# Preservation Essentials

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## Enhancing Cultural Stewardship through Preservation Workshops

*By Justin Bridges, Miami University*

Preservation has long been an important part of library and archival science. With the ultimate goal of ensuring the present and future use of information in a variety of formats, the field of library preservation employs many approaches and strategies at both the collection and item levels. Within a library setting, preservation activities often include routine condition assessments of analog collections, the writing and execution of robust emergency preparedness plans, extensive environmental monitoring, and the execution of book repairs and conservation techniques.

To add, our ever-changing digital society has led to a new set of preservation needs. The digitization of fragile or volatile analog materials has become commonplace in most libraries. This benefits library patrons by increasing accessibility of fragile objects and the institution itself by creating a digital surrogate that can limit physical handling of the analog artifact. While these concepts and ideas may be common to library people, they can easily be translated to cover the preservation and safekeeping of various heritage collections that are held by individuals.

As a means of educating those outside of the library on the basics of analog and digital material preservation, I developed various public workshops to teach beginner-level preservation and conservation techniques to those with the interest and need. These workshops included a brief history of cultural heritage preservation, as well as how each person is truly the steward of his or her own heritage collections. In this article, I will briefly summarize and discuss two particular workshops: "Preservation 101: Caring for Your Family Heirlooms" and "Digital Archiving: Preserving Your Memories through Digital Scrapbooking."

"Preservation 101: Caring for Your Family Heirlooms" was written and created as a 1.5-hour workshop for Miami University's Institute for Learning in Retirement, an organization consisting of community members aged 50 and older looking to enrich their lives through educational seminars, lectures, and classes on a wide variety of topics. This particular workshop began with a historical introduction to cultural heritage preservation and its importance to both local culture and the world at large. In discussions about various cultural heritage preservation projects that have been undertaken by various institutions and individuals, workshop participants were able to gain a better understanding of the overall importance of preserving artifacts from the past for future generations to observe.
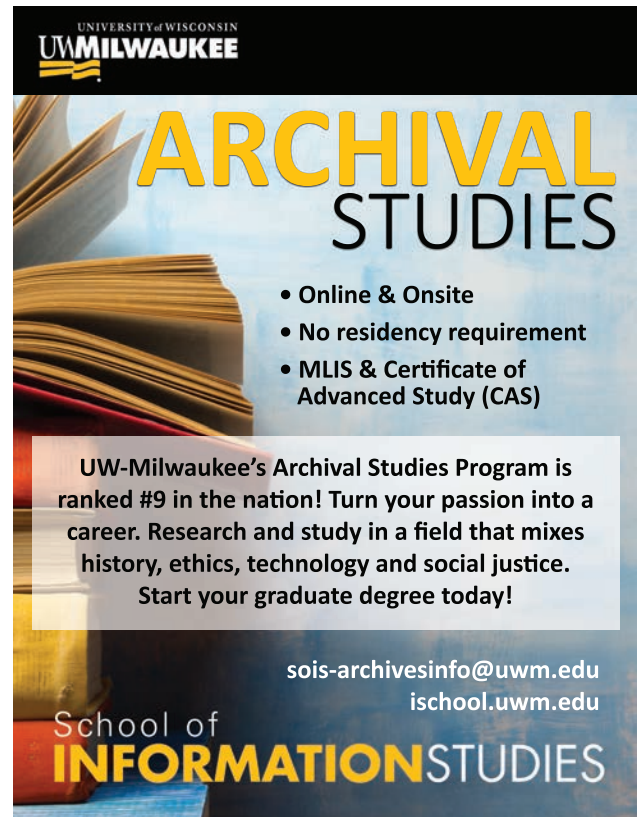
These conversations included topics such as best practices for housing culturally significant artifacts, the lasting effects that the environment can have on artifacts made from certain materials, tips on the proper storage of historical objects, as well as current trends in building personal historical collections. Participants were then given a tour of the Miami University Libraries Preservation Department and offered the opportunity to engage in hands-on preservation tasks such as encapsulation, pamphlet binding, and simple paper repair. The workshop included discussing tips and tricks for preserving historical items that the participants had in their personal collections: books, photographs, and textiles. While the workshop participants left having learned a bit about large-scale historical preservation, perhaps more important, they learned how to better care for items within their own personal collections.

While the aforementioned workshop focused on preserving family heirlooms and other historical artifacts, I decided to develop another workshop on another trending topic in the field: digital preservation. After much deliberation, I decided to create a workshop entitled "Digital Archiving: Preserving Your Miami Memories through Digital Scrapbooking," entirely focused on digital preservation and marketed primarily toward college students, though open to anyone with interest in the topic. This drop-in, noncredit, 1.5-hour class explored many of the basic tenants of digital preservation, including the need to keep multiple copies of any and all digital files, the importance of organizing and naming digital files so that they can be found in the future, as well as a discussion on how digital file formats can (and do) go obsolete over time.

After the basics of digital preservation were presented and discussed, several web-based digital scrapbooking applications were demonstrated which provided a fun

and creative option for archiving and preserving digital images for the workshop participants. Utilizing such web-based products as Canva and SmileBox, workshop participants were given the opportunity to create their own digital scrapbooking pages via guided hands-on exercises. The take-aways for those in the class included a better understanding of the importance of digital preservation, including "Get all of those pictures off your cellphones, and stored somewhere safer!," as well as an introduction to innovative tools to make the very act of digital preservation more entertaining.

The two workshops described in this article are just the beginning of educating people on the importance of historical preservation—now, not later. As professionals in this field, I believe it is our duty to share the knowledge we have gained, be it through our education or practical experience, with anyone who has an interest. With all the changes to technology, access, and the different means for individuals to record their histories, collectively and creatively, we can discover ways of educating people on the importance of cultural heritage preservation, allowing a community approach to preserving the past for the future.