

Realizing and Preserving Our Treasures: A Baseline Assessment Survey for Rare Books in Underresourced Special Collections

By *Emily D. Spunaugle*

ABSTRACT: This article fills a gap in the literature of item-level condition surveys intended for small or underfunded institutions, as well as those staffed without extensive expertise in rare books. The Book Condition Survey (BCS) uses a simple, web-based survey with pictorial representations for volunteer library staff members to easily note degrees of damage to a collection of seventeenth- to nineteenth-century books and pamphlets. This article discusses the creation of the survey, training of staff, and implementation of the BCS. Data from the BCS have been used to identify means of improving the collection's storage techniques, inform internal and external grant applications for preservation assistance, and deepen knowledge of rare books collections. The methods used for the creation and implementation of the Book Condition Survey could easily be adapted by other institutions to create an instrument suitable for their own assessment needs.

Introduction

The development of the circulating and rare collections at Michigan State University–Oakland began in the fall of 1959 with duplicates from its parent university (Michigan State University) library's holdings, the entire inventory of a secondhand bookshop in New York, and over 600 contributions from the collections of private donors.¹ From these humble beginnings, and a flurry of purchases of special collections materials in the 1970s, the Libraries now hold a small collection of about 5,000 codices and pamphlets deemed rare, spanning the sixteenth through the twentieth centuries. This collection includes first editions, association and presentation copies, the marginalia of former users, provenance markings, and more. Since its inception, the university—now Oakland University (OU)—has grown from its inaugural enrollment of 570 students in 1959 to 17,170 students in fall 2021.² Because of OU's explosive student population growth, the Libraries largely prioritized supporting the instructional needs of the young university. From the inception of OU Library in 1962 until 2015, Archives and Special Collections (ASC) was staffed without rare books expertise, and OU's collection of rare and valuable books sat with little preventative care. Sixty years of best intentions, albeit absent expertise, resulted in individual pamphlets interfiled with bound codices, books leaning and slumping against one another, and books' boards tied to their text blocks with string or twine. The rare books collection at OU was in a state of "benign neglect," desperately needing improved storage and preservation solutions.

Following this half century of hibernation, however, the riches of OU ASC are increasingly used in library instruction and undergraduate, graduate, and faculty

research. This increased use has revealed numerous items with aspects of interest to researchers, including uniquely held books, author-corrected proofs, laid-in manuscript letters, and more. ASC now regularly hosts instruction sessions using rare books for undergraduate and graduate courses in public history; art history and graphic design; and the history of the book; literature courses in modern poetry, eighteenth-century studies, and Romanticism; and other courses related to print and manuscript book cultures. ASC materials are now listed in the course catalog description for several upper-division seminars in literature. ASC materials also featured prominently in a 2018 faculty-curated exhibit at the University Art Gallery and are being added to a bibliographic database of women's involvement in the print trade. The increased use of and familiarity with ASC materials demonstrated the dire need for better understanding and preservation of these items. Even now, however, OU ASC is short-staffed with only one part-time coordinator with archival qualifications and a part-time archives assistant. Even as a large-sized, four-year, doctorate-granting public institution, the neglect of OU's ASC materials is not unique.³ Historically, the uneven growth of an institution can lead to the inequitable allocation of resources and expertise, both across a university and within its library.

This article fills a gap in the literature of item-level condition surveys intended for small or underfunded institutions, as well as those staffed without extensive expertise in rare books and ephemera through a 15-question Book Condition Survey (BCS). The data collected through the BCS articulate the extent of ASC's preservation needs to better understand the kinds of action required; provide a baseline assessment of OU's rare books collection; and highlight research aspects not captured by cataloging. Data derived from the BCS successfully facilitated better understanding of OU's rare books holdings, including unknown aspects of OU's collections; informed internal and external grant applications for preservation assistance; and deepened knowledge of ASC materials to enable undergraduate, graduate, and faculty research. The BCS uses a simple, web-based survey with pictorial representations for volunteer library staff members to easily note degrees of mechanical and chemical damage to items within a particular collection within ASC: the roughly 900 items of a collection of seventeenth-through nineteenth-century women's literature. The BCS also surveyed about 2,200 additional pamphlets and codices in the general rare books collection. This article discusses the training of nonspecialist staff, the implementation of the BCS, and the subsequent outcomes that draw on the data collected.

Literature Review

Given the history of neglect of OU ASC materials and the current staffing of OU Libraries, the BCS required an item-level condition survey instrument well suited for volunteer, nonspecialist implementation that yields data for plotting preservation priorities that are also manipulable for external purposes, such as preservation and research grants. As such, the needs of OU ASC fit at the intersection of a constellation of subsets of literature related to collections surveys, including survey motivation and sample size, survey instrument design and usability, and survey administrator expertise.

Extant Survey Motivation and Design

Because a study's motivation informs its structure and questions, a survey must be designed to be flexible enough to gather data addressing the needs of a multiplicity of stakeholders and audiences. Influentially, the Yale, Stanford, and Syracuse University preservation studies published in the late 1970s and into the 1980s investigated the health of circulating collections, including books' mechanical wear and chemical damage.⁴ In her 2005 review, Karen E. K. Brown wrote that most general preservation assessments are performed for the sake of creating a subsequent preservation plan.⁵ Within recent literature, the Rasmuson Library at the University of Alaska Fairbanks assessed items in its circulating Alaska Collection for "type of volume," pH, paper condition, binding style, binding condition, leaf attachment, patron damage, publication date, last circulation, and shelving condition.⁶ Alternately, researchers from the John C. Hodges Library at the University of Tennessee tested items for pH levels, user markings, pages torn or removed, UV damage, animal damage, food/drink stains, adhesive, mold, dust, and the presence of paperclips and other appendages.⁷ Within these examples of surveys for circulating collections, the design of each given study is tailored to the specific needs of its institution. Many published studies are intended to assess *circulating* collections, and, even then, attributes surveyed vary according to the institution.

The library literature relating to the evaluation of rare books and special collections, in contrast, emerges later and follows a separate trajectory. In 2004, *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* featured a special issue on "Exposing Hidden Collections"—in line with the Association of Research Libraries' interest in unearthing uncataloged, unprocessed, and uninventoried collections in member libraries—and spurred a variety of published case studies that reviewed and reprioritized these inaccessible collections. In 2012, *RBM's* issue on "Assessment in Special Collections and Archives" renewed this interest in systematic assessments, variously defined, of archival and special collections materials. Martha O'Hara Conway and Merrilee Proffitt's essay in that 2012 *RBM* special issue remains instructive for distilling the four main motivations for archival collection assessment projects: to "expose hidden collections; establish processing priorities; assess condition; manage collections."⁸ Other contributors, such as Lisa R. Carter, and Anne Bahde and Heather Smedberg, treated the role of the archives and special collections within assessment-obsessed institutional culture and the need to articulate value or express impact to administrators and stakeholders. Since this special issue, other priorities have emerged in the literature of rare books and general collection condition surveys, including justification to library administration to hire a full-time book repair technician and to inform the creation of a preservation plan.⁹ Additionally, many collections, adequately cataloged and described, are not hidden, but contain intellectual potential that is as yet unrealized; for example, Anna Dysert deployed a survey of a medical history collection not only to uncover hidden collections, but also to promote and communicate these holdings.¹⁰

Additionally, most studies use representative samples of collections to make generalizations of a larger subset of the rare books collection as a whole. These assessments can deliver data useful for making big-picture decisions, such as those relating to the room or wing where a particular collection is held. As late as 2005, Mary Ellen Starmer, Sara Hyder McGough, and Aimée Leverette bemoaned the dearth of condition surveys designed specifically for rare books collections, finding them “conspicuously lacking.”¹¹ The authors write: “Although some articles discuss guidelines for selecting rare books for conservation, they do not provide a methodology for a condition survey of an *entire* rare book collection.”¹² Jennifer E. Hain marks this shift toward collections conservation, which considers a holistic view of collections, rather than their constituent parts.¹³ Per Hain, collections conservation “concentrates on such concerns as environmental controls, protective enclosures, and other nonintrusive means of preserving materials and utilizes them to lengthen the life of the collection as a whole, not as individual pieces.”¹⁴ Collections conservation shifts the focus from individual items in a collection to a utilitarian view of preventative maintenance, focusing on actions that will do the greatest good for the greatest number, and can include focusing on elements such as crowded shelves and books’ contact with unsealed wood or wall heaters.¹⁵ In the wake of this shift, and to expedite the survey process, trends tend toward randomly selected samples of items in a collection to approximate the collection as a whole, rather than favoring the individual item.¹⁶ Item-level inventories are often noted as being too time-consuming. For example, Jennifer Hain Teper and Sarah M. Ereksion write that their survey design would “generate more generalized answers to questions on the material’s preservation and conservation needs more rapidly than an item level survey.”¹⁷ But such inventories, while cumbersome, retain their utility for gathering data that cannot be captured holistically, especially when no such survey has been conducted before. Tori R. Gregory’s item-level study, for example, while not of rare books, was completed from the perspective of a subject specialist wanting greater familiarity with holdings in fine arts for selection purposes.¹⁸

Furthermore, the usability of data generated from such surveys is often limited. Some surveys assign a cumulative score to a given item, say, one book.¹⁹ The item-level study undertaken by Oklahoma State University assigned a comprehensive score based on an “overall assessment of the cover, binding, and text block” using qualitative descriptions that corresponded to each number.²⁰ This score may give a snapshot of that particular item, but a single score responsible for representing multiple factors can neither simultaneously nor adequately express those complex and composite factors.

Expertise of Survey Administrators

An essential yet understated aspect of the published surveys is the expertise and availability of participants to carry out the survey. Most published condition surveys are predicated on the labor and expertise of well-trained librarians and staff, specifically those experienced in preservation or conservation work, including full- and part-time librarians and staff members, and trained graduate and undergraduate assistants. As importantly as expert labor figures into successful surveys, published surveys often

silently rely on the distribution of this expertise among *all* laborers. For example, a survey of the University of Kansas's Law Library involved a preservation librarian, an MLIS graduate student, two preservation staff members, and three undergraduate assistants; the authors explicitly state that "[a]ll participants in the survey team were experienced in conservation work."²¹ Similarly, Bradley L. Schaffner and Brian J. Baird's study of the condition of Slavic collections at the University of Kansas relied on the expertise of the preservation librarian and the Russian studies librarian.²² Preservation staff and two MLIS graduate students undertook the University of Tennessee's survey of its circulating collection.²³ A survey of Washington State University Libraries' Manuscript, Archives, and Special Collections unit employed the expertise of a special collections librarian, a manuscripts librarian, and a graduate student.²⁴

Divergences from this trend of experienced labor are few and emphasize the constraints of labor and the time-consuming nature of a condition survey. For example, Gregory's item-level condition survey took the author 450 hours.²⁵ Nicholas Pickwood's article on the condition survey of manuscripts in Saint Catherine's monastery library relied on the itinerant volunteerism of surveyors able to identify Syriac and Arabic.²⁶ Such examples of limited or contingent workforces emphasize their own limitations and, in the case of Pickwood, the excessive onboarding and training required to sustain a fluctuating labor force. A notable exception to the invariant professional standard of surveyors is Sam Capiou, Marijn de Valk, and Eva Wuyts and the creation of the Universal Procedure for Library Assessment (UPLA) for the Flanders Heritage Library Foundation.²⁷ The UPLA assesses 22 types of damage and is intended for use in tandem with the *Schadeatlas bibliotheken: Hulpmiddel bij het uitvoeren van een schade-inventarisatie*, or *Library Damages Atlas: A Tool for Assessing Damage*, which provides pictorial representations of degrees of damage.²⁸ To determine the feasibility and effectiveness of the UPLA when implemented by those without training in conservation or preservation, the foundation trained a group of nonexperts how to assess the condition of materials using the *Library Damages Atlas* and tasked them with categorizing the degrees of damage. The Flanders Heritage Library also deployed a control group of experts in preservation and conservation and compared the results of the two groups. The authors discovered that, while the team of book experts "were able to more easily identify damage, listing more types of damage across all samples," "the final results of the screening process produced by both teams were very similar."²⁹ The authors conclude that "'laymen' are capable of performing these assessments autonomously, especially if they receive proper training."³⁰ The work of the Flanders Library demonstrates the efficacy of using inexpert assistance, when trained and equipped with visual representations to aid in identification, to assess collections.

An additional form of assumed expertise in the library literature is in the recording or calculation of survey data. Surveys often use paper instruments to record the condition of items, and one item may require multiple pieces of paper. This excessive use of paper then requires the secondary step of inputting the data captured on paper into a computer.³¹ Computer-based forms require technical knowledge, whether in the creation and use of a Microsoft Access database or other proficiencies, such as coding

and ongoing system maintenance.³² For small or inadequately resourced institutions, access to this software and technological expertise cannot be presumed. However, many of the cited studies that require such software and technological expertise are 15 to 20 years old, being published before the preponderance of free or low-cost, open-source form-creation software with user-friendly, WYSIWYG³³ interfaces that lower barriers to entry.

In sum, the library literature thus favors random-sample assessments in service of collections conservation that are largely motivated by timely questions in the profession. The presumption of staff members' preservation or conservation expertise and the limited availability of technical skills and requisite software exempts understaffed and underfunded archives and special collections from seeing themselves in the published literature. Furthermore, the "outdated" and "basic" (albeit often unfulfilled) needs of many of these understaffed and underfunded institutions are likely to be continuously overlooked by publication bias as the profession shifts to address other questions over time. After all, the era of condition surveys has, by now, long passed by 20 years. But this does not mean that the literature should overlook underresourced institutions with small holdings or limited staff. Library employees with limited time and limited or no conservation or preservation training can be easily trained to undertake a condition survey that would address their own particular institutional needs.

Methods

Survey Creation

The Book Condition Survey (BCS) was designed with its ultimate utility in mind: identify actionable steps to improve the storage of rare books and to better understand the artifactual and intellectual content of the collections. The questions were developed from the literature of extant survey methodologies. As discussed, many surveys measure aspects such as the pH level or UV damage of the paper, or record the binding style, leaf attachment, or level of patron damage—not all of which were relevant aspects for the BCS. In fact, where marginalia and manuscript doodles in books might be termed "patron damage" in the case of circulating collections, in the case of the BCS, these readerly additions would be treated as potential research fodder. As such, potential questions were transcribed from other survey instruments and edited for the present purpose, including questions and images from the *Library Damages Atlas*. Questions and images were also repurposed from *The Book Damage Atlas*, a project developed by Tartu University Library in tandem with the Early Estonian Prints project. Like the *Library Damages Atlas*, *The Book Damage Atlas* is a tool that enables pictorial identification of damage to books and its extent; both atlases are freely available online.³⁴ Additional images for the pictorial representation for each question were also sourced from the open web (see Figure 1). The rare books librarian determined that using ready-made images from existing projects and from the open web was simpler than finding representative examples from the library's collections, photographing them, and uploading them to the survey.

Recruitment and Training

In fall 2015, the rare books librarian³⁵ and the coordinator of ASC began planning and recruiting for the BCS with the intent to start surveying the collection of about 900 books by and about women from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries and to advance to other collections from there. The project commenced without a timeline or intended date of completion. Technicians were recruited via an email sent to all staff in the Library's Collections Support Services and Access Services departments, upon receiving permission from their supervisors. Participation in the BSC was completely voluntary. Technicians included four employees from Access Services, four from Collections Support Services, two library faculty (the rare books librarian and the coordinator of ASC), and an undergraduate student interested in a career in librarianship. None of the recruited technicians, aside from the rare books librarian and the coordinator of ASC, had formal training in archives, rare books, or special collections. Technicians were required to attend one of two 30-minute training sessions in the Book Room, the secured and environmentally controlled room in the library where the rare books are held. During each of the training sessions, the rare books librarian demonstrated basic book handling techniques for deshelfing and reshelving books; proper storage techniques—including preferred and dispreferred bookends; and how to recognize improperly stored books and pamphlets. Technicians were also taught how to recognize the types of chemical and mechanical damage and shown examples from the collections. Training materials and educational literature were sourced from the website of the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC).³⁶ During this training and practice period, the rare books librarian addressed technicians' questions, and their suggestions were compiled for a revised iteration of the survey instrument.

Procedures

Because technicians for the BSC drew volunteers from various ranks and departments across the library, centralization of and easy access to all documentation for the project were essential. OU is part of Google's G Suite for Education, enabling integration of training, scheduling, and survey implementation through the suite of cloud-based applications, including the file-sharing service Google Drive, the survey software Google Forms, and the scheduler Google Calendar. The Google Suite enabled dissemination and storage of survey-related information among technicians who were spread across departments and physical spaces in the library and who would be working on the BCS at different times.

Because only three library employees have keys and credentials allowing access to the Book Room, technicians were required to sign up for shifts at least 24 hours in advance by creating an event using a Google Calendar that was shared with all technicians. Because the BCS would increase traffic into the Book Room, library administration mandated that technicians work in pairs and, to protect technicians from false accusations, that no technician be allowed in the Book Room alone (except for the three employees with keys). The advance sign-up allowed time to alert other technicians for a pair to be formed and so that staff from ASC could be present to disarm and unlock the doors to let the technicians into the Book Room at the scheduled time. Because of the newness of the labor, and to moderate burnout, technicians were advised to volunteer for no more than one hour of surveying at a time.

Each technician used a flat book cart outfitted with a set of book cradles and snake weights to support the book while examining it, a ruler for measuring the books' exact dimensions to help plan exhibits or build custom enclosures, and a tablet computer with internet access for accessing the web-based survey. These carts, cradles, and tablet computers were stored in the Book Room for the duration of the BCS. Using Google Drive, technicians were given access to the survey instrument and the resultant spreadsheet formed by their input data to correct inaccuracies if needed. To avoid duplication in assessment, technicians claimed a section of shelving—all of which were numbered—by writing their names on a list on the clipboard at the entrance of the Book Room. Fluorescent green strips of posterboard were provided to mark progress between shifts. Once all books in a section were completely surveyed, the technician marked an X in the *Done?* column of the list on the clipboard.

Survey Instrument

The Book Condition Survey asks 15 questions on a single, contiguous Google Forms web page.³⁷ Within the survey, all Likert-style questions are accompanied by images and descriptions allowing technicians to compare an image with the item-in-hand (see Appendix A for a mock-up of the initial survey). The survey instrument was developed drawing from the aforementioned model of the UPLA and its *Library Damages Atlas*, which balances questions of the “(in)stability of a library collection in addition to the accessibility of the objects” and grades degrees of noted damage according to handleability.³⁸ The *Library Damages Atlas*, and a review of extant instruments and their attendant aspects and degrees of damage, favored a 4-point Likert scale to discourage neutral evaluations. Likewise, the BCS utilizes a Likert-type scale noting 4 degrees of damage with an expanded explanation to further describe the degree of damage to the aspect being assessed. Like the *Library Damages Atlas*, degrees of damage to a particular aspect are textually explained and represented visually.

8. Spine of the book?



Figure 1: Visual representations of damage to the spine in question 8 of the Book Condition Survey

Unlike the *Library Damages Atlas*, the BCS juxtaposes the pictorial atlas with the instrument, allowing technicians to compare the book-in-hand at a glance to the textual and visual degrees of damage and immediately record it. In Figure 1, for example, technicians were asked to choose one of four options to represent the condition of a book's spine. Corresponding radio buttons in the Google Form further explicate (from left to right): the spine is complete; some wearing marks, slight deformation; worn, tears in the material, severely deformed; or large tears, parts of material missing, severe, irreversible damage.

Technicians began their assessment by transcribing into the survey an item's collection and call number from its acid-free flag. Technicians then inspected the item *in situ* to note the aspects of condition deemed most important and actionable: if the item was tied together with string (a solution devised by a past employee to constrain loose boards to the text block); if the item had sustained damage from neighboring books (red rot, packed books, etc.) or from bookends; if the item's pages slouched; and if the item had sustained poorly executed, previous book repairs (apart from being tied with string). The item was then removed from its shelf environment to record its dimensions, the presence of a dust jacket or slipcase, the condition of the spine and boards and of the edges of pages. If an item was tied with twine or cord or any kind, technicians were to cease surveying that item, submit the electronic form for the item, and move on to the next.³⁹ Providing an item was not tied with string, technicians then opened the book to assess the aspects of condition deemed less important and less actionable: the book's text block, indicating loose sheets, missing parts of pages, water staining and other marking, brittleness of pages, and additional damages, including foxing and ink corrosion. Finally, technicians could record a short, free-text note to indicate the presence of items laid in a book or pamphlet, such as manuscript letters or newspaper clippings.

Technicians were also asked to note possible presentation copies, ownership markings, or significant marginalia in a given item. At its close, the survey allowed technicians to note any anomalies as well as questions for the rare books librarian or the coordinator of ASC to review.

Results and Discussion

The survey was developed and tested, and technicians were recruited by the close of the fall semester of 2015. Training and implementation began in January 2016. By June 2017, technicians had assessed 2,987 volumes, wherein “volume” indicates an individual pamphlet or codex, and each item of multivolume and multicopy sets was assessed separately.

Volumes Assessed per Semester

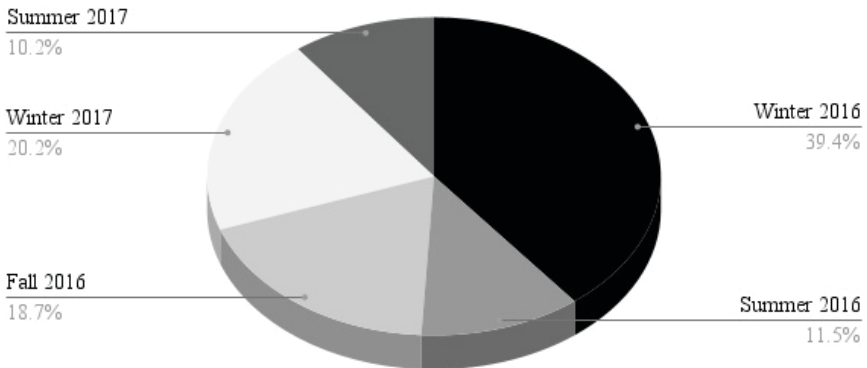


Figure 2: The distribution of volumes assessed via the Book Condition Survey per semester, where Winter is January–April, Summer is May–August, and Fall is September–December

Nearly 40% of volumes were assessed during the first semester in winter 2016. The fewest volumes, or just over 10%, were assessed in summer 2017 at the end of the project (see Figure 2).

Table 1: Improper Storage Techniques, Select Aspects

Aspect	Number	Percent of Surveyed Items
Pamphlets shelved amid books	245	8.2%
Items tied with string	310	10.4%
Damage from bookend	20	0.7%
Damage from neighboring books (red rot, packed books, etc.)	243	8.1%

Note: Categories are not exclusive (i.e., if an item is both a pamphlet and tied with string, it would be counted in each category).

Of the nearly 3,000 items assessed, 4 actionable types of damage emerged: 245 items were pamphlets improperly interfiled among bound codices, often resulting in slumping or poorly supported sheets. Over 10% of assessed items were tied with string or twine to hold their boards to the text block—the twine, in many cases, had cut into or otherwise damaged the edges of the boards. About 8% of items had been damaged by neighboring books, and 20 books had been damaged from forking-type bookends (see Table 1). From this assessment, the coordinator of ASC and the rare books librarian removed the unbound pamphlets for alternate shelving solutions; replaced the harmful twine with archival-quality, flat cotton ribbon; loosened packed books and removed and isolated items with disintegrating covers; and removed and replaced the forking-type bookends.

Volunteer Labor

Most books were assessed by the 11 technicians in the first semester, and volunteer labor steadily decreased from January 2016 to June 2017 (see Figure 3). Because all technicians (except three: the coordinator of ASC, the rare books librarian, and the archives assistant) were required to work in pairs, “labor hours” in Figure 3 measures the number of hours volunteered away from regularly assigned library duties. For example, 2 technicians working separately on the BCS during the same hour equals 2 labor hours, and the rare books librarian working alone on the BCS for an hour equals 1 labor hour.

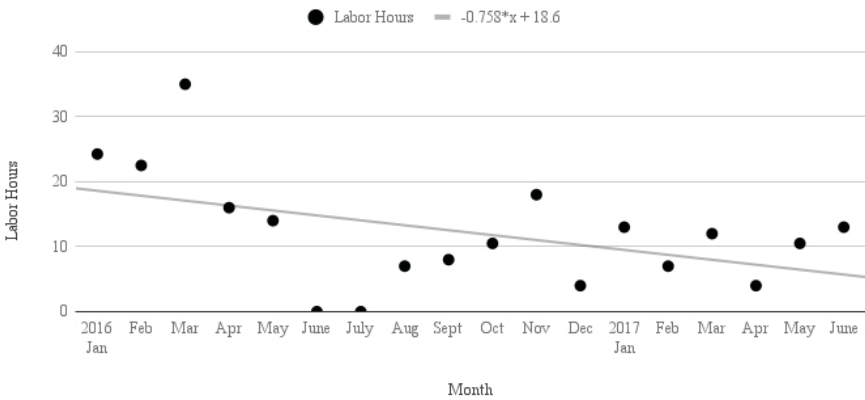


Figure 3: Summary of volunteer labor hours per month

For the duration of the BCS, 218.75 labor hours were concentrated into 111 contact hours, or the total time the Book Room was used for the project. Labor hours peaked at about 35 in March 2016 and bottomed in December 2016, with fewer than 5 hours (no assessment was completed in June or July of 2016 in accordance with the two faculty librarians' contractually allotted research time).

Although volunteer labor hours decreased over the course of the project, the efficiency of assessment steadily increased (see Figure 4). At the start of assessment, technicians averaged just under 10 volumes per labor hour, but increased to about 14 volumes per labor hour by June 2017, with spikes of up to 17 volumes per labor hour in the interim (again, no volumes were assessed in June or July of 2016 in accordance with the two faculty librarians' contractually allotted research time).

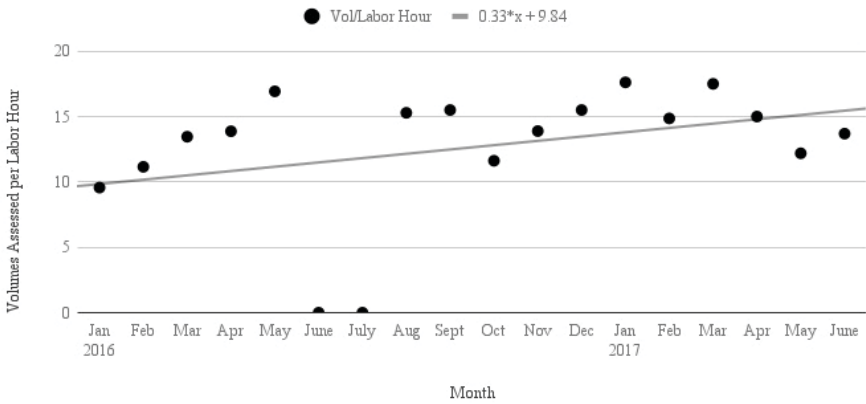


Figure 4: Rate of volumes assessed per labor hour

This steady climb in the rate of volumes assessed suggests that technicians grew more comfortable with the process and could assess volumes more quickly. It is also likely that the decrease in labor hours indicates that the coordinator of ASC, the rare books librarian, and the archives assistant—who could each work on the BCS alone—were at this time completing the bulk of the work.

Improving Procedures and Survey Instrument

Since the project's inception, technicians' feedback and suggestions were invaluable for streamlining the workflow and rendering the questions more specific. Technicians experimented with inputting data on their personal smartphones and library-provided tablets and laptops, finding that the tablets were the most convenient balance between a size small enough to fit on their book cart workspace, but with a keyboard large enough for accurately transcribing call numbers and notes. Technicians also provided useful feedback on the survey instrument. Question 10 asks technicians to assign a percentage to damaged edges of pages: "No wearing marks on sheets," "Wearing marks on no more than 10 percent," "Wearing marks on 10–30 percent," and "Wearing marks on more than 30 percent." Technicians noted that most books presented their wearing evenly. As such, future iterations of the survey instrument might be expressed in degrees of damage by wearing to the entire item, rather than percent of damage to portions (see amended language to question 10 in Appendix 1). Similarly, question 15 asks about additional types of damage to the text block, including ink corrosion and foxing. This question was included in the survey with the intent of identifying frontispieces and title pages too obscured to be used in exhibits. In the five years following the data collection of the BCS, this information has never been used, has not been a relevant consideration for designing exhibits, and could be struck from future iterations of the survey.

Outcomes

Data from the Book Condition Survey highlighted preservation priorities and undergirded funding opportunities for preservation projects. Data from the BCS were used to describe ASC needs for a successful 2019–2020 National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)'s Preservation Assistance Grant for Smaller Institutions, which funded custom enclosures for the collection of women's literature. The BCS enabled prioritization of those books tied with string and with loose boards. By the end of AY 2021, 540 books from the women's collection were fitted with custom enclosures to better protect them from environmental and mechanical damage.⁴⁰ The BCS also identified the quantity and measurements of pamphlets interfiled in the collection, enabling ASC staff to approximate costs and request money for relocating and rehousing these pamphlets in archival-quality slings and envelopes to curtail further mechanical damage. The NEH grant also enabled OU to hire a consultant from the NEDCC to institute an environmental monitoring program for all ASC areas.

Data from the BSC have also been integral to better understanding the unique intellectual contribution of the collection of women's literature. Table 2 includes select excerpts from technicians' free-text responses in the second column, which have been organized according to type by the rare books librarian in the first column as noting provenance, research value, or a preservation priority.

Table 2: Sample of Technician Descriptions of Item-Specific Findings

Type	Technician Description
Provenance	“index card with ink writing inserted”
Provenance; Research value	“Booksellers receipt in book, inscription in front cover”
Preservation priority; Research value	“some sort of note bound in back; inscription in back”
Research value	“At end of text, penciled note: ‘I have read this book and find it so persuasive I intend to begin my second journey through it.’”
Preservation priority; Research value	“covers loose and warped; book is handwritten; needs preservation now!”

These free-text responses were used to develop an inventory of ephemera tipped- or laid-in volumes, including manuscript letters, newspaper clippings, and index cards the former owner had used to record bibliographic and provenance information. Technicians also identified bookplates and former users’ markings, including the penciled note from one reader, scrawled in the back of the book: “I have read this book and find it so persuasive I intend to begin my second journey through it.” Because this notation evidences period reading practices, it has been classified as having “research value” and has since served as a useful example of readerly engagement in undergraduate and graduate-level research and instruction.

Book technicians also located index cards and bookseller receipts noting provenance information in some volumes of the collection of women’s literature, including the price paid for the book, the date purchased, and the antiquarian book dealer. These discoveries have been essential to a collaborative, multipronged initiative headed by the rare books librarian and a professor of English to re-create the provenance and understand the collecting methodologies of the women’s collection. Data generated from the BCS have, in part, informed successful grant applications to the Bibliographical Society of America, Friends of Princeton University Library, and internal university grants for student research opportunities.

Technicians’ notes also alerted ASC staff to information about books not adequately expressed by their catalog records. A technician, for example, indicated of one item in their assessment that the “book is handwritten.” The item is cataloged as the third edition of *Miss Beecher’s Domestic Receipt Book*, published by Harper & Brothers in 1848, but is actually a manuscript copy of the printed book, in which the creator transcribed the title page, copyright information, and the first few pages of the text, before inviting friends and acquaintances to contribute their own recipes. As indicated in Table 2, not only did the technician rightly recognize the need for better storage strategies for this item, but they also recognized that this item was an anomaly among the surrounding books. While the technician is likely unaware of the specific ways in which this item might be used in research, instruction, and exhibits, the technician’s comments in the

free-text field of the BCS were sufficient to alert the rare books librarian that this item warranted further attention. This manuscript book—like many of the other items identified by technicians—has since been used in multiple rare books instructional sessions and a handful of undergraduate research projects.

Although the data suggest that the rare books librarian, the coordinator of ASC, and the archives assistant completed the bulk of the labor toward the end of the project, the valuable contribution of these additional nonspecialist volunteers cannot be denied. To manage volunteer attrition in future deployments of the BCS, facilitators might offer retraining opportunities for volunteers throughout the implementation period. Facilitators might also arrange with library administration for volunteers' workloads to be adapted to devote time to the survey to expedite its completion.

Conclusion

Despite a preponderance of condition surveys in the literature, they are often poor fits for less-resourced institutions without an army of experienced conservators and special collections technicians. But the absence of recent and applicable literature for poorly resourced research and cultural heritage institutions should not preclude these institutions from taking steps to care for their holdings in rare and valuable books and pamphlets. Additionally, the limited number of employees with archival or rare books training within those institutions should not prevent greater familiarization with and care for the collections. The Book Condition Survey at Oakland University demonstrates that broader technological accessibility and availability can facilitate the creation of web-based survey instruments adapted for an institution's particular needs. These surveys can, in turn, deliver data for the support of grant applications for preservation and conservation or to further develop the intellectual history of the collections.

Appendix A: Book Condition Survey Instrument

1. Call number
2. Collection
3. Improper storage techniques
 - Tied with string
 - Damage from neighboring books (red rot, packed books, etc.)
 - Damage from book end
 - Slouching pages
 - Poorly executed previous book repairs
4. Book dimensions, to the nearest .5 cm (height x width x thickness; measure slipcase, if applicable)
OR pamphlet dimensions (height x width)
5. Does this book have a dust jacket or slipcase?
6. Condition of covers' covering and shape?
 - Good condition
 - Slightly worn
 - Tears in covering material
 - Large tears in the covering material; missing parts; warped covering
7. Condition of corners and edges of covers?
 - Not worn
 - Slightly worn, covering in good order
 - Worn, covering broken in places
 - Severely worn, parts of material missing; one or more corners missing; covers missing
8. Spine of the book?
 - Spine complete
 - Wearing marks, slight deformation
 - Severely worn, tears in material
 - Large tears, parts of material missing
9. Covers?
 - Covers are in good order
 - Covers attached, few rents in material
 - One of the covers is loose or missing
 - Both covers are loose or missing

Text block

10. Damaged edges of pages?
 - No wearing marks on sheets
 - Wearing marks on no more than 10%
 - Wearing marks on 10–30%
 - Wearing marks on more than 30%
11. Loose sheets?
 - No loose sheets
 - Up to 10% loose sheets
 - 10–30% loose sheets
 - Many loose sheets, over 30%
 - End Assessment here if tied with string
12. Missing parts of pages?
 - No major tears or missing parts
 - Few, small missing parts
 - Single missing part affecting 10–30% of pages
 - Multiple missing parts; relevant part of text is missing; missing parts on more than 30% of pages

13. Water staining or marking on pages?
 - No water stains or marking
 - Small stains on less than 10% of pages, does not obstruct reading
 - Small stains or marks on 10–30% of pages
 - Stains or marks on more than 30% of pages
14. Brittleness of pages?
 - No brittleness, pages flexible and strong
 - Mild chipping and/or snapping on outermost edges of pages
 - Medium chipping and/or snapping, pages brittle and difficult to turn
 - Severe chipping and/or snapping, pages very brittle and difficult to turn
15. Additional damage to text block
 - Foxing
 - Ink corrosion
 - Free Text Response
 - Return to record?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily D. Spunaugle is humanities and rare books librarian at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan.

NOTES

1. Michigan State University–Oakland, *Annual Report of the Librarian*, 1959–1960, <http://hdl.handle.net/10323/1508>.
2. “Enrollment,” *Michigan State University–Oakland Newsletter* (May 1960): 1, <http://hdl.handle.net/10323/127>; “Fall 2021 Enrollment Data Released,” *OU Official Newsletter* (October 18, 2021), <https://www.oakland.edu/newsletters/grizz-facts/2021/ou-fall-2021-enrollment>.
3. Based on the Carnegie Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education, drawing on data from AY 2016–2017.
4. Randall Bond, Mary DeCarlo, Elizabeth Henes, and Eileen Snyder, “Preservation Study at the Syracuse University Libraries,” *College and Research Libraries* 48, no. 2 (1987): 132–47, https://doi.org/10.5860/crl_48_02_132; Gay Walker, Jane Greenfield, John Fox, and Jeffrey S. Simonoff, “The Yale Survey: A Large-Scale Study of Book Deterioration in the Yale University Library,” *College & Research Libraries* 46, no. 2 (1985): 111–32, https://doi.org/10.5860/crl_46_02_111.
5. Karen E. K. Brown, “Use of General Preservation Assessments,” *Library Resources & Technical Services* 49, no. 2 (2005): 90–106, <https://doi.org/10.5860/lrts.49n2.90>.
6. Tyson Rinio, “Collection Condition Assessment in a Midsized Academic Library,” *Collection Management* 41, no. 4 (2016): 193–208, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01462679.2016.1227289>.
7. Mary Ellen Starmer and Dea Miller Rice, “Surveying the Stacks,” *Library Resources & Technical Services* 48, no. 4 (2004): 263–72.
8. Martha O’Hara Conway and Merrilee Proffitt, “The Practice, Power, and Promise of Archival Collections Assessment,” *RBM* 13, no. 2 (2012): 100–112, <https://doi.org/10.5860/rbm.13.2.377>.
9. Rinio, “Collection Condition Assessment”; Mary Ellen Starmer, Sara H. McGough, and Aime Leverette, “Rare Condition: Preservation Assessment for Rare Book Collections,” *RBM* 6, no. 2 (2005): 91–106, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5860/rbm.6.2.247>.
10. Anna Dysert, “Aims and Approaches in Special Collections Assessment: A Case Study from the Osler Library,” *RBM* 16, no. 2 (2015): 101–12, <https://doi.org/10.5860/rbm.16.2.446>.
11. Starmer, McGough, and Leverette, “Rare Condition.”

12. Ibid., 92 (current author's emphasis).
13. Jennifer E. Hain, "A Brief Look at Recent Developments in the Preservation and Conservation of Special Collections," *Library Trends* 52, no. 1 (2003): 112–17.
14. Ibid., 113.
15. T. J. Swanson, "Condition Survey Methodology Applied to a Small Historical Society Library," *Rural Libraries* 28, no. 1 (2008): 31–48.
16. See for example Starmer, McGough, and Leverette, "Rare Condition"; Kurmo Konsa, "Condition Survey for the Estonian National Preservation Policy," *Restaurator* 28, no. 4 (2007): 239–55, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/REST.2007.239>; Swanson, "Condition Survey Methodology"; Sam Capiau, Marijn de Valk, and Eva Wuyts, "The Universal Procedure for Library Assessment: A Statistical Model for Condition Surveys of Special Collections in Libraries," *IFLA Journal* 41, no. 3 (2015): 265–71, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0340035215598161>; Brian J. Baird, Jana Krentz, and Bradley L. Schaffner, "Findings from the Condition Surveys Conducted by the University of Kansas Libraries," *College & Research Libraries* 58, no. 2 (1997): 115, <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.58.2.115>; Alison Walker, "Preservation Assessment Surveys: An Interdisciplinary Approach," *Liber Quarterly: The Journal of European Research Libraries* 13, nos. 1–4 (2003): 273–80, <https://doi.org/10.18352/lq.7740>; Jennifer H. Teper and Sarah M. Ereksion, "The Condition of Our 'Hidden' Rare Book Collections: A Conservation Survey at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 50, no. 3 (2006): 200–213, <https://doi.org/10.5860/lrts.50n3.200>; Starmer and Rice, "Surveying the Stacks"; Bradley L. Schaffner and Brian J. Baird, "Into the Dustbin of History? The Evaluation and Preservation of Slavic Materials," *College & Research Libraries* 60, no. 2 (1999): 144–51, <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.60.2.144>; Cheryl Gunselman, "Assessing Preservation Needs of Manuscript Collections with a Comprehensive Survey," *American Archivist* 70, no. 1 (2007): 151–69, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40294454>.
17. Teper and Ereksion, "The Condition of Our 'Hidden' Rare Book Collections," 201. See also, for example, Paul R. Green, "A Method for Undertaking a Full Conservation Audit of Special Collections of Books and Manuscripts," *Collection Management* 28, no. 4 (2008): 28, https://doi.org/10.1300/J105v28n04_03.
18. Tori R. Gregory, "Stacking Up: A How-To Guide to Condition Surveys," *Collection Management* 31, no. 3 (2007): 90, https://doi.org/10.1300/J105v31n03_07.
19. For example, Swanson, "Condition Survey Methodology."
20. Gregory, "Stacking Up," 89.
21. Robert A. Mead and Brian J. Baird, "Preservation Concern for Law Libraries: Results from the Condition Survey of the University of Kansas Law Library," *Law Library Journal* 95, no. 1 (2004): 264.
22. Schaffner and Baird, "Into the Dustbin of History?"
23. Starmer and Rice, "Surveying the Stacks."
24. Gunselman, "Assessing Preservation Needs of Manuscript Collections."
25. Gregory, "Stacking Up."
26. Nicholas Pickwood, "The Condition Survey of the Manuscripts in the Monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai," *The Paper Conservator* 28, no. 1 (2004): 33–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03094227.2004.9638640>.
27. Capiau et al., "The Universal Procedure for Library Assessment."
28. Ibid., 269; Marijn de Valk, *Library Damages Atlas: A Tool for Assessing Damage* (Antwerp: Vlaamse Erfgoedbibliotheek, 2018), <https://vlaamse-erfgoedbibliotheeken.be/bron/4408>.
29. Capiau, de Valk, and Wuyts, "The Universal Procedure for Library Assessment," 269.
30. Ibid.
31. Swanson, "Condition Survey Methodology"; Pickwood, "The Condition Survey of the Manuscripts in the Monastery of Saint Catherine."
32. Baird, Krentz, and Schaffner, "Findings from the Condition Surveys Conducted by the University of Kansas Libraries"; Green, "A Method for Undertaking a Full Conservation Audit"; Mead and Baird, "Preservation Concern for Law Libraries"; Starmer and Rice, "Surveying the Stacks."

33. WYSIWYG, the acronym for “what you see is what you get,” indicates software in which content appears like the finished product during creation and editing; the user interfaces of WYSIWYG products do not require programming or coding expertise.
34. Kurmo Kansa and Anu Lepp, *The Book Damage Atlas*, University of Tartu Library and European Research Centre for Book and Paper, <https://paber.ut.ee/EN/raamatukahjustused>.
35. The rare books librarian was not officially designated as such until 2019.
36. Northeast Document Conservation Center, “Free Resources,” <https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/overview>.
37. The exception to the contiguous web page is the additional section made available when the presence of a dust jacket or slipcase is noted.
38. Capiou, de Valk, and Wuyts, “The Universal Procedure for Library Assessment,” 268.
39. The rare books librarian and the coordinator of ASC agreed that only the exterior of items secured with twine or string be assessed by technicians, as many of these items are especially fragile. Additionally, in many cases, the twine or string could not be easily removed and required special attention.
40. “Oakland University-Kresge Library 2020–2021 Archives and Special Collections Annual Report,” 5.