

Special Collections in ARL Libraries

A Discussion Report from the
ARL Working Group on Special Collections

March 2009



Association of Research Libraries

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Published by the
Association of Research Libraries
Washington, DC 20036
www.arl.org



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Preface

The ARL Working Group on Special Collections was charged by the Research, Teaching, and Learning Steering Committee in 2007 with advising it “on special collections issues on an ongoing basis. In this context, ‘special collections’ is construed broadly to include distinctive material in all media and attendant library services.”¹ The Working Group has two interrelated priorities:

1. Identify opportunities and recommend actions for ARL and other organizations that will encourage concerted action and coordinated planning for collecting and exposing 19th- and 20th-century materials in all formats (rare books, archives and manuscripts, audio and video, etc).
2. Identify criteria and strategies for collecting digital and other new media material that currently lack a recognized and responsible structure for stewardship.

In this report the Working Group identifies key issues in the management and exposure of special collections material in the 21st century. Though the initial focus was on 19th- and 20th-century materials, most of what is said below applies with equal force to collecting and caring for materials from previous centuries as well as materials that bring us into the present and oblige us to look forward into the future.

Working Group members include directors of research libraries, heads of special collections departments, and other professional leaders with particular concern for traditional and digital special collections. Visitors and observers have included Donald Waters of the Mellon Foundation and Charles Henry of the Council on Library and Information Resources (to consider proposals for the CLIR/Mellon Hidden Collections grant program), and ARL Research Library Leadership Program Fellows drawn from the special collections community.

The Working Group met in person four times in 2007–2008 and conducted extensive e-mail correspondence based on drafts of this report. The chair of the Working Group presented some preliminary findings and recommendations to the annual conference of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of ACRL in Los Angeles in June 2008, and subsequently circulated a draft of the report to representatives of both RBMS and the Society of American Archivists. The report presented here reflects extensive comments received from those bodies.

The term “special collections” has been used in North American libraries in many different ways. One of the more restricted uses designates special collections as rare books, generally dating from the dawn of European printing to some point in the 19th century, with the addition of rare editions and special printings of a later date, often known as the

¹ The charge of the Working Group is appended. The charge is also available at <http://www.arl.org/rtl/speccoll/spcollwg/#special>. For additional background information and a definition of special collections, see ARL’s Special Collections: Statement of Principles (2003), “Research Libraries and the Commitment to Special Collections” at <http://www.arl.org/rtl/speccoll/speccollprinciples.shtml>.

“book arts”. More often the term is used to include manuscripts, archival collections of mixed format including prints, drawings and photographs, and graphic materials such as maps, theatrical publications, pamphlets, advertizing and posters, and sometimes newspapers, which were not published in book form. “Special collections” also can be extended to include distinct collections of material relating to a particular subject or part of the world or sometimes reflecting the output of a particular publisher; and in this definition the materials often will be in non European languages. By the end of the 20th century, the collections of most libraries of any size had proliferated into numerous additional formats: film and video, audio tapes, microfilm, and other formats for written communication. A new information revolution also had established born-digital materials as an essential part of the holdings of research libraries, though they entered the consciousness of library administrators and their budget calculations first as scientific journals and databases, not a form of communication generally designated as special collections.

“Special collections” is used in this report ecumenically. Our thinking has embraced libraries’ stewardship of any kind of vehicle for information and communication that lacks readily available and standardized classification schemes, and any that is vulnerable to destruction or disappearance without special treatment. Thus we have included evanescent web sites as part of our deliberations, as well as fragile printed ephemera and rare books, and all the other formats mentioned above. We also have taken into account the increasing convergence between special collections in libraries and those held in museums and archives, paying particular attention to material that is not yet housed in any such institution but which needs to be collected, preserved and described in the interests of research in the future.

This document is intended primarily for the directors of ARL member libraries and the administrators within their organizations. Many statements included here will be seen by professional archivists, curators, and special collections librarians as assertions of existing best practice. Special collections departments are often very small and sometimes isolated, and they compete for attention and resources within their own institutions and the broader research environment. One aim of this report, therefore, is to draw the attention of the research library community as a whole to the exceptional opportunities that special collections present to the users of our libraries and to the challenges now faced by special collections departments. We wish to underscore the need for research library leadership to support actions that will increase the visibility and use of special collections and support both existing and developing best practice in the stewardship of special collections. While this report focuses on special collections in North American research libraries, we believe it has potential application more broadly. We hope it may form a useful part of the discussion among many professionals who are charged with the perplexing challenges of handling rare, unique or unusual material that is or ought to be available permanently for use by the widest possible audiences.

An additional purpose of this report is to set out and to invite reflection on the extraordinary challenges that face the collectors and stewards of special collections in libraries and archives in the 21st century. We hope to provide a framework within which some important discussions of policy may take place. We also hope that this report will support an enhanced and extended understanding within research communities more generally of the unique and irreplaceable contribution that special collections make to scholarship and learning, and to the general public good. The research library community has an opportunity to grasp the challenges and help shape a glorious future for the extraordinary resources found in special collections in North America.

— Alice Prochaska, Chair, ARL Working Group on Special Collections

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Introduction: The Time Is Now

Special collections in ARL libraries encompass the full gamut of research topics and formats. They have the potential to serve every discipline in the academic curriculum, and they can be useful to all possible clients and users of the research library: from the general public to special interest and amenity groups, to students at all levels and research scholars both within and beyond institutions of higher education. In an environment where mass digitization of books and periodicals for Web access is accelerating, and electronic journals and aggregated databases are part of the shared landscape of scholarly communication, it is their accumulated special collections that increasingly define the uniqueness and character of individual research libraries. The time is now to meet the challenges and responsibilities that these materials present. If they encapsulate the essence of a research library, it is vital that special collections be afforded sufficient resources for their good management.

This report identifies key aspects of the management of special collections material in the 21st century. Contemporary research libraries face limited resources, existing backlogs of under-described material, complicated legal issues, and a swiftly evolving technological landscape. All this challenges their ability to collect, preserve, and provide access to rare and historical resources in a way that offers the appropriate service to library customers. And yet there are abundant opportunities to expose truly unique research materials, as never before.

There are professional and management choices to be made in the way research libraries allocate resources to these rare materials. There are also questions of ethics: issues relating to the proper stewardship of materials that reflect human activity in the past and the selection of materials relating to the present, and a wide range of important issues connected to the obligation to make material accessible to our publics.

The continuing proliferation of public audiences for special collections is one significant aspect of the challenge we address here. Local and family historians, specialist interest groups, businesses of every kind, both for profit and not for profit, from the small and local to the multinational, and the many forms of electronic interactions, from blogs to email lists to social networking sites to interactive presentation tools: all these are features of a dynamically changing landscape, and they all generate an appetite for access to special collections. It is essential to involve the primary groups and associations that cater for these publics, including corporations, associations, and politicians and government at every level. Libraries and archives need to communicate to these communities the challenges of providing access to special collections.

Our charge directed us to look at the issues surrounding materials from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as digital and other new media. Most of what we say below applies with special force to collecting and caring for materials from those recent centuries as well as contemporary times, and we find it both unhelpful, and impossible in practice, to ignore the clamors of modern materials, which oblige us to consider the challenges of the present and future.

I. Collecting Carefully, with Regard to Costs, and Ethical and Legal Concerns

There are important considerations that should be taken into account in the process of deciding to accept stewardship of special collections materials. Libraries often document the full costs of acquiring a book; in many cases the ancillary costs equal or exceed the purchase price. Processing and preservation costs routinely are taken into consideration in determining whether to purchase or accept gifts of books. The calculation of total acquisition costs for special collections, however, is rarely as easy to determine.² The community of research libraries as a whole will also benefit from the establishment of shared databases describing their respective collecting strengths, and based on this, identifying gaps in provision. This information can help individual organizations to avoid costs that might turn out to duplicate the efforts of others.

Collections with substantial digital components add complexities, since both the near-term processing costs and, particularly, longer-term preservation costs for these kinds of materials are not well understood. Often these materials may be offered as gifts and require little or no near-term purchase outlay, but will clearly require significant long-term investment to maintain. In the digital world, it is all too easy to acquire materials that a library cannot afford to keep in perpetuity.

In addition to financial considerations, there are ethical concerns in accepting special collections without considering the total costs of maintaining and providing access to them. First among these is institutional credibility. Institutions risk embarrassment or even legal liability when they accept collections whose high total costs result in delays in meeting donor requirements or expectations. This can lead to even higher costs to the institution in terms of legal fees, public relations work, or accelerated processing expenses.

Next, collections care presents a whole range of issues. If the costs of managing a collection are excessive, the collection itself can be endangered or lost through inadequate preservation or security. The longer a collection languishes in processing, the more expensive it can become to retrieve the information needed to provide good intellectual control or undertake necessary migration or reformatting. Indeed, for digital content it may prove impossible to access and use the files because of technological obsolescence. Uncared-for collections occupy space, whether physical or electronic, that can affect an institution's ability to accept other, more appropriate materials.

There is also some argument that the capability to generate high quality digital surrogates of materials at reasonable cost is redefining expectations of care for the original. Increased user demands mean that preservation now equates to access as it never did before. Until a collection is digitized, and those digital surrogates are widely distributed, the organization that holds it may become vulnerable to the charge that it has not done all it can, or perhaps even all it

² See, for example, Kevin M. Guthrie, *The New York Historical Society: Lessons from One Nonprofit's Long Struggle for Survival* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1996), for an excellent case study of how unbridled collecting led to serious financial and managerial problems.

should, to ensure the survival and exposure of the materials. This too is a question of setting priorities in the allocation of resources. Adequate resources will never be available to preserve all special collections either physically or digitally. Decisions about priorities therefore will always be difficult. For example, while there is a strong historic professional body of opinion that only physical preservation (much of it by creating microforms) can be trusted to endure, digital technologies now clearly offer new alternatives.³

As special collections holdings become more visible through online finding aids and digital surrogates (which may then be indexed by services such as Google), institutions also have to consider in some cases the potential costs of defending against litigation that seeks to suppress access to the materials or causes them to be destroyed or taken from the archive or library. Once archival materials are indexed in public search tools such as Google, experience has shown that they attract a steady stream of threats, takedown demands, copyright challenges, and other potential litigation. While anecdotally widely reported, the extent of this is not well documented or measured, and it is a particular problem for newer organizations operating digital archives that do not have the depth of financial and legal resources characteristic of a major research library.⁴

An additional recent development of great concern in this area is the attempt to apply national laws across national boundaries in order to suppress information and communication; see here the recent developments in so-called “Libel Tourism.” The issues here go beyond the narrowly legal and reach also to continually evolving matters of public opinion (consider the treatment of materials created by or documenting indigenous peoples in various nations) and even shifting understandings of privacy and anonymity.

Restrictions on Access

Potential use is a vital consideration when the decision is made to acquire a collection. The goal of acquisition should be access. The Society of American Archivists’ Code of Ethics asserts that, “archivists recognize their responsibility to promote the use of records as a fundamental purpose of the keeping of archives.”⁵ In an era when convenient access can trump quality of content as far as the user is concerned, delaying access to collections—particularly digital collections—can have a deleterious effect on an institution’s ability to manage that material over time. As part of their commitment to developing a culture of stewardship and respect for cultural records in our society, one task for archivists, curators, and librarians is to educate donors to the dangers and consequences of lengthy restrictions on access to materials. They have to develop means for expediting access that balance donors’ rights, privacy concerns, and scholarly use.

At a minimum, the acquiring organization should require a timetable for access—including the possibility of staged access to portions of the collection—and the removal of restrictions as part of its negotiations with donors. The conditions of acceptance and use of a collection need to be clearly understood by both parties and shared with the research community. This is an area where professional organizations could help by providing accessible guidelines for use in negotiations with donors.

3 See, for example, the ARL statement “Recognizing Digitization as a Preservation Reformatting Method” at <http://www.arl.org/preserv/digitization/index.shtml>.

4 Some useful resources in this area are the EFF Chilling Effects site at <http://www.chillingeffects.org/> and the report of the 2002 Berkeley workshop on “Maintaining Integrity in and Access to Public Digital Archives”.

5 SAA: Council Handbook (App. K-A Code of Ethics with Commentary), http://www.archivists.org/governance/handbook/app_ethics.asp.

A corollary set of concerns is the high cost of processing and making materials accessible, which can delay access for years, decades, or longer. An institution does disservice to both donors and researchers by denying access to materials over an extended timeframe because of processing delays.⁶

In the digital realm, access and preservation are closely intertwined; those items that are maintained in their original digital state at the point of acquisition, but with long time restrictions, may not be accessible when those restrictions are lifted. Additionally, resources may be shifted to those materials that can be made accessible. It is necessary, therefore, to ensure that restricted digital materials receive early and regular attention to their preservation and migration.

Transparent Provenance

It is important also to ensure that users of any collection, now and in the future, can understand its provenance. Teachers at all levels of education need to help their students understand how to assess the utility and trustworthiness of the evidence they are using. Scholars and other researchers must have access to this information if they are to use the materials as credible and authentic resources. The special collections repository has an obligation to describe any questions that may remain about the origin of a collection, and alert the user to restrictions, gaps, and uncertainties.

A further dimension of this question arises in the case of materials whose ownership may be contested, now or in the future. Nations and distinct cultural and ethnic communities increasingly lay claim to archives held in North America and other parts of the world, which they assert to be their property.⁷ Individuals increasingly lay claim to intellectual property in the content of archives,⁸ especially when they are made public in digital form. Without well documented information about the provenance and surrounding circumstances of a collection, archivists and librarians and their institutions are vulnerable⁹ not only to legitimate claims but to others that may be opportunistic and ill founded.

Sound Records Management Practices

Records managers and special collections librarians should work together to support historical research, by setting aside important and unique records that may serve as primary sources for future research, by identifying records in danger of deterioration, and implementing appropriate preservation methods. Records management is the systematic and administrative control of records throughout their life cycle to ensure efficiency and economy in their creation, use, handling, control, maintenance, and disposition.¹⁰ Although some special collections units may be tasked with

6 Repositories that do permit access to unprocessed collections, however, need to make clear the implications of doing so, such as the likelihood that the order of items within a collection may change and that references to page or folio numbers are provisional.

7 There is a growing literature on the vexed questions surrounding cultural restitution or repatriation. For some examples dealing specifically with manuscript and archival collections, see the proceedings of an IFLA pre-conference on "Responsible Stewardship Towards Cultural Heritage Materials" in Copenhagen, Denmark, 2005, and Alice Prochaska, "Special Collections in an International Perspective" in Barbara M. Jones (ed.) *Special Collections in the Twenty-First Century*, vol. 52 no. 1 of *Library Trends* (University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science), 2003. Further discussion of these cultural stewardship issues can be accessed through Alice Prochaska's Web site: <http://www.library.yale.edu/about/librarian>.

8 See, for example, Ralph Blumenthal, "A Trove of Golden Broadway Images, Stuck in a Tangled History," *The New York Times*, September 12, 2008 http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/13/nyregion/13photog.html?_r=1&ei=5070&emc=eta1&oref=slogin.

9 For example, see "On Deposit: A Handshake and a Lawsuit" by Ronald L. Becker (*American Archivist*, Spring 1993). Becker discusses the impact the lack of a clear gift agreement to the outcome of Rutgers vs. Partisan Review.

10 *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*, Richard Pearce-Moses http://archivists.org/glossary/term_details.asp?DefinitionKey=200.

institutional records management, records management is in fact a separate function from stewardship of special collections. While the two fields are related, records management is its own field with its own specialist knowledge and resource requirements. Records management is focused primarily on facilitating current use of records, protecting the institution, reducing operating costs, and supporting better management and decision making. Special collections libraries may wish to preserve records for some of the same reasons, but they focus primarily on future use of records in order to serve as research centers and as the guardians of institutional memory.

Special collections departments should coordinate with records managers to ensure that new types of collections of interest to researchers are managed and preserved over the long term. This is particularly important for the products of creative activities which are often overlooked as records management normally concerns itself more with records of routine business processes. To benefit both the organization and researchers, both current and future users, records must be continuously managed so that they are available and useful through their entire lifecycle. As a result of this shared interest in protecting records, special collections professionals should advocate for and support the work of records management programs.

In addition to supporting records managers, stewards of special collections can also learn from them. Much can be gathered from the records management profession about early intervention with records creators in order to facilitate collecting, describing, and preserving new types of special collections, particularly those born-digital. Traditionally, relationships between special collections repositories and creators have not been well established until the end of the careers, or lives, of the creators. While this approach has been successful for traditional paper records and will likely continue to exist, it is not adequate for born-digital collections, which require more immediate and ongoing attention. Records managers have direct relationships with records creators during, and even before, the creation of records. In the same way, special collections departments could develop continuing relationships with the record-creators and provide advice over a number of years in order to ensure that born-digital collections are properly created, managed, and preserved, so that they can be transferred in good condition at a future date.¹¹

This new kind of relationship between special collections repositories and creators will also help with description. Born-digital collections are by their nature not physical, but logically constructed and often virtual entities. They cannot be easily understood like paper collections, where much of the content, context, and structure are embedded in the physical form.¹² Special collections professionals must describe these collections in new and more robust ways in order to make digital collections useable over time. It would be beneficial to build on the work in this area that has been accomplished by electronic records management professionals. They have made great strides in identifying the descriptive elements necessary for digital collections. Most importantly, they agree that such description cannot be postponed, but must be undertaken from the moment of creation and be augmented throughout the life cycle of the digital collections. Electronic records management professionals also understand the power of leveraging the knowledge and expertise of creators in creating description, because there is no group better positioned to provide such information.¹³

11 For examples of guidance given by special collections departments to creators of digital collections, see the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library's Authors' Guidelines for Digital Preservation <http://www.library.yale.edu/~nkuhl/AuthorsGuidelines.pdf> and the documents created by the Paradigm Project <http://www.paradigm.ac.uk/workbook/appendices/guidelines.html>.

12 Philip C. Bantin, *Understanding Data and Information Systems for Recordkeeping*, New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2008, 14–15.

13 Special thanks to Kevin Glick, Electronic Records Archivist at Yale, for providing insight for this section.

Recommendations:

1. Donors and senior administrators need to be informed about the value and the costs of managing collections. Repositories need carefully to assess their own capabilities prior to accepting collections. Tools should be developed to assist in this process of assessment.
2. The professionals and administrators who are charged with care of special collections must themselves take carefully into account the costs of preservation, processing and providing access, including digital access, when they accept or purchase a collection.
3. The heads of archives and libraries, as well as their special collections staff, must educate donors to the consequences of lengthy restrictions on access, and should strive to balance considerations of individual privacy with those of scholarly access and the long-term interests of collections and their users.
4. Rigorous, full, and accurate documentation of the source of any acquisition is essential.
5. Archivists, curators, and librarians must support the work of records management staff and adopt early intervention practices in order to facilitate collecting, describing, and preserving new types of special collections, particularly those born-digital.

II. Ensuring Discovery and Access

While the appetite for using special collections seems to be growing exponentially, the hoard of unused evidence that is still locked up in our undescribed, “hidden collections” is incalculable.¹⁴ Special collections too often remain hidden from view because their parent library lacks the resources to provide basic levels of descriptive metadata. While in some cases, special collections have moved to the head of the priority list, or close to it, this is true partly because other institutional imperatives (backlogs, retrospective conversion, holding data maintenance, etc.) are now seen as less urgent.

It is also true that the digital environment makes it possible both to disclose and to make usable materials in challenging formats or uncataloged quantities. As publishers, libraries, museums, and archives reveal a portion of their treasures with online images, the public appetite for these materials, both online and in the original, “grows by that it feeds on.”¹⁵ ARL directors need to address the resource problems that have held research libraries back from providing adequate descriptions of so much of the great national and international wealth of special collections.

Addressing the Problem of Backlogs and “Hidden Collections”

Many of the underlying considerations for setting processing priorities apply equally both to the overall choices that research libraries have to make and the internal criteria for making choices in special collections departments: preservation needs, likely scholarly value, links to complementary collections, potential rewards in support for institutional programs, and more.

There are also external considerations to apply in setting processing priorities for special collections, including:

- Support for the growth of evidence-based learning and teaching from collections¹⁶
- Tie-in with curriculum needs on campus and nationally
- The potential of some particular collections to capture attention and thus to raise public awareness of the library’s special collections
- Opportunities to attract private donations

14 See “Hidden Collections, Scholarly Barriers: Creating Access to Unprocessed Special Collections Materials in North America’s Research Libraries” <http://www.arl.org/rtl/speccoll/hidden/index.shtml>.

15 It is a common experience, for instance, that the demand to see the original materials increases when a digital surrogate is made available.

16 Some examples of faculty and student engagement with special collections materials are detailed in the ARL Virtual & Instructional Initiatives Survey <http://www.arl.org/rtl/roles/vrii/> in the report on the Special Collections Subtopic <http://www.arl.org/bm~doc/vriispecialcollections.pdf>.

- Grant-giving opportunities funded by international and national or federal organizations¹⁷
- Potential for links with other programs, whether in other universities or further afield¹⁸
- Links to local communities and outreach programs, e.g., to a local/state historical society or the local chamber of commerce
- Potential for cost recovery from the commercial sector¹⁹

Focus on Access in Setting Descriptive Standards

"If it's not [described] online, it doesn't exist." This saying, commonly applied by consumers in the 21st century to any form of information, applies with even more force to special collections. As managers of special collections repositories address the difficult task of setting priorities, they need to bear in mind the maxim that some access is better than none and the lack of any online description virtually amounts to no access. They should save perfection in descriptive practices for the most significant material or for that which cannot be described usefully at all without explicit detail. There is no excuse for books not to be described online. Inexpensive processes relying on vendors for sketchy or imperfect metadata is preferable to the alternative of not exposing the collection to use at all. Imperfect guides should be converted to digital with the least revision possible, focusing on data structure rather than upgrading the descriptive content as a first priority. The influential work of Greene and Meissner is extremely helpful here as a guide to making choices.²⁰

There is a body of good practice and recommendations coming out of the work of professional organizations through committees such as the Bibliographic Standards Committee in ACRL/RBMS, the SAA Standards Committee, the Canadian Committee on Cataloguing (CCC), the Canadian Committee on Archival Description (CCAD), and other organizations. Descriptive standards such as Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS) emphasize flexibility and are designed to function independent of transmission format (e.g. MARC catalog records or EAD finding aids).²¹ The development

17 For the new CLIR program, *Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives: Building a New Research Environment*, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, see <http://www.clir.org/hiddencollections/index.html>. The Arcadia Fund's Endangered Archives program made recent additional grants including one for \$500,000 to UCLA Library. See <http://www.Arcadiafund.org.uk>. These are but two of the significant funding agencies with new programs to support archives and special collections. In recent years numerous ARL member libraries have received grants from federal funding agencies such as NEH, IMLS, NHPRC, NSF, and the TICFIAA (title VI) program, to cite just some examples.

18 For example: 1) Harvard and Yale are both dealing with pamphlets, and both have projects on the First World War. 2) Yale is digitizing the Yale Daily News. Cornell has already digitized its student paper. Who else is doing the same? How might we combine, in a way that would be useful to all our campuses, and maybe provide a starting-point for some journalism courses? 3) CRL is working on the notion of adding a program in archiving human rights documentation to its Global Resources Network. How do we leverage this opportunity and combine forces with member universities, e.g., Duke, Notre Dame, Columbia, Yale, University of Connecticut, that have kindred collections as well as the soon to be opened Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg, Manitoba?

19 Right now the commercial sector's interest is focused on genealogical material, such as census data, passenger lists, immigrant records and documents. Costs may be covered by the private sector but the library or archives will need to consider the "saleability" of what gets to be digitized and its attractiveness to the private sector.

20 Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner, "More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing," *American Archivist* 68 no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2005): 208–63.

21 See Society of American Archivists, *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*, Chicago, Society of American Archivists, 2004.

and use of Encoded Archival Description (EAD) illustrates not only the importance but also the complexity of developing software tools and the necessary technical environment and shared practices that enable cost effective implementation.²²

At the same time as adopting the most cost-effective standards and working to the maximum extent possible within the standards framework recommended by the professional associations, repositories need to acknowledge the added expense of some special collections description and access compared with other library materials. Unpublished materials and ephemera lack standard references such as titles, names of authors, and places of publication. They often require in-depth research to establish their date, authorship, provenance, or authenticity; and collections of such material are often incomplete, calling for explanation and reference to other sources. Such facts of life should be explained clearly in terms of the collections' unique value to the academy and society, preferably with some well chosen illustrative examples. It must also be demonstrated that building and maintaining collaborative environments (linking repositories in the same geographic region, for instance) enables efficiencies and economies, and leads to the sharing of information and expertise. This fact applies with equal force to both digital and analog collections.

User Contributions

The experienced librarian or archivist knows that by presenting a collection to users, it may be possible to learn from the users just how much further description of that material might be desirable. Faculty and graduate students quarrying neglected collections for new sources may be called into service to describe those collections with a modicum of training and professional guidance. For example, with funding from Mellon, the University of Chicago is harnessing the talent of faculty and graduate students to assist with uncovering and describing metropolitan collections in African American history.²³

Local history societies can uncover and then describe hidden gold in collections that have never commanded attention because they were thought to be unimportant in the broader picture of accepted knowledge. Repositories are also experimenting with interactive descriptive tools which invite visitors to their reading rooms or Web sites, or both, to contribute additional information.²⁴ Catalogs of special collections are protean and increasingly open; and that is good for access. Or to put it another way, access begets access.

22 See, for example, The Archivists' Toolkit™ <http://archivisttoolkit.org/toolkit/oldSite/index.html>. The Archivists' Toolkit™ is an open source archival data management system to provide integrated support for accessioning, description, donor tracking, name and subject authority work, and location management for archival materials. Developed by the University of California, San Diego, New York University, and the Five Colleges, Inc., the effort to build this application benefited tremendously from the interested guidance of the archival community and was made possible with funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. For examples of EAD best practices developed to encourage interoperability and common practice, see the RLG standards for EAD <http://www.oclc.org/programs/ourwork/past/ead/bpg.pdf> and the Northwest Digital Archives' NWDA Best Practices for Encoded Archival Description (EAD) <http://orbiscascade.org/index/cms-filesystem-action?file=nwda/tools/nwdabpg%20version%203.4%2020080130.pdf>.

23 See "University of Chicago Explores Library-Faculty Partnerships in Uncovering Hidden Collections" <http://www.arl.org/resources/pubs/br/br251.shtml>.

24 See, for example, Magia Ghetu Krause and Elizabeth Yakel, "Interaction in Virtual Archives: The Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections Next Generation Finding Aid," *American Archivist* 70, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2007). See also: Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections, <http://polarbears.si.umich.edu/>. Another example is the Library of Congress' photostream on Flickr http://www.flickr.com/photos/library_of_congress that encourages visitors to add notes and comments to photos from their collections. Additional examples can be found in SPEC Kit 304 *Social Software in Libraries* July 2008.

Cross-Institutional Collaboration and Cross-Collection Searching

Changing habits among the users of special collections include the growing tendency to use new digital tools to mine data from collections.²⁵ Interactive opportunities lead communities of scholars and other users to share information and opinions about material within the electronic environment. Digitization has presented for some time the opportunity to bring together collections that are held in separate repositories, and that capability is now becoming part of the background to new collaborative enterprises.²⁶ There is a great opportunity to “integrate” all collections, archival and published, analogue and digital, through metadata and systems. For example, a biography of a military general could be supplemented by the letters or diaries of a soldier serving in the same mission. The user would be well served by being able to access material across formats and media within the same institution as well as across distance among institutions.

Increasingly, funding bodies encourage collaborations among libraries, archives, and museums. As the recent work by RLG Programs on Library, Archive, and Museum Collaboration: Organizational and Service Relationships has suggested,²⁷ there is an opportunity here--we might say an imperative--for archivists, curators, and librarians to take the lead to work together to bring disparate parts of a potentially whole collection together. The special collections community, which includes the parent libraries and other repositories in which collections are held, has a responsibility to advocate for appropriate support at the highest levels of research and development. Where access to collections is understood as a dynamic and essential part of the academic environment, scholars will reap long-term benefits.

Exhibitions

Exhibitions are an excellent means for promoting public access to collections. To risk stating the obvious, the public promotion of collections is an essential professional tool. Here too, the archivist, curator, or librarian may work with students or the local community to produce a show, always taking preservation issues into account. Often the conservation activity involved in setting up the exhibition can provide an opportunity for publicity and fund-raising in its own right. A published descriptive catalog or a virtual version of the exhibition online ideally provides longevity and greater access to the exhibition.

The publicity surrounding a special exhibition can promote the whole library or archive, as well as attract potential donors and provide a positive view of the organization in the local community. Working with the press and media on a regular basis, inviting them in for special previews, providing links between the work in hand and some other newsworthy event, making creative use of new software tools to design interactive exhibits Web sites: all this helps promote access not just for a one-off exhibition but for the library's special collections as a whole.²⁸ We applaud the

25 For a fuller discussion of data mining (or computing on collections) see page 28 in this report.

26 See, for example, the Codex Sinaiticus Project Web site <http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/> about the efforts of the British Library, the National Library of Russia, St. Catherines Monastery, and the Leipzig University Library to digitally reunite the dispersed fragments of the oldest Bible.

27 See Diane Zorich, Günter Waibel, and Rickey Erway, *Beyond the Silos of the LAMs: Collaboration Among Libraries, Archives, and Museums*, Report produced by OCLC Programs and Research, 2008. Published online at <http://www.oclc.org/programs/publications/reports/2008-05.pdf>.

28 Exhibits that highlight scholarly works that result from research on primary documents can increase awareness of the value of special collections. Other ways of increasing awareness of special collections include marketing primary materials via thumbnail images used as screen savers and login images on computers in learning commons, or posted via the library's Web page. Some libraries have imagined listing scores of collections with tantalizing images under the header “hot topics and primary materials to support papers in History 200, English 400,” etc.

extension of this practice to the digital world through the provision of online exhibitions that complement the physical ones. In all contexts, an online version of the exhibit is strongly recommended as a means of ensuring that a record is kept and the institution obtains maximum benefit from all the work involved in creating the exhibit in the first place.

The skills that are needed to produce an exhibition and, still more, to make sure it gets attention, are not always the same skills that special collections librarians possess by training or inclination. Particularly in repositories with only a small staff to do all the work of caring for hundreds of special collections (and that means most ARL libraries), it is helpful to have a constituency of faculty and students who are ready and able to help. These campus "volunteers," in turn, benefit from the exposure to primary materials.

Digitization

Digitization is a tool that special collections professionals have long used to promote access. Standards of practice in handling the objects and dealing with metadata are now well developed, and there is a swelling body of professional literature.²⁹ Some questions that should be highlighted here relate again to choices.

- Is there a choice to be made, for instance, between providing fuller catalog treatment or supplying a preliminary record and linking it to scanned examples from the collections?
- What priority should be given to the development of cross-searching mechanisms, which can expose kindred materials in separate collections?
- And then, when cross-searching can be facilitated, what impact does that have on decisions about which collections to digitize?
- How do we begin to think about families, or archival groups, of collections in a digital environment?

Such questions have a critical impact on access because our decisions about them influence the way our users search, and what they expect to find. The changing nature of our custodial responsibility and the changing habits of those who use our collections come sharply into focus in the digital environment.

Large-Scale Digitization

In all the activities mentioned above, the electronic environment has transformed the opportunities for access and will continue to change the way we all do our work. Digitization is a tool used now in virtually all special collections libraries. Most recently, the mass digitization movement, which began with large general collections in some of the largest research libraries, has begun to focus on special collections. This turn of events has much to do with the legal morass

ARL's handsomely illustrated compilation *Celebrating Research* is another example of how a project that highlights individual collections can also raise the visibility and use of all special collections. The volume and companion Web site have been well received by current and potential users of the collections as well as by potential library donors. See <http://www.celebratingresearch.org/>.

29 Harvard has provided a concise bibliography of the seminal sources which outline best practice for digitizing projects, <http://preserve.harvard.edu/bibliographies/digitalplanning.pdf>. Some common metadata standards can be found at <http://dublincore.org/> (Dublin Core), <http://www.loc.gov/standards/mets/> (Metadata Encoding & Transmission Standard (METS)) and <http://www.loc.gov/standards/mods/> (Metadata Object Description Schema (MODS)). For additional comment on the promise of digitizing special collections, see Ricky Erway and Jennifer Schaffner, "Shifting Gears: Gearing Up to Get Into the Flow." Report produced by OCLC Programs and Research, 2007, published online at <http://www.oclc.org/programs/publications/reports/2007-02.pdf>.

surrounding digitization of works in copyright and the issues of fair use and open access, as well as mass digitization simply extending its reach. Special collections from the 19th century and earlier, or indeed from any period up to the date of 1923 when copyright begins to kick in (in the US), have a special attraction because they present fewer problems of selection, rights clearance, and so on, than the large general collections that run over long periods.

As there come to be diminishing returns from digitizing the books that most or many large libraries possess, the rare and unique become more attractive, even if more of a challenge to handle. Promoting access to special collections through large-scale digitization is a real opportunity for certain sorts of materials in particular: pamphlets, which can be handled in a similar way to books and in some cases using the same scanning equipment, even though calling for special care; rare books for the same reasons and with the same caveats; manuscripts and other unbound archival materials, maps, ephemera and other flat paper collections that lend themselves to treatment page by page.

The "mass" approach also presents a whole range of special difficulties. Fragile material must be monitored by preservation experts, special workflows are needed to handle material that is not necessarily stored in book form on shelves, but inside boxes or cabinets. It is critically important to ensure that partners, especially commercial partners, understand the complexity of rights in special collections materials, and that repositories assert and protect those rights. Nevertheless large-scale digitization is an exciting option that will almost certainly become a fact of life for a significant number of special collections librarians and archivists in the near future. It calls for its own set of criteria to set intelligent priorities and to define the key issues that must be negotiated with digitizing partners such as: requirements for physical handling, expectations for use of the digitized files, standards for the files that ensure integrity and long term preservation, and respect for the public domain and copyright.³⁰

Creating Metadata

Having made choices about the priorities for processing collections, what are the technical opportunities for enhancing access? Digitization is of course preeminently a means of access to the content of original source materials. But, it is worth repeating the fundamental truth that without a means of identifying the material, and navigating its context, access to a physical original source or its digitized version will be a hit-and-miss business. It is not best practice to digitize material for public access without ensuring that an appropriate level of metadata is also provided.³¹ Digitization without metadata is an abrogation of stewardship.

Digitization, which is sometimes easier to finance through donations or special grants than basic description, should complement and enhance the catalog record. While it is not a good option to digitize or otherwise publish surrogates without generating descriptive metadata at some level, decisions do have to be made about what an appropriate level may be for a particular collection. There is a range of nuanced choices. For example, choices can be made between cataloging in more detail at the outset or providing a preliminary record. A higher-level, more general description than custom might prescribe can be revisited at a future date; and in the meantime, if it opens up a collection that has been effectively hidden, that enhances access. Broad collection-level description is worth doing for that reason alone.

30 See, for example, Rick Johnson, "In Google's Broad Wake: Taking Responsibility for Shaping the Global Digital Library," *ARL: A Bimonthly Report*... <http://www.arl.org/bm~doc/arlbr250digprinciples.pdf>.

31 One exception to this rule would be providing scanned images of material precisely so that it can be cataloged by someone working remotely.

Recommendations:

6. Special collections professionals should take a lead in researching and developing new forms of access, and finding opportunities to apply them to special collections. Libraries and other repositories need to make the necessary investment in technology to advance the creation of tools, and support their staff in taking this lead.
7. Adequate online metadata is an essential condition for good quality access to both the original and digitized versions of material. Minimal description is far better than none. Basic information about all collections (e.g., the initial record of acquisition) should be made available online as quickly as possible.
8. Special collections description is increasingly open to interaction with the community of users. Archivists and librarians should encourage and take advantage of these interactions in order to promote access. Such interactions include mounting and using catalogs within social networking environments, and using and developing tools that allow researchers to contribute to the documented knowledge about a collection.
9. Special exhibitions are important tools for promoting access, and should be accompanied by online digital versions, to be maintained after the physical exhibit is over.
10. Large-scale digitization is an important option in the tool kit of special collections departments. Repositories should work with large-scale digitization vendors and partners to help negotiate and develop appropriate agreements for digitizing special collections. These arrangements should be broadly shared with the community as they occur.
11. Repositories must also ensure that commercial partners respect and maintain basic rights over digital content.
12. The Working Group recommends that ARL encourage and contribute to the RBMS development of a set of guidelines on issues relating to the mass digitization of special collections similar to the negotiation checklist developed for mass digitization of general collections.

III. The Challenge of Born-Digital Collections

The remarks in this section make several important assumptions,³² some of which reflect a reality that as yet only a few, very large or very specialized, libraries and archival repositories are experiencing at first hand. Unexamined in this report as yet, is the overarching question, what are special collections in the digital environment? The ARL Working Group on Special Collections discussed several ways of answering this question. Answers will remain provisional, and often reflect local circumstances rather than a single way of looking at the question that can be applied across the board. The group generally agreed, first, that electronic commercial publications that mimic the form of their predecessors in the analog world generally are not special collections. Examples of these include e-Books and electronic journals and serials. Somewhere on the margins of digital special collections would be published aggregations of rare books, depending perhaps on the extent to which they already include appropriate metadata and editorial information.³³

Digital special collections, in the view of the group, do include any materials that, on account of their content, uniqueness of format, or context, require non-standard descriptions or call for special treatment. Such special treatment would include archival selection and preservation; thus the institutional archives of the library's or archive's parent body (in the case of ARL members, generally but not always a university) are by definition special collections. Electronic records management is a hugely important skill in the management of special collections. Digital special collections also include the digitized versions of original material held in physical form by the institution: here, the activity of selecting for digitization and creating the appropriate metadata and mechanisms for storage, preservation, and access are among the key skills that are needed. Digital special collections also include, without question, numerous types of material that either would not be treated as so special in the parallel, analog universe, and not a few new formats. For example, a major category of digital special collections, growing rapidly already, is the electronic "papers," including e-mail, of authors, artists, politicians, and others.³⁴ New types of special collections will only proliferate in the digital environment. Their treatment calls for new staff skills and also for careful integration with the more traditional forms of special collections

32 Two recent reports provide a context for addressing the digital challenges of special collections. For a broad-brush overview of the state of digital repository services in research libraries, see "The Research Library's Role in Digital Repository Services," a report prepared by an ARL Task Force and released in February 2009. It includes a "Horizon Analysis" projecting key shifts in the digital repository landscape in the next seven years, identifies key areas for research library engagement, and calls on research libraries to act to ensure an ongoing role in digital repository service development. The full text of the report is freely available at <http://www.arl.org/bm~doc/repository-services-report.pdf>. In addition, for an assessment of the state of preservation activities in research libraries, including those in relation to digital resources, see the forthcoming report by ARL Visiting Program Officer Lars Meyer, Emory University, "Safeguarding Collections at the Dawn of the 21st Century: Describing & Measuring Contemporary Preservation Activities in ARL Libraries" to be released in spring 2009 on the ARL Web site.

33 The Working Group chose not to focus on the ways in which e-research and e-science data might be viewed as an important form of 21st century special collection, leaving that to the ARL Working Group on e-Science and others.

34 For an examination of the issues of personal digital collections, see the ARIADNE/Digital Lives Research Project in the UK <http://ariadne.ac.uk/issue55/williams-et-al/>.

that they often complement. This section of our report alludes to some ways in which these new types of collections are developing now.

Models of How to Handle Digital Materials in Special Collections

The growing proportion of born-digital materials in special collections will shift the focus of digital curation from ad hoc, focused efforts for the occasional digital accession to established policies, procedures, and workflows that can manage these materials routinely. Organizations increasingly are experiencing pressure to muster the financial, administrative, and technical resources that such standardized practices require.

Special collections practices until now have tended to be shaped by an approach that privileges the unique needs of each body of materials rather than standardized, production-oriented processes that allow for their expeditious handling. Just as the level of customized work on traditional formats is being replaced by “processing light” and similar approaches, digital materials require a similar approach that emphasizes expeditious availability along with long-term stewardship. The United States National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is providing helpful guidance for the rest of the community in this sphere.³⁵ There is also much to be learned from litigation support and computer forensics technology.³⁶

There is a well-established set of core functional activities for managing and appraising special collections, including accessioning, physical management and preservation, description, and access. The OAIS reference model,³⁷ for example, provides a framework that mirrors these traditional functions in a digital environment and institutions with a responsibility for special collections need to respond to the need for each of them. To a degree not present in the analog environment, participation in the evolution of information recording technologies and collaboration with creators and service providers is essential to effective curation of digital materials.³⁸ Both the inherent stability of many analog media (especially ink on paper) and the ability of creators and service providers to manage them with little technical expertise or concern for long-term preservation and access are absent for digital materials. Early intervention and deep technical knowledge and skills are required in ways that most special collections repositories have not been attuned to or organized for. Even if repositories develop new approaches and capabilities in-house, the dynamic nature of digital materials requires effective partnerships with others, especially including information technology specialists. Case studies are needed to illustrate possible approaches and to help individual repositories avoid the thankless work of reinventing solutions in isolation.³⁹

35 See, for example, “Strategy for Digitizing Archival Materials for Public Access, 2007–2016” <http://www.archives.gov/digitization/strategy.html> and “Lifecycle Data Requirement Guide” found at <http://www.archives.gov/digitization/guidance.html>.

36 See, for example, “Adapting Existing Technologies for Digitally Archiving Personal Lives” in which Jeremy Leighton John addresses the relevancy of existing technologies in computer forensics to the needs of digital curation http://www.bl.uk/ipres2008/presentations_day1/09_John.pdf. Strategies for recovering digital works so that they can be preserved are explored in “Finding and Archiving the Internet Footprint” by Simson Garfinkel and David Cox <http://www.simson.net/clips/academic/2009.BL.InternetFootprint.pdf>.

37 The Consultative Committee for Space Data Systems’ recommendation for the OAIS reference model is available at <http://public.ccsds.org/publications/archive/650x0b1.pdf>.

38 Illustrations of effective, early partnerships with creators of digital content include the sustained conversations between expected donors of personal papers, such as elected officials or authors, and curators to discuss and influence the scope and organization of the materials to be deposited.

39 The work of the National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program (NDIPP) promises useful case studies in this area. Included in the sixty-seven partners (as of March 2007) are eight consortial partnerships comprising thirty-three institutions that are selecting, collecting, and preserving specific types of digital content. For an example of a significant attempt to capture born digital resources, in this case the Web, see the Internet Archive <http://www.archive.org>.

The need for early intervention, or for widely shared norms for accepting digital content (for instance standard file formats, such as the ones from the LAC and PRONOM from the UK⁴⁰) requires a range of activities that ensure the capture and preservation of digital materials much earlier and with much less selectivity than is currently the case for analog materials. By working with those individuals who are developing information systems, repositories might influence the integration of transparent or intuitive selection and preservation tools to make the capture of materials more reliable and effective. Many of these systems, such as courseware applications that contain records of teaching, once preserved in paper filing systems and often considered ephemeral, need to facilitate better the permanent retention of products that provide evidence of the teaching and learning process. Libraries and archives working with faculty and other users have to develop new approaches to selection and preservation as they consider whether to migrate content. Working with institutional repository services, special collections professionals find that they are obliged to create mechanisms for provisional accessioning of digital materials that will allow their ongoing preservation, before decisions on their long-term value can be made. Influencing the development of tools and educating creators in effective methods of managing and saving digital materials must serve much the same function as records management – ensuring a stable body of materials from which selection can be made.

Descriptive Practices and the Provision of Continuing Access

Descriptive practices need to leverage existing directory schemes, much in the same way archivists use the original file plans as their basis for arranging records in physical form. Powerful full-text search engines and browsing capabilities need to be integrated into access mechanisms in ways that complement or diminish the need for traditional arrangement and description. To the extent that metadata is built into digital materials, they may become self-describing and the task of the cataloger or processor becomes more one of extracting descriptive metadata rather than creating it from scratch. Integrating digital materials that are part of larger collections that include more traditional analog materials as well will require descriptive practices that are nimble in providing integrated access to all components.

Except on the smallest scale, the challenges of digital storage and preservation will be beyond the capacity of almost all special collections repositories. The volume of digital materials that will flow into special collections repositories is such that it requires collaboration with other repositories and service providers with the capacity and capabilities to house and manage them. In the context of such collaborative arrangements, the stewards of special collections must draw attention to the particular needs of their collections and their users. Preservation and retrieval capabilities will need to be defined and audited routinely in ways that are foreign for most traditional collections. Ongoing content migration, emulation, or other strategies to ensure long-term accessibility – along with media migration – need to be in place and monitored.

Ongoing access to digital materials requires the development, implementation, and maintenance of search engines, interfaces, and delivery mechanisms that meet evolving user needs. Experience has shown that most developments in these areas come from large-scale commercial, scientific, and production environments other than cultural institutions and shape user expectations in ways that repositories are forced to respond to. The skills needed to take advantage of these developments are expensive because of competition from these other environments and not readily available to libraries and archival repositories. Once again, collaboration and partnerships – including the occasional possibility of transferring responsibility to other entities – will be the only way in which special collections departments can fulfill their

40 See descriptions of the file format at <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/government/002/007002-3017-e.html> and <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pronom/>.

stewardship obligations for digital materials. Archivists, curators, and librarians need to be involved in campus planning for local cyber-infrastructure capabilities.

Two points need to be made here. First, indexing and or responsibility for access may no longer fall so strongly to libraries and archives. At some level, new scholarly practices may involve giving copies of sizeable digital corpora to interested scholars who will then perform various kinds of computing on them, some of it to get access, some to rank, some to summarize or interpret, some to do inference across multiple collections. These new points of access may be more specialized, variable, and situational than what the library or archive can be expected to offer. They may also be experimental, or requiring of subsequent scholarly interpretation. A second point to be made about access to digital materials is that sometimes, the best or only thing that the library or archive can do is to use some clearly insufficient technology, and then wait and re-run the technology later when it improves. This may be the case with some image or recorded speech collections, where significant effort and money is being expended to advance the state of the art, and what can be done in ten years computationally to provide access to the collection is likely to be much better than what can be done today.

A major theme that emerges during digital curation is the need for partnerships and collaborations – those that involve transferring responsibility for activities that repositories have managed for traditional analog materials. Defining requirements, identifying partners with the capabilities and capacity to meet those requirements, and routine monitoring of their performance need to become an integral part of strategies for managing digital materials in special collections. An example of these new types of partnerships/collaborations is the outsourcing of indexing of various corpora to Google and others.

Recommendations: (with some talking points on digitization privacy/institutional liability concerns)

13. New definitions need to be created for determining the scope of digital special collections, so that stakeholders can understand the nature of special collections professionals' responsibilities. These include a responsibility for harvesting and preserving endangered web sites, wikis and other dynamic information resources.
14. There is also a pressing need for training programs that will help administrators as well as special collections professionals to understand their responsibilities in this environment. Digital awareness is a responsibility that library managements need to address most especially in dealing with special collections.
15. Digitization makes visible materials that may be "public" but not broadly shared, such as legal records, which remain "practically obscure" in paper form thus providing some measure of privacy protection. With digitization, the access/privacy balance is shifted and can result in unintended consequences that may raise liability concerns for the institution. Institutions may end up facing requests to redact or take down content that has been put online.⁴¹ There is a need for those in charge of special collections to understand and have ready access to a clear institutional policy and procedure for responding to such requests, that ensures actions are taken in light of the most current legal decision in this field.

⁴¹ Consider, for example, the recent Vanginderen case at Cornell University, where an alumnus sued the university for breach of privacy because their digitized version of the student newspaper contained an unfavorable story about him.

16. The imperative to collaborate becomes far more apparent in the digital environment. Special collections librarians and archivists should both welcome and seek out collaborations, with museums and galleries, with scholars creating electronic databases, with lawyers, with information technologists, and with the creators and custodians of digital repositories (who will not necessarily be the libraries themselves, as the needs for electronic preservation diversify and grow).
17. There is an ongoing need for case studies that can illustrate possible approaches to early intervention with digital records creators, institutional collaborations, and partnerships with information technology specialists.

Conclusion

The leaders of research libraries have an opportunity to shape the future direction of special collections as a key element of our libraries. The recommendations included in this report call for the research library community not only to support and endorse the extraordinary work of our special collections professionals, but also to provide, with their help, tools, guides, and partnerships that will point to future directions.

19th- and 20th-century materials present special challenges because they cover all formats and engage us with the issues of copyright and intellectual property, privacy, and restrictions on access, as well as the technological challenges and opportunities arising from digital technology. But the issues we have identified here relate in different ways to all special collections, whatever their format and from whatever period they may derive. The important message that we wish to deliver is that special collections, taken together, define the distinctive features of the modern research library.

We hope that the leadership of research libraries will take this opportunity and seize this moment, to support and advocate for actions that reposition special collections to maximize their use for scholarship and teaching.

We hope to see these actions undertaken within the closest possible collaboration with the leading professional bodies (e.g., RBMS and SAA) that handle special collections in our libraries. We also hope to promote closer collaboration within the parent organizations of ARL member libraries (mostly universities), encouraging efforts that draw together collaborations on campus and between campuses and other bodies. ARL has an opportunity for critically important influence.

With ARL endorsement of this direction, the Working Group proposes to develop the following set of recommendations into an action agenda for itself or other groups within ARL and to undertake efforts to engage other segments of the library and higher education communities in advancing the agenda.

Appendices

Recommendations

I. Collecting Carefully, with Regard to Costs, and Ethical and Legal Concerns

1. Donors and senior administrators need to be informed about the value and the costs of managing collections. Repositories need carefully to assess their own capabilities prior to accepting collections. Tools should be developed to assist in this process of assessment.
2. The professionals and administrators who are charged with care of special collections must themselves take carefully into account the costs of preservation, processing and providing access, including digital access, when they accept or purchase a collection.
3. The heads of archives and libraries, as well as their special collections staff, must educate donors to the consequences of lengthy restrictions on access, and should strive to balance considerations of individual privacy with those of scholarly access and the long-term interests of collections and their users.
4. Rigorous, full, and accurate documentation of the source of any acquisition is essential.
5. Archivists, curators, and librarians must support the work of records management staff and adopt early intervention practices in order to facilitate collecting, describing, and preserving new types of special collections, particularly those born-digital

II. Ensuring Discovery and Access

6. Special collections professionals should take a lead in researching and developing new forms of access, and finding opportunities to apply them to special collections. Libraries and other repositories need to make the necessary investment in technology to advance the creation of tools, and support their staff in taking this lead.
7. Adequate online metadata is an essential condition for good quality access to both the original and digitized versions of material. Minimal description is far better than none. Basic information about all collections (e.g., the initial record of acquisition) should be made available online as quickly as possible.

8. Special collections description is increasingly open to interaction with the community of users. Archivists and librarians should encourage and take advantage of these interactions in order to promote access. Such interactions include mounting and using catalogs within social networking environments, and using and developing tools that allow researchers to contribute to the documented knowledge about a collection.
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11. Repositories must also ensure that commercial partners respect and maintain basic rights over digital content.
12. The Working Group recommends that ARL encourage and contribute to the RBMS development of a set of guidelines on issues relating to the mass digitization of special collections similar to the negotiation checklist developed for mass digitization of general collections.

III. The Challenge of Born-Digital Collections

13. New definitions need to be created for determining the scope of digital special collections, so that stakeholders can understand the nature of special collections professionals' responsibilities. These include a responsibility for harvesting and preserving endangered web sites, wikis and other dynamic information resources.
14. There is also a pressing need for training programs that will help administrators as well as special collections professionals to understand their responsibilities in this environment. Digital awareness is a responsibility that library managements need to address most especially in dealing with special collections.
15. Digitization makes visible materials that may be "public" but not broadly shared, such as legal records, which remain "practically obscure" in paper form thus providing some measure of privacy protection. With digitization, the access/privacy balance is shifted and can result in unintended consequences that may raise liability concerns for the institution. Institutions may end up facing requests to redact or take down content that has been put online. There is a need for those in charge of special collections to understand and have ready access to a clear institutional policy and procedure for responding to such requests, which ensures actions are taken in light of the most current legal decision in this field.
16. The imperative to collaborate becomes far more apparent in the digital environment. Special collections librarians and archivists should both welcome and seek out collaborations, with museums and galleries, with scholars creating electronic databases, with lawyers, with information technologists, and with the creators and

custodians of digital repositories (who will not necessarily be the libraries themselves, as the needs for electronic preservation diversify and grow).

17. There is an ongoing need for case studies that can illustrate possible approaches to early intervention with digital records creators, institutional collaborations, and partnerships with information technology specialists.

Working Group Charge

February 23, 2007

ARL WORKING GROUP ON SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Special Collections in the Context of New and Expanding Library Roles

An objective within the scope of ARL's Research, Teaching, and Learning Steering Committee is "Building and supporting collaborative integration and enduring access to comprehensive research collections and resources in all formats that advance research, teaching, and learning."

It is within this broad context that the steering committee set for itself a strategic priority of addressing the changing nature of collections, collection management, and collection use. Potentially, this might embrace many areas of inquiry for ARL but, in the view of the steering committee, none so pressing as addressing issues associated with the collection, surfacing, and leveraging of special collections.

Therefore, the Research, Teaching, and Learning Steering Committee is establishing a Working Group on Special Collections.

Charge to the Working Group

The Working Group on Special Collections is charged with advising the Research, Teaching, and Learning Steering Committee on special collections issues on an ongoing basis. In this context, "special collections" is construed broadly to include distinctive material in all media and attendant library services.

Priority Issues

The two issues that the Steering Committee identifies as first priorities for the attention of the Working Group are

1. Identify opportunities and recommend actions for ARL and other organizations that will encourage concerted action and coordinated planning for collecting and exposing 19th- and 20th-century materials in all formats (rare books, archives and manuscripts, audio, and video, etc).
2. Identify criteria and strategies for collecting digital and other new media material that currently lack a recognized and responsible structure for stewardship.

These two issues are closely linked. An enormous amount of valuable material in all formats remains uncollected and risks being permanently lost. Coordinated strategies for identifying, collecting, preserving, and exposing these materials are greatly needed.

International efforts are underway – and more are needed – to support the digitization of 19th- and 20th-century newspapers and books. Even before such digitization is possible, strong efforts must be made to

identify and acquire culturally significant materials from these periods.

While individual libraries should ultimately take action to acquire and expose such materials, ARL can provide leadership for encouraging collective activities. These would include but not be limited to, collection analysis, identification of gaps, coordination, and use of a “preliminary record” for identifying and making accessible otherwise hidden collections.

General Issues

In addition to the priority issues listed above, the Working Group may also wish to advise the Steering Committee about the following:

- ways to illustrate examples of how special collections contribute to innovative research, teaching, and learning.
- contributing to the work underway within ARL to develop qualitative and quantitative measures for the evaluation of special collections. These might include a target for surfacing hidden collections and mechanisms for tracking progress.
- contributing to and/or validating the work being done by the ACRL/RBMS Core Competencies Task Force to define the skills needed for work in special collections.

From time to time, the RTL Steering Committee may ask the Working Group to provide advice on other issues. For example, the Working Group may be asked to address preservation strategies for special collections in both physical and electronic spheres following Steering Committee discussion of a report from the ARL Task Force on the Future of Preservation in ARL Libraries.

Timeframe, Reports & Assessment

The Working Group is expected to be ongoing. However, the RTL Steering Committee asks the Working Group to report on their progress semi-annually.

No later than October 2008, the RTL Steering Committee will review the charge to the Working Group, assess accomplishments, and consider if this is the most effective way to ensure that the special collections agenda remains strategic to the directions ARL has set.

Proposed by Research, Teaching, and Learning Steering Committee, October 18, 2006

Endorsed by Executive Committee November 21, 2006

Revised February 23, 2007 in consultation with Chairs and ARL Executive Committee

Glossary

ACRL	Association of College and Research Libraries
ARL	Association of Research Libraries
CCAD	Canadian Committee on Archival Description
CCC	Canadian Cataloging Committee
CLIR	Council on Library and Information Resources
CNI	Coalition for Networked Information
DACS	<i>Describing Archives: A Content Standard</i>
EAD	Encoded Archival Description
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
NWDA	Northwest Digital Archive
OCLC	Online Computer Library Center
RBMS	Rare Books and Manuscripts Section
SAA	Society of American Archivists