



The Responsibility of Research Libraries for Preservation

The members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) reaffirm their commitment to preservation as one of the fundamental responsibilities of the research library community. A research library collection is a key capital asset of the parent institution. Through individual and cooperative efforts, a principal goal of research libraries is to preserve the record of knowledge from the past and present represented in the collection and to carry out this basic responsibility into the future. To invest in protection of this asset is a wise and responsible act to insure against loss.

Preserving the record of knowledge is a fundamental, but also an expensive and complex, undertaking for research libraries. Currently members of the Association for Research Libraries spend collectively over 100 million dollars annually on preservation activities. In a world where the production of information far exceeds any single institution's capability to manage it completely, research libraries must carefully and collaboratively select and actively preserve the most informative and representative records of past intellectual achievement in order to ensure the continuing growth of knowledge.

The universe of recorded knowledge includes all subjects and a vast and expanding array of physical formats, ranging from incised stone tablets to ink on parchment and paper, to photographs and film, to analog sound and moving picture recordings, to complex digital objects. The form in which information is produced and delivered will continue to change and evolve over time. Information content is intertwined with its physical, recorded form; sometimes this content is separable from its physical form, and sometimes it is not. Because of the sheer magnitude and variety of information produced, research libraries must make wise and economical choices among a spectrum of options from conserving an artifact in its original manifestation to preserving only its informational content in an alternative format that best facilitates its continued use.

Research libraries must act strategically, cooperatively, and in a multi-faceted way to get the most out of their preservation efforts. These efforts include the full complement of preventive and corrective measures. Among them will be establishing environmental conditions and handling procedures that promote the longevity of materials; providing repair, conservation, commercial binding, and deacidification solutions that best fit collection needs; using analog and digital methods to reformat materials that are beyond repair or conservation for content preservation and/or greater accessibility; constructing effective disaster preparedness programs and responses; implementing standards and best practices for permanent archiving of content in digital form; developing collaborative programs to preserve endangered materials with important artifactual value; and educating library staff and users so that they understand and can assist in the preservation enterprise.

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