

**February 23, 2007**

## **ARL WORKING GROUP ON SPECIAL COLLECTIONS**

### **Special Collections in the Context of New and Expanding Library Roles**

An objective within the scope of the ARL's Research, Teaching, and Learning Steering Committee is "Building and supporting collaborative integration and enduring access to comprehensive research collections and resources in all formats that advance research, teaching, and learning."

It is within this broad context that the steering committee set for itself a strategic priority of addressing the changing nature of collections, collection management, and collection use. Potentially, this might embrace many areas of inquiry for ARL but, in the view of the steering committee, none so pressing as addressing issues associated with the collection, surfacing, and leveraging of special collections.

Therefore, the Research, Teaching, and Learning Steering Committee is establishing a Working Group on Special Collections.

### **Charge to the Working Group**

The Working Group on Special Collections is charged with advising the Research, Teaching, and Learning Steering Committee on special collections issues on an ongoing basis. In this context, "special collections" is construed broadly to include distinctive material in all media and attendant library services.

### **Priority Issues**

The two issues that the Steering Committee identifies as first priorities for the attention of the Working Group are

1. Identify opportunities and recommend actions for ARL and other organizations that will encourage concerted action and coordinated planning for collecting and exposing 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century materials in all formats (rare books, archives and manuscripts, audio, and video, etc).
2. Identify criteria and strategies for collecting digital and other new media material that currently lack a recognized and responsible structure for stewardship.

These two issues are closely linked. An enormous amount of valuable material in all formats remains uncollected and risks being permanently lost. Coordinated strategies for identifying, collecting, preserving, and exposing these materials are greatly needed.

International efforts are underway – and more are needed – to support the digitization of 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century newspapers and books. Even before such digitization is possible, strong efforts must be made to identify and acquire culturally significant materials from these periods.

While individual libraries should ultimately take action to acquire and expose such materials, ARL can provide leadership for encouraging collective activities. These would include but not be limited to, collection analysis, identification of gaps, coordination, and use of a “preliminary record” for identifying and making accessible otherwise hidden collections.

### **General Issues**

In addition to the priority issues listed above, the Working Group may also wish to advise the Steering Committee about the following:

- ways to illustrate examples of how special collections contribute to innovative research, teaching, and learning.
- contributing to the work underway within ARL to develop qualitative and quantitative measures for the evaluation of special collections. These might include a target for surfacing hidden collections and mechanisms for tracking progress.
- contributing to and/or validating the work being done by the ACRL/RBMS Core Competencies Task Force to define the skills needed for work in special collections.

From time to time, the RTL Steering Committee may ask the Working Group to provide advice on other issues. For example, the Working Group may be asked to address preservation strategies for special collections in both physical and electronic spheres following Steering Committee discussion of a report from the ARL Task Force on the Future of Preservation in ARL Libraries.

### **Timeframe, Reports & Assessment**

The Working Group is expected to be ongoing. However, the RTL Steering Committee asks the Working Group to report on their progress semi-annually.

No later than October 2008, the RTL Steering Committee will review the charge to the Working Group, assess accomplishments, and consider if this is the most effective way to ensure that the special collections agenda remains strategic to the directions ARL has set.

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