

Medium-rare: An Innovative Treatment Approach to the Space between General and Special Collections

ABSTRACT

This paper presents an overview of a new treatment workflow that was implemented in early 2016 at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Library. Preservation professionals may be familiar with the idea of *medium-rare* within their collections—this term refers primarily to items that have exceptional material, historical, or condition characteristics that make them complicated to categorize beyond their collection designation. Adaptive conservation treatment approaches have long been employed in the conservation and care of library collections, usually administered on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of the conservator or technician performing the treatment. However, these treatment approaches for “in-between” materials previously have not been collected and formalized into a codified workflow. Having attempted to create a functioning workflow in the context of restricted resources and limited time over the course of a year, this paper will address the challenges and conditions that made the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Library ideal for piloting this new treatment approach. It will additionally address the formulation of parameters and limitations for treatment, as well as the infrastructure for tracking and documentation that was adapted and created to support the new workflow in the context of our existing conservation treatment approaches. Last, this paper will offer some insights on the benefits, challenges, and outcomes observed after its implementation, and provide a possible model for other institutions facing similar issues within their collections.

CONTEXT

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) Library is one of the 10 largest university library systems in the United States. The library collection contains 24 million items, 13 million of which are bound volumes. The

undergraduate library alone has more than 200,000 volumes and provides in one location more reference resources for undergraduate instruction than any other undergraduate library in the country. Apart from that, the university is home to more than 25 individualized area libraries that house both circulating and special collections. Moreover, the Oak Street Library Facility provides high-density storage for items from multiple collections. Some of the more notable collections include the Sousa Archives and Center for American Music, the Illinois History and Lincoln Collection, numerous archival collections, and the Rare Book and Manuscript Library, which is home to the personal papers of John Milton, Marcel Proust, H. G. Wells, and Carl Sandburg.

As a result of having such robust collections, UIUC Library is often host to collection-focused exhibits and often loans collection material to outside institutions both within the United States and abroad. Additionally, the library works collaboratively on exhibits with on-campus institutions including the Krannert Art Museum and the Spurlock Museum of World Cultures. As a result of all of these exhibit opportunities, the pace of the exhibit calendar is kept at breakneck speed, with each curator managing his or her exhibits separately, so installation schedules and deadlines often overlap.

However, despite the fact that our collections and the opportunities to view them are vast and diverse, like many institutions the size of our collections largely outmatch the number of resources available. As a public university funded by the state of Illinois, UIUC has been severely impacted by the ongoing financial crisis that has resulted in a lack of budget for the past three fiscal years. The library has sustained cuts across all departments and has no capacity to hire many additional permanent staff members, even where there is a demonstrated need. In many areas of the library, when positions are vacated due to retirement, duties are shifted and reassigned rather than replenishing staff hours through new hires. Although the staff hours cumulatively decrease throughout the library, there is no decrease in the services provided to the university community.

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The conservation unit, which operates within the preservation services department of UIUC Library, has served the library community on the second floor of the Oak Street Library Facility in the John “Bud” Velde Conservation Laboratory since the early 2000s and is staffed by two conservators; two technicians; and a constant flux of student volunteers, academic hourlies, graduate assistants, and interns. As a hybrid lab, we treat both general and special collection materials based on a wide range of need. Between May 2016 and April 2017, the library’s conservation unit also prepared collection material for nine major exhibits. Due to the scope of the exhibits program throughout the libraries, it is a constant challenge for conservation staff to meet priority deadlines for exhibit materials and have time at the bench to deal with the ongoing needs of the rest of the collection. With a staff that is comparatively tiny to other library conservation programs of a similar size and scope, time is often at a premium.

In addition to balancing exhibit- and nonexhibit-related treatment, conservation staff are frequently attempting to mediate the needs of various collections within the limitations of time and resources. Thankfully, broader preservation issues such as disaster planning and preparedness, integrated pest management, environmental monitoring, and general rehousing are managed by Miriam Centeno, the collections care manager. However, although these preventative measures ensure that our collections are properly stored and generally well cared for, it has not diminished the backlog of items awaiting treatment. As a result, another challenge has been balancing the time-sensitive priorities of individual collections in such a way that all collections are receiving fair, if not equal, attention. Although the squeakiest wheel is often the one to get the grease, so to speak, conservation does its best to keep track of the necessities of various collections so that they can eventually be treated in time. Needless to say, this has continued to be a challenge.

ADDRESSING A LONG-ESTABLISHED NEED

NOT A NEW IDEA

Although these challenging conditions are by no means isolated to our institution, the confluence of all of them at once made UIUC Library a good case study for trying something new—both to seize the opportunity we saw and to attempt to ameliorate some of the more challenging aspects of our existing workflows.

In fact, a “medium-rare” workflow as a concept had been discussed by conservators at UIUC since 2008. In its infancy, however, the workflow took a decidedly different form than it ultimately would when finally implemented. The earliest specifications for medium-rare treatment were created by conservation in September 2009 and originally included the following:

- Treatment for any individual item will be completed in 2 hours or less.

- No written or photographic treatment documentation will be created for any item in medium-rare.
- No more than 10 hours per week total would be devoted to medium-rare.
- To begin, only bound items destined for Rare Book Oak Street storage would be considered treatment candidates.

To facilitate communication between conservation and collection managers without formal documentation, a “Medium-Rare Conservation Treatment Form A/B” was created in the form of a two-sided streamer, which could accompany each item that was sent to the lab. Form A (fig. 1) would have been filled out with requisite catalog information and treatment preferences by the curator or librarian making the request. Form B (fig. 2) would then be filled out by the conservator when the item was received, tracking the repairs completed on the text block and binding.

However, although much of the ground work was laid and revisited starting in 2008, it was not until 2016 that the lab moved toward serious implementation of a medium-rare workflow. This was primarily due to some of the constantly competing factors formerly stated—to begin a new workflow requires an initial investment of time and resources that was heretofore not prioritized within the context of other ongoing projects.

In the winter of 2016, staff began to notice an uncharacteristically dwindling stream of items for our general collection conservation workflow. Regardless of whether this sudden reduction was a momentary lull or a developing trend, the lab was running out of appropriate work to keep our technicians and student workers fully occupied. Meanwhile, in the midst of undergoing staff transitions, the conservators had the challenging exhibit schedule and an unending backlog to contend with. This moment seemed like a perfect opportunity to take advantage of newly liberated time for our technicians to accomplish treatments beyond the scope of the usual basic binding repair.

Given the volume of treatment work waiting, we were hoping that perhaps a new workflow would allow conservation to serve collections more widely by making batch treatment and other general repair options available to objects that had been otherwise difficult to prioritize given competing needs and limitations. More specifically, we thought it might give us the opportunity to address a long-existing need in library and archive conservation—namely, how to treat “medium-rare” materials, or items that have exceptional material, historical, or condition characteristics that make them complicated to categorize beyond their collection designations.

DEFINING MEDIUM-RARE

Just as the notion of a medium-rare treatment scheme was not new in our labs at UIUC, the concept of *medium-rare* as

RBR
839.309
B47
v.b

Medium-Rare Conservation Treatment Form A

To be filled out by the Curator

Date sent to Conservation: 12 Nov. 2008

Library: RBR
 Contact: Alvin Bregman
 Barcode: 30112085625124
 Author: John Landwehr
 Publication Date/Place: 1976 / The Netherlands
 Format: manuscript no. of vols. _____
 printed other: _____
 missing pages, plates, etc.: _____

Title for spine label:

Landwehr

 Romantic
 Emblem
 Books

Why has this item been selected for treatment?
 previous use anticipated use
 cannot be used safely transfer to Oak St.
 age other: _____

What concerns you *most* about the item's current state?
 boards detached signatures loose/detached
 spine detached label missing
 leaves torn, mutilated or deformed
 other: _____

Features that *must not* be damaged or lost during repair:
 signature, marks, notations original cover
 bookplates original endsheets
 library marks/pockets/labels prev. damage/repairs
 evidence of original binding
 other: _____

Do any of the following apply to this item?
 important/rare artifact important/rare content
 important/rare format important provenance
 part of a matching set (*describe:* _____)

Curator's signature: _____
Curator's signature grants permission to discard any portions not specifically noted above, as necessary.

Location: G:\PresConsPublic\Forms\MedRareStreamer.doc
Last Modified: 9/26/08

Medium-Rare Conservation Treatment Form B

To be filled out by the Conservation Unit

Received by: MAT

Textblock
 remove accretions
 dry clean:
 all
 portion: _____
 mend tears:
 Japanese tissue/WSP
 heat-set tissue
 hinge in loose leaves
 line with Japanese tissue/WSP
 reweave:
 portion of textblock
 entire textblock
 other: _____

Binding
 leather consolidation:
 Klucel-G
 red rot cocktail
 minor cover repairs: consolidate corners
 joint/hinge repair or reinforcement
 Japanese paper/WSP
 Solvent-set tissue
 reback:
 cloth
 Japanese paper
 reback with inner hinge repair:
 cloth
 Japanese paper
 reattach boards:
 Japanese paper
 tackets
 solvent-set tissue
 rebind:
 retain existing endsheets
 discard existing cover
 retain existing cover separately
 other: _____

Enclosure
 cloth covered drop-spine box
 portfolio case
 tux box
 other: _____

Treatment completed by: EN / JR
 Date completed: 12/16/08 - 4-9-09

Location: G:\PresConsPublic\Forms\MedRareStreamer.doc
Last Modified: 9/26/08

Fig. 1. Side A of the Medium-Rare Conservation Treatment Form streamer, for use by the collection manager.

Fig. 2. Side B, for internal use by conservation to track treatment actions.

it applies to library collections is not new either. The earliest appearance of the term in professional literature can be found in an article by Ferguson (1987) titled “Rare Books in University Libraries,” in which he discusses the application of the term at institutions such as the Library of Congress, where it was used as a designation to remove certain nonrare books from the “ordinary conditions of use” without completely removing them from the collection or necessitating more elaborate security and services as are required in rare book rooms. Since then, the term *medium-rare* has acquired several meanings and is often used to define items with regard to the selection and transfer of circulating materials to special collections when they are deemed materially significant but not valuable enough to justify a place in rare book collections. More recently, the terms *medium-rare* or *newly rare* have been used to refer to books within special collections that are less valuable but still pose security issues as targets for theft and resale.

Ultimately, the most general use of the term presently seems to be as a tongue-in-cheek catch-all to help librarians and curators identify books that fall within the “gray area of rareness” without pigeonholing a volume based on its age, composition, or relative uncommonness. This, however, still does not offer up a solid definition. Although libraries as institutions often intensely focus on the classifications of their materials, “medium-rare” remains a loophole to categorize what is otherwise difficult to classify.

For the purposes of this project, the definition of *medium-rare* was less concerned with rarity, security, or formal classification within MARC records and more toward developing the term with respect to treatment approach. “Medium-rare” identified items that were a lower priority for treatment, and whose treatment needs did not stray too far beyond general book repair. This included both special collection items where treatment was quick, simple, or otherwise straightforward, as well as general collection items that might not have been highly valued but had unusual or notable material features and therefore called for a higher level of retention or care.

Sensitive to the fact that most library conservators were probably familiar with this category of items, Jennifer Hain Teper sent out a broad query via several professional distribution lists in December 2015 to get a sense of what approaches, if any, our institutional peers were already taking with regard to conservation treatment. Specifically, respondents were asked:

- What sorts of materials typically fall into this workflow, and how do you delineate this category of treatment?
- What level, if any, of photo documentation do you conduct?
- Do you involve curatorial approval of treatments as part of your process?

The overwhelming sentiment of the few responses received was that there was little to no formal effort to separate out treatment procedures on these types of materials from the rest. More often, items falling into the medium-rare category were treated on a case-by-case basis, with the conservator or technician making decisions on the level of documentation needed or the types of repair materials utilized at their own discretion. Indeed, this was the treatment approach used by UIUC’s conservation lab as well prior to formalizing the medium-rare workflow in February 2016.

TARGETING OBJECTIVES AND DEVELOPING A WORKFLOW INFRASTRUCTURE

As staff began to consolidate treatment practices into a codified workflow, the goals became clearer. Staff had to develop a treatment approach that could finally meet the long-standing need for “in-between” collection items and hoped that this would simultaneously magnify the scope of impact on the number of items treated and the variety of collections served. This would also hopefully allow the unit to make best use of the qualified technicians and their newly liberated time. Additionally, staff were interested in seeing whether or not they could reduce the number of competing priorities for our two staff conservators. Last, staff wanted to organize a consistent approach to treating medium-rare library materials, both flat and bound, that could be used as a model for other institutions.

UTILIZING ESTABLISHED PROCEDURES AND CREATING NEW ONES

In many ways, staff were fortunate in that they knew many of the already existing procedures in both general and special collection treatment workflows would remain relevant and functional for medium-rare. To begin with, transporting medium-rare items to and from the conservation lab was easily facilitated through the existing relationship with the library’s shipping department. Items could be packaged in predelivered totes and could often be picked up within 24 hours of a request for transport (fig. 3). This required minimal coordination between the conservation lab, library shipping, and the originating collection.

Documentation was another area where staff relied heavily on already established processes. Although prior iterations of the medium-rare workflow called for no required photo or report documentation, it was felt that some documentation was necessary to adapt and record medium-rare treatment practices, especially since the intention was to broadly apply these practices to items within the library’s collections.

Communication was aided by the documentation database, a web-based platform that was built in-house for custom use at UIUC. A major benefit of the database is that it



Fig. 3. Library shipping “totes” outside the conservation lab awaiting transport.

is able to pull an item’s bibliographic record from Voyager—the library’s cataloging software—via barcode scanning. Practically speaking, this meant that catalog information could be automatically populated into our documentation forms

(fig. 4), which saved significant time when preparing reports. However, if a medium-rare workflow was to be successful, staff knew that they would have to streamline documentation processes more significantly, particularly with regard to the use of narrative description for individual objects. Working with the library’s software developer, we created a new medium-rare interface that replaced narrative description fields with short-form categorical checkboxes. Using the checkboxes, a conservator could quickly specify if an object was bound or unbound, if paper was laid or wove, if a binding was leather or cloth, and so on (fig. 5). This interface, which operates more like a brief object assessment, was intended to furnish a snapshot of the object treated without taking up too much time spent on the process of reporting.

Another important feature of the database was the way in which it enabled conservators to communicate with collection managers about items in the lab. As is standard practice among conservators, submitting proposals for review and approval to a curator or librarian is a regular function of a special collection conservation workflow. Previously, staff relied on the database’s automated function for submitting a condition report or treatment proposal to a specified collection manager, allowing for easy, automatically archived communication between the conservation lab and owning libraries. Since medium-rare was a new treatment approach, it was felt that maintaining the practice of submitting proposals to collection managers for approval was an important step in preserving trust and fostering understanding.

Preservation / Conservation Workflow and Tracking Database

User: Quinn Ferris

Search [New Bih. Item](#) [All Treatments](#) [Brittle Books Shipments](#) [Internet Archive Packing Lists](#)
[Treatment Tags](#)

Import from Voyager:

Medium Rare #151742— [Delete](#) — [Reassign Treatment](#)

Checked In By: qferis 11/2/2016 12:13 PM → Assigned To: qferis 11/2/2016 12:13 PM → Modified By: mvvp 4/25/2017 9:59 AM → SubmittedForApproval By: mvvp 4/25/2017 9:59 AM → Approved By: memerson 4/25/2017 10:08 AM → Modified By: mvvp 5/4/2017 1:55 PM → Completed, but still in lab By: mvvp 5/4/2017 1:55 PM → Modified By: mvvp 5/25/2017 1:11 PM → Completed, but still in lab By: mvvp 5/25/2017 1:11 PM

Bibliographic Info | Check In Summary | Treatment History

[Catalog Record](#) [WorldCat: [10443572](#)]

Barcode 30112024605013	Title Insignium Romae templorum prospectus exteriores et interiores / a celebrioribus aehitectis inuenti; nunc tandem suis cum plantis ac mensuris, septuaginta tribus figuris aeri incisus, in luce[m] editi.
Bib Id 2043208	
Item Number 4158994	Physical Description [1] leaf, 73 leaves of plates (some folded) : ill. ; 41 cm. (1ē)
Material Type Monograph/Item	Language lat
Voyager 0	Author Sandrart, Joachim von, 1606-1688.
Circulations	Imprint Norimbergæ : Sumptibus Joannis Jacobi de Sandrart, [1690?]
Location Arch/Art Vault [noncirc]	Publisher Date [1690?]
Call Number F. 726.545 SA56I	
Copy Number 1	

Priority **No** | Priority Deadline

Digital Projects
 Exhibit
 Loan
 Grant Funded/Other

Treatment Tags (all tags)
 add a tag

Fig. 4. Bibliographic information imported into a treatment record via Voyager, made accessible through the interface of our documentation database.

Exhibit
 Loan
 Grant Funded/Other

Treatment Tags (all tags)

add a tag

General Info | **Description** | Condition | Proposal | Testing | Treatment Report | Notes

Description

<p>Media</p> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Black printing ink <input type="checkbox"/> Color Printing ink <input type="checkbox"/> Graphite <input type="checkbox"/> Pen and Ink <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="text"/>	<p>Paper</p> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Decorative Endsheets <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Handmade <input type="checkbox"/> Laid <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Machine-made <input type="checkbox"/> Wove	<p>Textblock/Sewing Structure</p> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Endbands <input type="checkbox"/> Manuscript <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Printed <input type="checkbox"/> Scrapbook <input type="checkbox"/> Sewn <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sewn on supports <input type="checkbox"/> Stitched <input type="checkbox"/> Unsupported sewing
<p>Binding</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Cloth <input type="checkbox"/> Hollow spine <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Leather <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Paper <input type="checkbox"/> Rebacked <input type="checkbox"/> Rebound <input type="checkbox"/> Tightback	<p>Attachments/Foldout</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Ephemera <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fold-outs <input type="checkbox"/> Maps <input type="checkbox"/> Photos <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="text"/>	<p>Other</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="text"/>



 University Library
 University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
 1408 W. Gregory Dr. | Urbana, IL 61801
 217-333-2291

Fig. 5. Another view of our database, showing the abbreviated documentation description used for medium-rare assessment prior to treatment.

Likewise, the established protocol for photo documentation was the starting point for a truncated medium-rare approach. We retained processes for image capture, file migration, and management, as well as the operational use of the designated photo documentation space within the conservation lab. However, instead of taking numerous images to represent the condition of the object to the fullest extent possible, we limited the number of shots per item to the following (fig. 6):

- Front or front cover of the object
- Back or back cover of the object
- One to three shots of “representative damage”

To further simplify the process, staff eliminated the standard $\frac{3}{4}$ view of bindings (fig. 7) for representing the edges and spine. This eliminated the need to switch between the use of a copy stand and a tripod, which saved significant time during the photo documentation process. We also decided not to shoot objects in transmitted or raking light, as it was assumed that these treatments would be minor enough that such documentation detail would not be necessary.

As the workflow developed, staff began to see occasional treatments for which photo documentation was not needed. Staff therefore gave themselves the option of forgoing it. This usually was in the case of certain minor treatment actions that might be done in situ, such as removing something from an old pamphlet binder or repairing a few minor edge tears—repairs that were fast and simple enough to not require going over to the lab. Of course, the option to proceed without photo documentation was only completed subsequent to consulting with collection managers about the reasons and risks.

WHAT MEDIUM-RARE IS *NOT*

As difficult as it was to clearly define what medium-rare is, it became obvious what medium-rare was *not* early on in the process of identifying potential treatment candidates. Treatment approaches that were categorically complex and challenging were excluded from consideration. This meant that any objects requiring these treatments would by definition have to be excluded from the workflow. For example, treatment involving the use of solvents for adhesive reduction or stain

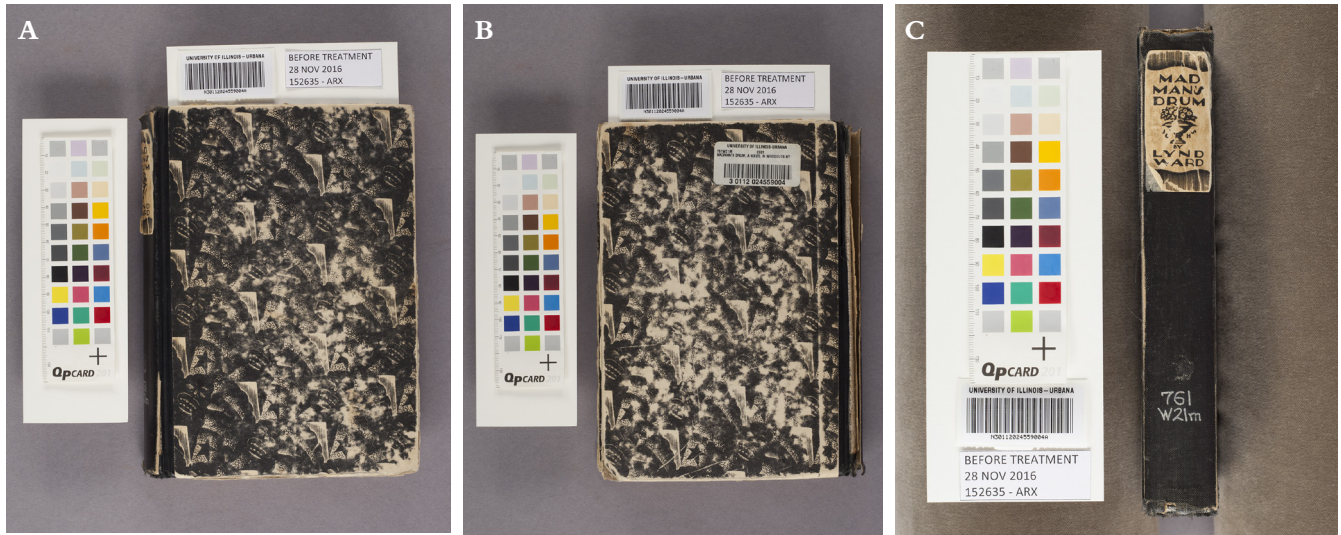


Fig. 6. (a-c) Limited before treatment images used in the medium-rare conservation workflow.

removal was considered too high risk to be completed without the supervision or direct involvement of a conservator. Likewise, any items that required the paring, tooling, or specialized working of leather would have to be excluded as well. Moreover, any items that featured compound or problematic material features such as parchment and certain photographic emulsions were also not considered for medium-rare treatment, in part due to their difficult material features (rather than the complexity of the treatment approach), which made them risky to work with without close supervision from a conservator (figs. 8, 9).

Most, if not all, of the usual medium-rare treatment options were based on lab practices for general collection repair. This included basic spot-sewing and resewing, mending, hinge tightening, spine cleaning and consolidation, board reattachment, and retaining old cases or creating new

ones. However, from a material point of view, it was necessary to alter the approach to reflect the standards typically applied to special collections materials. Whereas staff might use polyvinyl acetate in lining a spine for circulating collections repair, we used wheat starch paste for medium-rare. Tissue mending was done with water-torn Japanese tissue and diluted paste rather than heat-set tissue. Original components were retained wherever possible, and all treatments were approached with “reversibility” in mind.

IMPLEMENTATION

Once staff identified goals for the workflow, developed the infrastructure to support it, and figured out the parameters of what was to be treated, there was nothing left to do but begin. The first step was simply to start a lot of conversations

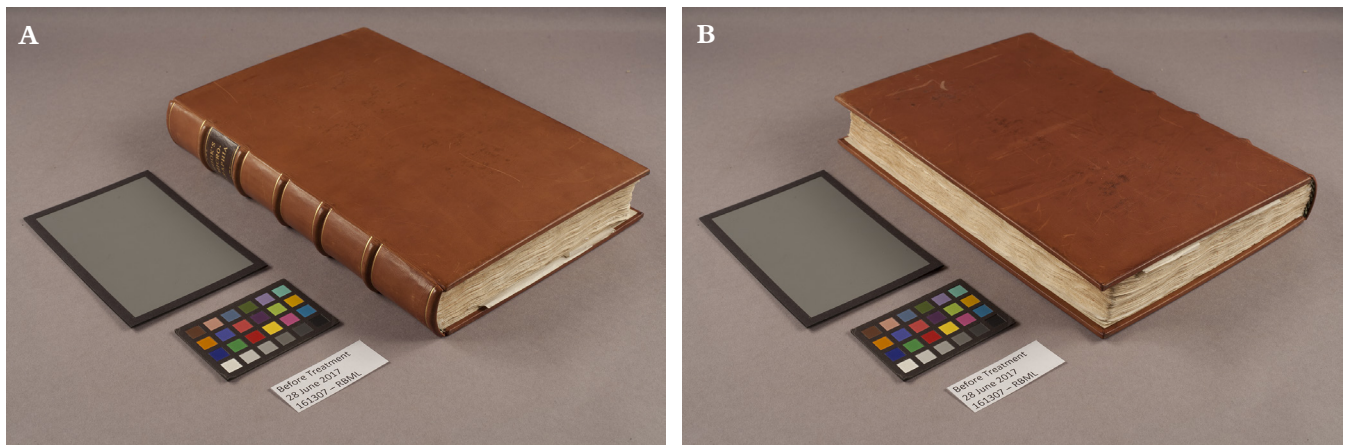


Fig. 7. (a, b) Using ¾ shots of volumes for special collection photo documentation is preferred because it is able to capture all edges on the spine but is not used for medium-rare.



Fig. 8. A collection of curling photos in need of flattening and rehousing. Although fairly straightforward, this treatment approach would not be identified for the medium-rare workflow due to the risks and experience required for handling photographic emulsions.

throughout the library. Conservators began “plugging” medium-rare conservation as a potential treatment option during routine priority meetings among various collections, simultaneously noting any objects that might be appropriate for transportation to the lab for medium-rare treatment. In the early stages of implementation, conservators operated as the primary point of contact with the collection managers. They established review meetings to look at objects and suggest treatment options, using each object as an example to explain the differences between the possible workflows. When medium-rare treatments were completed for one collection, conservators shared the before and after documentation with curators from other collections to give them a sense of what could be expected, as well as to alleviate any resistance born from protective instincts.

To keep the medium-rare workflow moving, it was necessary to set aside weekly time for both the logistical administration and coordination of medium-rare materials, as well as the practical hands-on time at the bench. Staff members dedicated one to two days to working on treatment and managing the workflow. It also became important to allow for flexibility in the infrastructure—although the new database was successful in reducing the time needed to complete written documentation, initial omissions or operating errors made it less than optimal at first. Staff used paper assessment forms that could be added to the online database later as needed.

BENEFITS

Almost immediately, staff began to observe some major benefits as a result of the addition of the medium-rare workflow. Working relationships with collection managers around the

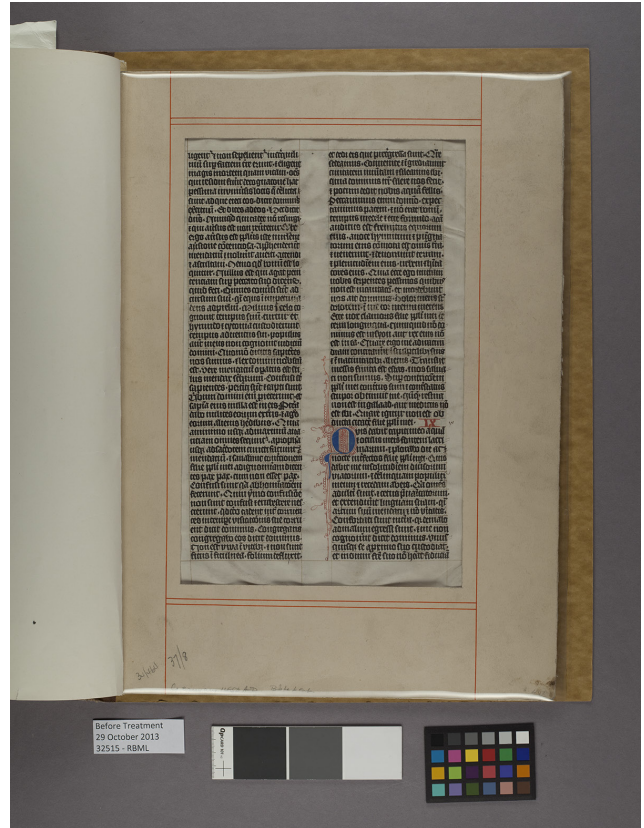


Fig. 9. Because the organic structure of parchment makes it highly reactive to its surrounding and can often present challenges in treatment, it also was excluded from medium-rare.

library were immediately augmented by the higher level of communication, and soon collection managers who in the past had felt as though their collections did not receive enough attention started to look at their collection needs with a mind toward what might be able to be treated under this new designation. The faster turnaround time for treatment certainly helped—whereas for conservators the special collection treatments were taking between 6 and 12 months to finish, the medium-rare items coming into the lab were seeing an initial turnaround time of closer to 3 to 4 months. This quicker rotation meant that collections could get their materials back faster for use in classes and reading rooms.

Corollary to that, because objects were spending less time in the lab, staff were seeing a broader range of collections served than had been seen previously. This was concentrated within two or three library collections that had been historically underserved. However, the ability to prioritize their materials for treatment meant that items long in need of treatment were finally receiving it.

As was hoped, the medium-rare workflow allowed technicians to focus on treatments that required more time and somewhat more complex decision making rather than typical

general collection repair. As an added boon, having technicians perform these treatments reduced the backlog of items waiting for the attention of one or both of the conservators.

The least anticipated benefit came in the form of being able to create a new stream of work that could potentially be appropriate at a student or intern level. UIUC's conservation lab has long been recognized as a teaching lab, engaging students at all levels of education, experience, and interest. Having a new lifeline to seek out medium-rare items allowed us to clearly identify discreet projects for students working in the lab. For those who planned to continue studying conservation, we were able to find and designate treatments that both augmented their portfolio and were at an appropriate level for them to accomplish.

CHALLENGES

Although the benefits were immediate, the new workflow was not without its challenges. Early attempts at describing what "medium-rare" treatments actually consisted of were as convoluted as previous attempts to define it within this paper. Other than suggesting to collection managers that "you'll know it when you see it," it was important to build confidence and knowledge in their abilities to understand and identify what conservation staff were specifically looking for—especially if they were going to be expected to independently designate which items were coming to the lab for treatment. However, this also meant that staff in conservation had to learn when to judge that placing the responsibility on the collection managers was actually too much and was slowing our processes down as a result. Having numerous meetings to try and establish what could be considered medium-rare might not be the most efficient use of anyone's time if the decision on treatment approach could more easily be made by conservation once the item was in the lab.

To that end, throughout the implementation process, it was important to learn staff limitations on an individual basis—which really just meant adjusting to the learning curve of each individual staff member. Previously, conservators and technicians operated predominantly within one workflow, whether it was special or general collections. Working in medium-rare meant that staff had to change their approaches and develop more versatility to expand their holistic knowledge of what goes on in the lab. This, in turn, would hopefully enable a better understanding of the parameters of the new workflow. Doing so was contingent on frequent communication in the form of biweekly check-in meetings, where staff all applied a constant revisionist eye toward the aspects of the workflow that needed improvement.

One of the biggest challenges early on in implementation came in the form of balancing the new workflow's administration with respect to already existing workflows within the lab. Although staff were seeing more treatment happening,

the time it took to establish and administer the workflow actually took time away from the bench rather than adding to it, especially with respect to the conservators. Although the conservator was the primary point of contact for the collection managers in the beginning, it soon became apparent that it was more efficient to have the staff member completing treatment in direct contact with the collection manager from the owning library. It is possible that this would be a hurdle with implementing any new treatment methodology, as the initial investment of time and resources to get it moving is always most significant in the beginning.

There was also resistance encountered while proposing the medium-rare workflow. The most interesting example of this came in the reaction of certain collection managers to the *medium-rare* terminology itself. To conservation staff, medium-rare was not an assignation of value or priority of the object but rather a means to classify a treatment approach for particular materials. However, for some curators, having their items categorized as such felt as though conservation staff were diminishing the "specialness" or rarity of their special collections, and working to allay the fears that that terminology introduced could sometimes be an obstacle. Internally, staff have wondered if it would have been better to use more neutral or objective language, such as treatment levels 1 through 3, to designate treatment streams rather than using the loaded terminology of *special*, *medium-rare*, and *general*. This may be an important consideration for other institutions that might be interested in implementing some form of medium-rare treatment within their own collections. However, after months of campaigning on the platform of medium-rare, UIUC staff have concluded that changing the name at this point would only muddy the waters.

OTHER AREAS OF GROWTH

As it turns out, one workflow can apparently beget many other workflows. Once the medium-rare treatment workflow was in steady swing, staff began seeing other areas of our processes that needed more formalized attention. For example, staff found that having a confluence of so many collection items from various locations with multiple treatment routes really called for the creation of a more standardized request form. In consultation with the rest of preservation services and using a custom-designed Google Form, we launched an online conservation treatment request form in spring 2017 (fig. 10). The request form gathers initial data such as bibliographic information, repairs needed, whether the item is for exhibit or digitization, and the date when treatment needs to be completed. This allows collection managers to build a queue of items in one location and allows conservation staff to keep track of whose collection is receiving treatment at any given time.

A Conservation Treatment Request

This is a public form for collection managers and curators to propose items for conservation treatment (<http://lib.arts.uiowa.edu/conservation/>). If you would like to simply view the list of items previously submitted as conservation priorities, please see our wiki documentation on the queue at <https://wiki.lib.arts.uiowa.edu/wiki/Queue>

Required

Email address *

Your email

Contact Name

Your answer

Library Unit

- ALA Archives
- Art and Architecture
- Illinois History and Lincoln Collection
- Maps
- Rare Book and Manuscript Library
- Sousa Archives and Center for American Music
- Student Life and Culture Archive
- University Archives

B Conservation Treatment Request

Bibliographic Information

(books and other items typically cataloged in Voyager)

Brief Item Title
please provide a title (or description) for this material(s)

Your answer

Barcode
Please provide the barcode to help identify the item in Voyager

Your answer

Bib ID

Your answer

Call Number (or record series)

Your answer

If part of a series, which volumes or boxes if not all?

Your answer

C Conservation Treatment Request

Need and Timeline for Repair

Conservation Priority
Please consider the overall priority of this item for conservation versus other items needing conservation

	1	2	3	4	5	
Lower priority (no touch, but worth repair)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Highest priority (due to time sensitivity for teaching/research, or frequent use)

Value (optional)
To help with prioritization, please add a value ranking to the material being submitted.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Lesser value/more commonly held	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Cultural Treasure

Due Date
If this treatment is time sensitive because it is required for class instruction, an exhibit, loan or other known date obligation, please provide the date by which you need the item returned to you. NOTE: Conservation will do its best to take firm restrictions into consideration when proposing treatment plans. However, due to the complex nature of certain conservation treatments, this is no guarantee that items will be able to be returned by the requested date.

Date
mm/dd/yyyy

Fig. 10. (a-c) Views of our web-based conservation request form.

Another example of new workflows was developed as a result of rethinking the photo documentation setup. One of the main motivations for the medium-rare workflow was to increase productivity. However, a new accumulation of material to be photographed slowed staff down significantly. Someone was constantly needing to photograph something to keep the other stages of the workflow moving along. To deal with this, staff created a new graduate position—photo documentation coordinator—to handle the many aspects of the photo documentation setup. The inaugural student, hired in spring 2017, has been trained in safe handling of rare and delicate materials, as well as the standards of conservation photo documentation (fig. 11). This position is responsible for completing image capture, file migration and management, as well as the consolidation of our documentation *about* our documentation processes, so that training and knowledge can be easily transferred to the next student to hold the position.

Additionally, in the course of having to promote the medium-rare treatment workflow around the library, Preservation Services as a whole thought it might be a good time to reprise a former practice of conducting site visits to all of the area studies collections throughout the university library system. This would give them an opportunity to touch base with campus libraries with whom they have less frequent interaction to let them know of new services that may be beneficial to them. These site visits were also implemented in spring 2017.

Being able to track more minor treatments in the medium-rare database also aided in the concurrent development of a new plan for in situ conservation at the Rare Book and Manuscript Library. The goal of this plan is to create a secondary conservation space within the main library on campus to broaden the number of basic treatments able to be completed without requiring transport to the lab. Furthermore, being able to hold regular office hours, answer routine questions, and offer higher availability to curators will hopefully deepen working relationships and improve communication overall.

CONCLUSIONS

Between September 2016 and May 2017, the conservation lab at UIUC had completed a total of 90 treatments designated as medium-rare. Staff currently do not have a reliable way to



Fig. 11. Sushant Sapre, our inaugural student in the capacity of photo documentation coordinator, taking light readings before image capture.

capture a data metric regarding the percent increase of treatment across various collections, nor a means to quantify the exact types of treatments that were seen within the medium-rare workflow. However, anecdotally, staff are able to report that collection managers seem to both recognize the efforts staff are making toward caring for their items and are deeply appreciative—this may be arguably more important than data metrics. An aspect of working in an institution where every position and department is working with limited resources is that everyone can become keenly aware of others' needs and stresses. As conservators, we are deeply concerned with objects and their care—often this is what draws us into the conservation profession to begin with. However, as library conservators, we are additionally concerned with the use of these objects, and with supporting the people who facilitate that use. By empowering that connection, we make room to create unique learning experiences for users and staff alike.

Medium-rare treatment as an independent workflow is still in its infancy, but with continued diligence and work, the staff at UIUC hope that it will continue to thrive and provide an opportunity to update the conservation community on longer-term outcomes.

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