Guideline 265 - Use of Special Collections

Among the many items acquired and preserved by the Library for the future use in study and research are rare or even unique materials, as well as other items of exceptional fragility or value. Given these conditions, access to and use of such materials must be restricted so that preservation of the materials can be assured.

Library materials deserving of such care are maintained and used under carefully controlled conditions in the Special Collections unit of the Library. This guideline outlines the restrictions placed on access and use of Special Collections materials.

A. Access to the Special Collections:

To prevent their unsupervised use or removal, Special Collections materials are held in restricted, staff-only areas (sometimes called "closed stacks"). Users must remain in the designated reading area and are not permitted to enter the closed stacks to browse or retrieve materials.

1. Upon entering the Special Collections unit, the user must place any and all coats, briefcases, bookbags, parcels, packages, and umbrellas in lockers or at the designated location by the door.
2. Prospective users must show acceptable identification and register by signing the designated form to indicate they understand and agree to abide by the following rules governing use of Special Collections materials.
3. The user may then request to use specific Special Collections materials by submitting a completed materials request form (see sample attached as Appendix A) to the Special Collections desk attendant. Only two items (or one photographic portfolio) may be requested at a time. Requests are not accepted within 15 minutes of the hour the unit closes to the public.
4. All requested materials will be retrieved by a staff member and delivered to the user at a reading table. Note: Use of some Special Collections materials may be refused because:
   - of restrictions imposed by deposit or gift agreements, or for reasons of confidentiality (e.g., certain record series within the University Archives). Staff will inform readers accordingly.
   - the Library holds a duplicate in another more accessible and appropriate format (e.g., the Baltimore Sun and UMBC Retriever are also available on microfilm). Staff may make exceptions according to users' particular research needs.

B. Rules governing handling and use of special collections:

1. Materials must be used in the designated reading area under staff surveillance. Users may not remove materials from the assigned reading table except to return them to the desk attendant.
2. Notes may be taken only with a pencil or computer. Use of ink is not permitted; no type of pen or ink may be placed on the reading table.
3. Open all books and albums carefully, paying close attention to the condition of the spine and binding.
4. Materials must be retained in their original order (e.g., loose pages in a folder, folders within an archival container) as received by the user.
5. Users are not allowed to write upon, mark, lean upon, trace, fold, or otherwise misuse materials which have been provided for their use. Electronic scanning may not be performed without specific permission. Careless handling of materials may lead to the denial of user privileges.
6. It is the user's responsibility to handle materials with deliberate care and stay alert to the possibility of damage. Report to staff immediately any and all perceived damage such as tears, breaks, folds, or abrasions.
7. Special Collections staff will check all returned materials for completeness and condition upon return.

C. Additional rules for handling photographic items:

1. Users may look at one portfolio at a time.
2. White gloves must be worn at all times. These may be obtained from a staff member.
3. Handle prints one at a time. Use both hands at all times and never touch the emulsion side of a photograph.
4. Do not slide one print upon another. Prints must be kept face up and flat on the table.
5. Do not remove a print from its mat, sleeve, or protective packaging. If this is necessary for research purposes, one of the staff members will do it for you.
6. If prints must be stacked, do so by size, are stacked, never placing large prints over small ones. Take care to return prints in their original order as received.

D. Photocopying and photo-reproduction procedures

1. The Curator of Photography and Special Collections is authorized to determine what may be photocopied. Some materials may be too fragile to be photocopied.
2. All photocopying will be done by Library staff and charged to the requesting user.
3. Photographs may not be photocopied. Users may request that a photographic reproduction be made at their expense (see schedule of costs Appendix B - paper copy in Library Administration). The Curator of Photography and Special Collections will determine if the request can be supplied without risk to the original, and without violating copyright or other agreements. Researchers are not permitted to use their own photographic equipment unless special permission is obtained in advance.

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