VCU Libraries Faculty and Staff Presentations

VCU Libraries

2015

Bring out Your Dead: Digging up Print Reference Issues to Recommend What Is Next for a Collection

Julie Arendt
Virginia Commonwealth University, jaarendt@vcu.edu

Nell J. Chenault
Virginia Commonwealth University, njchenau@vcu.edu

John Glover
Virginia Commonwealth University, jglover2@vcu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/libraries_present
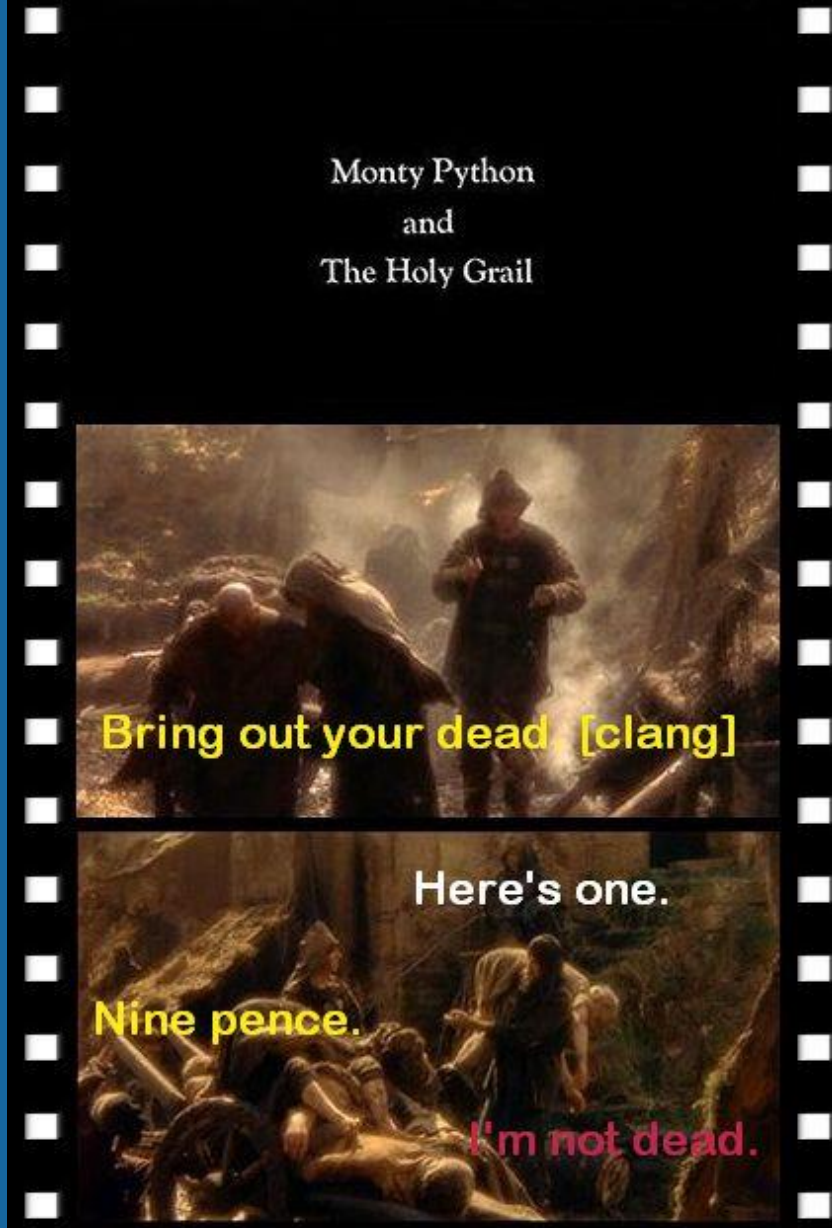
Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Downloaded from

http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/libraries_present/46

Bring out Your Dead
Digging up Print Reference Issues to Recommend What Is Next for a Collection
Julie Arendt, Nell Chenault, and John Glover

"You'll be stone dead in a moment."

Print Reference at Cabell Library

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) is a premier urban, public research university. Its two main libraries in Richmond are James Branch Cabell Library and Tompkins-McCaw Library for the Health Sciences. Cabell is the primary library for VCU undergraduates and serves graduate students in non-health fields.

Cabell Library is undergoing a 93,000 sq. foot expansion. Notably, 90% of new space will be for student use, not shelving.[1] In 2014, librarians carried out a much-needed weeding project, after which they were still unsatisfied with the size and usability of the print reference collection. We investigated use of the print reference collection at Cabell Library and at academic and research libraries in general to determine next steps.

Print Reference in a Time of Transition

Death appears imminent
- Library publications ask, "Is it dead yet?"[2] and question whether print reference is "necessary," or merely "nice."[3] Others note an "ever shrinking print environment,"[4] and are "dismantling the reference collection."[5]
- Online databases include components that began as reference books.
- 70% of Gale's 2013 academic publishing was digital; e-book sales saw approximately 5% growth, while print sales remained flat.[6]
- In a 2014 Charleston Conference report on academic libraries' reference purchasing, 68% preferred online, 7% online only, and 4% preferred print.[2]
- Publishers are losing market share to Google, *Wikipedia,* and other free, online, crowd-sourced resources.[6]
- When surveyed, most ARL libraries' heads of reference considered their print reference collections too large or larger than ideal.[3]

However
- Illustrations may be limited or eliminated online due to rights issues.
- Online replacements have not appeared for some 'legacy' reference works, particularly covering material prior to 1970s. These titles are not available through online archives.
- Pricing and licensing for online does not always compare with print.

Thus
- Format decisions are still made title by title.

Ways to Kill a Print Reference Collection

Library space and librarian time are limited. Print reference may be pushed into a back corner – literally and figuratively. Death can be hasten by inattention and reduced usability.

To kill a print reference collection…
- Provide insufficient, inadequate signage.
- Pack books tightly. Pinch patron fingers!
- Put electrical outlets in the aisles.
- Eliminate empty spaces for setting a book during quick lookup.
- Remove nearby tables.
- Interfile specialized periodical indexes with general-interest reference titles.
- Weed only during a space crisis.
- Don't track use.
- Declare it moribund and banish it.
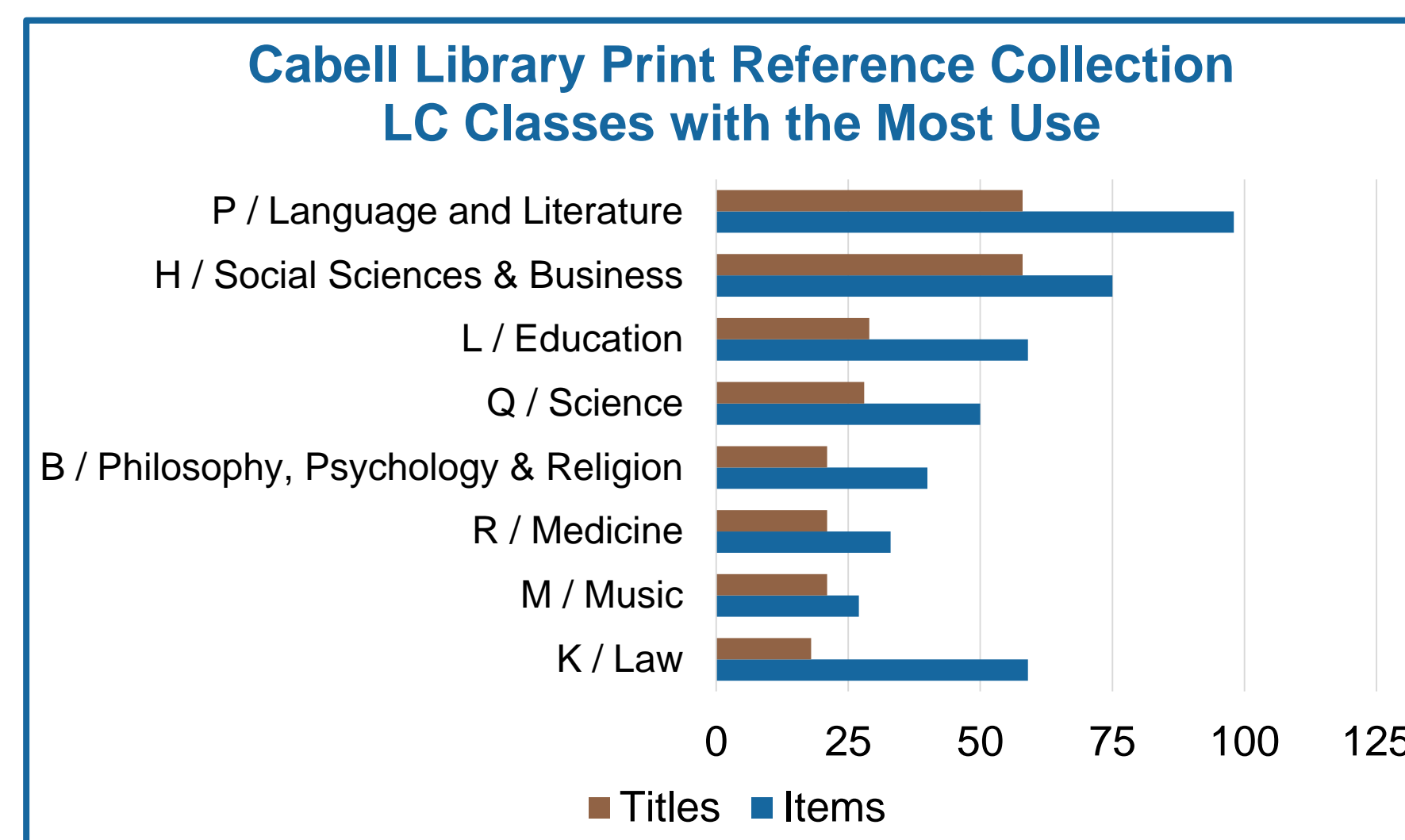
"He says he's not dead."

Reshelving Use Study

Methodology: Book barcodes were scanned after shelf maintenance and prior to reshelving. Data reports came from Ex Libris' Alma. Cabell Library Reference includes 8,922 print titles, 19,512 print items.

581 Loans of 362 Titles Jan – Jun. 2015
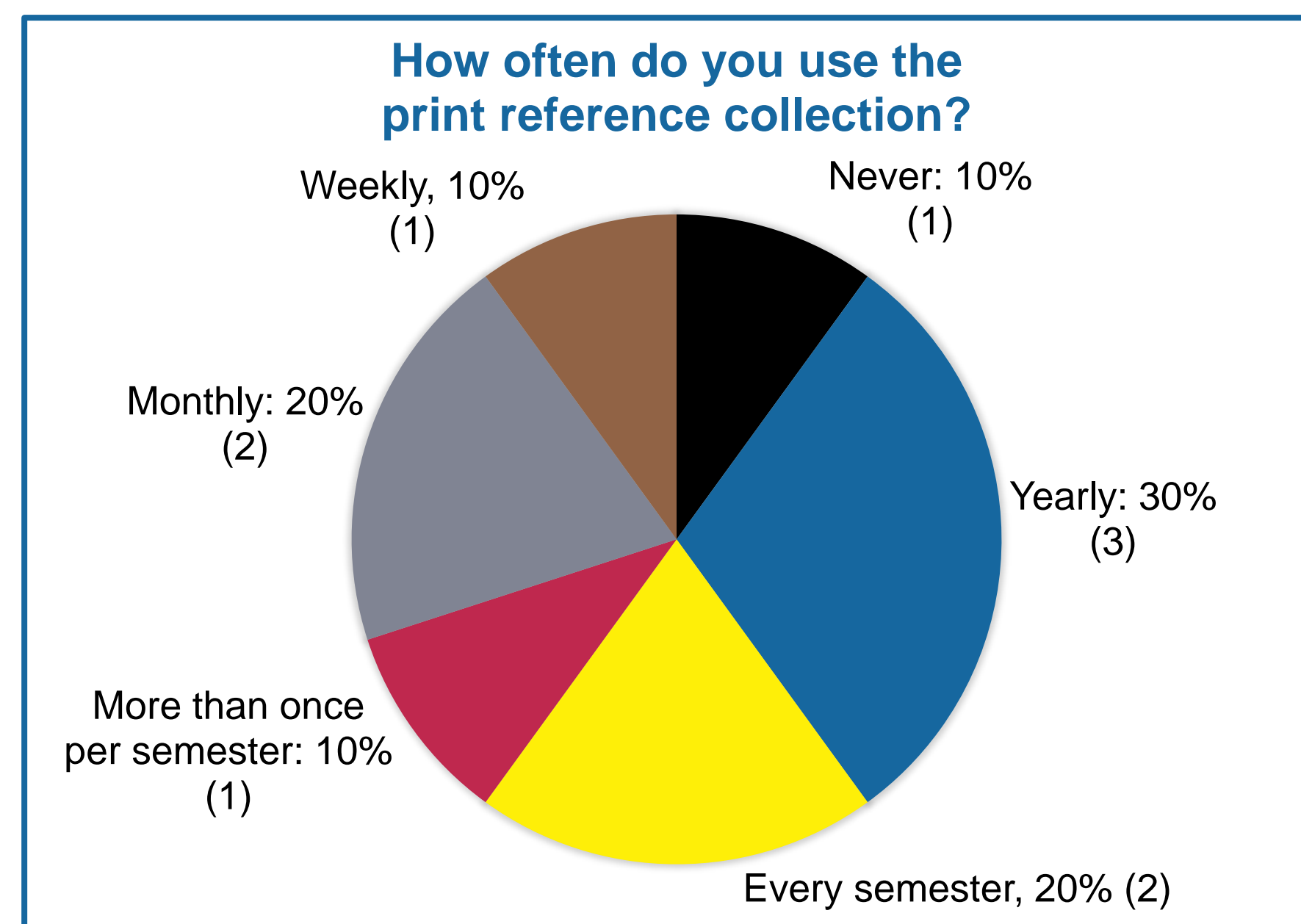
Findings include:
- Many publication types saw use. Encyclopedia was the top type (21%).
- Top titles: *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* (12); *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (8); *Handbook of Analytical Techniques* (8); *Encyclopedia of Energy* (8); *DSM-IV-TR* (7).
- Broad use across many LC subclasses.

Cabell Library Print Reference Collection LC Classes with the Most Use

(Bar chart — categories: P / Language and Literature; H / Social Sciences & Business; L / Education; Q / Science; B / Philosophy, Psychology & Religion; R / Medicine; M / Music; K / Law. X-axis 0 to 125. Legend: Titles, Items)

What use wasn't counted?

Reshelving studies document significant undercounting of reference material usage, anywhere from 33% to 95%, and one study found that instances of use under ten minutes went entirely uncounted.[7]

Research & Teaching Librarians' Use

How often do you use the print reference collection?

(Pie chart)
- Weekly, 10% (1)
- Never: 10% (1)
- Yearly: 30% (3)
- Every semester, 20% (2)
- More than once per semester 10% (1)
- Monthly: 20% (2)

"I feel fine."

Why is it used? Why have it?

Reference materials are ideal to fulfill many research needs for both master's and undergraduate students. For example, master's students rely on lists of resources and experts in their field.[8] Although faculty may provide such lists, many reference resources provide them as well. A recent Ex Libris study on search and discovery [8, 9] found many users have research needs that can be met by reference sources.

"First, we found that searching is accompanied by learning. For example, **master's students** often need to begin their research by learning the relevant terminology; they may start with creating a list of keywords that they then use for searching for material about their research area. Only after finding the relevant information do they drill down to specific topics. **Undergraduates** also often need to understand the general topic of their assignment before they move on to more specialized material."[9, emphasis added]

-- Stohn, Ex Libris

"I think we need to re-consider the old definitions and uses of the reference collection. I don't think they are necessarily still valid, and I think there are other needs that are going unmet, that a reference collection might assist. Maybe we shouldn't even call it a reference collection anymore. Maybe it should be more like a "discovery" collection."
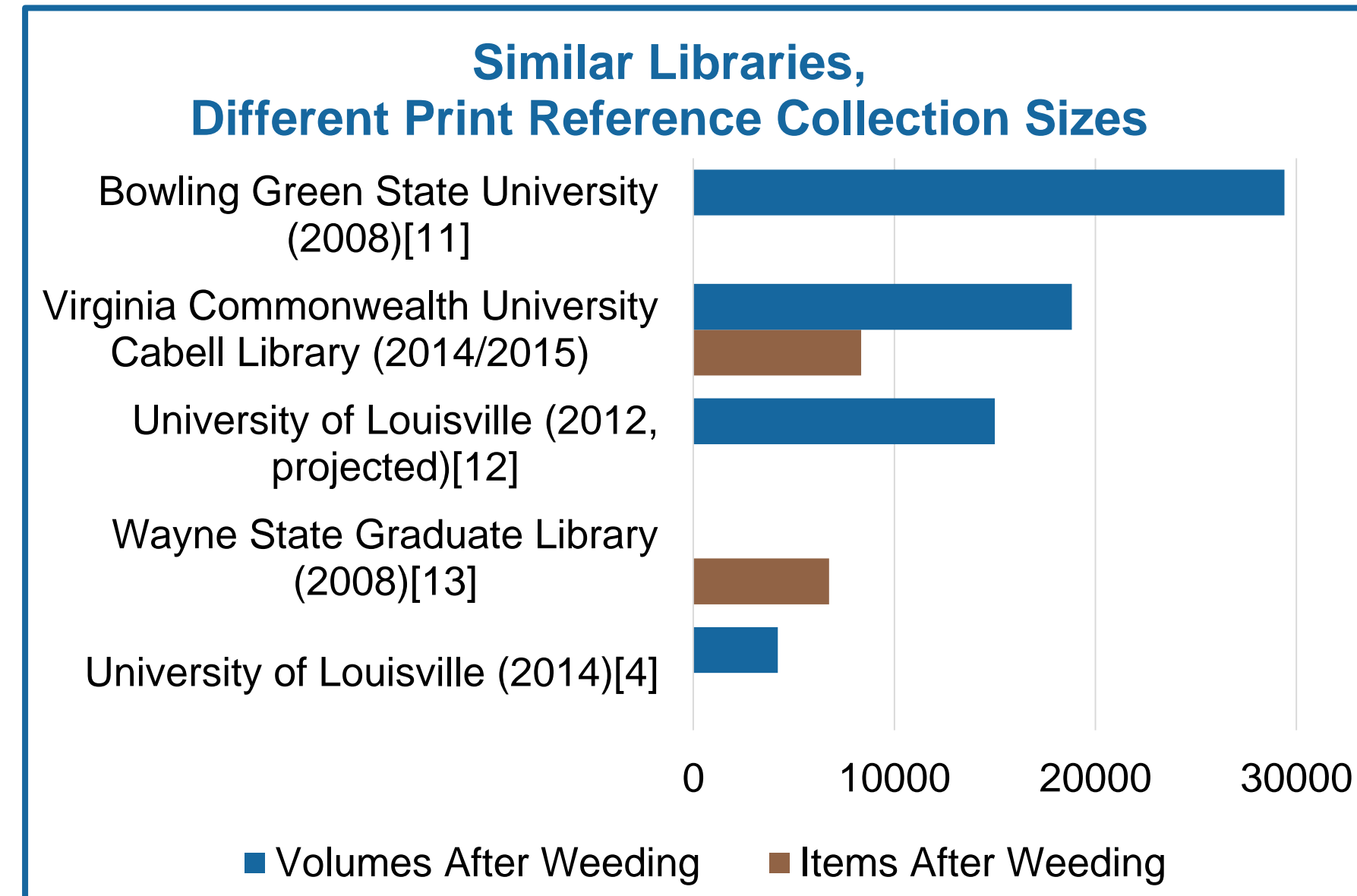
-- Librarian response to internal survey at Cabell Library

If it's good enough for Google...

"We know that Google has already proven reference necessary. Otherwise why would Wikipedia be the first entry on every page?"
-- Carol Helton, Credo Reference [10]

What is the Right Size?

Similar Libraries, Different Print Reference Collection Sizes

(Bar chart — categories: Bowling Green State University (2008)[11]; Virginia Commonwealth University Cabell Library (2014/2015); University of Louisville (2012, projected)[12]; Wayne State Graduate Library (2008)[13]; University of Louisville (2014)[4]. X-axis 0 to 30000. Legend: Volumes After Weeding, Items After Weeding)

We still add new print books to Cabell Library Reference, across most subject areas:
FY2014   155 titles; 365 items
FY 2015   275 titles; 508 items

"I'm getting better!"

Rediscovering Reference Collections

- Integrate reference resources within your ILS or discovery system. Examples: Credo Reference, Reference Universe, Oxford Reference.
- Adjust result ranking or display and filter options in the catalog or discovery tool to uncover reference resources.
- Integrate reference into library/information literacy instruction.
- **Promote! Promote! Promote!** through LibGuides, tours, blogs, news, web site, screen displays, end-panel and face-out displays. [3]
- Circulate reference titles, or inter-shelve with general collections [5]

How to Revive a Print Reference Collection

If a print reference collection is to stay alive in high-traffic areas, the area will be more lively if it is usable and appealing. Physical changes to the shelving can add to the appeal, such as…
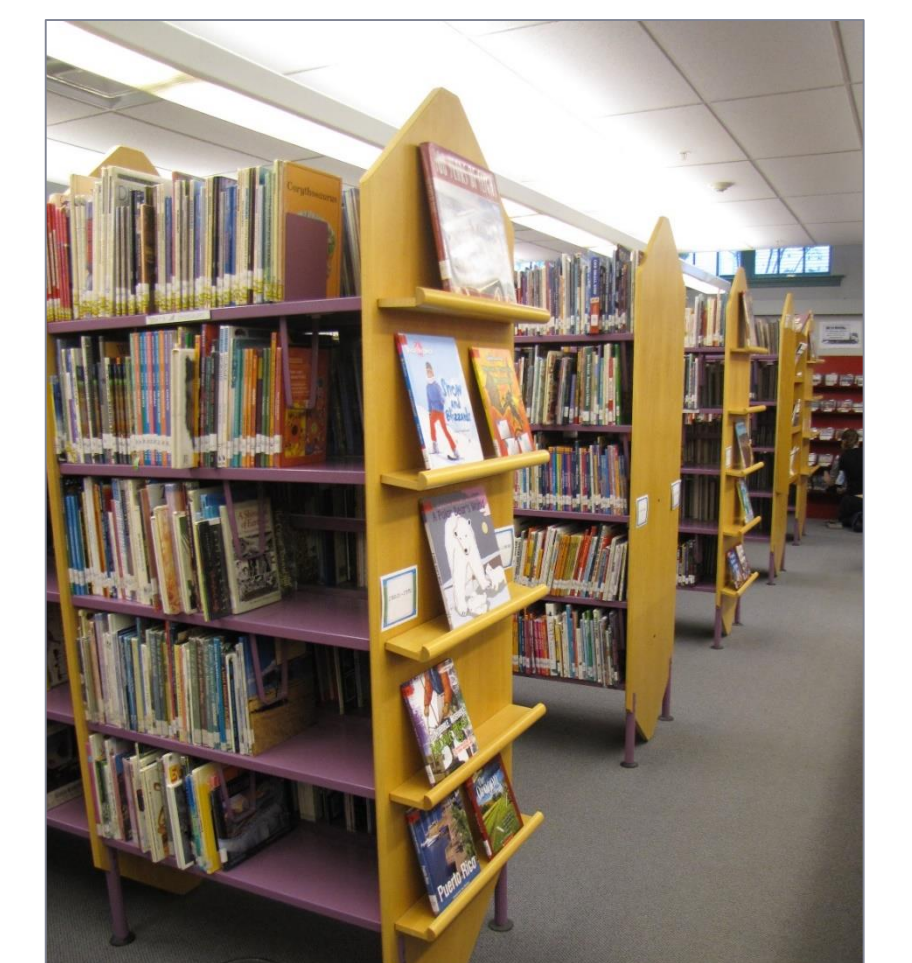
Book Displays

Nonlinear

Half and Half

Endcaps

"Who's that then?"

Bibliography
[1] Virginia Commonwealth University. VCU Libraries New Building on the Monroe Park Campus. 2015. Available from http://www.library.vcu.edu/newlibrary/
[2] Janke R, Leonard E, Peppers M, Tyckoson D. Print reference: is it dead yet? Paper presented at the 2014 Charleston Conference, SC. 2014 Nov 6. Available from: http://www.slideshare.net/slideshow/embed?code=41484817
[3] King N. Nice vs. necessary: reference collections in ARL member libraries. The Reference Librarian. 2012;53(2):138-55. Available from: dx.doi.org/10.1080/02763877.2011.607415
[4] Johnson A., Finley S, Sproles C. Dismantling the reference collection. The Reference Librarian. 2015; 56(3):161-173.
[5] Vnuk R. Reference collections in an ever-shrinking print environment. Booklist. 2013 Sep 12:54.
[6] Bond G. The changing world of reference: Reference publishers continue with digital initiatives as users demand increasing access to up-to-date information. Publishers Weekly. 2013;260(15):20-5.
[7] Butkovich NJ. Use outside: a selective review. Library Resources & Technical Services. 1996;40(4):359-68.
[8] Stohn C. Understanding how users search and discover. Ex Libris Primo. Presentation at ALA Midwinter Meeting, Chicago, IL. 2015 Feb 1.
[9] Stohn C. How Do Users Search and Discover? Findings from Ex Libris User Research. Ex Libris. 2015 May: 7. Available from: http://www.exlibrisgroup.com/files/Products/Primo/HowDoUsersSearchandDiscover.pdf
[10] Thornton-Verma H. Reaching the Wikipedia Generation. Library Journal. 2012 Apr 15:32-40.
[11] Singer CA. Weeding gone wild: Planning and implementing a review of the reference collection. Reference & User Services Quarterly. 2008;47(3):256-264. Available from: dx.doi.org/10.5860/rusq.47n3.256

[12] Detmering R, Sproles C. Reference in transition: A case study in reference collection development. Collection Building. 2012;31(1): 19-22 Available from: dx.doi.org/10.1108/01604951211199146
[13] Andrews M, McGinnis R. The academic library reference collection: What's in, what's out, what's online. Paper presented at the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts & Letters Conference, Wayne State University on March 29, 2008. Available from http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/libsp/18/

Image Credits
- Monty Python and the Holy Grail. Dirs. T. Gilliam, T Jones; Prod. J Goldstone; Perfs. E Idle as Corpse Collector, J Cleese as Customer, J Young as Not Dead Body. Michael White Productions, Python (Monty) Pictures, National Film Trustee Co.; Cinema 5 Distribution: NY. 1975.
- Kennedy Library. Reference. 2010 August 4. Available from https://flic.kr/p/8pNiEw (CC BY-NC)
- NPL Newburyport Public Library. Archival Center Compact Storage. 2011 April 13. Available from https://flic.kr/p/9Ag5Li (CC BY)
- Elliot Bay Metal Fabricating, Inc. Book Display Shelving. 2014. Available from http://www.elliottbaymetal.com/wp-content/uploads/Gallery1/Photo%2009.jpg (copyright)
- Cockburn Libraries. New curved shelves in children's library @ Coolbellup Library. 2010 August 20. Available from https://flic.kr/p/6eghD (CC BY-NC-ND)
- Margo. TLM corporate Library. 2005 November 2. Available from https://flic.kr/p/9GRBS9 (CC BY-NC-ND)
- Auston, A. Juvie Endcaps. 2010 April 22. Available from https://flic.kr/p/7Wq5Pd (CC BY-NC)