

Strategic Planning Report: Special Collections Division

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 ILLINOIS LIBRARY

Introduction

The Special Collections Division of the University Library is comprised of the following units and sub-units:

- **The Illinois History and Lincoln Collections** is known for curating historically significant materials documenting Abraham Lincoln's life and legacy and the history of the State of Illinois. Approximately 35,000 printed volumes and 1,000 manuscript collections as well as numerous maps, photographs, ephemera, and other materials provide rich resources for researchers in many fields. The collections range from the colonial era and before to the present day and include records of organizations and individuals as well as diaries, letters, and other personal papers.
- **The Map Library** is a highly prized destination for all types of cartographic materials including maps, atlases, and aerial photography. Map and atlas coverage includes worldwide materials produced during the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. Complementary to the cartographic materials, the Map Library is home to texts on cartographic techniques and map interpretation, history of cartography, geographic information science, global positioning systems, remote sensing, spatial statistics, and place names.
- **The Rare Book & Manuscript Library** holds notable materials ranging from medieval manuscripts to the papers of poet laureates. The Rare Book & Manuscript Library is known for one having of the world's foremost rare book collections and is dedicated to outreach and public programming. Among many other items, the Rare Book & Manuscript Library holds a copy of John James Audobon's *Birds of America* folio, and provides a home to the Kolb-Proust Archive for Research, and the Carl Sandburg, and Ernest Ingold Shakespeare Collections.
- **The University Archives**, established in 1963, provides an authentic, enduring record of the University. Of particular note, the University Archives has strong records holdings representing engineering, international agricultural programs, Russian and East European history, Olympics and international sport, and political affairs reporting. The University Archives is also a trusted home for several contract-funded association archives relating to public affairs advertising and agriculture communications, and oversees activities across the University System to meet compliance requirements of the *Illinois State Records Act* 95ILCS/160) and the University *General Rules* (Article VI, Section 4).

- **The American Library Association Archives**, with the equivalent of over 8.4 million pages, has been for the past four and one-half decades a bedrock source for dissertation writers and international scholars to study topics of freedom of speech, literacy education, information standards, library architecture, and the changing profession.
- **The Sousa Archives and Center for American Music** is a go-to destination for scholars and enthusiasts interested in American music, John Phillip Sousa, the origins of electronic music, or the many aspects of music, society, and culture as well as museum objects especially focused on innovation in musical instruments.
- **The Student Life and Culture Archives** is home to significant research archives and collections documenting fraternity and sorority history nationally and all aspects of the student experience at the University of Illinois.

The Special Collections Division units serve a wide expanse of user populations representing individuals from the University of Illinois and scholars and history buffs from across the country and around the globe. Like many other units within the Library we routinely support the research of undergraduate, graduate, and post-doctoral students as well as faculty conducting their own research. We also provide reference support to all levels of University administration. Beyond the University community, we routinely support individuals researching genealogy or family history, authors conducting research for both fiction and non-fiction books, international scholars from many disciplines, teachers and students from public and private K-12 school classrooms, and the public at large through our many public engagement activities.

Strengths

The Special Collection Division units are the core locations within the University Library for researchers at all stages and of all ages to experience the joys and mysteries of working with unique and primary source materials that span at least 7 centuries and are encyclopedic in the disciplines covered. Individuals are encouraged to work with these materials with the guidance of and in partnership with knowledgeable Library staff who have discovered, and continue to discover, these joys themselves.

COLLECTIONS

One-of-a-kind and Rare Materials

Within the collections held by the units of the Special Collections Division, the archives and manuscripts comprise items that exist nowhere else in the world, thereby uniquely positioning the collections to have high value for research. Rare books, unique records, artifacts, and other documents held by Division units span a broad range of materials including but not limited to: medieval illuminated manuscripts, early modern codices, ethnomusicology audio files, historical music instruments, early and modern maps and gazetteers, letters from Abraham Lincoln, aerial photographs, campus architectural plans and photographs, scientific research records, newspaper reporter notebooks, yearbooks, and student and alumni scrapbooks.

SERVICES

Public Engagement and Outreach Programming

Personnel working within the Special Collections Division come with a broad range of expertise and capacity to support the University's mission. A particular strength is reflected in the staff's ability to bring professional

knowledge, passion, and enthusiasm to all aspects of their work so as to build bridges between the collections, students, researchers, and the general public. The Division is known for offering a full spectrum of public engagement and outreach programming both on and off campus.

Opportunities (and Challenges)

1-3 Years:

- **Bringing public services together**

The Special Collections Division has an opportunity to begin realizing the potential of coming together in a shared space articulated within the Library Building Project. However, much of this opportunity will not be realized until the Project has been completed assuming significant planning and financial support can be secured.

- **Building awareness of our archives and collections**

The Division has the opportunity to coordinate and expand outreach efforts offered by various units and programs both within the Division and across the Library as a whole. For example, following the lead of the Sousa Archives and Center for American Music we believe public awareness of our archives, collections and services can be greatly expanded to the benefit of the entire University.

3 – 7 Years:

- **Expanding access to unique collections and resources**

The Special Collections Division has an opportunity to capitalize on the University Library's national and international leadership. By expanding access to our unique collections and resources we can demonstrate the value that archives, special collections, and artefactual materials bring to the operations of a land-grant research university. Expanding access to our unique collections also requires expanding our depth and breadth of the expertise of our staff; developing sustainable models for expanding resources as the collections must inevitably grow; and deploying public engagement activities built in collaborative community partnerships.

- **Integrating discovery and access systems**

Because of the inherent differences of collections within the Division and because of differences in system availability, there has been a variation in the discovery and access systems that have been deployed by Special Collections Division units over the years. Given sufficient systems and staffing support, the Special Collections Division now has an opportunity to more fully integrate user access to optimize discovery of and accessibility of all library resources, collections, and services.

- **Expanding public engagement and outreach programming**

The Special Collections Division will be in a good position between 3 to 7 years from now to utilize existing outreach and engagement activities in a way that fosters new opportunities within the Library, across the University, and beyond.

7 Years and Beyond:

- **Library space that supports deep engagement**

The Special Collections Division envisions library space that will provide an opportunity to build out public services in a way that maintains a close proximity to a large percentage of our holdings. Doing so will support an environment to foster deep engagement of our subject matter experts with our materials and to create opportunities for working more closely with other library units. This model will enhance the research and learning endeavors of our students, faculty, and the public at large.

The challenges to these opportunities, both short term and long term, will grow or recede depending on how well we communicate with one another as the Library undergoes fundamental changes in space reconfigurations and public service models. Good communication should follow a plan calling for respect of differences and listening openly and responding thoughtfully to opposing views about the best path toward a shared future. The greatest challenges will be to build trust and establish patterns of good communication all around.

Aspirations

- **Establish improvements in operations.**

- **Streamlining**

Finding points where operations can be streamlined to increase effective collaboration.

- **Expanding**

Learning from and expanding on existing staff expertise in public engagement and outreach programming to benefit all units more effectively.

- **Increasing output**

Finding ways to work more efficiently with preservation and conservation planning to increase efforts to care for our unique collections.

- **Continue to grow a group of collections and individuals to create opportunities for inspiring new learning and life-changing experiences.**

The Special Collections Division aspires to be an ongoing source of opportunities for new learning and life-changing experiences. Some of these opportunities include:

- **Assistantships**

Offering more and diverse assistantships for students interested working in a special collections and archives setting.

- **Volunteer and paid student work opportunities**

Providing volunteer opportunities for emeritus members of the faculty and members of the public at large. Offering more student hourly work opportunities.

- **New Research Directions**

Offering opportunities for researchers to discover unexpected and sometimes new directions for their work through uncovering previously unexplored documents within the collections.

- **First time exposure experiences**

When a person sees or touches many of the items in our collections for the first time, they are often so moved that the impact is clearly visible in their whole body language. Many times, their comments convey how deeply moved they are by the experience. Providing opportunities for unique experiences that can be called "first time exposures" to one-of-a-kind resources can:

- transform how one sees one's place in the world;
- raise new questions not previously pondered;
- offer a deeper and more complex understanding of a culture, an art form, or a political movement;

- spark one's imagination of a past time and place; and/or
- inspire individuals to make new discoveries.

Results

Goal One: Scholarship, Discovery, and Innovation

The Special Collections Division provides opportunities to support many aspects of scholarship by providing expert-led mediated access to the primary and unique resources we collect and curate. We also play a strong role in supporting scholarship and discovery through our active acquisition and collection development efforts as well as include detailed work to provide effective levels of description. The Special Collections Division, by the nature of our materials and how they are accessed differently from other units, takes a long range view of what will contribute to the University's goals around scholarship, discovery, and innovation. While what we are stewarding is often from the distant past, we are focusing on current and future generations of scholars and individuals that are, or will someday be, conducting research or asking new questions about the past to inform the trajectory of their current or future lives.

Goal Two: New Learning Experiences

Our professional staff routinely speak to classes and the public, exposing them to materials not easily experienced through online resources. This kind of exposure in and of itself can be a transformative learning experience, providing opportunities to re-envision research questions, to imagine oneself in a different time and place, to glimpse the future through understanding the past.

Goal Three: Societal Impact

By supporting new learning experiences, the Special Collections Division has an immeasurable positive impact on society. Every student, every member of the public, every researcher who engages with our collections will come away from their experience better able to understand the world and better equipped to move society forward.

Another notable societal impact of the Special Collections Division is inherent in the academic and public community's understanding that the materials held in our collections are trustworthy and we know their provenance. Our materials have informational, legal, evidential, artefactual, and/or intrinsic value for a broad array of internal and external users.

Goal Four: Resources and Strategic Investment

The collections curated and made available through the Special Collections Division are routinely included in plans to garner donor support for the University. This role for our great collections is understandable and we anticipate it continuing to be a cornerstone of many of our future successful campaigns. However, the advancement communications staff need a stronger researcher focus to exploit adequately the values that exist in our collections.

Appendix: Division Work Overview

The Special Collections Division developed this document through an online iterative review process and through individual and informal small group conversations. Resources used include the unit annual reports, notes from various Division meetings, and informal information gathering surveys sent out via email.