Special Collections Assessment Efforts at ARL

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QUALITYMETRICS

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OUTLINE

• Background
• Quantitative data
• Qualitative data
• Going forward…
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>ARL</th>
<th>SpColl</th>
<th>% of ARL average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>$35,311,640</td>
<td>$1,511,018</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>$35,311,640</td>
<td>$1,510,255</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>$35,974,864</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>$36,531,581</td>
<td>$1,490,810</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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 qualitative types of assessment.

• Two projects resulted:
  – *Research Library Issues* case studies on mainstreaming special collections (2013)
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
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 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?