

# RESEARCH, TEACHING & LEARNING

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## UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO EXPLORES LIBRARY-FACULTY PARTNERSHIPS IN UNCOVERING HIDDEN COLLECTIONS

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The University of Chicago is currently piloting two models of library-faculty partnerships that support cooperative collection development and graduate student training. The Uncovering New Chicago Archives Project (UNCAP), now in the first of its three years, is creating new research and teaching resources and developing graduate students' skills in working with primary materials. UNCAP builds and expands on the work of Mapping the Stacks (MTS), an archival project started in 2003 by university English Department faculty members.

A feature shared by Mapping the Stacks and the other, more recent UNCAP model is the involvement and responsibility of university faculty members and librarians. In both models, university faculty members are active partners with librarians but the two models are distinguished from each other by the degree of faculty involvement. MTS was designed as a faculty-directed project and it continues to operate as such as part of UNCAP. UNCAP also includes a faculty-guided component that requires a smaller time commitment by the faculty members with greater reliance on librarians and archivists. By piloting the two approaches within UNCAP, the university will reach a better understanding of the circumstances when one approach may prove to be more effective than the other.

There are four distinct but interrelated components within UNCAP:

- Participants extend beyond the university into the South Side of Chicago to foster collaborations with and among community organizations, institutions, and individuals, in order to locate privately held and previously inaccessible collections of potential value for research.
- Scholars' expertise is relied on to guide archival processing priorities and processing levels.
- Graduate students work as part of an interdisciplinary team with scholars, librarians, and archivists to develop research skills and gain experience in a collaborative project.
- The library is developing an extensible technical infrastructure to allow for cross-collection, cross-institution searching of materials in a wide variety of formats.

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## UNCAP'S SHARED, EXTENSIBLE, TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

As a result of participating in UNCAP, institutions will have the finding aids to their collections available online as part of a shared database that offers users the capability to search across as well as within collections.

The UNCAP database will extend an existing system that is used to provide access to the University of Chicago Library's Encoded Archival Description (EAD)-encoded archival finding aids.\* The current interface, based on a MarkLogic XML content server, will be extended (1) to allow searching across a variety of metadata formats; (2) to search across collections held at multiple institutions; (3) to limit searches by collection and by institution as needed. To accommodate metadata for other formats such as visual resources, all metadata formats will be crosswalked to the Metadata Object Description Schema (MODS), which will be used for cross-collection searching.

The University of Chicago Library is now in the process of planning for the first application of the extensible technical infrastructure with the Black Metropolis Research Consortium (BMRC). BMRC is an unincorporated association of Chicago-based libraries, universities, museums, and other archival institutions with significant holdings in African-American and African diasporic culture, history, and politics, of which the University of Chicago and Mapping the Stacks are members. BMRC member institutions will contribute their finding aids to the UNCAP database, and the UNCAP interface will be embedded on the BMRC Web site. Finding aids contributed by BMRC members will be identified so that they can be retrieved individually or as a group. The library will consult with the BMRC archivist and provide tools to ensure that BMRC finding aids can be easily ingested into the UNCAP database for seamless cross-collection searching.

At the conclusion of the UNCAP project, the UNCAP Web site and its underlying technical architecture will be available for application to other efforts to connect finding aids from institutions within geographical areas or with collections on related topics.

\* University of Chicago Library, Archives and Manuscripts Finding Aids, <http://ead.lib.uchicago.edu/>.

## Distinctive Features of UNCAP

UNCAP provides an example of how special collections can contribute to ARL's strategic direction for Research, Teaching, and Learning to "promote and facilitate new and expanding roles for ARL libraries to engage in the transformations affecting research and undergraduate and graduate education." Doing so, however, requires departing from conventional thinking about collection development, the traditional use of graduate students as archival processing assistants, and the typical roles faculty play in library activities.

A basic principle of UNCAP is creating access to primary sources needed by faculty and their students.

Toward this end, UNCAP and the University of Chicago Library serve as a catalyst and locus for developing and providing access to collections of primary sources needed by the institution's faculty and students, regardless of whether the collections are

institutionally held or not. Adherence to the principle of "access not ownership" entails the commitment of library staff and external funds to activities that place collections in other repositories and reduce arrearages in all participating institutions.

Preserving the identity of separate institutions within the context of a seamless search experience across repositories, collections, and formats presents some technical challenges, but this functionality is absolutely essential to inter-institutional collaboration. (See sidebar accompanying this article.)

UNCAP is also distinctive in its approach to graduate student training. Graduate students are assigned to archival collections in their own disciplines and work as part of an interdisciplinary team that is led by faculty members and includes graduate students from various academic departments as well as library staff. Discovering primary sources of direct interest and functioning as part of an interdisciplinary team provide an intellectual experience that contributes to the professionalization of graduate students. This outcome creates a powerful incentive for faculty members as well as students to partner with the library.

## Background

There is a massive amount of 20th-century materials of potential research value held by private individuals and private organizations. UNCAP offers an opportunity for the library to engage with scholars in a coordinated effort to discover, select, and collect these primary sources.

UNCAP has its origins in Mapping the Stacks, started by University of Chicago English Department faculty members Jacqueline Goldsby and Jacqueline

Stewart in 2003. Their own research and teaching interests in post-Depression pre-Civil Rights-era African-American literary and cinematic history shaped their goal: "to survey the holdings of Chicago-area libraries and archives and to identify primary source materials...that were in need of processing and cataloguing." Mapping the Stacks was established to perform that work, combining the faculty members' field expertise and labor power together with that of graduate students from the University of Chicago. As a first step, the faculty members and students immersed themselves in archival processing literature. This preliminary course of readings was followed by training

sessions that were organized and led by library archivists.

Mapping the Stacks began with a focus on collections in the Vivian G. Harsh Collection of Afro-American History and Literature of the Chicago Public Library, the DuSable Museum of African American

History, and the editorial offices of the *Chicago Defender*. Seed monies from the university's Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture and Humanities Division, supplemented by a Mellon Foundation Officer's Grant, provided support for the project's initial phases.

Under UNCAP, Professor Goldsby will direct the third phase of Mapping the Stacks. Professor Stewart will serve as a consultant on the project from Northwestern University, where she is now on the faculty. The library will partner with faculty members Robert von Hallberg and Travis Jackson to develop and process University of Chicago Library collections in contemporary poetry and the Chicago Jazz Archive.

## Cooperative Collection Development

A chief aim of UNCAP is to ensure that currently hidden primary resources are preserved and accessible to scholars. Faculty members' first-hand knowledge of the community, and word-of-mouth about the initiative, are already bringing to light privately held collections and opening doors to others that were previously inaccessible. We anticipate that a number of collections will be acquired as a result of UNCAP, some that may be appropriate for the University of Chicago Library's holdings and others that will be housed at another institution.

UNCAP pairs faculty subject expertise with library staff professional knowledge to identify collections that need to be preserved and to determine the repository that would best serve researchers and the collection. The principle of "access not ownership" as a part of archival collection development is especially well suited for Mapping the Stacks because of the

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strong African- American collecting initiatives in place at area institutions. University of Chicago Library staff members have already participated in discussions about the disposition of collections, providing guidance and educating potential donors on aspects of the process. The library's ability to be a neutral advisor has been immensely productive to these interactions.

## Graduate Student Training and Faculty Commitment

Along with many ARL institutions, the University of Chicago Library has long benefited from employing graduate students as archival processing assistants. At the University of Delaware, academic departments fund graduate student internships. The University of Iowa has established a fellowship that provides a two-year graduate assistantship and tuition support.<sup>1</sup> The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and Columbia University have recently launched programs that hire and mentor graduate students, at UCLA with the involvement of faculty members.<sup>2</sup> These programs play an important recruitment role in attracting graduate students to the library and archives profession, and the processing experience helps all students become more critically aware and productive researchers. The emphasis in most of these programs is typically on accomplishing processing goals established by the library: the students are assigned to collections that the library has identified as processing priorities, and they work according to processing levels and standards established by the library. By contrast, the selection and prioritization of collections to be processed as part of UNCAP are driven by faculty and student research interests.

Because graduate students involved with UNCAP work with faculty on collections in their own disciplinary fields, they are likely to discover specific sources for use in papers or dissertations, in addition to developing skills in working effectively with primary sources. Professional archivists on the library staff collaborate with faculty to organize training workshops and provide expertise throughout the project. The faculty members, graduate students, and library archivists constitute teams that encourage interdisciplinary collaboration and sharing of expertise. This interdisciplinary, collaborative experience is especially crucial for graduate students in the humanities, who have less opportunity to work collaboratively than their counterparts in the sciences.

Developing the conceptual, intellectual, research, and professional skills of graduate students is a chief priority of UNCAP and a key to the direct involvement

of faculty members. According to Jacqueline Goldsby, this process includes: "(a) training in organizing and analyzing large tracts of primary source materials; (b) learning how to envision broad-based research questions that primary sources inspire; (c) conceptualizing data use across disciplinary lines, thus learning how evidentiary protocols differ across intellectual fields; (d) learning the ethical use of primary source materials; (e) conducting themselves in a non-classroom, professional work environment; and (f) making intellectual judgments in collaboration with peers, library professionals, and faculty."

Not surprisingly, this approach demands a substantial commitment on the part of the faculty member that may be difficult to add to teaching and

research responsibilities without the incentive of course relief. Moreover, directing archival discovery and processing projects will appeal primarily to faculty members who have themselves worked with archival materials and whose own areas of current

research would benefit from access to new sources. The Mellon Officer's Grant provided the Mapping the Stacks faculty directors a summer stipend to recognize the labor-intensive work they performed in completing the project's initial survey. Under UNCAP, Jacqueline Goldsby will have two periods of teaching relief: at the beginning and end of the grant period, to allow her sufficient time to launch and close down the MTS components of the project.

To broaden the extensibility of its core elements, UNCAP is testing faculty-guided models of faculty involvement in addition to the faculty-directed model of Mapping the Stacks. The library-faculty partnerships for the Chicago Jazz Archive and the contemporary poetry collections at the University of Chicago Library are structured to require a more limited and focused time commitment from the faculty advisors. The Mellon award to the library will fund an archivist for two years who will assume a number of the roles undertaken by the faculty director of the Mapping the Stacks project. The Mellon Project archivist will coordinate the development of processing plans and train and supervise the graduate students working on library collections. This will eliminate the considerable administrative and management time required of faculty. And since they will not be involved in activities relating to hands-on processing, subject expert faculty members, Travis Jackson and Robert von Hallberg, will not need to develop such in-depth familiarity with archival processing theory and practice as did the Mapping the Stacks faculty. While this model is closer

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to existing programs for using graduate students to reduce library archival processing arrearages, it is distinguished by faculty guidance in selecting graduate students, collections, and processing levels.

The pilot phase of Mapping the Stacks confirms that training and experience in archival processing hone the ability of graduate students to appraise the content of primary source materials and discern patterns and principles of organization within a collection. The payoff is multi-fold: students discover research topics and questions that will form the basis for seminar papers and dissertation projects; processing arrearages are reduced; and the collections receive enhanced metadata since they are described by knowledgeable scholars. Thus the graduate students, the library, and future researchers all benefit. The faculty-student-library teams discuss interdisciplinary research methodologies and how diverse research needs drive the kinds of archival arrangement appropriate for a given collection.

Working off-campus on collections at other institutions has an additional benefit for Mapping the Stacks students: as Christina Petersen, one of the students, remarked, “The life of a graduate student often by necessity shrinks to the confines of academia at the expense of our involvement in the community surrounding the university. What I enjoy most about my work with Mapping the Stacks is that I am able to bridge the gap between studying film history and drawing attention to film as a moving embodiment of social history, through my involvement in a community greater than the university.”

### **Hidden Collections: New Challenges, New Definitions**

UNCAP is providing opportunities to test and refine approaches to uncovering hidden collections that have been the subject of lively debate in the archival and library communities over the past several years.<sup>3</sup>

The Mapping the Stacks collections to be processed are in Chicago repositories that have remarkable holdings in South Side Chicago African-American literature, history, and culture. As is the case at the University of Chicago and most research libraries, many of these collections are “hidden” according to today’s standards: print finding aids exist for some collections and others are unprocessed.

Mapping the Stacks archival processing policies and procedures vary widely according to each institution’s mission, constituents, and priorities. The Vivian Harsh Collection is located at the Carter Woodson Regional

Library, a branch of the Chicago Public Library; the DuSable Museum of African American History is an independent museum; and the *Chicago Defender* is owned by a privately held company. University of Chicago Library archivists recognize the many ways in which processing standards and procedures appropriate for a large academic research library may be unsuitable for other types of institutions with different collections and user populations. The involvement of faculty—who are often long-time, trusted researchers in non-academic collections—greatly facilitates establishing cooperative relations with community organizations and institutions essential to interinstitutional collaboration.

Mapping the Stacks work to date confirms that there is no “one size fits all” approach to archival processing.

There is no doubt that collection-level descriptions and online records for unprocessed collections most efficiently meet the pressing need to make new resources known to researchers. Collections must also be processed at a level responsive to the nature of the collection, the institutional context and

mission, and the needs of the researchers who will use it.

The devil, however, is very often in the details: faculty and student user input is very likely to result in archival processing plans that push inventories away from a minimalist, collection-level approach and toward detailed and costly item-level description. And, while the processors’ subject expertise allows for richer metadata, it is also likely to raise the question of where archival processing ends and user-generated content, or research investigation, begins. Access tools already produced for Mapping the Stacks range from item-level inventories to series- and folder-level finding aids, a diversity of approaches that will provide ample opportunity for the partners to better evaluate and understand the advantages and disadvantages of streamlined archival processing.

### **Early Lessons Learned**

UNCAP has already “uncovered” several issues of broad interest that we hope to explore with the library and archival profession.

The Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) Code of Ethics for Special Collections Librarians states that special collections librarians “may not withhold information about the library’s holdings or sequester collection materials in order to further their own research and publication.”<sup>4</sup> Since humanists have less experience with team-based research and authorship than researchers in the sciences, these

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issues will form part of our discussions, another way that UNCAP will contribute to the growth of interdisciplinary and collaborative scholarship in the humanities.

In addition, the principle of equal access may be seen by faculty or students as an obstacle to individual professional advancement when previously inaccessible primary sources of direct relevance to their current research interests are discovered. Can the library's standard of equal access be reconciled with the faculty member or graduate student's use of these resources before the finding aids are publicly available? Are ethical concerns about access addressed as long as the finding aid is made public promptly and represents the collection in accordance with the standards established for processing it? How should the library respond if a graduate student claims exclusive right to publication of resources discovered at the initiative of faculty members, or if a faculty member claims the right to publish descriptive material generated by students?

Another challenging area is the dialectic between scholars and archivists regarding the appropriate level of arrangement and description in processing a particular collection. Special collections librarians are aware of the irony that, even as we move in the direction of collection-level records and folder-level access in order to provide at least minimal access to otherwise hidden collections, digitization is forcing us to undertake additional and ever more elaborate item-level description.

UNCAP assumes that scholars have the ability to identify the level of access that best meets their needs, but few libraries will have the staff, resources, and technical capacity to provide detailed processing for all these materials. Will libraries be able to educate faculty to the trade-offs we face and enlist them in making difficult choices? Is there a risk of a standoff about who makes these decisions—and the respective roles of researchers and professional archivists? UNCAP partnerships raise these issues in new and challenging contexts.

### Measuring Impact

The desired outcomes of UNCAP are more effective approaches to engaging faculty with the library, improved graduate student training, and access to previously hidden collections. We plan to track the graduate students who work on UNCAP to gather data about the impact of the project on their educational and career paths. Some of the questions we have are: Does the experience help focus selection of a dissertation topic and reduce "time to degree," or does it have the opposite effect? Will more archives-based dissertations be produced by students who are less daunted by the prospect of tackling the inherent intellectual and physical

complexity of original sources? Will the project be able to generate an impact on recruitment and diversity in the archival and library professions? And, perhaps most importantly, will it help develop a generation of faculty members excited about working with primary sources, who then build graduate and undergraduate courses, and promote student research, around the special collections holdings at their institutions? We are also interested in comparing archival processing costs associated with the different models being tested.

The 2003 ARL statement, "Research Libraries and the Commitment to Special Collections" identifies special collections as "one of the critical identifiers of a research library" and affirms the "critical role" played by special collections in fulfilling the mission of research libraries.<sup>5</sup> Projects such as UNCAP demonstrate how the original materials in special collections provide rich opportunities for engaging in library-faculty partnerships that can help transform teaching and research.

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<sup>1</sup> University of Iowa Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives, Robert A. and Ruth Bywater Olson Fellowship, <http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/spec-coll/about/olsonfellowship.html>.

<sup>2</sup> UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections, Center for Primary Research and Training, <http://www.library.ucla.edu/special/scweb/CFPRT.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> This initiative, launched under the auspices of the ARL Special Collections Task Force, began with a working conference at the Library of Congress in September 2003 "to explore the challenges of providing access to uncataloged and unprocessed archival, manuscript, and rare book materials," followed by the white paper, "Hidden Collections, Scholarly Barriers," prepared by Barbara Jones for the task force <http://www.arl.org/rtl/speccoll/hidden/>. Discussion was further stimulated by pre-publication distribution of "More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Processing Approaches," by Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner, in *American Archivist* 68 (2005): 208–263.

<sup>4</sup> ACRL Rare Books and Manuscripts Section, <http://www.rbms.info/>.

<sup>5</sup> ARL, "Research Libraries and the Commitment to Special Collections," <http://www.arl.org/rtl/speccoll/speccollprinciples.shtml>.