



Date : 23/06/2006

Preservation Partners: Engaging staff in preservation efforts

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Meeting:	96 Preservation and Conservation with Continuing Professional Education and Workplace Learning and the Preservation and Conservation Core Activity (part 2)
Simultaneous Interpretation:	No

WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 72ND IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL

20-24 August 2006, Seoul, Korea

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla72/index.htm>

Abstract:

Preservation advocacy is a key component to protecting collections by engaging and convincing staff to think about how their actions affect the collections. In the same way that conservation of natural resources is now seen as a responsibility for the many and not the few, so too preservation of library collections is not the domain of one but of every one. Institutional understanding of the value of collections, and the appropriate handling and care of those collections is a key component in their longevity. Giving staff a sense of ownership, helping them see themselves as part of the solution can inspire staff to be part of the effort to prolong the life of collections. Using a variety of means from funny skits for staff meetings, to informational web sites, to library displays with examples of damaged materials; the furthering of understanding about micro damage and the best techniques for handling fragile materials is all part of a full range of methods used to boost understanding and engage staff in considering how their own behavior affects collection conditions. This paper will share a multitude of simple but successful means to engage staff in preservation activities whether as part of their normal job in handling materials or as part of a group that works on specific preservation projects such as disaster mitigation planning, cleaning projects or inventorying materials for conservation treatment.

Preservation advocacy is a key component to protecting collections by engaging and convincing staff to think about how their actions affect the collections. In the same way that conservation of natural resources is now seen by many as a responsibility for the many and not the few; so too preservation of library and archives collections is not the domain of one but of everyone. Institutional understanding of the value of collections, and the appropriate handling and care of those collections is a key component in their longevity. So how does the person responsible for preservation accomplish this goal? How does the one convince the whole that preservation is part of their task, part of their responsibility? The first step is establishing the value of the collection in the minds of the staff, and helping them recognize that the collection is held in trust, it is not yours or mine, it is ours for now to carry into the future. Thinking of the care of the collection as simply part of everyone's job helps to share the responsibility and also gives ownership of the solution to the entire staff, from director to shelver.

One successful step for many institutions is to make preservation a part of every staff job description. From circulation to cataloging, from administration to shelving each person who works for the library or archive plays a part in the life of the collection through their careful handling, appropriate shelving, reasonable care and treatment. Everyone who handles the collection influences the health of the collection. Having a preservation component in job descriptions helps to reinforce from day one the importance of each individual to the well being of the collection. As job descriptions are updated that is a good time to add the preservation component. Creating a sense of ownership of the collection creates the sense of responsibility that staff must feel to care for an institutional collection as if it were their own. Indeed the collection is key to the quality for much of the institutional value. While much reference is now done on the Internet there are still vital materials in collections that are an important part of what creates the institutional value. So how does one convince, indeed inspire staff to go the extra step in caring for collections?

Administration buy-in is a key component, if the administration sees value in preservation activities and allocates resources to preservation of the collection, staff will also see that value. If head administrators speak to the value of the collections and allow time at staff meetings for discussion and idea sharing for care and handling tips that will help to make preservation ubiquitous in the organization. Adding preservation steps to procedures such how to identify damage, how to shelve oversized materials, or how best to push a book truck into an elevator without tipping it over for an excellent start on this front.

Respect for community property needs to begin with library staff members who see the places where they work as public trusts, not as *my library*. They teach, directly and by example, how to use and how to handle materials with respect. Library administration and staff members are the key to successful preservation education for library staff and users. The administration must actively support the importance of preservation education for the staff, such as allowing release time for training, funding for proper book repair materials, and improved containers for interlibrary loans or branch-to-branch transport. Library staff must learn new ways of working and must be educated to the extent that they buy into the library's preservation effort and choose to participate.

Education for Behavior Change

To elicit a positive response to preservation education, it is more effective to use preservation-related messages in the library rather than to display a list of do's and don'ts.

Fit these little preservation bites of information into all sorts of library encounters such as:

- Use the library staff newsletter for a “preservation corner”
- Take staff meeting time to talk about one aspect of preservation
- Bring a speaker from another institution to share ideas on preservation
- Provide new employee orientation with a component for preservation-care and handling tips
- Involve the Friends of the Library to engage a public speaker to share ideas on care of personal collections.
- Create a student training website on preservation with a quiz. Have a prize for right answers
- Ask for the help of every staff person to care for the collection

The teachable moment is everywhere and should not be overlooked for its impact. And when you combine preservation bites of information with related posters, exhibits, handouts, and bookmarks, the preservation message will come across loud and clear.

Even while using the teachable moment you can make it fun. Use a play on words for posters and bookmarks. Create a funny skit about the Book Doctor to help staff remember key principles and also to encourage them to bring problems to the attention of preservation staff.

What Preservation Education Means

The goal of preservation education is to inform and educate the staff in using library materials in the least damaging way. All use takes its toll, but there is use and there is misuse. Preservation does not mean denial of access. Preservation of materials actually enhances access for present and future users, as long as those materials are needed. Preservation in the present means access in the future.

Means to an End

Let's start with a simple preservation quiz that can be used for new hires, for orientation, or as part of an easy assignment before a staff meeting.

You could even create a preservation quiz and offer prizes for the winner.

The following quiz is an example taken from the University of California preservation website.

Preservation Quiz

1. You find that the book you've checked out at the library has several pages that are badly torn. Would you:
 - a. Put transparent tape over the tears.

- b. Tell the librarian about the torn pages when you return the book.
 - c. Hope that the pages won't fall out before you return the book.
 - d. Not return the book because you might be accused of mutilating the book.
2. Which of the following will prolong the life of books, CDs, photographs, videos, cassettes, disks, films, and other library materials?
- a. Low temperature and humidity.
 - b. High temperature and humidity.
 - c. Water
 - d. A once-a-year soaking in the USDA's daily allowance of Vitamin C
3. Eating and drinking in the library is Prohibited because:
- a. Food and beverages can stain and damage books and other library materials.
 - b. Most of the foods and beverages consumed by students are of little nutritional value.
 - c. Food and beverages attract book-eating insects and rodents
 - d. eating and drinking is not allowed on the UCSD campus.
4. If you notice a leak anywhere in the library you should:
- A. Locate your boogie board.
 - b. Find a dry area to study.
 - c. Stop up the leak with an old picture book from Special Collections
 - d. Immediately notify the nearest library staff member.
5. You should open up your bag to the exit guard as you leave the library because:
- a. Everyone else does and you are just another pathetic sheep following the herd.
 - b. Some people steal library materials and this is how they are caught...and punished.
 - c. Bags have been exit-checked since 1856 when pioneers stole books to feed their young
 - d. Exit guards are just curious about students' lives
6. You are reading while leisurely eating and drinking a cup of coffee. Quite by accident the cup overturns and coffee spills over the book. Would you:
- a. Try to remove the stain by washing the paper with soap and water
 - b. Absorb as much of the coffee as possible with a paper towel and stand the book up to dry
 - c. Close the book and hope the wet and stain will not be noticed
 - d. Tell the librarian about the accidental spill and be willing to pay for any repairs
 - e. Throw the book away
7. You are reading a very interesting book but must stop because you have an appointment to keep. Would you:
- a. Turn the book upside down on a flat surface in order to keep your place
 - b. Memorize the page number and close the book
 - c. Put a pencil between the pages where you stopped reading
 - d. Mark the place by inserting a bookmark where you stopped reading and put the book in a secure place

- e. "Dog ear" (fold down) one of the corners of the page and put the book down
8. You have several books that are due at the library today and it is raining very hard. Would you:
- a. wrap them in newspaper before leaving the house
 - b. take the books back at a later date when it's not raining and pay the overdue fine
 - c. put the books in a plastic bag before starting out
 - d. put the books under your jacket to protect them

Answers

1. You find that the book you've checked out at the library has several pages that are badly torn.

b. Repairs, no matter how small, are best left to the library personnel who are specially trained to do them with archival quality materials. Pressure sensitive tape will dry out, stain paper, gum up cloth, shrink, and ooze at the sides. It can take hours to remove the residue of a few pieces of old tape. Please don't complicate the effort of the library conservation staff experienced in making repairs by trying to save them work.

2. Which of the following will prolong the life of books, photographs, CDs, videos, cassettes, disks, films, and other library materials?

a. Although people thrive with sunlight, water and warmth, library materials live much longer in low temperatures and low humidity -- away from ultraviolet rays. The higher the temperature, humidity and ultraviolet light level, the faster the rate of deterioration.

3. Eating and drinking in the library are prohibited because:

a, c. Spilling food and beverages on books and library materials cause irreparable damage. Crumbs, food wrappers, and liquids can attract insects and rodents that eat and destroy paper and the adhesive that secures the bookbindings. Moisture can easily lead to mold that damages or destroys paper-based materials.

4. If you notice a leak anywhere in the library you should:

d. Water damages library materials. If wet or damp library materials are left unattended, destructive mold and mildew will begin to grow. The sooner the leak is reported, the sooner it can be attended to, and the greater the chance that the damaged library materials can be salvaged.

5. You should open up your bag to the exit guard as you leave the library because:

c. Although it is time consuming and sometimes annoying to have to stop and open your bags at the exit, it is even more annoying to find that the library item that you need is missing. Unfortunately, each year some of the library materials for which your tuition dollars pay are stolen. By inspecting bags, we are soliciting your help in an effort to minimize theft. Because of this effort, most books and other library materials are available when you need them.

6. You are reading while leisurely eating and drinking a cup of coffee. Quite by accident the cup overturns and coffee spills over

the book.

b, d. Wet book paper will begin to mold within 48 hours, especially in a warm atmosphere. Moderately wet books that have no water damage to the spine can be dried by standing them on a flat surface with the covers spread open. Gently moving air (ideally with a fan) will shorten the drying time. By all means tell the librarian so that appropriate repairs can be made.

7. You are reading a very interesting book but must stop because you have an appointment to keep.

b, d. If you have a good memory, b is the ideal solution. Inserting a bookmark to keep your place is the least injurious practice. Turning a book face down can weaken and often damage the spine of an older, fragile book. The crease left from turning a corner down will not disappear, but often the corner will!

8. You have several books that are due at the library today and it is raining very hard.

b, c. It's always a good idea to protect books from the elements, particularly the rain. Bindings will be spotted by the rain. In extreme cases the paper of the book can become very wet and fall victim to mold if not dried properly.

Web preservation quiz is taken from <http://orpheus.ucsd.edu/preservation/pquiz.html>
University of California-San Diego Preservation Department

While this quiz is fun and easy you do still have to get the staff to the webpage and that can most easily be done by sending out an email with an active link. Discussing preservation tips at staff meetings and linking that discussion to questions and answers on the webpage helps to reinforce what you are trying to teach. Instructors often use this method and teaching preservation is no different. Think about techniques that favorite teachers used when you were in school. How did they inspire you to learn the subject? You want to do the same with preservation for staff. They say it takes twenty-one days to break a habit or create a habit. Remember that number when you think about how often to send encouraging emails after a presentation or training session. Be positive but be persistent and your preservation education program will bear results in a better cared for collection.

About the Author

Jeanne Drewes is the Chief of Binding and Collections Care at the Library of Congress. Previously she was Assistant Director for Access and Preservation at Michigan State University Libraries. Ms Drewes is the co-editor of a number of publications including "Promoting Preservation Awareness in Libraries: A Sourcebook for Academic, Public, School, and Special Collections" published by Greenwood Press in 1996. She is an active member of ALA, and AIC serving in various capacities and speaking at conferences on a variety of topics including preservation education. Ms Drewes has worked internationally predominately in Cuba where she has organized workshops in basic repair of documents and books as well as more advanced workshops. Her interest in preservation education has also lead her to accept an adjunct teaching position at Wayne State University where she teaches the preservation introduction course.