News from Dalhousie Libraries

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Title: Dismantling an eleven thousand volume Reference collection in twenty days, during a pandemic!

One could reasonably ask why we would do such a thing as dismantle an eleven thousand volume Reference collection during a pandemic when most of the subject selectors were off-site. It all started before March 2020. We were making room for the *Indigenous Community Room* which was supposed to be launched in September 2020. We all know what happened in mid-March 2020 to derail those plans.

The Plan:

To reduce the collection by at least two-thirds (if not entirely).

The Ideal:

We would write a new collection policy to guide decisions. We would check for electronic editions that we currently owned, update our LibGuides, and check for earlier editions in the stacks that could be superseded. We would recommend offers to other libraries, and Better World Books. We would set aside regular time each week to evaluate our portions and the generalist items such as encyclopedias. There would be clear workflows that succeeded immediately. It would be peaceful, orderly, and stress-free.

The Reality:

It turns out that this kind of evaluation and deaccessioning exercise is not everyone's favourite activity and it's easy to push it down the 'to-do' list. There was some cajoling/encouraging/begging involved to get decisions made on time. The collections policy did not get written because the authors were overwhelmed with other time-sensitive tasks. Recommendations for offers to other libraries and Better World Books ended with the pandemic. The data was not perfectly clean: We did find the occasional error in the shelf list – some items were missing, and some items were found in the room that weren't in the catalogue.

We did have workflows that worked pretty well.

We had spreadsheets. (So. Many. Spreadsheets.)

We used MS Teams as our shared workspace for access and review of the spreadsheets. Actually, we had two Teams – one for liaisons (decision-making) and one for Access and Resources staff (implementing decisions). The original shelf list was modified to one entry per set of volumes to make the lists less intimidating to review. Liaisons were given their spreadsheet listing (by call number ranges) for decision-making, and there was a 'general' list for items like general encyclopedias.

In the spreadsheets, subject selectors were given the title, call number, imprint, publisher, year information. Their mission was to indicate for each title if the title should be kept or deaccessioned; and if kept, where? – the new 'streamlined' reference collection, or in the stacks. When required, interdisciplinary titles were assigned to more than one liaison. With help from our Data Librarian and Excel guru, Julie Marcoux, all the liaison spreadsheets and the general spreadsheet were reassembled into one workbook. The conflicting recommendations were reconciled by the Head of Killam.

Novanet Shelf list for Location code DKREF = JJ Stewart Room Reference Collection.
Report run February 10, 2 Last format update 17 March 2020
Duplicate BIB numbers removed so that multi-volume sets only appear once.

BIB number	Liaison(s)	Callnumber	Title	Year	Barcode	Iter	Liaison Recommendation Keep/Discard (dropdown list)	Liaison initia	If keep, where (dropdown list)	If discard, why	Other notes (including reshelving)
580903	Sarah Kirsten	AG 250 H43 2001	Iconographic encyclopaedia =	2001	31264030288778	49	keep	SES	GEN-circ		ks -KEEP Gen ncirc
1454394	Sarah Gwen	HV 8073 T55 2006	Forensic science :	2006	31264031793289	49	discard	SES		unnecessary duplication	
601657	Sarah Gwen	HV 8073 W674 2006	World of forensic science /	2006	31264031386373	49	discard	SES		online	
290625	Sarah Kirsten	P 380 E53 1998	Encyclopedia of the languages of Europe /	1998	31264024725744	49	discard	SES		online	
629159	Sarah Kirsten	P 57 U7 B4 1981	Directory of foreign language service organizations, 2 /	1981	N10005040	49	not on shelf	SES			
273439	Sarah Gwen	T 11 D324 1997	Scientific papers and presentations /	1997	31264023811420	49	discard	SES		out of date	
1474322	Sarah Gwen	T 11 S386 2006	Scientific style and format :	2006	31264031959302	49	discard	SES		more recent edition	
4657059	Sarah Gwen	T 11 S386 2014	Scientific style and format :	2014	31264037213696	49	keep	SES	REF		
932560	Sarah gwen	TP 455 F66 1981	Food chemicals codex /	1981	31264013274027	49	discard				
1216828	Sarah Gwen	R 119 M28 1996	Successful scientific writing :	1996	31264020537267	49	discard	SES		out of date	
630781	Sarah Gwen	T 11 B63 1982	Technical writing :	1982	31264013270983	49	discard	SES		age of resource	
275996	Sarah Gwen	T 11 H582 1999	Enjoy writing your science thesis or dissertation :	1999	31264024816410	49	discard	SES		age of resource	
909106	Sarah Gwen	T 11 O94 1991	The Oxford dictionary for scientific writers and editors.	1991	31264013613836	49	discard	SES		not longer relevant	

The collections budget for 2020-2021 included funding for electronic replacement of print materials and we did spend ~$17,500 on conversions to electronic format.

We also used sticker dots on the spine labels in the room so folks would have visual indicators of what had been evaluated. Resources and Access staff found conflicts between the spine dots and the spreadsheets. Those questions also went back to the Head of Killam.

In theory, we were all working through our lists in a systematic way between the March 2020 shift to remote work and partial returns to campus in the fall. Some of that did happen, but we were mostly engaged in other work and worries. (We could write a separate piece about implementing streaming video services for the first time during a pandemic.)

While many decisions could be made remotely, almost all of the liaisons found they needed access to the collection to make final decisions. When we were permitted to return to campus, most liaisons continued to work remotely. They did come in for access to the collection to continue their decision-making, but we were limited in how many people could be in the room at a time, so folks had to sign up for access. Then in December 2020 there was another Covid outbreak in Halifax and access to the collection ended until late January. In the spring of 2021, timelines were set for the opening of the Indigenous Community Room, and the schedule became very concrete and very short! We had three months to complete it all. The room needed to be emptied by mid-August as the movers had been scheduled to dismantle the shelving. Our stress-free ideal became more of a race to the finish.

Resources staff needed time to process catalogue changes. Access Services needed time to move physical materials. The movers were booked to dismantle the shelves. We got things done in it in pieces. Starting in July, weekly updates of selector decisions were made in the Reference/Access Teams site Excel workbook with the tabs *Keep in Reference, To Stacks, Discard*. The workbook was updated every

Friday evening with new selector decisions recorded in new *keep/stacks/discard* tabs dated and colour-coded by week.

| ☰ | Keep REF July 7 | Discards July 7 | Keep Stacks July7 | July 19 - Discards | July 19 Keep REF | July 19 Keep Stacks | July 26 - Keep stacks | July 26 - Keep REF | July | + |

On Monday mornings, Access services would print the previous week's decisions and shift the materials to their next destination. Each designation had its own space – discards in one area, Ref to stacks to another, and another for Reference to Reference. This successfully prevented errors with discards. At the end of the process, we still had 58 books left over – fondly known as the "Reference Orphans". They were shelved as 'undecided' at given their own spreadsheet for another round of decision-making.

A very happy Gail Fraser with the last cartload of material

Empty shelves!

Did we mention that it was a hot muggy summer? Shifting 11,000 volumes turned out to be hot, dusty work. At least everyone was used to wearing masks by summer 2021. On the last day, we finished EARLY! There was a trip to a nearby grocery store for watermelon and Magnum ice cream bars for each member of the Access and Resources teams who took part in this massive move.

What would we have done differently?

Sarah: In retrospect we should have pushed for even a draft update to the collections policy to aid decision-making, and I should have provided more structure around timelines for decisions. A quick refresher for some handy Excel features would have beneficial to some team members too.

Gail: One of the problems we didn't fully anticipate, and which caused confusion, was that we had a number of annual series (Directories, yearbooks, and the like) of which the current edition was in Reference and previous editions in the general collection or in Gov Docs. The very handy "one item per

title" excel sheets weren't able to capture this level of complexity, resulting in a number of secondary questions from Resources staff. Knowing what we know now, I'd suggest thinking through different serial scenarios because they're likely to be more complicated than you expect.

What would we do again?

We would definitely celebrate with ice cream bars and watermelon again! We would keep the weekly check-ins between Sarah (liaisons), Gail (Resources team) and Amanda Sparks (Access Services). Those meetings were critical to getting everything done accurately and on time. Amanda made the suggestion at the beginning of the move that we add columns to the Excel files to indicate who pulled the volumes, who edited Novanet, and who did the physical discarding. This was a useful and brilliant way to create accountability and left a bread-crumb trail if we had to try to find a volume again.

What's happening now?

Our new space for Reference is still smaller than the existing collection. Thanks to the Alma migration in May we have had the help of a Resources staff member to go through the remaining Reference collection and check holdings for electronic access and previous editions in the stacks in preparation for the next round of evaluation and deaccessioning over the summer. The next goal is to make the collection fit the space and be ready for use in the fall.

The Indigenous Community Room will be officially launched on June 21, 2022 (Indigenous Peoples Day). Part of the opening will include the naming of the room by consulting Elders. That story is for a future APLA Bulletin.

Indigenous Community Room as of May 12th