Observations on Scholarly Engagement with Hidden Special Collections and Archives: Study Report for Year Two
Council on Library and Information Resources
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This report offers a brief summary of the study activities completed since the submission of the last report to CLIR in March 2010. The findings of this year's report build upon those described previously and, thus, should be read as a follow-up to the earlier findings. The study's methodology has remained consistent. After the announcement of the 2009 awards, the study team administered an initial online survey of the recipients, collected the results from participating projects, and provided analysis. In the next phase, the team conducted one-day site visits at twelve of the fourteen institutions that received awards in 2009 and compiled detailed site visit reports, including a summary of key points for each visit. In addition to collecting a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, the team has also made connections between individual projects and, whenever possible, fostered engagement with expert users.

Over the course of the second year of the study, our team noted that the growing community of Hidden Collections projects is resulting in knowledge-sharing within library and archival communities in individual institutions, cities, and regions. For instance, in situations where a second grant has been awarded to the same institution, we noted that new project teams have applied lessons learned and shared staff from the previous projects, resulting in increased efficiency and effectiveness. In several cases, we also saw evidence that the 2008 grants have had regional impact, i.e. project team members are actively offering advice and expertise on processing and cataloging for other institutions in the area.

The following report contains three sections: 1) Cumulative Survey Results, 2) Summary of Key Points from the Site Visits (anonymized), conducted July – December 2010, and 3) Proposed Plan for Year 3.

I. Cumulative Survey Results

Online surveys were conducted Spring 2009 and 2010 that asked questions about primary users, services provided to researchers, assessment, and the extent of scholars' involvement in the project. In 2010, the survey was slightly adapted, eliminating two redundant questions, adding new categories to the users list, and asking participants to provide their own definition of "scholar" as it applied to their institutions.[1] We had a response rate of nearly 100% for the 2009 and 71% for 2010. Both years the number of respondents was higher than the number of grantees because some projects involved multiple institutions (in

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[1] There is some fluctuation in the numbers of total respondents (the number equaling 100%) in the survey data because not every respondent answered every question. In most cases 100% is 31 respondents, but in some cases 100% is 30 respondents (questions #3, #6, #8, and #10) and in a few 100% is 29 respondents (questions #4 and #9).

2010, for example, 5 of the 15 respondents came from one consortia project).

Scholarly use of collections was included in the mission and/or strategic plan of 83% of the special collections libraries and archives surveyed, and 79% of respondents said their Hidden Collections project would affect services for scholars. 90% of respondents identified academic faculty and graduate students from *outside* their institution as the primary users of their collections, confirming that special collections libraries and archives serve a broad constituency beyond their institutional base. Other primary users included independent researchers (87%), local faculty (71%) and local graduate students (65%), local undergraduate students and community members (55%). Secondary user groups included elementary and secondary school teachers and professionals such as doctors and lawyers (45%), staff and government officials (39%), authors of non-academic works (32%), journalists and genealogists (26%) and museum curators (23%) and printers (19%). One respondent commented that while their users varied widely, "the majority of users who repeatedly and deeply use the collection are students and scholars."

Services for users

The libraries and archives surveyed provided a range of access points and services.

Services offered at most Special Collections Libraries and Archives	
Phone and e-mail reference (100%)	Patron accessible computers (90%) & wireless (84%)
Consultation (90%)	Interlibrary loan (68%)
Library instruction for classes (77%)	Scanning and/or digitization (97%)
Educational programs by staff (84%)	Photocopying (94%)
Tours of collections (71%), exhibits (68%), & facilities (68%)	Tools such as paper, book rests, & magnifiers (94%)
Reading room access (94%)	
Less Common Services offered at Special Collections Libraries and Archives	
Education programs by research fellows or visitors (58%)	Purchase requests (42%)
Digital scholarship support (53%)	Electronic equipment check out (including digital cameras, scanners, or laptops) (35%)
Copyright and intellectual property consultation (53%)	Grants or fellowships for researchers (35%)

Services that saw an uptick included digital scholarship support and copyright and intellectual property consultation (up 15%) and library instruction for classes (up 10%), while services that saw a slight down turn included consultation (down 10%), interlibrary loan (down 7%) and patron accessible computers (down 6%). Publication – in the form of newsletters and monographs – was an additional service to researchers noted by one respondent.

Assessment activities occurred at most of the libraries and archives surveyed – in fact, 77% of them assessed their services for scholars. In most cases assessment involved collecting statistics on use of collections (largely through permissions) and services, including reference and instruction. One respondent used LibQual, eight respondents conducted surveys, interviews, and focus groups with users (one specifically about finding aids,

another about instructional sessions), and another described a "User Profile and Satisfaction Survey." Many expressed dissatisfaction with options available for assessment while also noting that their resources were limited: "I'm the only librarian, period."

Project development

References for the grant application – individuals who wrote letters of recommendation for the project – were selected based on 1) their subject expertise (84%); and 2) their knowledge of specific collections targeted for the grant (47%). This is a decrease from 2009 when 100% of respondents selected referees based on subject expertise and 69% based on their knowledge of the targeted collections. Nevertheless respondents described their referees as "top scholars in the field" who would "add weight to the argument of our collections' scholarly value." Other criteria for selecting references included previous experience working closely with librarians or archivists involved in the project (45%) and having a Ph.D. or terminal degree (32%). Only three respondents (10% of the total) identified knowledge of cataloging technologies or metadata as a determining factor.

Involvement in Project Planning and Execution

To what extent were scholars involved in the following project planning activities? Select one of the four options and, when possible, please explain the nature of the involvement in the comment space provided.

- NO INVOLVEMENT
- SOME INVOLVEMENT
- INTENSIVE INVOLVEMENT
- MINIMAL INVOLVEMENT
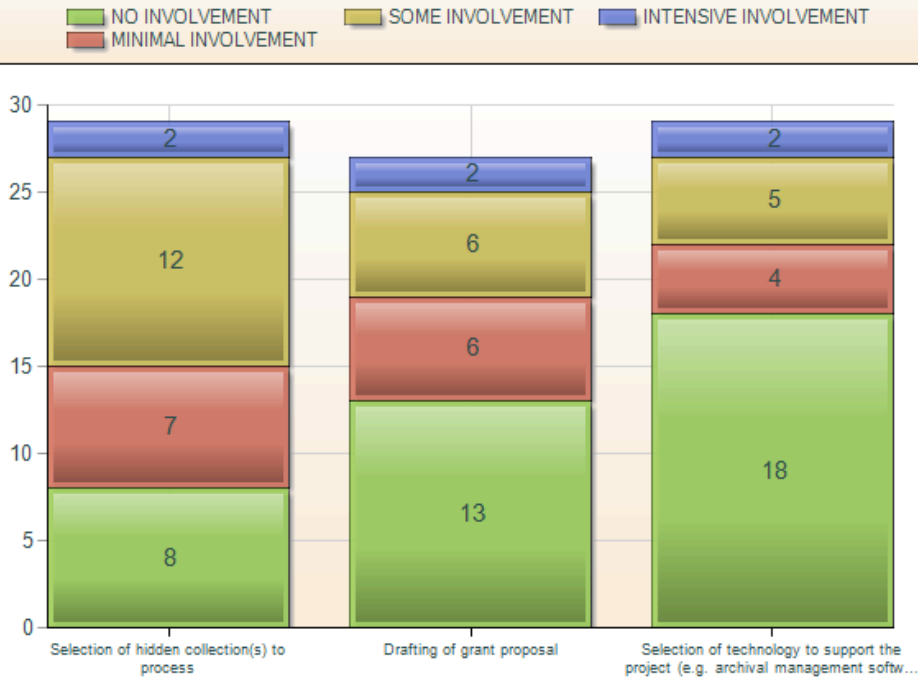
To what extent are scholars involved in the following aspects of project execution? Select one of the four options and, when possible, please explain the nature of the involvement in the comment space provided.

NO INVOLVEMENT | SOME INVOLVEMENT | INTENSIVE INVOLVEMENT | MINIMAL INVOLVEMENT
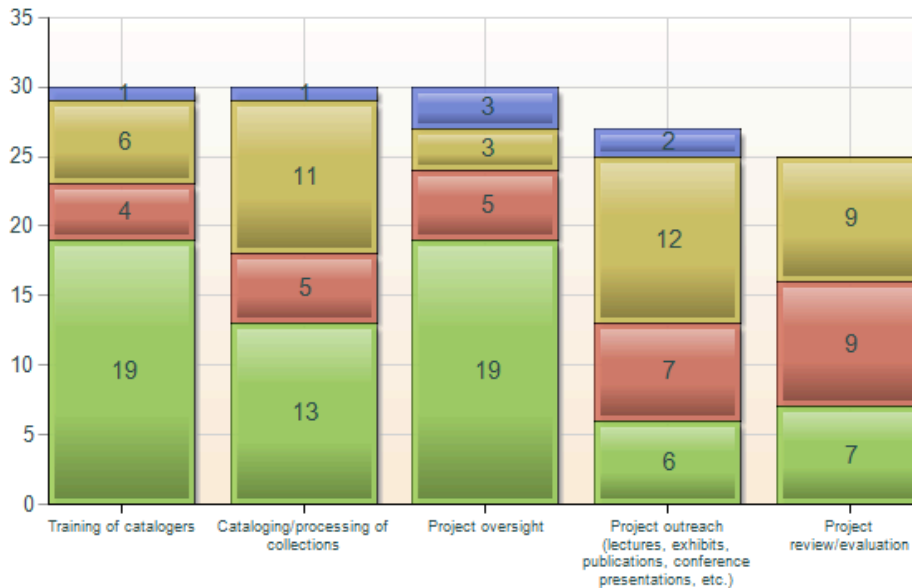
As indicated in the tables above, scholars had varying degrees of involvement in the identification of targeted of collections, the drafting of the grant proposal, and the selection of technology. "No involvement" was the most common response, and no institution involved a scholar intensively in all three areas. When involved, scholars were most likely to assist with 1) selecting hidden collections and project outreach; 2) cataloging/processing collections; and 3) project review and evaluation. Most of the time (80%) scholars who provided references for the project where not involved in the project itself.

Some respondents commented that they employed scholars as librarians and archivists and that scholarly demand had helped them to identify collections and/or themes for the project. In at least one case scholars were involved in assisting with vocabulary and reviewing catalog records and finding aids, providing oversight and quality control, promoting collections in their classes, and participating in outreach programs. Other outreach efforts described included presentations at colloquia, presentations for visiting scholars, integration into professional development programs for secondary school teachers, and academic seminars. Another project drew on scholars to recommend readings for project archivists. And in two cases the creator of the collection or their family members provided consultation for the project.

All respondents identified increased scholarly interest in, and use of, targeted collections as a successful outcome. Other factors included an increased number of requests for information about the targeted collection (90%); adoption of project technologies and/or methods of cataloging (77%); increased visits to the project website (74%); and increased use of the target collections in teaching (71%). Respondents also commented that an improved understanding of their collections would improve services to scholars, as well as

enabling them to build on their success for further acquisitions, processing, and digitization. One respondent noted that the participation of scholars at their institution was "critical to the success of the project," in part because of their knowledge of related collections within the institution and at other repositories.

II. Summary of Key Points from the Site Visits (anonymized)

Note: Our site visits have resulted in data collection far exceeding the initial bounds of the study topic (scholarly engagement). Because we believe the data to be valuable, even if it does not directly relate to our immediate focus, we have chosen to list key observations made, and questions raised, during the site visits. We are also keenly aware that many of the topics mentioned below are being actively discussed and debated within the professional library and archival communities, and that a significant body of literature is developing around these topics. We hope that this study and its findings can contribute to these ongoing discussions.

Building the Project Team: Hiring and Training Strategies

- Including a project manager as part of the project team can be beneficial. For instance, the Co-PIs of one project mentioned that they wished that they had thought to hire a project manager. Both of these PIs lead either a special collections library or archive; consequently, as they have learned, neither of them is able to spare the time for managing the day-to-day operations of a Hidden Collections project. Also related to this need for project management is a clear agreement between Co-PIs of the kinds of commitment each would be able to uphold. They believe that a document of agreement would have provided them with something to refer to whenever questions arose.
- A number of projects include students as members of the processing teams and provide training in how to conduct research using primary sources. Professional members of the project team sometimes struggle to balance the time-consuming nature of training students with the pressure to process collections efficiently. Observed benefits of involving students in the project include 1) student exposure to primary sources and research methods, and 2) archivists' direct exposure to user perspectives.
- Many projects are grappling with questions about the right "formula" for the composition of the project team. Hiring experienced project archivists who could "hit the ground running" was deemed extremely valuable, but determining who precisely should assist and advise in processing the collections can be more challenging to determine, especially in an era of increasing application of MPLP. In short, who should process: archivists, professional catalogers, scholars with Ph.D.'s, graduate students, undergraduate students, or volunteers? What level of expertise is necessary? And how much time should be devoted to training?

Applicability and Practice of MPLP

During the study, projects expressed many questions on the subject of MPLP, particularly in regard to the impact of MPLP practices on end users:

- What is the best way to provide access to vast, unstable, minimally processed collections? What is the impact on reference and technical services, and how do reference and technical services work together to manage the process of making such collections available?

- How much expertise is needed to catalog? (see also "Building the Project Team")
- How much cataloging is necessary?
- Is enhancing description more important in the MPLP era? What technologies, policies, and workflows are needed to enable enhanced descriptions of current finding aids? At least one project is intentionally processing only minimally, with an eye toward "more intensive [descriptive] work" to come later.
- How should the enhancement of finding aids, i.e. through crowd sourcing, be managed? (with attention to technology, workflows, etc.)
- How is MPLP changing the nature of interactions between expert-users and libraries/archives?

In order to determine preliminary answers to these questions and others, several projects are actively collecting data and applying metrics to their processing strategies.

Space

Taken as a whole, the Hidden Collections' projects offer many different examples of configurations of work space that affect the way project team members interact with one another, the collections, and potential users. Questions and topics of particular interest to the 2009 projects include:

- How can work space best be configured to maximize efficiency and communication between project members? What if there's not a lot of processing space where collections are stored? Projects often need more space to store and process collections and greater flexibility in the spaces that are available.
- In some projects, space is being configured for the purposes of experimentation with public exposure of hidden special collections. For instance, at one institution, the project manager set up a work space for students to process a hidden collection of posters that is located just beyond the Special Collections reading room. The goal was to make sure that the posters are always in full view of the public that frequents the reading room. Because they are visually compelling, the posters attract interest and attention. One might term this "passive outreach": positioning the posters strategically enhances the possibility that patrons will inquire about them and want to look at them more closely.

Preservation/Conservation

- In some cases, projects are dealing with format-specific collections, but other projects are coping with collections of diverse formats. The challenge of the latter is that there is not always sufficient local expertise, particularly when it comes to handling and conservation. *Question: Could CLIR help leverage the format expertise in certain projects (i.e. on A/V) to assist those projects that are handling diverse formats?*
- Expertise in conservation and preservation is especially needed in smaller institutions. Lack of expertise, especially with non-traditional materials, can hinder cataloging efficiency. (Problematic formats are often set aside, because they are deemed too difficult to cope with.)

Copyright and Intellectual Property Rights Issues

- The challenge of coping with copyright and intellectual property rights issues is problematic

for some projects, particularly those working on collections that include audio/visual materials. While some institutions have legal counsel on staff, other institutions do not. Moreover, copyright and intellectual property rights issues are also a concern for users; in fact, according to our survey, 53% of the participating 2009 projects offer consultation on such issues as a service to users.

Software Applications/Tools Used in These Projects

Like their predecessors, the 2009 projects are making use of a variety of software applications and tools, including:

- Archivist Toolkit
- AUGIAS
- CONTENTdm
- Mandarin Cataloging
- Dropbox
- GoogleDocs (for spreadsheets)
- MS Access
- Twitter
- Blogging software
- Facebook

Librarian/Scholar Interactions

- In a number of projects, certain preconceptions of librarians/archivists/scholars about one another seem to be creating barriers to effective collaboration. For example, on one site visit, a librarian/archivist explained to the study team that, "Scholars do not make good processors because they will process according to their needs rather than for a broad audience from a range of disciplines." If this is true, there is a certain tension apparent in many projects. On the one hand, some projects actively allow for undergraduate and graduate students to process with supervision. On the other hand, many projects – such as the one mentioned above – are reluctant to allow more full-fledged scholars, post-docs and faculty, to enter the processing stages. We wonder: why is it that a graduate student may be capable of processing, but a scholar would not be? Or is it rather a question of the scholar's time and commitment to such a task? Our study indicates that the role of the emerging and established subject expert in processing is not yet fully understood, but that it is being tested in various ways.

- Some academic disciplines are more heavily represented in certain projects. We observed a tendency of projects to orient to the strongest, most obvious theme in the collection, rather than casting a wide net to point to as many possible disciplinary possibilities. However, in a few projects, this tendency is being productively disrupted; in fact, once identified, unexpected users are being engaged, e.g. lawyers have consulted an architectural collection and scientists have made use of a film collection to harvest data and conduct outreach to the public.

- Some teams are curious to find out what other Hidden Collections grantee institutions are doing – what kinds of experiences their counterparts at other institutions are having and what they are learning. In addition to the website, listserv, and site visits, are there other tools/means of sharing knowledge between projects that CLIR might employ?

Perhaps, webinars to discuss particular challenges or areas of concern?

Outreach

Most of the libraries and archives we visited are attempting a wide variety of outreach programs to publicize the existence of newly cataloged collections. Questions remain, however, about how to select the most effective modes of outreach and how to scale outreach to meet demand.

- Special collections librarians and archivists appear to agree that academic faculty, that is, scholars/researchers who are actively teaching and writing, are among the best supporters of special collections. But skepticism remains about whether scholars know enough about processing and cataloging to communicate the challenges facing libraries and archives accurately.

- The special collections library and archival community appears to be very interested in learning how best to empower expert users to become *advocates* for collections. Collaboration between archivists and scholars on project processing seems to offer a strong model for achieving this goal. Based on our conversations with expert users on site visits, scholars who are exposed to the complexity of processing and cataloging hidden collections appear to gain greater understanding of the challenges facing libraries and archives as they seek to make collections accessible.

- In at least one project, it was observed that an oral history program plays a significant role in creating a community of collection donors, librarians/archivists, and expert users.

- In multiple projects, staff observed that the span of time necessary to nurture donor and scholar connections extends for years, even decades.

Teaching in Special Collections and Archives

Special collections librarians and archivists conduct a great deal of informal training and instruction for undergraduates and graduate students that is not necessarily recognized formally as teaching. Librarians and archivists note the time-consuming nature of training students, but also note the rewards of such work, especially in student learning. Repeatedly, we heard stories about librarians and archivists observing students having "Aha!" moments – moments of profound discovery with physiological markers – that alter students' career paths, steer choices of thesis, dissertation topic, etc.

- How can the increasing demand for student access to collections and requests for class visits to collections be managed? (How can response be scaled?)

- Our study team wonders whether there are ways to encourage the notification of and, interaction with the advisors, professors, and departmental homes of undergraduates and graduate students who are working with hidden collections. We observed that in certain projects, this connection is not always being made and so there are lost opportunities. (Professors are not necessarily aware that students are gaining experience working with primary documents in their area of expertise.) One reason for

this: within special collections and archives, "student workers" are not always thought of as students or as potential scholars themselves; instead, they are at times perceived to be temporary, inexpensive employees.

Outcomes

- Projects identify the following outcomes of use of processed collections: integration of primary source material (texts and images) in college curricula, student research papers, scholarly publications, hosted conferences, conference presentations, exhibits. Note: many of these outcomes are collaboratively authored and produced.

Assessment

- Special collections libraries and archives have varied methods for tracking and documenting use and outcomes of use of newly accessible collections. There is great interest in learning how to collect such data most efficiently and more comprehensively. Permissions requests are one common method of tracking interest in particular collections or items, but there is general consensus that more information is needed.

Digitization, challenges of

- A number of project teams noted that digital resources are increasingly central to scholarship and teaching, but digitization continues to be funded inconsistently through grants and special projects. The projects ask: How could a steady funding source be created for these projects that serve archival, scholarly, and instructional needs? What kind of funding models and workflows make scan-on-demand feasible?

III. Proposed Plan for Year Three

For the third year of the study, we will shift our approach to accommodate new goals of publicizing, and stimulating discussion about, our findings. We aim to write articles, lead webinars, and present at conferences in order to bring attention to how scholars, librarians, and archivists are working together to advance research and teaching using primary sources in newly-available special collections and archives.

At the same time, we also hope to work more consciously to bring projects together that are thematically linked by subject area. The 2010 projects will be conceptually grouped into several compelling thematic areas, e.g. civil rights, natural history, transportation, media, etc. , and then teams of two or three fellows will visit each of the groups. Instead of site visit reports, we will compile only key points and focus our energies on shareable outcomes, i.e. the publications and presentations. These will result from considering the projects as a set and how scholarly engagement is occurring within, and between, projects. As in past years, we will also conduct our online survey with the Hidden Collections projects, in order to gather quantitative data, as well.