

# *“What’s So Special about Special Collections?”*

## Or, Assessing the Value Special Collections Bring to Academic Libraries

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# Introductions

## *Who we are ...*

## *Our backgrounds ...*

### **Christian Dupont**

- 15 years experience in academic library special collections as reference coordinator, curator and director
- ACRL/RBMS program and section chair
- Since 2008, Aeon Program Director for Atlas Systems
- Researcher, historian, special collections user

### **Elizabeth Yakel**

- Associate Professor, School of Information, University of Michigan
- Archival Metrics project
- User studies and assessment
- Economic impact studies



# Value and Metrics

- Why are value and metrics important in special collections?
- How are they related?
- Why here — why now?



# ARL Agenda

## *Activity Timeline*

1998 > Judith Panitch “Exploring Hidden Collections” survey

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2000 > *RBM and American Libraries*, “What So Special About Special Collections?” articles

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2001 > ARL “Future of Special Collections” symposium at Brown

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2001-2006 > ARL Special Collections Working Group I: Hidden Collections

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2006-2009 > ARL Special Collections Working Group II: New and Expanding Library Roles; 2009 report and ARL Fall Forum

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2010- > ARL Special Collections Working Group III: Digital Age; subgroup on value proposition

> ACRL “Value of Academic Libraries” report

> IMLS Lib-Value/ROI study

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# Value Propositions

- Operational efficiency
  - Lowest price
  - Quickest delivery
- Product leadership
  - Best product
  - Prestige
- Customer knowledge
  - Best solution (value-added)
  - Best service



# Value Propositions

In the Ithaka report, *Sustaining Digital Resources* (2009), Maron et al. argue that sustainable digital collections:

*“create a resource that offers unique value and continue to add value to the resources based on understanding users’ needs.”*

# Metrics Mayhem

- Circulation vs. visit counts



- Lack of standard definitions
- Lack of uniform data collection methods
- Difficult to analyze usage patterns
- Impossible to compare institutions



# Competing Definitions

<i>Source</i>	<i>Definition</i>
<b>ARL:</b> <i>Circulation</i>	➤ Count the number of initial circulations during the fiscal year from the general collection for use usually (although not always) outside the library. Do not count renewals. Include circulations to and from remote storage facilities for library users (i.e., do not include transactions reflecting transfers or stages of technical processing). Count the total number of items lent, not the number of borrowers. For Question 33, report total circulation for the fiscal year including initial transactions reported on line 32 and renewal transactions. Exclude reserve circulations; these are no longer reported.
<b>NISO:</b> <i>In-house Use</i>	➤ Documents taken by a user from open access stock for use on the premises.
<b>NISO Appendix A:</b> <i>Total Circulation</i>	➤ The total annual circulation of all library materials of all types, including renewals. Note: Count all materials in all formats that are charged out for use outside the library. Interlibrary loan transactions included are only items borrowed for users.
<b>SAA Glossary:</b> <i>Circulation Record</i>	➤ – 1. Documentation of who has used materials. – 2. Libraries: a log of books or other materials a patron has checked out, which can also be used to indicate all books checked out from a library. – 3. A document that records the movement of something such as blood, books, drugs, immigrants, money, or water from one place to another.



# Assessing Research Use

- Use implies value
- Reader-days vs. reader-hours
- Correlative analyses
- Intensity of use



# Assessing Learning Outcomes

## ➤ Output to outcomes

- Moving from value to the library to value for the user



## ➤ Output

- Classes taught
- Students in attendance
- Materials used



## ➤ Outcomes

- Information literacy skills
- Confidence level





# Questions to Consider

## *Areas for further study*

- Value**
- Where should we center the discussion of value?
  - Should the focus be on the value of the materials or the services through which they are used, or both?
  - How should value propositions for special collections be formulated?

- Metrics**
- What can standardized metrics offer special collections?
  - Should they focus on outputs or outcomes, or both?
  - What process should be used to define them?

*Thank you!*

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