

Purpose of the Conservation Needs Assessment Project

The over-arching goal of our project is to determine what elements of a preservation program are required to meet the long-term preservation needs of the University of Colorado-Boulder Libraries (UCB). This assessment project will gather and evaluate data about the nature and extent of the preservation activities UCB needs to undertake to care for its collections.

At present, UCB's Preservation Department, with its limited reserves of space and staff, does all it can to facilitate physical access to library materials using good binding and handling practices. To put it simply, preservation programs are designed to keep the books, documents, microfilm, and audio visual materials in good shape so patrons can continue to use them as long as possible. Special Collections have additional security, a higher quality environment in the vault, and conservation treatment by outside conservators when it is required.

A survey of other Association of Research Libraries institutions makes it clear that the preservation program at UCB is hardly complete. In order to present the argument for expanding preservation programs within the library, it is necessary to gather reliable data on the type and extent of our collections' preservation needs. To do this we are selecting random samples from representative portions of the collections, examining the physical condition of each item, and making recommendations for optimal preservation actions. The findings will allow us to project the types of treatments we need most and estimate the resources required to address the needs.

A secondary goal of the survey is to examine the results of past and current preservation activities. The samples will include examples of old preservation practices and reveal the long-term effects of that work. Our reports should indicate whether we are using our current bindery and repair resources not just efficiently but as effectively as possible.

As the assessment proceeds, the survey forms will be modified to gather data on different types of collections. For example, the general circulating collection in Norlin Stacks will consist primarily of bound volumes, though it will contain other types of media. Survey forms are designed to obtain the same basic information: what types of treatment are needed? However, different parts of the collection will present large numbers of non-print media or materials of unique value.

As a result, different preservation alternatives must be considered. As the survey moves from one portion of the collection to the next, this manual will incorporate new, modified survey forms. Sampling techniques will be modified. Documentation will reflect the modifications appropriate to each portion of the collection.