Glossary of Preservation Terms

Conservation treatment, reformatting, commercial library binding, environmental control, disaster preparedness and response, and preservation education and training are the core initiatives that make up a comprehensive preservation program. Implementing such a program requires skilled staff, carefully selected and implemented technologies, and sound management practices.

**Commercial Library Binding: Managing the use of contractual services**

Commercial library binding is the binding and rebinding of volumes in a largely automated commercial facility. In general, journal issues are bound together to collocate them and to prevent damage and loss; paperbacks are bound to make them more sturdy for library use; hardcover books are rebound because they are damaged and do not merit conservation treatment.

**Conservation: Protecting and restoring the original object**

The term conservation embraces activities that improve the condition of an object or protect it from damage. Paper treatments, for example, include everything from mending a small tear to washing, deacidifying, and other complex chemical and mechanical treatments. For books, treatments range from tipping in an errata sheet to full conservation rebinding. Conservation is also an appropriate strategy for preserving certain non-paper media. Conservation treatments for videotape, for example, include splicing and ultrasonic cleaning. Conservation also incorporates surveying collections or sub-sets of collections to assess their condition and develop treatment plans; as well as pamphlet binding, boxing, enveloping, and other means of protective enclosure.

Collections conservation is the treatment and protective enclosure of materials that are valuable in the aggregate (e.g., the literature of a subject area or period, posters of a particular genre). In this context, an individual item is more important as it relates to other materials in the collection than it is as a disassociated object. Typically, 19th and 20th-century books and journals in circulating collections are the focus of a collections conservation program. While collections conservation techniques are often complex, items with similar problems can be grouped for batch treatment. Significant numbers of materials are conserved annually (tens of thousands in a large research library) using archival-quality materials and techniques. The goal is to preserve large collections of scholarly significance and therein to improve the library's overall service performance.

Special collections conservation is the treatment of materials that, while they may be important because of their relationship to larger collections, also have intrinsic value (and sometimes great monetary value) as isolated objects-as do important pieces in museum collections. They may be valuable because they are rare, unique, were owned by an important person, are very beautiful, or for other historical or aesthetic reasons. Conservation treatments involve extensive written and photographic documentation and the use of instruments such as powerful microscopes. The goal is to protect treasures having extraordinary local or worldwide significance.
**Education and Training: Protecting collections through teaching**

The goal of preservation education programs is to build awareness within the library user community of the fragile, irreplaceable nature of research library collections, and to teach and encourage improved care and handling practices. Printed materials, training sessions, seminars, and conferences are typical communications vehicles employed for this purpose.

**Emergency Preparedness and Response: Protecting collections from hazards**

Emergency preparedness for libraries involves prevention, preparation, and response. Prevention is the reduction of risk, including inspecting, maintaining, and repairing library buildings. Preparation involves writing a disaster plan, assembling essential supplies, developing communications channels with essential service providers, and training staff to react effectively. Response is the skillful salvaging of collections damaged as the result of minor destructive incidents and catastrophic events.

**Environmental Control: Achieving hospitable storage conditions**

Creating and maintaining storage conditions that promote the longevity of collections is the single most beneficial preservation strategy that a library can pursue. Controlling temperature, relative humidity, light, and air quality within appropriate ranges can radically slow the deterioration of paper, leather, cloth, plastic, and other materials ubiquitous in libraries. In general, cool, dry, low-light spaces free of gaseous and particulate pollutants are optimal. Ongoing monitoring of conditions is essential to maintaining preservation-quality conditions.

**Reformatting: Reproducing information at risk**

Reformatting is the copying of library materials. Deteriorated objects such as brittle books are copied onto more stable materials (silver halide microfilm, alkaline paper) to preserve information. Decaying nitrate negatives are copied onto stable film; motion picture film is copied to new film to protect the original from the wear and tear of repeated use; photographs may be re-photographed using analog or digital means in order to protect originals from handling; sound recordings are transferred, now almost exclusively to digital form, to ensure that audio remains playable and usable.

Not all copying is motivated by preservation concerns. New versions are sometimes created to widen distribution and/or to add functionality. Digitizing text through scanning and Optical Character Recognition (OCR) produces fully searchable texts that may be indexed and delivered worldwide via the Internet. Conversion of information to alternative forms can sometimes create rather than solve preservation problems.