



Selecting Special Collections Materials for the HBCU Digital Collection:

*A Digital Collection Celebrating the Founding of
the Historically Black College and University*

Ira Revels

7/31/2009

This document provides detailed information in the form of a self-paced lesson on selecting paper-based special collections materials for conversion to digital formats.

Selecting Materials for the HBCU Digital Collection

Learning Objectives of the Lesson

After studying this lesson, you should be able to:

OBJECTIVE 1: Understand the purpose of the HBCU Library Alliance - Cornell University Library Digitization Initiative.

OBJECTIVE 2: Recognize the attributes of special collections materials that make them suitable for digitization.

OBJECTIVE 3: Identify the steps necessary to carry out a material selection process.

OBJECTIVE 4: Prioritize special collections materials for digitization based upon a set of defined criteria.

Structure of the lesson:

HBCU Library staffs who wish to contribute founding and historical documents to the HBCU Digital Collection "A Digital Collection Celebrating the Founding of the Historically Black College and University" are encouraged to read through this lesson in its entirety. The lesson is divided into four parts. Each part is designed to provide the reader with an overview of the components involved in the selection of special collections materials for conversion into digital formats. A general discussion on selection for paper-based materials is covered in this lesson. While this lesson does not cover specific issues related to audio and video conversion, many of the topics discussed can be loosely applied to selecting materials in other formats.

On the pages that follow "Lesson Take-Aways" are numbered and text is bold. "Lesson Take-Aways" are designed as a quick overview of the material that is covered in Parts 1-4.

Parts 1-4 are designed to provide more detail of a particular aspect of selecting special collections materials. These sections provide more information that is not covered in the "Lesson Take-Aways".

A table titled "Required and Desired Selection Criteria for *A Digital Collection Celebrating the Founding of the Historically Black College and University*" is provided near the end of the lesson for quick reference.

Finally, a list of online resources is provided to credit sources of information found within the lesson. You may also find these resources helpful should you require additional information.

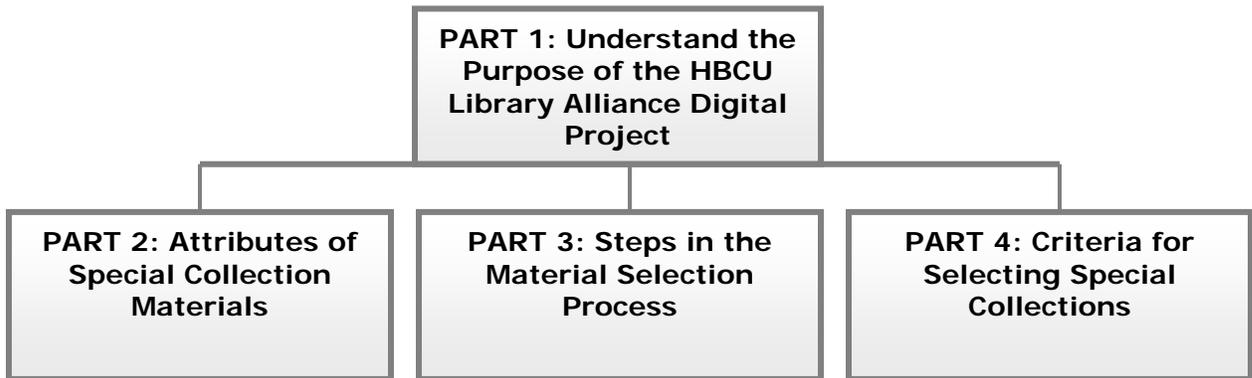
Completion Time: Approximately 75 minutes

Introduction

This lesson covers decision-making for selecting archival materials for the HBCU Digital Collection titled "A Digital Collection Celebrating the Founding of the Historically Black College and University."

HBCU Library staffs who wish to contribute their institution's founding documents to the HBCU Digital Collection are encouraged to review the guidance set forth in this lesson.

Organization of the Lesson



Lesson Take Aways

1. Understand the purpose for the Cornell University Library - HBCU Digitization Initiative.

The HBCU Library Alliance Board members identified the need for digitization training during the first "Call for Cooperation" in October 2002 (HBCU Library Alliance, 2002). This need for training among HBCU staff in digital collection building was reinforced in the final report of a project planning grant given by

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to the HBCU Library Alliance and SOLINET. The report noted that, "As more and more information becomes available in electronic form and as preservation efforts involving the digitization of information take precedence over other formats of preservation (i.e. microform, photocopying, etc.), there is a great need for HBCU Libraries to receive training in these areas. (HBCU Library Alliance, 2004.)

In 2005 The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded Cornell University Library (CUL) on behalf of and in partnership with The HBCU Library Alliance and its partners The Robert W. Woodruff Library of the Atlanta University Center and The Southeastern Library Network a grant to train a cadre of HBCU library staff at ten HBCUs in collaborative digital collection building activities. Two years later, CUL received from The Foundation a second award on behalf of The HBCU Library Alliance to extend the training to an additional ten institutions.

The second project phase had objectives beyond just training in digital collection building. The project would involve training in audio and video digitization techniques, the exploration of digital services, and the invitation to all HBCU Library Alliance member Libraries to participate in the collaborative project by sharing their digitized collections.

2. Recognize the attributes of analog materials which make them suitable for digitization.

Deciding what you should digitize is a value consideration that can be driven by several factors. First, one of the most clearly identifiable restrictions to copying materials is **copyright**. The HBCU Library Alliance asks that you select documents to which you own the copyright in most cases these will be official University/campus correspondence, photos of campus structures, photos of students/faculty, etc.

Second, look at the material. Are the **document attributes** capable of capture in digital format? For the purpose of the Founding documents collection, many of the documents across HBCUs are similar in that they are fragile or old. They all have details that can be captured in digital format using our **benchmarks**.

"As more and more information becomes available in electronic form and as preservation efforts involving the digitization of information take precedence over other formats...there is a great need for HBCU Libraries to receive training in these areas." (HBCU Library Alliance, 2004.)

Third, is the material **organized** and **documentation** available about the material? To provide detailed descriptions you should identify and use secondary resources such as published manuscripts about your campus history or HBCUs in general to describe images for which you are unsure about dates and other identifying information.

3. Prioritize analog materials for digitization based upon a set of defined criteria.

Selection criteria for the Founding documents collection were determined in the summer 2005 by HBCU Library Deans and Directors who were partners in the first phase of the CUL-HBCU Digitization Initiative. These criteria provide detailed information summarizing considerations for the selection of analog materials in seven key areas:

- **Value**
- **Usage**
- **Intellectual property**
- **Stability for digitization**
- **Metadata**
- **Impact on the library/institution**
- **Preservation**

A detailed chart outlining these criteria can be found on page 15 of this lesson. Selection committees or individuals responsible for selecting materials for the Founding documents collection are encouraged to review these criteria before making formal decisions about selection.

4. Be able to identify the steps necessary to contribute material to the HBCU Digital Collection.

Begin by developing a selection committee of individuals who have special collections responsibility, are technical experts, or users of the collection. Choose committee members who can contribute their expertise to answering questions that will come up during the selection process.

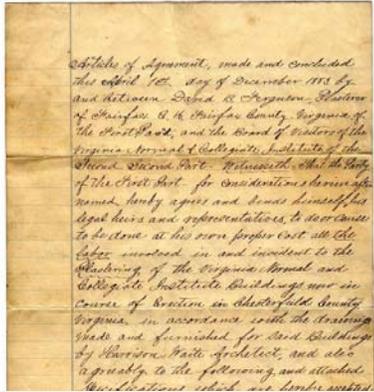
First, determine what you *may* digitize based on copyright restrictions. Do you own the materials? Since the Founding documents collection is restricted to materials that your college or university has produced, the question of ownership may be less important (in most cases).

The second step in the material selection process is to decide what you *can* digitize based on **technology issues**. You may ask 'What features of the original do we want to capture? Can we do this relatively easily given the condition of the original and the hardware or software available?'

The third step involves scanning archival documents. You will create at least two types of digital images. A preservation quality scan and an access quality scan. You may decide to create a third image, called a thumbnail, for viewing over the web.

Fourth, rank the special collections materials using the selection criteria guidelines offered by The HBCU Library Alliance. These guidelines provide

seven areas to review and numerous questions to ask about the materials prior to digitization.



Virginia State University, Petersburg, Virginia. Bill establishing the institution. Used with permission.

The final step involves reviewing the **benchmarks** that have been established by Cornell University Library (CUL) and the HBCU Library Alliance for the CUL-HBCU Digitization Initiative. These benchmarks are based upon guidance that the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) provide as well as efforts by the 20 HBCU Library partners. Image capture using these standards can be accomplished relatively easily using the **Digital Image Production Guide**.

Part 1: Background on the CUL-HBCU Digitization Initiative



Shirley Epps, project manager at Miles College participates in the HBCU Digital Image workshop at the Georgia State Archives. August 2007.

The HBCU Library Alliance HBCU Digital Collection Mini-Case

History

In 2001 deans and directors from over 100 HBCU libraries met in an open forum at the SOLINET Annual Meeting to explore common opportunities and challenges that could be addressed through collaborative efforts. Affinity groups were created to address four key areas of concern:

- Preservation and Access to Cultural Materials
- Information and Advocacy
- Human Resources: Shared Expertise, Recruitment and Staff Development
- Better Access to Collections and Facilities

Subsequent to the face-to-face meetings in 2001 and 2002, the deans and directors continued their conversation over email and through an electronic mailing list (listserv). A statement on the HBCU Library Alliance webpage regarding the initial "Call for Cooperation among HBCU Libraries," reads that "There has been consensus that increased cooperation among HBCU libraries could be effective in strengthening the role of libraries on our campuses, improving preservation of and access to the unique cultural resources, developing staff, and in sharing expertise and resources among libraries."

Introduction

The HBCU Library Alliance is a consortium that promotes collaboration of information professionals and excellence in library leadership and services to enhance member resources and programs. As of 2006-2007 it was comprised of 87 dues-paying institutions. It has grown in the past two years by expanding its programs, such as the Leadership Institute, the Cornell Digital Project, and the Photographic Conservation Summit. The Alliance's aim is to build a HBCU Digital Library. To achieve this, the HBCU Library Alliance has been willing to embrace and manage partnerships with institutions and funding agencies.



Lab for the HBCU Digital Image workshop at the Georgia State Archives. August 2007.

External Factors

Library organizations that wish to build digital libraries must first gain experience and expertise developing digital collections. It is important for librarians to understand the processes involved in developing, managing, and sustaining digital assets over time. External influences on the HBCUs include:

- Budgetary constraints that make it difficult to allocate staff and tangible resources to the digitization effort
- HBCUs past experience with partnerships involving majority institutions have not always been successful
- Ownership of digital materials is a key concern
- Digitization issues and techniques can be difficult for people to understand
- Investment returns on digital projects are predictably low so many people perceive digitization as a drain on resources
- There is a lot of competition for grants (typical sources of funding for digitization projects)

Why Digitize?

The HBCU Library Alliance was a new organization and its members had given it a mandate to address preservation of and access to cultural heritage materials. It needed to test collaborative digital collection-building efforts involving HBCUs so institutions could identify it as a good place to invest resources and collections. In 2005 the HBCU Library Alliance went through a test and “discovery” phase to find out what it needed to do in order to reach its aim. The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded Cornell University Library in collaboration with the HBCU Library Alliance a \$400,000 grant to build a cadre of librarians trained in digital collection building and to develop a digital collection production initiative. This experience could then be used to lay the groundwork for an eventual HBCU Digital Library.

Learning Objective 1

Understand the purpose of the Cornell University Library - HBCU Digitization Initiative.



Homepage of the HBCU Digital Collection.

Creating the Collection

Building a collaborative HBCU Digital Collections requires training, technology, and a plan. It was important for the HBCU Library Alliance to do well programmatically. Success required raising awareness among its members and communicating its needs with its primary collaborator Cornell University Library. This meant:

- Inviting ten institutions to participate in the first phase of the CUL-HBCU Digitization Initiative
- Creating better trained

staff of partner libraries more able to carry out the digital collection-building effort

- Developing a unique product – the HBCU Digital Collection – based upon similar materials found at all participating HBCU libraries

Through the initial project HBCU Library Alliance developed a framework to support its member goals and aspirations.

Implementing the Training

The HBCU Library Alliance members used a number of methods to build the HBCU Digital Collection:

- Participated in a week-long scanning and metadata creation workshop at the Georgia Archives.
- With the assistance of CUL project staff, implemented workflow processes at their home institutions for the production of digital images.
- Received financial support from the grant to hire scanning technicians.
- Received computers, software, and scanners for the production of digital images and metadata.
- Sent digital images and metadata to a central server housed and maintained by staff at the Robert W. Woodruff Library of the Atlanta University Center.

The HBCU Library Alliance's success can be seen through the output and outcome results, which include the numbers of trained library staff and the development of a HBCU Digital Collection.

Conclusion

The HBCU Library Alliance recognized a need to improve access to HBCU materials. The HBCU Digital Collection has made the organization better prepared to think broadly about the implications for building a collaborative HBCU Digital Library.

Part 2: HBCU Digital Collection Scope



Images from the HBCU Digital Collection.

Collection Scope: Access

Access to the digital collection is open to the general public. Thumbnail images are displayed in the individual collections of each contributing institution. The records contain links to larger, reference images, which are stored in a CONTENTdm database that is maintained by staff at the Robert W. Woodruff Library of the Atlanta University Center. Contributing institutions are responsible for insuring that digital images available online meet fair use and other provisions of the United States Copyright law (Title 17).

Collection Scope: Content

Materials that can be found in the HBCU Digital Collection include founding documents such as photographs, official university correspondence, student catalogs, alumni letters, memorabilia, and programs from campus events, and photographs of campus buildings and maps. The following table provides a list of sample material types you may find among the Founding documents in the HBCU Digital Collection.

Sample Material Types found in the HBCU Digital Collection

Certificate	Affidavit
Circular	Biographical document
Course register	Board of Trustees proceedings
Diary	Essay
Flyer	Interview
Illustration	Journal article
Journal	Minutes
Legal brief	Note
Letter	Press statement
Map	Song sheets
Memorandum	Speech
Pamphlet	Trial proceedings
Postcard	Poster
Press article	Program
Report or annual report	Transcript
Yearbook	Invitation

Figure 1: Sample material types found among HBCU Founding documents.

Part 3: Selection Criteria and Document Attributes

Learning Objective 2

Recognize the attributes of special collections materials that make them suitable for digitization.

Criteria for the selection of analog materials at HBCU Libraries for digitization follow the protocols adopted during the HBCU-CUL Digitization Initiative. Collections that meet these criteria are potential candidates for digital reproduction.

Questions you should ask:

Value

Does the collection present unique subject matter, which has not been previously digitized? Digitizing research collections that can only be accessed locally will open access to a wider research and scholarly community. Furthermore, collections that comprehensively cover a subject are valuable in digital form and in combination with other similar materials, may have unforeseen uses.

Does the material describe the history or founding of the institution?

Technology allows users to manipulate digitized materials in ways that are not possible with analog materials. For instance, digital images in the collection “A Celebration of the Founding of Historically Black Colleges and Universities” comprise a unique digital resource that describes the history of individual HBCU institutions. They are housed in CONTENTdm – a digital content management system that allows users to create customized views of the images and perform cross-collection searches.

Usage

Is the current demand for the materials in your archive high? Digitized collections can decrease wear on original materials.

Does the collection meet research and teaching needs among HBCU Library Alliance member institutions? Digitized collections are being used across a variety of teaching and learning institutions.

Intellectual Property

Some people, intimidated by the potential risks involved in digital reproduction and an unfamiliarity with the processes involved in investigating copyright for archival materials, will ask why bother. While a primer on intellectual property and copyright law is beyond the scope of this document, there are a few questions that librarians should ask when selecting archival materials for digitization.

First ask, “**Are the materials in the public domain?**” Some considerations involved in determining public domain status include whether the materials are published and registered works, or unpublished and unregistered works. Another question to ask is, “Was the work published in the United States or abroad?” Yet another question to ask is, “Is the author is living or deceased?” Next, “Was the work published with a copyright notice and was registration renewed?” For each of these questions specific dates might be involved, which can make determining whether a work is in the public domain time-consuming. For more information, follow this link to view a chart on Copyright and the Public Domain: <http://www.copyright.cornell.edu/>.

The second question involved in determining copyright status is, **“Are the materials physically owned by the institution or does it have permission to reproduce them?”** The HBCU Digital Collection addresses the issue of ownership by encouraging contributing institutions to digitize materials that they own such as official university correspondence, student catalogs, and other collections for which donor agreements exist.

When you know the identity of the copyright holder of the materials in question, seek out the copyright owner in order to request permission to reproduce the materials digitally. Once a copyright holder or responsible party is located, he or she should sign a written agreement giving the Library permission to digitize the material(s). A sample letter requesting permission to reproduce copyrighted material is available here: <http://www.copyright.cornell.edu/>. Whether you succeed or fail to identify a copyright holder or to get permission to digitize copyrighted materials, you should always keep a detailed account of your activities.

Finally, should anyone have questions or concerns about digital images in your collection they should be able to contact someone at your Library. In some cases, users might contribute additional details about images and this information is valuable to enhancing descriptive metadata about the image. The HBCU Digital Collection contains a statement on the “About” webpage that encourages users to share corrections or additional information about the digital images contained in the collection.

Stability for Digitization

Are the materials suitable for online use? is a useful question when you want to identify constraints that might prevent users from viewing, displaying, downloading, or manipulating the digitized images.

The second question, **“Is the material in good physical condition?”** will aid you in identifying and noting features such as rips, tears, and missing pages of the analog material that might delay or prevent digitization. You may also want to determine whether exposure to light, heat, or flattening (on a flat bed scanner) damage the materials. Because of the tenuous nature of archival materials, some will require special handling and equipment for digital capture.

Is this an original or one of the only copies available? Scanning requires extensive handling of the original document. In some cases a copy may be suitable for digitization. For example, a microfilm copy of a newspaper is more stable than brittle newsprint, but may present different challenges if it was captured poorly.

Metadata

Is metadata available for the materials selected for digitization? All of the images in the HBCU Digital Collection require descriptive metadata. Metadata can be time consuming to locate and create. That is why you should choose only those materials for which descriptive information is available. Preparation for metadata creation may involve identifying people in the Library, on campus, and within the community who are knowledgeable about the collection. It may also involve identifying available print resources about the people, places, and subject matter of the collection.

To ensure that the images are searchable across all contributing libraries participants are asked to provide comparable metadata and comparable collections. It is for this

reason that collections such as GIS data or artist data are not included in this digital collection. Metadata for those types of digital objects could have such different values and characteristics that searching them together with founding documents would be meaningless.

The participants in the HBCU-Cornell University Library Digitization Initiative created at least three types of metadata for each digital image. They created descriptive (metadata using the nine elements above, plus optional elements they deemed necessary), administrative, and technical metadata. The latter two types of metadata are useful in the long-term management of their digital resources.

Impact on the Library and the Institution

Is the scope of the project within the range of staffing and staff expertise?

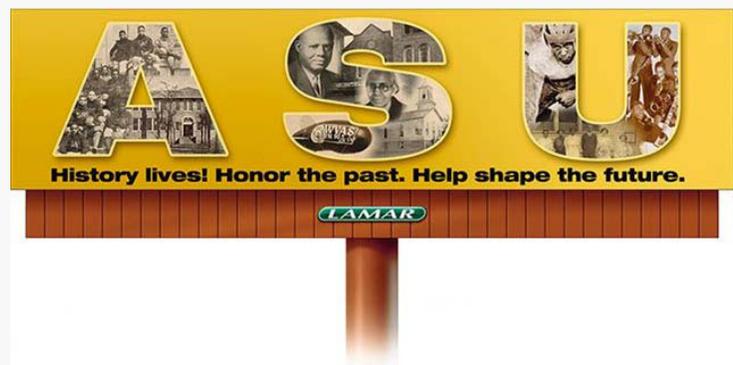
Digitization requires a commitment to the creation, management, and potential long-term preservation of digital assets. It is for this reason that digital imaging projects can be costly to maintain and time-consuming to develop. An important consideration for the institutions involved in the pilot phase of the HBCU-CUL

Digitization Initiative was their ability and willingness to continue producing digital images once the project ended. In some instances, a library may not have the staff, expertise, or budgetary resources to digitize. In those instances, individual institutions may refer questions to the library directors at the institutions that are participating in the HBCU-CUL Digitization Initiative. Several other considerations were made in regards to staffing, project scope, and budgeting.

Preservation

Can you create and maintain over time high-quality master image files?

Several concerns for the digital preservation of archival materials exist. Chief among those is that digital master files can be created and maintained by the library and IT staff at the host institution. Care and management of digital masters includes storage, periodic review of the images to determine whether pixels have been lost over time and migration to newer file formats. Although digital imaging will never be able to address the needs of the original document, it can enable the creation of a surrogate that properly created and preserved will last a long time.



Billboard containing digital images contributed by Alabama State University to the HBCU Digital Collection. The sign is located at the entrance to the campus. Used with permission.

Part 4: Steps in Selecting HBCU Special Collections

There are five steps involved in selecting HBCU special collections to share in the collaborative HBCU Digital Collection. They are as follows:

1. First, you may choose a committee of individuals made up of archivist, librarian and or Library IT specialist, collection users, or researchers. These experts will be able to help guide decision-making about which collections should be nominated, evaluation, and prioritized for scanning and metadata creation based upon a set of pre-defined criteria.

Learning Objective 3

Identify the steps necessary to carry out a material selection process.

- This committee may vote on special collections using a democratic process or by consensus. The Northeast Document Conservation Center Handbook for Digital Projects suggests developing a selection nomination form so that collection stakeholders (e.g. users, donors, etc.) can help weed out problem materials and rank selected materials based on a pre-determined set of criteria.
2. Second, determine whether there are any copyright restrictions which would prevent you from sharing the materials in digital form. Peter Hirtle has devised a table titled **Copyright Term and the Public Domain in the United States**, which you may use to guide your decisions. A copyright permission form is another helpful resource, should you need to request permission to digitize the material. A sample form is provided for you online at <http://copyright.cornell.edu>.
 3. Third, selection decisions are often guided by knowing what you can digitize. These technological considerations require you to understand what features of the original document might prevent a quality capture. For instance, is the photograph in need of repair (i.e. worn or frayed edges, torn, etc.).
 4. Fourth, follow the selection criteria guidelines located below. Rank the special collections based upon the seven criteria outlined in the guidelines. Committee members may use the guidelines in order to decide which collections will be shared in the collaborative HBCU Digital Collection.
 5. Fifth and finally, read the **Digital Image Production** guidelines to ensure that your digital images meet the scanning and metadata guidelines for all HBCU digital founding documents. The procedures can be found online at <http://hbculibraries.org/html/programs.html>. The procedures contain instructions on how to download and install the CONTENTdm Acquisition Client to your computer. The Acquisition client and a username and password are required to upload your digital images and metadata to the online collection.

Learning Objective 4

Follow pre-defined criteria for selecting special collections materials.

Required and Desired Selection Criteria for “A Digital Collection Celebrating the Founding of the Historically Black College and University”

	Required	Required	Desired	Desired	Good
Value	Uniqueness of the material/not found in other digital collections	Material describes the history of the institution	Research value	Extensive coverage of a subject	Revenue generating potential
Usage	Current demand for material is high	Meets research and teaching needs among HBCU Library Alliance member institutions	Meets research and teaching needs nationally and globally	Anticipated use is high	Access opened to a broader community of users
Intellectual Property	Materials are in the public domain	Materials are physically owned by institution, or you have permission of owner	If copyrighted, you have legal authority to digitize either by exemption or law	Attempts have been made to locate copyright holder	A contact person is available to address copyright and intellectual property concerns about digitized content
Stability for Digitization	Content is suitable for online use	Material is in good physical condition	High-resolution and original color may be captured in digital form		
Metadata	Metadata is available	Metadata may be managed, cataloged, and accessible in the HBCU Digital Collection	Metadata that describes this collection is compatible with other HBCU collections		
Impact on the Library/Institution	The scope of the project is within range of staffing	The scope of the project is within range of staff expertise	The scope of the project is within range of budget		
Preservation	A high-quality digital master (TIFF) can be created and maintained.		Digitization will aid in preservation and will not divert resources from conservation efforts		

Online Resources

Cornell University Library Research Department. 2003. "Selection." *Moving Theory into Practice: Digital Imaging Tutorial*. Available online: <http://www.library.cornell.edu/preservation/tutorial/selection/selection-01.html>. Last checked: 11-11-08.

Diane Vogt-O'Connor. 2000. "Part IV. Selection of Materials for Scanning." Maxine E. Kitts, ed. *Handbook for Digital Projects: A Management Tool for Preservation and Access*. Northeast Document Conservation Center: Andover, Ma. Available online: <http://www.nedcc.org/oldnedccsite/digital/dman.pdf>. Last checked: 11-11-08.

Kristine R. Brancolini. "Selecting Research Collections for Digitization: Applying the Harvard Model." Graduate School of Library and Information Science. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. *Library Trends* 48 (4) Spring 2000: Collection development in an Electronic Environment: 783-798. Available online: <http://hdl.handle.net/2142/8310>. Last checked: 11-11-08.

Robert L. Oakley. 1990. "Part E. Determining the Copyright Status of a Work." *Copyright and Preservation: A Serious Problem in Need of a Thoughtful Solution*. Council on Library and Information Resources *Commission on Preservation and Access*. Available online: <http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/oakley/scheme-e.html>. Last checked: 11-11-08.