



Integrating Preservation Activities

A SPEC Kit compiled by

Karen Brown
Preservation Librarian
University at Albany, SUNY

Emily Holmes
Assistant Preservation Librarian
New York University

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Activities
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SURVEY



Executive Summary

Introduction

In the wake of the brittle books crisis, it has become apparent that more than item-level treatment is required if research library collections are to be maintained for future use. Where once preservation was regarded as a specialized activity devoted to care of a few valued resources, it now includes a wide range of activities that interact to ensure long-term access to collections overall. These increasingly complex activities often occur outside of the library's preservation department, which creates both an opportunity and a need for interdepartmental collaboration.

Preservation specialists have argued that to ensure long-term access to collections, preservation activities must be closely integrated with other library operations. Attention to maintaining the collections must be part of all jobs, all departments, all operations, and must apply to materials in all formats from the point of acquisition until withdrawal. Such an approach promises that more damage will be prevented and at-risk material will be intercepted in a timely fashion because staff across the library are assisting the preservation process, making it more efficient and effective.

This SPEC survey attempted to discover if library preservation programs are in fact more integrated and more effective than in years past. It examined which units participate in preservation activities in research libraries and the degree to which those activities are spread across the library. It asked whether levels of activity have changed over the years, how staff and users are trained about preservation issues, and how preservation is evaluated.

The Establishment of Preservation Programs

This survey was distributed to the 124 ARL member libraries in June 2002. Sixty-nine (56%) responded to the survey. Of these, fifty-five (80%) report having a preservation program. Though the other fourteen respondents may not have a formal program, the majority of them have elements of one, including a disaster plan, an environmentally controlled off-site shelving facility, environmental monitoring, and review of items for preservation treatment. More than half of the formal preservation programs were established between 1985 and 1994. This period of growth appears to have been the beginning of acceptance of preservation as a distinct discipline within libraries, but the rate of establishment of preservation programs has dropped sharply; only six new programs began between 1995 and 2002.

The establishment of a program and the existence of a preservation officer are not necessarily correlative—55 respondents (80%) have programs, while only 48 (71%) have preservation administrators. Six institutions began a preservation program without an administrator position, but created a position within one to five years. One institution created the position before the program was established. Seven institutions with long-established programs still operate without a preservation administrator position.¹ However, the data show that for most institutions, the creation of a preservation administrator position correlated with the establishment of the program as a whole. More than 75% of these positions are full-time. Evidently, the creation of a position and the appointment of a preservation administrator are considered essential to the establishment of a preservation program for most of those surveyed. The existence

of a preservation administrator position also demonstrates the administrative support necessary for effective preservation efforts over the long-term. One respondent commented, "We have a preservation committee, but are really in need of a preservation staff position and/or positions. Our work in preservation is presently erratic, and more planning and training is needed. We have brought in a consultant this year, which is a great start."

Preservation Activity

The survey asked which units participate in each of 19 categories of preservation activity. When all of the responses to this question are aggregated, several patterns emerge. One pattern shows how widely preservation activity is dispersed across library operations. There is some level of participation by all 13 library units in five activity categories: disaster planning and response, development of policies, shelf preparation, and staff training. There is participation by all but one unit in four other categories: selection for treatment, reformatting decisions, microfilm reformatting, and fundraising. In these nine categories of dispersed participation the preservation department carries a relatively low percentage of the weight, as well. These activities are arguably well integrated into library operations.

In the remaining 10 activity categories there is participation by all but a few units and, logically, those units would have no reason, nor expertise, to contribute to the specific activity. In most of these 10 categories the preservation department shares the bulk of the weight somewhat equally with one to four other units and the rest of the library has a lower level of participation. Staff and user training are two activities that appear to fall more heavily on the preservation department than on other library units. All 10 of these activities could be described as appropriately integrated into library operations.

A second pattern shows the prevalence of specific preservation activities across the responding libraries. The 19 activity categories fall into several concentration clusters. The activities that have the highest level of participation across all respondents are disaster planning and response,

policy development, and selection for treatment. The second concentration cluster contains shelf preparation and shelf maintenance, conservation treatment, and decision making about reformatting versus replacement. Even though activity is fairly widely dispersed across library units, there is less activity overall in the areas of reformatting, environmental monitoring and control, bindery preparation, and fundraising. The areas of least activity are digital preservation and preservation training.

A third pattern shows which activities each library unit participates in most fully. Outside of preservation, the units with the highest level of involvement in preservation activity are special collections, collection development, circulation, and bindery. Special collections most often participates in development of preservation-related policies, selection for treatment, disaster preparedness and response, conservation treatment, fundraising, and digital reformatting. Ironically, while 35 special collections units are involved in digital reformatting, only 22 are involved in preserving what was digitized and only 14 participate in the preservation of "born-digital" materials. It would be interesting to discover whether the digital objects were meant to be preserved. It is possible that at most reporting institutions the goal of digital reformatting is primarily for access or for mounting temporary exhibits.

Collection development units play an active role in decisions on reformatting versus replacement, preservation policy development, selection for treatment, and microfilm reformatting. It is evident that a close working relationship between preservation and collection development is essential in the areas of selection and reformatting and that selectors and preservation librarians depend upon each other's expertise to make these crucial decisions. One respondent wrote, "Preservation...is administratively part of collection development. This means that most preservation activities, particularly those involving selection for preservation are conducted within the larger context of collection development." This statement is consistent with the literature.² For example,

Cunningham-Kruppa characterizes preservation and collection development as two phases of one function, rather than as two separate functions.

Circulation units' biggest role in preservation is shelf maintenance. They also have an active role in selection for treatment and disaster planning and response. Since so many preservation departments employ a use-based method of selection for preservation treatment, it is not surprising that the circulation unit is involved with selection; they are in a prime position to identify items that need treatment and route them to preservation.

Library bindery units, which are frequently under the purview of preservation departments, are active not only in commercial binding preparation, but also with preservation-related policy development, shelf preparation, selection for treatment, and in-house pre-binding or reinforcement of new acquisitions.

Library administration is moderately active in preservation operations. The main areas of participation are disaster preparedness and response, policy development, and fundraising. Compared to other departments—such as collection development, special collections, and bindery—the data show less involvement in policy development on the part of library administration than was anticipated. Otherwise, the data indicate that library administration has a limited role in day-to-day preservation activities.

Information systems units are involved with digital reformatting and preservation, and disaster planning and response, but are not highly involved with other preservation activities. Their involvement with digital preservation, like that of special collections, is fairly low for both reformatted and “born-digital” materials. (Several respondents indicated that separate digital units within their libraries have responsibility for digital preservation.)

Library facilities units also have a focused participation in a few preservation activities. They are fairly active in disaster planning and response, and environmental monitoring and control. They are moderately involved in shelf maintenance and policy development. This indicates that more collaborative relationships between preservation

and facilities should be pursued, since such cooperation contributes to the long-term survival of all types of library collections.

Public services and technical services involvement with preservation activities is less significant and tends to be focused on disaster planning and response, policy development, and selection for treatment. Cataloging and acquisitions contribute some to shelf preparation and public services plays a small role in training, but on the whole, the expertise contained within these units has not been fully tapped by preservation departments. It may be worthwhile to explore ways to increase the collaboration between these departments in the areas of selection (especially for technical services) and user education (for public services).

Branch libraries' preservation activities seem to mirror those of special collections but on a smaller scale. They appear to manage their own preservation decisions and activities independently from the main library. Since integration of preservation activities should extend beyond the boundaries of the main library, it would be interesting to determine whether branch libraries are underserved by preservation departments or whether there are obstacles to integration, such as lack of proximity.

Changes in Preservation Activities

In addition to inquiring about involvement in preservation activities by units across the library, the survey asked respondents whether certain activities have increased, decreased, or stayed the same since 1997. Responses show an increase in all categories of preservation activity over the past five years. The two areas of greatest growth are environmental monitoring and digital reformatting. More than half of the respondents report that the level of activity for disaster planning, selection for preservation treatment, conservation treatment, and digital preservation has increased. Policy-making, in-house pre-binding of new acquisitions, staff training, shelf maintenance, and shelf preparation have stayed the same for the majority of respondents. The only activities that have decreased for a significant

number of respondents are photocopy reformatting, microfilm reformatting, and commercial bindery preparation.

The Extent of Integration

The survey then asked whether preservation activities were more integrated into library operations and whether they were more effective than five years ago. Libraries that have a preservation program and those that don't both answered these questions. Overall, almost as many libraries report that activities are more integrated (51%) as those that think the level of integration is about the same as five years ago (48%). Only one library responded that activities are less integrated. Thirty-two (58%) of the fifty-five respondents that have a program think that activities are more integrated; twenty-two (40%) think they are about the same; one thinks they are less integrated. Ten (71%) of the fourteen respondents that don't have a program think that integration is about the same, while two (14%) think there is more integration of preservation activities.

Again, there is an almost 50–50 split between those who think preservation activities are more effective (33, or 50%) than five years ago and those who think they are about the same (31, or 47%). Overall, there appears to be a positive correlation between respondents' perceptions of integration and effectiveness. Twenty-five (76%) of the respondents who report that activities are more integrated think they are also more effective; eight (24%) think effectiveness is about the same. Twenty-three (72%) of the respondents who report that integration is about the same think that effectiveness is also about the same; seven (22%) think effectiveness is more than five years ago; two (6%) think effectiveness is less. The library that reported that the integration of activities is less than five years ago thinks that effectiveness has increased.

Preservation Education

One respondent wrote, "Promoting the preservation of the collection is continuous, and a wide variety of strategies are used." Staff training is one of the most important elements of promoting

the preservation program. A program that relates the fundamental principles of preservation to the daily work of staff members from various departments will support the integration of preservation across library operations. Hands-on demonstration and special programs for staff are both the most widely used and the most successful means of preservation training for this survey's respondents. Formal committees and task forces are the next most successful technique. Although 62% of the respondents use e-mail and Web sites to provide preservation information for staff, they are considered less effective than committees, exhibits, or educational posters, signs, bookmarks, etc. Library users seem to respond best to exhibits and educational posters, etc.

The Importance of Policy, Planning, and Evaluation

Slightly more than half of the preservation programs (29 of 55) have a written preservation policy or strategy but only about one-third of these (9) regularly update their policies. Most of the policy reviews occur on an annual cycle. A notable exception is the New York State Program for the Conservation/Preservation of Library Research Materials, where the awarding of grant funds is contingent upon the existence of a preservation plan that is updated every five years. Only 13 of the respondents have a preservation plan for digital resources, a clear indication of the inchoate state of this form of preservation but not necessarily of the degree of programmatic integration. While there is little evidence from the submitted documentation that survey respondents have developed overall preservation policies, most have written procedures that include some preservation components.

All of the respondents that have a preservation program evaluate its effectiveness. Even seven of the libraries that report having no program evaluate some preservation activity. Sixty respondents (97%)—including all seven with no program—track the number of preservation treatments; fifty-two (84%)—including five with no program—track both the number of preservation treatments and the number of materials reformatted. Almost two-thirds

of the respondents track the amount of time spent per treatment and use annual staff performance reviews to measure program effectiveness. Statistical and budget analysis is used by 52% and 45%, respectively; these two figures are surprisingly low, since ARL member libraries submit such data to the association annually for compilation. The numbers may be higher than reported, although gathering and analyzing statistics are not equivalent. In addition, while 48 respondents report having a preservation administrator, only 39 preservation administrators submit reports that are considered when evaluating the effectiveness of preservation activities. And only two libraries look to feedback from users.

Despite the strong indicators that preservation departments evaluate their effectiveness using a range of methods, examples for inclusion in this SPEC Kit were not forthcoming. Perhaps this is because most methods of review are fairly standard management tools, e.g., counting the number of items treated and comparing this to cost.

Preservation Performance

Respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions about the quality of their library's performance with respect to six preservation activities. After indicating their expectations for the minimum level and desired level of performance on a scale of 1 to 9, they were asked to indicate their perception of their library's actual performance level. While all of the respondents have fairly high expectations, their perception of their library's actual performance level is lower than the minimum they consider adequate in all six categories. In other words, research libraries perceive themselves as providing less than adequate preservation service across the board.

On average, the respondents desire the highest level for performance in the areas of disaster preparedness and planning, environmental monitoring, and selecting for preservation treatment. These are followed closely by conservation treatment and educating staff and users. When the perceived *actual* performance level is compared to the minimum performance

level for these activities, it becomes clear that education, environmental monitoring, and disaster preparedness have the largest "adequacy gaps" and may warrant the attention of preservation administrators.

The adequacy gaps for reformatting, selection for preservation treatment, and conservation treatment are relatively small. This may indicate that these activities have matured and that programs are working at maximum capabilities (given existing staffing levels and resources) and have firmly established procedures and decision guidelines.

Conclusion

The literature suggests that for a preservation program to be effective it must be integrated into all aspects of library operations. The survey findings indicate that the scope of research library preservation programs is expanding, the level of activity is increasing overall, and many of these activities are highly integrated across library operations, especially disaster planning and response, selection for treatment, policy development, and reformatting. Preservation activities are more integrated and more successful than five years ago in a significant number of libraries.

Integration has been successfully accomplished in many ways and in many institutions, primarily through the distribution of specific preservation tasks across departmental lines. However, integration of preservation activities should be taken a step farther. True integration is not just task allocation; it has as its framework a preservation policy and/or plan that is created, sanctioned, utilized, and evaluated not only by preservation specialists, but by library administrators and staff members throughout the organization. For most institutions, this framework has not been formalized. Carolyn Clark Morrow wrote, "There is no magic formula for a library preservation program; rather, it is the result of a continuous process of definition, planning, and priority-setting keyed to the needs of a particular library...." Morrow stresses the importance of a frequently updated policy that represents "institutional

consensus”.

Staff training is a fundamental component of any successful preservation program. Training promotes understanding, raises awareness of conditions and practices that damage library collections, and increases commitment on the part of “non-preservation” staff at all levels to care for collections.

Although the institution’s resources will have some bearing upon the scope of preservation activity, modest resources need not inhibit the development or degree of integration of a preservation program. Establishing an effective, integrated program is less dependent upon funds or institutional size than upon library-wide consensus on the importance of the program and a willingness by staff across library units to participate in preservation-related activities.

As one survey respondent wrote, “Preservation is an ongoing commitment and philosophy. The challenge...is to convey that ethos and to stimulate an integrated, programmatic approach that receives support by the system, not just the department. After 10 years...we are making significant progress towards that vision.”

(Footnotes)

¹ Comparing this data to *ARL Preservation Statistics 2000–01* shows an even distribution by size of institution. One respondent each from Group 1 (the largest ARL libraries) and Group 4 (the smallest) had a program but no administrator position, with two respondents from Group 2 and three from Group 3.

² See the articles listed in the Selected Resources by R. Atkinson, M. Child, E. Cunningham-Kruppa, C.C. Morrow, and R. Silverman and M. Grandinette.