RIGHTSIZING THE ACADEMIC LIBRARY COLLECTION

SECOND EDITION

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Preface

Suzanne M. Ward, the author of the first edition of this book, identified challenges and proposed solutions to shaping physical collections for today's academic library. She addressed a common conundrum that nearly all academic institutions face: in order to meet the changing needs of users and the parent institution, they must dramatically reduce the size and footprint of physical collections acquired over decades or centuries, and they often do so in the span of months.

The first edition of *Rightsizing the Academic Library Collection* resonated with me because my own institution faced many of the circumstances Ward described. Our collections have grown in both size and diversity of formats over time, until finally all our remote storage facilities—a patchwork of purpose-built and annex facilities—are nearly full, and the majority of open-stack areas in our campus libraries exceed standards for capacity. At the same time, we continue to undertake projects to remodel and renovate some library spaces on campus, while closing others. These changes reflect both reduced budgets and changes in user needs for increased space for teaching, student collaboration, greater access to technology and student support services, special collections storage, exhibits, and more. Regardless of the rationale behind these projects, each one has necessitated a further reduction or consolidation of our print collections to free up space for other uses. At the same time, we recognize that we have a responsibility to care for the most at-risk content in our collection as part of national preservation efforts. Like so many of our peers, we must continue to balance the stewardship of our physical spaces with the stewardship of our collections.

The topics covered by Ward in her first edition continue to be relevant, and as academic libraries face growing pressure to reduce budgets and reclaim the space traditionally held by print collections, her call to action for libraries to adopt a rightsizing approach to managing print collections has grown only

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more urgent. Since the first edition was published in 2015, there have been many significant national developments that support both individual institutions and consortia in their efforts to rightsize their collections. In the span of just five years, regional and national shared print infrastructures have grown by leaps and bounds. In 2015 a group of academic libraries launched the Eastern Academic Scholars' Trust (EAST), a shared print program for scholarly print materials; as of this writing it had 79 member institutions that had committed over 6 million volumes for retention. In 2016, the HathiTrust Digital Library formed a Shared Print Program to serve as a backup print archive; today its members have committed to retain 18.4 million monograph volumes, representing 5.6 million individual titles held in that digital repository. Not only have shared print programs grown exponentially in both number and scale in recent years, but there have also been significant advances toward national coordination among these programs. In 2020 the Partnership for Shared Book Collections, a federation of shared print monograph programs in the United States and Canada, was launched. Its mission, as stated on the program website, is to coordinate collaboration among shared print programs to "support cost-effective retention and access to shared print monograph collections." One of the goals of the program is to identify common work that can be done collectively to support preservation and scholarship while also saving time, space, and money for its members. Through initiatives such as this, it is becoming increasingly feasible for institutions to access the decision-making tools and resources needed to rightsize their collections as part of a network.

This second edition reflects the continuing growth of shared print programs and the increasing urgency to preserve at-risk titles as libraries continue to reduce their physical collections. Chapter 1 ("Background") includes an expanded discussion of recent perspectives on rightsizing in the content of weeding and retaining collections, the relationship between libraries and the numerous stakeholders in a rightsizing project, and the current environment in which academic libraries manage their physical collections. Chapter 3 ("Rightsizing Policies and Strategies") addresses rightsizing policy development and the role of shared print programs as a rightsizing strategy. It also provides guidance on evaluating the support tools for collection decisions.

Chapter 5 ("The Future of Rightsizing") forecasts trends for rightsizing in this complex and quickly changing landscape. *Rightsizing the Academic Library Collection* is intended to offer practical guidance throughout all phases of developing rightsizing programs and implementing projects; therefore chapter 4 ("Project Management") has been updated to focus on four distinct stages of managing rightsizing projects.

There have been other changes since the publication of the first edition that will have a wide-reaching impact on academic libraries. During the completion of the second edition in March 2020, academic libraries began closing their facilities to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and quickly began developing other means—from increased scanning to curbside pickup—to get otherwise

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unavailable content to users. The scale and nature of the changes taking place as a result of the coronavirus pandemic will not be fully understood for some time, but it is already clear that libraries must address the access needs for print-only content in a post-COVID-19 world.

As we look to the future of academic libraries, with numerous challenges, opportunities, and unknowns, one thing is clear: our futures are interdependent. If we are to leverage the lessons of our present time to strategically and intentionally create new and innovative collections, we cannot do it alone. If we move forward, we move forward together.

—MARY E. MILLER

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Introduction

In 1956, McGaw wrote that the librarians of his day "might conclude that we have plenty of time before we are faced with the problem of maximum size. But eventually that day will come" (McGaw 1956, 269). That day is now here. The stacks in many academic libraries have been bursting at the seams for years. The possibility of adding new buildings or storage facilities is becoming increasingly unlikely for many institutions. Many academic administrators are taking a close look at the space on central campuses and concluding that increasingly deserted stacks space would be ideal, if cleared out, for a variety of other purposes.

We encounter the term *sustainability* frequently in various aspects of our lives. In academic libraries, we know that many of our activities are not indefinitely sustainable if based on traditional models of funding, staffing, and space. One of these activities—building and maintaining local physical collections of a depth and breadth sufficient to support not only current scholars but also future ones—is no longer sustainable for even the largest research libraries. Academic librarians are continuously developing new visions about their libraries' functions and services. One aspect of implementing that new vision requires making tough decisions about *whether*, as opposed to *how,* to retain large portions of their physical collections.

Across the country, academic libraries of all sizes are weeding, or withdrawing, journals and, increasingly, monographs from their print collections to recover space for a variety of reasons. The realities of space, resources, and the demand for new services are forcing even the largest and most well-funded academic libraries to acknowledge that they cannot, in fact, keep everything. They must make irreversible decisions about discarding unprecedented amounts of materials accumulated over the past century. At the same time, relatively little is known about the long-term impact of current withdrawal practices on the future quality of legacy print collections, particularly

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for monographs. There is a significant risk that, once we've all weeded our collections individually and with little or no coordination, we're left with a de facto national collection built on whatever remains.

The concept of rightsizing is presented here as an approach to counteract that bleak future, while simultaneously enabling libraries to thoughtfully draw down their print collections. This book suggests the term *rightsizing* to describe the overarching plan for shaping a library's physical collection into one that meets its users' needs. Although many libraries face the need for an immediate, large-scale, retroactive print retention project, rightsizing is much more than just a massive weeding effort. Rightsizing is the comprehensive suite of ongoing and routine evaluation activities that keep a collection fresh and relevant. While withdrawing collections is a key component, rightsizing is much more than a massive weeding effort. It is a holistic, data-informed approach to responsibly managing physical collections that allows libraries to thoughtfully determine not only what must be withdrawn, but also what should be retained. Rightsizing, at its core, is a method for prioritizing which content libraries should keep, including titles of local and regional significance, and titles that are held by very few other institutions. It usually involves an awareness of regional and consortial partners' needs to conduct these same activities, and it employs a variety of collaborative approaches for collectively meeting users' needs for less-used material. Rightsizing utilizes data decision tools to create candidate lists for withdrawal and retention that take into account many variables, including local criteria and the holdings in other institutions and trusted digital repositories.

Rightsizing does not automatically imply crisis management, although libraries that have not undertaken substantial weeding projects recently may find themselves in crisis situations. It is also not a one-time fix. Rightsizing is an ongoing process that maintains a collection's optimal physical size by balancing such factors as:

- building current collections that have a high potential for use in the short and medium term
- choosing electronic resources over print ones for most new acquisitions
- identifying local collections of distinction
- removing low-use titles that are widely held by other institutions
- participating in shared print programs to reduce the number of lesser-used titles held in a consortium or region, while retaining enough working copies to meet occasional demand
- withdrawing titles in physical formats that duplicate user-preferred, stable electronic access to the same material

When faced with planning and implementing such a large project, sometimes under less-than-ideal circumstances, it is easy to focus on the mechanics of removing vast quantities of material while perhaps losing sight of the overarching goals of rightsizing: shaping and presenting library collections and

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spaces in the best possible way to improve the user experience and ensuring that users have timely and ongoing access to content, regardless of its format or location.

Many academic libraries face enormous rightsizing projects for a couple of reasons. From a national perspective, we now understand that collections are hugely redundant, and large portions go unused. Collections were built on a "just-in-case" basis over the course of centuries. In previous eras, when items needed to be close at hand and out-of-print titles were difficult and expensive to acquire, this was the best strategy to ensure access. This strategy is no longer sustainable, but more importantly, it no longer serves the best interests of most academic library users. Today, collections—both print and digital—are only one component of a vast array of services academic libraries now provide, ranging from digital humanities to research support, data repositories and data research services, publishing services, performance and creative spaces, and much more.

Another major reason why so many academic libraries must now rightsize on a large scale is that, for decades, many of them deferred routine periodic analysis and strategic withdrawals; alternatively, some libraries built extensions and storage facilities and filled them with low-use material that is widely duplicated elsewhere. One of the positive aspects of deferring this collection maintenance, however, is that both technology and national infrastructure are finally advancing to a point that libraries can more easily make decisions about whether to retain or withdraw large portions of their collections while ensuring that their users will still be able to get hold of the materials they need. No longer must each individual library weed in a vacuum, nor must staff physically handle every single piece during the decision-making process. Today librarians can easily compare local holdings across their consortium, region, country, and throughout the world to make data-driven batch decisions that are based not just on local circulation figures, but also on factors such as the relative scarcity of some print titles, the holdings of specific peer or partner libraries, full-text availability from a stable vendor, and many other considerations. As libraries gain confidence in the growing national shared print and digital collections that serve as backups, various groups are now undertaking joint book rightsizing projects, the better to ensure the retention of an adequate number of working copies within the membership. The majority of decisions can be made based on the results of carefully crafted withdrawal and retention candidate lists, rather than from volume-by-volume inspection in the stacks.

Librarians well understand that some of today's outdated material will form tomorrow's foundation for historical scholarship. The problem, of course, lies in predicting which specific titles will form that foundation. As Shirky points out, "People are good at guessing what will be important in the future, but we are terrible at guessing what won't be" (Bustillos 2018). The point is that not every library need maintain all the material, or even a

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significant portion of it, against the day when someone might need it. The vast majority of titles are widely duplicated in other libraries and repositories; so as long as librarians act responsibly to ensure that enough print copies exist across a region for future resource-sharing, they can withdraw their own library's unused copies with a clear conscience.

This book advocates establishing an overarching vision for rightsizing a library's physical collection and helps librarians develop a systematic, rules-based approach for evaluating that collection and making decisions about what to retain and what to withdraw. However, the book will also assist library professionals faced with sudden and externally imposed deadlines for reducing their collection's physical footprint. Although the focus is on evaluating and acting on the entire collection, or at least large portions of it, librarians may find the suggested methods helpful even if they only want to work with a small subset of the collection.

Academic libraries come in many types and sizes; a situation or best practice at a small private liberal arts college library may not even apply in a medical library at a large research university. But there are also many similarities, and the challenge of not having enough space to house the physical collection, either because the library's space for collections is shrinking, the collection is expanding, or both, is a problem that most academic libraries face today. Readers can easily adapt many of the actions suggested in this book to meet their own local needs.

This book also offers practical advice on possible approaches to these tasks. It will explore ways to minimize the need for title-by-title reviews by embracing batch-processing methods whenever possible. Some tasks are relatively easy to manage in-house; others require cooperation with peers, and some might best be undertaken in partnership with a consultant. This book emphasizes the benefits of creating an overall plan for proactive physical collection downsizing; building internal consensus; encouraging buy-in from constituents like university administrators and teaching faculty; project management; options for the disposal of deselected material; and collaborating with other institutions. It reminds the reader that although a large, initial rightsizing project can meet today's pressing needs, rightsizing is also a routine process that should take place at regular intervals in the future.

Some redundancy has been built into this book, based on the expectation that some readers may focus only on sections that are relevant to their immediate needs. For example, in several places the book mentions the importance of determining if the library has *perpetual* access (not just access) to electronic content before identifying print titles as withdrawal candidates. However, this redundancy is not extensive and should not distract readers who work their way through the book from the beginning.

This book tries to separate the discussions of books and journals. These are two very different types of material, and rightsizing decisions about them involve different factors and considerations. In addition, many libraries

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handle these formats separately rather than simultaneously when they rightsize. However, this separation is not always possible. The discussion of collaborative print options covers joint storage facilities and distributed retention plans, and because both books and journals may be included in either of these two options, both are discussed together.

With regard to support tools for making collection decisions, this edition does include brief references to specific services, products, and organizations. These instances provide examples that were current at the time of publication; they do not constitute endorsements.

The book is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 ("Background") surveys the larger academic environment today and examines how the changing priorities of colleges and universities are affecting academic libraries and, more specifically, their collections. The chapter then explains what rightsizing is, why institutions choose to rightsize their collections, the arguments for and against the practice, and who the stakeholders are in rightsizing. Chapter 2 ("Traditional Solutions for Deselecting Collections") provides an overview of conventional methods for reducing the size of collections in library buildings. Chapter 3 ("Rightsizing Policies and Strategies") focuses on system-wide policy and strategy development, while chapter 4 ("Project Management") includes an overview of the four distinct phases of managing a rightsizing project. Chapter 5 ("The Future of Rightsizing") looks at current and likely trends for local and consortial collection management and rightsizing going forward.

The interrelated topics of print withdrawal, print retention, use studies, storage facilities, and collaborative collection management ventures all have long histories and extensive literatures. This book does not take an exhaustive look into the past, but quotes from selected articles to give readers a glimpse of how academic librarians have approached the continuous challenge of crowded shelves over the past hundred years. Understanding the roots and context of this challenge helps us appreciate how the problem of large no- and low-use academic collections developed over time, and how we can apply modern solutions to shape collections that our users need today and tomorrow.

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1
Background

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CHALLENGES FACING COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Before discussing the current state of academic libraries and their collections, it is useful to understand the larger academic environment and the current and changing states of those libraries' parent institutions.

Academia is undergoing constant transformational change. The number of simultaneously occurring influences, expectations, requirements, and opportunities is staggering. Some factors are new, while others have increased in importance. They include, in no particular order:

- accountability to students, parents, donors, funding agencies, and taxpayers
- collaborations with international counterparts
- collaborations with business
- distance learning
- instructional redesign
- attracting and retaining high-caliber students
- employers' expectations that graduates demonstrate certain skills
- students' need to balance study, work, and leisure

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- tuition costs and financial aid
- practical work experience or internships
- commitment to student success, including reasonable time to graduation
- special assistance for student groups (e.g., first-generation college attendees)
- international students
- nontraditional and returning students
- student mental health
- increased emphasis on interdisciplinary scholarship
- faculty research and scholarship
- data management and privacy
- alumni relations
- campus computing (campus technology and access for students and faculty)
- state-of-the-art classrooms and laboratories
- compliance with state and federal laws
- equity, diversity, and inclusion
- international campuses
- attracting and retaining high-performing faculty
- post-graduation support
- placement services and preparing students for the workforce
- climate change and sustainability; reducing environmental impact on campus
- budget cuts

College and university administrators must respond to and, in some cases, drive the many changes resulting from these internal and external forces. As higher education institutions compete to attract and retain the best students, they must demonstrate an ongoing commitment to quality education through much more than just social media and marketing campaigns. As the costs of higher education continue to rise, prospective students and their parents must shop for the best value and assess everything from the faculty-student ratio to institutional reputation, to graduation and job placement rates, to recreational facilities and other services. At the same time, many public and even private colleges and universities are experiencing budget cuts and must find ways to deliver the same high-quality educational and cultural experience with fewer financial resources.

Partly as a result of all these changes, academic institutions value assessment more than ever. Assessment has always been a part of academic life, from various kinds of rankings to periodic visits from accreditation organizations, but today many colleges and universities consider assessment a key component in achieving their teaching and learning missions. Assessment offices are now common on most college campuses, and their visibility and significance continue to grow as higher education institutions strive to embrace

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a "culture of assessment." Their staff members are devoted to measuring student learning outcomes, developing workshops, assessing resources, conducting surveys, reporting program strengths and weaknesses, and most of all, suggesting and overseeing the implementation of changes to strengthen the institution.

ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: THEN AND NOW

How do the changing environment and priorities of parent institutions affect academic libraries? One important element is the expectation that all academic units have strategic plans that align with those of the central administration, and that those plans include assessment criteria. Libraries need to prove not only that their services benefit the institution's students and faculty, but also that these services are an integral part of student and faculty success. For decades, librarians' experiences with assessment involved reporting statistics, such as the number of classroom visits, the number of circulated items, the number of reference questions, and, of course, the number of volumes. In an environment with increasing accountability and diminishing resources, however, universities now require departments and programs to produce qualitative—and not just quantitative—measures of effectiveness that demonstrate their contributions to student success and faculty productivity.

Academic librarians have long grappled with the issues of collection size, quality versus quantity, and maintaining a core collection. In previous eras, libraries provided access to content by acquiring and owning print copies of titles to allow immediate access to users. This had several consequences. First, collections were assembled on a "just-in-case" basis; that is, materials were purchased just in case they might be used, though they might never be used very often. Second, the bulk of a library facility was occupied by shelving space for books and journals. Third, the size of the collection was strongly associated with the strength, or quality, of the collection—the larger the local collection, the better it could meet the needs of local faculty and researchers. As a result, for many institutions, the number of volumes they held conveyed the concept of value or prestige; having more volumes than the college library in the next city meant that one's own institution was somehow superior. Colwell described the desire to make one's own college better than others in the state or region as one based on "institutional competition, institutional pride, and institutional jealousy" (Colwell 1949, 197). The size of library collections has been a time-honored measurement of an institution's worth and value, encouraged by all kinds of comparative rankings and endorsed by library professional organizations.

Not everyone subscribed to the concept that bigger libraries were better libraries, however. At a 1949 symposium called "The Optimum Size of Libraries," Gosnell pointed out that "size is better defined in terms of the objectives

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of the library and the demands on it," and he boiled the issue down to one sentence: "You keep the ones [books] they use, buy more, and throw out what is not used" (Gosnell 1950, 137). Trueswell explored this theme further when he wrote in 1976 that "in the no-growth collection new books must still be added, but little-used books will be removed at a comparable rate" (Trueswell 1976, 102). Some even argued that size actually diminishes a collection's value; Gosnell wrote about obsolete books obscuring the good books (Gosnell 1950, 138). More recently, Marcum noted that "it is the use of the books, not their numbers, that gives evidence of meeting the needs of our stakeholders," in an article that equated unused books with a business's "idle inventory" (Marcum 2008, 15).

Nor does increased collection size necessarily translate into increased percentages of collection use. Academic libraries of all sizes contain large percentages of unused material. Traditionally, the very largest research institutions have acquired titles to build as complete a collection as possible in many subject areas, knowing that some titles might not be used frequently. In general, however, librarians build collections to meet their users' anticipated needs. McCarthy described "demand . . . as a two-pronged thing, i.e., perceived long term demand and actual immediate needs" (McCarthy 2007, 350). Materials acquired on a just-in-case basis to meet long-term demand may never be used, may be used a few times when relatively new, may be heavily used early in their shelf life, or may enjoy steady use over time. The problem is that it is nearly impossible to predict in advance into which of these categories a particular title will fall. In addition, some items that fill current needs, such as test preparation manuals and annual directories, may by definition have very short active shelf lives. Over time, the accumulation of thousands of items each year resulted in book stacks filled with low- and no-use titles interspersed with those relatively few titles that patrons actually use frequently.

Because their space options are often more limited, many librarians at small- and medium-sized colleges have become accustomed to the idea of maintaining a collection at a certain fixed size. But librarians in larger academic libraries, particularly at research institutions, have often been much slower to embrace this philosophy. They have worked, sometimes for decades, in an environment that prioritized building massive collections not only for current use, but also for future scholarship. They embraced, or at least concurred with, "the notion that an academic library must be large in order to be good" (Trueswell 1976, 73).

Today all academic libraries, regardless of size, must redefine the relationships between physical collections and space. In the Council on Library and Information Resources report *Library as Place: Rethinking Roles, Rethinking Space* (2005), Freeman described the enormous shift taking place:

> Academic libraries in the United States and abroad have generally been designed first and foremost as places to collect, access, and

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> preserve print collections. . . . Given this longstanding practice, it is no surprise that the traditional library we inherit today is not the library of the future. To meet today's academic needs as well as those in the future, the library must reflect the values, mission, and goals of the institution of which it is a part, while also accommodating myriad new information and learning technologies and the ways we access and use them. (Bennett et al. 2005, 1–2)

Schneider characterized this with greater urgency, stating that "the most significant infrastructure issue faced by the library facility is that the bulk of the space is occupied by very-low-use materials . . . the only way our library can maintain relevance is to reclaim the bulk of this space for 21st-century services," including spaces for instruction, performances, exhibitions, collaboration, and technology (Schneider 2010).

How do collections fulfill the library's mission? In the past, a library's mission included collecting material that supported the parent institution's curricular and research needs, and offering services, such as reference and instruction, that promoted the use of that collection to fill users' information needs. If rewritten today, the mission statement might be changed to *providing access to* material that supports the parent institution's curricular and research needs. Dempsey describes this evolution as a shift away from the *owned collection* toward the *facilitated collection* (Dempsey 2016). The facilitated collection consists of a coordinated mix of local, external, and collaborative services that are assembled around user needs. Through the facilitated collection, libraries can meet research and learning needs in the best ways available, and not just by assembling material locally. Today, the total collection need not reside on campus; for most libraries, the collections to which their users have access exist in many places besides the local shelves. A growing part of it now exists digitally (and in the case of e-book patron-driven acquisitions plans, remains unpurchased until the moment of use), in off-site storage facilities, in consortial or regional cooperative storage facilities, or geographically close enough to allow resource-sharing within a reasonable amount of time.

This increased range of access means that the library can withdraw older or less-used materials as long as it can provide rapid access on those relatively few occasions when the materials are needed, and thus focus its resources on building and maintaining a smaller local core of more frequently consulted material. Librarians may decide to keep and maintain a portion of the legacy print collection, but they may retain only those items that support a few specialized collections of distinction that define their own institution, rather than struggle to maintain a comprehensive historical record in many subjects, especially when the material largely duplicates titles held in similar institutions across a state, region, or country. This means that library professionals can develop plans to reduce their physical collections.

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WEEDING: A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME

Library professionals have developed many terms for the process of identifying and removing material that is no longer needed. The word most commonly used for this is *weeding*. Sometimes *weeding* is used to mean identifying material to send to a storage facility; at other times it means removing material permanently. The word *weeding* has a negative connotation from its use in gardening and agriculture, where it indicates an unwanted, or even downright harmful, plant. The gardening analogy is useful, though, because it reminds us that it's hard to see or appreciate the useful items (lovely blooms) if the shelves (flower beds) are choked with undesirable ones (weeds). Segal wrote that "weeding implies ridding an area of the undesirable, even infectious" (Segal 1986, 25). The term *pruning* suggests a similar concept: thinning part of a plant and removing superfluous branches so that the bush or tree may thrive.

Library professionals have tried many other terms to avoid the word *weed* and its negative connotation. A century ago, an anonymous no-nonsense author entitled their article "Discarding Useless Material" (1911). Some librarians have tried the term *retirement* (Ash 1963; Stueart 1985). A British author wrote about *obsolete stock* (Seymour 1972a). An Australian used the term *stock stabilization* (Taylor 1976, 28). *Stack thinning* has been used (Trueswell 1965). Williams called it *stock relegation* (Williams 1988). *Shelf-load reduction* has been used (Metz and Gray 2005). Tongue in cheek, Manley suggested *library collection refreshment program* (Manley 2014, 80). A few library professionals have been inspired to use terms such as *tidying up*, in reference to Mari Kondo's bestselling book, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing* (Spomer, Estelle-Holmer, and Limpitlaw 2018). The phrase *collection draw-down* has been used to describe the widespread withdrawal of print materials across library systems (Schonfeld and Housewright 2009, 18).

In recent years, the terms *withdrawal* and *deselection* have been more frequently used (and they will be used in this book). Johnson defines *weeding* as "removing materials from the active collection for withdrawal or transfer," whereas *withdrawal* refers to the process of "permanently getting rid of materials and removing the descriptive records from the catalog" (Johnson 2018, 197). The word *deselection* can refer to the process of identifying materials for withdrawal or identifying serial subscriptions for cancellation, and it implies the thoughtful application of criteria to choose which items will leave the collection (Cooper and Norris 2007; Thomas and Shouse 2012; Ward and Aagard 2008).

Although the term *weeding* does not adequately describe the activities that comprise a rightsizing approach to managing physical collections, let's review some of the past discussion on this topic.

In 1976, Trueswell described weeding as a process whereby librarians make retention decisions by examining books and considering other factors

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such as circulation, age, subject area, and so on. He suggested that the results would be of "questionable value," but that "weeding decisions made by faculty experts are usually even less reliable. . . . Subject expertise counts for very little when the central problem is to predict [the] mass behavior of a very large population of library users" (Trueswell 1976, 79–80).

In 1979, Bulick and his colleagues identified two main types of weeding: scientific and nonscientific. The nonscientific method requires experts to decide which items may have sufficient future value to justify keeping them; these decisions are subjective. The scientific approach involves developing models based on "tangible evidence" such as publication dates or circulation history, and then automating the retention decisions based on the model; these decisions are objective (Bulick, Sabor, and Flynn 1979, 48). Stueart emphasized the importance of "decisions [that] are based on facts and not simply on fancies or hunches" (Stueart 1985, 48). Similarly, Manley advised librarians not to employ "a random approach [and to] be systematic to avoid being accused of being arbitrary" (Manley 2014, 80).

Stueart considered the process to be linear:

> On the one hand, one must evaluate materials before purchasing them, and, on the other hand, one must re-evaluate their usefulness to the collection and then remove them, if they have lost their value. This removal requires judgment just as selection does and involves added pressures that the initial purchase did not. (Stueart 1985, 49)

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Gosnell suggested that "weeding must be posited on accessibility to a central source that does keep the material that everybody else weeds" (Gosnell 1950, 138). In 1950, it was difficult to determine that another library would maintain the specific titles that one's own library weeded. It is much easier today through tools, which are discussed in later chapters.

Today most librarians would agree that the objective method offers the best approach to rightsizing collections that may not have been seriously evaluated for decades and which contain a million or more items. It is simply not feasible to make item-by-item decisions, especially because while doing so, one must also spend time reviewing thousands of items that obviously should be retained. Now it is possible to build sophisticated withdrawal candidate models that not only weigh many more variables (Bulick's "tangible evidence") than was possible even a few years ago, but also automatically exclude titles that the library should keep (Bulick, Sabor, and Flynn 1979, 48).

Despite having more sophisticated tools for analysis today, many of the criteria to consider are still the same as they have been in the past. Two criteria that are almost always considered for books are the work's circulation history and its publication date. Because most academic libraries have used automated circulation systems for at least several decades, compiling circulation data is

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usually possible. It is important to know how many years of data are available (it will usually date from the installation of the system). Are there any reasons to doubt the accuracy of the data, and if so, what adjustments should be made to compensate for this? Does the system capture browsing or in-house activity for the same time period, and if so, will the data compilation incorporate it? Some older studies examined the amount of time between circulations to make use calculations; although this activity was possible when researchers could examine date-due stamps on books' circulation slips, this factor is now impossible to calculate from automated circulation systems that are designed to purge details once users return books. Librarians can now query their circulation systems to learn the total number of circulations and browses within a particular date range for a particular book, and also the date of last circulation, but interim details are not available. Increasingly, libraries are also incorporating criteria that address Gosnell's suggestion that local weeding decisions should reflect the long-term availability of copies held elsewhere.

WHAT IS RIGHTSIZING?

So why use the term *rightsizing* instead of one of the other words or phrases used in the past? It is not just another term to replace *weeding*. Rightsizing implies that librarians have developed a holistic approach for shaping their libraries into the optimal size to serve their constituents, not only with the right mix of materials, in terms of both content and format, but also with the right set of services to obtain needed information quickly and efficiently if it is not available on-site.

Rightsizing is not the ruthless culling of a library collection, nor is it just the tentative and apologetic removal of "safe" material like old editions of textbooks and superseded reference works. Rightsizing is a strategic, thoughtful, balanced, and planned process whereby librarians shape the collection by taking into account factors such as disciplinary differences; the impact of electronic resources on study, teaching, and research; the local institution's program strengths; previous use based on circulation statistics; and the availability of backup regional print copies for resource-sharing. Rightsizing is determined by an individual institution's mission, scope, priorities, and responsibilities; a "rightsized" approach for one institution might be too conservative or too aggressive for another.

While rightsizing does, generally, result in the reduction of browsable print collections through the intentional application of criteria and use of analysis, the term *rightsizing* encompasses much more than this. Through the same thoughtful processes used for the removal of collections, the library may identify materials which are rare that it wishes to physically preserve, digitize, and/or transfer to special collections. The library may also identify groups of materials that it wishes to commit to retain, either as part of a shared print

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program or on its own. The term *print retention* is frequently used in relation to collection weeding, or withdrawal; rather than emphasizing the material leaving the shelves, it focuses on the items chosen to remain. A *print retention commitment* implies both a formal decision to retain a title and a declaration of that commitment, either on the catalog record or in a print registry. The phrase *print archiving* is commonly used to describe a group of libraries' efforts to identify a certain low number of copies of works that will be committed to be retained in light storage (circulating) or dark storage (noncirculating preservation copies) on behalf of a group, often so that other members can then discard their own low-use copies if desired; this process often refers to runs of print journal titles for which publishers have issued electronic backfiles (Bird and Ashoughian 2012).

The rightsizing approach suggests intentionality throughout the collection management process—that the same care used in the initial process of selecting materials should be used for other phases of the collection management processes throughout the "life" of an item. In other words, although many libraries face the necessity of an immediate, large-scale, retroactive print retention project, rightsizing is much more than just a massive weeding effort. It is a holistic, data-informed approach to responsibly managing physical collections that allows libraries to thoughtfully determine not only what must be withdrawn, but also what should be retained, such as titles of local and regional significance, and titles that are held by very few other institutions.

REASONS FOR RIGHTSIZING

The reasons why libraries rightsize their collections are many, complex, and often interrelated. Space is an obvious reason; any growing physical collection cannot continue to occupy the same finite space indefinitely. Coupled with this is the need to use library space differently, or pressure to meet other campus priorities by finding space for new or expanding programs and services. Large libraries that in the past seldom discarded anything have found that over time their collections have grown enormously, and the cost of maintaining low-use material has risen out of proportion to the utility of having it available on-site or nearby, especially when much of this material is now available in digital equivalents. Maintaining no- and low-use material also represents real opportunity costs: in what other ways might the library have spent those maintenance funds for better-used and more appreciated programs, services, and materials? Even when comparing the cost of storing collections on-site versus remote storage, there are significant costs associated with keeping low- or no-use materials on browsable shelving; in 2010, Courant and Nielson calculated that it cost nearly five times as much to maintain a book in an open-stack library as it did in a remote, high-density storage facility (Courant and Nielson 2010).

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Obsolescence is another major reason. The information in some books eventually goes out of date, although at different rates for different disciplines. Farber worried that for "many students, the mere fact that their library has a particular title in its collection means that the book is a valid work of scholarship" if they have not yet learned to evaluate the sources they use (Farber 1998, 1).

Some parts of a library collection are now in less desirable formats, such as microform, and many other items are outdated, physically deteriorated, duplicated in newer and preferred formats, or unused because of program changes or other reasons due to lack of local academic interest. Users increasingly prefer (or will at least use) electronic resources, which provide 24/7 access when visiting the library can range from inconvenient to impossible, as is the case with growing numbers of distance learners.

A further concern is that as collections grow and age, users will find it increasingly difficult to identify and locate relevant material on crowded shelves. "Removing low use materials should increase the user success rate, decrease user frustration in search time and effort, and facilitate stacks maintenance" (Stueart 1985, 53). One drawback of a physical collection is that an item physically present on the shelves is more likely to be "rarely borrowed rather than one which is regularly borrowed, and there is danger that the reader, and perhaps especially the undergraduate, will come to regard the collection as comprising largely dead material which will induce in him a lack of confidence in the library stock, eventually hindering his discovery of live material" (Taylor 1976, 28). Some studies have shown that books located on the uppermost and lowermost shelves are used less frequently than books shelved at more easily accessible levels. Circulation staff must spend more time shifting books to try to make more room. Crowded stacks may be prone to shelving errors, thus requiring more staff hours for shelf-reading.

Thomas and Shouse identified two traditional reasons and two newer ones for withdrawing collections. Traditionally, libraries weeded to create space for new material and to create "a more usable, up-to-date, and attractive collection." The authors added two new reasons: "the changing perception of libraries from book warehouses to service points, and the . . . radical shift from print use to electronic use of scholarly content" (Thomas and Shouse 2012, 92).

While recovering space, removing unpopular formats, and avoiding further building costs are all important reasons to rightsize a collection, at the heart of any rightsizing project stands the core value that the effort is being undertaken to improve the user experience. Libraries can facilitate browsing by students and faculty and increase the relevance of the existing collection to current curricular needs by removing dated or irrelevant titles from open shelves. Trueswell expressed this idea in 1965 when he wrote that "the criteria for stack thinning should be designed to help the library satisfy the requirements of the users of the library" (Trueswell 1965, 22). Rightsizing projects should ideally be undertaken in the same user-centric spirit as collection

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development: as a complement to the activity of building the collection to meet user needs, rightsizing shapes the collection to help users find relevant, up-to-date material quickly and easily, and to provide access to publications that users prefer in paper format.

A growing number of libraries also view contributing to the *collective collection* as a key component of user-centered rightsizing activities. Collective collections, also known as shared print programs, involve mostly academic or research libraries collaborating to retain, develop, and provide access to their physical collections (Crist and Stambaugh 2014, 15). By consolidating the retention of little-used items across multiple institutions, libraries can protect the scholarly record while reclaiming library space and reducing the costs of maintaining duplicate titles. In 2014 the OCLC issued *Right-Scaling Stewardship: A Multi-Scale Perspective on Cooperative Print Management,* a report that looked at the issue both from the perspective of one of the member libraries and from the perspective of the entire consortium (Malpas and Lavoie 2014). The authors stated that shared print strategies not only focus on reducing redundancy among member libraries, but can also identify both local and group strengths. While the print book collection at one library, the Ohio State University Library, duplicated much of the other consortial members' collections, ranging between 31 and 59 percent, they also found that each local collection had a significant element of rare titles that were not widely held by other consortial partners. They noted that "uniqueness is rare, but rareness is common." The report concluded that "managing, providing access to, and preserving the collective print book resource must be a shared responsibility, because no single institutional collection (or even group-scale resource) has a reasonable approximation of the complete corpus of material, either overall or in any particular subject area" (Malpas and Lavoie 2014, 46).

When rightsizing, a single library should keep titles that are rare or scarce—that is, when within a prescribed set of institutions, only a few copies remain—even if local patrons no longer use them. Not only will these titles be maintained for the scholarly community in general, but they will also form at least part of the library's contribution to future consortial cooperative print-management efforts. Research suggests that 75 percent or more of the print books in any given North American region are held by five or fewer libraries in that region, meaning that scarcity is fairly common (Lavoie, Malpas, and Shipengrover 2012). But a large question concerns the number of print copies that should be retained and where they should be located. While undertaking a rightsizing project, a common concern that Wesleyan University library staff heard was: "Yes, the books being considered for withdrawal are held by at least 30 other libraries in the United States—for now. But what if some or all of those libraries decide to withdraw their copies?" (Wesweeding 2014). By participating in formal shared print programs with a Memorandum of Agreement that copies will not be withdrawn without consultation with other members, libraries can begin to address this type of concern.

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