Partnering with Scholars

Exposing a City’s Hidden Collections

Charles Blair and Elisabeth Long
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UNCAP
Uncovering New Chicago Archives Project

• 3-year Mellon-funded project
• Partners
  – Library
  – Faculty
  – Graduate Students
  – Local Archive-holding Institutions
• Precursor project: Mellon Officer’s Grant
UNCAP Goals

• City-wide hidden collections initiative
  – Identifying and processing collections supporting African American cultural history

• Faculty-Library collaboration
  – User-driven collections, programs, services
  – Process and preserve important research materials
  – Train graduate students to process collections in their field

• Cross-institutional discovery tool
Hidden Collections Initiative

• Library
  – Founding member of ARL *Special Collections Task Force* (2003 Working Conference at LC)
  – More Product, Less Process (Greene and Meissner)
  – Library-wide hidden collections initiative

• English Department Prof’s Goldsby and Stewart
  – Post-depression, pre-civil rights era African American literary and cinema history
  – Mapping The Stacks: Mellon Officer’s Grant
    • “to identify primary source materials (books, films, photographs, newspapers, magazines, manuscript archives, recorded oral histories, and other ephemera) in need of processing and cataloguing.”
Organizational Architecture

UNCAP

Mapping the Stacks (M)
- Jaqueline Goldsby
- Jaqueline Stewart
- CPL Vivian Harsh Coll
  - DuSable Muse
  - Chicago Defed

University of Chicago L
- Jazz Archive
- Modern Poetry Coll
  - Travis Jackson
  - Robert von Hallberg
Faculty/Library Collaboration:
User-driven Collections, Programs, Services

- Not just consultation - Not just scholarship
  - User involvement in Library decision-making and processing
- No one size fits all
  - Processing level dependent on
    - Nature of collection
    - Institutional context and mission
    - Needs of researchers using collection
- Faculty as emissaries in community for collection-building
Faculty-Library Collaboration: Training Graduate Students

- Primary source research skills
  - Hunting is fun, but overwhelming
  - Discovering patterns and relationships
- Fostering interdisciplinary investigation and conceptualization
  - English (including Poetry and Poetics), Cinema and Media Studies, History, Art History, and Music
- Discovery for seminar and dissertation research
Faculty-Library Collaboration: Faculty Benefits

• Discover new areas of research
  – Curriculum development
  – Scholarship production

• Student recruitment

• Fostering collaborative research in humanistic fields
  – Breaking the mold of individualistic research
  – Science model
Cross-institutional Discovery Tool

- One Tool For:
  - Multiple institutions with differing needs
  - Hierarchical relationships within project
  - Collection survey and finding aids
  - Multiple formats
    - Personal and institutional papers
    - Radio transcripts
    - Image collections
    - Oral histories
    - Sound recordings
    - Newspaper clippings
    - Stock arrangements
    - Etc.
Challenges and Opportunities

• Training students and faculty in archival standards
  – Ease vs. expertise
• Marrying goals of faculty and library
• Politics of inter-institutional cooperation vs. user needs
  – 800 lb. gorilla problem
• Collaborations with libraries in other areas undertaking similar initiatives
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