

**New York University, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library
Institutional Profile**

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Background statement on the collection

The New York University (NYU) Libraries include the Elmer H. Bobst Library, the general University Library; the Graduate School of Business Library; the School of Law Library; the School of Medicine Library; the School of Dentistry Library; the Institute of Fine Arts Library which includes the Conservation Center Library, the Courant Institute of Higher Mathematics Library; the Institute of Environmental Medicine Library, and the Real Estate Institute Library. Together these libraries house over 3,511,942 volumes, 2,867,794 microforms, 28,817 current serial titles, 53,000 audio-visual items, and approximately 5,000 linear feet of archives and manuscripts. Their combined budget exceeds \$19 million annually.

Also under the auspices of New York University Libraries are the libraries of Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, the New School for Social Research, and Parson's School of Design, all of which are members of the Research Library Association of South Manhattan.

The NYU library collections have been developed in support of the University's diverse graduate programs as well as to serve its large undergraduate population. Our preservation challenge ranges from keeping recent and very heavily used volumes in good repair to replacing, reformatting or otherwise protecting our very brittle collection of older materials. The latter includes books and serials purchased for our Latin American and Near Eastern area studies programs; our extensive collection of United Nations documents; our special collections of English and American literature and Judaica; and our general retrospective collection of standard works in the humanities, social sciences and sciences.

History of the preservation program

Efforts to establish a formal preservation program at NYU began in 1979 when a preservation committee was established. The committee first turned its attention to disaster planning and wrote and published the *Disaster Plan Workbook* which has been made available to many libraries. In 1980, an in-house bindery/repair unit was formed in Bobst Library. The Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) conducted a conservation survey of the Bobst Library in 1983. Their report helped to define the Library's preservation needs and set priorities for the future. Since these early years, the scope of the preservation program at NYU has expanded to include collections conservation, preservation microfilming, preservation photocopying, environmental control, student and user awareness, disaster preparedness, and continues to include commercial bindery processing.

Current conservation/preservation activities

The Preservation Department is administered by the preservation librarian who reports to the director

of Collection Services. The department includes a preservation supervisor, two conservation technicians, one preservation technician, two bibliographic assistants and a number of part-time student assistants. In addition, staff in related departments assist with identifying and screening materials for preservation.

The preservation program in Bobst Library is aimed primarily at treating material in the circulating collection. Books which have been identified for repair are sent to the preservation department. The preservation manager reviews all of the materials for preservation.

Volumes with a strong text block and good, non-brittle paper are sent to our binder for rebinding. Pre-1932 volumes and volumes that are more fragile and not likely to survive the physical stress of commercial binding are treated in our in-house conservation lab. Recently named the Barbara Goldsmith Conservation Laboratory, the lab supports a strong collections conservation program. Currently, two full-time conservation technicians, with the assistance of a part-time student, attend to the conservation needs of the general collection materials and special projects for special collection materials.

Volumes with pages that are too brittle for conservation treatment are processed in our brittle book replacement program. Materials for which there are no existing in-print or microform replacements are reviewed for preservation microfilming. Two FTE bibliographic assistants support the searching, preparation and inspection activities. Since the Library does not have an in-house preservation microfilming facility, an outside microfilm vendor is contracted for our filming needs. All vendors are required to adhere to ANSI and AIIM standards for archival quality microfilm, as well as the technical standards specified by the Research Libraries Group and published in the *RLG Preservation Manual*.

NYU participates in cooperative, grant funded projects, both within the New York State comprehensive research libraries network and as a member of the Research Libraries Group. New York State projects have included reformatting of deteriorating newspapers, audio tapes and photographic negatives, as well as preservation photocopying of music scores. As participants in Phase II of the RLG Great Collections Microfilming Project (GCMP II), NYU will preserve 7,350 volumes of the British fiction held in the Fales Collection. NYU's Wagner Archives is also participating in the RLG Archives Preservation Microfilming Project (APMP).

Other components of the NYU preservation program include environmental control, disaster preparedness, staff training, and patron awareness. Well placed hygrothermographs measure temperature and humidity in the Libraries archives and special collection areas on a weekly basis. In addition to the *Disaster Plan Workbook*, the Library recently appointed a Disaster Preparedness Committee to further prepare the Library in the event of a disaster. On several levels, staff in the preservation department and other areas of the library are encouraged to improve their skills and understanding of preservation and conservation by attending workshops both inside and outside the Library. Patron awareness is achieved primarily through handouts, such as the Library Information Bulletin, bookmarks containing preservation messages, a book handling video, a rain bag, and a very thorough exhibit installed once a year that depicts common preservation issues and how NYU's preservation program resolves them.

The collections conservation program

Damaged and deteriorating volumes in need of preservation treatment are identified by circulation staff and routed to the preservation department. Circulation staff set aside volumes on shelves designated for preservation and preservation staff pick up volumes on a biweekly basis. The bindery manager reviews each of these volumes and sorts them according to their appropriate treatment, i.e., commercial rebinding, conservation, or brittle book replacement. Volumes identified for conservation treatment are not reviewed by subject specialists unless they belong to a large set. In that case, the entire set is reviewed for treatment.

Conservation staff examine items routed to the lab and determine treatment specifications. They efficiently organize their work by type of treatment to maximize their time. Because Bobst general collection materials are so heavily used, recasing is the most highly used form of treatment. When a volume arrives in the lab for treatment, conservation staff take the opportunity to strengthen the item as much as possible so that the item is not returned for treatment again soon after. In other words, if a heavily used volume is loose in its case, conservation staff will take the opportunity to recase it, rather than simply tighten the joints. This

applies, of course, only to general collections materials. Approximately eight to twelve recases are completed a day. Because of the high volume of recases, the average turn around time for them is approximately three months, including the time spent awaiting treatment in the treatment queue. Turn around time for other items is approximately two weeks. These other treatments include rebacking, box making, some rebinding and washing, and paper mending.

There is no quota system used to allocate conservation treatments. Treatments are prioritized by the conservation staff. Volumes needing conservation treatment are placed in a queue and treated on a first-in, first-out basis. Generally speaking, reference items and items needed for the reserve desk receive priority treatment. Special collection projects are scheduled around daily treatment activities and are assigned priority if needed. Most of the materials treated in the lab are from the circulating collection, but in-house conservation staff provide limited treatments for special collection items as well. Additional treatments for special collection materials is provided for by free-lance conservators. The decision to treat a special collection item in-house or contract with an outside conservator is made by the head of the preservation department in consultation with the curator of the collection, as well as the conservation technicians.

New staff members are expected to have experience and well-developed skills in bookbinding and conservation techniques. They are expected to maintain a current level of understanding in conservation through the information published in professional literature and are encouraged to pursue professional development opportunities. In addition, conservation staff serve on committees whose charge relates to preservation, or an aspect of it, e.g., disaster planning, exhibits, etc.