
The ARL Special Collections Initiative

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ABSTRACT

IN NOVEMBER 2001, the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) announced the formation of a Task Force on Special Collections charged with developing an action plan to address a set of issues deemed significant by the ARL Board and membership. The establishment of the task force followed several years of ARL interest and activity in the area of special collections. This paper will review the stages through which ARL's engagement with special collections evolved, describe the motivation and rationale for initiating this engagement, discuss the perspectives that ARL brings to special collections, and provide a status report on the work of the task force.

INTRODUCTION

In November 2001, the ARL announced the formation of a Task Force on Special Collections charged with developing an action plan to address a set of issues related to special collections deemed significant by the ARL Board and membership. The decision to establish the task force and the identification of issues listed in the charge emerged from a series of discussions in a variety of ARL groups and meetings dating back to the fall of 1997.

The discussion of special collections began in the Research Collections Committee (RCC) meeting on 15 October 1997 in response to a proposal by committee chair, Joe Hewitt. Over the course of several meetings, the committee had considered the possibility of adding new projects to its portfolio of activities. The predominant project then, as now, was the AAU-ARL Global Resources Program, a multifaceted, long-term initiative which was

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moving ahead under the leadership of Deborah Jakubs, the committee's staff liaison. In addition to monitoring the Global Resources Program, the RCC heard reports from and provided informal advice to the Center for Research Libraries and the Library of Congress. Archiving of electronic resources was discussed as a possible issue for RCC engagement but was referred to other groups. Several members of the committee were at work on a widely distributed discussion paper (Brinin, Groen, & Thorin, 2002). The future of area studies librarianship was a frequent topic of discussion. Although these topics were sufficient to fill the committee's semiannual meeting agendas, there was a sense that the RCC needed to develop a new focus with long-term programmatic implications, similar in scale to the Global Resources Program. Committee members felt that some major issues related to research collections were not receiving the attention they deserved.

Special collections struck an immediate chord with members of the committee. The early discussions in the RCC were wide-ranging brainstorming sessions in which committee members expressed a variety of views on special collections. All of the issues that eventually emerged as part of the task force's agenda were raised in the initial discussions, along with others that were dropped as the agenda was refined and focused. Briefly described below are the points that surfaced in the early discussions that led to the decision to add special collections to the RCC's agenda.

RCC's Basic Perspectives on Special Collections

The RCC agreed that collecting, preserving, and providing access to the primary resources commonly referred to as "special collections" are part of the core mission of the research library. Members recognized at the beginning that the definition of the term "special collections" was open to discussion and that materials included in special collections varied from library to library. The committee avoided being sidetracked by detailed discussions of definition and tended to use the term in an inclusive sense with an understanding that special collections included rare books, manuscripts and archival collections, and many other types of materials that libraries might separate from general collections for special curatorial treatment. There was an apparent consensus, however, that at some point the committee would need to discuss the definition of special collections in the light of new formats and user demands. In general there was a tendency to associate special collections with "primary resources," however they might be defined, with an understanding that the collecting of primary resources is a distinguishing characteristic of a research library qualified to be a member of ARL. The committee assumed that all ARL libraries were involved in special collections to some degree.

Secondly, the RCC recognized that the special collections holdings of ARL libraries are a resource of great richness and variety representing an important component of the nation's intellectual capital. In addition to

supporting the teaching and research missions of the parent institutions, the special collections provide an indispensable resource for national and international scholarship. Preserving and providing access to the primary resources in special collections involves an obligation on the part of individual libraries to the world of scholarship at large, and these collections are frequently the principal elements of a library's reputation and stature as a scholarly institution. The committee acknowledged that the value of special collections is not always recognized by budget-conscious academic administrators in some institutions, and it is necessary that librarians actively promote an understanding of their value to the institution.

In light of the acknowledged value of special collections and their centrality to the research library's mission, it was obvious to the committee that special collections had been neglected as a focus of attention in the RCC and in ARL generally. ARL programs on special collections had been infrequent. The last ARL survey on special collections had been conducted in 1979. Since then neither ARL nor any other organization had undertaken a comprehensive, quantitative look at the status of special collections in research libraries. During that time a variety of factors had led to reexamination of traditional library priorities. These factors included budget pressures from inflation in STM journals, an emphasis on new approaches to accountability and performance measures in many universities (especially in public institutions), and new programs emerging as competing priorities in the digital environment. Committee members discussed the fact that special collections had historically been treated as somewhat separate and of self-evident value, but must now, like other library programs and services, be reconsidered in the light of changing demands and expectations from users, new information technologies and, of course, changing fiscal realities. In short, the RCC sensed a need to reexamine special collections in the light of the evolving conditions of research libraries in the same way as other research library programs and services. Committee members wanted to achieve a clearer sense of what they, as research library directors, needed to do to better support special collections during a period of rapid change in which the roles of traditional library services are being redirected and reshaped.

A fourth theme of the early discussions was that a major issue of special collections in many individual libraries is their very separateness, often leading to organizational and operational isolation. Anecdotal evidence from RCC members attested to problems with integrating special collections into the overall program of library services, a failure to adequately address special collections in long-range planning and budgeting processes, failure to include special collections in general collection development policies, and a lack of understanding and shared values between special collections and other library staff. Some reported inconsistencies in special collections service policies and the prevailing culture of the library and the institution.

As a corollary to these points, it was also agreed that ARL had not, for the most part, addressed special collections issues strategically and collectively in the same way that it had developed approaches to global resources, scholarly communications, copyright, and preservation. In short, there was a strong sense that special collections needed to be “mainstreamed” at the institutional level in a number of dimensions as well as become part of a collaborative research library agenda.

These, then, are the underlying perspectives that came to the fore in the early discussions of special collections in the RCC. Consensus on these points was the basis for moving ahead with the RCC special collections initiative. Taken together, these perspectives represented a positive concern for special collections with the goal of promoting them within their parent institutions and maximizing their value to scholarship at large.

Specific RCC Special Collections Issues

In addition to the basic shared perspectives evident in the early RCC discussions, a number of specific issues were raised as possible items for an eventual ARL agenda. Some of these survived to be included in the agenda as adopted—others did not. For the most part, these points did serve to set the focus for discussions among the full membership and in ARL-sponsored conferences. Some of the observations and concerns expressed in the early committee meetings are noted briefly below:

- RCC members expressed concern for special collections both from local perspectives as directors of research libraries and from the viewpoint of collaborative approaches to general issues of special collections. Some members expressed frustration that statistics and benchmarks available in other areas of research library operations did not exist for special collections. The comparative context for resource allocation, planning, and other administrative decisions related to special collections seemed weak. The possibility was raised of ARL developing examples of best practices and organizational models as it had for other library services. Locally oriented issues discussed included organizational questions such as the placement of processing functions, the role of special collections in the library’s development program, the lack of understanding of the role of special collections among other library staff, the value of exhibits, and the need to promote the use of special collections among undergraduates and other constituencies. As discussions proceeded, however, the focus tended to shift away from these local concerns to the broader agenda as more appropriate for an ARL initiative, although the interest in local management remained a factor in planning for a special collections statistical program.
- Some RCC members expressed the fear that special collections were especially vulnerable to budget pressures in research universities and

sensed that they were not being adequately supported in a number of ARL libraries. Articles in the literature by curators were cited and anecdotal evidence was presented on space problems restricting the acquisitions of archival collections, lack of funding to purchase materials, and the inability to maintain staffing levels. However, the 1998 survey, described in more detail below, revealed that these fears were unfounded. The survey showed that special collections were enjoying relative prosperity in ARL libraries, although clearly undersupported in some institutions. More accurately, perhaps, the committee also expressed great concern about the overall capability of the special collections enterprise to collect and provide access to the enormous cultural, historical, and social record of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, an issue that did emerge as part of the final action agenda.

- RCC members early on discussed access to special collections as a critical issue, especially processing backlogs and the need for more electronic finding aids. Access evolved into an even more prominent concern as discussions expanded to include special collections librarians and archivists and is now a major focus of the ARL agenda.
- Digitization programs based in special collections were discussed as an area in which difficult decisions were required, involving complex questions of priority, standards, funding, and coordination.
- The committee discussed at length the perceived problems of recruiting qualified staff for special collections, paralleling the long-standing concern in the RCC for the education of area studies librarians.

The RCC's initial discussions of issues such as these were time constrained and superficial but served at least to surface a sufficient number of questions to convince the committee to develop a set of programs and activities with a special collections focus.

ARL ACTIVITY

ARL's formal activity relating to special collections has unfolded in a series of projects and events designed to gather information, raise awareness, and, ultimately, develop an ongoing special collections agenda. After the discussions in the RCC described above, special collections was raised as an issue with the ARL membership generally. Participation in the discussions was high and expressions of support were frequent. This section will present chronologically the major ARL actions and activities to date.

Survey of Special Collections in ARL Libraries

As a result of being poorly informed about the status of special collections in ARL libraries, the RCC in 1997 recommended a wide-ranging survey of special collections to be used as the starting point for further reflection and decision-making. Survey forms were sent to ARL libraries in July

1998, and the results were compiled and described in a subsequent ARL publication (Panitch, 2001). The high level of survey completion (90 percent of the 110 ARL academic members at the time of the survey) reflected the intense interest of most members in the results. The instrument itself consisted of forty-five principally quantitative questions focusing on special collections materials and on a wide array of associated management issues, specifically: collections (size and scope); organization and administration; facilities; use and users; preservation and conservation; and electronic access

In general, the survey found that special collections were doing better than might have been expected based on anecdotal evidence and a reading of the literature. Most institutions reported that their special collections were growing both in size and in scope, incorporating both emerging subject areas and new formats. Most institutions reported that staffing levels for special collections were stable or growing and that use of the collections was increasing. Most special collections received a stable or growing percentage of institutional resources, and nearly two-thirds of institutions reported that special collections facilities had been recently built or renovated.

Among the striking findings of the survey were the significant differences distinguishing large libraries from smaller ones and Canadian libraries from both public and private institutions in the United States. The largest libraries, it was found, tended to have appreciably larger special collections—approximately two to ten times as large as others in terms of volumes and manuscripts held—and they reported staff and expenditure levels for special collections that were commensurately higher than at smaller institutions. Larger special collections also reported much greater reliance on endowment funds while smaller collections depend heavily on appropriations from the parent institution or from state budgets. Although not as prominent as differences based on library size, library type (private, public, Canadian) seemed also to determine responses. For measures of special collections size, staffing levels, and total expenditures, private institutions exceeded overall means substantially, while Canadian institutions were far below the means.

Along with providing previously unavailable data about special collections, the survey raised or reinforced a number of concerns. Chief among these issues is the very definition of special collections, which, as survey responses indicate, can comprise any variety of materials and organizational structures. While deriving a single, simple definition of special collections may be neither possible nor desirable, it was clear that future initiatives in this area will have to be extremely specific in their parameters or else will have to allow for the wide degree of variation which exists in ARL institutions.

Other areas of concern were less theoretical, but no less difficult to address. Large portions of collections, for example, were found to be without adequate intellectual access or had records or finding aids requiring on-site consultation. The dependence of many institutions on appropriat-

ed funds raises questions about the vulnerability of special collections to budget cuts and the ability of such collections to acquire needed materials, particularly the voluminous record of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It was clear that special collections librarians are being asked to take on an ever-greater variety of responsibilities, such as digitization and development, and it appeared as well that many institutions had plans to hire new special collections librarians in the near future. Less clear is whether existing staff levels and available skills were appropriate to support those new roles and growing collections or where training for new special collections librarians would come from. Also of note were questions about the investment being made in the preservation of special collections materials, with some institutions reporting little staff devoted to conservation and little preservation activity focused on special collections materials.

Special Collections in the Digital Age

As results of the special collections survey were being compiled and analyzed, ARL held its first broader discussion of special collections issues. Convened by then-ARL President Betty Bengtson, the association's 134th membership meeting, held May 1999 in Kansas City, was devoted to *Special Collections in the Digital Age*.¹ The meeting provided a forum for ARL directors to hear from and exchange ideas with invited special collections administrators and scholars.

Keynote speaker Werner Gundersheimer, then director of the Folger Shakespeare Library, reiterated the importance of special collections to the research library and decried their marginalization—often inadvertent—as mere symbols or emblems of institutional distinctiveness. A meaningful commitment to collecting, preserving, and making available carefully developed special collections, he argued, signals a university's intention to honor intellectual inquiry that is based on “the discrete, the unique object of study.” The value of these collections, particularly in awakening the wonder and curiosity of students, should not be dismissed.

The remainder of the meeting was notable for its fostering of dialogue among those with a stake in the future of special collections. One panel featured two directors and two special collections librarians outlining a number of major issues and explicating the different viewpoints informing decisions about special collections. At a later panel, scholars from the University of Kansas and the University of Nebraska described their own use of special collections. A lively general discussion was followed the next day by small breakout sessions to consider some of the issues which had been identified as particularly pressing: “Digital Projects and Finding Aids”; “Integrating Special Collections into the Curriculum”; “Rights Management”; and “Staffing and Organization.”

Although not giving rise to immediate action, the Kansas City meeting was critical in affirming the interest of the ARL membership in continuing

the discussion about special collections. It was also clear that any meaningful ARL movement in this direction would need to include the voices not only of directors but of all parties involved with developing, managing, and using special collections.

Building on Strength: Developing an ARL Agenda for Special Collections

The lively exchange of the 1999 ARL membership meeting confirmed interest in the development of an ARL agenda related to special collections. It also demonstrated the importance of close interaction between ARL directors and special collections librarians in shaping and implementing action in this area. A small volunteer planning group consisting of representatives from both communities began meeting in January 2000 to coordinate a symposium, eventually entitled *Building on Strength: Developing an ARL Agenda for Special Collections*.

Members of the planning committee early agreed on the necessity of moving beyond general discussion to more concrete action. The symposium was therefore conceived of and promoted as an intensive working forum having as a goal the formulation of recommendations to ARL's Research Collections Committee concerning what the association could do to reaffirm the importance of special collections, develop benchmarking and other comparative data, and encourage a collaborative approach to longstanding issues. Directors and heads of special collections were encouraged, although not required, to attend as pairs. Conference costs were largely underwritten by generous grants from the Gladys Krieble Delmas and Andrew W. Mellon foundations. In all, more than 125 registrants attended the symposium, held 27–29 June 2001, at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island.²

A keynote address by David Stam, University Librarian Emeritus, Syracuse University, sought to be "provocative and irritating on the subject of special collections." Stam encouraged greater access to and use of special collections but noted many of the potential impediments—historical, operational, philosophical—to this vision. He was followed in turn by a library director (Sarah Thomas, Carl A. Kroch University Librarian, Cornell University), a special collections librarian (Robert Byrd, director, Rare Book, Manuscript and Special Collections Library, Duke University), and a former director turned special collections administrator (William Crowe, Spencer Librarian, University of Kansas). All promoted a vision in which special collections transcend their (real or imagined) separateness, although the speakers emphasized different measures required to overcome marginalization. A lively general discussion was followed by afternoon breakout sessions in which participants were asked to articulate "urgent issues," "non-urgent issues," and "nonissues" for ARL consideration.

The final day of the symposium was devoted to formulating a specific outline as the basis upon which ARL could initiate activity. Joe Hewitt and

Merrily Taylor (university librarian, Brown University) presented a "Proposed ARL Action Agenda for Special Collections" that they had composed. The eleven-point draft agenda, circulated beforehand to participants, was as follows:

1. ARL should promote special collections as a fundamental and indispensable part of the research library mission in the modern university through a statement of principles describing the obligation of research libraries to collect, preserve, and make available the primary historical and cultural record. Concurrently, a demonstrated institutional commitment to special collections and related services should be a criterion for membership in ARL.
2. ARL should initiate appropriate collective action related to special collections as it has in areas such as scholarly communications, copyright, global resources, and diversity. In doing so, ARL should seek to work as a facilitating organization that mobilizes member libraries and other organizations to address the general issues of special collections in research university libraries.
3. At a time when the traditional role and priority of special collections in the university library are being questioned, ARL should provide programs to members that assist them in developing, managing, and supporting special collections in the contexts of modern scholarship and pedagogy, and trends in higher education.
4. ARL should ensure that its other projects and programs address special collections whenever appropriate. A special collections liaison, similar to the preservation liaison, should be considered for ARL as an ongoing advocate for special collections interests in ARL.
5. ARL should work with others to develop a coordinated approach to the collecting and preservation of the voluminous records of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and to the challenges of new formats and sources of archival data in the modern age. ARL and its member libraries should work with each other and with other agencies to inventory, map, and, where appropriate, define responsibility for collecting and preserving primary materials of all types.
6. Ongoing statistical efforts relating to special collections should be established under ARL auspices. This effort should focus on the gathering of core longitudinal data on an annual or biennial basis, as well as on occasional special efforts as needed through the SPEC process or a similar mechanism.
7. ARL should encourage individual institutions to provide shared intellectual access to their frequently substantial backlogs of special collections materials without such access. ARL can assist in this effort by advocating for and administering funding to support access projects, and by developing or endorsing model guidelines for adequate access. ARL

- should also acknowledge the importance of access in any statement of principles. (This item was cited by the participants in the conference at Brown as of primary importance.)
8. ARL should assume a coordinating role or should support external efforts to ensure that information regarding digitization projects is appropriately shared among institutions in order to foster collaboration and prevent duplication. ARL should also advocate for the continued importance of original materials in the digital age and should participate in or endorse the articulation of reasonable expectations for the ongoing stewardship of these materials following reformatting.
 9. ARL should encourage further investigation into the status of preservation efforts for special collections materials and should develop model guidelines for preservation programs which will be effective in addressing these materials. The ARL preservation liaison should be invited to participate in these efforts or to propose appropriate representation from the special collections community. ARL should also advocate for and, when appropriate, endorse guidelines and standards for the preservation of information in electronic form.
 10. ARL should support the education of the next generation of special collections librarians and determine core competencies. ARL should sponsor further systematic research into the changing nature of the profession and assist member libraries in creating opportunities to develop special collections professionals. Models similar to those developed for the training of area studies librarians should be considered.
 11. ARL should incorporate into its portfolio of legal concerns the problems created by the Tax Reform Act of 1969, which does not allow a charitable deduction for self-created works, and work actively for the repeal of this provision of the Federal Tax Code.³

Although general approval for ARL's engagement with special collections was evident, this portion of the discussion also brought to light remaining differences. In particular, attendees representing the special collections community were concerned that many directors still harbored outmoded perceptions regarding special collections. They pointed out that large areas of activity discussed over the course of the symposium—e.g., improving intellectual and physical access, providing training and development, attracting new users—were in fact being addressed within the special collections community, but that a seeming lack of interest on the part of institutional administrators, consortia, and funding agencies limited progress. The necessity of a collaborative approach to special collections issues and increased coordination with the many groups and interests already involved with special collections were again evident.

ARL Task Force on Special Collections

In order to advance the agenda discussed at the Brown symposium, the ARL Board formally established a Task Force on Special Collections. Its charge, drawn from the points of the draft agenda which elicited the strongest interest, is as follows:

The Task Force is asked to develop an action plan to:

1. Enhance access to collections and backlogs, surface "hidden collections." Advocate for and administer funding for projects, and collaborate with RBMS to develop and endorse guidelines for what constitutes adequate access.
2. Coordinate planning for collecting nineteenth- and twentieth-century materials and those in new formats.
3. Coordinate information sharing regarding digitization efforts.
4. Define core competencies among special collection librarians and create training opportunities.
5. Promote special collections as fundamental to the mission of the research library.
6. Gather data on special collections operations.
7. Incorporate some of these issues into agendas of RBMS, SAA, and other ARL standing committees (especially the Access Committee but also possibly Preservation, Scholarly Communication, Statistics & Measurement, Copyright, and Diversity).⁴

In keeping with the collaborative spirit that both characterized and was endorsed by the Brown meeting, task force members were selected from among both ARL directors and ARL special collections librarians, many of whom had been instrumental in planning the activities described above. Joe Hewitt was asked to chair the group. As of this writing, the ARL Task Force on Special Collections has formally met on four occasions—in Chapel Hill (April 2002), at the ALA Annual meeting in Atlanta (June 2002), at Yale University (October 2002), and in Lexington, Kentucky (May 2003). As might be expected in the face of such a wide-ranging charge, certain areas appeared better suited to collaborative action or else, by their urgency, tended to attract the greatest attention. It was readily agreed that point seven of the charge (to incorporate major issues into the agendas of related groups and organizations) was, in effect, implicit in the successful development and implementation of projects related to each of the other points. Task force members were also quick to recognize the work already accomplished or being undertaken elsewhere, noting that it was equally important to incorporate existing initiatives into ARL's agenda and, where appropriate, to advocate for ARL's support and endorsement of these activities. Otherwise, the most fully developed activities of the task force currently stand as follows:

Principles Statement on Special Collections. In order to “promote special collections as fundamental to the mission of the research library,” the task force recognized the importance of starting within the ARL membership. Not all ARL libraries, as the 1998 survey demonstrated, support special collections with the same intensity; certain libraries may also face university administrators, boards, faculty, and others who fail to understand or support special collections. Consequently, the task force drafted a statement of principles that reaffirms the implicit commitment of research libraries to special collections and outlines the basic responsibilities of those libraries to develop, preserve, support, disseminate, and otherwise steward primary resource materials. The statement is intended not to be prescriptive but to articulate the centrality of special collections to the research library mission and to recall the obligations thereby assumed. The principles statement was endorsed by the ARL Board of Directors at its February 2003 meeting and is posted on the ARL website.⁵ It is hoped that the statement can serve as a powerful tool for leveraging change within member institutions and for promoting special collections among key individuals and organizations. To that end, the statement will be sent with a cover letter to members of the ARL academic community to draw their attention to special collections and to urge their support for adherence to the principles in their institutions. Also, the task force is discussing the possibility of a publication that would illustrate the principles through best practices and innovative programs related to special collections.

White Paper on Access. From the earliest discussions within ARL’s Research Collections Committee, concern over providing timely yet sufficient access to special collections materials has been strongly voiced and widely shared. The 1998 survey provided additional evidence of the magnitude of the problem, confirming large backlogs in the processing of certain types of materials and substantial collections with local access only. Point one of the charge (enhancing access to special collections) has therefore drawn substantial interest. A working group within the task force, aided by volunteers from the special collections community, has written a white paper on access issues.⁶ The audience for this document is library administrators and others who need to understand the commonly shared problems and recommended solutions from those who have expertise and professional responsibility in the area of access and cataloging of manuscripts, archives, and rare books. Among questions the paper addresses are: 1. Why “hidden collections” are, in fact, a problem, and how great the scope of the problem seems to be; 2. What access to special collections means in the twenty-first century; 3. How access can be provided in a way that is both timely and meaningful; and 4. How improving access ought to be carried out. The white paper will be used not simply to raise awareness, but also as the basis for discussion at a September 2003 conference entitled *Exposing Hidden Collections*. This working confer-

ence, to be held at the Library of Congress, is intended as a first step in developing a scaled, collaborative action plan to address unprocessed archival, manuscript, and rare book materials.

Statement of Need: Training and Recruitment. Concern about developing the next generation of special collections librarians has surfaced in every forum described above. As with academic librarianship generally, a wave of retirements among highly experienced professionals is expected in the field of special collections. Recent searches suggest a shortage of new professionals equipped to assume stewardship and leadership positions; at the same time, the limited number of entry-level positions make it difficult for newcomers to enter the field. Finally, the nature of special collections librarianship is itself changing even as formal training opportunities are becoming fewer and fewer. In response to these conditions, the task force is developing a statement of need that describes the current environment, looks to relevant training models, and proposes directions for ARL action. Of greatest interest is the development of internships or residency programs in special collections for persons with the Ph.D. or other appropriate advanced degree in a relevant academic discipline. The internships would be offered in conjunction with an "immersion short course" that would introduce students to the fundamentals, culture, and issues of academic librarianship. Such a program would represent a lateral or alternative avenue to a professional career in special librarianship. A working group consisting of interested task force members, ARL directors, deans and faculty from schools of information and library science, rare books curators, and representatives from the archival community will meet in Chapel Hill in November 2003 to develop the concept in greater detail.

Special Collections Statistics. Based on the success of the 1998 survey on special collections and the numerous requests for ongoing follow-up, preparing a proposal for data collection within ARL has been a task force priority. Task force members believe that regular tracking of special collections operations through a quantitative survey will allow assessment of progress on the crucial issues already raised within ARL. It is clear, however, that any survey instrument would have to be considerably streamlined from the original version and subject to rigorous review and testing by ARL member libraries. In order to ascertain member interest in a pilot project, ARL directors were polled on the willingness of their libraries to participate in a statistics initiative and were asked for suggestions about desired frequency and reporting methods. A report on the results of the poll is being prepared. The task force is also soliciting suggestions regarding qualitative data that would help libraries assess the success of their special collections, although it is expected that the most urgent projects would emerge directly from the other actions proposed by the task force. Preliminary interest in ongoing statistical tracking appears high; if support continues, the task force will prepare a more detailed proposal.

CONCLUSION

While much of the activity of the task force has taken place at its infrequent meetings or via e-mail, greater outreach and visibility is planned as the group's priorities coalesce. A presentation made by members of the task force to the 2002 Preconference of ALA's Rare Book and Manuscript Section elicited substantial interest and offers to volunteer. Additional outreach activities are planned as the work of the task force proceeds. The task force's progress has been characterized by the steady expansion of the circle of engagement in the initiative. In taking on the collective challenges and issues of special collections, the task force has kept in mind the demonstrated strengths and limitations of ARL in similar issues of major scale.

First, ARL has a strong track record of advocacy—engaging issues and bringing them to the attention of other organizations and communities that can help in the effort to resolve them. ARL advocacy signals the importance of issues for other organizations, and ARL has the influence to elicit a response to the concerns it raises.

Second is coordination. The association has been successful in bringing the right people together to connect and develop projects in areas similar in scale and complexity to special collections. Nowhere is this clearer than in the Global Resources Program, where viable projects have been developed in Latin American resources, German resources, Japanese journal access, African newspapers, South Asian resources, and Southeast Asian resources. The global resources program has helped to establish sustainable projects in each of these areas by facilitating and coordinating the work of people in each area of interest. It is reasonable to anticipate a similar level of success with special collections.

Third, ARL can play a role by incubating projects. The association is not interested in taking on the management and operation of new projects or programs on a permanent basis, but it may be in the position to provide space and seed funding to create projects that will result in programs that other organizations, such as individual member libraries or a consortia of libraries, will continue into the future.

Overall, ARL's willingness to bring these strengths to bear on special collections must be counted as an extremely positive development. ARL looks forward to working with others to improve the collective institutional capacity to collect, preserve, and provide access to primary resources for scholarship and learning.

NOTES

1. Selected proceedings from the meeting are available at <http://www.arl.org/arl/proceedings/134/index.html>.
2. Selected proceedings from the symposium are available at <http://www.arl.org/special/index.html>.
3. <http://www.arl.org/special/action.html>.
4. <http://www.arl.org/collect/spcoll/tforce/charge.html>.

5. <http://www.arl.org/collect/spcoll/principles.html>.
6. <http://www.arl.org/collect/spcoll/ehc/HiddenCollsWhitePaperJun6.pdf>.

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