

Getting to One: De-duplicating the journal collections

By Ginger Saha, Director

The book and journal collections of the Allen Memorial Medical Library and the Health Center Library are extensive! The over 387,000 volumes contain hundreds of years of the scholarly record of medicine, nursing, dentistry, biology, and the basic sciences. However, since the two libraries developed *in parallel* for over 100 years, there is a great deal of duplication between them. Thousands of volumes are held in both places, providing no new information, but nevertheless, taking up valuable shelf space. Since one of the basic principles of the Agreement that established the Cleveland Health Sciences Library was “to eliminate unnecessary duplication,” we are proceeding with a plan to reduce this “double storage.” The Library’s Advisory Council, which has representatives from the CMLA and from CWRU, has approved the plan, as has the Dean of the School of Medicine. When this project is completed, the Library will be in the unusual – and desirable! – position of having enough shelf space for the present and future collections without having to use off-site storage, and we will have gotten there without losing any intellectual content.

In deciding which library keeps a title we are following these principles: older (pre-1947) materials will all be shelved at the Allen in support of its extensive historical collections. Newer (1947-) materials will be distributed by discipline, with clinical materials at the Allen and everything else at the Health Center. By narrowly defining “clinical,” we expect to lessen confusion about why a particular title is held at the Allen or the Health Center and to improve the efficiency of using the collections. Dozens of journal runs will be moved from one library to the other as we bring the collections into alignment with this policy. Data from our usage studies support these transfers and suggest that our users will be well served by these moves. One example of such a transfer is Current topics in microbiology and immunology, a title which is clearly not clinical but which, for reasons that made sense at the time, has always been held at the Allen! By moving it to the Health Center we hope to better serve our faculty, save time explaining why this title is in the “wrong” library, and free up shelf space for new clinical journals.

This is not a trivial undertaking! The staff have started work with the journals, which are the biggest part of our collections and the most heavily used materials. Journals, however, are much trickier than books! Librarians regard them as living things, referring to the “birth” and “death” of journals. Title changes, however, present the biggest challenge: a run of 50 volumes of American journal of blood-letting suddenly “stops” because the title changed; v.51-v.55, now called Let it flow, get shelved in the L’s, until cooler editorial heads prevailed, and with v.56 it changed again to AJB and is now shelved at the beginning of the A’s... Our workflow calls for handling all parts of a title at the same time, so we are working in several parts of the stacks at once. We have considered draping bright yellow “Under Construction” tape around!

When we have two or more copies of the same volume, we keep the one that is in better condition, thus assuring that our collections will be usable for the longest possible time. The “de-accessioned” volumes are being offered to other libraries in Ohio, and a surprising number of them have been snapped up! This is a new kind of “recycling” of journals, and turns the project into a win-win proposition.

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