



Preservation and Digitization in ARL Libraries

A SPEC Kit compiled by

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SURVEY



SPEC Kit 262

Preservation and Digitization in ARL Libraries

Executive Summary

Introduction

This SPEC Kit is based on data gathered by an ARL Preservation Committee survey of ARL member libraries in June 2000. The committee wished to gather more detailed data on members' preservation programs than is collected in the annual ARL *Preservation Statistics*, including data on the involvement of preservation staff in new digitization initiatives. The goal of the survey was to identify issues to be addressed and actions ARL might take to advance the preservation goals of the membership. The survey was designed to gather data on recent changes, successes, and challenges to preservation programs, staffing and funding patterns for preservation, staffing and funding patterns for digitization efforts, and trends in managing preservation programs. Eighty-seven libraries responded to the survey. While survey responses from some major programs are absent, sufficient data were collected to identify major issues and trends.

Preservation Program Developments

The first five questions of the survey were intended to be answered collaboratively by the library director and the individual with primary responsibility for the library's preservation activities. These questions sought insight into the preservation program's recent developments and accomplishments, its current challenges and ability to fulfill the library's needs, and factors that will impact the program in the future. When asked whether the library's preservation program had changed over the past five years, 32 (37%) answered "significant change," 28 (32%) answered "moderate change," and 27 (31%) answered "slight or no change." Respondents described many different types of changes. Those who reported significant change cited a growing focus on, or activity in, digitizing for preservation and/or digital archiving; creation of a preservation department or program; creation of a preservation librarian position; and staffing changes, all but one of which were position gains. Those who reported mod-

erate change cited changes in personnel, mainly gaining new positions; a growing focus on, or activity in, digitizing for preservation and/or digital archiving; and growth or improvements in conservation activities.

Responses to the question on the library's top preservation accomplishments over the past five years indicate a broad range of activities. The categories noted most often were growth or stabilization of funding (34%); investigating, establishing, or expanding digital preservation activities (28%); and new or expanded preservation or storage facilities (26%).

The responses on preservation challenges facing the library today were equally broad ranging. The most frequently cited categories were lack of funding (46%), preserving digital resources (36%), reformatting growing collections of brittle books (30%), lack of environmental control (26%), and hiring and retaining quality staff (26%).

Forty percent of respondents believe that their preservation program is meeting the library's current needs. About one-third believe that their program is not. One-quarter believe that their program is meeting the library's needs in some areas but not in others. Many who see deficiencies in their program's ability to meet the library's needs listed areas for improvement. The most prevalent were the three issues that dominate this section of the survey: funding (44%), digital preservation (27%), and staffing (25%).

When asked what factors will influence most significantly the future direction of the preservation program, funding was the overwhelmingly response (73%). Digital technology was second (38%) followed by commitment, strategic planning, and vision of management (36%), and personnel (29%).

Emergent Themes

Three themes emerged from responses to questions across the survey. Concerns about funding levels, digital preservation, and staffing levels appeared repeatedly.

Overall, the data reflect an important evolutionary trend for preservation programs. After years of struggle on the part of practitioners to educate library administration, colleagues, and users about the scope and significance of preservation efforts, it appears there has been some success in positioning preservation as an essential, integrated library service. The ubiquity of preservation efforts is becoming more recognized. On a less positive note, recognition of the inseparable nature of preservation work from other library functions means that today preservation programs are faced with new struggles—insuring that budgets, staff, and projects are reserved for preservation and not siphoned off for other, related functions.

Funding

Almost half of the survey respondents (46%) reported lack of funding as one of the top three preservation challenges facing the library. Seventy-three percent indicated that funding is the factor that will most significantly influence the future direction of the preservation program. An interesting dichotomy in funding sources is revealed by the survey responses. On average, the majority of preservation funding comes from operating funds (87%). Only a little more than half of the funding for digitization comes from operating funds (55%); fifty-two percent comes from grants. Thirty-six percent of the responding institutions obtain 100% of their preservation funding from operating funds while only twenty-one percent obtain 100% of their digitization funding from operating funds. The proportion of endowments and grant monies supporting digitization is worth monitoring. Funding opportunities from granting agencies could have the potential to skew preservation programs toward digitization projects.

Digital Preservation

“Digital preservation” is believed by many in the field to be a misnomer. They argue that in the absence of digital repositories, digital preservation doesn’t exist; rather, libraries are digitizing collections to enhance access. Regardless, research libraries are digitizing collections, and in most, preservation programs are contributing to the efforts. The documentation on the role of preservation in digitization efforts in ARL libraries that was provided by survey respondents reflects a range of involvement from consultative to proprietary. The ubiquity of digitization projects is also shaping preservation strategy as it changes

information delivery methods and services. As all ARL libraries seek ways to incorporate digitization projects and products into their schemata, interesting patterns of collaboration with preservation programs are being revealed. One senses that the preservation community is quickly evolving and adapting to the challenges posed by preservation of digital objects.

Staffing

Staffing issues have long been a concern for preservation programs. The number of staff devoted to preservation, the level of the positions involved, and the duties assigned to the positions signal the focus of a given program, may indicate its maturity, and certainly reflect the scope of the efforts with which preservation programs are involved. The survey requested detailed information about staffing levels for preservation and digitization activities. For preservation activities within preservation units, professional staff is largely dedicated to special collections conservation (average 1.39 FTE) and, not surprisingly, preservation administration (1.03 FTE). Support staff is dedicated to bindery/shelf preparation (2.87 FTE) and microfilming (2.29 FTE). Student/temp staff is concentrated in bindery/shelf preparation and general collections conservation treatments. Outside of preservation units, fewer staff overall are involved in preservation activities. This professional staff focuses predominantly on preservation administration. Support and student/temp staff is dedicated to bindery and shelf preparation.

A clear pattern emerges from the data provided on staff involvement in digitization activities. Overall, the majority of staff activity related to digitization is outside the preservation unit. Professional staff is largely involved with selection and post-scan quality control. Support and student/temp staff is involved with metadata creation, quality control, and digitizing.

The survey also requested information on the change in staffing levels for preservation activities over the past five years. In preservation units, the largest gain in professional staff was in special collections conservation; the largest decrease was in microfilming. The largest support staff gain was in the “other” category, where growth was reported by libraries in collections storage and care, and brittle book reformatting/replacement; the greatest decrease was in bindery/shelf preparation. The largest gain in student/temp staff was in general collections conser-

vation; the largest decrease was in bindery/shelf preparation. For preservation activities performed by other library units, the largest professional staff gain was in preservation administration and care of nonpaper media; the largest decrease was “other” (unspecified). The largest support staff gain was in general collections conservation and bindery/shelf preparation; the greatest decrease was in “other” (unspecified). Student/temp staff was gained in special collections conservation; decreases were largest in bindery/shelf preparation.

A preponderance of survey respondents indicated that, given the opportunity, they would add new, permanent preservation positions in general collections conservation (72%), special collections conservation, (59%), and preservation administration (36%). There is general agreement that more staff is needed and a shared recognition that preservation programs are increasing the scope of services they provide. There is widespread recognition that preservation is an increasingly critical component of ARL library management and service.

Preservation Studies

The survey inquired about collections condition surveys and environmental conditions monitoring and improvements. Out of 87 responses, only 21 libraries (24%) reported performing a collections condition survey within the past three years. On the other hand, 77 libraries (89%) regularly monitor environmental conditions. The most common environmental monitoring instruments used are hygrothermographs (64%), dataloggers (36%), and temperature and humidity sensors (21%). Half of the libraries that monitor environmental conditions do so in special collections; almost one-quarter monitor conditions in storage areas. Fifty-three libraries (61%) reported significant improvements in environmental conditions in their buildings over the past three years, with close to one-third of those improvements made through new building construction or renovation and almost one-quarter made to the HVAC system.

Conclusion

The competition for scarce resources is inextricably bound to the increased recognition of preservation as a mission-critical library program, no more separable than cataloging or reference. Preservation programs—as reflected in the responses to this survey—provide a broad

array of services within their institutions. Some are new, small programs, addressing basic issues: care and handling of library materials, commercial binding, microfilming projects, and environmental controls. More mature programs continue to address these core elements, but are going beyond them to address preservation concerns brought to the fore by digitization projects, some of which are managed by the preservation office, some of which are distributed across the organization. As established preservation programs seek to maintain fundamental services while expanding into the digital arena, something inevitably is lost. Notable in the survey responses is the small number of collection surveys done recently in ARL libraries. What does this signify for the future? What does it suggest about the digitization projects now underway?

The survey results do not relieve all of our concerns about preservation and digitization. The data gathered and the insights to be learned from it satisfy the goal of the survey. The documentation provided by respondents offers insights into successful strategies for organizing and managing the workflow of digital projects, staffing for preservation, and funding an expanding range of preservation initiatives. In all cases, the data suggests that the ability to regularly conduct collection surveys and the ability to systematically assess progress toward organizational preservation goals would be of benefit both to the individual institution and to academic libraries as a whole. The data do not reflect a consensus of approach or action; rather they present a number of strategies currently being employed by the ARL membership. Examining the differences and similarities of approach practiced at the various institutions, and reflected by the documents provided here, resulted in one valuable insight: we in the preservation community are unable to concretely identify one or two best practices at this time. It is clear that the institutions that provided the documentation compiled here can help other libraries know what questions to ask in order to make informed decisions about how and where preservation and digitization fit into their organizations.