

Deselection Dilemma: Incorporating Faculty Voices in Monograph Deselection

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Incorporating faculty feedback increases support for deselection without sacrificing rigor.

Since 2017, Santa Clara University has pursued a multi-year rules-based monograph deselection program. Despite clear criteria for weeding, some faculty were nervous about discarding books. Last year we began sharing title lists with faculty to incorporate their feedback into our deselection program, and the results have been very positive.

Literature Review

A significant body of literature favors rule-based weeding programs, and Santa Clara University has had good results using OCLC's GreenGlass to implement comprehensive deselection (Lugg and Fischer 2008; Lugg 2012; Snyder 2014; Chrzastowski, et al. 2017). Shelf-time is a reliable indicator for whether books will see additional use (Slote 1997), but it should not be the sole data point used for weeding – especially in an era of collective collections and shared print (Lugg 2012; Snyder 2014). Empathetic incorporation of faculty feedback is encouraged (Agee 2017) but can introduce significant added work (DeMars et al 2019).

Works Cited

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Methods

The 2018-2019 academic year marked the second phase of Santa Clara University's comprehensive deselection program, focusing on the Q, R and T classes using data from OCLC GreenGlass and LINK+ while incorporating faculty input via title lists.

Our weeding criteria yielded 14,355 titles. These books had to be in the collection for at least 12 years with zero circulation or – if they were older – with no circulation in the last 15 years. They had to be held by at least 50 other libraries in WorldCat and at least 1 other academic library in the LINK+ resource sharing network.

Based on LC range, we identified 19 departments that would be affected by the project. The Associate University Librarian and the relevant subject librarians reached out to all of the affected departments. 8 departments invited the Library to present and 15 requested to review a list of titles. The in-person presentations took place in formal department meetings and occasionally in smaller sessions. Afterwards, the list of candidate titles for deselection was made available to faculty via Google Spreadsheets. All columns were locked for editing except for the feedback column, where faculty could mark the titles they wanted to keep.

Faculty had to give a justification for titles they wished to keep – either for teaching, research, or because they felt it was a seminal work in their field.

Results

Faculty asked to keep 10% of books (1,472 out of 14,355). The effort to include faculty feedback added about 32 person-hours to the project – 16 from meeting with faculty and 16 from working with title lists.

Discussion

This approach cost the Library in terms of time spent visiting departments, preparing lists and incorporating faculty feedback, and in terms of fewer books deselected. However, the Library made significant gains in terms of faculty support, good will and visibility. The additional time and the number of books retained were deemed acceptable.

An unexpected outcome of the in-person meetings was increased engagement with a greater range of faculty – many of whom appreciated the logic of deselection. A few bibliophiles held strong views but were satisfied with the chance to review title lists. Most faculty did not choose to review. The visits also provided an opportunity to remind faculty about library services, to highlight new formats like unlimited use e-books, and to discuss open access and OER. On more than one occasion, faculty praised the library for involving them in the process and for demonstrating a concrete example of shared governance.

We look forward to continuing this approach next year with LC classes G, J, K and L.

