

UNIVERSITY LIBRARY WEEDING POLICY

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Collection development is often considered the process of adding new materials to the Library to benefit the university community. Weeding (or de-selection) of materials in the collection is another component of collection development and serves to maximize the usefulness of the Library collection. Weeding the collection provides space for new materials and increases the value of the collection by removing outdated/unwanted material or items in poor condition.

The collection will be periodically examined for material to be withdrawn, usually under the direction of the librarian in charge of the subject to be weeded. Candidates for disposal will include superseded editions, duplicate copies no longer needed, alternative formats, out-of-date works and material in poor condition. Procedures will include consultation with faculty and selectors and, in some cases, consultation with Special Collections. Certain subject areas will benefit from comparison of holdings with the Law Library. In addition, all materials to be withdrawn will ultimately need to be handled by the Technical Services Department. Therefore, it is best if the selector maintains steady dialogue with the Head of Technical Services when weeding material from the collection.

The University Libraries currently use several methods for weeding materials:

On-going Weeding – these methods provide weeding opportunities as a result of an immediate issue or problem with the material(s) in question

1. As new editions are purchased, selectors are prompted to make decisions about retaining or withdrawing older editions.
2. Withdrawal decisions regarding serials on subscription are usually determined by the selector and the Head of Technical Services when the subscription begins. As a result, some serials are automatically replaced when they are superseded.
3. Items in poor condition or missing pieces that are returned to the Circulation Desk are routed to the Head of Technical Services for a decision about replacement, rebinding, repair or withdrawal, with input by subject specialists.
4. Items that are declared lost (either through Circulation routines or stacks inventory) are routed to the Head of Technical Services for possible replacement, with input by subject specialists.

Systematic Weeding Projects – these methods require preliminary work on the part of the Subject Specialist and typically involve larger amounts of materials from individual areas of the collection. Thus, these methods are project-level and are more likely to involve broader librarian and faculty involvement. Special formats may require additional consideration beyond the methods listed below.

1. Multiple copies or multiple formats that are no longer necessary should be withdrawn. Historical examples include a project to weed duplicates in the American History (LC Class #E) and United States Local History (LC Class #F) sections, as well as individually weeding print book titles that have been replaced by an electronic book format. In addition, as formats for audiovisual materials change, the Library has weeded the older format (e.g. VHS videotapes weeded in favor of DVDs).
2. Subject areas are examined by subject specialists for research value within the subject area. Typically, this type of weeding removes outdated, inaccurate or irrelevant material and is closely aligned with usage, age of publication, and checkout statistics. Historical examples include weeding in Law (LC Class #K), Social Sciences – General, Statistics, Economic Theory (LC Class #H-HB), and Psychology (LC Class #BF). More general subject area weeding occurs in Reference and Government Documents on an annual basis.
3. Periodically, the Library conducts a serials review to make sure that the Library is providing faculty and students with the materials that are critical to Washington and Lee University's academic program. While the purpose of this review is not strictly cancellation, it is important to make sure that resources for serials are devoted to materials that are essential to the university community. In cases of cancellation as part of a serials review, the Library has not traditionally withdrawn retrospective print serial holdings from the collection.

The complex nature of systematic weeding benefits from consistent use of procedures by the library staff, listed in the next section, as well as regular dialogue between the Subject Specialists and the Head of Technical Services.

Procedures for Systematic Weeding of Multiple Copies or in Subject Areas

1. Preliminary work must typically be completed by subject specialists prior to removing titles from the collection. This work includes: informing the Head of Technical Services about the project; informing librarians and the appropriate faculty of the proposed project; gathering library statistics related to age, duplication, and/or circulation of items; and pinpointing titles in poor condition.
2. Millennium can be used to create lists that indicate multiple copies or publication dates, etc. Just about anything in the bibliographic and item records can be used to create a weeding list. The list can then be used in print or electronic format to guide the weeding project with call numbers, titles, etc. Creation and output of the weeding list benefits from some knowledge of MARC codes; the Subject Specialist will benefit by asking Technical Services for assistance with these codes.
3. Selecting a publication date cut-off as a weeding criteria requires the Subject Specialist to communicate with the Head of Technical Services to avoid future issues (e.g.

withdrawing older material that has just recently been added). Due to the commitment of the Library to purchasing titles for long-term scholarly pursuit, weeding should not include items published within the past ten years, with few exceptions.

4. The Subject Specialist should determine how s/he will mark or situate each item selected for weeding so that it can be reviewed by faculty. The specialist will also need to indicate to faculty how they may remove a title from the weeding project.
5. The Subject Specialist will have to determine the duration of faculty review for materials to be weeded. Typically, a large weeding project in a subject area should allow faculty at least one term for review.
6. After candidates for weeding are pinpointed, the Subject Specialist should make an attempt to keep faculty informed about the schedule for the weeding project.
7. Once the weeding deadline has been met, the Subject Specialist will notify the Head of Technical Services regarding the approximate number of titles that will be weeded (as a courtesy for workflow considerations). The Head of Technical Services will work with the Subject Specialist to select a date for the material to be re-located to Technical Services for withdrawal and disposition.
8. All items selected for withdrawal through subject weeding will be reviewed by the Head of Technical Services before any are disposed.

Cautions, Restrictions and Safeguards for Systematic Weeding

The Technical Services Department will handle disposition of materials that have been weeded by channeling suitable material to the annual booksale, then remainders to the Library's third-party bookseller. In general, the university discourages giving university property away after it has been deemed "surplus", and so other alternatives must be considered carefully.

In general, items that are withdrawn must be recycled if they are giftplated. It is good to be somewhat selective in the number of gift items that are weeded. Otherwise, potential bad publicity from withdrawn gifts could damage our credibility regarding future gifts.

Subject Specialists should avoid weeding parts of a numbered set, and should be sensitive to items that might qualify for Special Collections. These items include for example: faculty and alumni publications (if known), Washington and Lee University, Virginia and local area interests, and imprints pre-1850. The Subject Specialist should seek consultation with the Special Collections Librarian for materials that fall within these categories. In addition, items that were selected for Reserve at some point may require additional consideration. Finally, during the de-accessioning process, the Cataloging Unit may determine that we are the only library that holds the item, or that we are one of a very few institutions holding it. In these cases, the item may be returned to the Subject Specialist to verify withdrawal.

Materials that are held in more than one location warrant additional consideration (e.g. items that are held in Science and Leyburn or the stacks and Special Collections, etc.).

Regular communication to the appropriate faculty and/or department regarding the status of a weeding project is great public relations for the Library and is highly encouraged.