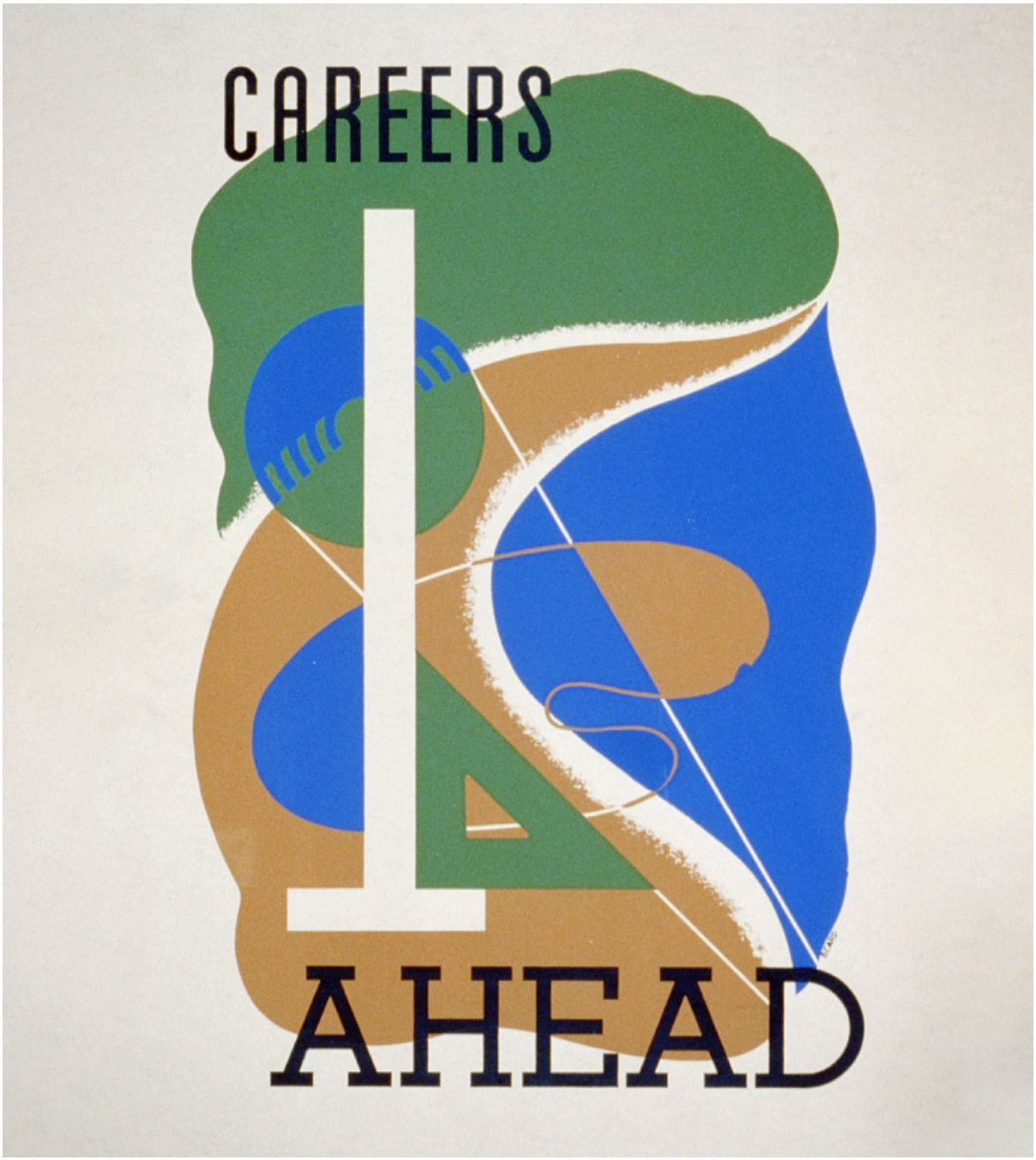
RBM:

A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage

Volume Twenty-six, Number 1, Spring 2025



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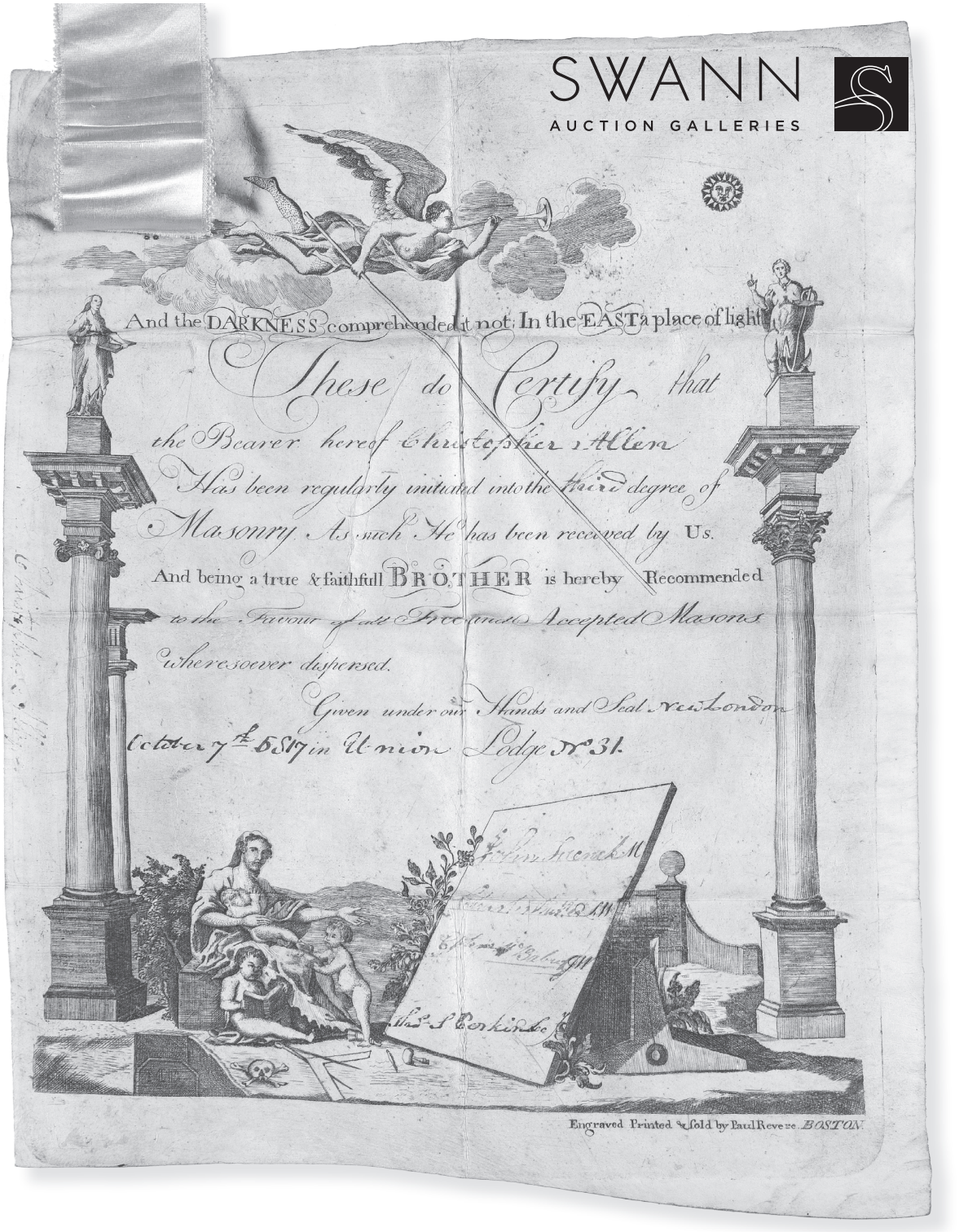

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Cover image: [Artists Unidentified. (signed: Beard).] *Careers Ahead*. [stamped: Sep 7 1939] 1 print on board (poster): silkscreen, color, [dimensions not recorded]. Illinois: Federal Art Project, Works Progress Administration, [1939]. Work Projects Administration Poster Collection (Library of Congress). https://www.loc.gov/item/98517916/

INTERVIEW

UPDATES FROM RBMS

Diane Dias De Fazio

Editor's Note: Work Is Work

In the autumn, my Editor's note was, in part, an accounting of the work we'd done, and a hesitant pledge in uncertain times. Writing in February to be read in May or June now seems less soaked in doubt, though we are awash in uncertainty.

Developing this issue took over a year, and what a difference a year made. This issue brings dauntless authors, who collectively took an honest look at the special collections profession and—despite revealing uncomfortable truths—herein provide pathways, for all of us who nonetheless *want* to *remain* working in archives and special collections, to demand better for ourselves, our colleagues, and the future of the field. Melanie Griffin, Yuzhou Bai, and Ruth Xing helped me critically assess my own workplace, and worth. Perhaps you'll find yourself musing, like I did, "There are still universities advertising special collections and archives jobs that require only a bachelor's degree?" Or: "If more than three studies are published by different organizations, and all of those studies are created by different individuals, and they all use different study participants, but nevertheless all the results *concur*—that contingent, contract, term, and part-time positions are unhealthy and discouraging—why do those roles still exist?"

This issue aimed to be thematic, with articles only on "jobs, recruitment, hiring, and retention," and, in a way, it remains that. Griffin, Bai, and Xing will inform how the field considers attracting new talent and keeping us all from the precipice of burnout and career abandonment. The RBMS Membership and Professional Development Committee's Rebecca Bramlett, Sophia Dahab, Eric Friede, and Michael Seminara asked RBMS members, "Tell Us About Yourself," and (to borrow a phrase) the results will surprise you! Gemma Steele and Hayley Webster reflect on widespread inconsistencies in marking materials to safeguard our collections—that being the ethical, physical, and philosophical work of special collections practitioners. Jen Hoyer's piece expands the definition of "librarian's [writing] work" in that it is not a case study but, rather, marks the return (and reimagining) of interviews to *RBM*, spotlighting an author's investigation of a historic librarian whose name is so familiar we all almost think we knew her: Belle da Costa Greene (1879–1950). Finally, Mara Caelin and Lyric Grimes challenge us to rethink the workplace, those it represents, and our collective reputation, in their abbreviated papers from the annual RBMS conference session, *Power of New Voices*. Rounding out the issue, RBMS Chair Grif-

fin and RBMS25 conference co-chairs Beth Kilmarx and Jeremy Brett (who is also a Board member) provide updates. This issue declares, again, that our Section has something to say, and we are willing risk-takers who strive to do what's right (also: some of us are tired).

My ACRL Editorial colleague, Kristen Totleben, provided an inspiring Editor's note in a recent issue of *C & RL,* where she outlined the work of an Editor and Editorial Board within our parent division of ALA. The following borrows from that transparent offering.

Selected Accomplishments, 2024–2025

- Your Friendly Neighborhood Editor, along with *RBM*'s Reviews Editor John Henry Adams, coordinated and participated in an online panel that brought together publishing leadership from the American Printing History Association (APHA), the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading & Publishing (SHARP), *Papers of the Bibliographic Society of America*, and *Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library Information Practice and Research*.
- The Editor and Reviews Editor presented a virtual poster at RBMS 2024 designed to present a forum for early-career professionals interested in publishing.
- Updated submissions guidelines were added to rbm.acrl.org, with specifications for image quantities and word counts.

Selected ACRL Work Plan Activities, 2024–2025

- Sarah Allison and Joel Minor volunteered to coordinate a subcommittee to document processes at *RBM*. As part of that subcommittee's work, sharing the submission evaluation rubric is under development, as is a draft scorecard.
- Jolie Braun, Margaret Gamm, Alison Fraser, and Fiona Kovacaj volunteered to coordinate an editorial board subcommittee to create, implement, and provide results of a reader survey. The survey was reviewed by ACRL before it went live in April, and the subcommittee will make their report publicly available soon.
- Jennifer Gunter King and Virginia Sytsma volunteered to work with RBMS social media to expand *RBM*'s outreach efforts, so tell your friends to follow RBMS on BlueSky!

Future Plans

- *RBM* is creating a stance on generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). By the time this issue goes to print, we will have had one open meeting to discuss identifying priorities and policy.
- I hope to facilitate a workshop for early-career special collections librarians and archivists on writing effective scholarly abstracts and conference proposals.

- Finally, house style idiosyncrasies aside, we will continue to refer to the large body of water south of Louisiana, west of Florida, and northeast of the Yucatan as the "Gulf of Mexico," and we will continue to provide a home for conversation-provoking scholarship. 'Til next we read again!

Correction

A book review in the print version of *RBM* volume 25, no. 2 misspelled the surname of the book's author. His name is Georgios Boudalis, not Boulais.

The Editor recognizes an ethical responsibility to promptly correct all factual errors, large and small, and encourages you to contact us if you think you see a mistake. Messages can be sent to diane.diasdefazio@gmail.com. To learn more about how corrections are handled, readers are encouraged to view a similar page by the New York Times *at https://www.nytimes.com/article/new-york-times-corrections.html.*

CONTRIBUTORS

Yuzhou Bai is a Special Collections Librarian and Archivist based in Massachusetts. He holds a PhD in East Asian Studies from Princeton University and is an MLIS student at Indiana University, Indianapolis.

Rebecca Bramlett is the Instruction and Outreach Archivist in the Department of Distinctive Collections at MIT Libraries. She holds a MA from the University of Chicago, a MLIS from Florida State University, and is a 2023 M.C. Lang Fellow in Book History, Bibliography, and Humanities Teaching with Historical Sources from Rare Book School.

Mara Caelin is a Catalog and Metadata Librarian at Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. She holds an MS in Library and Information Science from Simmons University and an MA in American Studies from the George Washington University. She is the metadata lead for the Black Bibliography Project. Her interests include reparative metadata, rare book cataloging, and linked data.

Sophia Dahab (she/her) is Curator of the Rare Book Department at the Free Library of Philadelphia. She has over ten years' experience in the rare books and special collections field, having previously worked at the Library Company of Philadelphia, University of the Arts, and the Grolier Club of New York. Her research interests are the material culture of the book and bookbinding history, with particular focus on nineteenth-century American publishers' bindings. She lives in Philadelphia with her husband and two cats, runs marathons for fun, and thinks chili should always be served with a cinnamon roll on the side.

Eric Friede is the Head of Acquisitions at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. He has previously held roles at Yale Library's Technical Services Department and Yale Divinity Library. He is a member of the RBMS Membership and Professional Development Committee. His interests include acquisitions of rare materials and provenance research.

Melanie Griffin is the Chair of Archives & Special Collections at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Libraries. She was the Director of Special Collections Services and Interim Associate Dean for Special Collections at the University of Arkansas at the time of administering the survey discussed in this issue. She holds a PhD in Literacy Studies with an emphasis in children's literature and an MLIS. Her research interests include the history and practice of special collections librarianship.

Lyric Grimes is a PhD student at the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Her research explores trauma and harm in library settings, emphasizing the patron's perspective. She focuses on trauma-informed care and integrating social work principles in libraries to create more supportive, inclusive environments. Lyric aims to bridge the gap between library services and social care through her work, advocating for policies and practices prioritizing patron well-being. Her interdisciplinary approach seeks to enhance the role of libraries as safe, accessible spaces for all community members.

Jen Hoyer is Technical Services and Electronic Resources Librarian at CUNY New York City College of Technology. Her passion for giving access to and teaching with visual culture is exemplified in *What Primary Sources Teach: Lessons for Every Archive* (2022). Her scholarship appeared in *American Archivist, Archival Issues, Radical Teacher*, and the *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*. Jen most recently co-edited *Armed By Design: Posters and Publications of Cuba's Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America* (Common Notions, 2025). She is a facilitation team member of TPS Collective and a host on New Books Network.

Michael Seminara is the Curator of the Historical Collection of the Institute of the History of Medicine at Johns Hopkins.

Gemma Steele is an experienced librarian with a demonstrated history of working in the special and academic library sectors with rare books and special collections, with a particular focus on metadata, description, collection management, and library marketing. Skilled in research, Gemma is a strong education professional with a double master's degree focused on information management, business, and marketing (https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3220-9293).

Hayley Webster is Manager, Library at Museums Victoria, where she oversees a rare book collection with a strength in eighteenth and nineteenth century natural history titles. Hayley is current Convenor of the Australian Library and Information Association's Rare Books and Special Collections Special Interest Group. Her research interests include the history of the Museums Victoria Library, rare natural history books and special collections librarianship (https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3719-6134).

Ruth Xing is a Research and Instruction Librarian based in Connecticut. Ruth holds an MS in Library and Information Science from Syracuse University and dual BA degrees in Psychology and English from Cornell University.

Melanie Griffin

"Some Days, My Work Is Unbearable": The Impact of Chronic Illness and Disability on Recruitment and Retention for Workers in American Archival Repositories and Special Collections Libraries[1]

This survey-based article explores how chronic illness and disability impacts workers in archives and special collections, and focuses on how these individuals experience recruitment, retention, and working life in the United States. At the cultural level, it explores how the profession can create inclusive environments that enable all practitioners, including those with physical, mental, and neurological illness and/or disability, to enter, remain, and flourish in the field. The paper concludes with suggestions for systemic, structural change based on participant responses.

Introduction

Archival and special collections librarianship literature of the past two decades includes an increasing emphasis on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Accessibility-focused literature, however, primarily focuses on user services in archives and special collections. A nascent body of literature investigates the intersection between accessibility, disability, and library workers. Through explorations of lived experiences of information professionals with chronic illnesses and/or disabilities,[2] this study considers how employers might make spaces, services, and policies more equitable and inclusive for workers. This study builds on these topics, focusing on US-based archives and special collections workers and exploring how they experience recruitment, retention, and working life. At the individual level, this study seeks to understand how chronic illness and other disabling conditions affect career paths and working lives in special collections and archives. At the cultural level, the study's

1. A version of this article was presented by the author, under the title, "The Impact of Chronic Illness and Disability on Careers in Special Collections Libraries and Archives," as part of the RBMS 2023 conference.

2. This article predominantly employs person-first language to describe the experience of individuals with disabilities, due to my own preference and the importance of this practice in my own life. I acknowledge, however, the wide range of descriptions possible, and that not all people with disabilities or chronic illnesses use person-first language when describing themselves.

findings explore how the profession can promote systemic change that enables all practitioners—including those with disabilities or chronic illness[3]—to enter, remain, and flourish.

Personal and Professional Positionalities

Following Michelle Caswell, I value knowledge gained through lived experience.[4] I acknowledge how lived experience shapes my understanding of the relationship between disability, chronic illness, the archival and special collections labor market, and my research on this topic. For these reasons, I share this positionality statement: I identify as having a primarily physical, primarily invisible disability that I have had for over ten years. I have worked in the field for between ten and twenty years and am employed full-time at an academic institution where I perform chiefly administrative duties. Before I started this study in 2022, I never voluntarily disclosed my disability unless it demonstrably impacted my work. I never requested an accommodation, primarily because I witnessed negative repercussions in my immediate work environment when others did so. I changed jobs due, at least in part, to my disability rather than asking for an accommodation. This research project reflects my desire to explore accessibility in the field with more data than my lived experience offers and to effect change, making the profession more accessible for workers with chronic illness and/or disability.

This article's origins are not purely personal. Both the Society of American Archivists (SAA) and the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) took important steps in promoting accessibility in the profession. The ACRL Code of Ethics for Special Collections Librarians, revised in 2020, states: "[Special Collections] practitioners work to recruit and retain a diverse and representative staff . . . regardless of . . . disability. . . . They actively strive to dismantle systems of oppression in institutional and professional spaces."[5] Similarly, in its Guidelines for Accessible Archives for People with Disabilities, endorsed in 2019, SAA addresses archivists' workplaces, noting that "accessibility is a vital element in promoting the archival profession's values of diversity, equity, and inclusion."[6] SAA also includes an active Accessibility and Disability Section, a membership group where "people with disabilities and their allies can learn from each other, share resources, and promote accessibility and disability representation

3. See Appendix A.
4. Michelle Caswell, "Dusting for Fingerprints: Introducing Feminist Standpoint Appraisal," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 3, no. 2 (2021): 3, https://doi.org/10.24242/jclis.v3i2.113.
5. "ACRL Code of Ethics for Special Collections Librarians," Rare Books and Manuscripts Section, 2020, https://rbms.info/standards/code_of_ethics/
6. Society of American Archivists, "Guidelines for Accessible Archives for People with Disabilities," February 2019, 8–9, https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/SAA%20Guidelines%20for%20Accessible%20Archives%20for%20People%20with%20Disabilities_2019_0.pdf

across the archival field."[7] Despite these guidelines and best practices, demographic information suggests that the field has room for improvement in terms of accessibility for workers with chronic illnesses or disabilities.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that one in six people worldwide have a disability (16% of the global population, approximately 1.3 billion people).[8] The CDC estimates that one in four Americans (25%) have a disability[9] and that 60% of adults in the US have at least one chronic illness.[10] Professional association member surveys provide similar demographic information for archivists and special collections librarians with disabilities.[11] Although RBMS member surveys, conducted in 2015[12] and 2023,[13] did not include questions about disability or accessibility within the profession, a 2017 survey of American Library Association (ALA) membership found 2.91% reported having a disability.[14] A*Census II, a 2022 survey of "archivists and community memory workers" in the United States, found 16% reported having a disability.[15] These demographics suggest that librarians and archivists with disabilities[16] are either underrepresented, or chose not to self-report at rates higher than expected given available data from the CDC and the WHO.

My lived experiences, alongside the publication of RBMS and SAA documents calling for increased accessibility in the profession, inspired me to design a study exploring the following research questions: How does disability or chronic illness impact careers in special collections and archives, especially in recruitment, the hiring process, and retention? How can the archives and special collections profession promote systemic, structural support that enables all practitioners to enter and flourish in the field?

7. Society of American Archivists Accessibility and Disability Section, "Welcome to the Accessibility & Disability Section!" https://www2.archivists.org/groups/accessibility-and-disability-section

8. World Health Organization, "Disability,"2023, https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health

9. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Disability Impacts All of Us," updated July 2024, https://www.cdc.gov/disability-and-health/articles-documents/disability-impacts-all-of-us-infographic.html

10. This includes, but is not limited to heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and asthma. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "About Chronic Diseases," October 4, 2024, https://www.cdc.gov/chronic-disease/about/index.html

11. "Disability" was the term used in the surveys.

12. Rare Books and Manuscript Section membership and Professional Development Committee, "2015 Membership Survey: Data Report," https://rbms.info/files/committees/membership_and_professional/2015_RBMSDataReport.pdf

13. Rebecca Bramlett, email message to author, December 6, 2024. See Rebecca Bramlett et al., "Moving Forward: Membership and the Future of RBMS," *RBM: a Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage*, 26, no. 1 (2025): 50–51.

14. Kathy Rosa and Kelsey Henke, "2017 ALA Demographic Study," ALA Office for Research and Statistics, 2017, http://hdl.handle.net/11213/19804.

15. Makala Skinner and Ioana G. Hulbert, "A*CENSUS II All Archivists Survey Report," Ithaka S+R, August 22, 2022, https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.317224.

16. Again, as "chronic illness" was not included in the survey, one can only speculate about individuals who so self-identify.

Literature Review

Scant literature explores the intersection of disability, chronic illness, and working as an archivist or special collections library practitioner.[17] The earliest considerations of disability and accommodations in the archival and special collections literature predate the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), but focus on access considerations for repositories as they serve *users* with disabilities.[18] This approach maintains a strong presence in scholarship, including explorations of archival repositories' website accessibility,[19] creating accessible outreach services,[20] assessment of physical and intellectual barriers to access for disabled communities,[21] and use of digital surrogates to promote accessibility of collections.[22]

Some literature explores the inclusion of disability in archival collections, in conversation with processing and access decisions. One strand of research explores the remediation of archival silences around disability, created via hegemonic collection development and descriptive practices.[23] Others disrupt traditional practices by documenting archival erasures of disability vis-à-vis feminist disability and user studies,[24]

17. I wrote this article in the fall of 2024, and it underwent peer review in January 2025. Therefore, this article does not reflect or engage with executive orders issued on or after January 20, 2025, related to accessibility.

18. Lance J. Fischer, "The Deaf and Archival Research: Some Problems and Solutions," *American Archivist*, 42, no. 4 (1979): 464–468; Brenda Kepley, "Archives: Accessibility for the Disabled," *American Archivist* 46, no. 1 (1983): 42–51.

19. Lora Davis, "Providing Virtual Services to All: A Mixed-Method Analysis of the Website Accessibility of Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries (PACSCL) Member Repositories," *American Archivist*, 75, no. 1 (2012): 35–55, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.75.1.a716w067468262h5

20. Kevin M. O'Sullivan and Gia Alexander, "Toward Inclusive Outreach: What Special Collections Can Learn from Disability Studies," *RBM: a Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage*, 21, no. 1 (2020): 11–25, https://doi.org/10.5860/rbm.21.1.11

21. Gracen Brilmyer, "'They Weren't Necessarily Designed with Lived Experiences of Disability in Mind:' The Affect of Archival In/Accessibility and 'Emotionally Expansive' Spatial Un/Belonging," *Archivaria*, 94, December (2022): 120–153, https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13869

22. Clare Withers et al., "Advancements in Primary Source Pedagogy: Catalysts for Collaboration, Context, and Change," *RBM: a Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage*, 24, no. 2 (2023): 112–128. https://doi.org/10.5860/rbm.24.2.112

23. Penny L. Richards, "Online Museums, Exhibits, and Archives of American History," *The Public Historian*, 27, no. 2 (2005): 91–100, https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2005.27.2.91; Laurie Block, "'An Invented Archive:' The Disability History Museum," *RBM: a Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage*, 8, no. 2 (2017): 141–154, https://doi.org/10.5860/rbm.8.2.288; Meghan Rinn, "Nineteenth-Century Depictions of Disabilities and Modern Metadata: A Consideration of Material in the P.T. Barnum Digital Collection," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*, 5, Article 1 (2018): [unnumbered], https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol5/iss1/1; Anne Ricculli, "Curating History in the COVID19 Era: Philadelphia Epidemics and Nineteenth-Century American Women's Medical Education," *RBM: a Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage*, 22, no. 1 (2021): 45–52, https://doi.org/10.5860/rbm.22.1.45

24. Gracen Mikus Brilmyer, "'I'm Also Prepared to Not Find Me. It's Great When I Do, But It Doesn't Hurt If I Don't:' Crip Time and Anticipatory Erasure for Disabled Archival Users," *Archival Science*, 22 (2022): 167–188, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-021-09372-1

political/relational models for interrogating descriptive practices,[25] and negotiating new understandings of disability and archival practice through a critical disability studies framework during appraisal, arrangement, and description.[26]

Common throughout is the absence of lived experiences of workers. Research centering archivists and librarians with disabilities foregrounds legal requirements, such as Gilardi's summary of the ADA and considerations of its impact on archival repositories as employers.[27] A more recently published example provides a descriptive overview of invisible disabilities and the concurrent legal requirements for accommodation in the United States alongside strategies for allyship and recommendations for managers.[28]

Until the mid-2010s, library and information science (LIS) literature likewise focused on meeting information needs of users with disabilities, despite an early call to make the profession more inclusive through hiring practices and public-facing services.[29] In a content analysis of disability- and accessibility-related LIS literature published between 2000 and 2010, Hill finds emphases on surveying website accessibility, and describing and assessing services to persons with disabilities.[30] Early research on the effect of library recruitment and employment practices on workers with disabilities focuses on ways that systems intersect with disability in the workplace, and not, typically, on the ways in which individuals experience and live within those systems. These studies include legal descriptions,[31] recommendations for employers and managers as they navigate the accommodations process,[32] a consideration of disability

25. Gracen Brilmyer, "Archival Assemblages: Applying Disability Studies' Political/Relational Model to Archival Description," *Archival Science*, 18, no. 2 (2018): 95–118, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-018-9287-6

26. Sara White, "Crippling the Archives: Negotiating Notions of Disability in Appraisal and Arrangement and Description," *American Archivist*, 71, no. 1 (2012): 109–124, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.75.1.c53h4712017n4728

27. Ronald Gilardi, "The Archival Setting and People with Disabilities: A Legal Analysis," *American Archivist*, 56, no. 4, (1993): 704–713, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40293776

28. Ann Abney et al., "Understanding the Unseen: Invisible Disabilities in the Workplace," *American Archivist* 85, no. 1 (2022): 88–103, https://doi.org/10.17723/2327-9702-85.1.88.

29. Cara Barlow, "On My Mind: Don't Just Serve People with Disabilities—Hire Them," *American Libraries* 26, no. 8 (1995): 772.

30. Heather Hill, "Disability and Accessibility in the Library and Information Science Literature: A Content Analysis," *Library & Information Science Research* 35, no. 2 (2013): 137–42. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2012.11.002

31. Jodi Johnstone, "Employment of Disabled Persons in the Academic Library Environment," *Australian Library Journal* 54, no. 2 (2005): 156–163, https://doi.org/10.1080/00049670.2005.10721743

32. Anne-Marie O'Neill and Christine Urquhart, "Accommodating Employees with Disabilities: Perceptions of Irish Academic Library Managers," *New Review of Academic Librarianship* 17, no. 2 (2011): 234–258, https://doi.org/10.1080/13614533.2011.593852; Samantha Cook and Kristina Clement, "Navigating the Hidden Void: The Unique Challenges of Accommodating Library Employees with Invisible Disabilities," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 45, no. 5 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2019.02.010. Jessica Schomberg, "Disability at Work: Libraries, Built to Exclude." In *Politics and Theory of Critical Librarianship*, ed. Karen P. Nicholson and Maura Seale (Library Juice Press, 2018): 111–123.

justice and library values,[33] and theoretical explorations of systemic barriers found in cultures of resilience.[34]

Increasingly, LIS studies consider lived experiences of librarians with chronic illnesses and/or disabilities and explore solutions for systemic barriers through autoethnographies, or self-studies that interrogate lived experience(s) to generate understanding of cultural experiences.[35] Examples range widely and include: an author with a disability suggesting improvements to libraries as workplaces for employees with disabilities,[36] the impact of an invisible disability on growth and practice as a leader in academic libraries,[37] the importance of failure in information work,[38] requesting accommodations under the ADA and the impact of not being believed during that process,[39] the ethical challenges associated with "passing" as able-bodied,[40] and the cognitive costs of working in the LIS field—which seemingly glorifies vocational awe and resilience—as a person with a disability.[41]

Researchers also introduced a shift in survey- and interview-based research, foregrounding the impact on careers in libraries for individuals with chronic illnesses or disabilities. The earliest example, published in 2018, explored satisfaction rates of Canadian academic librarians with their jobs and workplace environments,[42] and subsequent survey-based studies center voices and experiences of librarians with disabilities. A qualitative survey articulates systemic workplace barriers, with findings that suggest impediments arise from lack of awareness and cultural stereotyping of library workers with disabilities.[43] Other survey-based studies center librarians with disabilities describing themselves

33. Alana Kumbier and Julia Starkey, "Access is Not Problem Solving: Disability Justice and Libraries," *Library Trends* 63, no. 3 (2016): 468–491, https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/lib.2016.0004
34. Christine M. Moeller, "Disability, Identity, and Professionalism: Precarity in Librarianship," *Library Trends* 67, no. 3 (2019): 455–470, https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/lib.2019.0006.
35. Carolyn Ellis et al., "Autoethnography: An Overview," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 1, no. 12 (2011): https://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589
36. Schomberg, "Disability at Work."
37. Jessica Olin, "My (Library) Life with Invisible Disabilities," *Letters to a Young Librarian* (blog), October 8, 2015, http://letterstoayounglibrarian.blogspot.com/2015/10/my-library-life-with-invisible.html
38. Gina Schlesselman-Tarango, "Reproductive Failure and Information Work: An Autoethnography," *Library Trends* 67, no. 3 (2019): 436–454, https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/lib.2019.0005
39. J. J. Pionke, "The Impact of Disbelief: On Being a Library Employee with a Disability," *Library Trends* 67, no. 3 (2019): 423–435, https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/lib.2019.0004
40. Shanna Hollich, "What It Means for a Disabled Librarian to 'Pass': An Autoethnographic Exploration of Inclusion, Identity, and Information Work," *International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion* 4, no. 1 (2020): 94–107, https://doi.org/10.33137/ijidi.v4i1.32440
41. Amelia M. Anderson, "Exploring the Workforce Experience of Autistic Librarians through Accessible and Participatory Approaches," *Library & Information Science Research* 43, no. 2 (2021): https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2021.101088
42. Joanne Oud, "Academic Librarians with Disabilities: Job Perceptions and Factors Influencing Positive Workplace Experiences," *Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research* 13, no. 1 (2018), https://doi.org/10.21083/partnership.v13i1.4090
43. Joanne Oud, "Systemic Workplace Barriers for Academic Librarians with Disabilities," *College & Research Libraries* 80, no. 2 (2019): 169–193, https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.80.2.169

and reflecting on their experiences working in libraries,[44] and academic librarians and archivists with "invisible illnesses and/or disabilities" describing their experiences.[45] This survey-based research provided an important framework for this article: it provides a community of practice in which to situate this survey of affected workers, and it provides inspiration for the methodological framework, explored below.

Methodology

In February of 2023,[46] I conducted a web-based survey of archivists and special collections librarians who self-identify as having a chronic illness or disability, using definitions drawn from the ADA and CDC.[47] Following practices modeled by Oud[48] and Quirin Manwiller, Anderson, Crozier, and Peter;[49] this survey used a methodology that allowed participants to remain completely anonymous and that required as little cognitive or physical energy as possible for respondents. The web-based survey primarily used Likert-scale questions coupled with three open-ended prompts, and the questions were inspired by those asked in the survey instruments centering the experiences of librarians with chronic illnesses and/or disabilities cited in this paper's literature review. I advertised the study on various professional listservs and discussion boards as well as social media,[50] and the survey tool was available for one month. Although designed to allow complete anonymity, the survey collected limited demographic information, including type of institution at which respondents worked, length of time in the field, employment status, and the type(s) and duration of chronic illness and/or disability. (See Appendix A.)

This article analyzes two types of data. Quantitative data produced from Likert-scale questions defines the ecosystem in which participants live and work. An open-ended coding strategy explores data from the open-ended questions and provides information on participants' lived experiences. The purpose is to use the data to answer the study's specific research questions, noted earlier.

44. Robin Brown and Scott Sheidlower, "Claiming Our Space: A Quantitative and Qualitative Picture of Disabled Librarians," *Library Trends* 67, no. 3 (2019): 471–486, https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/lib.2019.0007

45. Katelyn Quirin Manwiller et al., "Hidden Barriers: The Experience of Academic Librarians and Archivists with Invisible Illnesses and/or Disabilities," *College & Research Libraries* 84, no. 5 (2023): 645–677, https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.84.5.645

46. This project was reviewed and determined exempt by the University of Arkansas IRB, protocol number 2011295958.

47. These definitions are imperfect and limiting, but using the legal terminology that governs American access to employment enables explorations of systemic barriers and suggests avenues for potential structural rather than individual change.

48. Oud, "Systemic Workplace Barriers."

49. Quirin Manwiller et al., "Hidden Barriers."

50. Listservs and discussion boards included the Society of Southwest Archivists, Ex-Libris-L, SAA, and the SAA Accessibility and Disability Section. Social media channels included personal Facebook and Twitter accounts. The Accessibility and Disability Section of SAA's Twitter channel cross-posted.

Results

About the Participants

Sixty-nine individuals participated, and sixty-three respondents met the study's inclusion criteria: the participant must self-identify as working in the archives and special collections field and as having a chronic illness and/or disability.[51] The majority were employed at an academic institution (62%), followed by museums (8%), independent research libraries and archives (5%), public libraries (5%), corporate libraries and archives (3%), government institutions (3%), religious orders (3%), and 10% selected "other" type of workplace.[52] Ninety-one percent reported working in the field for over five years; 43% worked in the field for ten years or more. Eighty-nine percent reported full-time employment and listed a wide range of work that they performed (Table 1).

TABLE 1

Responses to the question, "I perform the following type(s) of work in special collections libraries or archives: (select all that apply)."

Job Duties Performed	Number of Respondents[a]
Processing	48
Research services	39
Cataloging	36
Accessioning	35
Collection development	32
Outreach and programming	31
Donor engagement and management	28
Digital preservation	27
Preservation and/or conservation	27
Administration	26
Digitization	26
Exhibition development	26
Instruction	21

[a] Total number does not equal 63 as participants selected all options that applied.

51. As only questions establishing inclusion criteria were required, response rates to individual questions varies from sixty-three throughout this discussion.

52. Includes consulting companies, membership libraries, educational but not academic institutions, and religious orders in academic institutions. Percentage reported does not equal one hundred due to rounding in this and all similar instances throughout the study.

Recruitment and Job Search

Participants noted if their chronic illness and/or disability affected their job searches and, if so, how. Sixty-seven percent (n = 40) participants indicated that their chronic illness and/or disability affected their job searches,[53] with a further 15% (n = 9) indicating that it might. Eighteen percent (n = 11) responded that chronic illness and/or disability had no impact. The ways in which participants experienced an effect on job searches included considerations of benefits packages, types of institutions, employment status of the position, work schedule, physical requirements, location, availability of medical specialists, and ability to work from home.

Participants also provided insight into if chronic illness and/or disability affected the specific types of work for which they applied. Responses to this quantitative question ranged widely: 39% (n = 24) replied that their chronic illness and/or disability affected the types of work for which they applied, 29% (n = 17) replied that it might, and 33% (n = 20) responded that it did not. Participants reflected further in response to an open-ended question on how chronic illness and/or disability impacts the types of work for which they applied. The inductive coding process used revealed three categories for analysis: physical, mental health, and structural considerations. Respondents most frequently mentioned assessing physical considerations when deciding if they would apply. Some mentioned avoiding positions that require long periods of standing, manual dexterity, or work such as pushing, pulling, or lifting. Respondents noted that buildings without elevators could deter them from applying, and many noted avoiding rigid scheduling, particularly around mealtimes, arrival and departure times, in-office work, and/or extensive travel.

Respondents mentioned mental health and structural considerations at roughly equal rates. Responses coded as "mental health considerations" included budgeting known causes of anxiety with job requirements and avoiding tenure-track, public service, and/or management positions due to associated stress levels. Responses coded as "structural considerations" related to benefits and the infrastructure required to manage long-term care needs. Specific examples include checking benefits availability and coverage before applying; applying for positions that provide adequate sick leave and flexible scheduling options; and seeking positions in geographic locations with the specialist medical care required to manage complex conditions. Finally, participants noted structural issues related to the job such as office environments, environmental conditions, and administrative practices that could exacerbate difficulties managing chronic illness and/or disability.

53. Options presented throughout findings are quoted directly from survey instrument.

Accommodations and Disclosure

Accommodations, as defined and mandated by ADA Title 1,[54] exist to provide structural supports that allow individuals with disabilities to access and succeed in employment opportunities. Although most participants had lived with their chronic illness or disability for over five years, over half (54%, n = 33) reported that they had not requested workplace accommodations. By far the most reported reason (73%, n = 24) for avoiding accommodations requests was: "I don't want to ask unless I absolutely have to," followed by: "I don't know what to ask for" (42%, n = 14), and: "I am afraid of negative impacts on my job" (33%, n = 11). Only two participants indicated they requested an accommodation during the interview process.

Requesting formal accommodations is possible only with disclosure. However, survey participants indicated reluctance to disclose in the workplace. Thirty-three participants reported disclosing to their direct supervisor; twenty of the thirty-three who reported disclosing to their supervisor did so only "when illness and/or disability impacted work." After "direct supervisor," respondents indicated they were most likely to disclose to "colleagues [they] consider friends outside of work." Participants reluctantly disclosed to Human Resources (10, or ≅ 16% of all participants) and ADA coordinators (3, or ≅ 5%). One participant elaborated:

> if you report your mental illness to HR, etc., everything turns into a question of whether you are at risk of harming yourself or others. . . . So, I make sure no one knows about my lifelong struggle with a mental illness, but it's exhausting to cover it all the time.

Another participant wrote: "The ADA accommodation process was gaslighting and abusive and it needs to change." These responses provide insight into why disclosure and accommodations request rates are low.

Retention

Participants noted that they stayed in positions they otherwise wished to leave, to avoid triggers for their chronic illness and/or disability. Nevertheless, over half of respondents considered leaving their jobs (53%, or 33), and 32% changed jobs, in part, because of their chronic illness and/or disability. The top reasons cited for considering and/or changing jobs were "seeking a more accommodating work environment" (38%, or 24), followed by "unable to perform job duties," and "other" (14%, or 9 each). Under "other," participants noted reduction in benefits, toxic work environments, discrimination, and leaving before chronic illness and/

54. Office of Disability Employment Policy, "Accommodations," U.S. Department of Labor, https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/employers/accommodations

or disability rendered their position impossible without accommodations. One participant reflected:

> in my current digital archives job, I don't have to lift things or walk much, and so I can mostly hide the symptoms of my condition from others. People have noticed sometimes, and offer sympathy/pity, which I think is kindly meant but I don't like it. It makes me feel like they see me as broken in some way, which is why I try to hide it instead.

Another participant noted that "with a chronic illness, I have many different care providers, and moving is not easy and wait times to see a new specialist are long. Long waits could negatively impact my health in the future." Illuminating the health care balancing acts required by survey participants illustrates reasons for both remaining in and leaving positions.

Although participants were hesitant to request accommodations, they provided insight into what accommodations would make their current position more accessible. Open, inductive coding of responses to the question "if you could change one thing about your job to make it more accommodating and accessible for you, what would you change?" revealed four thematic clusters: scheduling flexibility, physical changes, structural changes, and professional interpersonal relationships. Scheduling flexibility, including flexible work locations and hours, was cited by eighteen of the forty participants who responded to this question. Nine participants noted that physical changes would make their jobs more accessible, including turning off fluorescent lighting; access to a private office to use text-to-speech software; help with driving; storing cubic foot records boxes on lower shelves; and using more, smaller boxes for collections storage. Seven participants indicated structural changes, including permanent, benefited positions rather than contract work, improvements to the accommodation process, and affordable health insurance premiums. Three participants desired changes in interpersonal relationships, including clear communication norms around disclosure and more understanding bosses and colleagues.

Moving Forward: Suggestions for Making the Field Accessible

Participants shared a range of experiences in response to this survey. One participant noted: "having a physical disability has had almost no impact on [my] working in special collections and archives—it has impacted my career choice and living choices, but I feel fortunate to work in a profession that has shown only accommodation and understanding for my needs." Another wrote, "for my particular set of issues, I've found archives to be a very supportive and positive work environment." Other participants reported the opposite: bosses and colleagues who they felt did not take accommodation requests seriously, "gaslighting" accommodation processes, losing

jobs due to chronic illness, and not requesting accommodations for fear of negative repercussions. One participant noted that "some days, my work is unbearable … let's face it, the archives world and academic institutions are set up for able-bodied people." Another questioned their place in the field, noting: "I'm autistic and newly in a managerial position, and I am just always exhausted from trying to figure out the people around me. Maybe it's a sign I'm not suited for management in archives."

This dichotomy of experiences serves as a useful reminder that the analytical approach in this article centers commonalities in the data set and specifically considers system-wide implications, rather than individual. The commonalities do not to suggest that workers in archives and special collections who experience chronic illness and/or disability form a monolith. Rather, they highlight trends where systemic, structural change would benefit the field's practices; these, in turn, would benefit individuals, who experience chronic illness, disability, and employment differently.

A significant area for necessary systemic change suggested by responses to this survey is the accommodations process. No American workplace is required *only* to allow ADA requests; institutions can and should go above and beyond the legal baseline of the ADA to make archives and special collections more accessible workplaces. As shown by this survey, workers tend not to ask for accommodations unless absolutely necessary, due to fear of reprisal and/or prior negative experiences with the system. Additionally, the ADA process foregrounds bureaucracy and legal requirements and has a negative reputation. Institutions and individual supervisors in archives and special collections should know this and adjust their practices accordingly. Managers can make "flexibility" and "accommodation" watchwords of work culture, rather than the result of special requests. This survey particularly underscores the necessity of making more accessible interview processes a default, as only two of sixty-three participants requested an accommodation at the interview stage.

Participants also reported feelings of fearing disbelief. Supervisors can and should believe employees when they request accommodations to make their jobs more accessible. When they receive formal requests, supervisors can believe in the necessity of the request, and advocate for the employee with the ADA Office. Supervisors can support their employees making vulnerable requests in a bureaucratic process that all too often focuses on limiting liability for the institution rather than meeting an individual's needs.

Participants highlighted the care-related challenges associated with moving and changes jobs. Archival repositories and special collections libraries must stop relying on term-limited contracts and positions without benefits. Previous research indicates

how these positions are detrimental to everyone,[55] and this study demonstrates how they create barriers and risks for practitioners with chronic illness and/or disability. Contingent appointments do not provide the stability for benefits or access to care necessary for workers with chronic illness and/or disability, which actively contributes to the perpetuation of a system built on inequity.

Conclusion

This survey adds to research documenting the need for more accessible workplace practices through an exploration of lived experiences in special collections and archives. The recommendations suggested by such experiences are not easy. They require systemic changes that must often take place in institutions where the special collections library or archival repository is not the decision-maker for human-resources-related policy. This survey's participants illustrate how they have made accommodations for institutions for years—sometimes for entire careers. The profession can and should assume that burden. The alternative is to say the quiet part out loud: this profession is not accessible to people with chronic illnesses and/or disabilities, and creating a truly accessible, equitable, and inclusive field is a shared value in name only.

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55. Micha Broadnax et al., "New England Archivists Contingent Employment Study Report to the Executive Board, January 2017," *New England Archivists*, 2018. https://www.newenglandarchivists.org/resources/Documents/Inclusion_Diversity/NEA%20Contingent%20Employment%20Study%20Final%20Report%202018-08.pdf; Stephanie Bredbenner et al., "'The Career Does Not Love You Back:' Impacts of Contingent Employment on Workers, Cultural Heritage Institutions, and the Archival Profession," *American Archivist* 87, no. 1 (2024): 131–154, https://doi.org/10.17723/2327-9702-87.1.131

Appendix A: Survey Instrument

The Impact of Chronic Illness and Disability on Careers in Special Collections Libraries and Archives

You are invited to participate in a research survey about the impact that having a chronic illness and/or disability has on your career as a special collections librarian and/or archivist. The study is conducted by Melanie Griffin, Director of Special Collections Services at the University of Arkansas in compliance with IRB standards. Please contact Melanie (melanieg@uark.edu) if you have any questions about the survey.

To participate, you must be 18 years or older, a current employee at a special collections library or archive, and self-identify as having a chronic illness and/or disability. If you decide to participate, understand that participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any point without penalty. You can choose not to participate. There is no cost associated with participating in this study, and you will not receive compensation for participating. At the conclusion of the study, you have the right to request feedback about the results by contacting the researcher.

This study consists of an online survey. The survey will ask questions about your current employment status as well as questions related to your experiences working with chronic illness and/or disability while working in a special collections library or archives. It should take 10-15 minutes to complete the survey.

These questions may make you feel uncomfortable, and you may have a negative emotional reaction to them. If you find that the survey makes you uncomfortable, you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time.

All information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by applicable State and Federal law. Data will be anonymized before analysis, and results will only be presented in the aggregate. Records will be stored on secure university servers.

You may also contact the University of Arkansas Research Compliance office listed below if you have questions about your rights as a participant, or to discuss any concerns about or problems with the research:

Ro Windwalker, CIP
Institutional Review Board Coordinator
irb@uark.edu

By clicking "I consent" below you are indicating that you are 18 years old or older, have read this consent form, and agree to participate in this research study. You are free to skip any question that you choose or stop participating at any time without consequence. Please save a copy of this page for your records.

- ○ I consent, begin the study
- ○ I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

Q1: I work as a special collections librarian or archivist at a(n):

- ○ Academic institution
- ○ Corporate library / archives
- ○ Government institution
- ○ Independent research library / archives
- ○ Museum library / archives
- ○ Public library / archives
- ○ Religious order library / archives
- ○ Other, please list: _____

Q2: I perform the following type(s) of work in special collections libraries or archives: (select all that apply)

- ☐ Accessioning
- ☐ Administration
- ☐ Cataloging
- ☐ Collection development
- ☐ Digital preservation
- ☐ Digitization
- ☐ Donor engagement and management
- ☐ Exhibition development
- ☐ Instruction
- ☐ Outreach and programming
- ☐ Preservation and/or conservation
- ☐ Processing
- ☐ Research services
- ☐ Other, please list: _____

Q3: I have worked in special collections libraries and/or archives for:

- ○ 1 year or less
- ○ 2-5 years
- ○ 6-10 years
- ○ 10-20 years
- ○ Over 20 years

Q4: What is your current employment status?

- ○ Full-time
- ○ Part-time
- ○ Retired
- ○ Volunteer

Q5: How is your current position classified?

- ○ Professional staff
- ○ Support staff
- ○ Tenure track faculty member
- ○ Non-tenure track faculty member
- ○ Other, please list: _____

Q6: Do you self-identify as having either a chronic illness and/or a disability? This study defines "chronic illness" as an ongoing health condition, either physical or mental, that lasts a year or more and that requires ongoing medical attention and/or limits activities of daily living (adapted from https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/about/index.htm). This study adopts the ADA definition of "disability": "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities" (https://www.ada.gov/topics/intro-to-ada/).

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Skip to end of survey if No is selected

Q7: My chronic illness and/or disability is:

- ○ Primarily visible
- ○ Primarily invisible
- ○ Both

Q8: Which types of chronic illness and/or disability do you self-identify as having? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Chronic physical illness
- ☐ Chronic mental illness
- ☐ Mobility impairment
- ☐ Sensory impairment

Q9: I have had my chronic illness and/or disability:

- ○ Since birth
- ○ More than 10 years
- ○ 5-10 years
- ○ Less than 5 years

Q10: Do you supervise other employees?

- ○ Yes, I supervise full-time staff as well as part-time workers, student assistants, and/or volunteers when applicable
- ○ Yes, I supervise part-time, student assistants, and/or volunteers
- ○ Yes, I supervise volunteers
- ○ No

Q11: To whom have you disclosed your chronic illness and/or disability? (select all that apply)

- ☐ No one
- ☐ Colleagues I consider friends outside of work
- ☐ Colleagues I work with regularly
- ☐ Direct supervisor
- ☐ Library or archives director
- ☐ Human resources
- ☐ ADA coordinator
- ☐ I openly share about my chronic illness and/or disability with all colleagues
- ☐ Other, please describe: _____

Q12: When did you disclose your chronic illness and/or disability to colleagues you consider friends outside of work?

Display only if "Colleagues I consider friends outside of work" is selected in Q11

- ○ During the interview process
- ○ When negotiating a job offer
- ○ Upon receiving a diagnosis
- ○ Upon beginning treatment
- ○ When illness and/or disability impacted work
- ○ When requested accommodations
- ○ When colleagues became friends outside of work

Q13: When did you disclose your chronic illness and/or disability to colleagues you work with regularly?

Display only if "Colleagues I work with regularly" is selected in Q11

- ○ During the interview process
- ○ When negotiating a job offer
- ○ Upon receiving a diagnosis
- ○ Upon beginning treatment
- ○ When illness and/or disability impacted work
- ○ When requested accommodations
- ○ When colleagues became friends outside of work

Q14: When did you disclose your chronic illness and/or disability to your direct supervisor?
Display only if "Direct supervisor" is selected in Q11
- ○ During the interview process
- ○ When negotiating a job offer
- ○ Upon receiving a diagnosis
- ○ Upon beginning treatment
- ○ When illness and/or disability impacted work
- ○ When requested accommodations
- ○ When colleagues became friends outside of work

Q15: When did you disclose your chronic illness and/or disability to your library/archives director?
Display only if "Library/Archives director" is selected in Q11
- ○ During the interview process
- ○ When negotiating a job offer
- ○ Upon receiving a diagnosis
- ○ Upon beginning treatment
- ○ When illness and/or disability impacted work
- ○ When requested accommodations
- ○ When colleagues became friends outside of work

Q16: When did you disclose your chronic illness and/or disability to Human Resources?
Display only if "Human Resources" is selected in Q11
- ○ During the interview process
- ○ When negotiating a job offer
- ○ Upon receiving a diagnosis
- ○ Upon beginning treatment
- ○ When illness and/or disability impacted work
- ○ When requested accommodations
- ○ When colleagues became friends outside of work

Q17: When did you disclose your chronic illness and/or disability to the ADA coordinator?
Display only if "ADA coordinator" is selected in Q11
- ○ During the interview process
- ○ When negotiating a job offer
- ○ Upon receiving a diagnosis
- ○ Upon beginning treatment
- ○ When illness and/or disability impacted work

- ○ When requested accommodations
- ○ When colleagues became friends outside of work

Q18: When did you disclose your chronic illness and/or disability to all colleagues?
Display only if "All colleagues" is selected in Q11

- ○ During the interview process
- ○ When negotiating a job offer
- ○ Upon receiving a diagnosis
- ○ Upon beginning treatment
- ○ When illness and/or disability impacted work
- ○ When requested accommodations
- ○ When colleagues became friends outside of work

Q19: Have you ever considered changing jobs because of your chronic illness and/or disability?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Q20: What factors associated with your chronic illness and/or disability led you to consider changing jobs? (Select all that apply)
Display only if "Yes" is selected in Q19

- ☐ Seeking a change in employment status affecting benefits
- ☐ Seeking better health insurance
- ☐ Seeking a more accommodating work environment
- ☐ Unable to perform job duties
- ☐ Other, please describe: _____

Q21: Have you ever changed jobs, in whole or in part, because of your chronic illness and/or disability?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Q22: What factors associated with your chronic illness and/or disability led you to change jobs? (Select all that apply)
Display only if "Yes" is selected in Q21

- ☐ Seeking a change in employment status affecting benefits
- ☐ Seeking better health insurance
- ☐ Seeking a more accommodating work environment
- ☐ Unable to perform job duties
- ☐ Other, please describe: _____

Q23: Have you requested a workplace accommodation?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Q24: Why haven't you requested an accommodation? (select all that apply)
Display only if "No" is selected in Q23

- ☐ I don't need an accommodation
- ☐ Accommodations aren't available
- ☐ I don't know what to ask for
- ☐ I don't know how to request an accommodation
- ☐ I don't want to ask unless I absolutely have to
- ☐ The process is too stressful
- ☐ The process is too expensive
- ☐ I am afraid of negative impacts on my job
- ☐ I am afraid of my supervisor's response
- ☐ I am afraid of my colleagues' responses
- ☐ I am afraid that I will be treated differently after receiving an accommodation

Q25: Was your accommodation request granted?
Display only if "Yes" is selected in Q23

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ In part

Q26: What accommodation(s) did you request? (Select all that apply)
Display only if "Yes" is selected in Q23

- ☐ Adjustment to schedule
- ☐ Adjustment to work environment
- ☐ Adaptive or assistive technology
- ☐ Modification to job duties
- ☐ Other, please describe: _____

Q27: What accommodation(s) did you receive? (Select all that apply)
Display only if "Yes" is selected in Q23

- ☐ Adjustment to schedule
- ☐ Adjustment to work environment
- ☐ Adaptive or assistive technology
- ☐ Modification to job duties
- ☐ Other, please describe: _____

Q28: Did your request have any negative consequences?
Display only if "Yes" is selected in Q23

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Maybe

Q29: Does your chronic illness and/or disability impact the types of special collections or archives work you apply to do?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Maybe

Q30: Please describe how your chronic illness and/or disability impacts the types of special collections or archives work you apply to do.
Display only if "No" is not selected in Q29

Q31: Does your chronic illness and/or disability influence your job search(es) more broadly?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Maybe

Q32: Does your chronic illness and/or disability influence your job search(es) by impacting (select all that apply):
Display only if "No" is not selected in Q31

- ☐ Type of institution(s) I apply to
- ☐ Location of institution(s) I apply to
- ☐ Benefits package offered by institution(s) I apply to
- ☐ Employment status of the position(s) I apply to
- ☐ Other, please describe: _____

Q33: When interviewing for a job, do you make a conscious effort to hide symptoms of your chronic illness and/or disability during the interview process?

- ○ Always
- ○ Most of the time
- ○ Some of the time
- ○ Rarely
- ○ Never

Q34: Do you make a conscious effort to hide symptoms of your chronic illness and/or disability while at work?

- ○ Always
- ○ Most of the time
- ○ Some of the time
- ○ Rarely
- ○ Never

Q35: Do you feel that your boss treats you differently than other employees in your unit because of your chronic illness and/or disability?

- Always
- Most of the time
- Some of the time
- Rarely
- Never

Q36: Do you feel that your colleagues treat you differently than other employees in your unit because of your chronic illness and/or disability?

- Always
- Most of the time
- Some of the time
- Rarely
- Never

Q37: Do you feel that your chronic illness and/or disability affects the professional development opportunities you are able to pursue?

- Always
- Most of the time
- Some of the time
- Rarely
- Never

Q38: Do you feel that your chronic illness and/or disability affects the service opportunities you are able to pursue?

- Always
- Most of the time
- Some of the time
- Rarely
- Never

Q39: How satisfied with the degree of flexibility you have with your work schedule in your current position?

- Extremely dissatisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Extremely satisfied

Q40: Do you feel that your chronic illness and/or disability affects the opportunities you have to advance in your career?

- Always
- Most of the time
- Some of the time
- Rarely
- Never

Q41: How frequently do you experience discrimination at work because of your chronic illness and/or disability?

- On a daily basis
- On a weekly basis
- On a monthly basis
- Infrequently
- Never

Q42: How frequently do you experience harassment at work because of your chronic illness and/or disability?

- On a daily basis
- On a weekly basis
- On a monthly basis
- Infrequently
- Never

Q43: How frequently do you experience microagressions at work because of your chronic illness and/or disability?

- On a daily basis
- On a weekly basis
- On a monthly basis
- Infrequently
- Never

Q44: How satisfied with are you with your current job overall?

- Extremely dissatisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Extremely satisfied

Q44: If you could change one thing about your job to make it more accommodating and accessible for you, what would you change?

Q45: Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences working in special collections libraries and/or archives with a chronic illness and/or disability?

Ruth Xing and Yuzhou Bai

"But Do They Really Want *Me*?": Reflecting on the Language of DEIA Adopted in Entry-Level Job Postings for Special Collections Librarians in 2023[1]

This study evaluates the extent to which job descriptions for special collections librarians reflect organizational values surrounding Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA). In early 2024, the authors began by reviewing thirty randomly selected advertisements posted to the RBMS News Blog in 2023, using a newly devised DEIA Assessment Checklist. This paper summarizes past practices and common pitfalls in the recruitment of diverse candidates through job descriptions. Considering the key legislative and political changes in early 2025, the authors also seek to guide institutions unable to openly adopt DEIA language on alternative ways to portray organizational values in the recruitment process.

Introduction

For the past two decades, the Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) has promoted special collections[2] librarianship as an attractive career option for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and "historically underrepresented" people.[3] RBMS identified diversifying the profession as a goal in its 2003 "Diversity Action Plan."[4] In 2020, ACRL released the Code of Ethics for Special Collections Librarians, which connects diversity to the

1. A version of this paper was presented by the authors, under the title, "'But do they really want ME?': An Exploratory Diversity Audit of Job Postings," as part of the RBMS 2024 conference.

2. Throughout this article, "special collections librarianship" encompasses work in any library or institutional archives, rare books, and manuscripts collections.

3. The term "historically underrepresented," in the context of education, describes individuals belonging to "groups who have been denied access and/or suffered past institutional discrimination," including ethnic minorities; people with disabilities; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals; among others (Emory University Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance, "Common Terms: Historically underrepresented," https://equityandcompliance.emory.edu/resources/self-guided-learning/common-terms.html).

4. "RBMS Diversity Action Plan," *RBMS.info*, June 23, 2003, https://rbms.info/diversity/rbms_diversity_action_plan/. It is also listed on RBMS's "About" page: "Commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion," RBMS, https://rbms.info/about/#diversity

professional responsibility to "represent . . . marginalized voices."[5] Library professional organizations established Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) initiatives, yet many of their goals remain aspirational. Furthermore, with the flurry of anti-DEIA legislation and executive orders in early 2025, these goals are now under scrutiny and attack, forcing institutions to recalibrate how they approach DEIA in their staffing efforts.[6]

RBMS's Membership Survey conducted in 2015 indicated that 9% of members identified as BIPOC, whereas 87% identified as White. This survey also noted that "diverse respondents have lower representation in administrative positions."[7] Surveys in archives convey a similar challenge: only 11% of respondents to the 2022 A*Census II: Archives Administrators Survey were BIPOC,[8] whereas the A*Census II: All Archivists Survey recorded a respondent pool of 16% BIPOC/84% White.[9] In addition, only 16% of BIPOC respondents agreed with the statement, "I feel represented by the membership of the archives profession." The survey further revealed a significant 44% of BIPOC respondents felt the profession had not "adequately addressed [DEIA] issues."[10] These results indicate broader systemic challenges for these predominantly White fields to make industry-wide improvements.[11]

This paper examines job descriptions, which often serve as a primary source of information for BIPOC candidates, and which, we contend, merit scrutiny by employers who seek to reflect equitable values and diversify their staff. We ask two fundamental questions: 1. How well do job descriptions demonstrate DEIA values in our profession; and 2. What are the common pitfalls in creating job descriptions? To address

5. "ACRL Code of Ethics for Special Collections Librarians," *RBMS.info*, June 19, 2020, https://rbms.info/standards/code_of_ethics/

6. Maggie Hicks, "The New Anti-DEI Bureaucracy," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 21, 2024, https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-new-anti-dei-bureaucracy; Erin Gretzinger et al., "Tracking Higher Ed's Dismantling of DEI," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 20, 2024, https://www.chronicle.com/article/tracking-higher-eds-dismantling-of-dei; Tracy Richelle High et al., "President Trump Acts to Roll Back DEI Initiatives," *The Harvard Law School Forum on Corporate Governance*, February 10, 2025, https://corpgov.law.harvard.edu/2025/02/10/president-trump-acts-to-roll-back-dei-initiatives/

7. 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 (2016): 60, 79. At the time of this writing, the results of the 2023 RBMS Membership survey were not yet publicly available. See Rebecca Bramlett et al., "Moving Forward: Membership and the Future of RBMS," *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 26, no. 1 (2025): 50–51.

8. Makala Skinner and Ioana G. Hulbert, "A* CENSUS II: All Archivists Survey Report," *The American Archivist* 86, no. 1 (2023): 261.

9. Skinner and Hulbert, "A* CENSUS II," 19.

10. Skinner and Hulbert, "A* CENSUS II," 57, 61.

11. The RBMS Surveys did not ask respondents to self-identify as a person with a disability and/or chronic illness, though SAA surveys did. See Melanie Griffin, "'Some Days my Work Is Unbearable:' The Impact of Chronic Illness and Disability on Recruitment and Retention for Workers in Archival Repositories and Special Collections Libraries," *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 26, no. 1 (2025): 12–34.

these questions, we begin with the study's literature review and methodology. Next, we lay out the criteria developed for evaluating individual job postings, before summarizing our findings and illustrating them with examples. The paper concludes with reflections on pathways toward inclusive and inviting job descriptions, as well as alternative options to build more diverse special collections staff.

Literature Review

Our research on job postings builds upon previous studies providing insight into BIPOC candidates' challenges in the hiring process, and how employers may make improvements by signaling DEIA in job postings.[12] Slow progress toward workforce diversity results directly from systemic issues. Hodge asserts that the library profession cannot live up to its Code of Ethics until it achieves "workforce diversity on par with our communities;" only then can libraries provide "equitable, culturally relevant, and inclusive" services.[13] However, as organizations work to achieve this, they often fail to prioritize BIPOC workers' voices. Galvan points out that the performative process of library recruitment, defined by White, middle-class culture, often disproportionately burdens BIPOC candidates by, for example, perpetuating alienation or the notion that BIPOC candidates are merely "diversity hires."[14] VanScoy and Bright revealed BIPOC librarians often feel like the "only one" in libraries, and harbor feelings of isolation and otherness.[15] Participants of their study report emotional labor, pressure to take on DEI responsibilities, microaggressions, and race-based discrimination.[16] Warren considers barriers for Black archivists seeking employment, arguing that institutions must value Black archivists as knowledge producers instead of mere data points.[17] These studies inform our close reading of job postings from our dataset.

12. This paper focuses on a single year's job postings and engages more specifically with the issue of DEIA, whereas Crocoll and Hansen provided a broad overview of job postings over the course of nine years. See: Ikumi Crocoll and Kelli Hansen, "An Analysis of RBMS News Blog Job Advertisements, 2013–2021," *RBM: a Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 25, no. 2 (2024): 115–132. Amy VanScoy and Kawanna Bright, "Articulating the Experience of Uniqueness and Difference for Librarians of Color," *The Library Quarterly* 89, no. 4 (2019): 289–295; Carmen Cole and Emily Mross, "Ensuring More Inclusive Hiring Processes," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 22, no. 3 (2022): 507–515, https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/pla.2022.0037; Kristyn Caragher and Tatiana Bryant, "Black and Non-Black Library Workers' Perceptions of Hiring, Retention, and Promotion Racial Equity Practices," *Journal of Library Administration* 63, no. 2 (January 25, 2023): 137–178, https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2022.2159239.

13. Twanna Hodge, "On Being Black in Librarianship," *I Love Libraries*, July 15, 2020, https://ilovelibraries.org/article/being-black-librarianship/

14. Angela Galvan, "Soliciting Performance, Hiding Bias: Whiteness and Librarianship," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe,* (June 3, 2015), https://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/soliciting-performance-hiding-bias-whiteness-and-librarianship/

15. VanScoy and Bright, "Articulating the Experience," 289.

16. VanScoy and Bright, "Articulating the Experience," 289–295.

17. Kellee E. Warren, "We Need These Bodies, But Not Their Knowledge: Black Women in the Archival Science Professions and Their Connection to the Archives of Enslaved Black Women in the French Antilles," *Library Trends* 64, no. 4 (2016): 776–794.

To increase equity in hiring practices, researchers have proposed various strategies for employers. Smith et al. recommend creating "diversity indicators" in job descriptions, such as flexibility in required qualifications,[18] which may include allowing professional experience to substitute for academic degrees. Chun and Evans' study similarly emphasizes flexibility as a means of discouraging pre-existing hiring standards and practices.[19] Bledsoe and Frederick's review of job descriptions for DEI librarians proposes adopting antiracist language and reflecting a "change orientation."[20] Most postings reviewed for this study adopted these strategies to varying extents.

Assessment Criteria for Special Collections Librarian Job Postings

Drawing on the literature, we created an eleven-point DEIA Assessment Checklist (Checklist). By no means exhaustive, the Checklist was initially prepared as a resource of criteria for employers to adapt within their institutions. Following key legislative and political changes in early 2025, however, we recognize that not all institutions can adopt these criteria explicitly. Nonetheless, hiring managers may still find the Checklist useful as they devise new ways to portray organizational values to attract diverse candidates, in and/or beyond job descriptions. Our eleven assessment criteria for Special Collections Librarian Job Postings were:

1. Emphasizing current institutional DEIA culture with a change orientation;[21]
2. Avoiding generic DEIA statements while discussing antiracism, or acknowledging the history of inequality and the necessity of combating it;[22]
3. Adopting gender-neutral language;[23]

18. Daryl G. Smith et al., "Interrupting the Usual: Successful Strategies for Hiring Diverse Faculty," *The Journal of Higher Education* 75, no. 2 (2004): 133–160.

19. Edna Chun and Alvin Evans, "Building an Inclusive Talent Proposition: Recruitment, Hiring, and Search Committee Development," in *Conducting an Institutional Diversity Audit in Higher Education: A Practitioner's Guide to Systematic Diversity Transformation* (Stylus, 2019): 107–116.

20. Kara Bledsoe and Jennifer K. Frederick, "Advancing Strategy through Staffing: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Library Leadership Roles," *Ithaka S+R*, August 17, 2021, https://sr.ithaka.org/blog/advancing-strategy-through-staffing/

21. Bledsoe and Frederick, "Advancing Strategy."

22. Bledsoe and Frederick, "Advancing Strategy." See Frames 2 and 4 in: Joint ALA/ARL Building Cultural Proficiencies for Racial Equity Framework Task Force, "Cultural Proficiencies for Racial Equity: A Framework," August 2022, https://www.ala.org/pla/initiatives/edi/racialequityframework

23. Keahi K. Adolpho et al., "Trans and Gender Diverse Inclusion in Academic Library Hiring," in *Toward Inclusive Academic Librarian Hiring Practices*, eds. Kathryn Houk, Jordan Nielsen, and Jenny Wong (ACRL Publications, 2024): 97–110.

4. Providing an accurate pay range;[24]
5. Providing a land acknowledgment, or referencing reparative actions taken to honor Indigenous communities and their lands;[25]
6. Inviting applicants from various academic disciplines and non-traditional backgrounds; center actual skill set/knowledge combinations;[26]
7. Highlighting that hiring from underrepresented groups benefits the professional team and overall profession;[27]
8. Emphasizing that diverse users deserve diverse special collections workers;[28]
9. Connecting necessity of having diverse perspectives and lived experiences represented in the professional team to ethical special collections' collection development challenges;[29]
10. Consistently adopting clear language for what diversity means to your organization;[30]
11. Bringing transparency to the core job requirements and helpful qualifications.[31]

Methodology and Data Collection

Entry-level position postings are "gateways" diverse candidates encounter when entering the library profession, establishing portfolios, and becoming change agents. They are also a key means by which an institution conveys and achieves its DEIA goals. However, postings are ultimately marketing tools, used by an institution to achieve its goals and best interests, and, intentionally or not, job postings can mislead candidates. For example, postings may list a considerably broad pay range, which attracts well-qualified candidates, yet early-career applicants may only receive a salary offer in the lower range. This disconnection between advertisement and candidates' expectations[32] suggests a larger methodological challenge for evaluating an institution's

24. "RBMS policy requires that all position announcements include salary information (minimum, range, or maximum) as advised by the Association of College and Research Libraries' *Guidelines for Recruiting Academic Librarians*. Position announcements that do not include salary information will not be posted" ("RBMS News Blog," *RBMS*, https://rbms.info/blog/category/news-events/). See: Carolina Hernandez, "Need Not Apply: Identifying Barriers to Application in Academic Librarian Job Postings," *Forging the Future: The Proceedings of the ACRL 2023 Conference* (2023); Louise L. Lowe et al., "Post-Pandemic Perspectives on Academic Librarian Recruitment Practices," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 50, no. 6 (2024). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2024.102977.
25. For more information on taking reparative action, see also: David X. Lemmons et al., "Beyond a Land Acknowledgement: Taking a First Step Towards Reparative Action," *Journal of Radical Librarianship* 10, (2024): 81–90.
26. Smith et al., "Interrupting the Usual."; Chun and Evans, "Building an Inclusive."
27. "Diversity," *RBMS*, https://rbms.info/diversity/
28. Hodge, "On Being Black."
29. David Macaulay, "Applications of Diversity Language to Descriptions of Collection Development Activities at Academic Libraries: An Exploratory Analysis of Strategic Plans and Diversity Information Webpages," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 49, no. 4 (2023): 102–139.
30. Dustin Fife et al., "Leader Responsibility for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Justice in Academic Libraries: An Exploratory Study," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 47, no. 4 (2021): 102–161.
31. Mimosa Shah and Dustin Fife, "Obstacles and Barriers in Hiring: Rethinking the Process to Open Doors," *College & Research Libraries News* 84, no. 2 (2023): 55.
32. Lowe et al., "Post-Pandemic Perspectives."

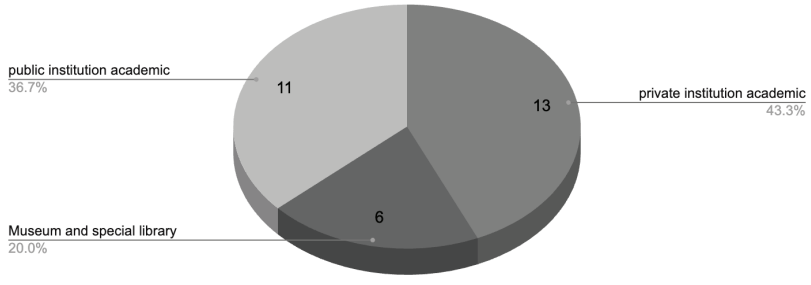
DEIA efforts solely based on job postings. In practice, candidates should look beyond job descriptions to develop a full understanding of the work environment, including pay equity, belonging, and support structures.

This study explores the adoption of DEIA verbiage in entry-level job descriptions for special collections, based on a sample of thirty jobs posted to the *RBMS News Blog* in 2023.[33] We began by considering all 179 job postings posted that year, then narrowed our focus to only postings with requirement of a Master's-level education (but not explicitly more) and a maximum of three years' experience. Thus, the original dataset narrowed by 23%. The remaining 136 positions were chronologically numbered and imported to Google Sheets. To enable closer reading and to complete the study in a reasonable timeframe, we further limited our study sample to thirty, selected by applying the "randomize" function (RAND) (see Appendix A). Our dataset covers three institution types: private institution academic (43%, or 13); public institution academic (37%, or 11); and museum and special library (20%, or 8) (see Figure 1). Institutions spanned sixteen US states. Job categories included "Archivist" (27%, or 9); "Librarian" (27%, or 9); "Curator" (24%, or 8); and "Cataloger" (15%, or 5).[34]

Eight postings from the initial dataset did not meet the criteria for entry-level positions and were replaced, again using the same RAND function as in the original pool (see Appendix B). Furthermore, when postings appeared truncated (e.g., ending abruptly, providing no duties) on the *RBMS News Blog*, we discovered full-length postings on third-party sites, which were treated as preferred information sources.[35]

FIGURE 1

Institution Types for Job Postings within Sample



33. "RBMS News Blog," https://rbms.info/blog/category/news-events/

34. Three positions' titles overlapped categories (e.g., "Librarian and Archivist"). Both categories were counted in such cases.

35. Expanded positions were located on "Society of American Archivists," https://www2.archivists.org/; and "The Chronicle of Higher Education," https://jobs.chronicle.com/

The authors independently reviewed the thirty posts using the Checklist, and recorded sentences from each posting that successfully or unsuccessfully embodied Checklist criteria. Then, we convened to discuss observations across posts that are summarized in this paper.

Results

Any job description combines the efforts of hiring managers, human resources departments, and other stakeholders. This section summarizes the appeal and success of certain institutional end-products that reflected the early development of anti-DEIA legislation before 2024, when some libraries began to face content restrictions.

We identified three areas where many postings succeeded in reflecting DEIA values. First, all thirty postings (100%) both adopted gender-neutral language and provided a pay range. Secondly, most postings (67%, or 20) demonstrated some flexibility regarding the Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS)[36] requirement. Finally, 13% (or 4) of postings actively encouraged applicants with less traditional backgrounds.

We also observed three common issues among postings. First, a majority contained general DEIA claims and neither discussed nor acknowledged the need for institutional-level change. "Antiracism" appeared only twice (7%).[37] Second, zero (0%) postings included a statement about Indigenous communities—despite many institutions' formal land acknowledgements, and the fact that some special collections librarians include these in their email signatures and professional communication. Though some critique land acknowledgements as performative and propose that institutions focus on reparative actions instead,[38] the absence of statements may reflect impediments to centering Indigenous communities in library work. Third, few postings connected institution-level DEIA efforts to special collections' memory work, which may signal an insufficient infrastructure. This illustrates a necessity to clearly state how diverse special collections workforces empower diverse users, prepare organizations for ethical questions, and contribute to the profession's progress and wellbeing.

Examples

Postings cited here are snapshots in time, reflecting the wide array of local and historical contexts in 2023. We share examples to demonstrate common approaches to

36. Here, representing such degrees, variously abbreviated as MLS, MLIS, MSLIS, MSI, MI.
37. Extended to mean an institutions' acknowledgement of past injustices, and usage of antiracist vocabulary.
38. See: Lemmons et al., "Beyond a Land Acknowledgement."

attract diverse candidates, not to discredit or defame. The first three examples demonstrate success in portraying DEIA values.

The following posting advertises a rare books librarian position at a public university in the West:

> All candidates should be prepared to discuss how they see themselves contributing to the University's equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts. The library serves an increasingly diverse constituency of patrons, and our employees, services, collections, and policies should honor and reflect this diversity. We are therefore interested in candidates who have experience with historically excluded groups and who are committed to advancing our mission to provide equitable access to information resources.

This post connects patron diversity to staffing needs, actual collections, and library policies. It also acknowledges historically excluded groups and the search for a candidate who upholds the institution's stated commitments.

Another successful example advertises a curator role at a private university in the Northeast:

> [Department's core initiatives:] diversifying the collection by acquiring materials in underrepresented areas, including works by creators from underrepresented communities and geographical regions, examples of lesser-known and underground print technologies, and artifacts of printing and graphic arts influenced by digital technologies [. . .] Additional qualifications: A demonstrated commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, belonging, and antiracism and to serving the needs of a diverse population.

The text magnifies how the institution diversifies collections and amplifies marginalized voices through its acquisitions work, which the incumbent will directly contribute to. Additional qualifications emphasize antiracism and centering diverse groups.

Postings should explicitly address preferred skills and set expectations, as does this posting for an archivist position at a private institution in the South:

> Candidates need not possess every one of the preferred skills listed or perform all of the duties with equal proficiency on day one. We strongly encourage those who are passionate about supporting our mission to apply, including those from historically underrepresented groups or who have followed less traditional paths to archival work. Additionally, applicants

> are encouraged to communicate in their cover letter how their experiences fulfill the required qualifications in ways that may not be obvious.

This posting encourages applicants from outside academia, including those who might have changed careers. It also provides actionable guidance to candidates as they compose their application.

The common thread between these three successful examples is an effort to elucidate what is often implied: an institution's commitment to antiracism, how the incumbent contributes to DEIA concretely, and who is encouraged to apply. Transparency and specificity distinguish them from the next few examples, whose genericisms and boilerplate verbiage undermine their efficacy to attract diverse candidates. Consider an advertisement for a curator position at a large public university in the Midwest: "[Incumbent participates] in the . . . Library's strategic plan as part of the University . . . DEI 2.0 initiative to build diverse collections and create an inclusive environment for research and study." This posting specifies neither what "participation" entails, nor how the role concretely relates to the described initiative.

Imprecision is also seen in technical services roles: a metadata librarian posting from a public university in the Midwest expects the incumbent to perform "ethical remediation" for metadata while simultaneously mentioning "EDI" only briefly under its preferred qualifications. This mismatch between responsibilities and relevant skills suggests that DEIA competency is not viewed as equally crucial to technical skills or is insufficiently integrated into the role.

Another posting for an archivist role at a private institution in the West states: "qualified individuals should be able to articulate a strong commitment to diversity, and have the ability to work effectively with individuals from different backgrounds." This description adopts generalities that downplay historical injustice. It joins several other examples in the dataset in "racial colorblindness," or, "the belief that racial group membership should not be taken into account, or even noticed, as a strategy for managing diversity and intergroup relations."[39] Such postings not only fail to acknowledge how race historically shaped their particular communities, but also imply reluctance to prioritize marginalized or misrepresented voices and take reparative actions.

Finally, employers must resist ableism. The following advertises a librarian position at a special library in the Northeast:

39. Evan P. Apfelbaum et al., "Racial Color Blindness: Emergence, Practice, and Implications," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 21, no. 3 (2012): 205–209; Kimberly Diggles, "Addressing Racial Awareness and Color-Blindness in Higher Education," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 140, (2014): 31–44.

> *Qualifications:* Ability to handle and move heavy books and boxes and wheel carts of books and other collection objects around campus (25–30 lbs.), extensive walking, standing, kneeling, stooping, climbing up stairs and narrow spaces; ability to work for extended periods on a computer, and tolerate moderate levels of dust and odor generated during normal collection management activities, movement of objects, and cleaning.

Describing physical movements at length suggests preference for an able-bodied candidate. "Narrow spaces" without context may imply that individuals of certain body types, or who experience claustrophobia and/or anxiety, should not apply. "Moderate levels of dust and odor" could likewise signal to individuals with asthma or other respiratory issues. Without indicating what accommodations, if any, the employer provides, this posting may discourage applicants with disabilities. It contradicts best practices for recruiting people with disabilities, including those created by SAA's Accessibility and Disability Section: "Evaluate the job description for unnecessarily exclusionary 'essential functions' that rely on physical ability," and "Express willingness to provide accommodations and indicate how an applicant can make requests."[40] Last but not least, framing physical ability itself as a "qualification" is unethical. Following O'Sullivan and Alexander's argument that "to best align with the ethics of our field . . . special collections practitioners must extend these efforts [to accommodate individuals with disabilities] beyond the minimum set by the legal mandate,"[41] we contend that the staffing of special collections libraries must move beyond legal compliance to values-motivated inclusivity.[42]

Concluding Remarks

Job postings are marketing tools. As such, job seekers should not treat them as sole information sources when considering a position and employer. Given the censorship of DEIA language by federal and state legislation, the authors expect more institutions will exclude DEIA and antiracism from their job descriptions. Therefore, job seekers must consult with other sources of information to develop a fuller picture of an institution's culture. Safe professional networks, especially spaces dedicated to BIPOC library workers, will play a key role in this new era (see Appendix C). Institutions should effectively leverage such networks to provide additional information to diverse candidates, such as DEIA information excluded from job descriptions for compliance, or an institutional contact who volunteers to connect with applicants informally, to attract BIPOC candidates. We believe that a pilot study of this model

40. See: Lydia Tang et al., "Toward Inclusion: Best Practices for Hiring People with Disabilities," *Archival Outlook,* (July/August 2020): 4.

41. Kevin M. O'Sullivan and Gia Alexander, "Toward Inclusive Outreach: What Special Collections Can Learn from Disability Studies," *RBM: a Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 21, no.1 (2020): 15.

42. See also Griffin, this issue.

of recruiting diverse candidates in collaboration with BIPOC librarians' organizations will provide tremendous value to both employers and the profession.

Many job postings from 2023 named various required DEIA responsibilities, yet institutions often do not provide emotional and professional assistance needed to match expectations, a reality especially detrimental to BIPOC candidates, who are often expected to produce such outputs.[43] Institutions must aid and advocate for BIPOC candidates undergoing this process. Leaders in the field must identify how special collections librarianship as a profession can be more welcoming and encouraging.

We must continue the conversation on DEIA and staffing in our field systematically, even—and especially—when it becomes taboo.[44] Special collections librarians and institutions must develop a consistent base upon which to build and uphold our professional ethics and the progress of our DEIA advocacy. More attention must be dedicated to BIPOC workers and workers with disabilities to uncover how they perceive the job search and professionalization processes. RBMS should lead efforts to bridge the gap between our words and actions, beginning today.

For employers, our study suggests that DEIA efforts be as visible and specific as possible when advertising job postings. Employers may achieve this by weaving DEIA principles into job responsibilities and requirements, and/or by circulating job postings with added information in professional spaces dedicated to BIPOC workers. Generic DEIA statements do not convey the significance of diversity in their workforce, or the expectations and support for prospective BIPOC employees. An insincere mention of DEIA in a job posting is both unethical and ineffective, as it misrepresents the nature of a role and creates the secondary issue of retention, thus failing to enrich a library's services and culture. Employers should persevere in articulating the positive impacts of having a diverse staff in creative ways, on paper and/or during the recruitment process. These benefits should always link to the institution's efforts and ability to achieve its mission. Such information will signal to BIPOC candidates that their presence is as valued by the employer as the expertise and skills they bring.

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43. VanScoy and Bright, "Articulating the Experience."
44. "Against Anticipatory Obedience," *American Association of University Professors*, January 2025, https://www.aaup.org/report/against-anticipatory-obedience

Appendix A: Job Postings Selected for This Study

1. Anne Belk Distinguished Fellow for Distinctive Collections (Curator), Appalachian State University. Posted February 3, 2023.
2. Archivist for Special Collections and University Archives, Pepperdine University. Posted April 3, 2023.
3. Archivist, Judd Foundation. Posted October 13, 2023.
4. Assistant Curator of Printing and Graphic Arts, Houghton Library, Harvard University. Posted May 22, 2023.
5. Barron Hilton Archivist for Flight and Space Exploration, Purdue University. Posted July 18, 2023.
6. Book Arts Studio Manager & Instructor, University of Utah. Posted January 6, 2023.
7. Cataloger, The Noel Foundation, LSU Shreveport. Posted February 8, 2023.
8. Collections Strategy Librarian, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Posted March 1, 2023.
9. Curator (Assistant or Associate Librarian), Baylor University (Extended). Posted October 23, 2023.
10. Curator for Pictorial Collections, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley. Posted August 14, 2023.
11. Curator of Maps and Graphics, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan. Posted February 8, 2023.
12. Curator, Feuchtwanger Memorial Library, USC Libraries. Posted August 16, 2023.
13. Digital Archivist, RIT Archives, Rochester Institute of Technology. Posted January 17, 2023.
14. Digital Collections Librarian/Archivist, Loyola University New Orleans. Posted April 30, 2023.
15. Ethiopic Manuscripts Cataloger, Hill Museum & Manuscript Library. Posted March 12, 2023.
16. Exhibits and Engagement Archivist, University of Arkansas. Posted March 7, 2023.
17. General Cataloguer, The Historic New Orleans Collection. Posted January 30, 2023.
18. Manuscripts Archivist, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Posted April 7, 2023.
19. Metadata Librarian, University of Missouri–Kansas City (UMKC) University Libraries. Posted January 20, 2023.
20. Processing & Instruction Archivist, University of Richmond. Posted July 26, 2023.
21. Rare Books Librarian, University of Utah. Posted December 1, 2023.

22. Reader Services Librarian, Morgan Library & Museum. Posted May 22, 2023.
23. Reference and Instruction Archivist, Mount Holyoke College. Posted January 30, 2023.
24. Reference Archivist/Librarian for Archives and Special Collections, Harvard Library. Posted August 27, 2023.
25. Robert De Niro Curator of Film, Harry Ransom Center. Posted November 17, 2023.
26. Special Collections Librarian, Carleton College. Posted December 8, 2023.
27. Special Collections Librarian/Curator Burroughs Collection, University of Louisville. Posted February 7, 2023.
28. Special Collections Project Cataloging Specialist, Princeton University Library (Multiple Openings). Posted April 7, 2023.
29. Special Collections Reference Associate, NYU Libraries. Posted June 26, 2023.
30. Western Manuscripts Cataloger, Hill Museum & Manuscript Library. Posted March 12, 2023.

Appendix B: Postings Removed from This Study

1. Associate Director of Special Collections and Galleries/University Archivist, Georgia College & State University. *Not entry-level.*
2. Associate University Librarian for Special Collections, Boston University. *Not entry-level.*
3. Digital Collections Coordinator, University of California, Santa Barbara. *Requiring a Bachelor's degree only.*
4. Drue Heinz Curator of Literary and Historical Manuscripts, Morgan Library & Museum. *Not entry-level.*
5. Special Collections Cataloging Specialist, University of Arkansas. *Requiring a Bachelor's degree only.*
6. Visual Books Project Assistant, University of Utah. *Requiring a Bachelor's degree only.*
7. Wilson Infrastructure Project Manager, UNC–Chapel Hill. *Requiring a Bachelor's degree only.*
8. Women's Archives Metadata Specialist, University of Utah. *Requiring a Bachelor's degree only.*

Appendix C: Jobline Services Provided by BIPOC Librarian Organizations, Arranged Alphabetically

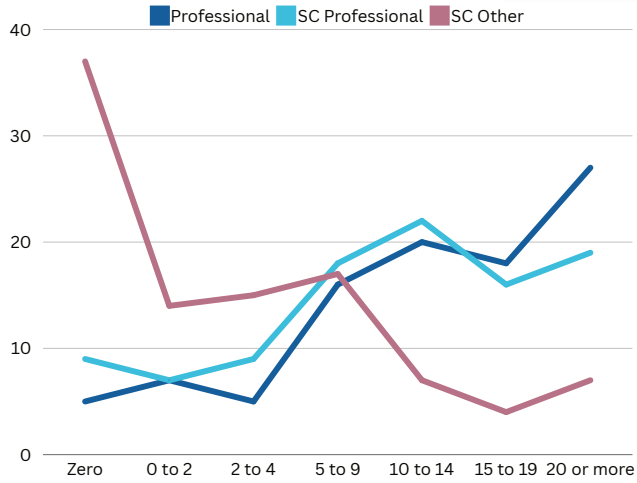
- American Indian Library Association (AILA): jobline service available via AILA Listserv, see the "AILA Listserv Guidelines" document on Membership page (https://ailanet.org/membership/).
- Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA): jobline service available via APALA Career Center (https://apala.careerwebsite.com/).
- Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA): jobline service available via BCALA Career Center (https://jobs.bcala.org/).
- Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA):[45] jobline service available via CALA Advertisement Posting (https://ad.cala-web.org/).
- REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library & Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-speaking: jobline service available via REFORMA Jobs Board (https://www.reforma.org/jobs_addnew.asp).
- We Here: jobline service available via "Submit a Job" page (https://www.wehere.space/submit-a-job).

45. The two authors currently volunteer for CALA.

Moving Forward: Membership

Rebecca Bramlett, MIT Libraries;
Eric Friede, Yale University;

Our Members

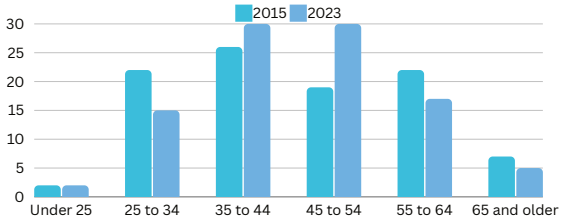


Our Years of Service

Over **75%** of respondents reported working in professional special collections position 5 or more years. Compared to 2015 results there was a **10%** increase in the responses for 10+ years.

Our Gender and Race/Ethnic Identities

The most common choices for gender (male or female) and race/ethnic identity (white) slightly decreased since 2015. **No Answer** doubled as a response in gender and decreased by two-thirds in race. Respondents selected multiple answers in race twice as often in 2023 as in 2015.

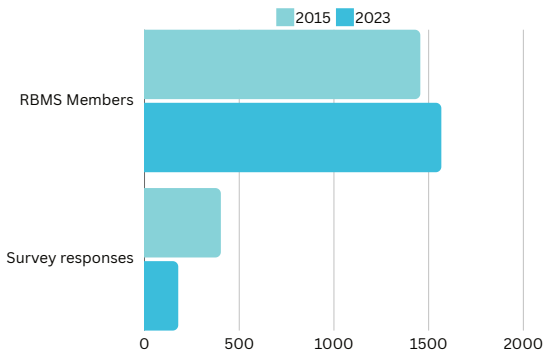


Our Ages

60% of respondents reported being between 35 and 54. Compared to 2015 results there were decreases in both younger and older respondents.

Survey Administration

Survey Response Rate



2015: 28% response rate

2023: **6.4%** response rate

The 2023 survey was administered to members through Qualtrics via the ALA Connect RBMS Community and promoted on RBMS social media.

The 2015 survey was administered to members through Qualtrics via the RBMS list-serv

The purpose of the survey is to gauge the interests, goals, regional hubs, and priorities of RBMS' membership.

The results of the survey will help RBMS Executive Committee shape task forces and committees, plan conferences and professional development offerings, and identify areas where outreach has succeeded (and failed) and can be expanded.

Changes to 2023 survey

Changes to the 2023 survey include removing:

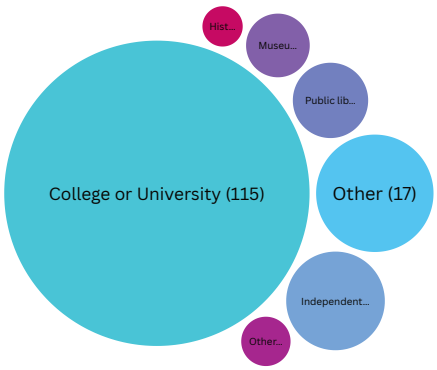
- a section on previous jobs
- questions about current institution (including number of staff, size of collection)
- questions on ALA and ACRL conference attendance

* A version of this infographic was presented by the authors, under the same title, as part of the RBMS 2023 conference.

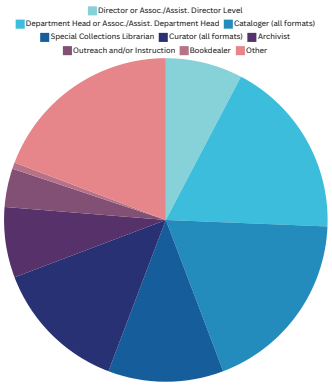
and the Future of RBMS*

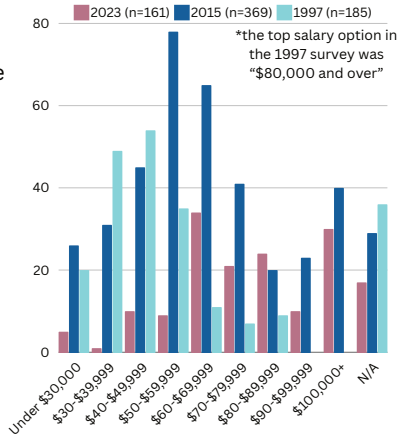
Sophia Dahab, Free Library of Philadelphia;
and Michael Seminara, Johns Hopkins University

Our Careers



The top 5 most common job titles have not changed significantly since 2015, though the rankings have shifted slightly and the number of catalogers has increased





Our Institutions

Over 71% of respondents reported working in a college or university library. Of those who chose "other," the write-in fields included non-profits, government libraries, LIS programs, and institutions that fit into more than one of the options provided.

Our Salaries

The average reported salary in 2023 was $77,290, a **22%** increase over the 2015 average, $63,205. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports an inflation rate of **29%** over that same period.

Our Involvement in RBMS

Conferences

59% of respondents have attended the RBMS Conference in the last two years (19% increase from the 2015 survey)

Committees

35% of respondents have held at least one RBMS Committee or Task Force appointment (unchanged from the 2015 survey)

Where RBMS can improve

Diversity of membership **20%**
Expense **16%**
Communication **12%**
Relationship with ACRL and ALA **12%**

"Inclusivity and diversity, the conference does a great job of addressing these issues but in practice, the industry is not as progressive"

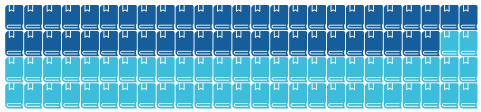
Which new or expanded initiatives would you like to see RBMS pursue?

"Digital preservation; collaboration between repositories (academic, non-academic; specialized; private; historical societies; other cultural heritage organizations) to engage in new ways of making special collections and archives relevant and accessible to all communities"

What are the most critical issues facing our profession?

1. Building diverse collections
2. Salaries
3. Institutional support for conferences
4. Funds for collection development
5. Burnout

Would you like to be more active in RBMS ?



48% YES **52% NO**

"Building more diverse and inclusive collections and a more diverse and inclusive profession; continuing to build interest in and demonstrate the value of consulting primary sources..."

Gemma Steele and Hayley Webster

Getting Inked? A Survey of Current Institutional Marking Practices in Rare Books and Special Collections

A survey was conducted to ascertain whether applying institutional ownership markings such as ink stamps, handwritten accession numbers, or bookplates to rare books and special collections items is widespread, as well as whether the practice, and thinking around the practice, changed over time. This article presents a detailed account of literature on practice and institutional guidelines, and how they have changed over the last seventy-five years. The authors present the background for and findings of their survey, following a literature review, the latter two of which show a lack of consensus around the adoption, value, and purpose of marking items—with considerable hesitation due to a perceived damage to an item caused by marking. The survey also revealed a lack of local policies and procedures on the practice of applying ownership markings. The authors conclude with recommendations for future implementation and additional surveys.

Introduction

Recent high-profile thefts in the cultural and heritage sectors bring back to the fore the importance of theft prevention and recovery measures.[1] This article presents a survey on one such measure: institutional marking practices, such as the application of ink or blind stamps, handwritten accession numbers, bookplates, as well as technological solutions, such as chemical or synthetic DNA markers, in rare books and special collections.[2] The survey results are presented alongside a summary of relevant

1. Travis McDade, "The Inside Story of the $8 Million Heist from the Carnegie Library," *Smithsonian Magazine*, September 2020, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/theft-carnegie-library-books-maps-artworks-180975506/; Lisa O'Carroll and Philip Oltermann, "Georgians Arrested Over Cross-Europe Thefts of Rare Library Books," *The Guardian*, April 25, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2024/apr/25/rare-library-book-thefts-europe-libraries; The British Museum, "Announcement Regarding Missing, Stolen and Damaged Items," August 16, 2023, https://www.britishmuseum.org/sites/default/files/2023-08/Announcement_regarding_missing_stolen_and_damaged_items.pdf

2. Faculty of Chemistry, Brno University of Technology, "Invisible Identification Mark Protects Rare Archival Materials and Art Prints," August 14, 2024, https://www.zvut.cz/en/ideas-discoveries/ideas-and-discoveries-f38103/invisible-identification-mark-protects-rare-archival-materials-and-art-prints-d262620; Michael Stillman, "Raptis Rare Books Adopts Invisible Marking System to Protect Books from Theft," *Rare Book Hub*, November 2018, https://www.rarebookhub.com/articles/2505.

professional literature and guidelines, which acknowledges the drawbacks of marking rare and special collections material but that, overall, supports marking as a pivotal theft prevention measure. However, the survey results reveal that, in practice, there is hesitation and inconsistency when implementing this recommendation.

Literature Review

While library security is dealt with frequently in professional scholarship, the literature on marking rare and special collections material is more limited. The paucity of professional literature on physical processing of books was raised as early as 1956 by then assistant director of libraries at Ohio State University, Rolland E. Stevens, who noted that the practice then, as now, was open to much debate.[3] Literature on library security shows that concern about the security of rare materials emerged seriously in the mid-1960s.[4] By the late 1970s and early 1980s, libraries in the United States were taking action through forming working groups and developing guidelines.[5]

Library director Susan M. Allen attributed growing concern around security of special collections to some high-profile thefts reported in the media, bemoaning the lack of seriousness with which these crimes were treated,[6] while research assistant Kristin M. Janus also linked library theft to media coverage, citing better public awareness of material value through television programs such as *Antiques Roadshow*.[7] Library director Mary Wyly attributed price rises and scarcity of materials on the antiquarian book market to greater consumption of private collections by institutional buyers. She linked this, in turn, to changes in educational practices that encouraged students to focus on primary source materials in their studies. Wyly also notes that, in North America, property theft dramatically increased between the 1950s and 1980s.[8] The American Library Association (ALA) observed that outreach activities—that promote use of rare books and special collections—may compromise security by drawing the attention of thieves to high-value items.[9] Growing concern around theft of rare materials in the mid- to late-twentieth century led to the transformation of an ad-hoc security committee of the American College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Rare

3. Rolland E. Stevens, "Loss of Books and Library Ownership Marks," *College & Research Libraries* 17, no. 6 (1956): 493.

4. Kristin M. Janus, "Securing Our History," *Library & Archival Security* 17, no. 1, (2001): 5, Https://doi.org/10.1300/J114v17n01_02; J. J. Rossman, *Access to Special Collections and Archives: Bridging Theory and Practice*, (Rowman & Littlefield, 2024), 115.

5. S. M. Allen "Preventing Theft in Academic Libraries and Special Collections," *Library & Archival Security* 14, no. 1 (1997): 38; Rossman, *Access to Special Collections*, 115–120.

6. Allen, "Preventing Theft", 37–38.

7. Janus, "Securing Our History," 4.

8. M. Wyly "Special Collections Security: Problems, Trends, and Consciousness," *Library Trends* 36, no. 1, (1987): 242–246.

9. American Library Association, "ACRL Standards and Guidelines: Guidelines for the Security of Rare Book, Manuscript, and Other Special Collections: A draft," *College & Research Libraries News* 60, no. 4 (1999): 304, https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.60.4.304.

Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) into a regular committee with a mission to develop guidelines that would inform policies at a local level.[10] The first guidelines on marking rare books and special collections material were published in 1979.

As shown by existing published guidelines and professional literature, marking is usually considered as one of a range of measures to improve library security. However, as this survey shows, there is professional confusion and hesitation around this issue, suggesting that marking practices deserve to be explored independently. This article provides recent data on marking practices within the rare book and special collections sector.

Published Guidelines

There are several published guidelines from American and European organizations that deal with marking rare books and special collections material. The most comprehensive and established of these is the *Guidelines for the Security of Rare Book, Manuscript, and Other Special Collections*, published by ACRL/RBMS in 1982, 1990, 1999,[11] and 2009, with revisions in 2019 and 2023.[12] The original 1979 marking recommendations were included as an appendix to successive versions of the *Guidelines*. Marking rare materials is endorsed by all versions of the *Guidelines*, with some minor variations in approach. Apart from the first iteration in 1979, marking is proposed as one of several security measures.

While seemingly the most pervasive source of advice on marking rare and special collections, the ACRL/RBMS *Guidelines* are not the only relevant policy documentation available. In 2012, the former Chair (2002–2006) of the ACRL RBMS security committee, Everett C. Wilkie, Jr., compiled and edited *Guide to Security Considerations and Practices for Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collection Libraries*, which contains a chapter dedicated to marking rare book and manuscript materials that vehemently supports the marking of *all* rare book and manuscript materials, which the author calls "planned mutilation for a good cause."[13] The *Collections Theft Response Procedures* published by the Getty Conservation Institute and Huntington Library in 2001 also endorses marking, referencing the ACRL/RBMS *Guidelines* for this recommendation.[14]

10. Allen, "Preventing Theft," 38.
11. American Library Association, "ACRL Standards and Guidelines," 1999, 304.
12. "ACRL/RBMS Guidelines Regarding the Security of Special Collections Materials" American Library Association, revised June 2023, https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/security_theft
13. Everett C. Wilkie, Jr., *Guide to Security Considerations and Practices for Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collection Libraries* (ACRL, 2012), 159–76.
14. Wilbur Faulk and Laurie Sowd, *Collections Theft Response Procedures*. (Getty Conservation Institute; Huntington Library, 2001), http://hdl.handle.net/10020/gci_pubs/collections_theft_response

The Rare Books and Special Collections Group of the United Kingdom's library and information association, (Chartered Institute for Library and Information professionals (CILIP)), published *Guidelines for the Cataloguing of Rare Books*. This guidance does not cover markings, except in the case of recording historical markings that relate to provenance.[15] However, CILIP's *Theft of Books and Manuscripts from Libraries: an Advisory Code of Conduct for Booksellers and Librarians*, jointly developed with the Antiquarian Booksellers Association (ABA), states that "Libraries have a responsibility to make unique and (if possible) indelible marks of ownership.[16] The Consortium of European Research Libraries' (CERL) Collection Security Working Group developed a Quick Audit Tool to help institutions protect themselves against theft that includes tacit endorsement of marking practices.[17] Despite the lack of universal acceptance for it, there is considerable support from recognized authorities in these high-level guidelines, for libraries who wish to implement a marking regime.

The ACRL/RBMS marking guidelines themselves are reasonably consistent, always advising use of visible markings with secondary application of invisible markings, that is, any marking not visible by the human eye such as use of invisible ink, microtaggants, microdots, or micro-embossers.[18] The rationale for a combination of the two methods is that highly visible markings are more likely to be removed or erased by thieves, as demonstrated in the case of the Lambeth Palace,[19] Texas State Library and Archives, and Harry Ransom Center thefts.[20] There has been acknowledgement throughout the various iterations of guidelines that the approach irrevocably changes an item, and that the final decision rests with the individual institution.

Current ACRL/RBMS marking guidelines unequivocally state "the failure to mark collections compromises security and increases the likelihood that materials will not be returned if stolen," emphasizing that this is especially important for printed books, which are difficult to tell apart, remarking that "some marking is better than none."[21]

15. "CILIP Guidelines for the Cataloguing of Rare Books", UK Bibliographic Standards Committee, CILIP Rare Books and Special Collections Group, 2007, revised 2007 https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.cilip.org.uk/resource/group/6b7ad90b-bf8b-4d07-8406-0d28376b41f1/guidlines_for_the_cataloguin.pdf
16. "Theft of Books and Manuscripts from Libraries: An Advisory Code of Conduct for Booksellers and Librarians," Antiquarian Booksellers Association (ABA) and the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), 2015, revised January 2015 https://www.cilip.org.uk/members/group_content_view.asp?group=201312&id=690475
17. *The Quick Audit Tool: A Self-Assessment Tool in the Fight Against Theft, Mutilation, Vandalism and Loss, offered to you by the CERL Security Working Group*, 5th ed. (Consortium of European Research Libraries, 2024) https://www.cerl.org/_media/collaboration/security/quick_audit_tool_booklet_prpage_v5_def.pdf
18. Wilkie, "Security Considerations," 165; Joshua Finnell, "Invisible Markings and Conservation Treatment: An Exploratory Study," *Library & Archival Security* 24, no. 1 (2011): 19–24, https://doi.org/10.1080/01960075.2010.494594.
19. Alison Flood, "Lambeth Palace Retrieves Stolen Collection of Extraordinary Rare Books", *The Guardian*, April 30, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/29/lambeth-palace-stolen-books-retrieved.
20. For a robust discussion of different methods of marking see Wilkie, "Security Considerations,"160–1, 159–76.
21. American Library Association, "ACRL/RBMS Guidelines."

Permanent, visible stamping in conservation-grade ink is recommended to deter theft. The mark itself should clearly identify the institution and appear in a prominent place that would be difficult to obscure or remove without raising suspicion. Invisible marks are proposed to prove ownership in the case of theft. These should be applied discreetly, their use recorded in internal documentation, with the information restricted to prevent their targeted removal. ACRL/RBMS also recommends documenting past procedures, markings and deaccessioning activities.

Best Practices: Recommendations from Professional Literature and Discussion

Literature and professional discussions, such as conference presentations, tend to consider the issue of marking in the wider context of collection security. The literature emphasizes the importance of policies and procedures, with Trinkaus-Randall noting the need to develop a security policy, and with both Allen and Janus recommending the inclusion of theft in collection emergency plans.[22] Trinkaus-Randall suggests developing a shared sense of responsibility for managing cultural property and seeking buy-in from staff by including them in policy development.[23]

The need to implement supporting collection management strategies is also evident in the literature, with recommendations to improve item-level description of significant materials to include copy-specific information.[24] Lieberman stresses the need to add detailed bibliographical information to catalogue records to help distinguish between editions, issues and states, and to mark materials immediately upon acquisition.[25] Digitizing or documenting items through reference photography can also provide proof of ownership in the case of theft.[26]

The main goal of marking rare books and special collections is to make items less vulnerable to theft and prove ownership in the case of theft. As noted by Kovarsky, despite recent advances in technology, "one of the simplest measures, the direct marking of materials, can and should be more widely employed."[27] The recommendation to mark is made with the understanding that this action permanently changes an item: as Lieberman states, institutional stamps become part of a book's provenance.[28]

22. G. Trinkaus-Randall, "Preserving Special Collections Through Internal Security," *College & Research Libraries* 50, no. 4 (1989), 452–3; Allen, "Preventing Theft," 30; Janus, "Securing Our History," 14.
23. Christian M. Cupp, *Security Considerations for Archives: Rare Book, Manuscript, and Other Special Collections. Air Force Institute of Technology*, Wright-Patterson AFB: 2.
24. Greg Seppi and D. Skeem, "Picking Up the Pieces," *RBM: A journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 21, no. 2 (2020).
25. Ronald Lieberman "Are Rubber Stamps Better than Chains?" *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 6, no. 1 (1999): 79, Https://doi.org/10.1300/J106v06n01_08
26. Cupp, *Security Considerations*, 4.
27. Joel Kovarsky "Keeping it Safe, Keeping it Available—Theft Prevention in Special Collections," *Library Student Journal* 2, no. 4 (2007): 10.
28. Lieberman "Are Rubber Stamps Better," 79.

Objections to marking raised in the literature include cost, labor, time, damage to the item, and the potential for damage to be inflicted through attempts to remove markings.[29] The notion of perceived damage surfaces regularly, and, in more extreme cases is described as "mutilation." Although very dated, the 1937 article "Librarians as Enemies of Books" arguably still resonates as an example of the cultural stereotype of a "destructive" stamp-wielding librarian more concerned with administration of an item than its cultural significance.[30]

Trinkaus and Randall emphasize that, in addition to the aesthetic impact of marking, the practice has drawbacks, due to the time and expense required to implement marking programs; they cite a 1966 estimate by the Archivist of the United States that it would take 5,000 years and 20 million dollars to mark the holdings of the National Archives.[31] Cupp seems to agree that there are limits to what can be achieved through marking regimes, stating that, "Marking offers one of the best means of protecting individual items from theft," but that it is not practical to mark everything.[32] Wyly notes that retrospective marking raises labor issues, and points to the fact that the practice still is not fully accepted by the profession.[33] Seppi and Skeen point out that improving description of rare materials can provide a "shopping list" to prospective thieves.[34]

Current Outlook on Marking Practices

In her recent Churchill Fellowship report, Phillipa Stevens affirms that marking remains contentious but similarly points to the strong support from professional bodies and the literature. She concludes: "The method of marking should be decided in the context of previous practices, tightly controlled as to where, and simple enough to be administered in sections other than the conservation team."[35] While the advice on marking from ACRL has been relatively stable for decades, there is less information available on whether these guidelines were widely adopted; an issue that this paper seeks to address. A minority of institutions have publicly accessible information available online that outlines marking practices. For instance, the Rare Book Policy of the University of Hong Kong Libraries shows that institution stamps rare materials and provides instructions on how to do so.[36] In contrast, the Rare Book Collections Policy of Western Libraries, states: "No labels, stamps or embosses are affixed to

29. Haworth Continuing Features Submission, "Marking of Materials," 50.
30. R. G. Adams, "Librarians as Enemies of Books", *Library Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (1937): 317.
31. Trinkaus-Randall, "Preserving Special Collections", 452–3.
32. Cupp, *Security Considerations,* 4.
33. Wyly, "Special Collections Security," 252.
34. Seppi and Skeem "Picking Up the Pieces."
35. Phillipa Stevens, *To Benchmark the Balance of Access, Security and Preservation for Significant Library Collections*, Winston Churchill Trust, 2024, https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/fellow/philippa-stevens-nsw-2019/
36. "Rare Book Policy," University of Hong Kong Libraries, 2020, https://lib.hku.hk/sites/all/files/files/general/Rare%20Book%20Policy.pdf

rare books," and recommends the use of acid-free bookmarks to record information instead.[37] A paper presented at the 2010 Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM) Book, Paper and Photographic Materials Symposium indicated that, at the time, the National Library of Australia used ink stamps and embossing on some materials to prevent theft, placing these at the top edge of a page without text.[38] A 2023 presentation by Gardham indicated that, at the time of presentation, University of Glasgow were applying water-soluble bookplates and handwriting the shelf marks in pencil, but were considering re-introducing stamping.[39] The lack of accessible institutional policies on stamping may not be so surprising, given that the ACRL/RBMS Guidelines recommend that these should remain confidential to protect against systematic removal of marks, in the case of theft.

This literature review identified two pre-existing surveys on marking practices. In 1956, Stevens reported on a survey of marking practices from nineteen large American college libraries to understand the implementation of ownership marks to reduce theft. The survey was not focused on rare materials; however, it investigated marking practices across different formats (e.g., bound, unbound, microfilm, microcards, and microprint). The survey found that two (10%) used a rubber stamp, six (31%) used a perforating or embossing stamp, and 17 (89%) used a bookplate.[40] In 1987, Wyly reported that a more targeted survey on security by RBMS found that 31% of 89 respondents were marking materials.[41]

Background

In 2021, both authors of this paper then worked at Museums Victoria Library. Museums Victoria is based on the unceded lands of the peoples of the Kulin Nation in Naarm/Melbourne and is Australia's largest public museum organization. At that time, the institutional library began documenting processes around cataloguing and end-processing of library materials, including rare books and special collections, which led to questions as to exactly why the practice of applying ownership markings to special collections materials ceased. This article's central survey, consequently, sought to gather recent data on marking practices in rare and special collections.

37. Debbie Meert-Williston, "Rare Books Collection Policy," Western Libraries, 2021, https://www.lib.uwo.ca/files/policies/collections/rarebooks.pdf

38. Jennifer Lloyd, "A Sticky Issue—Labelling Library Collections" in Contributions to the 6th AICCM Book, Paper & Photographic Materials Symposium (AICCM, 2011): 40, https://aiccm.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/AICCM_BP2010_Lloyd_p40-42.pdf

39. Julie Gardham, "Marking Our Collections: To Stamp or Not to Stamp?" (paper presented at the CERL Collection Security Summer School: Security Policy in Practice: Staff & Partners. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid, Spain, 6–8 September 2023). https://www.cerl.org/_media/collaboration/security/cerl_2023swgsummerschooljg.pdf

40. Stevens, "Loss of Books," 493.

41. Wyly, "Special Collections Security," 250.

At Museums Victoria Library, ownership markings were commonplace, from the establishment of the collection in 1854. At various points through the library's history, markings included handwritten accession numbers or a date of acquisition, either in ink or pencil. Ink institutional stamps and library stamps are also regularly seen on library collections (see Figure 1).

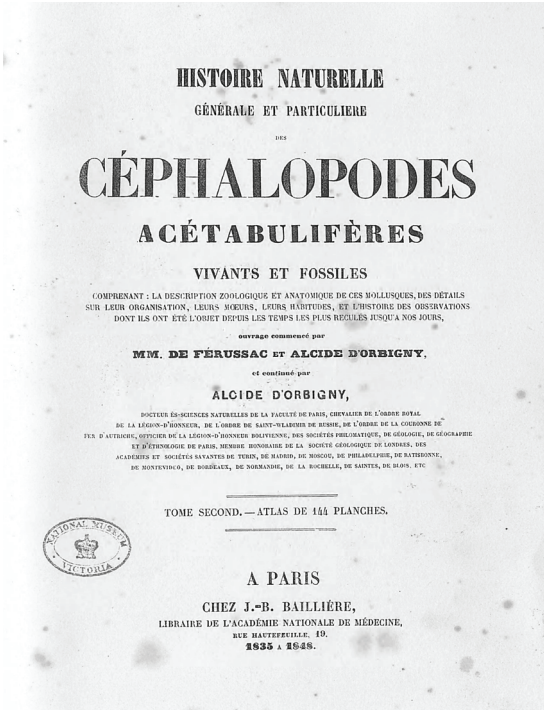
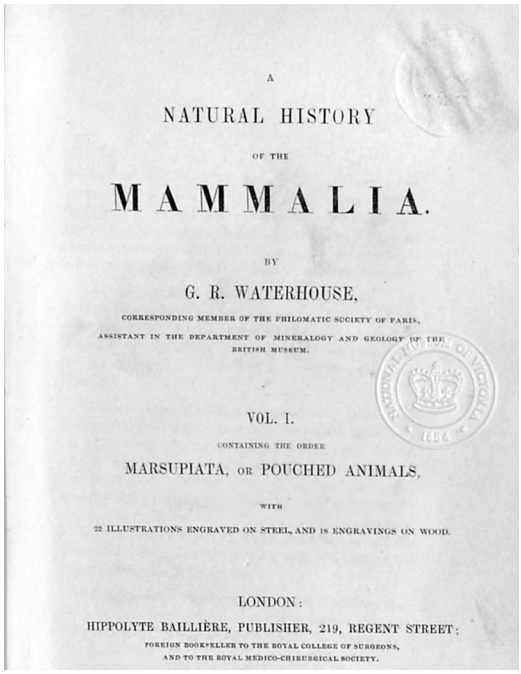

HISTOIRE NATURELLE
GÉNÉRALE ET PARTICULIERE
DES
CÉPHALOPODES
ACÉTABULIFÈRES
VIVANTS ET FOSSILES
COMPRENANT : LA DESCRIPTION ZOOLOGIQUE ET ANATOMIQUE DE CES MOLLUSQUES, DES DÉTAILS SUR LEUR ORGANISATION, LEURS MŒURS, LEURS HABITUDES, ET L'HISTOIRE DES OBSERVATIONS DONT ILS ONT ÉTÉ L'OBJET DEPUIS LES TEMPS LES PLUS RECULÉS JUSQU'A NOS JOURS,
ouvrage commencé par
MM. DE FÉRUSSAC ET ALCIDE D'ORBIGNY,
et continué par
ALCIDE D'ORBIGNY,
DOCTEUR ÈS-SCIENCES NATURELLES DE LA FACULTÉ DE PARIS, CHEVALIER DE L'ORDRE ROYAL DE LA LÉGION-D'HONNEUR, DE L'ORDRE DE SAINT-VLADIMIR DE RUSSIE, DE L'ORDRE DE LA COURONNE DE FER D'AUTRICHE, OFFICIER DE LA LÉGION-D'HONNEUR BOLIVIENNE, DES SOCIÉTÉS PHILOMATIQUE, DE GÉOLOGIE, DE GÉOGRAPHIE ET D'ETHNOLOGIE DE PARIS, MEMBRE HONORAIRE DE LA SOCIÉTÉ GÉOLOGIQUE DE LONDRES, DES ACADÉMIES ET SOCIÉTÉS SAVANTES DE TURIN, DE MADRID, DE MOSCOU, DE PHILADELPHIE, DE BATHSONNE, DE MONTEVIDEO, DE BORDEAUX, DE NORMANDIE, DE LA ROCHELLE, DE SAINTES, DE BLOIS, ETC
TOME SECOND. — ATLAS DE 144 PLANCHES.
NATIONAL MUSEUM VICTORIA
A PARIS
CHEZ J.-B. BAILLIÉRE,
LIBRAIRE DE L'ACADÉMIE NATIONALE DE MÉDECINE,
RUE HAUTEFEUILLE. 19.
1835 A 1848.

FIGURE 1
Title page of Museums Victoria's copy of *Histoire naturelle: generale et particuliere des cephalopodes acetabuliferes vivants et fossils* by Ferussac and d'Orbigny (1835) with National Museum Victoria stamp. Source: Museums Victoria via the Biodiversity Heritage Library https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/263034#page/9/mode/1up.

Ink stamps were used into the 1970s, and an embossed stamp was used for items entered into the Rare Book Collection from the 1970s until the 1980s, when the practice ceased. The placement of stamps varies a little but tends to appear on the title page and the verso of plates[42] (see Figure 2).

A conversation with Museums Victoria's paper conservator revealed an openness to resuming the practice, given more information as to whether this was still common elsewhere. To gauge whether the practice of institutions applying ownership markings directly to special collections materials is still widespread, a ten-question survey about the application of library ownership stamps on materials was circulated through rare book and special collections-related listserv groups, including SHARP-L, LIS-RAREBOOKS, and ALIARare (see Appendix A for survey questions).

42. Hayley Webster, "Provenance and Library Stamps at Museums Victoria and on BHL," *Biodiversity Heritage Library Blog*, October 3, 2019, https://blog.biodiversitylibrary.org/2019/10/provenance-and-library-stamps.html



A

NATURAL HISTORY

OF THE

MAMMALIA.

BY

G. R. WATERHOUSE,

CORRESPONDING MEMBER OF THE PHILOMATIC SOCIETY OF PARIS,

ASSISTANT IN THE DEPARTMENT OF MINERALOGY AND GEOLOGY OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

VOL. I.

CONTAINING THE ORDER

MARSUPIATA, OR POUCHED ANIMALS,

WITH

22 ILLUSTRATIONS ENGRAVED ON STEEL, AND 18 ENGRAVINGS ON WOOD.

LONDON:

HIPPOLYTE BAILLIÈRE, PUBLISHER, 219, REGENT STREET;

FOREIGN BOOKSELLER TO THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS,

AND TO THE ROYAL MEDICO-CHIRURGICAL SOCIETY.

FIGURE 2
Title page of Museum's Victoria's copy of *A natural history of the mammalia* by G. R. Waterhouse (1846–48) with embossed National Museum of Victoria stamp. Source: Museums Victoria via the Biodiversity Heritage Library https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/272451#page/7/mode/1up.

Survey Methodology

The survey was hosted on Microsoft Forms, was open from December 17, 2021, until February 1, 2022, and attracted 94 respondents, one of which was screened out due to evasive responses which suggested the respondent may not have been truthful due to privacy concerns. The survey was anonymized due to the potentially sensitive nature of the topic, and any identifying information given in free-text answers was removed before publication. Respondents were not asked to provide information on geographic location or type of institution.

Survey Results

When asked: "Does your organization apply ownership stamps to special collections materials?" 57% answered that they did not (see Figure 3).

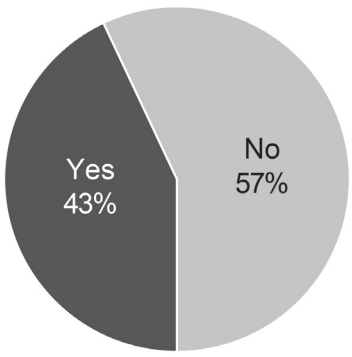


FIGURE 3
A visualization of responses to survey question 1: "Does your organization apply ownership stamps to special collections materials?"

Of those that answered in the negative, 72% indicated that their institution had applied ownership stamps to special collections in the past, and 28% stated that the practice had never occurred.

Of the respondents whose institutions had never used stamps on special collections, several other measures of marking or indicating ownership directly to items were highlighted; most common were the use of pencil markings and affixing bookplates using conservation adhesives. Several respondents also mentioned recording annotations and barcodes on acid-free bookmarks, containers, or in Mylar sleeves.

From the 38 respondents who indicated that their institution previously applied ownership stamps but no longer does, 22 stated that ceasing this practice was a conscious decision, one said that it was not, and 15 said that they were not sure. The most common reason given to stop stamping items was the perceived damage to the items and irreversible nature of the markings. The monetary value of the items, time taken to process items, and items being in closed access storage were also mentioned.

The 43% of respondents who answered the question "Does your organization apply ownership stamps to special collections materials?" in the positive were next asked if their institution has a policy around applying ownership stamps to special collections materials; 55% responded that they do. When asked if their organization has considered ceasing the practice of applying ownership stamps, 40% said they have. The most common reasons for considering ceasing the practice was, again, damage to the item. However, many respondents highlighted the perceived benefit of ownership stamps as a deterrent to theft and proof of ownership. A lack of viable alternative security measures was also mentioned, although digital stamps, RFID tags, and security tags were highlighted by respondents (see Figure 4).

FIGURE 4
A visualization of responses to survey question 9: "Please explain why you and/or your organization places value in applying ownership stamps."

Discussion

Throughout the free-text answers, several pros and cons were presented by respondents. As referenced above, a major reason against applying ownership markings to special collections materials given was the perceived damage to collection items by these practices. Indeed, any mark is a permanent alteration of an item and thus becomes part of its material history. One of the main reasons given for applying ownership markings was the perceived value of these to researchers, with respondents suggesting that any markings become "part of the history of the object" and served to contextualize and maintain an item's histories. Several respondents commented they were conscious of adhering to standards of conservation and preservation, while some respondents said that they worked alongside conservators to sensitively and responsibly apply ownership marks to items through use of conservation inks.

The placement of any marking was also raised as being important, with respondents suggesting that any marks should be "sensitive to aesthetics and functionality," should have no impact on the usability of the item by obscuring text or images and, therefore, should be decided on a case-by-case basis. Some respondents objected to the aesthetic of the marking itself, commenting that markings are "visually unappealing" and "look unprofessional especially when a researcher wishes to view the item or when the image is required for publication." Others stated that "stamps do not detract from the research or exhibition value of . . . material," and "do not impact its research value when properly applied," with one respondent pointing out that markings on digital copies can be easily removed with Photoshop if needed. One respondent also suggested that not all institutional collections are guaranteed to stand the test of time, and that

> not marking materials displays a bit of cockiness or short-sightedness about what may happen to these collections in future, and we want to be sure that future stewards and researchers can trace the history of the materials accurately, whatever may come.

The effect on the monetary value of the items was mentioned by a few respondents, with one stating that adding any markings would detract from any future sale price. Alternatively, another respondent offered that "reduction of financial value is no bad thing if it deters theft or thoughts by unscrupulous institutional leaders of selling material in the collections."

Unsurprisingly, the perceived benefit of ownership markings as a deterrent to theft and to assist with proof of ownership was a focus for many respondents. It was striking that the three respondents who reported their institution had been the target of a theft in the past in a free-text answer supported applying ownership markings to

special collections. One called it "an essential safeguarding measure" noting that the onus of proof is on the institution to provide distinguishing copy-specific information, and that even "suspicious rubbing or the non-existence of paper in the places where a stamp is can be a major element in such proof." Another noted that permanent markings were felt to be necessary by the institution, because not all items had copy-specific information contained in the catalogue record. The third of these respondents stated that ownership stamps assisted in their successful identification and return of stolen items.

As noted earlier, the use of non-permanent markings, such as pencils or affixing bookplates using conservation adhesives, were mentioned by many; however, by their nature, these could be removed with little to no sign. Several respondents also mentioned recording annotations and barcodes on acid-free bookmarks, containers, or in Mylar sleeves, which others noted came at a risk of disassociation.

A small number of respondents stated that ownership markings on items were not necessary because their collections are closed access and non-circulating. In opposition to this, one respondent noted that items can be loaned to external institutions for research or display, while another suggested that many thefts are conducted by internal staff. On cases of institutional theft, that respondent also contemplated that knowledge of the method and location in which ownership marks are applied should be limited as this could be used to disguise internal theft.

Recommendations

Together, the survey and literature review show lack of agreement around marking rare books and special collections. While the recommendation to apply ownership marks has considerable support from numerous professional bodies, and is backed up by professional literature, the survey results show both that this recommendation has been adopted in piecemeal fashion by the profession, and that there is considerable hesitation due to the perceived damage that marking causes to an item. Familiarity with existing guidelines from ACRL/RBMS, CILIP & ABA, and Getty Conservation Institute and Huntington Library publications may prove a useful first step for those initiating conversations about marking in their institution. The development of policies or guidelines by national libraries or library associations in other regions may also help individual libraries navigate this issue.

The survey revealed a lack of local policies and procedures, which institutions would be wise to address. Even if institutions decide against marking, having a documented position would reduce professional confusion over this issue and improve knowledge transfer within organizations. Additionally, the work done to establish a policy would ensure that the issue is properly considered, rather than acting upon assumptions

around "damage." If possible, work with conservators to establish local marking guidelines to reduce the impact on the item.

If implementing a marking program, an institution should follow the recommendations from ACRL/RBMS to apply a unique, visible mark that is readily identifiable, in an obvious but unobtrusive position that does not obscure any content. Preferably—if practical—a secondary, invisible mark should also be applied somewhere unexpected. This should be clearly documented, with these details restricted to only the necessary staff. While the specifics may be confidential, the lack of consensus around marking suggests that broader knowledge-sharing among the profession and exchange of high-level policy decisions would be useful.

Another factor that emerges strongly in literature is the need to consider marking practices in the broader context of collection security. Recommendations abound in the existing literature, and the CERL Quick Audit tool offers an accessible way to measure compliance. Marking regimes should be implemented in conjunction with collection management strategies such as reducing cataloguing backlogs and improving copy-specific description.

Conclusion

This paper highlights a wide gulf between published guidelines and best practices and the practical implementation (or lack thereof) of these guidelines. As an industry we have been warned for decades that failure to mark valuable materials can result in heavy losses and yet the marking of collection items appears to have declined.[43] There is much to explore in future studies on this disparity, not least the question of why permanent ownership markings are not being applied, despite the substantial amount of professional guidance to do so. This inconsistency is not a new observation: indeed, librarian and library security expert William A. Moffett, who is known for assisting in the capture of prolific library thieves James Richard Shinn and Stephen Blumberg, noted in 1983, "the rarer they are, the less likely they are to mark them."[44]

As librarians, the authors of this paper often see the reverence that people hold for physical books, the disgust that is often shown for folding pages or contemporary marginalia, and the guilt associated with sometimes necessary activities such as rebinding, opening uncut leaves or deaccessioning. It seems that books are still considered such sacred objects that any alteration or destruction of their form is considered sacrilegious. The authors hope this paper will encourage more transparency and com-

43. Wilkie, "Security Considerations," 159. Alice Harrison Bahr, *Book Theft and Library Security Systems, 1978–79* (Knowledge Industry Publications, 1978), 107.
44. William A. Moffett, "College Libraries Struggle with Theft," *Walla Walla Union Bulletin*, October 4, 1983, 5, NewspaperArchive.

munication between institutions on marking rare material. A follow-up survey in five or ten years to further gauge progress or change in this area would be pertinent. In building this survey, the authors erred on the side of caution by fully anonymizing the responses. However, if possible, the next version of this survey should ask for selective demographic data points, such as the type and size of library represented, and collect broad geographical location data, to help determine whether there are trends among libraries of certain types or sizes, or within specific regions.

Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. Does your organisation apply ownership stamps to special collections materials?
[Yes / No]

If yes, go to Q5. If no, go to Q2.

2. Has your organisation applied ownership stamps to special collections materials in the past?
[Yes / No]

If yes, go to Q3. If no, go to Q4.

3. Was there a conscious decision to stop? Please explain:
[Free text]

Go to Q4.

4. Would you like to add anything?
[Free text]

Survey branch ends at Q4.

5. Does your organisation have a policy around applying ownership stamps to special collections materials?
[Yes / No]

If yes, go to Q6. If no, go to Q7.

6. Can you share a link to this policy, or else copy the relevant passage/s into the text box?
[Free text]

Go to Q7.

7. Has your organisation considered ceasing the practice of applying ownership stamps to special collections materials?
[Yes / No]

If yes, go to Q8. If no, go to Q9.

8. Please explain why your organisation considered ceasing this practice, and why your organisation decided not to cease applying ownership stamps:
[Free text]

Go to Q9.

9. Please explain why you and/or your organisation places value in applying ownership stamps:
[Free text]

Go to Q10.

10. Would you like to add anything?
[Free text]

Survey branch ends at Q10.

Mara Caelin

Sustainably Critical Cataloging: Maximizing the Impact of Term Funding with the Black Bibliography Project[1]

In a political and funding climate increasingly hostile to DEI initiatives in academic institutions, private or external funding may offer important, though time-bound pathways for institutional change. As an academic project housed in special collections libraries and funded largely through private grants, the Black Bibliography Project (BBP) offers a case study in leveraging term-based project funding to embed lasting critical cataloging practices into technical services workflows. This essay outlines four strategies employed by BBP project staff to ensure that the valuable DEI considerations shaping special collections metadata creation and stewardship within the project extend beyond the confines of the project staff and grant duration: 1. expanding criteria for performing authority work; 2. prioritizing collections within a processing backlog; 3. proposing and conducting large-scale reviews of existing catalog records; and 4. convening communities of practice around metadata remediation events. Together, these strategies serve to maximize the value of grant-funded projects to library staff and users, while minimizing barriers raised by institutional politics.

Introduction

In 2023, I began a role cataloging special collections at Yale's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (Beinecke). This role was designed to provide metadata support for the Black Bibliography Project (BBP), as well as to act as a bridge between the academic imperatives of the project and the ongoing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives taking place within University Special Collections. The BBP, like many digital humanities projects in academic library/archive environments, is largely funded by an external grant and bounded by the duration of that funding, for which

1. A version of this article was presented by the author, under the title, "Cascading CritCat: a Case Study in Using Term-Based Projects to Advocate for Broader DEIA Work," as part of the Power of New Voices (PONV) session at the RBMS 2024 conference. PONV is an annual conference session featuring the work of early-career individuals, defined as five years post-Master's. Panelists were contacted to submit essays to *RBM*. Essays reflect the brevity of the lightning talk format.

there is always a planned end.[2] From the perspective of the institutional units housing the project, whose overhead costs may only temporarily be aided by grant funding, the projects would ideally also integrate with the long-term workflows of the institution, honing staff instincts and catalyzing institutional change to achieve maximum value from the project. In this paper, I use examples from my experience in this hybrid role with the BBP to illustrate methods of leveraging the momentum of grant-funded projects to advocate for lasting changes in cataloging workflows that prioritize reparative description and metadata remediation beyond a grant's duration.

The BBP is a digital humanities project headed by Drs. Jacqueline Goldsby and Meredith McGill, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.[3] The BBP uses linked data to create a mode of descriptive bibliography that is built specifically for describing Black print culture.[4] This mission asks us to imagine what current metadata practices might look like if they privileged formats with more collective modes of authorship and production, such as anthologies and serials, over the monograph. It also addresses the need to increase the visibility of Black creators and print workers and to center their agency in bibliographic description, even when white interlocutors may have traditionally been the main entry or primary access point for bibliographic works in library catalogs.[5] Viewing the bibliographic demands of these academic interventions alongside the goals of my cataloging unit, which include a mandate for DEI work, I looked for sites of potential synergy between the workflows. I identified four main strategies for integrating reparative description practices in my cataloging unit: 1. expanding criteria for performing authority work; 2. prioritizing collections within a processing backlog; 3. proposing and conducting large-scale reviews of existing catalog records; and 4. convening communities of practice around metadata remediation events.

1. Expanding Criteria for Performing Authority Work

Typical workflows for special collections catalogers in my unit involve occasional creation of authority records as part of the Name Authority Cooperative Program (NACO) of the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC). These records provide unique identifiers for bibliographic identities that can be used cooperatively by libraries and other institutions. They establish how names should appear in interoperable catalogs, disambiguate between entities with similar names, and link related bibliographic identities and variant forms. Fundamentally, authority records increase the

2. Jessica Otis, "'Follow the Money?': Funding and Digital Sustainability" *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (2023), 4–5.

3. For more information on the goals and processes of the Black Bibliography Project, see the project website: http://blackbibliog.org

4. Jacqueline Goldsby and Meredith L. McGill, "What is 'Black' About Black Bibliography?" *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 116, no. 2 (2022), 164–165.

5. Brenna Bychowski and Melissa Barton, "Modeling Black Literature: Behind the Screen with the Black Bibliography Project" in *Ethnic Studies in Academic and Research Libraries*, eds. Raymond Pun, Melissa Cardenas-Dow, and Kenya S. Flash. (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2021), 229–230.

visibility of an agent's presence in a library catalog by allowing catalog users to group all works related to that agent's unique name together in a single search.

Authority record creation can be time-consuming, and institutions may limit when authority records must be created for agents in typical cataloging workflows. In practice, names recorded in the contributor fields (i.e., 7xx fields that house access points for secondary authors, illustrators, printers, publishers, booksellers, binders, translators, etc.) or in local fields that contain metadata about provenance (e.g., prior ownership, annotation, custodial history, etc.) are often de-prioritized. This reinforces the primacy of the single author within bibliographic description, a bibliographic paradigm that the rich traditions of anthology editing, serial publishing, and collective creation within Black print culture all challenge.[6]

Because BBP workflows sit outside those for typical cataloging in my unit, and because guidelines around what sort of authority work is "necessary" in a linked data system are still nascent, NACO work conducted on behalf of the BBP exceeds typical institutional guidance on staff time. Name Authority Records in the BBP are justified by the project's need to create bibliographic visibility for all creators in the described works. Additionally, its linked data ontology requires that each agent in the BBP knowledge graph be represented uniquely by numerical identifiers, a system bolstered by linkage to external identifiers, such as NACO name authority records or Wikidata items.[7]

Re-imagining criteria for authority work in this way helps to establish authority records as an important part of institutional bibliographical stewardship processes, even when the agents described fall outside of narrow criteria. By increasing Black creators' discoverability in catalogs, finding aids, and linked data systems, BBP staff time on authority work produces a lasting benefit to all institutions relying on those authorities. This expansive consideration of benefit can inform institutional discussions about what authority work is owed to agents, especially to those from communities underrepresented in the Name Authority File and in library description more broadly.

2. Prioritizing Collections Within a Backlog

Priority processing of backlog collections capitalizes on the temporary fungibility of workflows engendered by time-bound projects. At institutions where catalogers work on material queued in a backlog, user demand can alter the order in which collections are cataloged and processed can be altered. Simply, the BBP relies on the availability of Black literature in reading rooms; this reliance demonstrates a user-focused need for prioritized processing of Black materials. When the BBP decided to focus on prison

6. Elizabeth McHenry, *To Make Negro Literature: Writing, Literary Practice, and African American Authorship* (Duke University Press, 2021), 12.
7. Bychowski and Barton, "Modeling Black Literature," 228.

writing, fellows needed access to a collection of uncatalogued prison periodicals in Beinecke's backlog. Substantiating user demand for this collection, BBP's needs justified prioritizing this material, and in doing so, made this material available to all users more quickly. To the extent that institutional policies allow cataloging queue flexibility, immediate project needs provide a compelling case for re-allocation of labor to process collections. Additionally, to the extent that they make their own prioritization decisions, centering user demand for Black books can help catalogers to critically structure individual workflows. Ideally, these temporary restructurings create new habits and criteria for future prioritization decisions at both a unit and cataloger level.

3. Large-scale Review of Existing Catalog Records

Under-described catalogued collections face a different set of challenges, with limited staff hours and new materials awaiting description. Short-term projects focused on subsets of a library's collection provide rare opportunities to get a holistic view of materials and metadata within that pool. This is a great vantage point from which to spot problems and to advocate for large-scale, retrospective changes. Short-term projects can demonstrate a clear user community with a documented interest in the metadata at hand. If the metadata falls short of current descriptive standards, it demonstrates the same need for metadata work as project-based user interest has for collections access.

BBP, for example, describes materials in the James Weldon Johnson Memorial collection, a large collection of African American literature at Beinecke. Established in 1941, the James Weldon Johnson Memorial collection contains materials catalogued prior to the library's move to digital cataloging.[8] Historically, provenance information, recorded separately from most bibliographic information, was not paired with main catalog cards upon digitization. Digital catalog records, therefore, do not always bear provenance information of the items described. I spotted this pattern during a review of the collection as source material for the BBP. I then engaged with collection curators to propose large-scale review of thousands of items which would restore provenance information to the record, which benefits users interested in Black book history. The project, undertaken by multiple unit catalogers, will extend beyond the duration of the grant and expand the critical approach to description beyond staff immediately connected to the BBP. While the intermittent absence of provenance information affects many records from this transitional period, catalogers can thoughtfully choose which collections to begin remediation efforts with. Projects of this scale require significant institutional support and cannot easily be undertaken in guerilla fashion, but short-term project staff are well-positioned to advocate for them in a data-driven and compelling way, or else to strategically select their starting point.

8. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, "James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection," http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/collections/curatorial-areas/james-weldon-johnson-memorial-collection

4. Communities of Practice

Finally, short-term projects create opportunities to gather people already doing similar work at or across institutions. The project itself creates cohorts who deepen not only their knowledge of Black print culture, but also interdisciplinary connections amongst scholars, faculty, and staff engaged in reparative bibliographic work. This inherent community-building function is further enhanced through sponsoring additional metadata events. In January 2024, the BBP hosted a Wikidata edit-a-thon, structured as both workshop on Wikidata creation, and a discussion of ethical imperatives that go into describing agents, resources, and communities. With guidance, participants created Wikidata items for Black creators with biographical information that would enhance the BBP database. Attendees included staff and faculty involved in reparative metadata work, including many members of Special Collections Technical Services looking for actionable ways to embed DEI ideals into their daily work. Graduate and undergraduate students interested in digital humanities and bibliography also attended, providing an opportunity to shape the weight they give to descriptive practices in their own academic and professional futures. By convening metadata workers and users for a DEI-focused event, the edit-a-thon served as a networking site for the university community interested in reparative metadata work.[9] Connections built through gatherings of this nature help to break down knowledge silos inherent to short-term projects. In this way, BBP can serve as a point of entry for broader institutional discussions about ethical description that have potential to extend far beyond the boundaries of the actual project.

Conclusions

At the time of writing, the BBP, still funded by its implementation grant, has not yet actualized all its potential for institutional change. Though future strategies may emerge, the four outlined in this article already helped to wring every drop of transformative value from short-term funding. Since the beginning of the current grant in 2023, BBP staff created or critically updated over one hundred Name Authority Cooperative Program (NACO) records, priority-cataloged two large print collections, proposed large-scale review of catalog records of the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, and hosted five public Wikidata editing events. These successes positively impacted staff and user communities beyond those initially imagined by the grant.

These strategies, however, have many potential limitations. Fundamentally, my ability to experiment with these strategies reflects a privileged position at a large and well-funded private institution with a publicly stated commitment to DEI work. While both the grant and my institutional position are privately funded, the BBP remains, at the time of writing, relatively shielded from political headwinds that affect public

9. Jeania Ree Moore, "Reflection on the First BBP Wikidata Edit-a-thon," *Field Notes from the Archive*, February 2024, https://blackbibliog.org/field-notes-from-the-archive-field-note-no-3

funding and institutions. However, with the rise of both anti-library[10] and anti-diversity legislation targeting academic and cultural institutions at both the state[11] and federal levels,[12] advocating for and funding reparative work can require careful maneuvering. Increasingly, library workers committed to inclusive description and stewardship practices find it necessary to do the work without naming the work, a state which makes advocacy for resource allocation inestimably more challenging.

Even in institutions publicly committed to supporting diverse collections, the strategies outlined here require significant institutional resource allocation. Already a gamble in terms of rate of return for labor put into applications,[13] grants from institutions looking to support DEI work may become increasingly scarce and more competitive in a hostile political climate. When a project is fully grant-funded, capitalizing on its reparative long-term potential, as outlined, still requires time, as well as the focus of staff, who are often underpaid, overworked, and too limited in number to experiment. Relatedly, the hire of short-term project staff is often bound by grant funding duration and, even when that staff can make individual changes, expertise and momentum moves with them to their next role, rather than accumulating in any one repository and/or growing through continuous attention. Legislative hostility comes not only in the form of laws that explicitly prevent thoughtful stewardship of diverse materials, but also in the form of federal and state budgets that strip knowledge institutions of the labor and resources required to perform and sustain remediation and community work.

This case study offers a path for thinking creatively about short-term projects as catalysts for user-substantiated change within even reluctant institutions. Not only does external grant funding provide some institutional cover for devoting resources to the enhanced description of un- or under-described communities, but the short-term projects themselves can generate and substantiate user interest in specific collections that justify increased attention to the descriptive practices used therein, without overtly triggering political booby traps. The temporary restructuring of cataloging workflows can allow staff time and mental bandwidth to prioritize authorities and collections of un- or under-described communities, to perform re-description and remediation work as necessary, and to convene communities of practice. These careful and attentive workflows, which can be boosted by a grant's seed funding and disseminated by the practices and programs of a short-term project, must be nurtured into sustainable practice that empowers cataloging staff to see themselves as long-term stewards of diverse and inclusive collections.

10. American Library Association, "Adverse Legislation in the States," December 21, 2024, https://www.ala.org/advocacy/adverse-legislation-states

11. Stephanie Birch et al., "On Defense: Academic Librarians in DEI Battleground States," *Journal of Library Outreach and Engagement* 4, no. 1 (2024), 105, https://doi.org/10.21900/j.jloe.v4.1650.

12. United States Department of Education, "U.S. Department of Education Directs Schools to End Racial Preferences," news release, February 15, 2025, https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/us-department-of-education-directs-schools-end-racial-preferences

13. Otis, "Follow the Money," 4.

Lyric Grimes

Making Third Spaces Safe Spaces: How Trauma-Informed Care Informs Librarianship[1]

Libraries are increasingly aware that patrons have experienced traumas related to social, economic, racial, and political factors. With the 2020 pandemic came an increase in vulnerable populations and library patrons. As a result, "Trauma-informed Care" (TIC) and "third spaces" in libraries emerged. Ray Oldenburg defined "third space" as neutral space separate from home and work where we build connections and have a good time. At the same time, TIC promotes person-centered, culturally aware, and strengths-based interaction. This paper provides a brief overview of TIC and "third spaces" in libraries and special collections, and shares strategies to follow to create a safe, inclusive, and supportive environments in library spaces.

Introduction

Conversations surrounding libraries frequently assert that they are open to everyone. Yet this viewpoint fails to acknowledge the harsh truth that libraries, being institutions, can cause both intentional and unintentional harm to the populations they aim to assist. This article explores the history of libraries, using the term "libraries" to refer to both public and special collections for brevity. It discusses libraries as a "third place," a term often interchangeable with "third space." The article will examine the essential elements of safety that shape the perception of libraries as "safe spaces," as well as the unintentional harm that libraries and librarians may inflict. Ultimately, it will emphasize how adopting trauma-informed care can help libraries create a genuinely inclusive and welcoming environment for everyone. It is important to note that while the terms "third place" and "third space" are related, they are distinct concepts that will be elaborated upon in this piece.

1. A version of this article was presented by the author, under the title, "Making Third Spaces Safe Spaces: How Trauma-Informed Care Informs Librarianship," as part of the Power of New Voices (PONV) session at the RBMS 2024 conference. PONV is an annual conference session featuring the work of early-career individuals, defined as five years post-Master's. Panelists were contacted to submit essays to *RBM*. Essays reflect the brevity of the lightning talk format.

This article originated from an active shooter incident on the university campus where I work. Although special collections were not the location of the incident, they nonetheless constituted an unintended casualty. The archive, often called the "jewel of the campus," is a respected hall of learning where students, prospective students, and visiting scholars come to study, research, and acquire knowledge. However, after the event, something changed. Researcher numbers declined, tours were canceled, and remote work increased—the library was no longer physically, psychologically, or socially safe for visitors or staff. This situation led me to question what it means when the "library as a place," or library safety is compromised, and how we can reaffirm the library as safe once more.

The Library as a Third Place

Libraries have shifted from a traditional "book-centric" definition to a more progressive "service-centric" approach. In contemporary discussions, libraries serve more as community centers and gathering places than merely as book depositories, including some special collections. However, at their inception, libraries were not intended to be community centers; instead, they were meant to help foster "an intelligent and educated electorate [which] is essential to a democracy, and in the great system of public education, which they foresaw, the public library was to be a true 'people's university.'"[2] Over time, libraries have increasingly become viewed as "third places." Oldenburg defined "third place" as a "generic designation for a great variety of public places that have the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work."[3] "Third places" must be: cheap or free; close to home or work so that you can go there regularly; amenable to conversation; a second home for old friends and new; not required to be there or restricted by time; and playful.[4]

Oldenburg did not view libraries as "third places" because of the existing structure and social conditions at the time of his writing; however, libraries now fit into these categories more than ever. They are at the forefront of addressing numerous issues, including homelessness, drug addiction, natural disasters, and more. Oldenburg's work significantly shaped the idea of libraries as community spaces, even if not directly referenced. For example, an article in *Social Work Today* noted, "The notion of libraries as a central gathering place for the community is not new."[5] Wood

2. Jesse Hauk Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England 1629–1855* (University of Chicago Press, 1949).

3. Anne Hendershott, "Review of *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You Through the Day*, by Ray Oldenburg," *Contemporary Sociology* 20, no. 1 (1991): 78–79, https://doi.org/10.2307/2072095.

4. Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (Berkshire Publishing Group LLC, 2023).

5. Christiane Petrin Lambert, "Libraries and Social Workers–Perfect Partners," *Social Work Today* 20, no. 2 (2020): 20.

suggests that "libraries meet the definition of third place in its purest form. . . ."[6] In 2002, Demas and Scherer similarly stated that libraries are "transcendent spaces," and much like third places, they "create opportunities for people who do not necessarily travel in the same disciplinary, social, political, or economic circles to frequently meet and greet each other."[7] Libraries, academic and public, and special collections may serve different purposes and cater to various populations but, fundamentally, they both embody the concepts of "third places" and "transcendent spaces." They serve as gathering spaces for public and private researchers, students, and the public to safely interact with each other, materials, and librarians.

Safeties and Safe Places

When discussing the evolution of libraries as "third spaces," it's essential to establish an environment where individuals feel safe.[8] Physical, psychological, cultural, moral, and social safeties all make libraries "safe spaces" and, in turn, represent "third places." In library contexts, one or several of these safeties may exist simultaneously. Library rules, guidelines, and regulations typically uphold physical safety concerns for patrons, staff, and materials. Psychological safety is "the ability to feel secure with oneself, to depend on one's own capacity to protect against destructive impulses originating from within or from others, and to remain safe from harm."[9] Psychological safety for patrons comes from customer service and staff interactions. For library staff, psychological safety hinges on administration support. Cultural safety is "the overall experience of an individual's ability to live, promote, honor, and explore their family's cultural heritage."[10] Staff education, as well as prioritizing—and elevating—marginalized voices, help promote cultural safety. A morally safe environment fosters healthy debate, and encourages traits like diversity, courage, compassion, and trust. It also removes toxic and punitive mindsets and environments, positively affecting staff and patrons. Social safety is "feeling safe with other people in group, public, or private settings ... [that] signifies a sense of security where individuals feel cared for and trusted."[11] Social safety is a fundamental principle in libraries because it ensures that all individuals feel welcome, secure, and respected while using the available resources and services.

It is critical to highlight the role of "familiar strangers" in establishing the library as a "safe space." Introduced by Milgram in 1972, a familiar stranger is someone you frequently encounter in a specific setting but do not interact with or know

6. Emma Wood, "Libraries Full Circle: The Cross Section of Community, the Public Sphere, and Third Place," *Public Library Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (2020): 144–166, https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2020.1737491.
7. Sam Demas and Jeffrey A. Scherer, "Esprit De Place," *American Libraries* 33, no. 4 (2002): 65–68.
8. Brian Sturm, "How 'Safe' Should Libraries Be?," *North Carolina Libraries* 63, no. 1 (2005): 23–24.
9. Ally Jamieson, "SWIS Trauma-Informed Practices: 4 Safety's 1 - AMSSA," SWIS Trauma-Informed Practices: 4 Safety's, 2025, 1–7, https://www.amssa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/SWIS-Trauma-Informed-Practices-Safety-Activity-and-Handout.pdf
10. Jamieson, "SWIS Trauma-Informed."
11. Rebecca Tolley, *A Trauma-Informed Approach to Library Services* (ALA Editions, 2020), 56.

personally. Paulos refined the term, suggesting that a familiar stranger: "(1) must be observed, (2) repeatedly, and (3) without any interaction."[12] Patrons may recognize and become familiar with librarians and library staff members they frequently see. The librarian-as-familiar-stranger creates a friendly and safe environment for visitors, reducing negative experiences. Familiar strangers help "maximize the human potential for growth, self-exploration, mutual co-operation, nurturing of the young, artistic endeavors, or creative expression and exploration."[13] Familiar strangers highlight the importance of libraries and special collections in fostering individual and community development. These institutions provide opportunities for engagement, education, research, and creativity, serving as information sources and drivers of human potential. They demonstrate their value by facilitating intellectual and social growth.

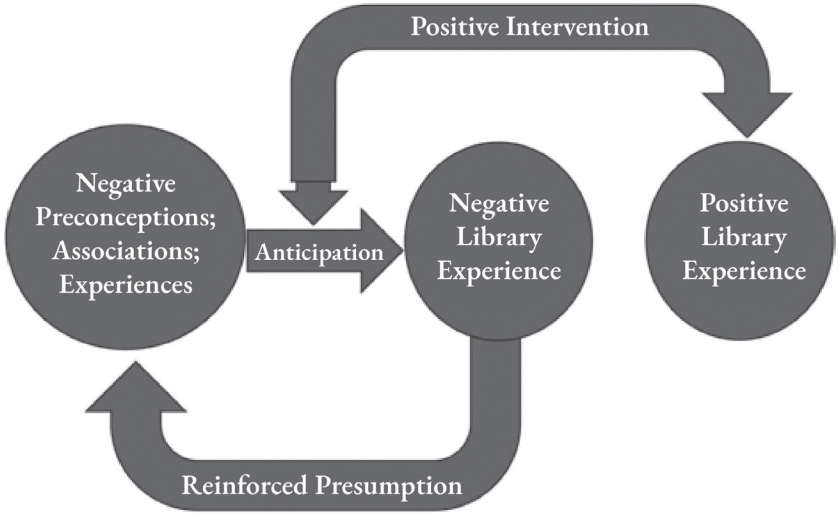
Library Safety Is Disturbed

Libraries offer secure environments and act as distinctive information and community hubs at the crossroads of public and government spaces. However, what occurs when the library fails to provide a "safe" environment/"third space," thereby harming a patron? A library could unintentionally—or intentionally—harm a patron, through "sarcasm, condescension, public humiliation, negative tones of voice and body language, inconsistent rules, procedures, and policies, favoritism, infantilization, gaslighting, shaming, and blaming, among others" when interacting with patrons.[14]

While libraries often strive to be inclusive and welcoming, they sometimes fail. The United States has a legacy of racial discrimination that racial minorities face in spaces such as libraries. The issue of what defines "safe" is nuanced; for specific populations, heavily policed and surveilled areas and reading rooms may feel unsafe, if not deadly. Libraries serving unhoused populations enacted problematic "odor policies" and "civility campaigns" that aim to "teach" the "homeless, children, and others how to behave."[15] Children and teens are often viewed as "problem patrons" and "an irritant to public library staff.[16] Special collections and archives frequently enforce rules and regulations—such as strict reading room policies, complex request procedures, and limited hours—that can unintentionally exclude non-academic users. These policies deprive users of library conveniences and are harmful. As a profession, we must acknowledge these failures to progress.

12. Eric Paulos and Elizabeth Goodman, "The Familiar Stranger: Anxiety, Comfort, and Play in Public Places," (2004): 1, http://www.paulos.net/papers/2004/Familiar%20Stranger%20(CHI%202004).pdf
13. Paulos and Goodman. "The Familiar Stranger."
14. Tolley, *A Trauma-Informed Approach*.
15. John Gehner, "Are Public Libraries Criminalizing Poor People?" Hunger Homelessness Poverty Task Force SRRTALA, September 12, 2016, https://hhptf.org/article/2/are-public-libraries-criminalizing-poor-people/
16. Mary K. Chelton, "The 'Problem Patron' Public Libraries Created," *The Reference Librarian* 36, no. 75–76 (2002): 23–32, https://doi.org/10.1300/J120v36n75_04.

FIGURE 1
The Library Trauma Cycle



When libraries and librarians cause harm, we risk sending patrons into a dangerous cycle, potentially causing them to avoid the library altogether—a phenomenon known as the "Library Trauma Cycle" (see Figure 1). Developed by the author and refined from an earlier model by Dudak and Yeon, this framework shows the cycle when libraries validate a patron's negative beliefs and experiences.[17]

This model visually represents a feedback loop related to all library experiences, primarily focusing on how negative preconceptions can shape future interactions and how positive interventions can break the cycle. Preconceived notions about libraries stem from past experiences, cultural influences, or misinformation, leading to reluctance, anxiety, or disinterest. This mindset may create a self-fulfilling prophecy, where individuals interpret experiences to confirm their hostile expectations. These experiences reinforce unfavorable beliefs, perpetuating avoidance of library resources. Conversely, positive interventions—such as welcoming staff, engaging programs, or improved environments—can disrupt this cycle, offering opportunities for more positive experiences. These interventions can reshape perceptions and promote ongoing positive engagement. The model highlights the necessity of breaking negative feedback loops, to create welcoming and constructive library experiences. We should implement positive interventions and practices, such as trauma-informed care (TIC), to interrupt this cycle for patrons.

17. Jieun Yeon and Leah T. Dudak, "Potential for Trauma in Public Libraries Experiencing Book Banning and Material Challenges," *Public Library Quarterly* (December 17, 2024): 1–25, https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2024.2442215: 16.

Libraries and Trauma-Informed Care

To reduce the risk of harm and injury, libraries must adapt services to serve their communities within these limitations. TIC is a necessary skill set for public service, and a psychological framework where "systems and services . . . have thoroughly incorporated an understanding of trauma, including its consequences and the conditions that enhance healing, in all aspects of service delivery."[18] TIC promotes person-centered, culturally aware, and strength-based interactions, which are essential for delivering effective services. The TIC framework emphasizes safety, transparency, and peer support as vital components of care and services. By adopting this framework, libraries can serve the community as "third spaces" and "safe spaces."

Conclusion

Over time, libraries have become known as "third spaces," due to their unique characteristics and role as community centers. They are also recognized as "safe spaces," because they often manifest several safeties. However, libraries exist at a unique intersection of public and institutional spaces; they must operate under restrictions and limitations that can negatively impact patrons through intentional and unintentional actions, such as policies, defunding, book bans, attacks on free access, and more. When patrons are harmed in a library setting, the library as a "safe space" and a "third space" is disrupted, potentially pushing patrons into the Library Trauma Cycle. To embody the qualities of a "safe space" and a "third space," libraries must integrate TIC at a structural level, to cultivate trust and confidence in the library as a haven. Even small steps toward implementing TIC principles of safety, trustworthiness, and collaboration can positively impact patrons and help them break free from the Library Trauma Cycle and enter a more positive one.

As a profession, what steps should we take to help patrons break the cycle? Structural change is long and arduous, but small actions can contribute significantly. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Four R's—realize, recognize, respond, and resist—create a strategic guide for steps we can take to restore our libraries as safe.[19] We can reaffirm and reclaim our spaces by: realizing how trauma and harm affect individuals, communities, and organizations; recognizing signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, staff, and others; responding with trauma-informed policies and practices; and resisting actions that harm patrons and visitors.

18. Roger D. Fallot and Maxine Harris, "Trauma-Informed Approaches to Systems of Care," *Trauma Psychology Newsletter* 3, no. 1 (2008): 6–7.
19. Tolley, *A Trauma-Informed Approach*, 18–19.

Jen Hoyer

Interview: Deborah Parker on *Becoming Belle Da Costa Greene*

In November 2024, Deborah Parker and I spoke in detail about her new book, *Becoming Belle Da Costa Greene*, for an episode on the New Books Network *Library Science* podcast.[1] We are grateful to *RBM* for letting us put together a complementary written interview that explores a different set of broader themes. While our audio interview is focused on Parker's analysis of Greene's correspondence with Bernard Berenson, this print discussion looks at the bigger picture of Greene's place in special collections librarianship, her growth as a professional, and how we might do research on important individuals in the history of rare books and special collections.

Jen Hoyer: Your book *Becoming Belle Da Costa Greene* examines the letters that Belle da Costa Greene, famous as a pioneering librarian at the Morgan Library, wrote to Bernard Berenson. Could you explain who Greene and Berenson were, and why Belle is an important figure for readers of *RBM* to know about?

Deborah Parker: Belle Marion Greener (1879–1950) was the daughter of two mixed-race Black Americans, Genevieve Ida Fleet and Richard T. Greener. Her father was the first Black man to graduate from Harvard. When they separated in 1887, Belle's mother assumed a Dutch middle name (Van Vliet), changed the family's last name to Greene, and lived henceforth as white. Belle Marion Greener became Belle da Costa Greene. As Pierpont Morgan's personal librarian, Belle rose to great prominence. By her death in 1950, Belle Greene had become a legendary figure in the rare book world.[2]

Bernard Berenson (1865–1959) was an eminent American art historian and connoisseur, advisor to many American collectors, and the author of numerous books on

1. Deborah Parker, *Becoming Belle Da Costa Greene: A Visionary Librarian through Her Letters*. (I Tatti - The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies; Officina Libraria, 2024); Jen Hoyer, host, New Books Network, "Becoming Belle Da Costa Greene: A Visionary Librarian through Her Letters: Deborah Parker," New Books Network, November 16, 2024, 58 min., 58 sec., https://newbooksnetwork.com/becoming-belle-da-costa-greene

2. Read more about Greene on the website of The Morgan Library & Museum, at: https://www.themorgan.org/belle-greene

Italian Renaissance art. By the time he met Greene in January 1909, Berenson was one of the most famous art historians in the western world.[3]

JH: Interest in Greene has surged as we have learned more about her life and work. She worked as librarian for John Pierpont Morgan and, in 2024–2025, was the subject of a major exhibition at the Morgan Library and Museum.[4] How did you first encounter Greene, and could you explain for readers how research and discourse around her has evolved over time?

DP: I had been aware of Greene since reading Heidi Ardizzone's, *An Illuminated Life: Belle da Costa Greene's Journey from Prejudice to Privilege*,[5] but my interest was piqued anew in fall 2021 while I was a Visiting Scholar at Villa I Tatti. While working on Berenson's interest in Dante for a Masterclass, I learned that the *Vita Nuova* had functioned as something like a book of love between Berenson and Greene.[6] Once I started reading Greene's letters, I couldn't stop. Her expressive writing reflects her vibrant personality. At times, her words seem to pop off the page.

JH: One of the areas that you explore in your research is Greene's own learning journey as a librarian. How did she become an expert on illuminated manuscripts and rare books? And how did she become a celebrity librarian? Can you give us a sense of the reputation she gained during her own lifetime among her professional peers?

DP: Over the course of her long career, Greene befriended many rare book experts and art connoisseurs. Some shared their expertise with her. Sydney Cockerell, Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, was a well-known arbiter of taste. Each time Greene visited London, the two friends visited collections and examined illuminated manuscripts together. Berenson helped hone her eye. The two traveled through Italy in the summer of 1910 and studied many works of art in churches and galleries.

Greene became a celebrity after newspapers across the US began running articles about her following her acquisition of a rare edition of Caxton's *Le Morte d'Arthur* at an auction for $42,800 in April 1911. Between 1913 and 1955, forty-eight articles on Greene appeared in American newspapers. The librarian herself was aware of all this notice: "I've come to the conclusion that I really must be grudgingly admitted the most interesting person in New York, for it's all they seem to talk about," she wrote

3. For more on Berenson, see https://itatti.harvard.edu/bernard-berenson
4. *Belle da Costa Greene: A Librarian's Legacy*, New York, NY: The Morgan Library and Museum, October 25, 2024–May 4, 2025.
5. (W.W. Norton, 2007).
6. Deborah Parker, "Berenson, Dante, and Botticelli," *I Tatti Masterclasses II*, November 2021, https://vimeo.com/659695915

Berenson in January 1912. The entire country was avid for news about Morgan's glamorous and brilliant librarian.

JH: One fact noted in the Morgan Library's exhibition on Greene is that her interest in Islamic art was far ahead of her time. Is there anything we learn from her correspondence with Berenson about her interest and growing expertise in that area?

DP: Greene and Berenson viewed the *Masterpieces of Mohammedan Art* exhibition in Munich in August 1910. The experience was transformative: both began collecting Persian drawings. After her return to the US, Greene mentions Persian art more than thirty times in letters to Berenson. Her bequest to the Morgan includes Persian, Turkish, Mughal and Arabic miniatures.

JH: Greene's personal collecting practices are impressive and serve as a reminder of her wealth; her salary from Morgan made her one of the highest-earning women of her time. How did this set her apart from her professional peers?

Greene's wealth distinguished her from other librarians. A November 1913 article in the *New York Tribune* notes that Greene was making $10,000 a year ($300,000 in today's terms) by 1911.[7] Other librarians were making $400 a year. Belle Greene moved in the highest echelons of society, was known for her stylish dress, and had many pieces of fine jewelry, some designed by Cartier.

Her last apartment, located at 535 Park Ave, had three master bedrooms and quarters for a butler and maid. The apartment itself was full of rare objects, including antique Chinese carpets and porcelains, Renaissance paintings, Middle Eastern artefacts. At her death in 1950, her estate was valued at close to $706,474.92. Adjusted for inflation, that's $7,406,474.92 in today's terms.

JH: In reading your book, I found it fascinating to bring together your study of Greene's personal life and evolving sense of self alongside revelations about the professional life and accomplishments that she is most celebrated for. Looking at Greene as our key example, when we study the professional work of individuals in our discipline, what do we gain from incorporating close reading of personal correspondence into our methodological repertoire?

DP: Any cache of letters offers revelations about the writer, and Greene's letters to Berenson are a treasure trove. They are the largest repository of information we have

7. "$10,000 Librarian Speaks a Word for $400 Sisters," *New-York Tribune* (22 November 1913): 6, accessed December 20, 2024, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1913-11-22/ed-1/seq-6/

on Greene's personal life and furnish a window through which we can glimpse her many worlds—rare book enclaves, auction houses, aristocratic estates, private libraries and collections, Harlem clubs, and avant-garde galleries—to name but some of the spaces she frequented.

I began by trying to identity the most distinctive features of her writing and their effects—how features like hyperbole and comparisons contribute to her creation of a highly expressive self. Many contemporaries noted her wit, sparkling conversation, and sense of humor. Lawrence Wroth, librarian at Brown University and a historian, noted that "to her life is drama."[8] In the absence of recordings of Belle speaking, her letters to Berenson allow us to hear her lively voice. The letters are now available on *The Letters of Belle da Costa Greene to Bernard Berenson* website, hosted by Villa I Tatti.[9]

JH: Your book reveals the extended time you spent with Greene's letters, demonstrated by your close reading and the selection of transcripts you've included. Could you share more about your research process for working with this source material?

DP: I read Greene's letters to Berenson four times, made transcriptions, extensive summaries, a timeline of her activities, and lists of people mentioned in the letters. I consulted biographies of Morgan, Berenson, and Ardizzone's biography of Greene regularly. Good thing they're all so well-indexed! I also read many of the books she mentions, investigated the historical and cultural references, read books on racial passing, and studies of many of the people mentioned. Fortunately, I had a good knowledge of Italian medieval and Renaissance art and knew something about Renaissance printing practices.

Working on Belle Greene is bracing—my cultural world has been enlarged through investigation of her many worlds. Investigating one topic often leads to new insights or the discovery of unforeseen connections.

JH: Outside the world of librarianship, Greene also left a mark on the world of fashion: she dressed incredibly well and perhaps one of her best-known quotes was: "Just because I am a librarian doesn't mean I have to dress like one." You write a lot in your book about her self-transformation and the way

8. Lawrence C. Wroth, "A Tribute to the Library and Its First Director," *The First Quarter Century of the Pierpont Morgan Library, a Retrospective Exhibition in honor of Belle da Costa Greene* (The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1949), 18.

9. *The Letters of Belle da Costa Greene to Bernard Berenson*, Villa I Tatti, The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, 2023, accessed December 20, 2024, https://bellegreene.itatti.harvard.edu/resource/Start

she curated her image; what did you learn in your research about the role of fashion in how she felt that she was perceived as a professional woman in a field dominated by white men?

DP: There are few explicit references to what Greene wore in her letters aside from her raptures over the Fortuny pieces Berenson gave her. One finds references to her stylishness and to some accessories: plumed hats, long cigarette holders, and the occasional outfit (black velvet dress adorned with chartreuse lace—quite the combination!) in some contemporary accounts. Co-workers describe her preference for Renaissance gowns and jewelry. Belle Greene dressed to be noticed—and she was.

Years ago, I kept a blog about artists' clothing—*A Hymn to Intellectual Beauty: Creative Minds and Fashion*—and the post on Belle da Costa Greene is still available.[10]

JH: Greene was born to mixed race parents but passed as white for most of her life; journalism and scholarship about her work have discussed her racial identity in a variety of ways, especially in recent years. How do you handle the subject of race and her racial identity? What do we learn from her own correspondence about her relationship to race?

DP: While there was gossip about Greene's background while she was alive, nothing certain was known until Jean Strouse revealed Greene's ancestry in her 1999 biography, *Morgan: American Financier*.[11] Strouse's big reveal reoriented dramatically subsequent investigations into Greene's life.

Since Greene's Black ancestry became a prominent topic, there have been two approaches to this subject: one, exemplified by Ardizzone's biography, emphasizes the complexity and indeterminacy of this subject with respect to Belle. Fictional biographies offer another approach: these writers "imagine" and recreate scenes of Belle's anxieties about passing.

I take a different approach: I see Greene's passing in more expansive terms, as part of a larger exercise in self-invention and self-transformation. Belle didn't identify herself through her race: she identifies herself through the things she loves. In my view any consideration of Greene's views on her racial identity must remain open-ended. Much as some might seek to fit Greene's comments on racialized subjects within a more definite program, what we don't know must be respected, as well as all the mystery and doubt that such a mode of existence implies.

10. Deborah Parker, "Belle da Costa Greene," *A Hymn to Intellectual Beauty: Creative Minds and Fashion*, August 2013, https://creativemindsandfashion.com/2013/08/20/belle-da-costa-greene/
11. (Random House).

JH: What other work would you like to see done to understand and celebrate Greene's life? What else do you hope we'll uncover by further study, discussion, and celebration of her personal and professional accomplishments?

DP: New resources such as the Letters site, the essays in the Morgan Library and Museum exhibition catalogue,[12] and, I hope, my book, will spur new inquiries into Greene's life and achievements.

In February 2025 the Institute for English Studies at the London University hosted a conference on Belle da Costa Greene and the Europe Book Trade. Participants spoke on Greene's relationships with a wide range of professionals as well as broader topics such as women in the book trade. The *Letters* website indexes her correspondence to Berenson with more than seventy subjects, among them Greene's observations on politics, language learning, art from different cultures, finance, her health, fashion, family, social world, even the weather. I have no doubt that all these activities and resources will spur findings about Belle Greene and her world.

12. Julia S Charles, et al., *Belle Da Costa Greene: A Librarian's Legacy*, eds. Erica Ciallela and Philip S. Palmer (The Morgan Library & Museum, 2024).

Melanie Griffin

RBMS Chair's Note

Serving as the chair of RBMS is one of the most profoundly rewarding professional experiences of my career. I always value the community I find in the section and the many opportunities RBMS offers me to learn, and serving as chair has multiplied both exponentially. As chair, I meet section members and learn of projects that I probably would not have encountered otherwise. I am so grateful for the opportunity to work with and learn from the RBMS membership.

In her 2023–2024 chair's note,[1] Sarah Horowitz noted RBMS has experienced a period of transition and change since 2020 that requires the section to assess its work, structures, and programming to ensure that it meets member needs and that the goals of the section remain sustainable. As a result, RBMS continues its work to explore areas that can be re-imagined. In this note, I offer brief updates on some of this year's work to assess and respond to RBMS needs.

- Following discussion and vote at the winter Executive Committee meeting, beginning July 1, 2025, RBMS will sunset the Workshops and Seminars Committees as separate committees and subsume their work into the RBMS Conference Program Planning Committee. This change recognizes the vital roles played by both committees at the RBMS Annual Conference and makes official the informal practices the three committees have developed over recent years.
- The conveners of active RBMS discussion groups, with the support of their Member-at-Large representative from the Executive Committee, have been charged with assessing the current structure of discussion groups. They will present a proposal for the future structure of discussion groups at the summer 2025 Executive Committee meeting.
- A Task Force for Guidelines and Standards has been charged with completing expedited reviews of all ACRL-endorsed guidelines and standards authored by RBMS that are due for revision on or before December 31, 2025. This task force will also make recommendations on sustainable solutions for ensuring that all RBMS guidelines and standards receive regular review.

1. Sarah M. Horowitz, "Chair's Note," *RBM: a Journal for Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 25, no. 1 (2024): 98–99.

In addition to these transitions in RBMS, uncertainty looms large in the United States for libraries and education (and more). During times of uncertainty and profound change, I find comfort and meaning in participating in community-led efforts to create the future(s) in which I want to live. While we aren't perfect and much work remains, I feel that RBMS is working to foster collective approaches to creating a more collaborative, inclusive, and accessible future for cultural heritage work, and I am proud to be a small part of its collective action. I hope to see many of you soon, either in a zoom room for RBMS-related business or at the 2025 RBMS conference. If our paths do not cross virtually or in person this summer, please know that the RBMS Executive Committee is always happy to hear from you. Reach out anytime with questions or concerns to exec@rbms.info.

Editor's note: While this contribution was solicited, the content remains solely that of the author. Other than adjustments made to conform with house style, the statement is presented here without revision.

Index to Advertisers

Jeremy Brett and Beth Kilmarx

RBMS 2025 Conference Update

Preparations for the 2025 RBMS Annual Conference are well underway. The conference theme this year is "A Multitude of Stories," reflecting the limitless array of voices that speak to us through the collections and materials we manage. One of the chief goals of the conference is to give special collections librarians and archivists opportunities to critically examine colonialism's impact on libraries and cultural heritage institutions, and to explore practices that make collections more inclusive and representative of often marginalized voices (e.g., repatriation and reparative cataloguing). In these times, especially, we hope that our profession will rise to the necessary occasion and get a better understanding of the lenses through which many of us view our collections.

The conference will run from June 24–27, 2025 in New Haven, Connecticut. Most of the activities, exhibits, and tours will take place on the campus of Yale University, the host of this year's conference. We're very excited about and proud of the quality and variety of presentations—panels, discussion groups, papers, posters, and lightning talks from students and newer professionals—available this year, which of course, form the heart of the conference. Informative and professionally relevant workshops and seminars will also be happening and add to the event's intellectual richness. And Yale has thrown open its doors to tours for conference attendees that showcase many of the wonderful cultural treasures it offers, including the storied Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, the Yale University Art Gallery, the Yale Center for British Art, Sterling Memorial Library, and the Lewis Walpole Library & Hill-Stead Museum.

The conference's opening plenary speaker will be Dr. Ricky Punzalan, of the University of Michigan School of Information, where he directs the university's Museum Studies Program. Dr. Punzalan has been a key figure in shaping the fields of repatriation and reparative description, as well as the ongoing process of decolonizing archives. The lead speaker for the closing plenary will be Cheryl Beredo, Director of Collections and Chief Curator at Beinecke Library, who will lead a panel of Yale librarians and archivists speaking about Yale's reparative collecting efforts.

Information about the conference can be found at: https://web.cvent.com/event/eec2ebfb-c5d9-47b3-8485-6c1def8b7a62/summary. The website will be updated as developments proceed.

We look forward to seeing many of you this coming summer in Connecticut!

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