

Do You Count?

The Revitalization of a National Preservation Statistics Survey

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The American Library Association (ALA) Preservation Statistics Survey, a national survey on the preservation activities of cultural heritage institutions, was introduced in 2012 in response to the decision of the Association of Research Libraries' (ARL) decision to discontinue its long-running preservation statistics program. This paper presents the history of both surveys, discusses the rationale for collecting national data on these activities, and how the data has been used. The paper also includes key results, derived from analysis of both surveys. The surveys suggest that institutional support for preservation activities has declined significantly since its peak in the early 1990s. Preservation programs continue to focus on text-based materials and seem to employ fewer nonprofessional staff than they did five years earlier. The benefits and challenges of conducting a voluntary national survey are also discussed.

The systematic collection of data that documents and describes preservation activities locally and nationally facilitated the emergence of library preservation as a professional field of practice and supports preservation programs today as libraries and archives preserve collections in a digital era. In the early years of the field, institutions conducted condition surveys such as Gay Walker's influential publication "The Yale Survey: A Large-Scale Study of Book Deterioration in the Yale University Library" to prioritize local preservation activities and advocate for program-building resources.¹ National efforts like the Association of Research Libraries' (ARL) Preservation Statistics Survey established benchmarks to measure research libraries' commitment to preservation.² Walker's article and the pilot ARL survey were both published in 1985, coinciding with an increased awareness of the need to prevent further deterioration of cultural heritage collections and with gradual increases in institutional expenditures on preservation.

For years, preservation programs in academic libraries have tracked their administrative and production activities for internal reporting and relied on a combination of local and national data to guide preservation decisions and to advocate for their programs. When ARL discontinued its Preservation Statistics program in 2009, the preservation community was shocked despite years of complaints that the survey inadequately reflected preservation activities, especially efforts to preserve and reformat non-book collections. While many institutions continued to maintain local data, the lack of a national statistics program impacted program administrators' ability to advocate for preservation measures within their own organizations. National preservation statistics fostered support for preservation among library administrators by demonstrating the commitment of peer institutions to preservation and providing a venue where libraries could be recognized for the system-wide benefits of their preservation efforts. Additionally, preservation

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administrators had come to rely on the ARL Preservation Statistics data to identify trends and changes within the field; to communicate the value of preservation efforts to libraries, patrons, and the general public; and to benchmark the performance of their own departments.

In terminating its Preservation Statistics program, ARL noted that “the preservation needs ARL addresses should focus at the policy level and not [on] the operational issues that the current ARL Preservation Statistics include” and that even with proposed changes to reflect emerging trends, the program was “not linked to strategic priorities.”³ This assessment stands in marked contrast to the rhetoric with which ARL launched the program less than twenty-five years earlier: “The aggregate result of our efforts should serve to strengthen the research capacities of our libraries for the years ahead. This is our obligation to future generations of scholars.”⁴

While the elimination of the ARL Preservation Statistics program suggested a declining prioritization of preservation among the directors of ARL libraries, the preservation community recognized an ongoing need to collect data on preservation activities. In 2012, the Preservation and Reformatting Section (PARS) of the American Library Association (ALA) launched a new national preservation statistics program. The new effort was different from ARL’s program: while the previous survey was administered by ARL and managed by research library directors, the new survey was administered by volunteer preservation practitioners and managed by the preservation community. Additionally, the new survey was designed to reflect significant changes in the field, such as emerging digital preservation responsibilities and an increased focus on outreach activities, and to be flexible and prompt in reflecting other evolving preservation activities.

This paper details the history of the ARL Preservation Statistics program to provide context for the current ALA Preservation Statistics Survey, reviews the ALA survey design and methodologies, provides summary results from the fiscal year (FY) 2012 and 2013 surveys, and discusses the future of the revitalized effort. The successes and challenges of collecting and comparing statistics across many types of cultural heritage institutions (libraries, archives, historical societies, museums, and more)—especially by a self-selecting, community-based program, as opposed to a mandatory program such as data collection required by ARL or accrediting agencies—is also discussed.

History of the ARL Preservation Statistics, 1982–2010

The first mention of a nationally coordinated preservation statistics program can be found in the 1982 publication

Preservation Planning Program: A Self-Study Manual for Libraries.⁵ As part of an NEH-funded effort to design and test procedures to enable libraries to identify and address preservation problems, ARL tasked Duane E. Webster of the Office of Management Studies and newly hired Preservation Specialist Pamela Darling to test and develop the preservation planning process. The *Manual* cited that few libraries had developed a “systemic approach to measuring preservation efforts” that would provide “valuable data for evaluating levels of current activity, for making comparisons with earlier years and other libraries, and for projecting future needs.”⁶ Proposed categories of data about preservation activities to be documented included preservation screening (what most now describe as selection) and replacement, physical care and treatment, preservation staffing and salaries, contract expenditures, and budgets for replacement and repair/treatment.

On October 25, 1984, the ARL membership approved the *Guidelines for Minimum Preservation Efforts in ARL Libraries*, which defined “minimum” as the “desirable and presumably practical level of moderate strength to which all ARL libraries should aspire in the course of this decade.”⁷ The *Guidelines* also set five goals for every ARL library: (1) the development of a local program statement “of current and prospective preservation activities;” (2) national participation in a coordinated microfilming effort; (3) the defining of minimum environmental conditions for materials storage areas not with environmental thresholds but with “at least a system which has cooling, humidity control, and particulate filtration;” (4) establishing minimum budgetary efforts indicating that 10 percent of a library’s materials budget—or 4 percent of its total expenditures—should be allocated to “measurable preservation activities;” and (5) the regular compilation of “statistics that will document the annual preservation activity and present over a period of time a picture of the change in activity.” At minimum, the compiled statistics were to include preservation staffing and expenditures; the proportion of preservation expenditures as related to the regular library budget; the number of items given conservation treatment, protective enclosures, library binding, and mass deacidification; and the number of reels of microfilm or sheets of microfiche both produced and held.

The *Pilot Preservation Statistics Survey 1984–1985* was mailed to member libraries in June 1985 requesting information in six areas of preservation: full conservation treatment, routine conservation treatment, protective enclosures, contract binding, mass deacidification, and preservation microfilming.⁸ Ninety-seven of the 118 ARL member libraries responded to the 1984–85 pilot survey. A report, modeled on ARL’s chief statistical publication, the *ARL Statistics*, was published in 1986. Data tables detailing each participating library’s responses opened the 1984–85 report, followed by rank order tables (that included only ARL’s university library

members) for each question on the survey. These rank order tables would not be tabulated in any future *Preservation Statistics Survey* report, though the practice continues to this day with the *ARL Statistics* and other surveys.⁹

The *ARL Preservation Statistics 1987–1988* survey, prepared by Jan Merrill-Oldham, then Head of the Preservation Department, University of Connecticut Libraries, and consultant to the ARL Committee on Preservation of Research Library Materials, incorporated many suggestions provided by member libraries who participated in the 1984–85 pilot survey.¹⁰ Several questions were dropped and new categories were added to the *1987–1988 Questionnaire*, which opened with a new section asking for information on administration: does the library have a preservation administrator, how much of their time is dedicated to preservation activities and management, to whom do they report, and if they directly administer all, some, or none of the preservation-related units. Additionally, the “full” and “routine” conservation terminology employed in the pilot 1984–85 survey was replaced by “minor,” “intermediate,” and “major” conservation categories that were defined by treatments listed in the *Questionnaire’s* instructions. Additionally, questions about the conservation of non-book formats (“unbound sheets” and “non-paper items”) were introduced, and information about the quantity of materials mass deacidified and preservation photocopied was requested. Respondents were asked to distinguish between contract and in-house quantities of items conserved, commercially bound, mass deacidified, preservation photocopied, and preservation microfilmed. Of the 119 member institutions, 109 libraries participated in the *ARL Preservation Statistics 1987–1988* survey.

Minimal changes were made to the survey questionnaire and its accompanying definitions in the following years; the questionnaire issued for the 1989–90 *ARL Preservation Statistics* survey continued completely unchanged until 1997.¹¹ Revisions to the 1996–97 *ARL Preservation Statistics* survey eliminated the distinction between “in-house” versus “contract” conservation treatment, commercial binding, and preservation reformatting categories distinctions (reasoning that the data was burdensome to segregate and that the expenditure of outsourcing would account for those activities), simplified the preservation microfilming questions (eliminating questions about the number of titles and frames filmed in favor of a single measure of accomplishment, “number of volumes filmed”), and added optional questions about digitization of bound volumes/pamphlets and single, unbound sheets (manuscripts, maps, photographs). From 1996–97 to the final *ARL Preservation Statistics* survey questionnaire issued for 2008–9, the questions were identical with only the modification of minor renumbering in the 2004–5 questionnaire. Even the question about the number of items digitized remained “optional” for the entire period.

Similarly, the *ARL Preservation Statistics* reports from 1987–88 to the final report issued for 2006–7 were nearly identical: the numbers changed, but the analysis remained the same. Each year, for two decades, the library community was assured that “the data offer persuasive evidence that preservation programs have become a standard unit in the majority of research libraries.”¹²

With the challenge of collecting and preserving digital materials firmly in mind and many libraries joining mass digitization projects with Google, the Open Content Alliance, etc., ARL convened the Task Force on the Future of Preservation in ARL Libraries in 2005 to define critical challenges in preservation and propose an action agenda to meet those needs. The resulting report of the task force, the *Strategic Action Agenda for Preservation in Research Libraries* recommended several action items, including a goal to “define recommended guidelines for minimal levels of preservation activity in ARL libraries.”¹³ These guidelines would be “grounded in data from the ARL Preservation Statistics and data from other recent preservation surveys”—a nod to the 2002 Council on Library Information and Resources (CLIR) report *The State of Preservation Programs in American College and Research Libraries: Building a Common Understanding and Action Agenda* and the first *Heritage Health Index* (2005).¹⁴ However, task force members acknowledged that the “current ARL Preservation Statistics are more and more inadequate as the nature of library collections changes rapidly and members grapple with rapidly diversifying, and often cooperative, approaches to preservation.”¹⁵ The Task Force recommended the recruitment of a Visiting Program Officer (VPO) to “consider broadly the qualitative and quantitative data needed to describe the full range of preservation activities supported and being developed by member libraries.”¹⁶

In July 2007, ARL fulfilled an action item defined by the Task Force on the Future of Preservation, reaffirming its commitment to preservation by releasing the statement *Research Libraries’ Enduring Responsibility for Preservation*, an update of its 2002 statement *The Responsibility of Research Libraries for Preservation*.¹⁷ Just months later, in September 2007, Lars Meyer of Emory University was appointed VPO to assess the state of preservation programs in ARL Libraries.¹⁸ His culminating report, *Safeguarding Collections at the Dawn of the 21st Century: Describing Roles and Measuring Contemporary Preservation Activities in ARL Libraries* was issued in May 2009 and provided recommendations to serve two purposes: “(1) to inform the development of a preservation self-study tool for libraries, and (2) to offer suggestions to the ARL Statistics and Measurement Program for enhancing the ARL preservation statistics.”¹⁹ Appendix B of the “Safeguarding” report offered specific recommendations to the ARL Statistics & Measurement Program to act as catalysts for further discussions

about the future of the ARL Preservation Statistics program. Meyer recommended:

- adding questions that would collect data about general preservation activities (such as environmental monitoring, staff and user education, and disaster recovery and response)
- the continued collection of commercial binding data with separate reporting for the use of contract services (conservation, protective enclosure construction, reformatting) provided by commercial binding vendors
- the continued collection of deacidification data with segregated reporting for general and special collections
- the addition of non-book and non-paper formats (specifically, sound recording and moving image materials) to conservation treatments, and the segregation of conservation treatment data into general and special collection categories
- a greater focus on the collection of data about the activities and expenditures of member libraries on reformatting, specifically the three categories of microfilming, preservation photocopying, and digitization

Meyer reported to the ARL Statistics and Assessment Committee and had presented *Describing and Measuring Contemporary Preservation Activities in ARL Libraries* to them in 2008.²⁰ The *Safeguarding Collections* report made no mention of discontinuing the ARL Preservation Statistics program. However, at their October 2009 meeting, the committee discussed the report and “agreed to forward a recommendation to the ARL Board that ARL no longer asks the community to complete the preservation statistics in their current format until a more defined ARL agenda for preservation is articulated.”²¹ The committee further noted:

The proposed revisions [outlined in appendix B of the *Safeguarding* report] to the annual ARL Preservation Statistics are not linked to strategic priorities. ARL libraries need better ways to make an argument that research libraries need to invest in preservation and the current survey is not asking the right questions. We may have to address the issue of preservation needs with new methodologies. For example, we need to capture the important collaborations LC has with research libraries in preserving sound and motion picture items but these may be one of a kind relationships that do not get captured with annual statistics. The annual survey may not be the best mechanism for assessment of preservation activities as we do not capture important elements like LOCKSS and Portico; we

also do not capture important relationships with OCLC, CRL, and other entities. Possible ways to get to the needed information may be commissioning a self-study protocol which is a parallel and probably more important recommendation surfacing from the larger report the committee was reviewing. The preservation needs ARL addresses should focus at the policy level and not the operational issues that the current ARL Preservation Statistics include.²²

At their February 2010 meeting, the ARL Board agreed with the recommendation of the ARL Statistics and Assessment Committee to cease publication of the annual *ARL Preservation Statistics*. This decision was not publicly announced until the May 2010 issue of *ARL E-News for ARL Directors*: “The Board endorsed a recommendation from the Statistics and Assessment Committee to cease future collection of the Preservation Statistics (beginning with the 2009–10 cycle) while the Transforming Research Libraries Steering Committee folds the stewardship responsibilities of research libraries into its scope of inquiry concerning the future shape of collections.”²³

The ARL Preservation Statistics’ website description of these events traces the discontinuation of the program directly to Meyers’ 2009 report, despite the fact that the report did not recommend that ARL discontinue the program: “As a result of examining the recommendations in [the *Safeguarding Collections* report], the ARL Statistics and Assessment Committee and the ARL Board recommended that ARL does not collect annual data on this area as outlined in the annual survey but rather focus efforts on defining a vision for the strategic importance of research collections in the 21st century and the related strategic challenges regarding preservation in this environment.”²⁴

ALA’s Revitalization of Preservation Statistics, 2012–Present

Though preservation and conservation professionals had long expressed frustration with how the ARL Preservation Statistics Survey counted and captured preservation activities, the quiet announcement of the end of the ARL Preservation Statistics program in May 2010 surprised the preservation community. Statistics collected with the 2008–9 questionnaire, gathered in November 2009, were never published, and the final 2007–8 *Preservation Statistics Survey* was not published until 2013 and remains unlisted on the ARL Preservation Statistics website.²⁵ Some groups, like the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC), agreed to continue collecting preservation statistics voluntarily.²⁶ Others, like the E. Lingle Craig Preservation Lab, Indiana University

Bloomington Libraries, published statistics on their blog.²⁷

PARS hosted a PARS Forum “The Future of ARL Preservation Statistics” at the 2011 ALA Midwinter Meeting. Past ARL President and University of Connecticut Library Director Brinley Franklin discussed the reasons for suspending the ARL Preservation Statistics program; ARL Senior Director of Statistics and Service Quality Programs Martha Kyrillidou provided an overview of the history of the ARL Preservation Statistics program and discussed task forces working to revise ARL’s statistics collecting programs; and Gordon Fretwell, consultant to ARL’s Statistics program, led a discussion about how to improve metrics for preservation that touched on the preservation community’s long-running issues with the ARL Preservation program: no use of online survey tools, no way to capture qualitative activities like disaster planning and recovery as well as education and outreach, disagreement over the best way to capture conservation treatment, and concerns about documenting digital efforts and preservation of nonprint materials.²⁸

Over the next year, PARS leaders worked to ascertain support among the preservation community for a revitalized Preservation Statistics program. Communication with ARL Statistics staff during that period clarified that ARL had no immediate plans to resume the program, and that PARS should proceed if the community indeed wanted to collect data about preservation activities. In June 2012, PARS issued a survey that was open to any library, archive, museum, or cultural heritage institution conducting preservation activities to assess the interest in and feasibility of revitalizing a preservation statistics program. In the survey announcement, the PARS Executive Board asserted, “We believe that most libraries, archives, museums, and other cultural heritage institutions still record preservation statistics for annual reporting purposes within their own institutions and consortiums. The loss of this shared data leaves the preservation community without a way to assess and analyze its collective current practices, staff and budget resources, and strategic direction.”²⁹

Two interest surveys were issued: one for ARL libraries that had been the focus of the former ARL Preservation Statistics program, and another “open to all” institutions. Fifty-one of the 126 ARL libraries responded, 90 percent of which had continued to collect annual preservation stats since the ARL program ended. The survey revealed that those institutions used the preservation data for internal program analysis and assessment, annual reports, budget requests, and grant writing. Respondents were asked to evaluate the most useful ARL categories of data (preservation program staffing; conservation treatment; and budget) and the least useful (preservation of flat paper, photographs, and audiovisual materials; microfilming; and mass deacidification). Categories of data that respondents believed should

be added to future preservation statistics efforts included preservation of audiovisual materials, preservation of digital files and resources, and general preservation activities like environmental monitoring and disaster recovery. A majority of ARL library respondents (57.9 percent) agreed that future preservation statistics survey efforts should be open to any organization.

Seventy institutions responded to the “open to all” interest survey. Most (61 percent) were non-ARL academic libraries; 20 percent were archives; and 10 percent were public libraries. The survey polled whether respondents would participate in a survey that published the respondents’ preservation data online (86 percent would) and 74 percent believed that they would have the “time and resources necessary to collect annual preservation statistics.” Like ARL libraries, respondents used preservation statistics data for internal program analysis and assessment, annual reports, budget requests, and grant writing.

Survey Design and Method

Given the positive response to the interest surveys, the PARS Executive Committee tasked the design of a pilot FY2012 survey to a group of preservation professionals with specialties in conservation, preservation administration, audiovisual preservation, and digital preservation. With no budget, no formal home, and only volunteers, the revitalization of a Preservation Statistics Survey project for ALA was an audacious effort. The design of the pilot survey was based on the ARL Preservation Statistics Survey given the many ARL member libraries in the preservation community, evidence that those libraries had continued to collect statistics and could in theory easily participate in a renewed surveying effort, and that the categories and increments of measure developed by the ARL Preservation Statistics Survey had influenced how statistics were tracked beyond ARL institutions and across the preservation and conservation fields. Survey coordinators sought the advice of experts in the areas of audiovisual preservation, collections digitization, and digital preservation to identify quantitative questions that would capture preservation activities in those emerging areas. Coordinators utilized free platforms (Google Docs, Dropbox) to host documentation and shared resources (ALCTS permitted use of its SurveyMonkey account) to provide an online method of collecting data. Preservation professionals outside the survey team reviewed and sharpened the pilot survey before its official launch. The most notable outcome of the review period was the retention of ARL’s levels for conservation treatment based on treatment time, of I (fewer than fifteen minutes), II (fifteen minutes–two hours), and III (more than two hours); anecdotal evidence had suggested that these broadly defined categories were not the best way

to track conservation treatment because they did not allow for highly granular analysis of time-intensive treatments over two hours. However, the ARL treatment time categories did allow for comparisons of conservation treatment statistics by the factors of both time and format, and many institutions had continued to collect statistics using these ARL treatment time categories, so the levels were retained to facilitate the responses of those target participants. Conversations such as the ones that occurred around the treatment levels are an important part of the design and ongoing process of the ALA Preservation Statistics program. It is a community-driven effort that responds to feedback, remains flexible and adaptable to change as it grows, and progresses along with the field.

The new ALA Preservation Statistics program expanded upon previous survey efforts not only by creating a new survey tool, but also by shifting the participating audience and making the data more open for input and reinterpretation. The survey tool was written so that it could be used by libraries, archives, museums, or any other cultural heritage organization conducting preservation activities. Comparisons across different types of institutions could add to the richness of the data and its utility, and demonstrate how approaches to collection care differ across various types of collecting institutions. Encouraging participation by different types of institutions could also minimize duplication of effort across professional organizations or groups that are all interested in collecting preservation statistics. Early on, the decision was made to make the data publicly available so that institutions or individuals could use it not only as it had been in the past (to analyze and define trends in the field), but also in novel ways enabled by new technology in data interpretation and visualization. Making the data open for use and interpretation facilitates its use by scholars both within and outside the preservation community. In support of this idea, the data, survey, and instructions and definitions document are available under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License so that the information can be reused, as long as the original survey is credited and the new work carries the same license.³⁰

The pilot survey, titled “A Survey of Preservation Activities in Cultural Heritage Institutions” but generally referred to as the Pilot FY2012 Preservation Statistics Survey, included six sections: administration and staffing, budget and expenditures, preservation activities, conservation treatment, reformatting and digitization, and digital preservation. An accompanying Instructions and Definitions document, also modeled after ARL’s Preservation Statistics Instructions, provided guidance for respondents collecting data. Though many questions in the survey had not previously been asked of institutions on an annual basis, these inquiries reflected current practices of many cultural heritage institutions. For instance, the preservation activities

section included questions about environmental monitoring, outreach, and disaster planning activities, all activities commonly administered by most preservation programs. The digital preservation section was also entirely new and crucial for reflecting the changing nature of preservation.

The Pilot FY2012 Survey was distributed via both preservation-specific and more general cultural heritage email lists, and was open from April 29, 2013 to June 25, 2013. Other survey efforts have directly contacted institutions’ upper administration of institutions, but the Preservation Statistics Survey targeted the probable respondents—the preservation administrators, conservators, audiovisual specialists, and digital archivists who are actually doing the preservation work in cultural heritage institutions. The results of the ALA survey were distributed to the same discussion lists that had received the survey invitation, and were made available both as a data set and an interpretive report on the statistics project’s website.³¹ The data analysis and reporting is a volunteer effort coordinated through PARS.

The ALA survey was initiated in response to the discontinuation of the ARL survey, but the design of the ALA survey was also influenced by another preservation metric project: the 2004 *Heritage Health Index (HHI)*, developed by Heritage Preservation in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services.³² Emergency planning and environmental monitoring were not part of the ARL survey, and their inclusion in the ALA survey was, at least in part, inspired by the *HHI*. While the two surveys cover some common topics, it is worth noting the significant differences between *HHI*’s approach and the ALA survey’s all-volunteer annual project. *HHI*’s 2004 survey received over a million dollars in funding from the Getty Foundation and other private groups, and consultants in the areas of survey design and development, data analysis, and media relations were retained for the project. While the 2004 *HHI* produced a significant media impact and launched the IMLS Connecting to Collections initiative to raise public awareness of the importance of caring for cultural heritage collections, it does not address many of the goals shared by the ARL and ALA surveys, particularly the tracking of production data to identify national trends in preservation activity in a timely manner.³³

The ALA Preservation Statistics FY2012 and FY2013 Surveys

Survey Redesign

Sixty-two institutions completed the Pilot FY2012 Survey, and many lessons in survey design, community outreach, and statistical analysis were learned over the course of the effort. The Pilot FY2012 Survey was a long questionnaire

(fifty-seven questions), with many data points that proved difficult for institutions with distributed preservation activities to collect. In time, the survey coordinators learned that some questions may not be necessary to ask annually, and that other questions needed further clarification in the instructions and definitions document. Changes to the FY2013 Preservation Statistics questionnaire were intended to improve the online survey tool and experience and to adjust terminology to evolving standards and practices. The narrow definition of digital preservation repositories was also removed from the FY2013 Survey, and institutions were encouraged to respond to questions about digital asset management whether their repository was defined as a “preservation repository” or not. The question about preservation activities performed on the digital repository was retained to continue tracking preservation activities regardless of the definition of “preservation repository.” An Excel worksheet was also released in FY2013 for institutions without an in-house data tracking system to use as a year-round method for gathering data. The changes were intended to make the survey easier to use and to better meet the participants’ needs, but the statistics program also aims to track trends, so consistency in data points is integral to the effort.

The survey was once again distributed to email discussion lists, targeting both preservation specific and more general library audiences. The FY2013 Survey was open only to libraries, as the Pilot FY2012 Survey showed that the questionnaire was working well for libraries but not for museums and archives, with the goal of honing the tool for libraries and then later partnering with museum and archives professional associations to fashion a questionnaire that could work better across multiple types of institutions. This method of distribution yields a self-selecting group each year, so the results cannot be used to extrapolate and make generalizations about the entire preservation community. The results of the FY2013 Survey confirmed trends observed in the FY2012 Survey, and are detailed in the FY2013 Preservation Statistics Survey report.³⁴ Between FY2012 and 2013, the statistics program solidified its relationship with ALA. The project is officially under the guidance of ALCTS, which is the broader association for PARS. Feedback from the Pilot FY2012 Survey indicated that the lack of sponsorship by a professional organization negatively affected the response rate. Preservation administrators indicated that because there was no organization officially sanctioning the statistics, there was less of an obligation felt both in preservation departments and more broadly among library administration to complete the survey. The connection with ALA also gave the statistics program an official web presence, an upgrade from the Google and Dropbox services on which the program had previously relied. The FY2013 Survey was released in January 2014, much earlier in the year than FY2012, based on feedback that it was

inconvenient for many institutions to provide statistics near the turn of the academic fiscal year (July), and that this timing had prevented some institutions from participating. The survey remained open until the end of April 2014.

Despite ALA’s endorsement and changes to the survey tool, the FY2013 Survey received only forty responses. The small number of responses precluded repeating the analysis methods used in the Pilot FY2012 Survey report, which focused on the institutions for which a full data set, including ARL survey responses, were available. Given the low response rate to the FY2013 Survey, only twenty-one institutional responses could be compared to the historical ARL data. As a result, a new method of analysis was developed that allows for reasonable year-to-year comparisons of the available data. For the thirty-nine quantitative questions that the two surveys share, the total value reported for each question—the sum of the values reported by each respondent—was compared to the total library expenditures of all reporting libraries. This method was intended to control for fluctuations in the size and capabilities of the group of responding libraries. Values were adjusted for inflation as necessary. This method of expressing the data allowed for meaningful comparisons despite the dramatic differences between the two surveys, and established a sustainable path for future reports.

Given the low response rate to the FY2013 Preservation Statistics Survey, the program coordinators sought additional feedback and ideas on how to shorten the FY2014 Survey to increase the participation rate. Questions about administrative details, including staffing, expenditures, and preservation activities such as environmental monitoring, outreach, and disaster response, were removed from the survey based on feedback that the data was burdensome for some institutions to calculate and required information from budget offices and staff beyond the preservation unit. To strike a balance between data that is easy for institutions to gather and data that is useful to the preservation community, the annual ALA Preservation Statistics Survey will focus on production data such as number of items conserved, digitized, and added to digital preservation repositories, for the foreseeable future. Given the widely acknowledged usefulness of administrative data, especially in peer comparison and program advocacy, a supplementary survey will be issued less frequently with questions about preservation program administration. As the program moves forward, it will remain important to stay flexible and open to change, while still maintaining the consistency needed to identify changes over time.

The FY2014 Preservation Statistics Survey was released January 20, 2015, and remained open until March 20. An ultimatum was set for the FY14 Survey: if seventy-five institutions did not respond to the survey, the annual survey would not be conducted for FY2015. The management of

this project is a significant investment of volunteer labor: creating the survey and the accompanying Instructions and Definitions document, distributing and publicizing the survey, then analyzing the data and writing a report. If only a very small number of cultural heritage institutions with preservation operations responded to the survey, that annual investment of time on both the survey coordinators and the survey respondents could not be justified. Eighty-seven institutions responded to the FY2014 Preservation Statistics Survey, assuring that an FY2015 Survey will be released in January 2016.

Survey Results

Of the sixty-two institutions that completed the Pilot FY2012 Preservation Statistics Survey, forty-three were academic libraries, six were archives, five were special libraries (a category which includes federal libraries), five were museums, and two were public libraries. The survey consisted of fifty-seven questions, many of which included multiple parts, so the survey results from the pilot survey include 338 separate fields for each respondent.

The number of institutions completing the FY2013 Survey fell to forty, thirty-five of which were academic libraries. Public, state, special, independent research, and national libraries were each represented by a single response. The FY2013 Survey included sixty-eight questions resulting in 356 fields of data.

Analysis of the FY2012 and 2013 data proceeded along two parallel paths. First, many questions were selected where the survey yielded meaningful results on its own. Because the respondents represent a small and self-selecting sample of libraries, archives, and museums, results cannot be confidently extrapolated beyond the group of institutions surveyed. However, many questions, particularly those related to staffing and expenditures, give real insight into the nature of preservation activities at the institutions surveyed. Second, the results from the Pilot FY2012 Survey were compared with results from previous ARL Preservation Statistics surveys. For the Pilot FY2012 Survey and the resulting report, this meant focusing on the thirty-four ARL libraries that responded to that pilot effort. Examining the changes those libraries reported between the 2007–8 ARL Preservation Statistics Survey and the Pilot FY2012 Survey revealed some significant trends, though again results cannot be extrapolated from this small, self-selected group to draw conclusions about the activities of all ARL libraries.

Due to the unpredictable nature of survey responses, methods that rely on the same group of libraries responding to the survey yearly could not be used past the pilot year of the survey. Instead, a new method was developed for the FY2013 Survey report, which used the total library expenditures (TLE) of the group of responding libraries,

adjusted for inflation, to control for the size and number of the libraries in the data set. This method was chosen for many reasons: (1) it allows data from all responding libraries, not only ARL libraries, to be used in calculations; (2) it corresponds with one of the original goals of the ARL Preservation Statistics Survey by placing preservation expenditures and activities in the context of total library expenditures; (3) while there are still concerns about the small sample size involved, this method allows for the identification of long-term trends in preservation activity with a greater level of certainty by expanding the pool of survey respondents that can be included in long-term comparisons.³⁵

Because the number of respondents is small and self-selecting, the results from many questions were inconclusive. Some activities, such as spending on equipment and digitization of bound volumes seemed to fluctuate wildly annually, suggesting that these results might primarily reflect grants or projects at a small number of institutions. However, in other areas, consistent multiyear trends could be identified, suggesting that the survey's results in those areas can be trusted. The results of the surveys are presented in great detail in *A Survey of Preservation Activities in Cultural Heritage Institutions: FY2012 Report*, which includes detailed comparisons between the final 2007–2008 ARL survey and the pilot survey, and *Preservation Statistics: A Survey for U.S. Libraries: FY2013 Report*, which introduces the methods used to control for total library expenditures and contains comparisons stretching back to the 1999–2000 ARL Survey.

Expenditures

Respondents reported preservation expenditures of \$59.6 million in FY2012 and \$41.4 million in FY2013, with the Library of Congress accounting for more than half of the reported expenditures in each year. Expenditures at other institutions ranged from \$800 to over \$1.9 million, reflecting the diversity of institutions that responded to the survey. The median preservation expenditure was \$213,700 in FY2012 and \$358,000 in FY2013; this change is an example of the year-to-year variation that occurs due to changes in the group of libraries who choose to respond, and which is accounted for by controlling for the overall expenditures of the responding libraries. As a percentage of total library expenditure, preservation expenditures were 2.75 percent in FY2012 and 2.73 percent in FY2013.

Salaries and wages accounted for 50 percent of total expenditures in FY2012 and 55 percent in FY2013, while contract expenditures absorbed 33 percent in FY2012 and 38 percent in FY2013. These results were consistent with previous ARL surveys in identifying staffing and contract expenditures as the largest preservation expenses. In FY2012, equipment made up 12 percent of preservation

expenditures and preservation supplies accounted for 5 percent, while both categories fell to 3 percent in FY2013.

Conservation Treatment and Digitization by Item Format

The survey highlighted the extent to which conservation programs at the surveyed institutions are focused on books and paper documents. Combining the data from the FY2012 and FY2013 surveys, Books and Bound Volumes and Unbound Sheets made up 89.8 percent of items that received conservation treatment, and Photographic Collections accounted for 9.5 percent. No other item format accounted for more than two tenths of a percent of the total number of items treated in either year. For some of the non-paper formats, such as Archaeological Collections and Natural Science Specimens, it might be fair to conclude that these formats are not widely held among respondents to the survey. For formats that are widely held, most notably Recorded Sound Collections and Moving Image Collections, preservation efforts were focused on reformatting those materials rather than performing conservation treatment.

Efforts to preserve recorded sound and moving image collections were reflected more strongly in the responses to questions related to digitization, but even here, paper-based materials dominated survey responses. Out of over 4.7 million items that respondents reported having digitized for preservation in FY2012 and FY2013, moving image collections made up 0.7 percent of the total number of items, and recorded sound collections constituted 0.4 percent. Books and bound volumes were 2.6 percent of the total, while unbound paper-based materials accounted for 95.5 percent of the total number of items digitized (unbound sheets: 91.8 percent; photographic collections: 3.7 percent).³⁶ Unbound sheets includes manuscripts, documents, maps, architectural drawings, and posters. Analysis in the FY2014 Preservation Statistics Survey report focuses on the current dynamic in digitization: the high rate of digitization of unbound sheets (which requires off-the-shelf infrastructure and minimal staff expertise and has a high return on investment) against the low rate of the digitization and reformatting of audiovisual materials, especially in light of the rapid deterioration and risk of format obsolescence characteristic of most audiovisual formats.³⁷ Figure 1 presents the total number

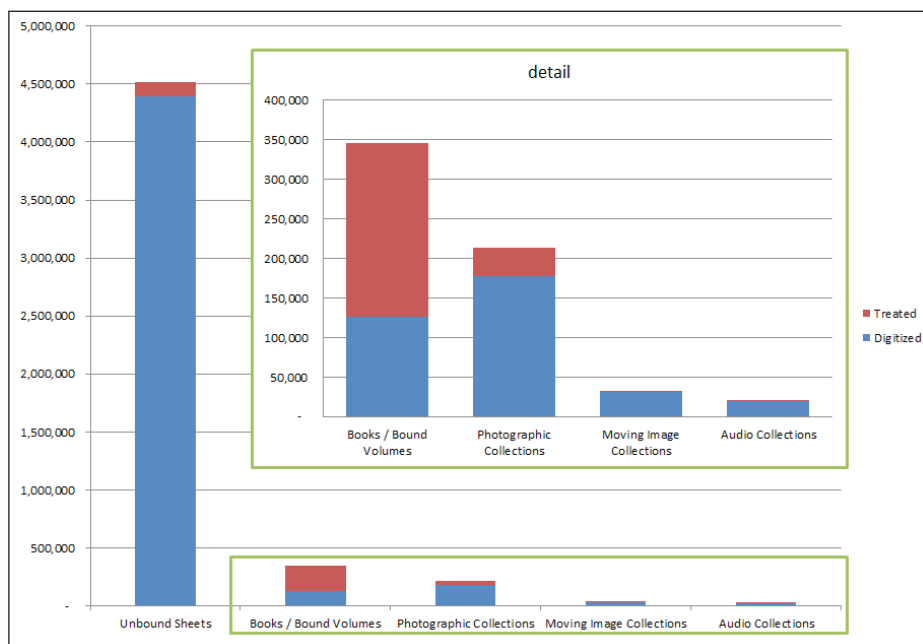


Figure 1. Total Items Receiving Conservation Treatment on Digitization at Responding Institutions, FY2012 and FY2013

of items of each format treated and digitized at responding institutions in FY2012 and FY2013.

These types of comparisons are problematic, however, because the number of items treated or digitized is a convenient but potentially misleading unit of measure. Especially when considered across formats, the number of items does not necessarily reflect the resources required to treat or digitize those items, nor does it necessarily correspond to the amount of intellectual content being preserved in the process. However, with these caveats in mind, the survey data gives a rough sense of the focus of the preservation programs that responded to the survey, indicating a greater focus on paper-based formats, with efforts to preserve moving image and recorded sound collections more focused on digitization than conservation treatment. It is also worth noting that books and bound volumes was the only format category where more items received conservation treatment than were digitized.

Comparisons to ARL Surveys, Controlling for Total Library Expenditures

The Preservation Statistics Survey retained many questions that had been a part of the ARL survey, allowing the results from the new survey to be compared directly to the ARL results and adjusting for the size and number of libraries responding by dividing totaled responses by the total library expenditures of the respondents. The questions on the two

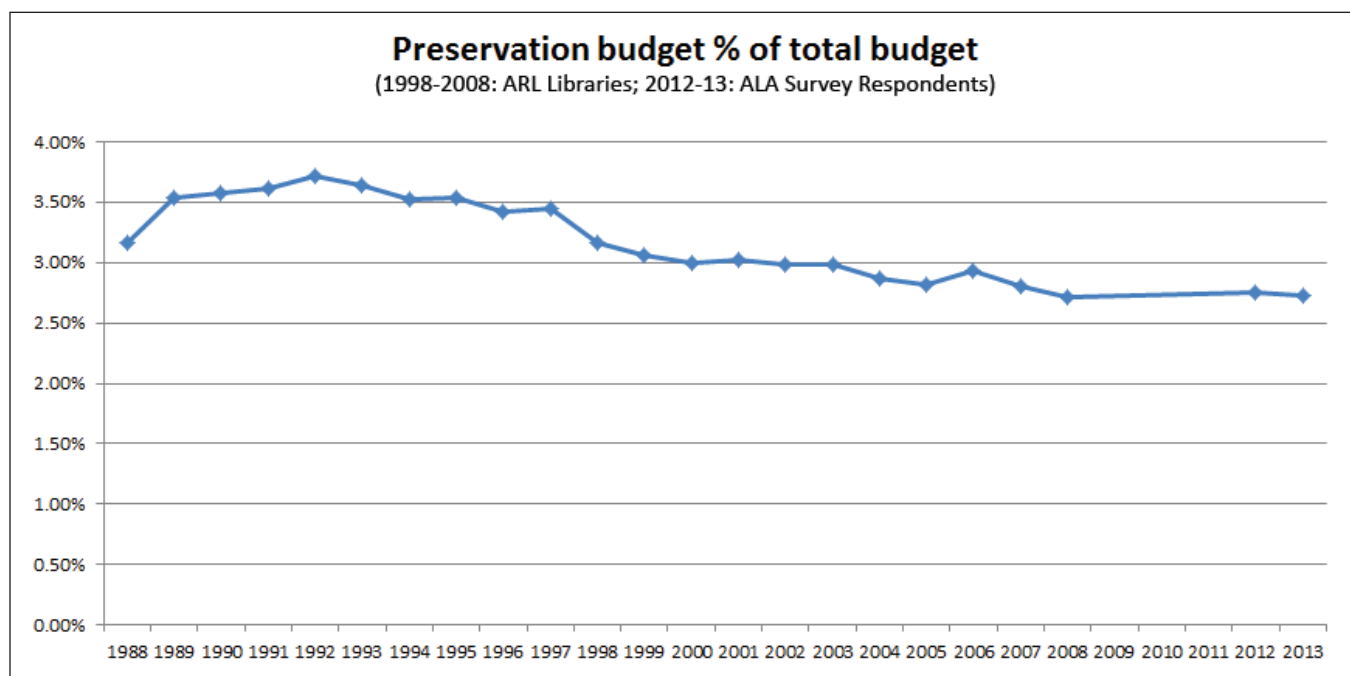


Figure 2. Preservation as a Percentage of Total Library Budget

surveys were not always identical, so in areas where the data from the ALA survey were more granular, calculations were performed to provide totals that corresponded to the categories of the ARL survey. The results discussed in this section were calculated by controlling for the total library expenditure of all responding libraries, as described above.

Many of the results of this comparison were dramatic, if not entirely unexpected. Conservation treatment of bound volumes or pamphlets was down 76 percent from 2008 to 2013. While some part of this effect may be due to differences in the sample pool, the comparison of ARL institutions that responded to both surveys, published in the Pilot FY2012 Survey report, revealed the same trend. This decrease was driven by a reduction in the rate of level I treatments (those which require fewer than 15 minutes of staff time), which appeared to decline by 86 percent from 2008 to 2013. More complex repairs also appeared to decline, but at less dramatic rates.

Spending on contract commercial binding dropped 45 percent since 2008 and 66 percent since 2003, continuing a steady downward trend that corresponds to a widely observed trend. Total contract expenditures were up 26 percent since 2008 though because of a 152 percent increase in spending on “other” types of contract work, including digitization, digital preservation storage, offsite storage, and disaster recovery services. More granular data on these categories is available in the newer survey, but not in the ARL data.

In many preservation departments, level I treatments and the management of the commercial binding workflow

have traditionally been performed by nonprofessional staff. The reduction in those activities seems to coincide with a reduction in nonprofessional staffing for preservation. As a percentage of total library expenditures, spending on nonprofessional salaries dropped by 36 percent from 2008 to 2013, while expenditures on professional staffing rose 14 percent. These trends were also confirmed by similar results in the comparison featuring ARL institutions who responded to both surveys.

The reasons for the dramatic decrease in non-professional staffing and a corresponding decrease in output in areas such as level I conservation treatments are no doubt complex, and cannot be completely inferred from the survey data. The impact of these staffing changes on preservation programs might be a fruitful area for future inquiry. These results suggest a profound shift in the staffing of preservation programs and the type of work performed in those programs.

Total Preservation Expenditures

As detailed above, in 1984 the ARL membership approved minimum guidelines for preservation efforts by ARL member libraries. One of the guidelines was that each member library should spend at least 10 percent of its materials budget or 4 percent of its total expenditures on preservation activities.³⁸ According to the data available, ARL libraries have never spent more than 3.72 percent of their total budgets on preservation, but they did exceed 10 percent of

their materials budgets every year from the beginning of the ARL survey in 1988 until 1999, with a peak of 13.64 percent of reported materials budgets spent on preservation in 1992. By 2008, preservation expenditures were just 8.22 percent of materials budgets. Preservation spending in ARL libraries declined steadily from its peak in 1992 until the survey was terminated in 2008. Compared to total expenditures, preservation spending declined by 27 percent during that period; compared to materials budgets, it declined 40 percent.

In 2012 and 2013, the new survey indicated that preservation expenditures had held steady as a percentage of total library expenditures, at 2.75 percent in 2012 and 2.73 percent in 2013. While it is encouraging to see that preservation expenditures did not fall dramatically during a period of financial stress for most libraries, those expenditures remain well below the minimum levels that ARL libraries attempted to establish in 1984.

Conclusion

The termination of the former ARL Preservation Statistics program demonstrates how a mission-critical function such as preservation can fall in prestige among institutional leaders, even to the point where it is no longer seen as a strategic priority. Community-based projects, like the one described in this article, can serve as a necessary corrective, preventing the essential work of stewardship from becoming invisible and serving notice as funding and support gradually erode.

Reviewing the history of the renewed ALA Preservation Statistics effort has been beneficial. The process involved revitalizing a discontinued survey program, assuring that community interest in data collection still existed, then updating the survey—both the initial pilot survey to render it in tune with the digital times and the ongoing annual assessment to make sure the survey remains a powerful, easy-to-use tool. This process, coupled with the post-survey release responsibilities for distribution, publicity, and technical support, have allowed the survey coordinators to truly understand the challenges of managing a successful national statistics program. Obstacles to achieving an adequate response rate include the ground-up nature of this program's outreach, targeting preservation practitioners rather than institutional directors, the challenge to some respondents to work beyond their units to collect data, and general survey fatigue among potential respondents. Feedback from the Pilot FY12 Preservation Statistics Survey indicated that sponsorship by an official organization was important to the project, and securing association with ALA helped solidify the survey's infrastructure. However, because of significant organizational differences in structure between ALA and ARL, it is not feasible for this survey to be mandatory, as

the ARL survey was. As a result, the 100 percent response rate that the ARL survey typically achieved is not a realistic goal for this effort.

General survey fatigue seems to affect the response rate for the statistics survey. Online survey tools are simple to use and links are easily distributed to email lists, which is highly beneficial to the statistics project, but also means that institutions are asked to complete an increasing number of surveys. Feedback indicates that potential participants are simply tired of filling out online surveys.

Because preservation activities are often embedded in workflows that span multiple departments within a single organization, some questions on the survey have proved difficult for participants to answer. While this obstacle reflects the nature of the activities in question, it also reflects the challenge of establishing a national survey without the explicit endorsement of institutional directors. Preservation administrators who participate in the survey cannot require other departments to provide information about their activities. Information about expenditures, digitization efforts, and digital preservation management has proven particularly difficult to gather.

An advantage of this survey's community-based approach has been the ability to remain flexible and react nimbly to these challenges. The survey was altered significantly between FY2013 and FY2014 to reduce the time commitment required of participants and to address the difficulty of collecting information on expenditures. New outreach tactics were introduced during FY2014, including a social media presence and targeted individual emails to preservation administrators.³⁹ New analysis methods were implemented to accommodate variations in the pool of respondents.

The payoff from a national statistics program is great, and the need to articulate the value of cultural heritage preservation to administrators and the public has never been greater.⁴⁰ The ALA Statistics Survey has provided data to document trends in the field that were previously only anecdotally supported. Preservation professionals can cite their own observations about trends in preservation departments, but an increased emphasis on data-driven decision making in institutions has made many administrators openly skeptical of anecdotal arguments. Reliable data about preservation activities is necessary to establish benchmarks and accurately understand changes and trends. Statistics can also point out trends that are not widely discussed, such as the decreasing reliance of preservation programs on non-professional staff. Data about preservation activities is necessary both within the field and when communicating about preservation to other librarians, archivists, and the public.

While the value of the data is great, the cost of collecting the required data is also significant. ALA's Preservation Statistics program continues to evolve in search of

a sustainable balance between the value of the data and the resources available to collect, analyze, and promote it. The success of the FY2014 survey in surpassing its goal of seventy-five respondents points to a promising future for this type of community-based statistics program.

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