
Guidelines on the selection of general collection materials for transfer to special collections

By the RBMS Ad Hoc Committee for Developing Transfer Guidelines

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Rarities in the stacks—how to identify and move them.

Many libraries intentionally acquire rare books, documents and manuscripts, but virtually all libraries acquire books and documents which, with time and changing circumstances, and regardless of intention, become rare. Over time, they acquire a special cultural and historical value, and sometimes a significant financial value in the market place, as well. The following guidelines relate to librarians' responsibility to identify rare and valuable materials in general and open stack collections and to arrange for their transfer to the greater security of special collections departments.*

These guidelines reflect two pervasive and underlying conditions which influence both the formulation and the administration of transfer policy: the identification of the rare and special, and the complex interaction of library departments required to effect changes in the records by which readers are informed of the location of materials.

Transfer policies and procedures will vary from

*While some libraries have had a good experience with intermediate, restricted access collections, others have not. The wisdom of whether to form them seems to depend on circumstances peculiar to a library and is not addressed in these guidelines. Note, however, that their use requires policy decisions regarding what to transfer and how to do so which are considered parallel to those considered here.

institution to institution, depending on staffing, physical setting, and use of the collections; these guidelines are written to identify the general topics to be considered in an adequate transfer program.

The transfer policy and delegation of responsibility

A successful transfer program depends upon cooperation and coordination at every level of the library organization. Both will be assisted considerably by a written policy statement. In developing the policy, it is essential to obtain the sanction of the library's senior administration. The policy should be written by those administratively responsible for the transfer program, usually the head of Special Collections, the Collection Development Officer, or the two in concert. Articulation of selection criteria and transfer procedures must involve all relevant components of the library: these will generally include Special Collections, Reference, Cataloging, Gifts, Circulation, Preservation and Collection Development and may include systems representatives in libraries under automation.

The transfer policy must:

1. promulgate publicly the library's definition of and policy toward rare and special collections, strongly justifying the measures being taken to pro-

tect rare materials, and describing how these measures will enhance the institution's resources in carrying out its mission;

2. establish firm lines of authority for the conduct of an economical and expeditious program;

3. reflect wide agreement on selection criteria and procedure based on the institution's mission, its resources for carrying out that mission, and the nature and strengths of its special collections;

4. list the criteria of rarity being used in selecting transfer items, which may be influenced to some extent by the nature and strengths of the library's general and special collections;

5. set forth clear procedures to be followed in the transfer process, including procedures for recommending transfer, altering bibliographic and circulation records, and inspection by the Preservation Officer;

6. instruct readers regarding the procedure whereby they can cause review of individual items thought to require restricted access.

In many cases it will be natural to solicit the review of draft statements of the policy by representatives of faculty, students, and/or other well-informed researchers. It may be useful to consult with staff at other libraries or to bring in a consultant to review or advise on statement preparation.

Once completed, the policy should be approved by the library's senior administration and incorporated into the library's overall collection development policy.

Transfer procedures

A transfer program has three phases:

I. the identification of materials which fit the selection criteria;

II. the physical relocation and processing (label removal, and/or repair and preservation processes) required; and

III. record changes.

I. Identification of materials

Ideally, a transfer program will systematically inventory large segments of the general collections, examining each item individually and reviewing the bibliographic records for each: catalog cards, computerized records, accession or shelf list and so on.

Few libraries, however, will find such a comprehensive review possible. They will opt instead to review materials and records selectively, perhaps as part of a program with another purpose. Regardless of how broadly or narrowly based the transfer program is, it is necessary to bear in mind that direct inspection of both individual transfer candidates and their corresponding bibliographic records are of the utmost importance. A selective program based on knowledge of the history of the collection and designed to review areas of known strength may—in many libraries—meet a substantial part of the need.

A selective review may include any of the follow-

ing:

1. reading the shelves (or examining the shelf list) in classifications known—or thought—to contain candidates for transfer. Examples might include those with a high concentration of early imprints or local imprints;

2. reviewing an imprint date file list for early books in subjects of particular interest and value; or

3. producing from machine-readable records review lists based on imprint date, place of publication, literary genre or subject, or any combination of similar keys.

Examples of library activities during which materials or records are reviewed and rare material may be identified include:

a. acquisitions;

b. gifts and exchange;

c. cataloging;

d. preservation;

e. binding;

f. photoduplication;

g. microreproduction;

h. circulation (either charge or discharge);

i. inventorying and shelf-reading;

j. interlibrary loan;

k. preparation of exhibitions;

l. collection surveys;

m. retrospective conversion or records; and

n. weeding.

Any of these activities may lead to the discovery of multiple copies in the collection, the retention or disposal of which will be determined by local policy.

II. Conservation treatment

Conservation treatment should be considered carefully during the development of a transfer policy. It is tempting to build into the policy physical treatment which responds sympathetically to the needs of each individual item, although this may create backlogs or funding requirements which complicate the transfer program. It may prove more effective to prescribe only the most simple physical treatments and to use the necessity of handling each item as an opportunity to gather the data required to design a program for more extensive refurbishing of the collection.

III. Record changes

A means must be devised, as part of the transfer program, to inform readers promptly when the location of an item has been changed. The most effective way to do this is through recataloging. This may, however, prove beyond the means of libraries faced with the transfer of any substantial number of items. The following techniques have obvious attractions (economic) and disadvantages (access to the collections). Still, a library might choose to:

a. annotate (or jacket) catalog cards; all cards might be treated or, less successfully, only some (e.g., main entry);

b. charge items via a circulation record. The record system should be selected carefully: "transfer

records" have a way of aging into obsolete systems and thus become doubly (or trebly) removed from the public;

c. indicate in machine readable records a change in location;

d. place a dummy in the old location to refer to the new;

e. transfer all materials published prior to a stated date (e.g., 1751 or 1801) in some or all subject classifications without record change but with general publicity. This systematic change has been received well in some libraries.

What to transfer

The transfer decision simultaneously evaluates the unique qualities of an item and applies institutional policy. Thus the candidate for transfer (e.g., a 16th century book) may be within the scope of an existing special collections or rare book collection development policy. Selection for transfer implies that all similar items in the collection (e.g., all books in original bindings printed before 1751) ought also be identified.

The constraints on policy are familiar: institutional mission, on the one hand, and, on the other, the resources—personnel, space and equipment, technology, and budget—needed to conduct that mission. The interaction between mission and resources dictates realism and, often, compromise. Defining what is rare or unique is not always obvious, and decisions will vary among institutions. Still, certain general considerations apply in evaluating an item for transfer:

- its age;
- its intrinsic characteristics and qualities;
- its condition;
- what we know from other sources.

I. Age

The longer an item has survived, the more worth saving it probably becomes; as an item ages it becomes one of a decreasing number of witnesses to its own time. Consequently there is now universal agreement on the need to protect 15th-century printing, even if fragmentary or present in leaf-books. There is growing agreement on the same grounds to protect all materials, regardless of form or condition, printed before 1801. There is less general agreement on books of later date and on "regional incunables"—books published in a locality or region in the first years (or decades) after printing was established in them—in spite of a consensus that responsibility for them must somehow be distributed among many institutions.

II. Intrinsic characteristics

Books provide two kinds of physical evidence: first, the technological facts of their production, which can be determined by a close examination of the physical objects; second, the aesthetic qualities of illustrations, typography, binding, and so forth. With the first class, institutional circumstances

may necessitate partial or complete substitution of the original by microform or photocopy. But there is general agreement, for example, that manuscripts, documents, and original drawings, all necessarily unique, require special protection of the artifacts themselves. Such volumes will require transfer. By the same argument books with fore-edge paintings should be transferred although the text itself may be of little consequence.

It is generally recognized that miniature books (10 centimeters or smaller) are too vulnerable for open stacks and that books with engravings, lithographs, and original photographs—necessarily produced in limited quantities at any time—are vulnerable to mutilation and deserve protection.

Other categories on which there is wide, but not always, general, agreement include:

- a. fine and signed bindings;
- b. early publishers bindings;
- c. extra-illustrated volumes;
- d. books with significant provenance;
- e. books with decorated end papers;
- f. fine printing;
- g. printing on vellum or highly unusual paper;
- h. volumes or portfolios containing unbound plates;
- i. broadsides, posters and printed ephemera;
- j. books by local authors of particular note;
- k. materials requiring security.

III. Condition

While age itself dictates transfer for our oldest surviving books, condition may be more important in judging more recent material. All values of the book—scholarly, bibliographical, and market—are greatly affected by condition. Copies that are badly worn, much repaired or rebound, should not automatically be considered for transfer, unless the age of the material preempts condition as a criterion.

The durability of most library materials declined drastically since the mid-nineteenth century, and it is now increasingly difficult to locate even representative examples of many printing and binding processes in fine original condition. So many volumes have required rebinding, for example, that the richness of the original decorative art applied to bindings and printed endpapers is increasingly difficult to find and study. Lesser copies must, therefore, be scrutinized with care as possible transfer items.

In the twentieth century, books generally have been issued in dustwrappers which most "general" libraries routinely (and for good reasons) discard. Nonetheless, dustjackets, like other ephemera, frequently contain important information (e.g., text, illustrative design, and price), and serious consideration should be given to their retention.

IV. What we know from other sources

The rarity and importance of individual books are not always self-evident. Some books, for example, were produced in circumstances which virtu-

ally guarantee their rarity (e.g., Confederate imprints).

Factors affecting importance and rarity can include the following:

1. desirability to collectors and the antiquarian book trade;
2. censored or banned books;
3. early and especially important works in a particular field of study or genre of literature;
4. works published in very limited editions or items known to be scarce;
5. costly acquisitions.

Older reference works and early periodicals still needed for general use frequently become highly valuable and may require careful consideration, especially if facsimile or other reprint editions are available to replace them on the open shelves.

The definition and redefinition of transfer policy is complex and ongoing. Its creation and refinement is continuous, requires the exercise of imagination and good judgment, and profits from wide and informed reading. Although there is no literature dealing with transfer *per se*, the following books, selected from the large literature of books about books and book collecting, may provide special help to those charged with forming and reforming their library's policies.

1. Brook, G.L. *Books and Book Collecting*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1980.

2. Carter, John. *ABC for Book Collectors*, 6th ed. rev. by Nicolas Barker. London: Granada Books, 1980.

3. Carter, John. *Taste and Technique in Book Collecting*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1947; reprinted, London: Private Libraries Assoc., 1982.

4. Cave, Roderick. *Rare Book Librarianship*, 2nd rev. ed., New York: R.R. Bowker, 1983.

5. Gaskell, Philip. *A New Introduction to Bibliography*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.

6. Peters, Jean, ed. *Book Collecting: A Modern Guide*. New York: R.R. Bowker, 1977.

7. Peters, Jean. *Collectible Books: Some New Paths*. New York: R.R. Bowker, 1979.

8. Schreyer, Alice D. *Rare Books, 1983-84*. New York: R.R. Bowker, 1984.

Editor's Note: Members wishing to comment on these guidelines may write to Samuel A. Streit, Assistant University Librarian for Special Collections, John Hay Library, Brown University, Box A, Providence, RI 02912. ■ ■

University of California's BI course slated for cuts

The University of California Regents' decision to reduce the number of units assigned to UC-Berkeley's Bibliography I course for undergraduates has come under fire from the University union. The University Council/American Federation of Teachers (UC/AFT) filed an unfair labor practice charge on April 29, asserting that the faculty of the School of Library & Information Studies had not been consulted.

Reducing the number of units from 3 to 2, effective this fall, will mean that instructors teaching the course will have to cram the same information into fewer hours per week at two-thirds the salary they formerly received. The number of sections offered will also be reduced, resulting in fewer students being trained in how to use the library. And the administration also plans to give preference to Ph.D. candidates in the library school as instructors for the course, who may or may not have the bibliographic instruction experience traditionally required of Bib I instructors.

The union's unfair labor practice charge was lodged with the California Public Employment Relations Board, which is now in the process of issuing a complaint. After the complaint is issued, a settlement conference and possibly a hearing will be scheduled.

The course was originally developed by the UC-Berkeley library faculty in the late 1960s, then sig-

nificantly expanded in 1972 by the School of Library & Information Studies. Librarians at Moffitt Undergraduate Library and other libraries on campus act as liaisons to the Bib I instructors, and will continue to do so after the cuts take place. ■ ■

Intellectual freedom award

The University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science will accept nominations from now through September 1 for the 1986 Robert B. Downs Award for an outstanding contribution to intellectual freedom in libraries. The school's faculty established the award in 1968 to honor Downs, dean emeritus of library administration at Illinois, on the occasion of his 25th anniversary with the University. Throughout his career Downs has opposed censorship and other efforts to restrict intellectual freedom.

The award recognizes individuals or groups for their efforts to oppose censorship or to further intellectual freedom in libraries and information centers. Letters of nomination may be sent to Charles H. Davis, Dean, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois, 410 David Kinley Hall, 1407 W. Gregory Drive, Urbana, IL 61801.