

Reference Collection Plan January 23, 2004

Collection Description

The reference collection consists of non-circulating materials in the Reference Collection, including materials on the Business and Consumer Table, phone books, the Ready Reference Collection, the Iowa Reference Collection and Iowa college catalogs, the Reference Documents Collection, the Pamphlet File, maps, and the Storage Reference Collection. Supporting collections include electronic resources Collection, (which outlined in the Electronic Resources Plan), bound periodicals and the microfiche and microfilm collections. The Fiction Desk and the Children's Desk also have Reference Collections, which are not covered in this plan.

Scope of the collection and exceptions

The scope of the Reference Collection covers the entire range of the Dewey Decimal Classification System. The Reference Collection includes general and specialized encyclopedias, dictionaries, indexes, atlases, concordances, handbooks, almanacs, and guides. A smaller subset of the Reference Collection includes the Ready Reference Collection, which is shelved behind the Reference Desk. This small collection of books is intended to provide easy access to Information staff answering brief, frequently asked questions. Some titles are unique to this collection, while some titles are duplicates of those found in the larger Reference Collection. The Iowa Reference Collection also spans the entire range of Dewey, but only for those materials pertaining specifically to Iowa. The majority of items in this collection are statistical, governmental and historical materials. Phone books are primarily for cities in Iowa, but also include a number of large cities in the Midwest. The phone book collection continues to decrease in size. Phone books have become an expensive collection to purchase and maintain and much of the information in these books can be found in subscription or web databases. The Storage Reference Collection is composed for the most part of items of local historical significance and are often earlier editions of current Iowa Reference, Ready Reference materials along with some previous years tax forms master lists and publications.

The Reference Documents Collection is much narrower in scope than the Reference Collection. It covers only documents created by state agencies, multi-jurisdictional agencies, Johnson County government, the Iowa City School Community School District and City of Iowa City departments or city task forces. Federal documents are generally not found in this collection with the exception of a relatively new category of documents produced by the United States Environmental Protection Agency that relate specifically to Iowa City or University of Iowa superfund sites.

The Pamphlet File includes primarily travel information in brochure and leaflet format and also contains some local information of an ephemeral nature. The Pamphlet File collection is a prime example of the changing nature of how and where information is stored and retrieved. This collection has dropped in size from 24 file cabinets to three. The Pamphlet File has become almost a relic of an earlier period of reference resources because of the ease of finding this type of information on the Internet.

Iowa City is an exceptional community for its size in the number of libraries that can be used by the public. The University of Iowa's main library and its branch libraries as well as the State Historical Society of Iowa's library offer much more specialized and expensive reference material than what is found at the Iowa City Public Library. Open and easy access to these libraries'

reference collections and the ever growing information available on the Internet has allowed the library to concentrate on basic reference materials instead of the more specialized titles.

Audience

The audience for the Reference Collections is the public seeking answers to questions. Adults are the primary users of the collection as well as young adults, junior high through high school. Some use is by elementary aged children needing information not found in the Children's Room materials. The collection is used by patrons on their own or with the assistance of the Information Services staff. Patrons need not be present to use the resources of the collection and can telephone, mail or email a question to the Reference Desk staff. Materials are used to answer questions of personal, work or educational needs. Questions range from quick easy-to-answer to longer in-depth research projects that may require referral to a more specialized library or to another relevant source.

Size and duplication

There is little duplication within the Reference Collection whose size is currently 2438 titles and 4786 volumes, with annual volumes accounting for the higher ratio of items to titles. The Iowa Reference Collection has 387 titles and 685 volumes. Approximately 550 titles in the Reference Collections are standing orders. The Documents collection contains 511 titles and 1058 volumes.

Some titles, such as almanacs and travel guides, are duplicated in the Ready Reference collection and the Reference Collection. There is some duplication of titles in the reference for the circulating collection. Most often these are popular annual titles such as college guides, investment information, travel guides and almanacs. In other instances when a new edition of a reference title arrives, the older edition goes to the circulating collection.

Standing orders range from business books such as annual mutual fund guides, medical dictionaries, atlases and general and specialized almanacs to literary titles such as **Contemporary Authors** and **Contemporary Literary Criticism**. The latter two titles are also examples of very large sets of books. Each volume is not superseded when a new one is added to the collection. These constantly growing sets of books make space an issue in the 800's area of the collection. An option in future years may be to replace the print version with an electronic version of these types of materials when the price and ease-of-use of the product meet the library staff's requirements.

The Reference Collection is a no growth collection. While print materials will always have a prominent role in the provision of reference services, online resources whether subscription or locally produced databases, websites or other electronic links to information are a growing component of the collection. (See the Electronic Resources Collection plan).

Selection

Selection tools for the Reference Collection are standard library selection sources such as **Booklist**, **Publishers Weekly** and **Library Journal**. Other sources for reference titles are **Reference and User Services Quarterly**, newspapers and general magazines; government documents and reference services listservs, and publishers' catalogs. Specialized library science titles such as **Reference Sources for Small and Medium-sized Libraries**, **Fundamental Reference Sources** and **Guide to Reference Books** are also consulted, especially when deciding which titles to retain and which to remove. A number of reference book publishers still solicit by

phone and send advance copies of titles for preview. The staff and public also offer suggestions for titles to add to the collection.

The availability of information in electronic format, either through commercial subscription or locally produced databases or through web sites on the Internet, creates a challenge in deciding whether to purchase a print title. Well-reviewed print titles offer a stable format and high quality, while electronic resources may provide more current information. Electronic resources may also provide wider access to users if licenses permit remote users. However, online resources can be very expensive, or be of dubious authority and may also lack permanency.

Maintenance

Many titles in the Reference Collections are replaced each year or on a specific cycle to maintain the greatest degree of accuracy as possible. The holdings for individual titles vary by title and depend upon the topic of the book. Some titles are kept for one or five years, while others are kept for a longer period of time on the reference shelves, with older editions moved to storage to provide historic perspective. Most titles are not used heavily enough to merit replacement, but some of the older classic titles have been rebound after years of use because the title is out of print. Loss through theft is minor in the Reference Collections.

The maintenance of the documents collection is changing as many of the governmental agencies have moved their documents to an online electronic format. The library is left with the option of either printing the document or creating a link the web site of the document in the online catalog. In some case the library does both.

A newer consideration in the maintenance of this collection is whether to replace a title or titles with the electronic version of the item or whether to keep the print version when adding the electronic. Issues of cost, access and ease of use, authoritativeness, space and stability of the format must also be addressed when deciding whether a replacement print copy will be purchased or an electronic product or resource added instead.