

**The 5K Run Toolkit: A Quick, Painless, and Thoughtful Approach  
to Managing Print Journal Backruns**

## **Abstract**

Increasingly, academic libraries are choosing to discard or place in storage online-available print journal backruns. The identification of these titles and related collection analysis activities are often time-intensive. The approach at the University of Saskatchewan Library was to develop an online toolkit that combined available data from disparate sources including the integrated library system, SFX link resolver, and WorldCat and present them in a collaborative open source environment. This paper demonstrates how the careful combination of existing data presented in a simple online format allowed subject specialists to make accurate print journal deselection decisions quickly and painlessly.

## **Introduction**

Increasingly, academic libraries are choosing to discard or place in storage online-available print journal backruns due to competing priorities for space. The confidence to discard print backruns has been growing as publishers provide good quality digitized versions, reliable day-to-day online access, and long-term access rights. It is, however, often difficult to determine the quality of these provisions so some libraries are choosing to store the print backruns, both creating space in the library and retaining a safety net for access. But the necessary collection analysis to identify the format duplication, decide which print journals could be stored or discarded, and still meet the users' expectations for access to the journals can be frustrating and time-consuming. This paper provides details of an innovative project at the University of Saskatchewan Library that aimed to effectively and efficiently deal with space concerns by confronting the format duplication issue. It provides a unique case example of managing this challenging situation with an emphasis on adhering to short deadlines, enabling collaborative decision-making, and ensuring continued access to the resources. The project management was enhanced in part by an online toolkit that brought together in-house and third party data to aid in decisions related to the storage or disposal of online-available print journals.

## **Literature Review**

A review of the professional literature helps to place this project within the context of small- and medium-sized academic libraries' struggles to balance space concerns with the needs of their users. There is evidence of a shift from a very cautious approach to

store or discard online-available print journal backruns to informed decision-making that is helping libraries clear their shelves.

In 2000, Janice M. Jaguszewski and Laura K. Probst stated that librarians were concerned that print and electronic resources were not necessarily equivalent and therefore online availability should not be the sole factor for storage or weeding.<sup>1</sup> A few years later, libraries had undertaken feasibility studies as cautious preparation for the storage of online-available print journals. One example is the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where librarians developed a proposal to move JSTOR-available journals to storage due to overcrowded library shelves. They used circulation and interlibrary loan data to justify their proposal.<sup>2</sup> The cautious approach to even move JSTOR journals to storage is interesting in that the goals of the JSTOR project were to help libraries deal with their space problems.<sup>3</sup> Another example is a feasibility study to develop a “new model” academic chemistry library at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign that involved storing bound volumes of electronically-available journals off-site. The study used data on reshelving, patron counts, photocopier use, and usage statistics for print and online journals to inform its conclusions.<sup>4</sup>

By 2004, there is evidence that libraries were actually withdrawing print backruns, but only if the online versions met certain standards. Marianne Stowell Bracke and Jim Martin outlined a time-intensive project at the University of Arizona Science-Engineering Library where the online versions were compared to the print for completeness and quality.<sup>5</sup> More recently, the Imperial College London Library, facing acute space

pressures, withdrew print journal backruns based on the sustainability of electronic access to the content.<sup>6</sup>

The last decade has seen improvements to the quality, reliability, and long-term access provisions of online journals, making it possible for academic libraries to consider storing or discarding print backruns. The cited examples demonstrate the use of readily available and other data to make storage or disposal decisions of online-available print journal backruns to deal with the issue of limited space. In all cases, concerns about user access to journal contents guided the process. While a review of the library literature uncovered concepts that informed the project outlined in this paper, the University of Saskatchewan Library project was unique in a number of ways.

### **Library Transformation Project**

The University of Saskatchewan is a medical-doctoral institution comprised of 13 academic colleges and three interdisciplinary graduate schools. The University Library is an Association of Research Libraries member providing access to over 32,000 print and/or electronic serial publications to approximately 18,000 students and 1000 faculty. The Library consists of seven branch libraries the largest of which, the Murray Library, is undergoing a major renovation that began in 2006. Phase 2 of the renovation involved relocating ground floor staff to the west side of the 6<sup>th</sup> floor. This meant that five kilometers of shelving needed to be removed from the 6<sup>th</sup> floor to accommodate the staff relocation.

While the options for clearing this space had been discussed theoretically for some time, the practical work to identify materials and shift the collection started in April 2006 with a deadline of February 2007. A small Library Transformation Project (LTP) team, consisting of the Associate Dean, Head of the Murray Library, Reference Coordinator, Serials Coordinator, and Budget & Planning Officer, had responsibility for planning and coordinating the preparation of the Library's collections for the modification of stack space. Early in the planning stages, it was agreed that journal backruns would be targeted in order to reach the goal more quickly than evaluating monographs one by one. The primary focus was journal backruns that were also available online. The project was also an opportunity to deal with the Library's "split-run" issue. This was a legacy practice of the smaller branch libraries storing print backruns in the Murray Library, resulting in journal runs being split between two branches.

The Library's subject specialists played an integral role in this project, both as decision-makers and client liaisons. The selectors, responsible for selection, withdrawal, and cancellation decisions within their disciplines, also had established relationships with faculty and students with whom they could share information and discuss concerns. In order to encourage full participation in this undertaking, the LTP team wanted to ensure the decision-making process for the selectors was as straightforward as possible. To this end, a sub-team consisting of the Serials Coordinator and a Programmer/Analyst developed a toolkit – internally dubbed the *5K Run Toolkit* – that presented relevant and readily available data in a simple online interface to aid in decision-making. The project then unfolded in three stages. The first step involved gathering the data and developing

the online interface. Then the selectors used the *Toolkit* to review potential candidates for removal and record their decisions. Finally, the information was exported to spreadsheets used by the stack maintenance staff to remove the items from the Murray Library.

### **Removal Criteria**

In order to meet the project goal of removing five kilometers of shelving, several strategies were used. First, the Library gained the use of a building on campus that required only minor renovations to house about two kilometers of journal backruns. In addition, “repatriating” the split-runs to their home branch also contributed to the goal. Finally, the LTP team decided that some online archives were stable, comprehensive, and secure enough for the print journal backruns to be discarded.

The central concept used for the removal of print journals from the Murray Library was online availability, but the LTP team was well aware that storing or discarding a print journal backrun could impede a researcher’s timely access to this information. The need to remove the journals quickly was not going to be done rashly. The team needed to determine which print journals should remain in the collection even when an electronic version was available. Consequently, it had to wrestle with a number of questions. For example, what would happen if the Library discarded online-available print journals? There was a chance that the online content would not be complete, that the quality of the online images would be subpar, that the day-to-day online access might not be stable, or that the Library would one day lose access to content that it had paid for. Due

to the looming deadline, however, Library staff was not able to compare the online versions to the print, examine the quality of the online photos, gather evidence of provider reliability or stability, or scrutinize the license agreements for long-term access provisions and still leave time for the selectors' input into the process.

The LTP team recognized that it would need to put into storage those print journals that *might not* have complete, reliable, long-term access; a backup for the online version was necessary. With this in mind, the concept was refined to three approaches. First, JSTOR-available print journals were considered for disposal, because of the stable, comprehensive, and secure nature of this collection of scholarly electronic journals. Second, publisher-available print journals were considered for storage, given that these online journals were generally complete and stable, but the long-term access provisions were unknown. Finally, print journals only available from an aggregator service (e.g. Galegroup, EBSCOhost) were kept in the Library. With these guidelines in hand, the final decisions of what should stay in the Murray Library and what should be removed were then made by the selectors.

Even though it was a portion of the 6<sup>th</sup> floor that needed to be cleared, all selectors with subject areas housed in the Murray Library were involved in the project. Materials were removed from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> floors (excluding Special Collections and Government Documents), and then the collection was shifted and re-compressed in order to make the 6<sup>th</sup> floor space available. Because the split-run situation was also being addressed, selectors from each branch were also involved in the project.

## 5K Run Toolkit

As mentioned, the LTP team was keen to ensure the decision-making process was as straightforward for the selectors as possible. The sub-team responsible for this aspect of the project accomplished this by creating an online, interactive interface and populating it with relevant, readily available data. The *5K Run Toolkit* was developed using Drupal, an open source content management system. Table 1 outlines the data used in the *Toolkit* and the sources of the data. A “snapshot” of data from each data source was used for the duration of the project.

The *Toolkit* contributed to the success of the project in three ways. First, it helped identify and relocate journal backruns within the short timeframe. It did this by “deduplicating” the journal holdings based on ISSN and displaying these results, along with other relevant data, on a series of pages that led the selectors through the decision-making process. Figure 1 shows how the *Toolkit* allowed selectors to analyze one subset of the Murray Library print collection at a time. Limiting by “Interest Code” allowed the selectors to view the journals in their subject area; there was no need to scan through title lists that were someone else’s responsibility. Next, the “Access Provider” filter further limited the result set and allowed the “high benefit” journals to be surfaced easily. For example, the JSTOR journals had the highest benefit to the project because they could be discarded and not take up space anywhere. Finally, the split-run aspect of the project was fulfilled by using the “Overlap” function, which identified the titles in the Murray Library that were also held at another branch.

The final filter within the *Toolkit* – “Status” – served a housekeeping role and eliminated confusion about what work was left to be done. This toolkit was developed to complete this specific project, which meant that in the end, all of the items in the database were to have some decision attached – keep, repatriate, store, or discard. A review of all items flagged for discard was undertaken by choosing the status “discard”, while selecting “open” was a way to display all of the items that still needed decisions. This option also permitted stack maintenance staff to export subsets of the data in order to fulfill the decisions that had been made. The staff was able to deal with everything that was intended to be discarded at the same time, and then deal with the volumes that were going into the storage area, and so on.

Additional information about the print format was provided on the Results Page (Figure 2). Clicking on a title from this page led to the Record View (Figure 3). All of the bibliographic records that shared the same call number were displayed in this view, which allowed the selectors to evaluate entire journal runs – including the title changes – at the same time. It is at this point that the selectors compared the print holdings to the online coverage and prepared to make their decisions. Various links out to the data sources were also available from this view. The final step of recording the decisions was made by clicking on the current status (Figure 4). Once a decision was submitted, the display in the Record View was also updated with the most current decision (Figure 5).

The *Toolkit* also contributed to the success of the project by allowing collaborative decision-making. The filters on the Main Page allowed anyone to peruse any subset of

titles, allowing the assessment of multidisciplinary titles by all relevant selectors. A history of all decisions, including the email address of the selector and accompanying comments, was displayed in the Record View so any contradictory information could be verified. Collaboration with faculty and students was also supported by the ability to export title lists that fit certain criteria.<sup>7</sup> For example, some selectors provided a list of titles being considered for disposal to faculty members for input.

Finally, the *Toolkit* helped ensure that unique items remained in the collection. Due to the tight timelines, a thorough analysis of the completeness, reliability, and long-term accession provisions of the online journals could not be undertaken. The project was instead an opportunity to take advantage of the myriad information about the print and online collections that was readily available in the Library's online systems. The LTP team relied on decades of hard work in technical services, collections, and library systems to provide accurate information that could be centralized and repurposed for this project. The selectors were able to examine a combination of manually-created, system-generated, and third-party data in order to make thoughtful decisions about what could be removed from the Murray Library.

## **Outcome**

The LTP team successfully planned and coordinated the removal of five kilometers of shelving from the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of the Murray Library. The project was carried out over 11 months by the sub-team, who developed the *Toolkit* and gathered data between April and July 2006; the selectors, who made decisions on titles over the summer and into

the fall semester; and the stack maintenance staff, who removed the selected journal backruns and shifted the Murray Library collection from late 2006 until February 2007.

About 1.5 kilometers of print journal backruns were placed into the storage area. These materials can be requested through the OPAC and are retrieved by the library truck driver as necessary during his twice daily route, Monday to Friday. Also, about 800 meters of JSTOR-available print journals were flagged for disposal. These materials, in keeping with the University of Saskatchewan's procedures and policies for the disposal of capital assets, were first offered to departments and other units within the University, and then to other institutional libraries in Canada. With only two kilometers of storage space for publisher-available backruns and a limited number of JSTOR-available and split-run titles, the LTP team had anticipated a shortfall of items removed from the Murray Library. After the selected materials were removed, the collection was compressed by adding shelving to a few areas and using the top shelves of the bays where necessary. While this situation is not ideal, the subsequent acquisition of more JSTOR collections, participation in Portico<sup>8</sup>, and the potential to clarify long-term access provisions, opens the door to similar projects in the future.

The second version of the *5K Run Toolkit* is in development, incorporating changes resulting from user feedback. One change in particular to the Decision Page should streamline the workload for any future projects. The work of the selectors and the stack maintenance staff for the project outlined in this paper was complicated by the lack flexibility on the Decision Page. Only one decision was permitted per title, but it was

common to have more than one required action for each journal run. For example, in Figure 5 the selector wanted to keep some volumes in the Murray Library and discard others, but could only explain that by writing a comment on the Decision Page. Another selector may have chosen “discard” as the main action in the same situation and then written a comment explaining which volumes to keep. If there was any question about the intent of the decisions, the stack maintenance supervisor contacted the selector for clarification – a time-consuming step for all involved. Figure 6 shows a potential revised version of the Decision Page that permits more than one decision for each title. There is space for the selectors to indicate the affected volumes as well as a place for the stack maintenance staff to note any measurement or shelf location information if necessary.

## **Conclusion**

The University of Saskatchewan Library is one of many academic libraries seeking creative solutions to balance space constraints with the needs of users. The Library Transformation Project utilized an online toolkit that allowed relevant and readily available data to undergo human analysis in order to remove print journal backruns in preparation for a major renovation. But only a post-project evaluation could determine if the LTP team chose suitable removal criteria, if the most relevant data were chosen to help in the decision-making, and if the data were accurate enough to ensure that appropriate decisions were made. An initial investigation indicates that 96 items were requested to be borrowed from the storage area in the 16-month period following the project deadline. Sixty-four of these items were retrieved for University of Saskatchewan faculty, staff, or students; 32 were retrieved to fulfill interlibrary loan requests. These

preliminary indicators suggest a successful project, ensuring a role for the *Toolkit* in future serials management activities.

## Notes

---

1. Janice M. Jaguszewski and Laura K. Probst, "The Impact of Electronic Resources on Serial Cancellations and Remote Storage Decisions in Academic Research Libraries," *Library Trends* 48, no. 4 (Spring 2000): 799-820.
2. David C. Tyler and Brian L. Pytlik Zillig, "Caveat Relocator: A Practical Relocation Proposal to Save Space and Promote Electronic Resources," *Technical Services Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (2003): 17-29.
3. JSTOR: Mission and History, <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/organization/missionHistory.jsp> (accessed March 30, 2009).
4. Tina E. Chrzastowski, "Making the Transition from Print to Electronic Serial Collections: A New Model for Academic Chemistry Libraries?" *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 54, no. 12 (October 2003): 1141-1148.
5. Marianne Stowell Bracke and Jim Martin, "Developing Criteria for the Withdrawal of Print Content Available Online," *Collection Building* 24, no. 2 (2005): 61-64.
6. Ruth Cooper and David Norris, "To Bin or Not to Bin? Deselecting Print Back-Runs Available Electronically at Imperial College London Library," *Serials: The Journal for the Serials Community* 20, no. 3 (2007): 208-214.
7. Titles were exported from the Results Page in Internet Explorer with the *Export to Microsoft Excel* function or in Firefox with an Add-on such as *TableTools*.

---

8. Since 2007, the University of Saskatchewan Library has participated in Portico, a service that provides a permanent archive of scholarly literature published in electronic form.