

Grassroots Report

Another Use for Pulp Fiction

by Jennifer Burek Pierce

In the early years of the profession, librarians were concerned with the permanence of their collections. Books should last, and their users should work with materials in ways that would help preserve the items on the shelves. Librarians railed against cheap books sold in bookstores. In a paper read at the 1914 ALA Annual Conference titled "Our Present Problem," Mary Ely lamented that children opted to purchase "a bargain in books, so much paper, so much print, for so little money" rather than enjoying "the best books of all ages of time" preserved at the public library (*ALA Bulletin*, 1914, p. 219–223).

Yet in the 21st century, most libraries discard materials for reasons such as condition and suitability to the collection. How they do so is seldom spotlighted. Rather than hide the fact that it's sometimes appropriate to dispose of books, some acknowledge that their efforts to keep their collections well managed and the earth green involve recycling.

Resourceful use of resources

At Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Peggy Miley, a library audiovisual reserves assistant and a member of the recycling committee, noted that donations may be reused or recycled in one of three ways. She explained that the first course of action is to add needed materials to the collection, then sell other titles at a Friends store. "Anything we don't think is usable, we throw in the recycling bins," Miley said.

A similar approach is used at the University of Utah health sciences library in Salt Lake City. "We want to see if anyone else can use them," Education Services Librarian Jeanne Marie Le Ber said of the materials that the library must discard. The library does receive some compensation for its recycling efforts. "They're

paying us by the ton to cart our stuff away," observed Le Ber.

Her colleague Joan Gregory explained that the library works with a local company, Redi-Therm, which recently picked up a two-month accumulation of 8,000 pounds of paper of all sorts. "They use this material to make insulation," she said. Sixteen staffers loaded bins supplied by the company, an effort that took about 45 minutes of labor.

Gregory acknowledged that was "a lot of people time," but she contrasted this method with the alternative of paying another recycling company or the city's trash service for its disposal. "It depends on how you look at these things," she said.

Not just weeding, but greening

At Georgia Southern, some computer labs reuse paper printed on only one side; other printed material is made into note pads. Miley explained that students can bring in their personal toner cartridges for recycling at the library, and even their cell phones. "We get points and can purchase printers and scanners," she said of the library's work as a recycling center. The library has a website with environmental links (library.georgiasouthern.edu/rtf/), participates in Earth Day, and plans to Adopt-A-Highway, too.

At these libraries, response to the recycling programs has not involved the sort of patron outrage some locales have experienced when public awareness of practices of handling discards has emerged. Instead, response has ranged from cautious to approving.

"People realize you can't just keep accumulating," Le Ber said. "As a campus, we are certainly committed to recycling. It's an effort of individuals as well," she added, explaining that even the coffee grounds generated in the staff lounge are saved for

compost in a librarian's garden. The director has specified that recycling be kept simple in order not to monopolize staff time. "I feel passionate about it," Le Ber said. "I think a lot of my colleagues are supportive."

The reasons for recycling at GSU likewise involve conditions many libraries experience, such as the need to remove material that no longer reflects advances in knowledge. "It's no longer valuable information, and we only have so much room," Miley explained. "Most of the stuff is so old and antiquated, I can't think of anyone being upset over it."

Gregory shared some tips for libraries interested in recycling. Among them was the importance of talking with others whose efforts have matured and working locally. "Keep the money and the work local," she said. "That's good for the environment, too." ♦

Resources on Recycling

Recycling.com, www.recycling.com/howitworks.html

Michele Calloway and Daren Callahan, "Paper Use and Recycling in Academic Libraries," *Electronic Journal of Academic and Special Librarianship*, Fall 2003, southernlibrarianship.icaap.org/content/v04n03/Calloway_m01.htm

Jeanne Marie Le Ber and Joan M. Gregory, "Becoming Green and Sustainable," *Journal of the Medical Library Association*, April 2004, p. 266–268, www.pubmedcentral.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=385309

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