Weeding the Reference Collection : Updating and Upgrading of the University of Malaya Reference Collection at the Main Library

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Abstract
The reference collection at the University of Malaya Library was reviewed intensely for the first time since its inception. It was a major task to review the entire print reference collection which amounted to over 7,000 titles. About RM300,000.00 was allocated for this purpose and a taskforce was setup to update and upgrade the reference collection during the semester break of the 2008/2009 academic session. The collection now consists of materials published in year 2000 and above. However, books of high value despite the age have been retained. The updated reference collection has been relocated to another floor to give it a new appealing image. The planning, implementation and the criteria used in this project are described.

Abstrak

Koleksi rujukan di Universiti Malaya dikaji semula secara intensif buat kali pertama sejak penubuhannya. Ia merupakan tugas berat dalam membuat semakan semula keseluruhan koleksi rujukan bercetak yang berjumlah 7,000 judul. Satu pasukan petugas telah ditubuhkan pada cuti semester sesi akademik 2008/2009. Dengan peruntukan kira-kira RM300,000.00 untuk tujuan mengemaskini dan meningkatkan koleksi rujukan. Kini, koleksi tersebut terdiri daripada bahan-bahan yang diterbitkan dalam tahun 2000 dan ke atas. Bagaimanapun, buku-buku lama yang masih bernilai tinggi tetap dikekalkan. Koleksi rujukan yang telah dikemaskini ditempatkan semula di aras lain untuk memberi imej baru. Artikel ini membincangkan mengenai perancangan, pelaksanaan dan kriteria yang digunakan dalam menjayakan projek ini.

Introduction

There is undoubtedly a positive correlation between a comfortable physical environment and infrastructure of a library with the physical visits by the library users. The University of Malaya Library realized from various sources that the reference collection had outgrown not only the shelving space but also its usefulness to patrons. The annual budget did not really provide for the development of the collection unless and until there was a request from the faculty. Studies have shown that reference materials are usually unused unless a bibliographic instruction assignment required it (*Sendi, 1996*). Building up the collection was one of the least priority areas as librarians became aware that online reference sources mainly dictionaries and thesaurus were becoming increasingly available free online. Choice Reviews Online in its April 2010 issue reported that the number of print reference titles reviewed has been declining over the years as more reference works are being published in electronic format.

Background Information

The Reference Collection was located at the 2nd Floor of the Main Library building. Rows of shelves covered the walls resembling a rectangle with one side open and measuring approximately 100' x 36' x 100'. Reading chairs and tables were placed in the centre of that space. The collection was built on the personal expertise of librarians and the faculty . Any form of written collection development policy pertaining to this collection was not to be found. There was only anecdotal evidence on the usefulness of materials for an academic library.

The characteristics of the Reference Collection prior to 2008 were as follows :

- 7,108 multilingual titles (English, Malay, French, Sanskrit, Korean, Japanese, etc)
- Many old, outdated titles
- Both old and new editions of Encyclopedias
- Some no longer relevant or important due to the curriculum changes in teaching and learning
- Research materials which are no longer current
- Bibliographies and listings which are not necessary due to technological advancement

Among the reasons which surfaced for the dire need to update / upgrade the reference collection were :

- The topic of outdated reference collection was frequently brought up at the faculty-library meetings
- Lecturers were informed by students about the old, outdated reference collection who in turn reported informally to the library
- Floor space was required to house the collection brought in with the closure of the Library of Foundation Studies in Sciences

Procedures

1. The entire reference collection was printed out using the library system. It was arranged by Call Number, Title, Publisher and Year of Publication. All titles published in year 2000 and after were removed from the shelves and kept aside to be shelved in the new area allocated. This amounted to less than 5% of the collection.
2. The taskforce had to decide the procedure to weed out publications prior to year 2000 and to retain old titles which are still of immense value to the library and users.
3. Books weeded out were sent to the Cataloguing Division to be removed from the system.
4. Taskforce stamped the weeded out books and marked them as "DISCARDED".
5. Discarded books were given out to students and staff during the annual Library Carnival held during the first semester.
6. Books not picked up at the carnival were given as gifts to schools and rural libraries.

Generic Criteria

General rules were formulated to be used as a guideline for weeding. First and foremost the physical condition of the books must be favorable. If they are deemed as valuable despite the deplorable stage, the books must be sent for preservation or efforts must be taken to replace the titles. Secondly, the contents of the book have to be scanned to gauge its importance. Thirdly, it must be ensured that all voluminous works are complete. Fourthly, it is not necessary to keep duplicate copies of each title or edition. Last but not least, the library holdings have to be checked for the alternate availability of electronic versions. If electronic versions of the print titles are available, a decision should be made on an individual title basis and not apply a blanket rule.

In the University of Malaya Library context, the generic criteria will include the following :

a. **Language**
The priority is to collect materials in English or Malay language. Languages used in the university and having a special collection in the library to be retained. Materials on languages such as Arabic, Dutch, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Tamil and Sanskrit should be sent to the respective libraries in the network.

b. **Local materials (Malaysiana)**
At least one copy of each title to be kept unless the physical condition is beyond redemption. If no copies can be kept and if it is still useful, the title to be passed on to the acquisitions division for replacement.

c. **ASEAN publications**
Titles about the ASEAN countries or published by them should be evaluated individually. It would be advisable to keep a copy of each title for preservation purposes.

d. **Theoretical works**
All theories to be retained. However, outdated methods and theories are to be discarded.

CREW method with modification for specific criteria

The CREW method emphasize more on quality than quantity. Providing comprehensive information resources and quality service are not necessarily reflected in the size of the collection. Once the volume holdings exceed 12,000 copies, full scale CREW method is strongly recommended. The acronym CREW refers to Continuous Review, Evaluation and Weeding. CREW is a ten step trail:

i) Make weeding a part of policy,
ii) Build weeding into the year's work calendar,
iii) Shelf Read the shelf about to be CREWed,
iv) Gather equipment,
v) Study the guidelines for weeding,
vi) Check the library's holdings,
vii) Indexes are not included,
viii) Treat books according to action plan such as Discard, Donate or Replace,
ix) Mark the weeded titles for Replacement, Checking and Ordering if the collection does not contain any other titles, and
x) Set up displays for low circulation but high quality books.

It uses MUSTY factors as a guideline to weed library collection. MUSTY stands for :

M - Misleading
U – Ugly
S – Superseded by a new edition or a much better book on that subject
T – Trivial of no discernible literary or scientific merit
Y – Your collection has no use for this book

Sometimes MUSTY is spelled as MUSTIE where I refers to Irrelevant to the needs and interests of the community served and E is Elsewhere available whereby the material may be easily borrowed from another source.

However, as librarians know, there are always conflicting issues arising such as :

"What if a user needs the book after it has been discarded?
How would the library know if the faculty still refers to the old issues in their curriculum?
The tendency to keep old books because of the fear that it is THE only copy in the entire nation or world.
Can the library give away or discard assets (books) bought with government funding"

Hence, the library came up with a modified guideline (*Table 1*) using the CREW/MUSTY factors which can be used to weed out reference collection on a regular basis. On a general basis, any titles less or equal to 10 years should be retained.

Table 1 : Guideline on the weeding of reference material for the University of Malaya Library using MUSTY factors

Type	Guideline	Action Plan
Almanacs, Yearbooks	More than 5 years / USY	Discard
Art, Craft, Photography, Recreation, Leisure Reading	All years / not U	Keep
Atlas, Maps	All years / not UT	Keep
Autobiography, Biography	All years / not MU	Keep
Bibliography, Listing	More than 5 years old / MUSTY	Discard
	Related to Malaysia/South East Asia	Keep one copy
Calendars from Universities and Colleges	Current years	Keep
	University of Malaya	Keep at least a copy for ALL years
	Top Universities of the world	Keep for 3 years
	Local Public Universities	Keep for 5 years
	Local Private Universities	Keep for 2 years
Dictionaries	All years/Any language / not U	Keep
Directories	Subject Directories / not MUST	Keep for 5 years
	Place directories	Keep 2 years
Education	Relevancy and currency are important criteria. Tackle each title individually / not UST	
Encyclopedias	More than 10 years old / not U	Donate / Replace
Gazetteers	All years / not MUST	Keep
Glossary, Terminology	All years / not MUST	Keep
Grammar, Languages	If language is used in the university	Keep
Handbooks	Subject handbooks / not US	Keep
	Handbooks of organizations / not UST	Keep for 2-3 years
Historical works	Each work studied to ascertain their relevance for the organization and the nation before a decision is made / not MUST	
Indexes & Abstracts	MUST	Discard
	If relevant and available in electronic format	Keep 2-3 years
Mythology / Fables/ Folklore	All years /not U	Keep

...continue

Table 1 : Guideline on the weeding of reference material for the University of Malaya Library using MUSTY factors

Type	Guideline	Action Plan
Philosophy (theories)	Famous philosophers / not U	Keep
	If less famous and more than 10 years old / not U	Move to Compactus
Political Science	Not related to Asia Pacific region and more than 5 years (unless has historical value) / MUST	Discard
Psychology (theories)	More than 10 years old / not U	Move to Compactus
Science, Technology, Medicine	Basic works, theories, calculation tables which are still relevant / not U	Keep
	MUST/ Outdated theories and viewpoints	Discard
Social Sciences	MUST / Old and outdated information Tackle each title individually	Discard
Travel and Geography	More than 5 years old / not MUSTY	Discard

Outcomes and benefits of upgrading and updating the reference collection

The reference collection in the library has been given a new look. Books are now shelved on low shelves with beautifully designed ends.   The signage is clear. Students are seen to be browsing the collection as the books are easily visible and reachable. As a follow up, the reading hall chairs and tables were also upgraded. What came next was setting up of the "Information Commons for Undergraduates" opposite the Reference Collection.   The entire floor has been declared as a "Quiet" area. It is one of the heavily used floor in the Main Library.

Information Commons for Undergraduate

Reference Shelves

Future Directions

The library has to continuously review and evaluate the reference collection. For this to manifest, a written collection development policy for the development of reference information sources is essential for the young library professionals to continue with the task of updating the collection.   The development of both print and online resources has to be emphasized as users needs and interests are manifold.   The usage of the reference collection has also to be assessed as was carried out by Sendi (1996).   Surveys to gather information of the users need for reference services and the preferred format would help the library to develop its collection in the right direction. Similarly, collaboration with the faculty will enhance the relevancy of the collection.

References

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