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# 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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*The final version that has been submitted to the ALA Standards Committee for review.*

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**M**any 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 re-

quired to effect changes in the records by which readers are informed of the location of materials.

Transfer policies and procedures will vary from 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

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 who are administratively responsible for the transfer program, usually the head of Special Collections, the Collection Development Officer, or the two in concert. The development of selection criteria and transfer procedures depends upon wide agreement among, and 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 un-

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\*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 particular 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 parallel to those considered here.

dergoing 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 protect 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. 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;

4. 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; and

5. stipulate procedures whereby readers can request individual transfer items.

In many institutions it will be useful to solicit comments from faculty, students and/or other well-informed researchers, consult with staff at other libraries, or 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:

1. identification of materials which fit the selection criteria;
2. physical relocation and processing; and
3. record changes.

### 1. 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, the direct inspection of both individual transfer candidates and their corresponding bibliographic records is usually essential. A selective program based on knowledge of the history of the collection and designed to review areas of known strength may meet a substantial part of the need.

A selective review may include any of the following:

- a. reading the shelves (or examining the shelf list) in classifications known—or thought—to contain

candidates for transfer, such as early or local imprints;

- b. reviewing chronological files for early imprints of particular interest and value; or

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

Rare material may be identified during the routine handling and review of materials for the following library functions:

- a. acquisitions;
- b. gifts and exchange;
- c. cataloging;
- d. preservation;
- e. binding;
- f. photoduplication;
- g. microreproduction;
- h. circulation;
- 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 incidentally locate multiple copies in the collection, the retention or disposal of which will be determined by local policy.

### 2. Conservation treatment

Conservation treatment should be considered carefully as a component of the transfer policy. Such treatment (e.g., label removal, repair, phase boxing, complete restoration) for individual items is desirable. But it may create backlogs or funding requirements which complicate the transfer program. The simplest physical treatment may prove most effective or most immediately cost-effective. The transfer program may provide information that will prove useful for more extensive restoration of transferred items at a later date.

### 3. 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 a substantial number of items.

The following techniques have obvious attractions (economic) and disadvantages (reduced 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 transferred items via a circulation record;
- 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 changes but with general publicity. This systematic change has been received well in some libraries.

### What to transfer

The transfer decision should simultaneously evaluate the unique qualities of an item and apply institutional policy. Thus the candidate for transfer (e.g., an 18th-century book) may fall 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 considered.

The constraints on policy are familiar: The institutional mission and 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 criteria apply in evaluating an item for transfer:

1. age;
2. intrinsic characteristics and qualities;
3. condition;
4. bibliographical, research or market value.

#### 1. Age

The longer an item has survived, the more worthwhile 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.

#### 2. Intrinsic characteristics

Books may possess intellectual value, artifactual value, or both. For those books of intellectual but not artifactual value institutional circumstances *may* necessitate partial or complete substitution of the original by microform or photocopy. But items with artifactual value, e.g., finely printed or bound books, manuscripts, drawings or other original art work including tipped-in photographs, require special protection of the objects themselves. Such material will require transfer.

It is generally recognized that miniature books (10 centimeters or smaller) are too vulnerable for open stacks and that many books with prints and

original photographs—often produced in limited quantities—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. books with valuable maps;
- j. broadsides, posters and printed ephemera;
- k. books by local authors of particular note;
- l. material requiring security (e.g., books in unusual formats, erotica or materials that are difficult to replace).

#### 3. 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—may be 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 produced since the mid-nineteenth century has declined drastically. It is now increasingly difficult to locate even representative examples of many nineteenth and twentieth century 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. Therefore, less than fine copies must be scrutinized as possible transfer items.

Many twentieth century books have been issued in dustjackets which “general” libraries often (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.

#### 4. Bibliographical, research or market value

The rarity and importance of individual books are not always self-evident. Some books, for example, were produced in circumstances which virtually 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. intrinsic or extrinsic evidence of censorship or repression;

3. seminal nature or importance to a particular field of study or genre of literature;
4. restricted or limited publication;
5. the cost of acquisition.

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

### Selected reading

The development, definition and updating of a transfer policy is a complex and ongoing process. It 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*. 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. ■■

## ACRL Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship

The ACRL Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship is sponsored by ACRL and the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI). Its purpose is to foster research in academic librarianship by encouraging and assisting doctoral students in the field with their dissertation research. The fellowship consists of an award of \$1,000 and an appropriate citation. The winner will be announced in New Orleans at ALA Annual Conference in 1988.

*Eligibility.* The recipient of the fellowship must meet the following qualifications:

- 1) Be an active doctoral student in the academic librarianship area in a degree-granting institution.
- 2) Have completed all coursework.
- 3) Have had a dissertation proposal accepted by the institution.
- 4) Recipient of the fellowship may not receive it a second time.
- 5) The applicant need not be an ACRL member.

*Submission procedure.* Qualified students who wish to be considered for the fellowship may apply by submitting a proposal to Mary Ellen K. Davis, Program Officer, ACRL/ALA, 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611-2795, by December 1, 1987. The proposal should be brief (ten pages or less, double-spaced) and include the following:

- 1) Description of the research, including significance and methodology.
- 2) Schedule for completion.
- 3) Budget and budget justification for items for which support is sought. (These must be items for which no other support is available.)
- 4) Name of dissertation advisor and committee members.
- 5) Cover letter from dissertation advisor endorsing the proposal.

ing the proposal.

Examples of acceptable budget items are printing, computer time, fees to subjects, keypunching, statistical consulting, photography, artwork, typing and professional travel.

An up-to-date curriculum vitae should accompany the proposal.

Because of limits imposed by timing considerations, applications may be made for research underway; e.g., a student who begins research in the Fall may apply for support for expenses incurred from the Fall until the time the award is made.

*Criteria.* The proposal will be judged primarily on merit with emphasis on the following:

- 1) Potential significance of the research to the field of academic librarianship. (No attempt will be made to define academic librarianship, but the subject should be consistent with topics usually published in *College & Research Libraries* or presented at ACRL meetings.)
- 2) Validity of the methodology and proposed methods of analysis.
- 3) Originality and creativity.
- 4) Clarity and completeness of the proposal.
- 5) Presentation of a convincing plan for completion in a reasonable amount of time.
- 6) Evidence of a continuing interest in scholarship such as a previous publication record.

This year's winner is Ling Hwey Jeng, a Ph.D. candidate at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Texas at Austin. Her dissertation is "The Title Page as the Source of Information for Bibliographic Descriptions: An Analysis of Its Syntactic and Semantic Characteristics." ■■

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