Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives

Student Engagement

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A Forum for Change...

CLIR is an independent, nonprofit organization that forges strategies to enhance research, teaching, and learning environments in collaboration with libraries, cultural institutions, and communities of higher learning.

CLIR pursues three primary goals in support of its mission:

• To foster new approaches to the management of digital and nondigital information resources so that they will be available in the future
• To expand leadership capacity in the information professions
• To analyze changes in the information landscape and help practitioners prepare for them.
Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives Program

- Cataloging collections of “national significance”
- Using appropriate standards and tools to maximize access, efficiency, interoperability, and sustainability
- Using innovative approaches to cataloging and outreach that engage scholars and other user communities

For details, see:

http://www.clir.org/hiddencollections/
Observations on Scholarly Engagement with Hidden Special Collections and Archives

- Ongoing survey and site visits since 2009
- Looking at ways project staff engage with teachers, researchers, and other users of collections
- Did not single out students
Scholarly Engagement in the Processing Project Lifecycle

Inside the Archive:
- Origin
- Planning
- Training
- Processing
- Record Creation
- Outreach (use)
- Outcomes

Outside the Archive:

Students from local institution

Students from other institutions
Survey on Student Engagement

Autumn 2011

http://www.clir.org/hiddencollections/student_survey_results.html
In what ways do you work with students?

- We employ students as workers. 97%
- We conduct teaching and learning activities with students using the project collections. 37%
- We use students as volunteer labor. 13%
- Other, please specify* 13%

*Responses listed under “Other” include:

1. We worked with graduate students on a special web-based class project.
2. We will use materials as part of our classroom instruction program.
3. We participate in events created for educators. We provide information on how educators may want to use collection content for teaching and learning activities with their students.
4. We work with students seeking primary resources for class assignments.
What kinds of students do you work with?

- Undergraduate students; 73%
- Graduate students; 93%
- Secondary school students; 7%
- Non-degree seeking students, such as those in continuing education programs; 7%
How significant were the following factors in influencing the choice to work with students on your project?

- Working with students is closely connected to the mission of our institution. (41% Significant, 38% Somewhat significant, 41% Slightly significant, 10% Not at all significant, 7% Not true for our project)
- Working with students keeps project costs low. (41% Significant, 38% Somewhat significant, 41% Slightly significant, 10% Not at all significant, 7% Not true for our project)
- Working with students saves staff time. (41% Significant, 38% Somewhat significant, 41% Slightly significant, 10% Not at all significant, 7% Not true for our project)
- Working with students is enjoyable for staff. (41% Significant, 38% Somewhat significant, 41% Slightly significant, 10% Not at all significant, 7% Not true for our project)
- It is easy to find students to work with on our project. (41% Significant, 38% Somewhat significant, 41% Slightly significant, 10% Not at all significant, 7% Not true for our project)
What kinds of work do your students do?

- Data entry into catalog systems or computer software programs such as Archivists' Toolkit; 73%
- Creating container lists and inventories; 73%
- Creating item-level records or descriptions; 37%
- Proofreading and quality control; 30%
- Collection storage and retrieval; 27%
- Creating papers, presentations, or exhibits using project collections; 13%
- Other*; 13%
- Contributing contextual information, as in scope and content, biographical, or historical notes; 60%
- Collection arrangement; 60%
- Preservation activities, such as preservation photocopying or paperclip removal; 57%
- Preserving archives, such as preservation photocopying or paperclip removal; 57%
- Contributing contextual information, as in scope and content, biographical, or historical notes; 60%
- Collection arrangement; 60%
- Data entry into catalog systems or computer software programs such as Archivists' Toolkit; 73%
- Proofreading and quality control; 30%
- Collection storage and retrieval; 27%
- Creating papers, presentations, or exhibits using project collections; 13%
- Other*; 13%

*Responses listed under “Other” include:

- Writing blog posts
- Labeling folders
- Curating Flickr sets
Is it important that your student workers’ work experience, academic background, or major is relevant to your project in some way?

No, it is not terribly important that students have a particular background to be successful contributors to our project. 17%

It can be helpful if students connected to our project have relevant foreign language, domain, or practical expertise, but it would be unrealistic to require such expertise in our institutional context. 31%

Yes, it is important that students connected to our project have a background or experience in museum studies, library and information science, or archival theory and practice. 38%

Yes, it is important that students connected to our project have relevant subject expertise related to the content of the collection(s). 34%

Yes, it is important that students connected to our project have relevant foreign language skills. 14%

“The focus of our institution’s work with students is to establish a mutually-beneficial cooperation in which the student contributes to the mission of the institution while also obtaining experience or knowledge that benefits their academic experience.”
What kinds of teaching or training are provided for the students connected with your project?

- We allow more experienced students to train other students who are new to the project; 24%
- We schedule formal group training sessions for students new to the project; 31%
- We provide informal group training to students during the course of project activities; 38%
- We provide one-on-one training to students throughout the project when needed; 93%
- Our students are enrolled in a credit-bearing course connected to the project; 10%
- No teaching or training is needed for our students, 0%
What kind of supervision is given to the students connected with your project?

- Students work independently but always have access to project staff nearby; 76%
- Students work always work alongside project staff; 17%
- Students work independently but can make appointments to meet in person with project staff when necessary; 3%
- Students work off-site and communicate with project staff largely through telephone, videoconference, or email; 0%
From a staff perspective, what are the primary advantages and disadvantages of working with students on your project?

Frequently mentioned advantages:
- Students are good at routine work.
- Working with library and archival collections is a valuable educational experience for students.
- Students are fun, enthusiastic, and rewarding to work with.
- Students offer relevant subject knowledge and a scholarly perspective.
- Student labor keeps project costs low.

Frequently mentioned disadvantages:
- Students require extensive training.
- Students require extensive supervision, which is time-consuming for staff.
- There is high turnover among student hires, increasing training burden for staff.
- Students have unpredictable schedules, cannot always work 9-5, and can be unreliable when studies and other commitments interfere with project work.
To your knowledge has the project influenced or advanced any of your students’ academic or career goals?

Some examples given by respondents:

"[Our project] provided essential experience in working with manuscripts that will serve all the students throughout their careers; it provided advanced codicological and paleographical training for one student who is drawing heavily from these disciplines in his dissertation work."

"One of our student workers was offered two other part time jobs in archives; we discussed which would suit her career goals best, and she accepted the one I recommended. She has now moved on to a full-time job with the same institution."

"Our project has hired a number of graduate students in archival studies programs, and several of them have now been able to get permanent professional positions. Several of our undergraduate workers have decided to go to graduate school with the intention of working with historical collections."

"Two of our students secured jobs possibly as a result of their work with us. Another student received high grades in his class writing about our project."

"[Our project] provided exposure to archival work for students coming from museum backgrounds."
Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives
Building a New Research Environment

http://www.clir.org/hiddencollections/
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Questions

- How does your institution work with students? What specific kinds of tasks do you give to students?
- What qualities do you look for in the student workers you hire?
- How do you train students, and how does training and working with students differ from similar interactions with paraprofessional staff?
- What are the most rewarding aspects of working with students?
- What are the most frustrating aspects of working with students, and how do you manage these frustrating aspects?
- Has your work with students affected their studies or career plans? If so, how?
- How might students assist in promoting collections to the community?
- How might archival professionals be better prepared or trained to work with students?
- How might archival professionals better track outcomes of student engagement with collections?