

Lynne M. Thomas

## Special Collections on a Shoestring: A Survey of Non-ARL Libraries Servicing Rare Book Collections

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*This article reports the first national survey that creates a baseline for documenting the experience of working with rare books in libraries without Association of Research Libraries (ARL) membership: a group of libraries that make up about half the field of librarians working with rare books. Scarcely studied despite decades of comparable studies of their ARL library colleagues, librarians working in non-ARL rare book collections have comparable demographics, professional training, and standards for their work as their peers in ARL libraries. Their experiences doing the work in non-ARL libraries demonstrate a significant disparity in resources for acquisitions, security, staffing, and fundraising. These experiences of half of the special collections professionals in the field require further study, reintroducing their narratives into our understanding of “what rare books librarianship looks like.”*

The establishment of rare book “treasure” rooms in the 1930s across the United States led to public impressions about rare books librarianship that we are fancy, well-funded, elegant, and our jobs are effortless—at least based upon dozens of conversations during the past 20 years with folks who learn what I do for a living. Nearly a century later, more and more of our work to maintain and steward these “fancy” collections as robust, vibrant, inclusive rare books and special collections has become much more visible to our patrons, our funders, our institutions, and our colleagues. Like many librarians who completed an MLIS program in an Association of Research Libraries (ARL) institution, I was assigned to read Dan Traister’s article “The Rare Books Librarian’s Day” as an introduction to the experience of being a rare books librarian.<sup>1</sup> After training at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, an ARL library, I began my career as a Rare Books Catalog Librarian at Yale University, also an ARL member library. In 2004

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1. Daniel Traister, “The Rare Book Librarian’s Day,” *Rare Books and Manuscripts Librarianship* 1, no. 2 (1986): 93–105, <https://doi.org/10.5860/rbml.1.2.8>.

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I accepted a tenure-track position as a Rare Books Librarian at Northern Illinois University, which is not an ARL member library. I spent more than half my career there, nearly 14 years, until accepting a position back at the University of Illinois in 2017. My experiences as a rare books librarian at a non-ARL library had some significant departures from expectations gained from the professional narrative of my ARL-based training and participation in the Rare Books & Manuscripts Section of the American Library Association. This survey report explores some of the differences between the work settings typical to ARL library experience, and the realities faced by many librarians who work in institutions that do not meet ARL membership standards.

One of the biggest experiential differences for me in a non-ARL library was learning to begin any given project with the default assumption of a lack of cash resources. Paying for supplies, equipment, professional travel, student help, and so on was a continuous struggle. My institution did not have gift funds to make up for institutional budget cuts. For example: finding sufficient funding to purchase two \$150 dehumidifiers for collection spaces that did not already have dedicated HVAC systems was a challenge. Preservation and archival processing supplies (such as pamphlet binders, archival boxes, folders, and envelopes) did not initially have a dedicated budget line in my unit; after several substantial project-based requests based on surveying initial needs for a collection that was roughly 75 percent acidic paper, I was able to establish a modest (and therefore predictable) annual preservation supply fund. In contrast, my current ARL institution has several endowments designated to specifically support preservation, as well as multiple actual professional conservators and preservation librarians on staff. As I adjusted and adapted, I tried to share my solutions with my colleagues in my state consortia through my work on its Preservation Committee, where we created workshops with titles like “Special Collections on a Shoestring: Preservation Without a Budget” (from which this article’s title is drawn). Without a travel budget, or sufficient personal finances to self-fund professional travel, I only attended the RBMS conferences about four times over my entire tenure at NIU, mostly based on driving proximity to the conference site. Funding or no, my tenure and promotion expectations still required national service. To solve this problem, I was one of the first people in RBMS to do service virtually. I was one of the first virtual members (and co-chairs) of the Seminars Committee; I also spent eight years as an inaugural member of the RBMS social media team, running its Twitter and Facebook pages.

I guessed that I wasn’t alone in this experience, and in 2016 I began trying to build a counternarrative to “what rare books librarianship looks like” that better reflected my own experiences. As an editor of *New Directions for Special Collections*, I pub-

lished an essay by Melissa Griffiths about her experiences at a non-ARL library, in part because I found very little in the professional literature that addressed anything beyond using rare books as teaching exemplars for undergraduate courses.<sup>2</sup> RBMS membership surveys are infrequent but more inclusive of non-ARL libraries, but they are more focused on determining the professional needs of section members than the experience of working in the field.

ARL maintains an openly available list of member libraries; there is no equivalent for non-ARL libraries who work with rare books. Rare book librarian colleagues at ARL libraries are routinely surveyed about their experiences working in the field, and this is presented as a de facto baseline for “Rare Books Librarianship” in the literature. This creates a presumptive bias that small liberal arts colleges, regional nonflagship state universities, independent research libraries, and minority-serving institutions are not doing similar work or facing similar challenges. We acquire, catalog, describe, preserve, and provide access to primary materials to patrons, although our patrons may not qualify as “serious” researchers to some observers. My most common walk-in visitors at Northern Illinois University were curious community members who had never encountered rare books before; many of them would visit us after visiting the NIU Regional History Center and University Archives for genealogical or local historical research. The survey that forms the basis for this article is a result of wishing to begin to see the work of my non-ARL colleagues better reflected in our collective professional literature. In the history of our collective profession, about half of our colleagues have routinely had their efforts elided, by virtue of the kinds of institutions that they work for not being studied as inherently part of our experiences in the field.

Association of Research Libraries (ARL) member libraries have a long history of survey-based studies in library literature. Surveys draw consistently upon the ARL’s membership of (currently) 116 libraries in the United States and Canada to scope their studies, and ARL conducts longitudinal studies of its own membership.<sup>3</sup> ARL survey results describe the current state of large academic libraries and, for good or ill, provide de facto standards for the field of academic librarianship. Historically, ARL membership was extended by invitation, strongly but not exclusively driven by the ARL investment index. In 2018 the ARL membership process and criteria went through a significant revision. This updated and more inclusive process can be initiated by candidate libraries or

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2. Melanie Griffin, “The Rare Book Librarian’s Day, Revisited,” in *New Directions for Special Collections: An Anthology of Practice*, eds. Lynne M. Thomas and Beth M. Whittaker (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2017).

3. Research Library SPEC Kits and Research Library Issues are publicly available; access to salary surveys and ARL annual statistics can be purchased by nonmembers. Association of Research Libraries, Digital Publications, <https://publications.arl.org/> [accessed 11 March 2022].

by ARL. Member applications typically involve one to two candidate-funded site visits, which include looking closely at rare and unique collections as part of an institution's research support, documenting specific resource and staffing levels within a given academic library. Revised membership criteria are more holistic, emphasizing institutional support for research without defining specific resource levels. Once admitted, ARL members are "assumed to be in good standing."<sup>4</sup> Examples of research libraries that may not meet the requirements for ARL membership include Independent Research Libraries Association members, Oberlin Group Libraries, theological libraries, some Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), regional public university libraries, and large state land-grant universities. These libraries steward vitally important rare materials yet may be excluded from academic rare-book-library studies that accept by default the ARL membership list as its representative sample. Non-ARL libraries have not been studied as a discrete and distinct group separate from their ARL member library peers.<sup>5</sup> As a librarian trained in an ARL Library and Information Science program but who has spent two-thirds of my career working with rare books in non-ARL libraries, I was curious just how different my experiences were from those of my colleagues who worked in ARL libraries. This survey-based study is the first to explore how academic libraries that are not Association of Research Libraries members service their rare books collections, and particularly, how their experiences may differ from those doing the same work in ARL libraries.

## Literature Review

One of the earliest advocates for assembling what is now understood as a rare-book collection was Yale professor of literature Chauncey Brewster Tinker in 1924.<sup>6</sup> By the 1930s, librarians were publicly discussing whether or not smaller or less well-resourced libraries should hold or build special or rare books col-

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4. Association of Research Libraries, "Becoming a Member," <https://www.arl.org/becoming-a-member/> [retrieved 11 February 2021]; ARL Policy B.2, "Procedures for Membership," <https://www.arl.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/B.2-Procedures-for-Membership.pdf> [retrieved 11 February 2022][site discontinued]. "Consideration for ARL membership is based upon an institution's demonstrated commitment to and achievements in research, commitment to and investment in its library, and upon the Principles of Membership in the Association of Research Libraries." The Principles of Membership do not directly discuss resources, either. *Association of Research Libraries Principles of Membership* (Chicago, IL: Association of Research Libraries, 2018), <https://www.arl.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2018.04.24-PrinciplesOfMembership.pdf>; personal interview with Mary Lee Kennedy, ARL Executive Director (March 7, 2022).

5. Libraries that have practitioners who are RBMS members have been included along with ARL library members in the RBMS Membership Survey (RBMS 2015 survey, RBMS 1997 membership survey).

6. Quoted in William L. Joyce, "The Evolution of the Concept of Special Collections in American Research Libraries," *Rare Books & Manuscripts Librarianship* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 19; William Warner Bishop, "Rare Book Rooms in Libraries," *Library Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (July 1942): 375–85.

lections at all.<sup>7</sup> Those arguing for such collections do so in terms of improving pedagogy, particularly in the History of the Book, fundraising, and scholarly access to locally focused materials.<sup>8</sup> However, the discussion of the administration, growth, and stewardship of collections in these institutions rarely appears in the literature outside of the enumerated curatorial tasks of collection development and instruction.<sup>9</sup> There are remarkably few studies of the overall structure, funding, and experiences working in rare books collections in non-ARL libraries beyond the one that I co-edited.<sup>10</sup> Every rare book library is unique, stewarding a subset of unique materials. Yet, despite extensive searching, I was not able to locate articles that talk specifically about rare books librarianship overall in non-ARL libraries. Those that focus specifically on ARL member libraries are rarely framed with the recognition that they do not represent all kinds of libraries that work with rare books. One example among many: Barbara Jones' 2004 "Hidden Collections" study convincingly laid out the significant cataloging and archival processing backlogs in ARL libraries, which arguably provided the impetus for the establishment of the CLIR Hidden Collections grant program to help address those backlogs, but Jones's study was limited to and drew from a survey of ARL member libraries only.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the vast majority of the literature discussing the education and training of special collections professionals is written by, emphasizes, and assumes an audience of fellow professionals working in ARL libraries; this same ARL-centric literature is taught to library school students training to join them in ALA-accredited Library and Information Science programs across

7. Warren L. Perry, "Can the Small College Library Afford Rare Books?" *College & Research Libraries* (December 1939): 104–07.

8. William Alexander Jackson, "Rare Books in the Small Public Library," *Bay State Librarian* 48 (April 15, 1958): 5–6, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lls&AN=521697512> [accessed 26 March 2021]; Jolyn Wynn and Sandra Crittenden, "Even Small Libraries Can Have Special Collections," *OLA Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 4–5, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lls&AN=502926190>; George P. Germek, "Starting Almost from Scratch: Developing Special Collections as a Teaching Tool in the Small Academic Library," *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 23, no. 4 (October 2016): 400–13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10691316.2015.1028606> [accessed 5 March 2020]; Barry Gray, "Cataloging the Special Collections of Allegheny College," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 49, no. 1 (January 2005): 49–56, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lls&AN=502941577> [accessed 5 March 2020].

9. See Elaine M. Doak, "Decisions, Decisions, Decisions: A Tale of Special Collections in the Small Academic Library," *Acquisitions Librarian* 14, no. 27 (April 2002): 41, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lls&AN=27648177> [accessed 5 March 2020], which emphasizes the differences in collection development work in such a library.

10. See Melanie Griffin, "The Rare Book Librarian's Day, Revisited," in *New Directions for Special Collections: An Anthology of Practice*, eds. Lynne M. Thomas and Beth M. Whittaker (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, an imprint of ABC-CLIO, 2017), for one "slice of life" discussion of work in a non-ARL library that serves as a recent counterpoint to Dan Traister's "The Rare Book Librarian's Day" from 1986, which describes his experiences in a similar role at an Ivy League institution.

11. Barbara M. Jones, "Hidden Collections, Scholarly Barriers: Creating Access to Unprocessed Special Collections Materials in America's Research Libraries," *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, & Cultural Heritage* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 88–105, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lls&AN=502937139> [accessed 17 August 2022].

the country. Alyssa Spoons' 2008 master's thesis on this topic lays out the ARL-based emphasis for educational guidelines as well as noting that the first version of the ACRL professional competencies was initiated through an ARL task force in 2001.<sup>12</sup>

How, then, do we tease out the experience of working with rare books and special collections *outside* of the ARL libraries that have driven our professional conversations about the profession for decades? A 2016 survey of the Rare Book and Manuscripts Section of the American Library Association membership (RBMS), the first conducted in 18 years, included both ARL and non-ARL libraries. It served as both an inspiration for this survey and a major point of comparison.<sup>13</sup> Its focus was firmly on demographics of the section, determining member needs for professional development; it did not engage directly with the experiences of professionals working within their own collections, particularly in terms of financial resources, collection sizes, and staff sizes. Despite non-ARL libraries stewarding roughly half the rare book collections in the United States, their work has not been explicitly highlighted in the literature. This survey is an initial attempt to bring the experiences of working with rare books and special collections outside of ARL libraries into the spotlight of our collective profession.

## Methods

Part of the initial challenge for this study was logistical. An established list of non-ARL institutions that held rare books did not yet exist, whereas anyone can access the ARL member library listing on the ARL website. In 2016–2017, I developed a crowd-sourced initial listing of 126 non-ARL libraries in the United States that held and managed rare books as part of their collections, using a webform and promoting it through social media. The list, publicly available on my website at <https://lynnemthomas.com/2017/01/31/special-collections-in-non-arl-libraries-our-list-so-far-2/>, served as the initial basis for contacting institutional survey recipients through the 2018–2019 academic year. I used crowd-sourcing in the hopes that it would be faster and more inclusive than personally compiling a list. I reasoned that self-selection for a listing might drive stronger response rates for the forthcoming survey. The institutional submission form requested the job title of the person charged with

12. Alyssa Spoons, *Understanding Gaps in Special Collections Education Through a Content Analysis of Syllabi* (master's thesis, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.17615/zqp5-qh26>. See also Alice Schreyer et al., "Education and Training for Careers in Special Collections: A White Paper Prepared for the Association of Research Libraries Special Collections Task Force" (2004), [www.arl.org/storage/documents/publications/special-coll-career-trainingnov04.pdf](http://www.arl.org/storage/documents/publications/special-coll-career-trainingnov04.pdf); and Michael Garabedian, "'You've Got to Be Carefully Taught': American Special Collections Library Education and the Inculcation of Exclusivity," *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 7, no. 1 (2006): 55–63, <https://rbm.acrl.org/index.php/rbm/article/view/254/254> [accessed 26 March 2021].

13. Elspeth Healey and Melissa Nykanen, "Channeling Janus: Past, Present and Future in the RBMS Membership Survey," *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 17, no. 1 (March 1, 2016): 53–81.

stewarding the rare book collections. I later identified the current person serving in each role and emailed them directly to request survey participation, in addition to openly promoting the survey on social media and library and rare books-centric listservs. After removing non-US libraries from the responses, 135 libraries who submitted their information were contacted directly via email to invite study participation. The survey was conducted using university-supplied Qualtrics software. Survey responses were relatively robust: of 135 direct invitations, in addition to open calls that netted an additional 20 responses, 38 libraries fully completed the survey for a completion response rate of 24.5 percent. An additional 10 responders partially completed the survey, answering some but not all of the questions (no reason was given for lack of completion). Of the 48 participating libraries, 15 (31%) participated anonymously; five (11%) came through an outside referral, and the remainder of survey answers (58%) came through responses to direct email invitations. With an n of 48 responding libraries overall (28 to the direct email call and 20 to the open call), out of a known N population of 155 institutions (135 identified plus 20 through the open call), this is a reasonable initial study sample. Between 24.9 and 30.9 percent of non-ARL libraries completed some of the study; the number of answering libraries varied by question and is broken out accordingly.

Survey questions (see appendix) initially drew from the 2016 RBMS survey; they were then adapted to emphasize and illuminate initial expectations of the potentially different experiences of non-ARL libraries. This survey has a much smaller sample size than the 2016 RBMS survey as administered, since this study excludes ARL member libraries. Data analysis began in fall 2019. It was interrupted by a months-long family medical emergency followed by significant additional administrative load due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, completing in early 2021. No confidence variable was calculated because this was a self-directed survey, with a portion of incomplete survey answers.

### **Limitations**

Survey answers included in the study were geographically limited to the United States. While I endeavored to publicize the survey to potential participants across multiple social media platforms as well as on several rare book, archive, and library-related listservs in addition to direct solicitation to libraries that had completed the non-ARL listing survey form, there was only one response from an HBCU, and no responses from tribal libraries. Organizations that only handled archival materials but not rare book collections were also excluded from the survey. The survey remained open for an entire academic year and was promoted roughly monthly on social media, with additional periodic outreach on library and rare book listservs. Directly solicited participants were sent several email reminders to complete the survey. As the survey was conducted entirely online, responses from smaller cul-

tural heritage organizations with limited internet connectivity or greater technical challenges (such as local volunteer-run historical societies) were also less likely to be submitted due to the survey method employed. At roughly a third of the initially identified potential responding institutions, this initial study demonstrates the need for further discussion of the specific experiences of professional rare books librarianship in non-ARL libraries.

## Results

### *Collections, Budgets, and Organizational Infrastructure*

Respondents identified their library types as related to Carnegie classifications (breaking down distinctions between different types of higher education organizations based on educational programs and degrees offered) and funding models.<sup>14</sup> Of 44 answering libraries, the majority of organizations (36%) identified as liberal arts colleges (for example, members of the Oberlin Group of libraries).<sup>15</sup> Nine libraries (20%) identified as Research I libraries, and four (9%) identified as Independent research libraries. Fourteen (31%) identified as publicly funded, and 11 (25%) identified as privately funded. Four libraries (9%) identified as being religiously affiliated.

Of answering libraries, the majority (45%) reported managing collections of fewer than 25,000 volumes. Eight libraries (21%) manage more than 50,000 volumes; seven libraries (18%) manage more than 100,000 volumes; two of those seven (5%) manage more than 750,000 volumes. Reporting libraries hold in aggregate 274,000 linear feet of manuscript materials, a significant amount of potentially unique material that was excluded from the Hidden Collections study. This study did not ask about backlogs, so we don't know yet how much of these materials remain inaccessible to users.

Funds for building non-ARL collections are quite modest. The vast majority of libraries answering (78%) had less than \$25,000 in annual acquisitions funds; 20 (48%) answering libraries had less than \$10,000. Only three libraries (7%) had annual acquisitions funds exceeding \$100,000. This survey did not ask about library acquisitions funding outside of special collections. The lowest amount spent on one-time acquisitions (typically monographs) in ARL University libraries from 2018 to 2019 was \$84,156; the highest was \$21.9 million, with a mean of \$3 million. This is across all ARL collections and does not break out special collections separately. If special collections funding is perhaps 10 percent of ARL acquisitions monographic

14. "Carnegie Classifications | Home Page," <https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu/> [accessed 14 July 2022]. "The Carnegie Classification® has been the leading framework for recognizing and describing institutional diversity in U.S. higher education for the past four and a half decades... This framework has been widely used in the study of higher education, both as a way to represent and control for institutional differences, and also in the design of research studies to ensure adequate representation of sampled institutions, students, or faculty."

15. "Oberlin Group of Libraries | A Consortium of Liberal Arts College Libraries," <https://www.oberlingroup.org/> [accessed 21 July 2022].



funding overall, then the mean funding for ARL special collections would be about \$300,000.<sup>16</sup> This is a significant difference in scale of funding for non-ARL libraries. Non-ARL Acquisitions funding sources are roughly evenly split between gifts and institutional funding, but the balance varies by institution. Of 43 answering libraries, more than half (58%) report that less than a quarter of their acquisitions funding comes from gift funds. Conversely, 35 percent report that more than three-quarters of their acquisitions funding is from gift funds. The vast majority of respondents (84%) pursue private funding opportunities either directly within their units or through a library- or organizationwide fundraising mechanism.

Collections in these libraries are relatively modern. Nineteen of the answering libraries (45%) had more than half of their collection holdings dating from after 1900. Half of the answering libraries noted that between 25 and 50 percent of their materials were from the nineteenth century. Ninety-five percent of answering libraries describe materials dating from before 1500 as making up less than a quarter of their collections, and 88 percent describe materials dating from 1600 through 1799 as less than a quarter of their collections.

Insurance values for collections roughly clustered across a range from 1 to 30 million dollars for answering libraries; however, more than half (55%) of respondents selected “no insurance valuation available,” a category encompassing both those who declined to share their insurance valuations and those who may not know what they are, or what kind of insurance their institution may or may not carry for their collections. This survey did not ask whether the institution was self-insured (that is, elects to pay for losses out-of-pocket rather than engaging a third-party insurance company). At my previous position, I learned what self-insurance was when I was told that the university self-insured our collections. I was asked to routinely provide a market value for the most expensive items to the campus risk management team, but I did not know what the self-insurance amount was for our collections overall. My current university includes us (along with several campus museums) in a fine arts rider on top of its self-insurance. I routinely provide ongoing valuation for the whole collection, and I am aware that we are insured for about one third of our collection’s replacement costs. I also know the cost of the annual premium for that insurance. Self-insurance may significantly affect the valuation of collections by assigning a base amount that an institution will cover that may or may not relate to the actual replacement or market value of the materials. It does not necessarily take into account that a subset of any loss of collections is likely to be unique or irreplaceable materials (examples: literary papers or manuscripts, local historical materials).

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16. Anam Mian and Gary Roebuck, *ARL Statistics 2018–2019* (Chicago, IL: Association of Research Libraries, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.29242/stats.2018-2019>.

These collections are available to users through routinely provided public services. More than three-quarters (78%) of respondents maintain set hours in their reading room, and the remainder use appointment-based systems. Tools and mechanisms for providing services rely more on sweat equity than spending money for task-specific available technology.<sup>17</sup> A quarter of respondents are still using solely paper-based circulation systems. Eight percent use the Aeon circulation system; the remaining libraries use a combination of their local library management systems, spreadsheets, and other home-grown systems for managing circulation tasks within their units. At my previous institution, implementing software like Aeon was immediately dismissed as unachievable because we couldn't afford the ongoing costs.

All reporting libraries provide instruction. All but three reporting libraries perform collection development activities. All but one reporting library provides both reference and digitization services. Only two reporting libraries do not mount exhibitions or hold public events.

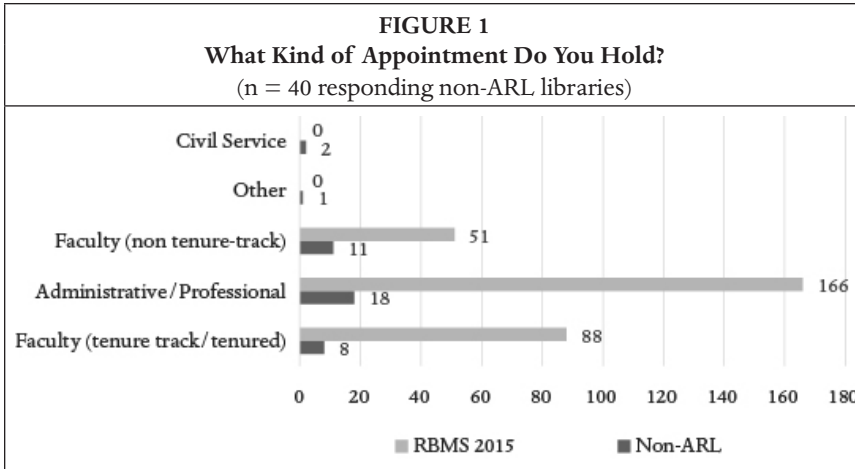
The majority of non-ARL libraries have security procedures, disaster plans, and fire suppression for their collections. Only 8 percent of respondents don't have standardized security procedures of some kind that might, for example, reflect the RBMS Guidelines Regarding Security & Theft or other institutional security guidelines.<sup>18</sup> Just less than half (41%) do not include video monitoring as part of their security protocols. Thirteen percent of respondents, however, have no access to on-site fire suppression systems for their collections, either within the unit directly or through the organization's infrastructure, and 13 percent note that they do not have a disaster plan, either for their unit or through their organization's infrastructure (such as part of a larger overall library plan).

Forty-one libraries responded to questions about cataloging and archival processing. Books and serials are cataloged solely within the unit in just under half (41%) of the responding institutions. About a third of the time, cataloging happens solely outside the unit, with the remainder of cataloging being a mix of inside and outside the unit. Archival processing is conducted exclusively within the unit an overwhelming 81 percent of the time.

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17. For example, the NEH- and IMLS-funded Digital POWRR program (aimed at institutions with restricted resources) leverages free software for digital preservation tasks in lieu of subscription services through third-party providers like Preservica. Digital POWRR: Preserving digital Objects With Restricted Resources, "About POWRR," <https://digitalpowrr.niu.edu/> [accessed 14 July 2022].

18. Association of College & Research Libraries, "ACRL/RBMS Guidelines Regarding Security and Theft in Special Collections" (October 5, 2009), [https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/security\\_theft](https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/security_theft).

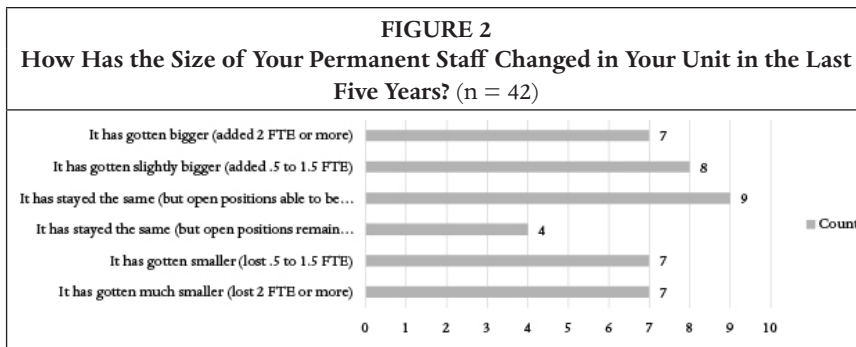


**Staffing, Appointment Types, and Job Protections**

Survey respondents were asked about the position types they held in their non-ARL libraries. Of 40 librarians answering, only eight (20%) held positions classified as tenure track or tenured faculty. Twenty-nine respondents (73%) held job classifications as administrative professionals or non-tenure-track faculty. Two respondents (5%) are classified as civil service employees. Thus, only a quarter of answering practitioners have significant job protections for their appointments through tenure or civil service systems. This differs slightly from the 2016 RBMS survey, which found that about a third (29%) of practitioners answering held tenure-track or tenured positions, while two-thirds (71%) of practitioners did not.

Staff in these units are small. Sixty percent of responding libraries have fewer than three professional staff in their units, while only 14 percent had professional staff exceeding five people. Eighty-six percent of responding libraries had three or fewer paraprofessional staff in their units. Fifty-eight percent reported fewer than three student workers or volunteers in their units. Staffing sizes have held steady or grown among the majority (57%) of respondents.

In non-ARL libraries, more than two-thirds (69%) of answering librarians were in positions that required a master’s degree in Library or Information Science or equivalent only for their positions. Of librarians answering, career stages were roughly broken into thirds. Fourteen respondents (35%) were in their first 10 years of the profession. The remaining answers were split evenly between 10 to 15 years and 16 or more years in the profession. Thus, two-thirds of librarians in these roles are experienced professionals with more than 10 years in the field. This is in keeping with the ARL survey of library professionals, which have an average of 15.7 years of experi-



ence among women and 15.4 years of experience among men.<sup>19</sup> Seventy-five percent of those answering the non-ARL survey noted that they got their jobs through a national search. Requirements for continuing appointment varied widely from “We serve at the pleasure of the Dean/President” and “There are no requirements except doing a good job and being qualified in the first place” to “Tenure: at least 5 publications in 5 years, library / university AND national service, primary effectiveness.”

### Demographic Information

There is a slightly higher percentage of women in non-ARL libraries and a higher percentage of people who prefer not to note their gender identity. Of respondents answering questions about race, the vast majority (87%) identified as white, 6 percent identified as Latino/Hispanic, and 6 percent preferred not to answer; this is consistent with other surveys of race across the library profession and is slightly lower than the 16.18 percent of nonwhite library professionals reported by ARL in 2018–2019.<sup>20</sup> The RBMS 2016 survey did not ask about sexual orientation, educational family history, or disability status; these categories were included in this survey, which indicated that nearly a third (32%) of respondents did not identify as heterosexual. Ten percent of respondents identified as disabled. The majority of respondents (72%) were not first-generation college students, reporting having at least one parent who attended college and completed a degree; 20 percent noted having parents where neither parent attended college, and 7 percent had a parent who attended college but did not complete a degree.

### Discussion

Having spent more than 13 years working with rare books in a non-ARL library, I initially believed that the results of this survey would demonstrate a substantively

19. Shaneka Morris, *ARL Annual Salary Survey 2018–2019* (Chicago, IL: Association of Research Libraries, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.29242/salary.2018-2019>.

20. American Library Association, “Diversity Counts,” About ALA (March 29, 2007), [www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/diversity/diversitycounts/divcounts](http://www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/diversity/diversitycounts/divcounts) [accessed 27 May 2021]; Morris, *ARL Annual Salary Survey 2018–2019*.

different experience (both professionally and demographically) for library professionals based on the type of library they worked in. The survey posited a potentially higher preponderance of earlier-career library professionals, potentially from underrepresented communities or first-generation college students working in non-ARL libraries, but the results tell a different tale. Fundamentally, the demographics, education levels, tasks, and work experience of our colleagues in non-ARL libraries are *no different* from those of colleagues working in ARL libraries. Credentialing for working in a non-ARL library is identical to ARL libraries, even when the non-ARL library is in a minority-serving institution, an institution primarily serving first-generation students or commuters, or otherwise working toward reducing educational barriers to entry. This is a significant issue in terms of our ongoing diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in the field and across higher education.

The most fundamental difference between working in ARL libraries and non-ARL libraries is the difference in *resources*. Despite no longer heavily relying on the ARL Investment Index as a metric, current ARL member libraries strategic goals and holistic membership guidelines do require a certain level of institutional investment in research support. Our field has developed a two-tier system, creating a divide between those who have ARL-level resources and those who do not, even when non-ARL libraries are still providing significant research support. In non-ARL libraries, staff are decidedly smaller for comparable collection sizes and workloads, as are acquisitions budgets. Non-ARL libraries are more likely to have “solo practitioners,” colleagues whose jobs incorporate curatorial, instruction, outreach, cataloging, and archival processing work into a single role, relying more heavily on volunteers, student workers, and support staff where available. Grant funding may be more difficult to attain without partnering with another institution (particularly from within the ARL). Fundraising abilities will vary widely between small liberal arts colleges with established fundraising cultures and regional state universities that may be relatively new to large fundraising campaigns. There are slightly fewer job protections for colleagues in non-ARL libraries.

This survey did not ask about salary ranges or frequency of raises. The average pay for ARL Library Heads of Special Collections in 2018–2019 was \$98,101; for professional archivists, \$69,941; and for research/reference/instruction librarians, \$72,125.<sup>21</sup> It is worth investigating how equitably non-ARL peers are paid for their work, accounting for cost-of-living differences in geography. The overall increase in tuition dependence and the systematic defunding of state-supported institutions in particular during the past 20 years is absolutely an issue across higher education. However, it becomes more acute in less well-resourced institutions, which have

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21. Morris, *ARL Annual Salary Survey 2018–2019*.

decidedly fewer options when budget cuts arrive, compared to ARL institutions with long records of grants and fundraising support that may allow them to offset funding gaps either on an interim or permanent basis.

The American Library Association accredits 65 professional programs in library and information science. Forty-five percent of ALA-accredited library and information science programs are at non-ARL libraries in the United States; of those, only six have programmatic emphasis on working with rare books and special collections.<sup>22</sup> The professional context for generation after generation of special collections professionals is overwhelmingly that of ARL libraries and their required resource levels. New graduates come out of their ARL library programs expecting that this is just “how things are” in terms of resources available, collections sizes, staffing, and so on, but this is only true of half of the libraries in the United States that service rare books.

This survey also did not ask about professional development funding levels, which was an oversight; it is much more difficult to contribute to the professional conversation without sufficient resources to attend the major conferences in the field routinely. I looked at the list of presenters for the 2016 RBMS conference (an in-person conference I did not personally attend due to lack of funding), held in Coral Gables, Florida. Of 145 listed presenters, 80 (55%) were from ARL member libraries. Of the 65 remaining presenters from non-ARL libraries and organizations, 11—about 17%—were from institutions within the state of Florida (that is, within driving distance), which means that only 37 percent of presenters were from non-ARL libraries not within driving distance. It is difficult to create change without being *present*, particularly within the current culture of our professional organizations. Virtual participation in committee work in RBMS is a relatively new phenomenon; historically, those who showed up at conferences were the ones selected to write policies, guidelines, and standards that set expectations for the field. That practice, in turn, overlooked not only the substantive work of our non-ARL colleagues in the field, but also the collections that they steward from

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22. Comparison between the listing on [https://www.ala.org/cfapps/lisdir/lisdir\\_search.cfm](https://www.ala.org/cfapps/lisdir/lisdir_search.cfm) and <https://www.arl.org/list-of-arl-members/> conducted 05/13/2021. The following 28 non-ARL institutions have accredited programs: San Jose State University, The University of Denver, Southern Connecticut State University, The Catholic University of America, The University of South Florida, Valdosta State University, Chicago State University, **Dominican University**, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, Emporia State University, **Simmons University**, St. Catherine University, The University of Southern Mississippi, East Carolina University, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, **North Carolina Central University**, **Long Island University**, **Pratt Institute**, Queen's College, CUNY, St. John's University, **Clarion University of Pennsylvania**, Drexel University, University of Pittsburgh, University of Puerto Rico, University of Rhode Island, The University of North Texas, Texas Women's University, and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The six programs in bold list subprograms or pathways that emphasize special collections librarianship (working primarily with rare books as opposed to archival management or records management) on ALA's site.

our shared cultural narrative, and the students, faculty, and researchers that they serve. When the professional training and the professional organizations for a field emphasize the narratives of ARL libraries, the experiences of *an equal number of non-ARL libraries* are omitted from our cultural and professional narratives. We are telling only half of the story of institutions working with rare books across the United States.

### **Conclusion and Next Steps**

ARL libraries have demonstrably driven the conversation about working with rare books in LIS education. This survey suggests that non-ARL libraries and their impact on the rare books field should be more consciously drawn into professional structures creating our profession and its standards. ARL is not the only reality. We need to compile and maintain a more comprehensive public institutional listing of non-ARL libraries rather than relying on those who have self-selected to include their institutions in this initial survey. Further longitudinal research is required to determine historic and current participation levels of non-ARL librarians in RBMS membership, RBMS conference attendance and presentations, and service on RBMS committees and leadership. A salary survey focusing on non-ARL librarians may be revealing in terms of pay equity. A future study of the institutional affiliations of colleagues publishing in *RBM* and other significant venues to determine how much the narrative of our profession is driven by ARL libraries is also needed. Examining work with rare books and special collections holdings at HBCUs and educational institutions that serve both Hispanic and Native American populations will highlight portions of our field long in need of illumination. Another potential future area of exploration is the impact of COVID-19 on non-ARL institutions in particular.

What might our field's expectations and guidelines look like if they fully reflected the significant variations in organizational funding, staffing, and other resources that exist at about half the rare book collections in the country?

## APPENDIX. Survey Questions

### **Rare Books in Non-ARL libraries**

You are invited to participate in a research study on the experience of working with rare books in libraries that do not participate in the Association for Research Libraries (ARL). This study is conducted by Lynne M. Thomas, Head of the Rare Books and Manuscript Library from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. This study will take less than 30 minutes of your time. You will be asked to complete an online survey about collection size, staffing, resources, job classifications, and demographic information. Your decision to participate or decline participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you have the right to terminate your participation at any time without penalty. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. If you do not wish to complete this survey, just close your browser. Although your participation in this research may not benefit you personally, it will help us understand how the experience of rare book librarianship varies based upon the type of institution that houses the materials. There are no risks to individuals participating in this survey beyond those that exist in daily life. Your decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will have no effect on your current status or future relations with the University of Illinois.

**Will my study-related information be kept confidential?** We will use all reasonable efforts to keep your personal information confidential, but we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. When this research is discussed or published, no one will know that you were in the study. But, when required by law or university policy, identifying information may be seen or copied by: The Institutional Review Board that approves research studies; The Office for Protection of Research Subjects and other university departments that oversee human subjects research; university and state auditors responsible for oversight of research; and federal regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections in the Department of Health and Human Services.

If you have questions about this project, you may contact Lynne M. Thomas (lmt@illinois.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 217-333-2670 or via email at irb@illinois.edu. Please print a copy of this consent form for your records, if you so desire. I have read and understand the above consent form, I certify that I am 18 years old or older, and, by clicking the "Submit" button to enter the survey, I indicate my willingness to voluntarily take part in the study.



If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline participation by clicking on the “Exit Survey” button.

- Submit (1)
- Exit Survey (2)

Q1 What kind of institution do you work at? (check all that apply)

- Community college
- Small liberal arts college
- Historically Black College/University
- Research II (mostly undergraduate, some master’s programs)
- Research I (undergraduate, master’s programs, doctoral programs)
- Independent/standalone organization/library not attached to an educational institution
- Public (state-funded/state-supported) institution
- Public (federally funded) institution
- Privately funded institution
- Religiously affiliated institution

Q2 What is the size of the staff working within the unit primarily concerned with servicing rare books? (Place the slider between numbers for half-time positions, etc.)

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20						

- Professional staff (librarians, archivists, etc.) FTE
- Paraprofessional/support staff FTE
- Students/volunteers FTE

Q4 Has the size of the permanent staff changed in your unit in the past five years?

- It has gotten much smaller (lost 2 FTE or more)
- It has gotten smaller (lost .5 to 1.5 FTE)
- It has stayed the same (but open positions remain unfilled)
- It has stayed the same (but open positions able to be filled)
- It has gotten slightly bigger (added .5 to 1.5 FTE)
- It has gotten bigger (added 2 FTE or more)

Q3 How are the typical job tasks related to rare books librarianship handled within your organization?

	Happens within unit	Happens outside unit	Both inside and outside unit	Not applicable
Acquisitions				
Archival/manuscript processing				
Cataloging				
Class visits/instruction				
Collection development				
Digitization/digital projects				
Exhibitions				
Fundraising				
Public events				
Preservation/conservation				
Reference				
Security				

Display This Question:

If Fundraising = [ Both inside and outside unit ]

Or = Fundraising [ Happens within unit ]

Or = Fundraising [ Happens outside unit ]

Q16 How does your unit dedicate staff time to fundraising? (select all that apply)

- Friends of the library group sited in unit; only for unit
- Friends of the library group sited in unit; librarywide emphasis
- Professional fundraising staff in unit
- Professional fundraising staff in library works with unit

Q5 What is the size of the book collection that your unit manages?

- 24,999 or fewer volumes
- 25,000 to 49,999 volumes
- 50,000 to 74,999 volumes
- 75,000 to 99,999 volumes
- 100,000 to 249,999 volumes
- 250,000 to 499,999 volumes
- 500,000 to 749,999 volumes
- 750,000 or more volumes

Q6 What is the size of the archival/manuscript collection that your unit manages (linear feet, in thousands)?

0      5      10      15      20      25      30      35      40  
45      50

Q7 By percentage, from what time periods are your collections drawn? (must add up to 100%)

- Pre-1600
- 1600–1799
- 1800–1900
- 1901–present
- Total

Q8 What is your total, typical annual unit budget (from any source) for acquisitions? (select one)

- \$10,000 or less
- \$10,001–\$24,999
- \$25,000–\$49,999
- \$50,000–\$74,999
- \$75,000–\$99,999
- \$100,000–\$124,999
- \$125,000–\$149,999
- \$150,000–\$174,999
- \$175,000–\$199,999
- \$200,000 or more

Q10 By percentage, how are your acquisitions funding sources divided? (your total must add up to 100%)

- Institutional/central funds
- Gift funds
- Grant funds
- Total

Q11 What is your annual unit budget (in thousands of dollars) for staffing?

0      100      200      300      400      500      600      700      800  
900      1,000

Q12 By percentage, from where do you draw your staffing funding sources? (must add up to 100%)

- Institutional/central funds: \_\_\_\_\_
- Gift funds: \_\_\_\_\_
- Grant funds: \_\_\_\_\_
- Total: \_\_\_\_\_

Q13 What is the insurance value of the collections managed in your unit? (select one)

- No insurance valuation available
- Less than \$1 million
- \$1 million to \$9.99 million
- \$10 million to \$29.9 million
- \$30 million to \$49.9 million
- \$50 million to \$69.9 million
- \$70 to \$99.9 million
- \$100 million or more

Q14 How does your unit manage collection circulation tasks? (choose any that apply)

- Paper-based system
- Library management system (Alma, Voyager, etc.)
- Special collections management system (Aeon, etc.)
- Some other system (please describe)

If = Some Other System, Display This Question:

Q30 Please tell us about your circulation system.

Q15 Does your unit have... (select all that apply, per line)

	In the unit	In the organization	Don't have
A disaster plan			
Fire suppression system			
Dedicated security staff			
Standardized security procedures			
Video monitoring			

Q15 Does your unit maintain a reading room/user space for accessing your collections that is open to the public?

- Yes, routinely/ on a set schedule
- Yes, only by appointment
- Affiliated users/members only; it's easy to get guest status
- Affiliated users only

The following questions will help us to better understand the demographics of professionals working in non-ARL rare books and special collections libraries.

Q17 For how long have you been a special collections professional?

- Less than 10 years
- 10–15 years
- 16 or more years

Q18 Were you a first-generation college student?

- Neither of my parents attended college
- One parent attended college but did not complete a degree
- At least one of my parents both attended college and completed a degree
- Both of my parents attended college and completed a degree

Q19 When you accepted your current position, was it through a national search?

- Yes
- No
- Don't remember/ Don't know

Q20 Is there a form of tenure or continuing appointment at your institution?

- Yes, tenure
- Yes, continuing appointment
- No, we have contracts for set periods of time longer than a year
- No, we have at-will employment only

Q21 What type of appointment do you hold?

- Faculty (tenure track/tenured)
- Faculty (non-tenure-track)
- Administrative/professional
- Civil service
- Other

Q22 Are there minimum institutional educational requirements for tenure or continuing appointment?

- Yes, professional master's degree only (Library/Information Science, Museum Studies, etc.)
- Yes, subject master's degree
- Yes, professional master's degree and subject master's degree
- Yes, PhD
- Yes, PhD and professional master's degree
- No requirements beyond bachelor's level
- Other (please indicate)

If Are there minimum institutional educational requirements for tenure or continuing appointment? = Other (please indicate)

Q33 Please elaborate on the requirements for continuing appointment at your institution.

Q26 Would you consider a career move now?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

Skip To: Q27 If Would you consider a career move now? = No

Display This Question:

Q27 If No, why? (select all that apply)

- Happy where I am
- Family reasons
- Not financially feasible
- Lack of appropriate opportunities
- Other (please specify if you wish)

If No, why? (select all that apply) = Other (please specify if you wish)

Q29 Other reasons not to make a career move include...

Q24 What is your racial and ethnic identification (as defined by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission)?

- American Indian or Alaska Native (not Hispanic or Latino)
- Asian (not Hispanic or Latino)
- Black or African American (not Hispanic or Latino)
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (not Hispanic or Latino)
- White (not Hispanic or Latino)
- two or more races (not Hispanic or Latino)
- other (please specify)
- prefer not to answer

If What is your racial and ethnic identification (as defined by the Equal Employment Opportunity Com... = other (please specify)

Q32 Feel free to use this space to further describe your racial and ethnic identification.

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Q23 What is your gender identification? (Select all that apply)

- Male
- Female
- Nonbinary/Gender Nonconforming
- Transgender
- Prefer not to answer

Q28 What is your sexual orientation or identity (select all that apply)?

- Asexual and/or Aromantic (1)
- Bisexual and/or Pansexual (2)
- Gay (3)
- Heterosexual (4)
- Lesbian (5)
- Queer (6)
- Prefer not to answer (7)

Q25 Do you identify as disabled, as a person with disabilities, or as someone living with a chronic condition?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer