of these materials have been withdrawn completely from the UMD Libraries' collections. Many historical publications such as pre-1940 serial set volumes and early census publications were temporarily housed in the Libraries' basement and will later be transferred to the UMD Libraries' new offsite storage facility, Severn Library.

During the summer of 2016, the government documents reference collection has been the focus of the project. The government documents reference area contains depository and nondepository materials. Nondepository materials are evaluated and processed according to collections' policies for the general collection. Other materials are being evaluated based on FDLP requirements and government documents holdings at selective depositories.

In October 2015, the GPO announced that the Joint Committee on Printing (JCP) had approved the *Government Publications Authorized for Discard by Regional Depository Libraries*, which would allow regional federal depository libraries to withdraw tangible copies of materials that:

- Are available through the Federal Digital System (FDSys) with a digital signature of authentication;
- Have been held by the library for at least seven years;

- Four preservation copies exist in geographically disperse locations.

Prior to GPO's October 2015 announcement, the UMD Libraries had been working on de-duping congressional hearings. The libraries held a significant number of hearings in paper and microfiche format. Using volunteers and student labor to pull the materials, paper copies were being withdrawn whenever the collection had a microfiche copy. In July 2016, GPO informed libraries that regional libraries would be able to start requesting discards in September 2016.

Librarians can make their jobs easier by developing project plans and deploying them. This article specifically speaks to academic regional depository libraries; however, careful project management is useful for all collection management projects.

As the UMD Libraries moves forward with its collection realignment project, several things are taking place. GPO's list will be used to identify materials that are eligible for withdrawal under the new regional discard policy. The current objective is to remove all of the noncirculating materials in freestanding shelving. Materials will be withdrawn or relocated to the circulating collection. Many of the titles in that area are duplicates, supersedes, or are eligible under the new guidelines.

The goal for the UMD Libraries is to ensure that there is a complete collection that is able to meet the needs of all its different user groups, including nonaffiliated users of the depository collection. The process is difficult, but it must be acknowledged that it is impossible to meet every potential user need by having the materials physically in the collection. As part of this process, the state plan for the region's libraries is being updated by a small workgroup to incorporate the recent policy changes. Updating the state plan in advance of the regional discard policy's full implementation will facilitate UMD's project while ensuring selective depositories have the opportunity to claim discards and provide input into the process. Although the collection realignment project's objectives contribute to institutional goals, its collections decisions are not made in a vacuum.

They affect many other libraries in the region. It is hoped that through collaboration and thoughtful collection management the libraries will be able to connect its users to content, regardless of the items' geographical location.

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