

Special Collections Assessment Efforts at ARL

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OUTLINE

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- Qualitative data
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BACKGROUND

ARL's work on special collections

- ARL special collections working group for about 20 years, mid-1990s to 2015
- Many outputs, including ...
 - First-ever survey of ARL special collections (1998)
 - Updated by OCLC Research survey (2010)
 - Several milestone conferences, including “hidden collections”
 - Reports on educational needs, 21st-century special collections, others
 - A model agreement for outsourcing digitization
 - *Research Library Issues* on mainstreaming special collections (2013)
 - Sponsored SAA workshops on managing born-digital archival content

QUANTITATIVE DATA

ARL special collections statistics

- As of 2011/2012, ARL annual statistics provide option to break out special collections data
- 88 of 125 ARLs (70%) have responded in all four years
 - 13 more members have responded at least once
 - Some of the largest ARLs have never provided special collections data
- Most answer only four questions (total expenditures and staffing)
 - Less than one-third of respondents provide data on collection size, reference, instruction, or interlibrary loan

Average total expenditures

	ARL		SpColl		% of ARL average
2014-2015	\$35,311,640		\$1,511,018		4.2%
2013-2014	\$35,311,640		\$1,510,255		4.3%
2012-2013	\$35,974,864		\$1,469,844		4.1%
2011-2012	\$36,531,581		\$1,490,810		4.1%

Staff size has been stable since 2010

- 1998 ARL survey showed average staff size was **14**
- 2010 OCLC Research survey data showed average staff size was **21**
- ARL data (2011-2015) shows a slight gradual increase, from 19 to **21**
- Comparison isn't 100% valid because different ARLs responded to each survey

QUALITATIVE DATA

The move to qualitative assessment

- When ARL annual statistics were revamped in 2011, focus shifted principally to to qualitative types of assessment
- Two projects resulted:
 - *Research Library Issues* case studies on mainstreaming special collections (2013)
 - “Impact stories” project (2015)

The “impact stories” project

- Twenty-one ARLs responded to a 2015 call for special collections impact stories
- The stories focus on how special collections improve ...
 - Undergraduate research and learning
 - Graduate research
 - Faculty research

An undergraduate research & learning story

The Dean's Fellowship program creates in-depth learning experiences for students over a semester or two. With **librarian and faculty mentors**, students work on **tactical projects**, learning new skills and completing projects that add to their expertise and resumes. Spring 2015 topics included a **digital exhibit** in Omeka of postcards collected by famed tenor Enrico Caruso; a **visualization of letters** written by Flannery O'Connor using Neo4j; and an **exploration of the Cumberland River using georectified maps** from 200 years of Tennessee's history.

--Vanderbilt University

A graduate research story

Dr. Susanna Lee's History 534 course combined **primary sources, digital images, and the Libraries' visualization spaces**. Students were assigned topics that involved **extensive research in University Archives and manuscript collections**. They **digitized and interpreted materials, designed online resources, and presented their exhibits** in one of the Libraries' Visualization Studios. The presentations were conducted simultaneously, creating an exciting, vibrant immersive learning space that promoted dialogue and and a lively exchange of ideas.

--North Carolina State University

A faculty research story

USC **School of Cinematic Arts** professors are collaborating with special collections librarians to develop **LibViz, a prototype discovery tool**. These faculty and their students are creating tools that **combine interactive media, data visualization, online databases** to explore new methods of representing, and communicating the material holdings of special collections. This ongoing 2-year project has resulted in **3D scans of collection items** and a joint presentation about LibViz at the recent San Diego Digital Initiatives Symposium.

-- University of Southern California

GOING FORWARD ...

- In 2015 special collections issues were folded into all ARL groups
- Two joint working groups of ACRL's Rare Books and Manuscripts Section and the Society of American Archivists are developing guidelines for standardized metrics, a project that was of considerable interest to ARL.
- *Questions to ARL*
 - *Should the optional special collections statistics form be modified to include only the few data categories that draw a high response rate?*
 - *Would more complete data in public services categories (and others?) be valuable to ARL directors?*
 - *How can the community keep generating strong impact stories?*



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