

A Preliminary Study of Current Book Conservation and Repair in Research Libraries: A Survey of the Landscape

ABSTRACT

The presentation reported preliminary results of a research project to evaluate the current state of book conservation and repair in research libraries. Following a review of the literature, the authors administered an anonymous, web-based survey to practitioners of general and special collections book conservation and repair in research libraries. The survey requested basic demographic information about the respondents and their institutions, and gathered details about their book conservation and repair practices. The authors analyzed the results and identified which treatments the survey data showed to be standard practice. In addition, some relationships between the demographic characteristics of respondents and treatment practices were noted.

INTRODUCTION

The authors carried out a research project to evaluate the current state of book conservation and repair in research libraries. Following a review of the literature, the authors administered an anonymous, web-based survey in August and September of 2007 to practitioners of general and special collections book conservation and repair in research libraries. In addition to basic demographic information about respondents and their institutions, the survey instrument requested information about their treatment practices with respect to six categories of book treatments typical to research libraries: (1) protective enclosures and book jackets, (2) binding reinforcements, (3) minor paper treatments and textblock repairs, (4) board reattachment methods, (5) other binding repair and rebinding techniques, and (6) advanced paper treatments for bound materials. The authors analyzed the results and identified which treatments the survey data showed to be standard practice, which were employed less uniformly, and which were rarely employed. In addition, the authors identified

some relationships between the demographic characteristics of respondents and reported treatment practices.

PROJECT GOALS

The research project, which is ongoing, aims to document the types of treatments currently employed in research libraries for the treatment of general and special collections materials. In addition, the authors are exploring the following related questions:

- How do current treatment practices compare with what is featured in the literature and presented at conferences?
- How consistent are book treatment practices among research libraries, from institution to institution?
- Has increased information exchange between general and special collections practitioners resulted in more similar treatment practices?
- Do “hybrid” practitioners—those with responsibility for both general and special collections—approach treatment differently than those focusing only on one type of collection?
- Do individuals in centralized facilities approach treatment differently than those in labs focused solely on general or special collections?
- How do training and education affect treatment practices?

This preliminary report describes the survey process and highlights major early findings from the survey.

THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The web-based survey consisted of six pages. The first welcomed the respondent and defined the survey audience as “the individual(s) with primary responsibility for book conservation and/or repair,” adding that “institutions with multiple conservation/repair units may respond once for the entire institution or individually for each unit.” An additional page requested basic demographic information about the

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respondent and his or her institution, such as its scope, size, and age of the conservation laboratory, and requested information about the job duties and training of the practitioner completing the survey.

The main pages of the survey gathered information about conservation and repair practices with respect to fifty-five types of treatments (appendix A). To insure the survey's relevance to both general and special collections practitioners and to permit comparisons of their practices, the survey focused on treatments that could conceivably be employed in either a general or a special collections setting. Practitioners were asked to identify how frequently they employed each of the fifty-five treatments. In order to minimize bias or error, concise descriptions were provided in cases where treatment names were not self-explanatory. Three rounds of pre-testing helped the authors refine the list of treatments, treatment definitions, and response options.

Preliminary results

Only complete responses to the survey were included in the analysis. Seventy-nine individuals fully completed the questionnaire. Because the forty-eight "hybrid" practitioner respondents—those involved with both general and special collections treatment—were asked to fill out two treatment questionnaires, one for each type of collection, the seventy-nine respondents provided a total of 127 treatment cases. By coincidence, the responses were distributed nearly evenly between general collections and special collections, sixty-four and sixty-three, respectively.

The respondents were diverse in terms of the size of their libraries; they were divided nearly evenly among large libraries with over five million volumes, mid-size libraries ranging from two to five million volumes, and smaller libraries with less than two million volumes. In addition, the vast majority of respondents reported full- or near-full-time conservation responsibilities, with over sixty percent of the respondents working with both general and special collections.

From the survey results, the authors identified which treatments the respondents widely considered standard practice, which were employed less uniformly, and which were very rarely employed. In general, responses pertaining to general and special collections practices showed more similarity than might be expected, but differences were noted. Treatments in the categories of "binding reinforcements," "minor paper treatments," and "textblock repairs" were found overall to be more common to general collections than special collections. Conversely, treatments in the categories of "protective enclosures," "board reattachments," "additional binding techniques," and "paper treatments for bound materials" were found to be more common to special collections. Within the various categories, however, there were individual exceptions to these broader trends.

The data also pointed to some relationships between the demographic features of the respondents and the treatments they reported as standard practice. Most of these findings were not surprising but rather confirmed the authors' expectations. In the context of general collections treatment, "hybrid" practitioners—those with responsibility for both general and special collections treatments—were slightly more likely than their counterparts working solely on general collections to report treatments as standard practice, especially for more complex treatments. In other words, the "hybrid" practitioners tended to utilize a broader and more advanced range of techniques. In the context of special collections, however, the higher-end treatments were more commonly reported as standard practice by "special-collections-only" practitioners than by their "hybrid" counterparts.

The authors continue to analyze the data derived from the survey and plan to publish complete findings in the near future.

APPENDIX A: TREATMENTS INCLUDED IN THE SURVEY

Protective enclosures

- Polyester book jacket
- CoLibri polyethylene book jacket
- Pocket, envelope, or three- or four-flap folder in pamphlet binder
- Three- or four-flap "tuxedo" box (tongue & slot closure)
- Three- or four-flap "phase" box (rivet & string closure)
- Corrugated board box
- Cloth-covered clamshell box
- Leather-covered clamshell box
- Fitting books with custom sized boxes purchased from a vendor
- Polyester sleeves or encapsulation

Binding reinforcements

- Pamphlet binding, adhesive attachment
- Pamphlet binding, staple-through-the-fold
- Pamphlet binding, sew-through-the-fold
- Paperback stiffening

Minor paper treatments and textblock repairs

- Creating or inserting photocopy replacement pages
- Mending with "archival" tape (e.g., Filmoplast, Archival Aids)
- Mending with heat-set tissue
- Mending with Japanese paper and paste
- Guarding sections with Japanese paper and paste
- Resewing several sections
- Sewing or re-sewing an entire volume
- Barrier spine lining of Japanese paper and paste
- New tipped-on endsheets

- New hinged-on endsheets
- New sewn-through-the-fold endsheets

Board reattachment methods

- Joint tacketing
- Japanese paper board reattachment
- Toning Japanese paper with acrylics for board reattachment or binding repair
- Solvent-set tissue board reattachment
- Board slotting
- Partial cloth hinge
- New slips

Binding repair and rebinding techniques

- Recase
- New case
- Lapped case or Bradel binding
- New limp vellum and/or limp paper case binding
- Cloth reback
- Leather reback
- Japanese paper reback
- Reattaching detached spines with a hollow tube or v-hinge
- Lifting endsheets to save original pastedowns
- Dyeing cloth with acrylics for binding repairs
- Dyeing leather with leather dye for binding repairs
- Consolidating leather with Klucel-G
- Sewn boards binding
- Split board binding
- "Treatment 305"
- Double-fan adhesive binding

Advanced paper treatments performed on bound volumes

- Aqueous washing or alkalization
- Bookkeeper deacidification (in-house) Wei T'o deacidification
- Localized tape/adhesive removal using heat
- Localized tape/adhesive/stain removal using water (e.g., methyl cellulose)
- Localized tape/adhesive/stain removal using other solvents
- Dry cleaning with vinyl erasers or vinyl eraser crumbs

WHITNEY BAKER

Conservator

University of Kansas Libraries

Lawrence, Kansas

wbaker@ku.edu

LIZ DUBE

Conservator

University of Notre Dame Libraries

Notre Dame, Indiana

ldube@nd.edu