

Institutional Profile: University of Wisconsin-Madison

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The General Library System (GLS) consists of Memorial Library and 14 branch or "member" libraries. In theory, all of these libraries are served by the Collection Preservation Department, but in practice the degree of involvement depends on the knowledge, initiative, and concern of the head of each library, or of individual staff members. Ninety-five percent of our work is on the collections housed in Memorial Library where our facilities are located. In addition to the GLS there are three professional libraries: Law, Medicine, and Engineering, and numerous small departmental libraries and reading rooms to whom we are willing to provide assistance and advise if asked. Also located on the campus is the State Historical Society. They have their own conservation/preservation staff and the nature of their work is quite different from ours but there is a good deal of informal communication between us. It is reasonable to assume that there are about five million volumes on the Madison campus. We serve a University population of about 53,000.

Formal preservation activity began here in 1972 with the formation of the "Preservation of Library Materials Committee" which was quite active until the mid-1980's. In-house conservation-standard repair work began to be done when a conservator was hired in the fall of 1977. In mid-1978 a Collection Preservation Department was formed with three sections: conservation, microfilm, and book assessment. In 1980 and 1981 two Title II-C grants provided equipment and materials to develop and expand both the microfilm and conservation labs. In 1987 the conservation lab moved into remodeled space and the microfilm lab expanded into the vacated space. We anticipate further remodeling within the next five years to provide a state-of-the-art microfilm lab with expansion of conservation facilities back into the vacated microfilm space.

The first student repair technician was hired in 1981. Currently, under normal conditions, the conservation lab personnel consist of the conservator and as many students as can be recruited and trained. This has been as many as eight, including, if possible, a library school practicum student. In theory this results in the equivalent of two full time employees but in practice is often considerably less. Over the past five years we have been able to complete 2500 to 3000 repairs each year, 80% of those being rebackings and recasings. Average cost per repair last year was about \$4.50-\$3.75 labor and \$.75 materials. Occasionally special funding is provided to hire limited term employees for six months or less. Usually these are highly experienced former students who may have been doing repair work for three years or more.

Briefly, this is how the Collection Preservation Department operates vis-a-vis repair. Most material comes in after it has returned from circulating or otherwise identified as damaged, mutilated, or in some other way deficient. The first review is by the conservator who selects volumes appropriate for treatment in the conservation lab. Material is rejected for three reasons: better suited for treatment by the commercial bindery (it should be noted that while the Bindery Preparation Office is not part of the Collection Preservation Department we work closely together and have no significant philosophical differences), contents missing, and untreatable. Copies of missing contents are obtained by the book assessment office and repairs are then made by the conservation lab staff. Untreatable volumes are usually on brittle paper which is actually breaking out of the sewing structure. These go to the assessment office and into another decision-making loop: reformat, replace, discard, etc. Often a selector or bibliographer is involved at this point.

For books coming into the conservation lab the conservator specifies treatment. Color-coded treatment specification slips help in compiling monthly statistics and indicate priorities. The library school practicum student is trained to assist in this process. Technicians are also instructed to check with the conservator if the treatment specified doesn't seem appropriate.

The bindery preparation office handles initial pamphlet binding of new material using the usual side-and-through-fold stapling. Single section pamphlets in need of repair are often used as training pieces and usually these make up a student's initial experience with washing, deacidifying and tissue mending.

There is no quota system as such. Certain items are given a high priority such as reference books and books going on reserve or scheduled to be exhibited.

The backlog in the lab is about 1500 volumes and it takes about 8 months to get from the back to the front of the line. Volumes waiting for treatment are recorded in the on-line circulation system and can be located easily if required for a user.

Labels, i.e. call numbers, if not present or complete after treatment are applied by the "marking room," a part of central technical processing. The lab provides new titles, if necessary, by hot-stamping or photocopy. We also apply "Tattletape" security system triggers and book pockets on a routine basis.

The staff, as mentioned above, consists of the conservator, student technicians and occasional LTE's, none of whom belong to any type of bargaining unit. Volunteers sometimes offer themselves and have provided useful service. We do not operate in shifts but once students are trained and have the conservator's confidence they are permitted to work anytime the library is open and many take advantage of this. With one exception, all workers past and present have been trained by the conservator, or occasionally by experienced students, or frequently, a combination of both. I have taught classes in basic bookbinding here since 1978 and have recruited many student technicians from my classes. There is an active book arts program in the University Art Department and for many of the students who work in the lab the skills learned are an important part of their academic training. Currently I require volunteers, library school practicum students, and students paid out of the regular budget to have previous bookcraft training – usually my class. Work-study students may be trained on-the-job since they can mean a significant savings for us in the long run. Students begin work in the lab doing rebackings, current pay is \$4.65 / hour. If they are interested and sufficiently skilled they may go on to recasings and a pay increase to \$5.05. Again if skill and interest warrant they may be taught additional techniques and procedures. Some students become highly proficient with three to four thousand hours of experience. In general students learn to do an entire treatment procedure, and advance by learning more complex techniques. We don't have any division of labor or hyper-specialization.

The repair procedures used at Wisconsin were developed based on book restoration techniques learned at the Newberry Library, without reference to manuals or consultation with other binders. In one way this might seem like reinventing the wheel but it was useful because it forced an examination of every step of the process and a consideration of the preservation aspects in each. The primary goal was to extend the useful life of circulating volumes for as long as possible in original format and appearance, without compromising too seriously its future value as an artifact. A secondary goal was to develop techniques that met limited conservation standards, were easy to teach and learn, and did not require too wide a range of decision-making on the part of inexperienced technicians. There are now about 15,000 volumes in our stacks that have been rebacked or recased using these techniques or earlier variations. We get back, as needing further attention, six or eight a year. In all cases they have been re-repaired easily and quickly and returned to the stacks.

Some brief comments about technical procedures will finish this review. Spines of sew-through-folds text blocks are cleaned using multiple applications of methyl cellulose until all original linings and residual adhesive layers are removed. Other text blocks and non-soluble adhesive layers are treated on an ad-hoc basis. Using straight PVA, spines are lined with a layer of Sekishu paper and a layer of Rives lightweight. Rebackings* get a layer of tyvek adhered across the spine and down onto the boards; recasings get an unbleached muslin hinge. In recasings the cases may be repaired in a variety of ways depending on the nature of the damage and the original material. Flat back spines are never replaced as such. We do not use leather as a repair material, substituting cloth where necessary. We usually do not repair worn corners or board edges. In general it takes about one hour to do a rebacking and less than two hours to finish a recasing, in batches of three or four. We do not pre-cut any materials. There are five student work stations in the lab, all similarly equipped with tools color-coded to keep them from getting misplaced. Last year we did about 1000 rebackings and a similar number of recasings at a cost of approximately \$.75 per volume.

* Rebacking: spine damage is external and repair is made working from outside with the covers closed. In recasing the case and the textblock are separated, new end sheet folios added and appropriate repairs made before the two are reassembled.