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

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**Bring out Your Dead**

**Digging up Print Reference Issues to Recommend What's Next for a Collection**

Julie Arendt, Nell Chenaught, and John Glover

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**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 square foot expansion. Notably, 90% of Gale’s 2013 academic publishing was digital; e-reference purchasing, 68% preferred online, 7% online only, and 4% print only.

**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-reference purchasing, 68% preferred online, 7% online only, and 4% print only.
- Publishers are urging market share to Google, Wikipedia, and other free, online, crowd-sourced resources.[6]
- When surveyed, most ARL libraries believe their print collections contain more reference collections too large or larger than ideal.[7]

**Ways to Kill a Print Reference Collection**

- Library space and librarian time are limited. Print reference is pushed into a back corner—literally and figuratively. Death can be hastened by interaction and reduced usability.
- To kill a print reference collection…
- Provide insufficient, inadequate signage.
- Pack bookshelves. 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 crisis.
- Don’t track use.
- Declare it moribund and banish it.

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**581 Loans of 362 Titles Jan – Jun. 2015**

Findings include:
- Many print collections are used. Encyclopedia was the top title[21].
- Top titles: The Glazed Encyclopedia of World Music[12].
- Broad use across many LC subclasses.

**What use wasn’t counted?**

Reshieving studies document significant undercounting of reference material usage, anywhere from 25% to 30%, and one study found that instances of use under ten minutes were entirely uncounted.[7]

**Reshieving Use Study**

Methodology: Book barcodes were scanned after shelf maintenance and prior to reshieving. Data reports came from Ex Libris Alma. Cabell Library Reference includes 9,822 print titles. 1,831 32 print items.

**Endcaps**

- Nonlinear
- Book Displays

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**Redisscovering Reference Collections**

- Integrate reference resources within your ILS or discovery system.
- Adjust result ranking or display filter options in the catalog or discovery tool to uncover reference resources.
- Integrate reference info into/fm library instruction.
- Promote! Promote! Promote! Through LibGuides, tours, blogs, news, web site, screen displays, end-panel and face-out displays.
- Circular reference titles, or inter-shelve with general collections.

**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 aid the appeal, such as...

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**Book Displays**

- Half and Half
- Endcaps

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**Similarly referenced libraries, different print reference collection sizes**

- Bowling Green State University
- Virginia Commonwealth University
- University of Louisville
- Wayne State Graduate Library
- University of Louisville

**What is the Right Size?**

- 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?”

**“Who’s that then?”**

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**Bibliography**