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The Practice, Power, and Promise of Archival Collections Assessment

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Abstract

The article discusses archival collections assessment. Research libraries have reportedly shifted from acquiring products of scholarship to being part of the process of scholarship. The new role requires research libraries to assess their special collections with the goal of reducing cataloging and backlogs, exposing existing collections and acquiring new ones. Archival collections assessment, which involves all kinds of collection surveys for purposes of appraisal, processing, conservation and collection management, reportedly enables institutions to make decisions on how to serve the needs of users, allocate available resources and acquire funding.

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The Practice, Power, and Promise of Archival Collections Assessment

IN THE ONGOING TRANSITION from institution-centered collections to a user-centered world of networked information, the role of the research library has changed dramatically. "Rather than focusing on acquiring the *products* of scholarship," a recent ARL issue brief noted, "the library is now an engaged agent supporting and embedded within the *processes* of scholarship."¹ Successful collection management in this new environment has become a juggling act requiring careful consideration of a number of factors including the proliferation of shared print repositories, the shift to patron-driven acquisitions, the role of digital surrogates in discovery and use, and the importance of redirecting effort from bringing the "outside in" (acquiring local inventory) to pushing the "inside out" (surfacing distinctive collections).² Accompanying this transformation is a recurring theme in which the role of special collections is increasingly prominent.³ If research libraries are successful in realigning general print collections, and if indeed their focus is now more oriented to building and exposing collections of rare and unique materials and collections of "local" importance—those that support the teaching, learning, and research mission of the institution—then research libraries must assess their existing special collections with the goal of reducing cataloging and processing backlogs, effectively disclosing existing collections, and strategically acquiring new ones.

1. Chris Avery, Sue Baughman, and Judy Ruttenberg, *21st-Century Collections: Calibration of Investment and Collaborative Action* (Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, Issue Brief, March 10, 2012), available online at www.arl.org/bm~doc/21stctfreport_11may12.pdf.

2. See Lorcan Dempsey, "Outside-in and Inside-out," Lorcan Dempsey's web log, January 11, 2010, available online at <http://orweblog.oclc.org/archives/002047.html>.

3. This has been asserted most notably in OCLC Programs and Research, *Information Contexts: Supporting the Changing Pattern of Research and Learning* (Mountain View, Calif.: OCLC Programs and Research, May 10, 2007), available online at www.oclc.org/research/partnership/highlights/infocontext_v1-0.pdf; Library of Congress Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control, *On the Record* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, January 9, 2008), available online at www.loc.gov/bibliographic-future/news/lcwg-ontherecord-jan08-final.pdf; Taiga Forum, *Provocative Statements (After the Meeting)* (Denver, Colo.: Taiga Forum, February 20, 2009), available online at www.taiga-forum.org/TaigaStatements_2009.pdf; and Lisa R. Carter, "Moving Special Collections Forward in an Age of Discovery: Themes from the ARL-CNI Forum," *Research Library Issues* 267 (Dec. 2009): 10–19.

*Please note: URLs for all websites referenced herein were valid at the time of article submission.

Taking Stock and Making Hay: Archival Collections Assessment, a report published by OCLC Research in July 2011, defines archival collections assessment as “the systematic, purposeful gathering of information about archival collections.” This activity consists of “collection surveys of all kinds, including those undertaken for purposes of appraisal, setting processing and other priorities, conservation decision making, and collection management.”⁴ The systematic gathering of quantitative and qualitative data about collections enables institutions to act strategically in meeting user needs, allocating available resources, and securing additional funding.

Institutions have been assessing collections using a variety of methodologies for some time now. However, the combination of almost limitless collecting opportunities and increasingly limited resources—especially when coupled with heightened attention to our “hidden collections” problem, the prospect of an avalanche of born-digital materials, and a new emphasis on measuring value, assessing impact, and data-driven decision making—means that a growing number of us are, and should be, more interested than ever in archival collections assessment. The timing of this interest couldn’t be better: there exists now a growing number of well-developed, well-documented tools and an enthusiastic community of practitioners who stand ready to share their experience. In what follows, we describe what has been and can be accomplished by putting shared practices to good work, taking what we’re doing to the next level by working together, and kicking everything up a notch by focusing on the needs of researchers.

The Practice

Most collections assessment projects are aimed at achieving one or more of the four purposes described below.

Expose Hidden Collections

Many institutions have undertaken collections assessment primarily for the purpose of preparing and sharing consistent and comparable summary descriptions of some or all of the collections in their care. When this is indeed the primary goal, the assessment activity may consist mostly of assembling, normalizing, and/or augmenting existing descriptive information at the collection level; indicating whether or not the collection is available for research; and making this information available online. More often than not, however, creating uniform collection-level descriptions necessitates the gathering of information that can only be obtained by physically inspecting some portion of the collections and gathering informa-

4. Martha O’Hara Conway and Merrilee Proffitt, *Taking Stock and Making Hay: Archival Collections Assessment* (Dublin, Ohio: OCLC Research, 2011), available online at www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2011/2011-07.pdf.

tion about those collections with a systematic, well-documented approach. The Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries' (PACSCL) Consortial Survey Initiative, though not the first, is generally regarded as the archetypical assessment of this kind.⁵ The 30-month, Mellon-funded effort assessed backlogged collections in a range of physical formats held by 22 libraries, archives, and museums. In addition to disclosing information about almost 2,000 previously hidden collections, the project enabled the establishment of consortial processing priorities by identifying collections with significant research value.

Establish Processing Priorities

Especially for institutions with large backlogs of unprocessed and underprocessed collections, collections assessment becomes a vital tool for planning, informing, and guiding priorities for collections processing. When these purposes constitute the primary goal, collections assessment becomes a more complicated undertaking, as it requires collecting information and making judgments about various aspects of the collection, only some of which may be already known or easily determined. Collections assessment aimed at the establishment of processing priorities includes but also goes well beyond the gathering of basic information about the size, scope, and contents of the collection. It typically requires that surveyors assess the state of its arrangement (by determining the ease with which material in the collection can be located), evaluate its discoverability (by identifying existing descriptive information), and estimate its research value for present and future users (by using some type of rating scale).

In the collections assessment context, the term "research value" usually refers to the value of the collection in terms of the extent to which it includes relatively rare, extensive, or detailed information about a topic that has received considerable prior attention, is gaining currency, or has apparent potential to attract significant interest. It typically consists of two separate evaluations that can be expressed separately and combined into a single rating, or considered together and expressed as a single rating. The first evaluation (Documentation Interest) assesses the value of the collection in terms of its topical significance; the second (Documentation Quality) assesses the value of the collection in terms of its topical richness. Considerations in guiding both of these evaluations, and a value scale for expressing them, are provided in Appendix 1.

Assessing research value has proved to be the most challenging component of collections assessment for a number of reasons, most of which can be attributed to the difficulty attendant in defining and measuring "research value" in the first

5. Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries, "Consortial Survey Initiative," available online at www.pacsclsurvey.org.

place. Here it must be said that a thoughtful, good-faith effort aimed at identifying collections that might be of high research interest is really all that is required. The benefits that come from engaging in what many perceive as a very subjective activity are real and tangible since they come in the form of compelling information that can be used to guide important curatorial and collection management decisions and impel related and necessary activities, including the creation or revision of collecting policies and the preparation of a deaccessioning policy.

Assess Condition

Even if establishing preservation or conservation priorities is not the primary goal of a collections assessment, it is difficult to resist the opportunity to capture information about physical condition when a collections assessment is under way. The information typically gathered ranges from a basic assessment of the overall condition of collection material and of the containers in which it is housed to a more systematic and detailed evaluation that provides the institution with a better understanding of the prevalence of specific conservation issues as well as unmet preservation challenges.

Librarians and archivists have a long history of using a variety of well-established, well-documented methods to capture essential information about the current state and the ongoing needs of the collections in their care. Increasingly, however, information about physical condition is one of many considerations in a larger balancing act, the overarching goal of which is to make collections accessible. Because collections that cannot be handled physically without causing additional damage cannot be used, collections assessment can help answer basic questions such as "How is use of this collection hampered or limited?" and "Does the degree of damage or deterioration, or the value of the collection, justify reproduction or treatment?" If laying the groundwork for the establishment of preservation and conservation priorities is the primary goal of collections assessment, greater emphasis on the comprehensive capture and systematic tracking of essential information about condition is required.

Manage Collections

Much of the information gathered during a collections assessment can be used almost immediately to address a number of collection management issues, including optimizing storage locations and conditions, identifying strengths and gaps in collecting areas, and validating deaccessioning decisions. A comprehensive inventory is the foundation of effective collection management. When information about "what you have" is combined with "what you know" (that is, the value judgments that usually accompany a collections assessment), repositories have a

powerful tool that can be used to address burgeoning backlogs of unprocessed and underprocessed collections, significant information gaps regarding the contents of collections, or pressing space concerns. Without exception, institutions that have undertaken collections assessment for any of the first three primary purposes described above have reaped additional secondary benefits in the form of better informed and more active collection management practices.

The Power

Armed with the array of information that collections assessment provides, many institutions find themselves empowered to tackle a variety of once-daunting tasks, to advocate for additional internal and external resources, and to work collaboratively toward common goals.

Doing the Work

PACSCL once again provides an impressive example of what can be realized when collections assessment is undertaken with an informed understanding of its intended purpose and desired outcome. Leveraging immediately the successes of the survey project described above, two dozen PACSCL institutions embarked jointly on an ambitious and innovative effort to process and make accessible 200 archival collections with documented research value. With funding provided by the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) through its Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives program, and with techniques and tools such as minimal processing and the Archivists' Toolkit, the "Hidden Collections in the Philadelphia Area" project developed a model that can be used by repositories large and small for reducing backlogs and making collections accessible.⁶

Processing is not the only once-daunting task that can be accomplished when the information that collections assessment generates is at hand. Fundamental collection management activities, including preparing and revising collecting policies, reappraisal, and deaccessioning, are transformed from insurmountable hurdles to feasible solutions. At the University of Wyoming's American Heritage Center, for example, an active deaccessioning program has resulted in increasing the value of remaining collections, fostering relationships with other repositories, and making more collections accessible.⁷

6. Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries, "PACSCL Hidden Collections Processing Project: Revealing the Unknown Stories of the Philadelphia Region," available online at <http://clir.pacscl.org>.

7. Mark A. Greene, "Doing Less Before It's Done unto You: Reshaping Workflows for Efficiency Before the Wolf Is at the Door," *RBM* 12, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 92–103; see also Laura Uglean Jackson and D. Claudia Thompson, "But You Promised: A Case Study of Deaccessioning at the American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming," *The American Archivist* 73, no. 2 (2010): 669–85.

Working Collaboratively

Research libraries have historically worked in an environment marked by both collaboration and competition. Recently, however, environmental drivers have been pushing institutions to work in a more collaborative and coordinated fashion.

The reasons for increased collaboration are many. As previously mentioned, institutions are already starting to work together to create shared repositories of legacy print collections. Cooperative collection building and collective approaches to digitizing existing collections will benefit scholars who work in increasingly cross-disciplinary and interinstitutional contexts.⁸ A future in which libraries grapple with an onslaught of born-digital collections will likely come with a high price tag; acting collectively may provide a rational solution to this pressing problem.⁹

The OCLC Research report *Collaboration Contexts: Framing Local, Group and Global Solutions* provides a useful way of thinking about the rationales that motivate collaboration within and between institutions. The report also proposes a “collaboration continuum,” which describes collaboration as ranging from “contact” (in which “cooperation or coordination are additive,” meaning that “they foster a working relationship among partners, yet remain distinct projects easily separable from the core functions and workings of the institution”) to “convergence,” which is characterized as “a transformative process that eventually will change behaviors, processes and organizational structures, and leads to a fundamental interconnect- edness and interdependence among the partners.”¹⁰

A variety of collaborative activity exists already in the collections assessment arena, providing abundant evidence that more is accomplished by working together than would be possible by working separately. Forms of collaborative action at the “contact” level include borrowing good ideas and useful tools (processing manuals, database templates, training materials, and the like) from other institutions and sharing the results of experimentation (successes and failures) with others in the field. Activities that look more like “convergence” include partnering with other institutions to share responsibility for resources (training, technology, and so on) or to develop and implement a common assessment plan, and executing on results in

8. This argument is nicely framed in Anne R. Kenney, “The Collaborative Imperative: Special Collections in the Digital Age,” *Research Library Issues* 267 (Dec. 2009), available online at www.arl.org/bm~doc/rli-267-kenney.pdf.

9. Dealing with born-digital materials was one of the top three issues identified by respondents to the study conducted by Jackie M. Dooley and Katherine Luce, *Taking Our Pulse: The OCLC Research Survey of Special Collections and Archives* (Dublin, Ohio: OCLC Research, 2010), available online at www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2010/2010-11.pdf.

10. Günter Waibel, *Collaboration Contexts: Framing Local, Group and Global Solutions* (Dublin, Ohio: OCLC Research, 2010), available online at www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2010/2010-09.pdf.

a coordinated fashion (for example, planning for joint processing projects or identifying collections that could be digitized according to a shared plan).

More, Better

The Black Metropolis Research Consortium (BMRC) is a Chicago-based association of cultural heritage institutions that have significant collections documenting the lives of African Americans and the history, culture, and politics of the African diaspora. Modeled closely on the PACSCL project, the BMRC Survey Initiative had as its goal the gathering of information about unprocessed and underprocessed collections in order to inform the creation and sharing of collection-level records and the establishment of repository and consortial processing priorities. By not reinventing or even tweaking the wheel, the BMRC was able to extend the scope of its effort in two very valuable ways. First, in addition to surveying more than 1,000 collections held by 25 member and associate member institutions, BMRC project staff identified and documented approximately 50 "Second Space" collections of related research material held in private collections and by community-based organizations across Chicago. Second, acknowledging that many collections of primary source material contain material that may be valuable for research in more than one area, the BMRC surveyors assessed each collection in terms of the significance and the richness of its documentation of multiple topics including Chicago history and politics and African American history, society, and culture.¹¹

The Promise

Empowered by the successes that collections assessment makes possible, librarians and archivists are shifting their focus from the immediate needs of the collections in their care to the longer-term needs of the researchers they serve.

Collaborative Collection Management

A compelling example of what can be accomplished—and overcome—by taking collections assessment to the next level and working together toward really big goals is provided by the Arizona Archives Summit, an ongoing effort aimed at developing a collaborative, statewide model of "best" collection management practices. The impetus for archivists, librarians, and other stewards of Arizona history to "transcend a culture of individualism and competition" by pulling together "for the greater good and ... toward a common goal" was fueled by two separate but related catalysts: growing recognition of the need to focus attention on what was not being collected and increased awareness of the staggering volume

11. Black Metropolis Research Consortium, "Black Metropolis Research Consortium Survey," available online at <http://bmrcsurvey.uchicago.edu>.

of unprocessed collections of primary source material in repositories across the state.¹² Central to the success of the Arizona effort is affirmation of the value of collections assessment and the importance of carefully prepared, widely shared collecting policies.

As those who planned the Arizona Archives Summit well know, productive, meaningful collaborations among librarians and archivists can be difficult to achieve and sustain. This is especially so when the collaboration requires, as the Arizona effort has, deep examination of past and current practices, often-dramatic changes in professional behavior, uncomfortable reflection on ethical issues, and evaluation of collecting policies that in some cases have not even been put into writing. Resulting in numerous benefits both tangible and intangible and an impressive array of specific accomplishments, including the Arizona Archives Matrix (a shared database of collection-level information),¹³ the Arizona Cultural Inventory Project (an online directory of more than 600 libraries, archives, museums, and historical societies),¹⁴ and Arizona Archives Online (a centralized finding aid repository),¹⁵ the Arizona initiative serves as a model for what can be achieved by engaging with others, taking on the tough problems, and focusing on outcomes that have positive impacts for researchers.

Reunification of Collections

Not surprisingly, some of the toughest conversations for the Arizona planners were those that revolved around the transfer of split, out-of-scope, or unprocessed collections to a more appropriate institution. Especially when paired with written collecting policies, cooperative collecting practices can serve to ensure that related materials are not scattered across repositories and that resources are not squandered on unnecessary competition for collections. Also not surprisingly, however, few repositories have yet to engage in cooperative collecting practices, though those that have undertaken collections assessment are considerably better positioned to make the case for, and take advantage of, the benefits for researchers and repositories alike that come from the reappraisal and reunification of collections. Even if physical reunification is not feasible, virtual reunification offers a host of possibilities for the creation and dissemination of digital versions of archival and other collections of works of common origin that have been dispersed for a variety

12. Linda A. Whitaker and Melanie I. Sturgeon, "The Arizona Summit: Tough Times in a Tough Land," *Journal of Western Archives* 1, no. 1 (2010), available online at: <http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/westernarchives/vol1/iss1/3>.

13. Arizona Archives Matrix Working Group, "Arizona Archives Matrix," available online at <http://azarchivesmatrix.org>.

14. Arizona State Library, Archives, and Public Records, "Arizona Cultural Inventory Project," available online at <http://cip.azlibrary.gov>.

15. Arizona State Library, Archives, and Public Records, "Arizona Archives Online," available online at www.azarchivesonline.org.

of reasons. Although institutions are likely to vary quite a bit in their readiness for virtual reunification projects that are collaborative in nature,¹⁶ the increased understanding that comes from the systematic gathering of quantitative and qualitative data about various characteristics of collections is an essential prerequisite for successful, cooperative, cross-institutional digital initiatives, including virtual reunification of scattered collections.

Reliable Information about Related Collections

Many institutions have undertaken collections assessment for the primary purpose of preparing consistent, comparable, summary descriptions of some or all of the archival collections in their care and sharing these with other institutions by way of a regionally or consortially managed database. Although most collections assessment activity has been directed at gathering and sharing information about unprocessed and underprocessed collections, it is easy to imagine the benefits that could be gained by assembling and creating a repository for much of the same information about all collections.

Two of the most valuable characteristics of the information that is gathered during collections assessment are its consistency (internally, across surveyed collections) and its comparability (externally, with other institutions). By using well-documented procedures and a vocabulary developed in common, including and especially the ratings descriptions and the checklists that have been promulgated by the assessments that have been accomplished to date, we are building a corpus of collection-level information that holds the potential for aggregating and providing centralized discovery services that would be of great value for researchers and the special collections librarians and archivists who serve them.

Shared Services

One possible future that collaboration at the “convergence” level might enable comes in the form of shared services that build on common commitments, leverage limited resources, and take advantage of networked technologies to increase existing or create new capacity. Some of the promises that shared services hold for the archives and special collections community depend fundamentally on the information and the experience that is gained with a systematic approach to collections assessment. Evidence of the benefits that shared services can provide is emerging in several distinctive areas, including resource discovery, collections processing, and collection management.

16. See Ricky Punzalan, “Virtual Reunification: Bits and Pieces Put Together to Form a Semblance of a Whole” (Ph.D. dissertation in progress, University of Michigan School of Information, 2012 [expected]), available online at <http://rpunzalan.com/dissertation>.

Centralized resource discovery services already exist, most notably in the form of union catalogs and shared finding aid repositories. Arizona Archives Online,¹⁷ the OhioLINK Finding Aid Repository,¹⁸ the Online Archive of California,¹⁹ and the Northwest Digital Archives,²⁰ for example, each provide a single point of entry to detailed, fully searchable descriptions of collections of primary source material held by regionally affiliated contributing institutions. By providing access to collections on a broad, cross-institutional scale, shared services like these significantly increase both the visibility and the accessibility of unique and valuable resources for research.

To be discovered, however, collections must be described. And in a world that is increasingly shaped by the view that "if it isn't online it doesn't exist," those descriptions must be online. Building capacity in the form of shared, centralized cataloging and processing services might be helpful in making accessible those "significant portions" of special collections material that are not known, cannot be discovered, and will not be used.²¹

"Next Generation Technical Services" initiatives currently under way at the University of California, along with similar efforts on the part of the Orbis Cascade Alliance and the Triangle Research Libraries Network, can serve as valuable examples of what can be accomplished by moving from the sharing of expertise to the pooling of resources.²² These and other similar efforts are aimed at minimizing redundancy, improving efficiency, and fostering innovation in making collection material of all kinds available for use. They are motivated and driven by the assumption that physically separate collections can and should be considered a single collection for purposes of development, discovery, delivery, and management. This same vision is also the motivating factor behind the nascence of jointly owned and operated storage facilities, such as the Research Collections and Preservation Consortium (ReCAP)²³ and the Western Regional Storage Trust (WEST).²⁴

17. Arizona State Library, Archives, and Public Records, "Arizona Archives Online," available online at www.azarchivesonline.org.

18. OhioLINK, "OhioLINK Finding Aid Repository," available online at <http://ead.ohiolink.edu>.

19. California Digital Library, "Online Archive of California," available online at www.oac.cdlib.org.

20. Orbis Cascade Alliance, "Northwest Digital Archives," available online at <http://ead.ohiolink.edu>.

21. See Judith M. Panitch, *Special Collections in ARL Libraries: Results of the 1998 Survey Sponsored by the ARL Research Collections Committee* (Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, 2001), available online at www.arl.org/bm~doc/spec_colls_in_arl.pdf, and Dooley and Luce, *Taking Our Pulse*.

22. See University of California Libraries, "Next-Generation Technical Services (NGTS)," available online at <http://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/about/uls/ngts>; Orbis Cascade Alliance, website available online at www.orbiscascade.org; and Triangle Research Libraries Network, website available online at www.trln.org.

23. Research Collections and Preservation Consortium (ReCAP), website available online at <http://recap.princeton.edu>.

24. Western Regional Storage Trust (WEST), website available online at www.cdlib.org/services/west.

Not yet part of the landscape, but easy to imagine, is a “next generation” approach to collections care that would leverage the expertise that exists in our conservation labs. Options abound and include moving highly skilled conservators to the archival and special collections that are most in need of treatment and moving those collections to collaboratively funded and staffed conservation facilities, such as the joint conservation lab that now serves the University of Cincinnati Libraries and the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.²⁵

The benefits of shared services—especially those that are derived most directly by the users for whom we maintain collections in the first place—have motivated a host of productive activity centered on the management of general print collections. Can these same benefits empower archivists and special collections librarians to consider and manage their collections in similar ways?

Conclusion

There are many indications that special collections will play an increasingly central role in shaping research library collections of the twenty-first century. As H. Thomas Hickerson has observed, “important changes in both curatorial practice and teaching and research interest have increased the educational value of these holdings, and digital technologies have provided a means to extend our impact worldwide.”²⁶ No less important are the changes that we can and must make to ensure that these collections are expeditiously disclosed, effectively discovered, and collectively managed.

As the recent *Cloud-sourcing Research Collections* report on the future of print management asserts, “many of the positive transformations that academic library directors hope to achieve in the next decade or so will require a fundamental shift in collections management.”²⁷ Such a shift is no less necessary in our special collections than in our general collections. To accomplish this, special collections librarians and archivists will need to step up to or be brought into new roles and work in increasingly coordinated fashion with those who manage general library collections. Regardless of whether institutions work individually or collaboratively, data about collections will help drive wise decision making about collection manage-

25. See Holly Prochaska and Jason Buydos, “Your Space or Mine: A Preservation Story” (presentation, “Outta Space: Best Practices in Storage and Space Planning for Ohio’s Cultural Heritage Institutions,” Cincinnati Museum Center, April 15, 2012, and Akron-Summit County Public Library, May 15, 2012), available online at www.webjunction.org/documents/ohio/ctc-programs/YourSpaceOrMineAPreservationStory.html.

26. H. Thomas Hickerson, “Rebalancing the Investment in Collections,” *Research Library Issues* 277 (Dec. 2011): 1–8.

27. Constance Malpas, *Cloud-sourcing Research Collections: Managing Print in the Mass-digitized Library Environment* (Dublin, Ohio: OCLC Research, 2011), 10, available online at www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2011/2011-01.pdf.

ment across the spectrum. Archival collections assessment is an essential tool that special collections librarians will need to use to effectively prioritize acquisitions, preservation, processing, and collection management efforts and to harness the full research value of archival collections.

Appendix 1: Assessing Research Value

A research value rating describes the value of the collection in terms of the extent to which it includes relatively rare, extensive, and/or detailed information about a topic that has received considerable prior attention, is gaining currency, and/or has apparent potential to attract significant interest. It typically consists of two separate evaluations—**Documentation Interest** and **Documentation Quality**—that can be expressed separately and combined into a single rating or considered together and expressed as a single rating.

The **Documentation Interest** evaluation assesses the value of the collection in terms its topical significance. Values range from 1 (negligible or none) to 5 (very high) depending on the degree to which the collection:

- contributes to the overall understanding of the subject;
- substantially reinforces or complements important collections already held;
- includes material on topics that have long been of significant interest to scholars;
- includes material on topics that are currently receiving high attention from scholars; and/or
- includes material on topics in which scholars are just beginning to take interest.

The **Documentation Quality** rating assesses the value of the collection in terms of its topical richness. Values range from 1 (slight) to 5 (very rich) depending on the degree to which the collection:

- contains material that affords unique insight into the topic;
- provides thorough (as opposed to sporadic or fragmentary) documentation of the topic; and/or
- consists primarily of original/manuscript material (as opposed to transcripts, photocopies, or published materials).

A single research value rating—ranging from a low of 2 to a high of 10—is achieved by combining the **Documentation Interest** and **Documentation Quality** ratings.

Documentation Interest		Documentation Quality	
very high	5	very rich	5
high	4	rich	4
moderate	3	moderately rich	3
slight	2	incidentally rich	2
negligible or none	1	slight	1

Alternatively, the results of the **Documentation Interest** and **Documentation Quality** evaluations can be merged into a single numerical rating, resulting in a research value rating such as one of the following:

1. **(None)** The collection has no research value.
2. **(Limited)** The collection has limited research value because of the insignificance of the topic(s) it documents or the lack of documentation it provides.
3. **(Some/Pertinent)** The collection has some research value and is pertinent insofar as it documents a topic (or topics) of demonstrated research interest and the material it contains is sufficient (in terms of quality and/or quantity) to warrant consultation by a researcher.
4. **(High)** The collection is of high research value, containing a large quantity of unique and/or important material on a highly researched topic, thereby making it vital to any research on the subject.
5. **(Unique)** The collection is unique because of the quality, quantity, and value of the material it contains on a topic (or topics) of significant research interest. Anyone interested in the topic(s) it documents would have to make extensive and primary use of the collection.