Preservation orientation for library staff

By Julie A. Page and George J. Soete

The University of California at San Diego approach

n 1990 the library of the University of California at San Diego developed a comprehensive five-year Preservation Program Plan. The plan covered disaster planning, selection and treatment decision-making, organization and administration, staff and user education for preservation, and environmental control. The library established detailed action plans for two-year and five-year target periods. A top priority was preservation education, and one of the first projects carried out was development of a required preservation orientation session for library staff.

Three years later, virtually all library staff have gone through the orientation, as well as selected student library employees. Contract custodial staff, campus police, and physical plant managers have also completed the session. In all, 325 individuals have gone through the orientation program in 15 sessions.

Though we have not formally evaluated the impact of the sessions, it is the perception of the authors that attendees now demonstrate a much better understanding of both preservation problems and the importance of their role in the preservation program. The purpose of this article is to provide an outline for other libraries as they develop a similar staff education program.

The importance of staff education

Staff education was chosen as a high priority for several reasons:

- All staff have a serious responsibility in the preservation program. Even those who rarely touch library materials need to understand the integral purpose of materials preservation in the life of their organization.
- As a group, library staff probably handle library materials more than all other groups combined.
- Staff can play an important role in engaging other users in advancing the cause of library preservation.

Designing the session

Having decided that staff orientation was a high priority, we then developed the following criteria for the design of a session for all staff:

- The session had to be brief—no more than an hour and a quarter—since it was to be required of all staff.
- The level of presentation had to be suitable for all staff, from students to administrators, and it had to be portable to other audiences—custodians, campus police, etc.
- Participants had to be engaged and interested from the beginning. We wanted them to say to themselves within the first five minutes, "This is important" or at any rate, "This is more interesting than I thought it would be!" To this end, we included hands-on experiences. We decided, moreover, to be shameless in declaring the monetary worth of collections and the cost of our preservation strategies as we went through the session.
- Though we wanted to introduce some basic ideas and techniques, the session could not be a mini-library school course. Technical content was kept to a minimum.

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- The session had to focus on the individual's scope and responsibility. We would not, therefore, spend time talking about preservation of specialized materials—e.g., audiotapes—that only trained staff are allowed to handle.
- The key points had to focus on the practical. What few messages would make a difference?
- It had to be clear that the "lessons" of the session had the backing of library administrators.
- The session had to have a high impact but be low in cost.



Julie Page demonstrates a point during a preservation orientation session.

individual performance.

To suggest clearly the

library's expectations for

The session itself

Preservation orientation sessions are team-taught by the authors—the associate university librarian (AUL) for collections and the preservation librarian. Tools are simple and portable: a prepared flip chart, several flip chart sheets for recording participant ideas, colored markers, examples of damaged materials, and

other realia—e.g., a hygrothermograph, good/bad bookends.

Following is a more detailed outline of the session. The presenter is indicated in brackets.

I. [AUL—collections.] The purpose of this segment is to get the group engaged, to establish their present knowledge of preservation information. After a very few words about the importance of the topic, some "gee-whiz" facts are presented: the size of the collections (specifying formats—maps, slides, bound volumes, documents, pamphlets, etc.); growth of collections over the past 40 years; key ARL rankings; insured value of the collections (millions and millions of dollars); the importance of the collections in the regional, national, and international settings. Then a question is posed: "What are the physical dangers that printed materials are subject to? What contributes to shortening their life?" Participants come up with answers such as heat, food, moisture, book drops, and inappropriate repairs.

II. [Preservation librarian.] This prepared presentation is the centerpiece of the session. The content is divided into "natural enemies" and "human enemies." Throughout, the trainers make references back to the ideas the participants suggested earlier, and points are consistently related to the practical strategies that the staff themselves can use. The natural enemies are first displayed on a flip chart sheet:

- Heat/fire
 Pests
- Moisture
- Mold/mildew
- Light
- Embrittlement
- Pollutants
- Water

The basic points

We next developed a conceptual outline—the basic messages we wanted all participants to hear:

- Library collections represent a resource of great monetary and incalculable cultural worth. Their preservation is an important trust that the library has committed to fulfilling.
- Individual library staff already have a great deal of basic knowledge about preservation. The purpose of the session is to build on it, to suggest key responsibilities, and to promote a consistent view of the importance of preservation.
- Library materials are subject to damage from both "natural" and "human" enemies.
- The library's preservation program, though functioning largely behind the scenes, is extensive and expensive.
- There are simple things that everyone can do to improve the chances of library materials having a long life.
- Furthermore, there are some additional strategies that staff can engage in voluntarily to help in the preservation effort.

Practical objectives

The practical training objectives were:

- To train staff in specific handling techniques for printed materials.
- To engage them in assisting with preventive measures.
- To provide a basic level of information about threats to the collections and about the library's preservation program.

Real objects are used throughout this segment: examples of water-damaged and insectdamaged books are passed around, as are brittle pages on which the participants perform a simple fold test. Participants are encouraged to take an active role in the preservation program. For example, if a library user complains about excessive cold in the stacks, the employee can explain about the adverse effect of heat on the collection. Staff are encouraged to report all instances of water leaks, excessive light, and other harmful environmental conditions.

The "human enemies" flip chart is then displayed:

- Routine handling
- Mutilation
- Shelving methods
- Stick-on notes
- Food and drink
- Clips/bands
- Incorrect repairs
- Book drops
- Highlighting
- Marginalia
- Photocopy machines

Here the emphasis is on everyday handling of materials: how to take volumes off the shelf, how to put them on copy machines, which bookends are safe and which ones damage the volumes. Again, examples of mishandled materials are passed around. And staff are encouraged to take an active role—for example, to suggest to a user about to dump volumes in a book return that it would be much less damaging to take them inside the library.

Throughout the session, participants are encouraged to ask questions and make comments. Since most know each other, the sessions are quite informal.

III. [AUL—collections.] The session here shifts to the library's preservation program—the strategies we use and the money we spend to preserve materials. Again, a prepared flip chart sheet guides the discussion. Brief comments are made about each of the following:

- Controlling environment Binding
- Special conserv. measures Repair
- Restrictions on use
- Reformatting
- Disaster preparedness
- Training

Realia for this segment include acid-free containers, encapsulation supplies, a hygrothermograph (for measuring temperature and humidity), and examples of materials damaged by water, heat, and other natural and human enemies.

IV. [AUL—collections.] The session closes with a review of staff responsibilities, as well as ways in which staff can provide assistance beyond what is required in their job descriptions. Here are the actual flip chart texts:

YOUR JOB:

- Use proper shelving/handling techniques
- Handle materials properly during photocopying
- No eating/drinking when working with library materials
- Refer damaged materials for proper repair
- Do not use stick-on notes, clips, bands improperly

YOUR FURTHER HELP:

- Help enforce no food/no drink rules
- Learn to identify library materials in need of help
- · Report all potential disaster situations
- Help educate users
- Be aware of environmental conditions that might be harmful to collections

A more complete two-page guideline, "Care of Library Collections," has been distributed to all staff and is given to all new staff as they are processed through the Library Personnel Office. As a means of reinforcing the importance of preservation, we have included two statements in all staff job descriptions indicating their responsibility for preservation:

1) "Handles all library materials according to accepted library preservation practices as presented in library training sessions."

2) "General knowledge of library preservation principles."

Library staff in all departments have indicated an enjoyment of and appreciation for the preservation training sessions. From grudging ("I hate to admit it, but I got a lot out of the session") to effusive ("Best ever general library training session"), staff comments indicate that the preservation orientation program has very effectively met its training objectives.

References

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