

Library Collections Conservation Discussion Group 2015: Let Me Help You Help Me: Outreach as Preventative Conservation

INTRODUCTION

The Library Collections Conservation Discussion Group (LCCDG) explored various methods of outreach through three presentations. Which channels worked best to communicate knowledge and resources? Which best captured community interest? The discussions incorporated case studies and presented both theoretical concepts and practical advice centered on preservation outreach to patrons of libraries, training of non-conservation staff to identify collection issues and use of social media to highlight conservators and their work.

LAURA MCCANN

TRAINING LIBRARY EMPLOYEES: A CASE STUDY FROM
NYU LIBRARIES

The Bobst Library Access Services staff and student workers are responsible for identifying circulating materials that are in need of preservation action. The library has established written workflows to aid in this determination, but it was discovered that those workflows were often misunderstood. The conservation unit developed a hands-on training program to educate library staff. This intensive training was successful with the permanent paraprofessional staff. The training resulted in timelier reporting of mold issues, an increase in communication between units, and an overall increase in preservation queries. Unfortunately, conservation staff found it difficult to engage the student workers during these intensive training sessions. It was difficult to keep them focused

This open discussion took place on May 16, 2015, during the AIC 43rd Annual Meeting, May 13–May 16, 2015, Miami, FL. The moderators organized and led the discussion and recorded notes. Readers are reminded that the moderators do not necessarily endorse all the comments recorded, and that although every effort was made to record proceedings accurately, further evaluation or research is advised before putting treatment observations into practice.

and off of their phones. In addition, it was challenging to arrange the sessions for student workers' staggered schedules, and as a result there was less than a sixty percent attendance rate. A high turn-over rate among student workers made the investment of preservation staff's time especially inefficient considering the inconsistent results.

To address these issues, conservation staff changed their tactics dramatically. The intensive hands-on training was shortened to a fifteen minute PowerPoint presentation given as part of a New Student Employee Orientation. Attending the orientation is mandatory for student workers, and to further entice students to show up and pay attention snacks were provided and their supervisors were also in attendance. These changes allowed conservation staff to train ninety to one hundred percent of student workers and led to a significant increase in items properly selected for preservation action by Access Services student employees.

NYU has three other campuses: NYU Polytechnic School of Engineering in Brooklyn, NYU Abu Dhabi and NYU Shanghai. There are no preservation staff at these campuses, and the time differences between New York and the Abu Dhabi and Shanghai campuses make instructor-led training methods nearly impossible. Preservation staff has turned to LibGuides as their solution to deliver preservation information to staff at geographically distant campuses. LibGuides allow preservation staff to present training and guidelines that can be accessed at any time by distant staff. These guides can also be used to link to tutorials and information created by other preservation professionals around the world, and can be a useful resource even to preservation staff themselves.

Q: Do you have any other tips on how to best train library staff and student workers on preservation?

McCann: It helps to include previously trained staff and supervisors. This keeps everyone up to date on changes in training and helps keep new staff focused. Try to keep the conversation positive and message clear and concise.

Q: What do you consider some of the most important information to stress during training of general library staff?

McCann: Training staff to guide users in safe handling of library materials is key. It is also important to make sure everyone knows they have a role to play in keeping library collections safe.

Q: How do you reach the public and pass preservation best practices on to them?

McCann: Bookmarks and table tents can be used to communicate concise information.

Participant: Using cartoons and humor to educate the public can be very helpful.

Q: How do you make sure your training is working?

McCann: For the access services staff training we track training session attendance and the number of books selected for preservation. We also work with the special collections staff to make sure they speak with us if they see that something isn't right.

Q: How long do you think a training session should be?

McCann: That depends on the group you are training. Preservation and special collection staff seem to get the most out of longer, smaller group sessions. Positions outside of the preservation lab with high turnover should receive shorter training sessions.

Q: What is the best way to supplement training outside of the actual in person sessions?

McCann: Short videos could be uploaded to the Internet to be accessed from the web at any time. Making things simple and user friendly is a top priority for training support materials.

*Laura McCann, Conservation Librarian, Barbara Goldsmith
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DAWN WALUS

OUTREACH AND ACCESS: A TOPIC ON COMMUNITY AND MEMBER OUTREACH

The Boston Athenaeum, an independent institution with library material and cultural history revolving around New England, was founded over two centuries ago. The institution holds the mission of serving its members, community, and scholars all over the world with community outreach at its core. The conservation department believes that this community outreach is vital to foster interest in and an understanding of the role that conservation plays in protecting the Athenaeum's collections. Rather than hiding themselves away from the public, they work hard to keep conservation

in the eyes and minds of members. There are small scale and large scale measures to implement and establish community outreach programs and policies within the institution. This is done through various events and an open attitude by the conservation department in conjunction with the other departments at the Boston Athenaeum.

An active social calendar is the key for such a successful community outreach program at the Boston Athenaeum. Talking to members, advertising, giving public tours, and in general "putting out the work" are basic steps the Boston Athenaeum is taking towards community outreach. Other events that the Boston Athenaeum hosts are rare books readings, discussion groups, lectures, and performances. The Boston Athenaeum's conservation department also holds exciting and creative events throughout the year especially to invigorate patrons and donors of the institution. For example, the Athenaeum hosts an annual "A Conservation Evening" where books and materials in need of conservation work are set out for the event so that donors can pledge the cost of treatment (with the option of gifting in the memory of a loved one). The books treated during the previous year are on display as well, giving the potential donors the opportunity to see firsthand how their donations benefit the collection. Events like these encourage patrons to recommit and remain involved members of the Boston Athenaeum.

In addition, the Boston Athenaeum allows occasional opportunities for visitors/members to tour the whole of the institution. For example, recently the institution has held a public "open house" event and have been quite the successful with about 1,000 visitors (and about a quarter of whom visited the conservation lab). This allowed visitors to tour areas normally accessible only by members or through invitation only. The doors of the conservation department at the Boston Athenaeum have clear glass so that visitors can watch treatments being performed and become interested in the work being done in the conservation lab. Members are free to knock on the lab door for admittance to ask questions and learn more about the department. The conservation department further extends itself to members through a digital photo frame outside the department on which viewers can see images of the work that the conservation department has completed.

The community outreach program is designed for visitors of all ages, including young children. The Boston Athenaeum has a reading event for children once a month and supplies them with a swag bag. The conservation department hosted a series of hands-on events where children were educated about book conservation, the proper handling of library materials, book binding and making paste paper. The students from the Commonwealth Children Center even took what they learned back to the classroom where they established a "Book Hospital." Though these are younger visitors who can't immediately contribute to the department, instilling an early love of books and appreciation for conservation is clearly a long-term benefit to the lab and the Athenaeum as a whole.

In addition to outreach with the public, the conservation department is committed to giving back to the field. They have an ongoing intern program, fellowships for graduate students, and a summer institutional exchange program with several partners like The North Bennett Street School. These efforts provide an exchange of knowledge that helps improve the department, the institution, and the field as a whole. Besides supporting fellow emerging conservators, scholars from all over the world are invited to study from the special collections and they too are supported through select fellowships awarded by the Boston Athenaeum.

The Boston Athenaeum's interactive approach to community outreach sticks. The conservation department, which celebrated 50 years in 2013 has repeatedly shown a deep investment and creative approach to engaging the community. As a result, those of all ages and all levels of involvement with the Boston Athenaeum not only become aware of the conservation department, but also help to propel it forward.

Q: What group of visitors did you find most challenging to reach?

Walus: Today's world is filled with technology, so those that are constantly glued to their phones, like teens for example, are difficult to reach. The key to reaching this group is extracting their curiosity in the subject matter.

Q: So is it safe to say that the Boston Athenaeum has an open door policy for members to come into the conservation lab?

Walus: I wouldn't say it's an open door policy since we don't advertise it as we would never be able to get work done in the conservation department if we did. There is a sign on the door that says members can knock to be admitted into the lab to learn more about the conservation work. Non-members must make an appointment to tour the conservation lab.

Q: What are the biggest challenges in your role in community outreach?

Walus: Arranging events certainly takes work and at times it requires me to work weekends so you and those around you have to be flexible. That is also in a way a benefit to this job.

Q: Are there any activates or ideas you all are looking into to further your already very successful communities outreach program?

Walus: When planning events for the lab, I like to combine the hands-on aspect of conservation related technologies with other events at the Athenaeum. For instance, if we are exhibiting a rare book show in the gallery, perhaps, over the course of the exhibit, the conservation lab will hold a book-binding workshop.

Dawn Walus, Chief Conservator of the Boston Athenaeum

SUZANNE MORGAN

CONSERVATION IN THE COMMONS: USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO TELL OUR STORY TO THE PUBLIC

Social media platforms offer conservators a new way to reach out to the public, to interest them and to inform them. For most conservators, using social media requires only an investment of time, since the platforms are easily accessible on technology that already permeates our lives and most of the accounts are free. The internet is full of tutorials on how to start up your social media presence and how to make the most out of the different platforms. So, how do you develop a successful following?

Don't overcommit. Start slow and build from there. Recognize that social media is a global community and comments will come at all hours of the night, but you do not have to reply immediately. You have to set your own boundaries to avoid getting swamped. There are many different venues, all of which are constantly emerging and evolving—find the one or two that make sense for you and your work. Keep it fun, but be consistently responsive. You also have to invest time in staying current, relevant and connected. Social media is all about interaction. Follow fellow conservators and institutions and chances are they'll follow you in return. In fact, don't just follow. Be an involved part of the conversation—repost, link and comment.

Don't be afraid to experiment. If something doesn't work, try something else. Your audience expects change. Keep an eye out for successful campaigns and apply their tactics to your own. Librarians and scientists have been especially good at using social media to mold public perception of their fields. Talk the talk and walk the walk—use memes, intriguing pictures, and videos. Keep it short and sweet, but cross-pollinate by linking with other more traditional online venues like blogs. Be human. Allow yourself to be as serious or silly as you want to be, all on one platform.

Don't go it alone. If you work for a large institution, seek out those who run the official social media accounts and offer content to get conservation under their spotlight—generally institutional accounts have a much larger following already. Use pre-existing trends like #shelfie days to tie yourself into the larger social media culture. Make full use of the technology to schedule posts to avoid floods and droughts.

Ready to dive in, or just want to find colleagues? Check out this list of conservators already on social media and add yourself. <http://conservethis.tumblr.com/list>

Q: What are your recommended social media sites?

Morgan: I use Twitter, Tumbler and Vine, but everyone is different and should explore all their options. Some other popular venues currently out there are Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.

Q: How do you deal with your institutional bureaucracy to get permission to represent them on social media?

Morgan: At my university, we have marketing staff dedicated to promoting the institution on twitter. I feed them content for the official account, and use my anonymous personal account to supplement that unofficially. I would recommend approaching someone in the university like our marketing staff would be a good first start. Give them content, build a rapport. If they let you interact with the public in your job, social media isn't a big leap. If you need to build a case for social media at all, show them successful campaigns like Emily Graslie at the Field Museum.

Q: How much time does it take per day?

Morgan: Not a lot of long stretches of dedicated time. I tend to do it in little snatches of time on breaks and before work. Again, I'm not using an official account. But you can set your own speed. Personal/Professional creep is a concern, you should try not to feel obligated. It's OK to have a life. And you can use tools like HootSuite and TweetDeck to schedule posts for a later date if you have a lot of good ideas all at once.

Q: How do you stay current on all of the incoming content from social media?

Morgan: I limit myself to a few pages of the most recent content. Trying to read everything everywhere is impossible.

Q: When is the best time of day to post to get more followers?

Morgan: I think everyone is different, but after you have been doing it for awhile, you can use Google Analytics to look for spikes in usage over time. That information can help you adjust when you post for maximum impact.

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