Dramatically Downsizing a Map Collection: A story from one library's experience with practical advice for others

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Unofficial 'Map Librarian'

Our Roadmap



Backstory

Our science library and it's closure during, but not due to, the pandemic

Library consolidation



Project Details

Aim to downsize to only 5-10%

Many uncataloged maps, and interfield categories



Friendly Advice

Philosophical and practical advice

1.

The Backstory

B.E.S.T. Library Closure

Miami University Oxford campus, located in southwestern Ohio
- Public institution, R2 classification
- ~20,500 students, predominantly undergraduates

In 2019, already plans to close the science library, which included a map room
- (B.E.S.T. = business, engineering, science, and technology)

Spring to summer 2020, the campus closed due to the pandemic and we decided simply to not re-open the science library

Plan was to move the science library's collection into the main library (King)
- Space concerns

Major Weeding Project

The goal was to weed the collections at both the main library (King) and the science library (B.E.S.T.), to make space for the consolidation.

The 2019/2020 library holdings

~539,575	at King
~ 109,750	at B.E.S.T, closed 2020
~51,880	*at Amos Music, closed 2023*
~75,620	*at Art and Architecture*

This project took place while most library staff were working 100% remotely

Weeding wrapped up mostly by summer 2021

The last of the books arrived from B.E.S.T. to King by August 2023

The Map Collection

This was a lower priority than the weeding books

The physical space still belonged to the library, and operated as a closed stack area

Aim was to keep only 5-10% of the map collection, due to the available space to relocate to and the minimal use

The dilemma therefore was deciding what to keep, not what to withdraw

Work on the collection began in 2021

2.

Project Details

The Big Picture

Myself

Unofficial maps librarian, liaison to geography and geology (among others)

Not used or reviewed the map collection - starting the position in mid 2019, followed by the pandemic and remote work, and book weeding

Limited use

2019-2023 no students or faculty ask about accessing paper maps

From 2020 onwards it was a closed stacks, so no access without asking

Limited space

With lack of space in the main library for the map cases, we aimed to only retain 5-10% of the collection

The Plan's Details

Deciding what to keep or not

Extended conversations between the head of the subject librarians department and the head of special collections settled on keeping any map covering the county we are located in, the adjacent county and any map from 1950 or before

The plan was to have the 'maps librarian' review the collection and set aside those filling the criteria

Planned to use the catalog as a tool for making lists for review

The maps we retain will be moved into the library's Special Collections, still available to researchers, and eventually more findable

Obstacle 1: Many Maps Uncataloged

This became obvious fairly quickly and was a surprise to the few people involved.

Hard to say how many were uncataloged, but it was around half.

Which meant, it was not possible to use the catalog as a weeding tool,

Which meant that every drawer needed to be physically sorted through.

We had a combination of maps that were folded up, like a travel map, but also those stored flat

As a closed stack space, it was rather a ‘construction zone’, not set up for researchers anymore, so the tables and chair set up in the room was minimal

Obstacle 2: Interfiled categories

The collection had a mix of maps from commercial publishers, and from different government agencies, such as U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Geological Survey, and the National Parks

Having them interfiled, and arranged by geographical location was best for users

For weeding purposes and procedures the maps fell into two categories

- U.S. government documents
- non-government documents

The process of deaccessioning government documents is very particular and is laid out by Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP), whereas it is much simpler for non-government documents

Eventually approached the end

Category	Notes	Final Destination
Government documents to keep	We had to keep anything from the past 5 years, plus local area maps	To be interfiled with the other government documents at King
Non-government documents to keep	Our county plus the adjacent county, along with anything pre 1950's	To go to the Special Collections at King
Government documents to discard	Circulation staff will index in a spreadsheet to be listed for offer to other institutions before being withdrawn	Destination unknown
Non-government documents to discard	Needed to be withdrawn from the catalog at this point	Donation to outreach program at neighboring university. Others destination unknown.

Each category was separated out with so each drawer only had one category - no regard to call number order at this stage

Withdrawing from the catalog

As mentioned, not everything was cataloged

However, for the non-government documents, we still needed to either scan barcodes or enter in hand written call numbers when there was no barcode, to withdraw those items

Started doing this, with the folded maps, but it was simply an enormous volume (this took place in the maps room, the maps were not moved to technical services)

Spoke to our e-resources librarian about possibly scanning only the things to keep, then withdrawing everything else with the location code for the science library - we managed to do this

Everything else at this point (Dec. 2024) was now in the main library

Physically emptying the space...

This is the present stage of the project

There is a local university who is interested in taking a number of the maps for an outreach program with a local high school (the non-government document maps)

Distribute some to students at GIS Day

Unsure where the rest are destined, university surplus auction or recycling

The government document maps are still awaiting the listing process with FDLP, And can sit where they are for now

The space still belongs to the library for another few years, but not forever



3.

Friendly Advice

Philosophical Advice

Talking

Be sure others in the library know you'll be weeding, especially if it's a hefty project

If possible, talk to others who've worked with the maps collection in the past

Reviewing

Physically familiarize yourself with the collection, if you aren't already - this will help with limiting surprises later

Try to determine how much is actually cataloged, or not

Motivating

Can be challenging to keep working at projects that are such a low priority that are on very few people's radar

Circles back to the talking to others point here



Practical Advise

Locations

If your office and the maps collection are in different buildings, this will likely slow you down

Timing

Half day time chunk seemed to work best, several hours at least, not a little here and there

Self Care

Even in drawers, this will be dusty work; it's also physically challenging to move maps in and out of the drawers



Discussion and questions



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