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Print Retention Decision Making

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SURVEY RESULTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

ARL has conducted a number of SPEC surveys about remote shelving that focused on physical facilities, selection of materials, user access, services, and cost, but those represent print collection management decisions in the pre-electronic back-file, pre-Portico, and pre-HathiTrust era. The idea for this survey came from the experiences of the authors as they attempted to manage major projects related to collections space planning, on-site shelving for materials, off-site shelving of materials, and the formation of a collaborative print collection with another research university. These activities were undertaken simultaneously and with some inflexible, externally imposed deadlines. The first step in determining the best course for print retention decisions was a literature review, and the authors discovered that most of the literature related to these decisions was created more than 10 years ago, which represents a very different time for libraries and collections. This survey investigates whether print collection management strategies have changed since the last SPEC survey in 2006. The intuitive notion was that many of the concerns regarding the availability of stored materials would have been abated by the widespread electronic availability of content and by the simple reality that many libraries' print journal and government documents collections are no longer growing significantly and are appropriately dubbed "legacy" collections.

This survey was distributed to the ARL member libraries in June 2013 and these results are based on data submitted by 65 of the 125 ARL member libraries (52%) by the deadline of July 15, 2013. The survey asked respondents about print retention decision making strategies related to storage of materials in three different types of facilities or circumstances: on-site, staff-only shelving, remote shelving, and collaborative retention agreements. The survey also examined the decision making and practices surrounding the deaccession of library material. Because in many cases the decision to retain certain materials will imply a decision not to retain other materials, the survey concluded with questions regarding deaccessioning strategies for print materials at member institutions. For each retention or deaccession strategy, the survey explored the type of on-going or project-based nature of the work, the involvement of stakeholders, the selection process and criteria for materials to be retained or deaccessioned, the communication strategy with internal and external audiences, and the responses from the libraries' internal and external audiences to these endeavors.

The Print Retention Landscape

All but four of the respondents indicated that their library had recently been involved in activities to either relocate or deaccession print materials. Of the 61 libraries (94%) that had participated in these activities in the last two years, 30 have sent print material to on-site, staff-only shelving, 45 have sent material to remote shelving, and 53 have deaccessioned print items. The great majority of libraries (between 77% and 84%) have managed this work through a combination of both on-going and project-centered processes. Forty libraries have collaborative retention agreements, and 33 of these have deaccessioned print material.

Stakeholder Involvement

The involvement of stakeholders varies slightly across the storage or deaccession decision scenarios. Senior

library administrators and library directors were most often identified as the champion of a strategy. Library directors, senior library administrators, and university administrators were involved with budget decisions for shelving facilities, but non-library stakeholders were rarely involved in budgeting for deaccessioning activities. Senior library administrators were most involved with policy decisions, and had input from directors, subject selectors/bibliographers, and preservation staff. They also worked with selectors and preservation staff on procedures. Only a small number of respondents reported involving any other categories of stakeholders in the initial strategy decision making.

The development of criteria for the selection of materials, across the scenarios, rests to a high degree with subject selectors and bibliographers. However, senior library administrators also play key roles across the different tasks associated with the selection of materials for either storage or deaccession. Twenty-three respondents (38%) involved faculty in the decisions to move items to storage or deaccession them, ten of these asked faculty to review lists of recommended materials, at least until these became routine activities. Only six asked faculty to help develop selection criteria.

Strategies and Considerations for Including or Excluding Materials

All but a few respondents use a combination of strategies to select print materials for storage or deaccession. Strategies for identifying items for local, staff-only shelving differ only slightly from the strategies used for identifying materials for remote shelving. For local shelving, selection based on a group or collection of materials is used somewhat more often than title-by-title review using lists; for remote shelving, the opposite is true. This difference may be a reflection of a perceived lower risk of inaccessibility in local shelving. Relying on system-generated lists of titles and reviewing items title-by-tile at the shelf are somewhat less-used strategies for storage decisions. Deaccession decisions rely more on title-by-title review, either of lists or at the shelf.

The criteria used to generate lists of titles for review also differs depending on whether items are being selected for storage or deaccession. Publication date, circulation history, format, condition, and subject area were commonly reported criteria for storage decisions. Duplication in either print or electronic format was overwhelmingly the reason for deaccession. Only rarely was low-use mentioned as a criterion for deaccession.

Certain materials are excluded from consideration for local, staff-only shelving, remote shelving, or deaccession, although the types of materials and reasons for exclusion vary widely. Format is the most common reason to exclude materials from local shelving, while condition of materials is the most common reason they are excluded for consideration for remote shelving. Finally, the subject area of the material is the most common reason materials are not considered for deaccession.

The Importance of Electronic Content in Decision Making

The importance of electronic collection content to print retention decision making was heavily underscored in this survey. From the perspective of serving users, it is not surprising that of the 22 respondents (82%) who stated that they did not consider availability of content in secure print archives when making decisions to transfer to on-site shelving, 16 did consider the availability of electronic surrogates in making the decision to store items on-site. The decision making is similar for remote shelving; of the 28 who don't consider whether items are available in print repositories, 23 do consider the availability of electronic formats. However, it is interesting that 25 respondents (49%) did not consider the availability of content in other print repositories when making deaccession decisions, while 47 (90%) did consider the availability of electronic surrogates in making the decision to deaccession.

Further, 62 of the responding libraries (97%) reported having policies that encourage acquisitions of serials in electronic format and 53 (83%) have policies that encourage acquisition of monographs in electronic format. This would suggest that the future of print management strategies will include a focus on an ever-shrinking proportion of print library materials.

Communication

Across strategies, the responsibility for communicating libraries' plans for including materials in local shelving, remote shelving, or deaccessioning them rests primarily with the collection development department. However, for decisions involving moving materials to remote shelving or deaccessioning, it becomes more likely that library administration will take on some responsibility for communication.

The most common communication strategy, regardless of the action being proposed, is presentations to groups. Libraries' websites are also commonly used. Respondents reported using communication strategies to reach external audiences to a much higher degree for moves to remote shelving than for deaccession initiatives.

Attitudes and Resistance

At first glance, it was surprising that 54% of the respondents had experienced resistance to on-site shelving plans and 70% of the respondents reported resistance to remote shelving plans, while the percentage reporting resistance to deaccession plans was only 58%. While this is an area for further study, some potentially likely scenarios are that materials selected for deaccession may be in categories that do not raise as many concerns for users. Examples of this could be materials duplicated in print or electronic formats, materials that are deemed damaged beyond repair, or materials that are dated but with seemingly small historical value.

Overall, 48 respondents reported some resistance and 13 reported no resistance to decisions about print material disposition. Of the libraries that reported resistance, 15 experienced resistance to one strategy, but not another. Respondents' comments indicate that initial concerns about print material strategies have been alleviated over time by positive experiences with the outcomes.

Collaborative Retention Agreement Strategy

For the purposes of this survey, a Collaborative Retention Agreement was defined as a commitment by one partner to retain a specific volume so that another partner may deaccession or store their duplicate copy. The focus of this question was on agreements independent of shared shelving facility agreements. The majority of respondents (40, or 66%) indicated that their libraries participate in these arrangements. They reported using a number of different agreements, including major regional endeavors such as the Western Regional Storage Trust (WEST) and the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL) Collaborative Journal Retention Program. Other respondents noted agreements that cover two or three libraries or library systems, such as the collaborative agreement between the University of Iowa, Iowa State University, and the University of Wisconsin. It seems that there is a degree of redundancy among agreements, which is logical given both the scale of preservation that needs to occur and the varied nature of these arrangements. This strategy is an area where further evolution and development is expected. For example, ASERL and the Washington Research Library Consortium (WRLC) have recently agreed to share their print journal archives under a new agreement called Scholars Trust.

Conclusions

Striking the right balance of continued ownership, access, and preservation of print materials is one of the many challenges 21st Century research libraries face. Off-site shelving, collaborative retention agreements, and careful deaccession are the existing pragmatic answers to the question, "Can research libraries simply keep adding print holdings forever?" This survey confirms that these practices are now an entrenched part of the work of libraries and also shows that, when responsibly administrated, the libraries' constituents view these activities as acceptable. As libraries strategically and creatively think about how to best provide access to materials and serve their long term obligations to preserve content, this SPEC Kit provides a snapshot of best practices as of 2013. Going forward, the trajectory seems to be toward highly collaborative and distributed ownership of legacy print materials. Areas for continued monitoring include the evolution of electronic and print archiving programs and the impact that these changes will have on local or consortial decisions regarding print retention plans.