

Dooley (2011) The OCLC Research Survey of Special Collections and Archives.

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Jackie M. Dooley served as the Program Officer of *Taking Our Pulse: The OCLC Research Survey of Special Collections and Archives*. The original report offered a “state of the union” for 275 research libraries’ archives and special collections departments in the United States and Canada with the goal of reporting their findings and providing recommendations for the future. This summary extracts specific data points of interest to the European library community and was presented at a conference in Barcelona. As a future archivist, I chose this article to complement my own studies in this area.

The research presented here, performed through a quantitative survey, is of great importance to understand what barriers exist for archives and special collections materials to be processed, preserved, stored, and discoverable. The survey included a broad sample of repositories with the greatest number of respondents from the university and college library communities.

The results of the survey are broken up into seven distinct sections: Metrics, Collections, User Services, Metadata, Archival Collections Management, Digitization, and Born-digital archival materials. Funding is addressed as a separate and primary issue. The study revealed that collections are growing exponentially across the board and that there is little collaboration between repositories. User Services is of particular importance to the researchers as discovery is the very reason these repositories exist (Dooley 2011). The findings in this area were disappointing metrics-wise as there was very little granularity in the data concerning the tracking of the type of user for each repository. The positive note is that, though respondents don’t know exactly who is using the materials, the demand for materials is increasing.

Cataloging and Metadata are key in helping archival materials reach a larger audience. The survey shows that repositories, while improving their backlog in describing materials, still have a long way to go to keep up with the influx of assets. The Archival Collection Management responses show much the same results as Cataloging and Metadata: a backlog in processing collections is preventing materials from becoming discoverable. A barrier exists in the lack of standard processing tools to make collections available online as well as a lack of collaboration between repositories.

Digitization proved to be a priority among respondents. The survey weighs ideas of large-scale digitization projects versus “boutique” projects as well as outsourced versus in-house digitization. Finally, the massive wave of Born-digital Archives is addressed. Born-digital materials and digitization are the two areas respondents reported as the most challenging. There are many unknowns in this area as the respondents report not know the true nature and volume of their born-digital collections, how to process them, and how to make them discoverable.

Since this study is over 10 years old, it was encouraging to read knowing the progress that has been made since it was published. 13 recommended actions are listed at the end of the summary. Collections are still growing dramatically, backlogs still exist certainly, but great strides have been made in standardizing language, creating, and sharing finding aids, collaboration among repositories, and software tools for managing archival collections and digitization projects. I look forward to an updated survey in the future to assess progress.