

Stanford University Libraries Conservation Treatment Section Profile

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Size of collection

Three million volumes housed in 12 libraries.

History

When the Preservation Office was founded in 1980, it was staffed by a Preservation Officer, a conservator, and a one-person Brittle Books Unit. The Repair Unit, formerly under Binding and Finishing, was transferred to Preservation in 1981, and the Conservation Treatment Section, which unites both circulating and special collections treatment, was formed in 1988 when a supervising head conservator was hired. Binding and Finishing (formerly under Acquisitions) was transferred to Preservation in 1989. The Preservation Office became a Department in 1989 and is part of the Technical Services Division.

Staff

Within the Conservation Treatment Section there are 4 technicians for the circulating collections and two conservators (totalling 1 full time equivalent in bench time) for the special collections. Although the work areas are separate (the special collections area is secured), the areas adjoin and equipment is shared. My long-term goal is to have 3 FTE on circulating collections and 2 for special collection materials (in addition to Special Collections proper, there are three "locked stack" collections in the branch libraries). Conservation Treatment is centralized and there is no sanctioned repair outside the unit. We are physically separated from Binding and Finishing, (this includes end processing where labeling and titling take place), and Replacement and Reformatting – a circumstance that inhibits streamlining and collaboration.

There is only one shift, and we have no students or volunteers (in circulating repair). There are two level I and two level II technicians. The degree of experience required distinguishes the two levels, but as time goes by, there is little distinction in the type of treatments performed – everyone does everything. Because the technicians are bargaining unit employees we have fairly restrictive job descriptions; technically, levels I and II do not work on Special Collections materials. To increase skills, introduce variety to the job, and get more attention for the Special Collections, the technicians work on housing projects for rare materials. Salary levels range from \$11 to \$13 an hour. The technicians received their training through a series of in-house workshops and binding lessons. Staff training is funded up to \$140 per quarter and there are limited travel/professional development funds for non-exempt positions. The technicians currently serve on no library committees, principally, I think, due to lack of interest.

Selection for treatment

Both Repair and Special Collections Conservation are primarily driven by use and new acquisitions. Incoming materials are identified at the end of processing in Technical Services; older collections are caught during use. We have a database of curator-identified collections with long-term preservation potential. These are used to identify projects for grant funding or to supplement the regular work flow during quiet periods. There is no item-level review by curators except for Special Collection materials.

Identification of retrospective collection materials needing preservation is done locally at each branch. Because the Preservation Department is physically segregated, it is impractical to have central review. This requires keeping a lot of staff trained to recognize problems and select the correct treatment. Preservation staff catch mis-specifications and route them.

Specifications for treatment

The circulating collections at Stanford University Libraries are not heavily used in comparison to many other institutions; faculty and students number around 16,000. This allows us to preserve many items in their original formats. Unless a book's cover is really in bad shape, we will most often reuse it. Librarians and

curators are provided with a matrix showing costs/benefits of commercial versus in-house treatment which gives them general guidelines for specifications. We recently added a place on our treatment form for the sending unit to note the potential use of the item. The choices are: high-use, long-term retention, or limited retention. The default is long-term, moderate use. We hope that this portion of the form will be used and that it will allow repair staff to further gauge their repairs.

Librarians are also given a decision-making tree to follow to determine whether something should be sent out or bound in-house. The guiding principle for in-house treatment is to select artifactually interesting books, books which are inappropriate for our commercial binder, or books which can be repaired for less than commercial costs (including shipping). We use the guidelines for artifactual interest in "The Book as Object" found in Research Libraries Group's *Preservation Manual*.

Budget

Almost all physical treatment is funded by the library operating budget and is use-driven, although our most recent National Endowment for the Humanities grant does include repair. There is a Conservation Endowment which provides some funds for treating special collections materials.

Pamphlet binding

Most pamphlets are sent to the commercial binder for sewing or stapling. Pamphlets in poor condition or which don't fit the size requirements for the commercial binder are bound in-house. We use LBS binders; pamphlets are stapled in unless paper is weak, in which case they are sewn.

Quota system

Circulating repair runs on a quota system set up in 1987 to deal with a multi-month backlog. It is still in place but is highly flexible. Librarians just call us if they're doing a project and we adjust their quota. Turnaround time is less than a month, there are no backlogs, and rush requests are processed within 24 hours. The quota allotments were based on historical use of repair services. Although I've considered adjusting them to reflect size and use of the collection, it hasn't seemed worth the effort. Currently the main library has an allotment totalling 50% of the total.

Philosophy

We adhere to no one school. I suppose, ideally, we'd say we strive to preserve the original whenever possible, to perform effective, non-damaging repairs, and to maintain a flexible and creative attitude to our work. In reality. . . .