

# 504 Research Proposal:

## Design & Methods

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## **Purpose**

This paper will provide a brief summary of the purpose and questions addressed by my proposed research study, outline the methods I plan to use, and state why I chose these methods. This paper will also include an appendix of the proposed questions in the survey.

## **Introduction**

This study will address “deselection” performed in Canadian public libraries in all provinces and territories. The study, although based on the work of Juris Dilevko and Lisa Gottlieb’s study “Weed to Achieve: A Fundamental Part of the Library Mission,”<sup>i</sup> will address issues such as electronic formats and Canadian culture in the weeding process. More specifically, the study will attempt to discover whether libraries use different deselection criteria for different media. Do Canadian libraries attach a specific value to Canadian content when deselection is considered? I plan to use a methodology and dissemination of the survey that will be similar to that of Dilevko and Gottlieb’s survey.<sup>ii</sup>

## **Description of the proposed method(s)**

My research will consist of an exploratory survey with open-ended questions supplemented by questions that ask the respondents to provide specific ordinal-level numerical data about the frequency of deselection. The survey for this research will be largely based on the work of Dilevko and Gottlieb with additional questions added to address issues related to electronic and alternative formats as well as the effect, if any, Canadian content affects deselection of materials.

The survey will be disseminated via e-mail to roughly 10% of the public library systems with municipal level library services. Provinces and the territories with provincial-wide or territorial-wide public library systems will each receive a single survey, as this study is aimed at discovering national trends, if any, in deselection. Sending two or more surveys to libraries in the same system would skew the results and invalidate any conclusions drawn from the study.

The surveys will be disseminated via electronic mail with a letter explaining the purpose of the study. Before the survey and accompanying letter are sent, they will be translated into French. While I expect most respondents outside of Québec will respond in English, all respondents will receive both the English and French versions to encourage a higher response rate and to prevent any pre-conceptions of the language used to interfere with the study.

Respondents will be selected from the Canadian Library Association's list of public libraries and e-mailed the package. To allow library staff to have adequate time to respond, the responses will be accepted for a month. This will allow library staff to seek permission, if necessary, or for them to contact me with any questions before completing the survey.

### **Justification of this Method(s)**

This research will use an exploratory survey with open-ended questions in order to encourage responses which reflect the truth. Questions which restrict people to a list of possible responses, usually with ranges such as 3-6 months between rounds of deselection, cause people to report truthful but imprecise data. For example, if 25 percent of respondents respond by choosing this option,

we will not know whether the respondent deselected every three, four, five, or six months.

Therefore, open-ended questions are likely to gather more accurate information which can be more thoroughly analyzed and tabulated.

Secondly, Palys supports the use of exploratory surveys when little is known about the subject.<sup>iii</sup> Since little research exists on deselection in Canadian public libraries, this is a valid method to use in this study.

Thirdly, Dilevko and Gottlieb used this method for their study and received a high rate of response,<sup>iv</sup> possibly due to the low cost to complete the survey. In addition, as my research is a continuation of their work which focuses on Canada using similar methods, the results of this study can be compared and contrasted with their results.

As this study is based on their work, I have borrowed questions 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 13, 15, 20-23, and 25 directly from their study. Questions 12, 18, 19, 24, and 26 have been modified from their survey to fit my survey. The remaining questions are new and are focused on the areas their study did not cover.

To ensure the questions in the survey are clear, I will recruit MLIS professors and UWO library staff to screen the questions for clarity. This should prevent the problems associated with terminology which Ted Palys identified as possible pitfalls with surveys.<sup>v</sup> In addition, a similar approach was used by Charles A. Donovan who sent his survey about the retention of classic works, such as Darwin's Voyage of the HMS Beagle, to libraries known to have good collections to ensure the survey is clear.<sup>vi</sup>

Respondents will be chosen from the Canadian Library Association's directory of public libraries. As with the Dilevko and Gottlieb study, I plan to choose potential library systems at random. Although, once the list has been chosen, I will eliminate any duplicates to ensure some library systems are not counted twice.

Before the survey is disseminated I will ensure the survey meets the University's regulations for ethical research.<sup>vii</sup>

The survey will be e-mailed to the libraries chosen as possible participants. This is both faster and cheaper than a traditional mailing as it costs nothing to send an e-mail and it saves money on stamps, envelopes, and paper. Furthermore, if library staff have questions regarding the study, they can easily e-mail me their concerns and/or questions which I can address, thus hopefully raising the response rate. It would also enable me to verify that they received it or send a reminder, if necessary.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, I believe I have chosen an appropriate method for examining the deselection policies of public libraries in Canada with special emphasis on electronic and alternative formats as well as determining the effect Canadian culture plays in the deselection process. I have developed a survey that examines the issues and allows respondents to respond openly. I hope to increase response rates by providing the survey in both official languages. Furthermore, by using e-mail systems, I have developed a low-cost and efficient manner for disseminating the survey and receiving responses.

## **Preliminary Data Collection and Analysis Survey**

## **Appendix 1**

Text of survey questions (all questions except #1 refer to the general [circulating] book collection of public libraries [fiction and non-fiction] but do not refer to reference collections).

1. How many total print book volumes are currently in your public library?
2. How many electronic or alternative format items are currently in your library?
3. Please list all the reasons why your library weeds books and other material from your collection.
4. Are there any factors that discourage the weeding of material in your library's collection?
5. What are the criteria that you use to weed the print material in the general book collection of your library? Name all the criteria that you use, and indicate which criteria are the most important for your library.
6. What are the criteria that you use to weed the electronic or alternative format material in the general collection of your library? Name all the criteria that you use, and indicate which criteria are the most important for your library.
7. Is an item's classification as Canadian content, either by or about Canada, considered a factor in the deselection process? If so, please explain as fully as possible.
8. How often do you weed the material of the general book collection of your library? Is it on a regular basis, or irregular? If regular, what is the usual frequency of weeding? If irregular, when were the last two times that the general collection of your library was weeded?
9. How often, if ever have electronic or alternative media been weeded? Is it on a regular or irregular basis? If regular, what is the usual frequency of weeding? If irregular, when were the last two times that the general collection of your library was weeded?
10. What do you do with the weeded print material from the general book collection? For example, is it sold, discarded, does it go into storage, or do you do something else with it?
11. What do you do with weeded material that is in alternative format? For example, is it sold, discarded, does it go into storage, or do you do something else with it?
12. What are the position titles of the people who participate in the weeding process? For example, is it generally one person or a collective team effort? How does this process

work? If different people participate in the weeding of electronic and alternative format material, please indicate as appropriate. Give as much detail as possible.

13. Is there a chance for other members of the library staff or members of the community to review material that has been designated as “to be weeded” before it actually is finally weeded? How does this review process work? For example, is there one level of review or multiple review levels?
14. If this process is different for electronic or alternative formats, please indicate below how it is different.
15. What is the position title of the person who has the final say on any weeded print book material?
16. What is the position title of the person who has the final say on any weeded electronic or material in alternative format?
17. Have you ever personally saved material that met your library’s criteria for weeding? If so, why did you save this item?
18. Please give details regarding any complaints from members of the general public about weeded materials, regardless of format.
19. Do you personally believe that weeding increases usage of material? If yes, what is your reason for thinking this? If no, why not?
20. Do you personally believe that weeding increases the satisfaction of your patrons? If yes, what is your reason for thinking this? If no, why not?
21. Do you personally believe that weeding saves staff time? If yes, what is your reason for thinking this? If no, why not?
22. Do you personally think that weeding is necessary in order to make room for new technologies? If yes, what is your reason for thinking this? If no, why not?
23. Not taking into account the procedures that your library actually follows in weeding, what is your personal philosophy about weeding?
24. If you could personally make changes in your procedures for weeding books or other material in your collection, what aspects of your weeding procedure would you like to change and why?
25. In a perfect world, what would you personally do with the material that your library designates for weeding?
26. Does your library follow any written guidelines for weeding the print and/or other material from the collection of your library? If so, what are these guidelines?





<sup>i</sup>Juris Dilevko and Lisa Gottlieb, “Weed to Achieve: A Fundamental Part of the Library Mission”, Library Collections, Acquisitions, & Technical Services 27, (Toronto, 2003), pp. 73-96.

<sup>ii</sup>Juris Dilevko and Lisa Gottlieb, “Weed to Achieve: A Fundamental Part of the Library Mission”, Library Collections, Acquisitions, & Technical Services 27, (Toronto, 2003), pp. 73-96.

<sup>iii</sup>Ted Palys, Research Decisions: Quantitative and Qualitative Perspectives, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., Chapter 7.

<sup>iv</sup>Juris Dilevko and Lisa Gottlieb, “Weed to Achieve: A Fundamental Part of the Library Mission”, Library Collections, Acquisitions, & Technical Services 27, (Toronto, 2003), pp. 73-96.

<sup>v</sup>Ted Palys, Research Decisions: Quantitative and Qualitative Perspectives, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., Chapter 7.

<sup>vi</sup>Charles A. Donovan, “Deselection and the Classics” in American Libraries (1995), pp. 1110-1111.

<sup>vii</sup>UWO’s Office of Research Ethics <http://www.uwo.ca/research/ethics/>

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