

Negative Library Growth

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This paper, which appeared originally in the *Un*a*b*a*s*h*e*d Librarian* (Number 13, Fall 1974, p. 6), was inspired by an ad in *Library Journal*, although problems with remote book return boxes at the University of Connecticut Library also contributed to the approach to helping control library growth described here.

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Drastic problems sometimes require radical solutions. While zero library growth now is receiving much attention, The Molesworth Institute has been engaged for several years in research designed to help libraries achieve negative library growth. This research was undertaken in response to a request from a major research library faced with severe space problems, stabilizing budgets, an inadequate circulation system, a book drop system that simply didn't work, as well as a host of other problems.

After much study of conventional solutions which proved either too expensive or too complex, we recommended a simple, inexpensive solution which soon proved to have dramatic impact. At a total cost of under \$5,000, three paper disintegrators manufactured by the Security Engineered Machinery Co., Inc. (see *Library Journal* 96:1951, 1971) were installed in place of the conventional book return collection points. Two were installed initially as remote location collection points and one within the library. They proved so effective, however, that within a year the one in the library was moved to another remote location and a larger model was installed in the library.

By reducing all books being returned to "a mass of tiny, confetti-like particles," this system has had truly startling effects. Negative library growth has been accomplished; the collections have been reduced from 1,495,327 volumes to

1,233,608.5 volumes in less than three years. Space problems have been reduced and plans for a new building have been abandoned at a saving of at least \$15 million. Rather than being forced to install an expensive computerbased circulation system, the library has been able to totally abandon its circulation system at an annual savings of at least \$75,000. Cataloging has been abandoned as well and books are simply shelved alphabetically by author at an annual savings of at least \$400,000. Weeding is automatic, users are insured of getting more new and valuable material and less old and outdated material since all savings have been put into the book fund.

Most importantly, however, this new approach has entirely eliminated the rubbish-picking activities of the curious which, in the past, had created serious litter and public relations problems for the library. It also, of course, represents a major contribution to paper recycling efforts.

A few faculty members are unhappy over the loss of their favorite texts but administrators and students alike are extremely pleased since faculty members are now forced to update their readings, and their thinking, constantly. Some traditionalists feel that the library has lost its research potential but that is a small price to pay for the enormous savings that have been achieved.

A complete 10-page report on this major study entitled *Negative Library Growth; How We Run Our Library Excellent* (Storrs, Connecticut, 1974) is available for \$50 from The Molesworth Institute.

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