

Public Services Discussion Group draft minutes

Midwinter Meeting, Boston
Sunday, January 17, 2010
Sheraton Boston, Back Bay B
10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Attendees: Hjordis Halvorson (Newberry Library), Martha Conway (University of Michigan), JoEllen Dickie (Newberry Library); Nicolette A. Dobrowolski (Syracuse University); Heather Smedberg (UC San Diego); Larry Creider (New Mexico State University); Mark Greenberg (University of S. Florida); Cait Coker (Texas A&M); April Brewer (UNC-Chapel Hill); Mary Lacy (Library of Congress); Jennifer Nelson (Robbins Collection, UC Berkeley); Moira Fitzgerald (Beinecke, Yale); Cynthia Becht (Loyola Marymount University); Jeffrey D. Marshall (University of Vermont); Melissa Conway (UC Riverside); Laila Milevic-Vejzovic (University of Central Florida-Orlando); Timothy Murray (University of Delaware); Lois Fischer Black (Lehigh University); Margaret Tenney (University of Texas); Susan Walker (Walpole, Yale University)

Welcome and introductions

Announcements and open positions

- This was a joint meeting between the PSDG and the Manuscripts and Other Formats Discussion Group.
- One of the workshops that will open the 2010 RBMS preconference in Philadelphia will be Joel Silver's (Lilly Library, Indiana University) workshop on Reference Sources for Rare Books. It is also being offered at Indiana's Summer Rare Book Course.
- Several attendees had position announcements. During the last meeting, 7/09, there was only one position announced.

Topics discussed

1) Hjordis Halvorson requested some input from the attendees regarding the revision of the Guidelines for Borrowing and Lending Special Collections Materials.

Topics included discussion of the different experiences among institutions in lending (and borrowing) special collections materials.

Most of those present viewed loaning for research and loaning for exhibitions as two different procedures and the size of the institution impacted the process. Those institutions large enough to have a registrar and an exhibits staff had more developed procedures

Participants mentioned that some were open to lending for exhibits but not for ILL and while some loaned rare books for ILL no one present loaned manuscripts for ILL. Discussion followed on the difficulties of getting the materials to the borrowing institution, the hazards of moving materials within the receiving locations, and the necessity of written procedures.

A short discussion of the differences between loaning for exhibitions by small & medium sized institutions and large institutions covered autonomy. Participants requested the guidelines encourage all decisions to be made by special collections rather than the institutional administration or a centralized library administration. A major concern among participants was that the loaned materials would then not be available for researchers in the owning institutions. A request was made that the guidelines include a policy to replace loaned items with digital surrogates where possible.

Most participants acknowledged leaning heavily on the current guidelines.

2) Serving non-print formats to researchers.

Discussion centered on the different non-print types of materials contained in special collections and the difficulties of serving researchers interested in these materials. Several attendees mentioned heavy use of non-print materials by instructors for classes and by librarians for outreach.

Audiovisual materials were brought up as problem materials because of the costs of reformatting and the delays reformatting poses for researchers. Costs were also mentioned as being prohibitive for students.

A few people mentioned their libraries/archives were delivering sound recordings on a server through the web or in-house.

Other challenges in the nonprint format were costumes; specifically getting them into the hands of researchers. Staffing problems, off-site storage, security, and delivery were mentioned as hurdles. Several people suggested maintaining research areas at the off-site storage location would generate the same set of issues just in another location.

One suggestion was to create a small exhibit or keep a sample set of materials in the stacks, and not remotely stored, particularly at times of expected renewed interest. A suggestion was made that one can deal with special formats early by not accepting collections with difficult materials. Discussion included conservation issues, political aspects, and the ability to say no. Another suggestion was to include funding agreements from the donors.

3) As we were meeting with the Mss and Other Formats Discussion Group we revisited the impact “exposing hidden collections” is having on the reading room.

One attendee’s library was creating abstracts for hidden collections; organized by subject area, attached to an inventory, and available through the web. It was mentioned that it helped reference staff get to know the collections better. The impact on public services of exposed, formerly hidden, collections was then explored. A marked response to such things as posting abstracts to the web has been seen in the reading room. Many places sought the input of public services staff in considering prioritization, and benefits seen included increase in efficiency for readers as they could identify what they wanted to see before coming, although the challenges of having requests made for less-than fully processed collections were acknowledged as well.

It was mentioned that for those institutions collecting faculty papers delaying the processing of those collections until after the people are deceased could make time for other collections. Also, student workers were proving very helpful in getting brief summaries of collections out but that survey assessment tools were needed on how to briefly survey collections. Archivist's Toolkit was named as being helpful, <http://www.archiviststoolkit.org/>.

The Public Services Discussion Group thanked the members of the Manuscripts and Other Formats Discussion Group for attending. The co chairs are currently accepting requests for future topics for discussion.

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