Work It, Baby!
The Power of Collections Assessment

Martha O'Hara Conway

Collections Assessment

▶ What it is

▶ Why you do it

▶ How you do it

▶ What you get

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OCLC Research Reports

Taking Stock and Making Hay:
Archival Collections Assessment

Taking Stock and Making Hay: Archival Collections Assessment

An OCLC Research Report by:
Martha O'Hara Conway, University of Michigan
Merrilee Proffitt, OCLC Research

Download the report (.pdf: 570K/37 pp.)

This report identifies projects and methodologies that can be used as-is or serve as models for librarians, archivists and others who are considering collections assessment to meet one or several institutional needs. The goal of the report is to encourage a community of practice and to make it easier for institutions of all types to undertake collections assessment.

Related information:

Activity page:
Develop a Holistic Approach to Archival Collections Assessment

Report publication announcement:
New Report: *Taking Stock and Making Hay: Archival Collections Assessment*

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Martha O'Hara Conway and Merrilee Proffitt

The Practice, Power, and Promise of Archival Collections Assessment
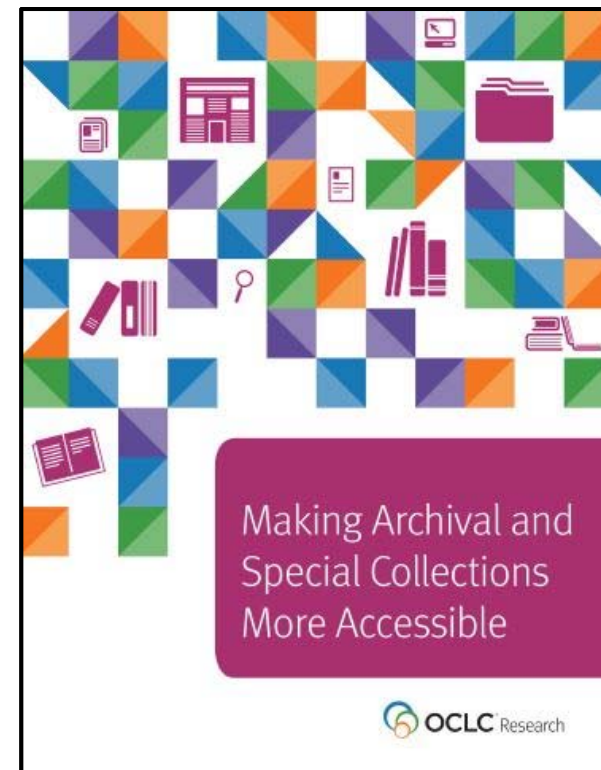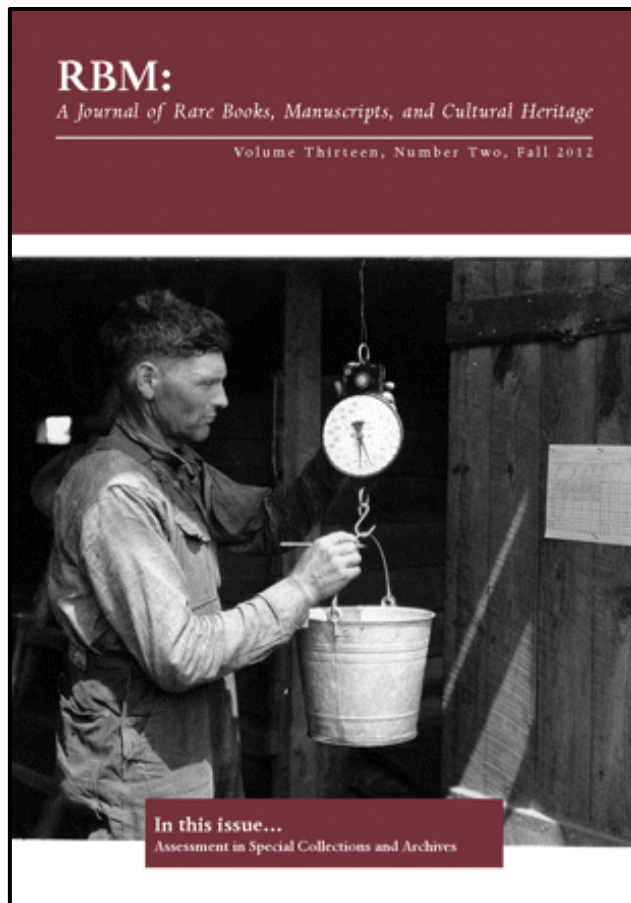
What is Collections Assessment?

▸ **Systematic and purposeful information gathering**

  ▸ Systematic

    ▸ Having, showing, or involving a system, method, or plan

  ▸ Purposeful

    ▸ Goal: the result or achievement toward which effort is directed

    ▸ Outcome: a final product or end result

  ▸ Information

    ▸ Quantitative: describing or measuring quantity (how many of what)

    ▸ Qualitative: describing or measuring quality (how good)

    ▸ Other: about the assessment itself (who, when, how long, what done)

Collections Assessment: Rationale

▸ **Expose hidden collections**

   ▸ Create and share collection-level information

▸ **Establish processing priorities**

   ▸ Identify collections with significant research value

▸ **Assess condition**

   ▸ Understand unmet preservation needs

▸ **Manage collections**

   ▸ Undertake better-informed collection management

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Collections Assessment: Tools

▶ What data will be collected and how it will be collected

- ▶ Procedures manual (definitions, examples, checklists)
- ▶ Data-gathering instrument(s)

▶ Where collected data will be stored and made available

- ▶ Relational database (FileMaker Pro, Microsoft Access)
- ▶ Collection management systems (Archivists' Toolkit)

First Things First: Get Organized

▸ Define the scope
  ▸ Unprocessed collections
  ▸ Collections meeting certain criteria
  ▸ All collections

▸ Identify the resources
  ▸ Who will do the work?
  ▸ What do they need to know?

▸ Assemble the documentation and test the tools
  ▸ Procedures manual (definitions, examples, checklists)
  ▸ Paper worksheets => relational database

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Next Things Next: Get to Work

▶ Methodology

  ▶ Open the boxes

  ▶ Look at the stuff

▶ Activity

  ▶ Count and assess the condition of the containers

  ▶ Identify and assess the condition of the material

  ▶ Evaluate arrangement (ease of use)

  ▶ Evaluate description (existence and accessibility)

  ▶ Assess research value

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Collecting Quantitative Information

▸ Requires little or no judgment to determine

  ▸ How many? (extent)

  ▸ Of what? (types of materials, special formats)

▸ Questions

  ▸ Will every box be opened, or is sampling OK?

  ▸ How will extent be measured?

  ▸ Which types of content will be identified?

  ▸ How will it be categorized?

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Collecting Quantitative Information

▸ Tools = Counts and Checklists

  ▸ Types of Containers

  ▸ Types of Materials

  ▸ Collection Surrogates

  ▸ Conservation Issues

  ▸ Special Formats

  ▸ Topics/Themes

Tools = Counts and Checklists

▸ Container Types

- ▸ manuscript box
- ▸ record center box: filed legal
- ▸ record center box: filed letter
- ▸ banker's box: 24"
- ▸ envelope/mailer
- ▸ flat storage box (small)
- ▸ flat storage box (large)
- ▸ other box: oversized
- ▸ other box: not oversized

Tools = Counts and Checklists

▸ **Collection Surrogates**

  ▸ accession report

  ▸ appraisal

  ▸ box/container list

  ▸ catalog record (Mirlyn)

  ▸ collection file/control file

  ▸ finding aid (EAD)

  ▸ finding aid (paper)

  ▸ finding aid (Word)

  ▸ inventory/substandard finding aid

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Tools = Counts and Checklists

▸ Conservation Issues

- ▸ paper: folded or creased

- ▸ paper: rolled

- ▸ paper: tears

- ▸ paper: metal fasteners

- ▸ paper: mold

- ▸ paper: active/recent pest damage

- ▸ media: visually deteriorating carrier

- ▸ books: paper problem(s)

- ▸ books: other problem(s)

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Tools = Counts and Checklists

▶ Special Formats

 ▶ grooved audio: vinyl disk (33, 45, 78 rpm)

 ▶ magnetic: computer disk (3-1/2", 5-1/4")

 ▶ magnetic: video cassette

 ▶ optical: CD-ROM

 ▶ optical: DVD

 ▶ photo film: negatives (B&W)

 ▶ photo glass: lantern slides (positives)

 ▶ photo metal: daguerreotype, ambrotype, tintype

 ▶ photo paper: color prints

Collecting Qualitative Information

▸ Requires making some kind of judgment in order to

▸ assign a rating (value)

▸ along a numeric or descriptive continuum (scale)

▸ In a numeric continuum

▸ 1 is the lowest or worst

▸ 5 is the highest or best

▸ In a descriptive continuum

▸ "poor" or "terrible" to "very good" or "excellent"

▸ "negligible" or "none" to "significant" or "very high"

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Collecting Qualitative Information

▸ Tools = Ratings Scales

  ▸ Condition

    ▸ physical condition of collection material

    ▸ quality of the housing in which it is contained

  ▸ Physical Access (Arrangement)

  ▸ Intellectual Access (Description)

  ▸ Research Value/Significance

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Tools = Ratings Scales

▸ **Physical Condition**

▸ 5 (excellent) Little damage with no further deterioration expected due to the high quality of the material.

▸ 4 (very good) Little damage with some further deterioration expected due to the mixed quality of the material.

▸ 3 (good) Expected deterioration with some further deterioration possible.

▸ 2 (fair) Somewhat worse than expected deterioration with some further deterioration possible.

▸ 1 (poor) Significant damage and/or deterioration that makes the collection difficult to use.

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Tools = Ratings Scales

▸ **Physical Access (Arrangement)**

- ▸ 5 (excellent) Fully arranged to the item level in series and subseries, as appropriate.

- ▸ 4 (very good) Arranged in series and subseries, as appropriate, to the folder level. Generally good order within folders.

- ▸ 3 (good) Roughly arranged by date, document type, function, source, or other characteristic. May require researchers to work through extraneous material to locate pertinent items.

- ▸ 2 (fair) Partially or superficially arranged; arrangement discourages use except with staff assistance.

- ▸ 1 (poor) Totally unarranged; lack of arrangement prohibits use even with staff assistance.

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Tools = Ratings Scales

▸ Intellectual Access (Description)

- ▸ 5 (excellent) The collection is described online in an appropriate collection-level record that is sufficient to promote use.

- ▸ 4 (very good) There is a MIRLYN record and a good finding aid but the finding aid is not online.

- ▸ 3 (good) There is no MIRLYN record; there is a good finding aid but the finding aid is not online.

- ▸ 2 (fair) There is no MIRLYN record; there is a sub-standard finding aid that is not online.

- ▸ 1 (poor) The collection is described only in an accession record, collection/control file, and/or other document(s) that is/are inaccessible to researchers.

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Tools = Ratings Scales

▸ Research Value/Significance

Documentation Interest		Documentation Quality	
very high	5	very rich	5
high	4	rich	4
moderate	3	moderately rich	3
slight	2	incidentally rich	2
negligible or none	1	slight	1

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Tools = Ratings Scales

▸ Research Value/Significance

  ▸ 5 (Unique) The collection is unique because of the quality, quantity, and value of the material it contains on a topic (or topics) of significant research interest. Anyone interested in the topic(s) it documents would have to make extensive and primary use of the collection.

  ▸ 3 (Some/Pertinent) The collection has some research value and is pertinent insofar as it documents a topic (or topics) of demonstrated research interest and the material it contains is sufficient (in terms of quality and/or quantity) to warrant consultation by a researcher.

  ▸ 1 (None) The collection has no research value.

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Tools = Ratings Scales

▸ Research Value/Significance
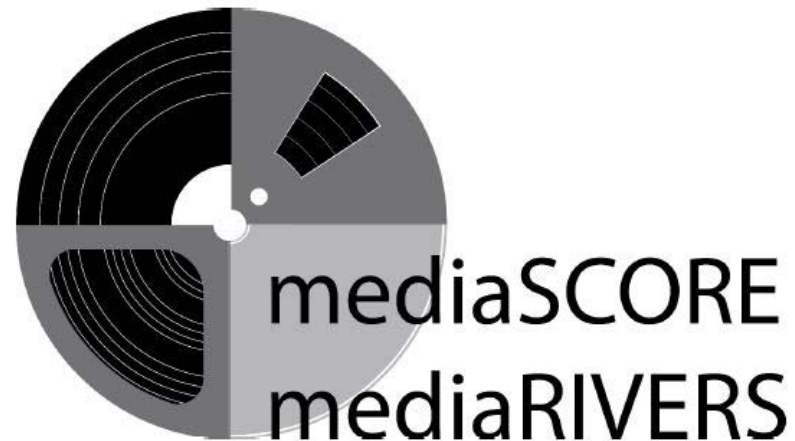
MediaSCORE and MediaRIVERS

Media Preservation Prioritization Software

User Guide

Guide created by:

The Power of Collections Assessment

▶ Get your act together

  ▶ It feels good

  ▶ It makes you look good

▶ With your act together you can

  ▶ Pursue and protect strategic priorities

  ▶ Create opportunities for collaboration

  ▶ Make compelling appeals for new resources

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Thank you!

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