

Discussion Module
Conservation and Disaster

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Reading “The Ten Agents of Deterioration” recalled a recent conversation I had with my family. The Louvre is not air-conditioned! There was much ado about air conditioning when we visited Europe this summer. We did not visit Paris but sweated through a (very beautiful) mass at St. Mark’s Basilica in Venice. When we learned that the church, the Louvre and many other institutions housing precious collections had no HVAC system I was floored. I had to investigate. The Mona Lisa has her very own temperature-controlled box that serves both as protection against theft and vandals but also to keep the poplar wood on which her image is painted from further cracking. The Louvre itself however, and many other sites in Paris are cooled by an underground network of pipes that send cold water from the Seine River throughout the city. Venice is an entirely other conversation.

Climate change is ushering in new challenges to prevent the ten agents of deterioration: “fire; thieves, vandals, and displacers; water; physical; pollutants; biological; light; incorrect relative humidity, and incorrect temperature...and curatorial neglect and dissociation.” (Bainbridge et al., 2023) Florida is an oppressive and aggressive state in which to conserve precious materials. Our climate seems to be the perfect mix of threats: powerful hurricanes, frequent summer storms with heavy lightning and flash flooding, heat, and high humidity, constant strong sun, and so many bugs! In the academic library where I was employed in the archives, a well-meaning student worker put a donation into archive storage while I was away for a week. Ten cardboard boxes full of important files, absolutely teeming with silverfish.

It is fascinating to me what a book *can* survive. The mitigation instructions for water damage seem to be especially useful to Florida repositories. That water leads to mold and mold remediation is another aspect of conservation I have been exposed to when a collection of files

was stored in a warehouse on the floor. The warehouse had been flooded during several storms. All the athletic equipment on the top shelves was in excellent shape. The university president's files on the floor, however, were full of mold.

I appreciate the language choice in Joanna Garnett's *Academic Libraries – Changing the Approach: Resilience Building against Disruptive Events and the Contribution to Disaster Risk Reduction Frameworks*. The choice of the terms “disruptive events” as opposed to disaster and “resilience building” to preparation highlight the importance of planning on the part of academic libraries. Garnett notes, “Educational institutions are examples of ‘naïve organisations’ as they ‘see low probability of such events occurring’ and ‘are less likely to apply resources to prepare for such events’” This has not been my experience. I was charged with writing a disaster preparedness plan and order all necessary supplies while working in the academic library. Shortly after its completion I was rewarded with a hurricane – if you build it, they will come! Perhaps because we are in Florida, we understand that disruptive events are a surety. While touching on emotional intelligence in disruptive event response, Garnett does not address the issues with library staff needing to simultaneously address a disruptive event in the library while possibly addressing that same event at home. Cullingford does note the need for prioritization of employees' well-being during and after a disaster in Emergency Planning for Special Collections chapter of *The Special Collections Handbook*. “If an emergency affected the whole region, staff and users will have suffered other losses. Communication remains vital: keep staff, users and the public involved in the ongoing story “

References

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