Research and Learning Agenda for Archives, Special, and Distinctive Collections in Research Libraries
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INTRODUCTION

OCLC Research exists to support the library community "in collaboratively designing their future."[1] This research and learning agenda represents the latest in a long line of OCLC Research efforts on behalf of archives and special collections in research libraries, to discern and respond to current and emerging needs in the community, and to convene colleagues across the profession to collectively move the profession forward. It represents our best thinking after numerous conversations, reading broadly and thinking carefully about what the most pressing needs are that face our collective collections and operations, and where OCLC Research and the Research Library Partnership (RLP) can make the most impact.

The agenda makes suggestions for areas of inquiry and potential research outputs. It is a map toward the future, but one with many potential routes by which to get there. OCLC will continue to engage with the RLP community, to gauge where there is energy and desire to work on the topics outlined here, and let that knowledge guide where effort is placed and what paths are ultimately taken.

Beginning in 2008, OCLC conducted two large, multi-year surveys that established a wide-scale understanding of problems and opportunities in archives and special collections at the time.[2, 3] Engaging with those issues drove much of the group's subsequent work in archives and special collections over the ensuing nine years. In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, and with a motivating clarity about the scale of our hidden collections, much of this work focused on decreasing the costs of caring for collections, while increasing their discoverability and utility.

Taking Stock and Making Hay: Archival Collections Assessment[4] encouraged repositories to achieve baseline control and understanding of their collections as a foundation for strategic decision-making and advocacy. Jennifer Schaffner's influential *The Metadata IS the Interface: Better Description for Better Discovery of Archives and Special Collections, Synthesized from User Studies*[5] was a clarion call to consider our descriptions as data, in order to leverage and mobilize it in modern discovery environments and connect to contemporary users. *Over, Under, Around, and Through: Getting Around Barriers to EAD Implementation*[6] gave important practical advice for implementing that structured data in the EAD encoding standard, in support of making collections more widely visible and accessible on the web. The *Demystifying Born-Digital* series of publications and activities responded to the growing need to begin to build strategies and tools for dealing with born-digital collections. The Mobilizing Unique Materials stream of work encouraged generous and open approaches to facilitating use of collections. *Capture and Release: Digital Cameras in the Reading Room*[7] encouraged allowing researchers to take photos of material and gave guidance on how to do so responsibly, and *Rapid Capture: Faster Throughput in Digitization of Special Collections*[8] offered case studies and lessons to help scale up digitization of archival materials.

While work to reveal hidden assets in strategic and efficient ways continues to be important, this agenda suggests a broader perspective is needed moving forward. It advocates a shift, from concentrating solely on the value equation in the internal work of special collections, to giving equal focus to building and articulating the value of archives and special collections via engagement with external colleagues and stakeholders. The value of special collections is in the collections, certainly, but it is also in the skills of the people who work with those collections. *The Archival Advantage: Integrating Archival Expertise into Management of Born-digital Library Materials*[9] began a conversation about the skills that archives and special collections can offer the research library proper

as it builds capacity to steward digital collections. This agenda extends that conversation across multiple functions and programmatic areas. As general collections start to look more and more like special collections, and as research libraries are increasingly finding their value in services to support research, teaching, and learning, special collections must bring their skills to bear beyond the silos of their stacks and reading rooms, and into the full research library enterprise. Special collections must consider how they are communicating their value, and being valued, across the research library ecosystem, and how they can position themselves effectively as valuable to the broader research library.

PROCESS

OCLC Research undertook the creation of this research and learning agenda throughout the first half of 2017. The agenda is designed to respond to current and emerging needs in the RLP community, and will guide OCLC Research's work in this area over the next several years. A transparent, iterative approach was taken to building the agenda, with significant input from the RLP. Chela Scott Weber was contracted to lead the process and to act as primary liaison to the RLP community during the development period. She collaborated closely with program officers Merrilee Proffitt and Jackie Dooley.

An advisory group of archives and special collections leaders was assembled to offer consultation and advice regularly throughout the process. In addition, colleagues throughout the profession were consulted, in order to identify major areas of challenge and opportunity, define problem spaces, and develop ideas for activities and outputs. Consultations were sought from people representing a cross section of roles, including leaders and administrators, and specialists with expertise in specific areas like audiovisual collections and born-digital records. The goal of this approach was to get a well-rounded sense of how issues play out at different levels of the enterprise, from the overarching view of an administrator to the on-the-ground perspective of the librarians and archivists working closely with collections and researchers.

Drafts of the research agenda will be shared with the RLP community for comment throughout the process. An early-stage draft was shared for written feedback with those who participated in early discussions, and work-shopped at an invitational working meeting in June at the 2017 RBMS Conference in Iowa City with a small group of leaders from RLP institutions. Next steps for further cycles of feedback and iteration are outlined at the end of this document.

RESEARCH STREAMS AND OUTPUTS

The types of work undertaken should vary across the agenda, as appropriate to the current understanding of the problem space and level of community interest. Some issues are in need of in-depth exploration before further work can be identified, while others are already well defined and will be best addressed by practical guidance. Three basic streams of work are recommended:

- *In-Depth Research*: work that helps establish or define current status, or illuminate an ill-defined area of need, such as surveys or other intensive data gathering activities, with analysis

and synthesis of that data. Example: *Taking Our Pulse: The OCLC Research Survey of Special Collections and Archives*

- *Community Exploration*: work that brings the community together to better understand a preliminarily defined area of need, such as convening working groups to explore specific issues, facilitating an ongoing discussion group to connect practitioners around an emerging or evolving area of work, or gathering case studies that can point to shared issues or best practices. Examples: Web Archiving Metadata Best Practices Working Group; *Mobilizing Unique Materials* series of papers and case studies

- *Practical Advice*: work that addresses well defined need by articulating shared learning from other streams of work, with practical guidance for on the ground practice, or highlights current projects employing smart practice. Examples: *Demystifying Born Digital* series; Works in Progress webinar series.

Just as an iterative approach was employed in shaping the agenda, the resulting work will be iterative. The strength of the RLP is its collaborative nature, and OCLC Research program officers will work to maximize learning from these collaborations. They will listen and synthesize across research streams and areas of inquiry, and ensure that all work can feed back into this loop of research, community exploration, and practical guidance.

Diversity, inclusion, equity, and accessibility must be a dimension in all streams of work. Because oppression of diverse voices and people is a systemic issue, all work undertaken as part of the research agenda has potential to move the cause of diversity and inclusion forward or to further impede it. OCLC should develop a tool to be used in planning and implementing all research and learning activities that result from the agenda, such as a matrix of questions to ask, to help recognize systemic bias and identify diversity implications in all efforts.

THEMES
In identifying areas of inquiry for the agenda, a number of themes emerged, where common factors or concerns repeatedly surfaced across multiple areas of work. These themes can help contextualize any research work undertaken and inform appropriate approaches.

- *Structural and Organizational Positioning:* The last decade has seen important shifts in the way that archives and special collections are organized and positioned within the research library. Individual repositories within the same organization have merged to achieve operational efficiencies, and special collections are increasingly coming under a distinctive collections umbrella in recognition of an alignment of interests and needs with area studies or other specialized collections. Issues throughout the agenda point to possible further evolution of organizational structures, such as representing special collections on library leadership teams to better facilitate alignment with the core goals of the organization, rethinking structures within special collections to distribute responsibility for born-digital, or creating formalized cohorts across the library with shared interests and complementary skills in areas where there is strong mission alignment such as instruction, collection development, or digital collections.

- *Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion:* Increased awareness of and interest in issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion are encouraging re-examination of practice across the enterprise. There is significant interest in working ethically and respectfully with community archives and rethinking traditional frameworks for collection ownership to facilitate this work. Our backlogs invite questions about how our collection management decisions can serve to further bury or to center the histories of marginalized people. There is a desire to critically engage with our technological tools and systems, and their underlying value assumptions. Nearly every aspect of our work can be interrogated to determine how it can better serve the goals of building an equitable, inclusive, and diverse profession and broadly representative collections.

- *Appraisal:* The core function of appraisal runs through almost all of our suggested areas of investigation. Tom Hyry recently framed the central role of appraisal in the archival endeavor by acknowledging that "the theory and practice of archives are not about saving records as much as they are about acknowledging and managing loss."[10] With an ever-expanding universe of information to steward and sizable existing backlogs, it is time to rededicate our efforts to appraisal. Born-digital and audiovisual formats require new knowledge and frameworks for appraisal practice. Our continued backlogs and resource challenges require a renewed energy be put toward appraisal and reappraisal as part of comprehensive strategies to live up to our stewardship obligations. The evolving nature of the scholarly record[11] and research library interest in collecting outside traditional acquisition channels means that archivists' appraisal knowledge can benefit work outside of the archives, as well.

- *Data and Systems:* An increasingly digital environment is shaping our practice, revealing new problems and possibilities. Digital tools and needs are omnipresent: in building out our electronic records programs; in the array of systems we now use to manage collections, track workflows, and provide access; and in an increased desire for data analysis to support planning and decision-making throughout the enterprise. Evolving user expectations for discovery system functionality are causing us to examine our descriptive metadata practices to ensure they support user needs. The need for metadata to interact with, flow through, and support multiple systems and functionalities calls for increased data quality and literacy, and intentional practice around data collection and flow in all areas of our programs.

- *Access Systems:* Our evolving collections, as well as increasingly sophisticated users and research methodologies, necessitate rethinking the goals and scope of our access and discovery systems. Many repositories now hold large bodies of digitized surrogates of analog collections that they want to deliver online, alongside audio and moving image files, and a wide variety of born-digital materials ranging from web archives to email caches to word processing documents. The growing interest in collections as data means we must grapple with what computational access to our collections might look like.

TOPICAL AREAS OF INVESTIGATION
Convergence of Special Collections and the Research Library
Research libraries are increasingly recognizing a convergence of collections, goals, interests, and skill sets across both general and special collections. In the last several years, the intersection of the

growth of computational scholarly research methodologies and outputs, growing collections of research data sets, and an increased interest in collecting ephemeral and grey literature, have shifted what libraries are collecting such that many recent additions to the general collections look much more like special collections. They are often contextually situated objects coming in through nontraditional channels or in digital formats that have urgent preservation needs. The growing interest in computational research methodologies in the humanities and social sciences means that more and more researchers are seeking data sets for their research. Because they are owned, and not licensed like so much other library content, archival and special collections stand apart and offer opportunities for research access and methodologies we can't offer with vendor-supplied materials, though we are still far from being able to enact the potential of special collections as data. Publication of the *ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*[12] (2015) codified a shift in emphasis in library instruction, centering information literacy and threshold concepts, as well as the collaborative relationships between faculty and librarians. Instruction in archives and special collections has followed a similar trajectory, shifting away from show-and-tell of treasures to a pedagogical approach that leverages primary source materials to allow students to engage in the critical thinking and information evaluation skills in which the *Framework* is grounded.

This presents both great opportunity and challenge. Archives and special collections have, in many cases, operated outside the main structures of the larger libraries of which they are a part. Skills in donor relations, appraisal, digital preservation, and instruction are relevant across the library, and archivists and special collections librarians can find excellent collaborators to learn from throughout the organization. Siloed organizational structures and professional identities can stand in the way. Future work should focus on aligning special collections with the goals of the library and its parent institution, building allies across the organization, broadly sharing the important knowledge special collections professionals possess, and identifying opportunities to reach much larger audiences and make collections used and useful to a broader cross-section of our stakeholder organizations.

Potential Research Activities:

Serving the Core Teaching Mission || The parallel trajectories of recent reconceptualizing of the goals and approaches to instruction, and the increasing recognition of the potential of primary source materials to support this pedagogical approach, point to an opportunity for special collections to play an important role in the library's programmatic vision for teaching and learning.

Activity: Conduct an environmental scan or convene a working group to identify examples of collaboration between archivists, instruction librarians, and teaching faculty that integrate special collections into required courses and curricula or otherwise provide examples of working at a high level to align special collections with instructional goals and vision. Share case studies and overall principles and themes in a subsequent publication.

Scaling Up Instruction || One of the key challenges of teaching with special collections is scalability. Many instruction interactions are bespoke, one-off classes that require much preparation and planning. Building instruction programs that serve large numbers of students without being staff-intensive is a challenge.

Activity: Conduct an environmental scan of large-scale usage or instructional initiatives, both in special collections and archives and in general library undergraduate instruction, and compile lessons and guidance for program building.

Rights Toolkit for Special Collections || Decisions throughout the stewardship process can serve to impede or support open access to our collections. In order to make the broadest portion of our archives and special collections accessible online in both traditional ways and for emerging computational methodologies, intentional practice in our legal agreements, that centers access whenever feasible, is key. Advice is needed for deeds of gift and other agreements when material is acquired. And as publishers show an increased interest in packaging and licensing primary source content, repositories that wish to enter into such digitization and licensing agreements need advice on how to do so while balancing access priorities.

Activity: Convene a working group to examine models for including use-centered options and language in contracts and legal agreements with donors, vendors, and others. Generate samples and practical advice for centering open access and use through documents such as deeds of gift; clauses regarding born digital materials to add to existing deeds of gift; permission to use name, voice, etc. in lecture or event recordings; oral history agreements; agreements to digitize special collections and archives with content vendors.

Collection Development Across the Library || Collaborations across functional departments can bring together complementary skill sets and interests, in service of collection development initiatives and goals throughout the library. Area studies librarians may be best situated to engage the communities they are a part of to initiate new archival collecting initiatives that could help diversify holdings. Archivists' skills in appraisal and collecting contextually-situated materials may be of use to data services, GIS, and social science librarians as they build data set collections, or to traditional bibliographers as they look to bring in more rare materials through non-traditional channels.

Activity:

Explore Collections As Data || Current interest in collections as data[13] and a desire for computational access to collections are pushing the boundaries of what archives think of as access, and what an object of research might be. This is an emergent area for which a better understanding of issues is needed to guide further work.

Activity: Convene a collaborative working group with data services librarians, archivists, and other digital scholarship colleagues, to identify and interview researchers about their computational research methodologies and goals, in order to better understand emerging collections as data needs.

Advocating for Archives & Special Collections
At the same time that we work on reconceptualizing our value in the research library writ large, we need to increase our capacity to communicate that value and advocate for the resources to support

our programs. *Taking Our Pulse* indicated that use was up, staffing was down, and backlogs were growing in our archives. If these patterns have held true, we have a real need to effectively advocate for support of our archives and special collections programs.

Much has been written about the value of these collections in distinguishing the research library, but it is unclear whether research libraries are making these operations central to their enterprises and in resource allocation. Most archives and special collections rely heavily on external, soft-money to accomplish both core responsibilities and to explore and launch new projects. Both internal and external resource allocators are increasingly relying on data to drive decision-making, and want statistics to back up any statements of impact or need. Understanding the full landscape of how special collections and archives staffing is funded, gaining skills in how to advocate for those funds, and having the tools to back up that advocacy are key to ensuring the longevity and richness of our programs.

Potential Research Activities:

> *Enabling Data-Driven Decision-Making ||* A large and standardized body of data about research libraries has been collected by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) for many years, and many research library directors rely on it for programmatic and resource allocation decision making. Although ARL has enabled submission of supplementary data about special collections since 2011, member libraries do not consistently provide it. The main bodies of data about archival and special collections programs come from a 1998 ARL survey and a 2009 OCLC Research survey. Cross-institutional and longitudinal data about special collections staffing, budgets, programs, and collections are key to informed advocacy and resource allocation.

> > Activity:

> *State of Resource Allocation ||* Many leaders in archives and special collections are administratively removed from resource allocation decisions across the research library. They cannot effectively advocate for resources without understanding the full resourcing landscape in their institutions and how special collections fits in. A clear understanding of the landscape of staffing and resources for archives and special collections, and how it relates to the larger library, is necessary to understand in order to try to change it.

> > Activity: Conduct a data-gathering activity to determine the current state of resource allocation to special collections in research libraries.

> *Skill Gap: Advocating for Special Collections ||* Leaders and administrators in archives and special collections have expressed a desire for guidance in effectively measuring and communicating value, and advocating for special collections to both external and internal stakeholders.

> > Activity: Convene a working group to put out practical advice about defining audiences, determining value arguments for those audiences, and gathering data and stories that can inform and support those value statements.

Long-Term Effects of Term Labor || Term positions have been a major part of the employment landscape in the archives and special collections field for decades. Concern is widespread regarding ways in which such insecure employment affects both the diversity of the profession and early career professionals, as well as how forced turnover, fluctuating staff resources, and short-term frameworks inherent to project-based work affect our programs long-term. It is unclear if soft-money positions have replaced or supplemented permanent line positions in the long term, or if they are more prevalent in special collections than in other parts of the library. These discussions are currently based only on anecdotal evidence; there is no longitudinal data about term employment in research libraries. Such data is needed in order to facilitate an informed discussion and investigation of impacts.

> Activity: Conduct a data-gathering activity to document the current state of term employment versus ongoing employment in special collections in research libraries. If possible gather retrospective data, as well.

Next Steps for Born-Digital
Born-digital collections have grown exponentially since the *Taking Our Pulse* survey in 2009, when the median size of born-digital holdings across institutions was a modest 90 gigabytes. What was an emerging need less than a decade ago is a vital and varied need now, with both nascent and mature programs puzzling through how best to provide for the collection, preservation, and accessibility of born-digital records.

An array of challenges exists when building sustainable born-digital programs, which variously require critical examination, structural analysis, and practical advice. Much work thus far has concentrated on capture of files from physical media and the actions necessary to ensure their authenticity and preservation. Work is needed now on all of the activities that come before and after the capture process, from appraisal and donor relations to reading room access. Similarly, much focus in building digital archives programs has been on creating a Digital Archivist position, whether on a term appointment, project funding, or a permanent line. However, as Erin O'Meara so memorably put it in her 2013 presentation at the Past Forward! Conference, "no one cooks the bacon alone"[14]; that is, one person cannot be entirely responsible for a robust and responsible electronic records program. It must become a distributed responsibility, and all aspects of the archival enterprise must be rethought to account for this.

Potential Research Activities:
> *Staffing concerns ||* Building a born-digital program likely means building a new position, or asking an existing employee to take on significant new responsibilities. Much thought, energy, and hope are invested in new digital archivist positions, and equal attention should be paid to making the people in these positions successful. A range of factors can impact that success: reasonable and appropriate skill expectations for digital positions; support systems and structural placement for positions expected to be change-agents; availability of networks and relationships to identify resources and collaborations; and ongoing leadership support for programmatic change. Practical guidance is needed for supervisors in preparing for and providing ongoing support for digital archivists and other positions with similar responsibilities, as well as for archivists tasked with a major role in building a born-digital records program.

Activity:

Frameworks for Distributed Responsibility || If responsibility for born-digital collections is to be truly and appropriately distributed across our programs, it is important to consider what the skills and roles might be to operationalize that shared responsibility.

Activity: Convene a small working group to design a "greenfield" organizational framework for a modern special collections department, considering issues such as labor distribution, types of skills and knowledge needed in different roles, how special collections would interoperate with the rest of the research library, and how this might play out in small, medium, and large institutions. Identify change management considerations for enacting such a shift.

Skill Gap in the Digital Environment || Building a born-digital records program also means building new skills sets. While SAA's Digital Archives Specialist program has done important work in providing continuing education to address this need, there are still gaps in our collective skill sets, and the needs are continually evolving. Additionally, costly workshops are not an accessible professional development model for many in the profession, and other training approaches should be explored.

Activity: Convene a working group to identify the skills needed across an organization to support distributed responsibility for born-digital records, and perform a corresponding gap analysis of current training opportunities for those skills and analyze costs for such training.

Explore Appropriate Risk Tolerance || Possibilities for online access, sheer volume of records to be reviewed, and general uncertainty about providing access to born-digital collections have produced wide-spread anxiety about rights and privacy issues as they relate to born-digital collections. Similar anxiety around issues of copyright in the past has lead to unnecessary risk aversion, with attendant ramifications for collections access. An intentional examination and clear articulation of relevant issues is needed to avoid repeating this pattern, and moving forward with responsible and informed practice.

Activity: Convene a working group to examine rights and privacy issues specific to born-digital records, and issue findings and guidance.

Understand Access Needs || Access systems for born-digital records are in their infancy, and many practitioners feel overwhelmed by both the needs and possibilities of such systems. Complex born-digital objects with many software dependencies might require emulation environments to be fully understood as research objects, while word processing documents may be best served in a similar way to digital surrogates. Access systems should prioritize functionality that supports researcher need.

Activity: Undertake a series of researcher interviews to assess their access needs and priorities.

Build Appraisal Tools and Frameworks || Appraisal is a core and complicated archival function, made more challenging in the digital environment. Curators and donors are challenged to do appraisal work before a collection comes in, and archivists and curators are struggling with how to appraise after a collection comes in. Digital archivists with no donor relations experience are being asked to step into informal curatorial roles for digital materials and feeling ill-equipped to do so.

> Activity: Convene a working group to identify the range of issues and best areas for action.

Critical Examination of Digital Forensics Tools || Many of the tools we use in digital forensics work originate in the law enforcement and surveillance industries, and have specific values and worldviews built into them, which don't always align with the those of libraries and archives.

> Activity: Convene a group of authors to conduct a series of critical examinations of use of these tools, and how they uphold or challenge our professional values.

Audiovisual Collections

Recorded sound and moving image, or audiovisual (a/v), holdings continue to be a top concern for archival repositories, where they are found throughout modern collections. Changes in scholarship have led to increased interest in the kinds of content documented in a/v formats, and preservation concerns about a/v formats push them further up the priority list. Important work in assessing the state and scale of a/v collections and their preservation need, and identifying ways to address that need, has been done by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation[15], Council on Library and Information Resources and Library of Congress[16], and others.

A 2014 study found that there are 537 million sound recordings in collection-holding organizations across the US, and that 57% of those holdings are rare or unique.[17] These numbers account only for recorded sound, and do not include the equally at-risk moving image holdings. The profession has acknowledged for some time that there is a finite window of time in which magnetic media will remain viable, and therefore preservation reformatting must be a high priority. While preservation reformatting deserves energy and resourcing, the volume of a/v in our collections is such that reformatting alone cannot address the need, and reformatting all of our holdings is not realistic. Holistic programs to assess, prioritize, and take action to deal with these materials are needed. For decades, a/v materials in our collections have largely either been separated from related manuscript material and shunted away to be dealt with at a later date, or treated at the item level. Both have served to create sizable backlogs of un-quantified and un-described a/v materials. To address these backlogs, we must look at all points in the archival enterprise for ways to integrate and address a/v holdings.

Potential Research Activities:
> *Appraisal Frameworks for A/V ||* The scale of a/v materials in our collection demands informed prioritization of what is to receive preservation, processing, and other attention, as well as what is and isn't worthy of long-term retention. Appraisal of a/v presents specific challenges, different from other record types.

Activity: Convene a working group of curators, audio/visual archivists, and others to establish appraisal frameworks for a/v materials.

Operationalizing A/V || Audiovisual materials have often been treated separately from the rest of materials in archival collections, either removed to be dealt with later, or tracked and described in entirely different systems. This inefficient practice has lead to loss of contextual information, and to large portions of holdings in a backlog. Incorporating a/v materials into overarching accessioning, arrangement, and descriptive practice so that they are managed and described alongside other record formats would make a significant impact in reducing backlogs and increasing access, as well situating a/v as research objects and maintaining important context.

Activity: Convene a working group to identify integration points for a/v materials into processing prioritization workflows, as well as into the processing work itself.

Activity:

Vendor Guidelines || Few research libraries will have the capacity and means to deal with all necessary preservation reformatting in-house. Vendors can and should be a part of the solution ecosystem.

Activity: Convene a working group to establish guidance for working with vendors for a/v preservation and digitization projects.

Access Needs || Audiovisual materials pose format-specific questions about researcher access needs that have impact for discovery and access systems, and for our descriptive practice. We need to better understand how a/v resources are being used as research objects in order to best develop strategies to facilitate access to them.

Activity: Undertake a series of researcher interviews about search strategies and research methodologies related to a/v materials, to better understand their access needs.

Section 508 Compliance || Institutions that receive federal funding are required to comply with the rules of Section 508 of the Federal Acquisition Regulation, which addresses access for people with physical, sensory, or cognitive disabilities to information and electronic technologies. Research libraries are in early days of determining what constitutes compliance with Section 508 for archives and special collections, and how it might impact online streaming of primary source content. Captioning streaming primary source audio and video presented on the web would be a major step toward equitable access to our collections, but would also significantly impact preservation reformatting programs and resources at a time when the need for preservation reformatting is already at a crisis point.

Activity: Convene a working group to define different options for compliance, and quantify labor and other cost impacts for each option.

Systems Ecosystems

Recent years have brought a proliferation of systems used to manage our collections and facilitate their use. A number of factors are pushing the profession to become increasingly reliant on and fluent in dealing with technological systems to perform and support a broad range of functions in special collections. Collection management systems such as Archivists' Toolkit, Archon, and ArchivesSpace have become central to producing descriptive data and managing an increasing array of functions. Born-digital collecting necessitates a suite of tools for appraisal, acquisition, processing, and providing access. The creation, management, and delivery of digital surrogates brings still more systems into the mix. Digital preservation tools such as Archivematica and BitCurator are needed for both born-digital collections and digital surrogates, and must interact with our digital repositories. As collection sizes grow and secondary storage facilities are used, machine systems are increasingly employed to manage locations and circulation. Evolving user expectations dictate not only that collections be discoverable via web-based tools, but also that they be requestable and, ideally, viewable online as well.

We need our descriptive, administrative, and other data to move into, out of, and across a growing ecosystem of tools that support the full range of collection management, preservation, display and discovery, and public service functions. Inconsistent and under-documented description and encoding practice becomes a problem not just for discovery but also for movement of data across systems. As these tools become more sophisticated, we are asking our data to support an increasing array of functionality, and our archivists to be increasingly data fluent. These systems bring the opportunity to collect data about our collections, activities, and impact, but data must be gathered and systems configured with reporting in mind in order to exploit this opportunity.

Systems integration and interaction is a closely related issue. No one system can provide an end-to-end workflow for capture, ingest, processing, describing, and providing access, nor should we be looking for one monolithic solution. Major recent projects have addressed systems integration and multi-system workflows[18], but more work is needed.

Potential Research Activities:

Data Literacy || As our work becomes more systems-dependent and relies on a range of systems that our data must interact with, the issues of data quality and data literacy becomes crucial. Though different roles necessitate a range of levels of comfort with and knowledge about working with data, it is important that all involved in our programs have some baseline literacy.

Activity: Convene a working group to define data literacy skills for different levels of mastery and/or different functional roles.

Data Collection Strategies for Reporting and Analysis || The systems ecosystem offers opportunities to collect data, often in automated or low-barrier ways about our collections and their use. Data from different systems can be combined and analyzed to give us new understandings and insights. In order to do this, reporting needs must be articulated clearly, and data collection must be approached intentionally to serve those needs as well as responsibly balance privacy and other ethical considerations.

Activity:

Mapping the Systems Ecosystem || A need exists for understanding and articulating expectations for data within systems, and functionalities across system boundaries. Archivists and administrators must demystify how core systems interoperate and understand how data flows across those systems. Practical advice for considerations and approaches to system selection and integration is needed to help both administrators and practitioners make good choices and build effective and efficient networks of systems.

Activity: Develop practical guidance on mapping business processes and developing systems architectures for needs within modern special collections, appropriate to small, medium, and large units. Analyze limitations and opportunities for reuse of data across functions and systems within special collections.

Open Source Software Communities || A number of important tools and systems in wide use in archives and special collections are open source software projects, providing the community an opportunity to build tools that are aligned with our professional values and address our true needs. Archivists and librarians can contribute to open source projects in a variety of ways, including writing specifications, doing user research or usability testing, writing documentation, and participating in collective governance activities. Existing administrative structures and mindsets may not take into account total cost of ownership for using open source systems, which will hinder the profession in building vibrant and sustainable open source communities and tools. Similarly, archivists and librarians may have a skill gap that prevents them from participating usefully and effectively in these projects.

Activity: Develop practical guidance about roles that archivists and librarians can fill in open source projects, and the associated skills and competencies needed to succeed in those roles. Articulate models that identify business owner roles for archivists, as well as technical roles needed to manage the systems within the larger IT departments serving special collections.

Stewardship Responsibilities and Collection Management

Addressing backlogs of hidden collections has been a major focus of time and energy across the profession in the last two decades. *Taking Our Pulse* indicated that hidden collections actually increased in size in ARL libraries between 1998-2009. While good work has been done to develop extensible processing programs and survey models to address backlog, this kind of modern collection management practice has not taken hold across the profession. Further work is needed in this area to better understand the problem space, and to push practice forward to truly address the problem.

In addition, larger issues of collection management have been obscured in what have been deemed hidden collections. Survey projects to get basic control of backlogs are revealing a spectrum of collection needs that are more nuanced than just being unprocessed, including a need for accurate location management and data about collection size and condition; clear understanding of provenance, custodial history, rights, and ownership status; and identifying and quantifying a/v and digital media held in collections. In many cases, these surveys being framed as minimal processing projects should instead be understood as retrospective accessioning projects. Many institutions do not

have baseline administrative, legal, and physical control, in addition to lacking minimal descriptive control. This makes clear that backlogs are not just an issue of impeded access, they also prevent strategic collections management decisions, hinder informed collection development work, and complicate our ability to deal with increasing space constraints. Baseline control of collections, and the data created while gaining that control, are key to understanding, responsibly managing and advocating for our collections.

Potential Research Activities:

Define the State of Backlogs || An understanding of the current state of backlogs is important in order to know where to put further energies to combating them.

Activity: Conduct an assessment of the state of backlogs, in such a way that allows us to better define the nature of that collective backlog.

Promote Modern Processing Programs || While survey methodologies and extensible processing approaches have been developed and discussed, they have not translated into holistic collections management and processing programs.

Activity:

Articulating Accessioning || The professional literature about accessioning is scant. The best work is fairly recent and focused on electronic records, where accessioning has had to be rethought and clearly articulated for the born-digital context. In light of the need for baseline physical, intellectual, and administrative control in our backlogs, a clear reconceptualization of the goals and needs of accessioning is in order.

Activity: Convene a working group to create accessioning goals and frameworks.

Space || Space constraints were identified as a key issue in the *Taking Our Pulse* survey, and continue to be a key challenge. It is unclear how best to serve this need in the community.

Activity:

Off-site Storage || Many repositories are now using off-site storage for at least a portion of their archival and special collections. This is a relatively unexamined area of our operations, but may have significant long-term impacts for preservation, space planning, and public service programs.

Activity: Convene discussion groups to explore emerging issues, opportunities, and concerns as off-site storage becomes ubiquitous.

Data Collection Strategies for Collections Management || Structured data has great potential to help us understand our collections, assess and address their needs, and advocate for their care. Data about collection content, condition, and use are gathered in a number of systems, and when combined, can be a valuable knowledge resource. However, intentional data collection and reporting strategies are necessary to realize this potential.

Activity:

Appraisal || A renewed emphasis on appraisal must be part of addressing collection management needs and considering collecting obligations prospectively. However, it is unclear what is needed in this arena, whether it is more appraisal theory, frameworks for applying that theory, or just more practice and action.

Activity: Perform an interview-based research activity with curators and collection management, and processing archivists to generate a state of appraisal report.

Reappraisal and Deaccessioning || SAA put out best practices for reappraisal and deaccessioning in 2011, with the goal of normalizing responsible practice and making the profession more comfortable with deaccessioning. Reappraisal and deaccessioning can be a part of assessing backlogs and collecting obligations.

Activity:

Engaging the Challenges of Diversifying Our Collections
There is significant interest in ensuring that our collections broadly and equitably document human experience and empower a broad public to see themselves as part of the historical record. This has been driven by changes in cultural and historical scholarship, alongside a growing awareness of the many negative social and scholarly impacts of our asymmetrical historical record. There is also an increasing recognition that documentation is being produced and collected outside of traditional institutions, and a desire to collaborate with communities archives groups working to preserve their own histories, as one way to address the gaping representative holes in our collections.

In order to respectfully and responsibly work with marginalized communities and those who have been working to document their own histories outside of institutional structures, we need to examine and reconsider institutional and interpersonal relationships. This work should include recognition of power dynamics and identifying methods of working that acknowledge and mitigate power imbalances. Many institutions have histories of harm to and conflict with marginalized communities and peoples. Institutions may need to reckon with these incidents and patterns of harm if they wish to build the trust necessary to build archival collections collaboratively. Similarly, moving from a framework of stewardship to one of partnership, and a willingness to explore collaborative, consortial approaches to collection building is needed. This will require examination and renegotiation of our professional identities, policies, and procedures and their attendant assumptions about expertise, authority, and ownership, as well as how certain forms of recordkeeping are privileged within our current models.

Potential Research Activities:
Examine New Models for Partnership || Collaborating with community archives requires a paradigm shift and adoption of more shared and fluid approaches to collection building, ownership, description, and collection management.

Activity: Convene a working group to investigate what rights or other structures institutions need to manage collections long-term, and how this might inform flexibility in existing models, or development of shared responsibility models for deed of gift, collection development, description, and other functions.

Post-Custodial Models Best Practices || Several institutions have been working for a number of years on establishing post-custodial[19] models for collecting, and the knowledge they have gained can be widely valuable to the profession.

Activity: Convene a group to disseminate knowledge and lessons learned from existing work in this space. Discuss instructive challenges and failures, and successful practices in working with post-custodial approaches and relationships. Articulate the value of these relationships and suggestions for advocating for post-custodial collecting in our institutions, and what changes would need to take place in order to operationalize these models.

Archives as a Site of Historical Reckoning || Since roughly 2001, a number of universities founded in the colonial and antebellum periods have confronted their ties to, complicity in, and enrichment from the systems of slavery of African peoples and killing and displacement of Indigenous peoples.[20] Archivists have played a central role in the difficult but necessary work of identifying and acknowledging these historical harms and their continued legacies.[21] The experiences of archivists and librarians engaged in this work can offer important insight into how archives and special collections can support historical redress in our institutions, and in our own relationships with communities we now seek to include in the archive.

Activity: Convene a working group of archivists, students, and scholars from the institutions that have used their institutional archive to grapple with their institutional relationship to slavery. Ask them to reflect on their experiences and share advice to those wishing to do similar work at other institutions, related not only to centuries old wrongs, but to any sites of conflict, pain, or harm in their communities and histories.

Imagining New Approaches to Collecting || Jillian Cuellar recently framed traditional collecting models as assimilationist, with people's stories only entering the archive once they have assimilated to our traditional notions of record keeping, and challenged the profession to imagine new, flexible, inclusive models for collecting, that "allow individuals or communities to tell their own stories with complexity and nuance."[22] We can work to imagine new, collaborative, generative models for collection development, and conceptualizations of collections that move beyond the types of records that currently make up the bulk of our archives.

Activity:

NEXT STEPS

We see this agenda as an articulation of the current lay of the land in archives, special, and distinctive collections. Though OCLC Research only has the capacity to take on a handful of projects at any one time, we hope that presenting it as a whole and sharing it broadly will help frame a conversation and be a guide for future work beyond just one organization. We hope that other people and organizations will also engage with the agenda in accord with their audiences and strengths, and believe there is great benefit from moving forward as a community.

Over the next several months, OCLC Research will be taking steps to finalize the agenda, as well as to gauge where best to put its organizational capacity and energy. We will be considering where work is already being done in the profession, how OCLC can best leverage its strengths and resources, and where there is interest and energy across the RLP to discern where it makes most sense for OCLC to focus its efforts.

Drafts of the research agenda will be shared with the RLP community for comment and iterative improvement in several stages. A draft will be shared for feedback with an invited group of archives leaders and practitioners from RLP institutions in July at the 2017 Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting in Portland. A series of webinars and blog posts on the OCLC Research blog *Hanging Together* will discuss the agenda and solicit feedback from the broader community, and will be publicized through OCLC social media channels.

The finalized agenda will be presented at the OCLC Research Library Partnership Meeting in November 2017, and a series of webinars to will follow to roll out the agenda and gather community reaction.

NOTES

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[2] Dooley, Jackie, and Katherine Luce. *Taking Our Pulse: The OCLC Research Survey of Special Collections and Archives.* Dublin, OH: OCLC Research. 2010. http://www.oclc.org/content/dam/research/publications/library/2010/2010-11.pdf.

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[7] Miller, Lisa, Steven Galbraith, and RLG Partnership Working Group on Streamlining Photography and Scanning. *'Capture and Release': Digital Cameras in the Reading Room.* Dublin, OH: OCLC Research. 2010. http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2010/2010-05.pdf.

[8] Erway, Ricky. *Rapid Capture: Faster Throughput in Digitization of Special Collections.* Dublin, OH: OCLC Research. 2011. http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2011/2011-04.pdf.

[9] Dooley, Jackie. *The Archival Advantage: Integrating Archival Expertise into Management of Born-Digital Library Materials.* Dublin, OH: OCLC Research. 2015. http://www.oclc.org/content/dam/research/publications/2015/oclcresearch-archival-advantage-2015.pdf.

[10] Hyry, Tom. 2016. "Conversion or Collision? Archival Appraisal and the Expanded Role of Special Collections in the Research Library" Paper presented at The Transformation of Academic Library Collecting: A Symposium Inspired by Dan C. Hazen, Harvard University, October 21. https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/hazen/files/convergence_or_collision_hyry.pdf.

[11] Lavoie, Brian, Eric R. Childress, Ricky Erway, Ixchel M. Faniel, Constance Malpas, Jennifer Schaffner, and Titia van der Werf. *The Evolving Scholarly Record.* Dublin, OH: OCLC Research. 2014. http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2014/oclcresearch-evolving-scholarly-record-2014-overview.html.

[12] Association of College & Research Libraries. 2016. "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education." http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework.

[13] See the As Data project led by Library of Congress https://blogs.loc.gov/thesignal/2017/02/read-collections-as-data-report-summary/ and the Collections as Data project led by Thomas Padilla at University of California, Santa Barbara https://collectionsasdata.github.io/.

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[18] See projects at University of Michigan https://archival-integration.blogspot.com/ and Rockefeller Archives Center http://projectelectron.rockarch.org/; the Stanford University Libraries, University of North Texas, and Rutgers University WASAPI Project https://github.com/WASAPI-Community/data-transfer-apis; and The Educopia Institute and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Information and Library Science OSSArcFlow Project https://educopia.org/research/ossarcflow.

[19] A post-custodial approach to archives is defined as "the idea that archivists will no longer physically acquire and maintain records, but that they will provide management oversight for records that will remain in the custody of the record creators." See: "Postcustodial Theory of Archives." *Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*. Society of American Archivists. Accessed June 9, 2017. http://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/p/postcustodial-theory-of-archives. For an example of post-custodial approaches in practice, see Kelleher, Christian, T-Kay Sangwand, Kevin Wood, and Yves Kamuronsi, "The Human Rights Documentation Initiative at the University of Texas Libraries." *New Review of Information Networking* 15, no. 2 (2010): 94-109.

[20] The Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice at Brown University, formed in 2003, is widely cited as the first of such official efforts, see: https://www.brown.edu/Research/Slavery_Justice/. Craig Steven Wilder's 2013 book, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury Press), is widely credited with bringing the issue to popular attention, and to showing the systemic nature of the phenomenon, beyond just one institution. Two New York Times articles detail the impact of Wilder's book, and efforts across a range of institutions: Schuessler, Jennifer. 2013. "'Ebony and Ivy,' About How Slavery Helped Universities Grow." *The New York Times*, October 18, sec. Books. https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/19/books/ebony-and-ivy-about-how-slavery-helped-universities-grow.html and Schuessler, Jennifer. 2017. "Confronting Academia's Ties to Slavery." *The New York Times*, March 5, sec. Arts. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/05/arts/confronting-academias-ties-to-slavery.html.

[21] See, for example, recent projects at Williams College and Rutgers University: Conathan, Lisa. 2017. ""Take Due Notice of Us for the Future": Archives and Cultural Representation at Williams College." Paper presented at RBMS, Iowa City, Iowa, June 23. and Gorder, Erika. 2017. "The Archivist and Institutional Narratives: Author, Translator, and Muse." Paper presented at RBMS, Iowa City, Iowa, June 23. http://conference.rbms.info/2017/session/breakout-session-tbd-12/.

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