

Guidelines for Deselecting Literatures in English Collections in Academic Libraries

Association of College and Research Libraries
Literatures in English Section

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ACRL Literatures in English Section Task Force on Deselection Guidelines (2014-15):
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Foreword

The genesis of the *Guidelines* stemmed from interested LES members at the ALA annual conference in 2013. Even before, many general discussions on the LES listserv focused on questions about deselection and case scenarios (both good and bad), further emphasizing a collective need for some sort of best practices document for the process. With pressure from university officials for library leaders to repurpose their spaces and shift from a “just in case” to a “just in time” model, many of us have been charged with creating environments that focus on collaborative learning, discovery, and creation, rather than on expanding capacity to collect and store print material. Since many in our profession perceive that the very nature of this activity conflicts with the long-held credo that libraries should preserve information, deselection, not surprisingly, is often an emotionally-charged topic and a contentious matter between librarians and stakeholders.

One of the challenges the task force faced was that most of the current literature on deselecting fiction focuses on collections held in public libraries. While some of those considerations apply to academic library collections, public libraries do not have the same impetus to archive scholarly and creative works for future use. As such, public library retention guidelines are not sufficient for academic libraries. The usual deselection criteria such as inaccuracy, relevancy, low circulation statistics, and poor condition may not apply to literary materials where few or no options exist for replacement.

Nonetheless, there was a clear demand for guidelines that better fit the needs of academic library circulating collections and that take into account issues unique to literature. In the humanities, in general, and in literature, specifically, there are additional considerations for librarians when determining whether to retain particular authors and titles. Ideally, regular weeding is part of a

healthy library's ecosystem, but the reality for many of us today is to complete large-scale projects with a goal of freeing up space within a targeted timeline and without an option of compact or off-site storage. Since storage decisions are reversible and deselection decisions are not, the stakes of the process are that much higher.

Purpose of the Guidelines

The primary purpose of the guidelines is: *to aid academic librarians in making informed decisions about deselecting print literature circulating collections when no offsite or compact storage options are available.*

Because different library collection policies vary by institutional mission, curricular emphasis, consortia memberships, etc., librarians undertaking deselection projects may apply these guidelines in different ways to meet the need of their own institutions' unique and rare holdings. The intent was not to create a "one size fits all" model for academic libraries, but to offer suggested criteria vetted by a group of academic librarians with demonstrated experience in this area. It is anticipated that librarians charged with leading deselection projects will use these guidelines as a starting point -- rather than a template -- in developing their own criteria. Please note that the recommendations in this document pertain to regularly circulating library collections only. This document does not speak to deselection in archival, non-circulating, or special collections, which will all have different requirements and guidelines. We generally assume that rare and unique materials discovered in the regular stacks during the process of deselection will be moved to Special Collections when appropriate. Selectors may want to be familiar with [RBMS Guidelines on the Selection and Transfer of Materials from General Collections to Special Collections](#).

General Criteria for Possible Deselection in English Language Literature Collections

The following criteria are not specific to English-language literature collections; however, they should still be considered in any deselection project.

Items may be candidates for deselection if they fit one or more of these general criteria:

- Duplicate copy
- Superseded edition
- Poor physical condition
- Poor translation or edition
- Outside the scope of current curricular or research needs

- Available in a stable electronic archive such as in JSTOR, HathiTrust, or the Internet Archive
- No circulation for a specified period
- Highlighted, annotated, underlined
- Adequate number of titles available through consortium or WorldCat
- Availability of titles in clearinghouse

Special Considerations

Because libraries serve as research labs for humanities scholars, librarians should take the needs of those scholars into consideration when embarking upon deselection projects. Communication with faculty must be prioritized to ensure that current or anticipated curricular or research needs or complete collections by particular authors are not culled in overzealous deselection. In a data-driven decision-making environment, there will likely be administrative expectations to remove an established percentage of the collection based primarily upon circulation statistics. The Literatures in English Section does not endorse such a methodology because a strictly quantitative approach to deselection does not support the integrity of a literature collection. With this in mind, the Literatures in English Section recommends that the following special considerations also be applied to literature deselection projects:

- **Aesthetic value:** In some cases, the book's physical characteristics such as binding, marbling, marginalia, quality of illustrations, and book plates may be taken into consideration for retention, particularly for institutions that offer courses on bookmaking or the history of the book.
- **Abridged editions:** Abridgements may be weeded at the discretion of the librarian; however, they may be worth retaining to support cultural studies programs.
- **Anthologies:** Since they are often the last source for identifying works that were once popular, anthologies may be retained as evidence of changes to the literary canon. They help contextualize authors and literary works with regards to their relative importance at the time of the anthology's publication date and in relation to a particular geographic location, historical era, or genre.
- **Currency:** Due to the nature of literature, currency is not a primary factor in deselection decisions since literature and criticism generally retain their scholarly value. Retaining literary works from earlier periods speaks to the archival function of an academic library collection.
- **Diversity:** In the interest of maintaining diversity in literature collections, care should be taken that the deselection process does not create a deficiency of works by or about historically oppressed, underrepresented, and underserved groups.

- **Donor relations:** Ideally, the deselection process should not discourage the goodwill of donors. In individual cases of deselection, the wishes of the donor—as best as can be determined—should be honored.
- **Duplication:** In select instances, retaining duplicate copies may be desirable, particularly for heavily studied authors and texts.
- **Edition:** Research collections may want to retain unique editions of a particular literary work in order to support textual scholarship; however, smaller collections may elect to withdraw some older editions due to space considerations. Librarians should pay close attention to publishers and specific editions, which should be retained in order to preserve the scholarly record and to facilitate comparative literary close readings of texts.
- **Genre- and author-specific collecting priorities:** If a library has a collection strength in a particular genre, those titles may be deselected more judiciously than texts in other genres. Additionally, whether an author is canonical or non-canonical should also be taken into consideration.
- **Literary award winners:** Libraries may want to retain works that have won major literary awards along with other titles by the award-winning author.
- **Pre-1923 books:** While pre-1923 material may be considered for deselection based on the existence of digitized public domain copies, it is also important to consider the artifactual value of books. It may be appropriate to consider whether items have particularly interesting annotations, bindings, cover designs, or other important material aspects.
- **Primary v. secondary sources:** Preference may be given to retaining critical work over the primary literary source if the primary source can be acquired more easily and inexpensively.
- **Small presses:** Libraries may want to retain works that were published by small presses as a way of ensuring that works not widely disseminated or held adequately preserve the record of diverse publishing, including works by independent publishers and writers.

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