

Creating Access to HBCU Library Alliance Archives: Needs, Capacity, and Technical Planning

A Focus Group Study

Sharon Ferguson Freeman

March 2022



Meharry College, Nashville, Tenn.



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About the Author

Sharon Ferguson Freeman holds a doctorate in professional studies in higher education leadership from Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi. After earning her bachelor's degree in mathematics and computer science from Tougaloo College, Freeman began her career in higher education as a systems analyst in the James Herbert White Library at Mississippi Valley State University, where she currently serves as the assistant vice president for institutional research and effectiveness. She has taught research methods at Delta State University while also serving as a competitive grant program evaluator for the US Department of Education.

With a focus on informed decision-making, Freeman has extensive experience in the fields of strategic planning, data analysis, institutional effectiveness, outcomes assessment, and higher education quality assurance. She currently serves as an evaluator and university liaison for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, the regional accrediting body for southeastern states.

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Sincere appreciation is extended to the Council on Library and Information Resources and the HBCU Library Alliance for the opportunity to participate in this study. Thank you Sandra, Becca, and Christa for supporting me, Portia, and Synatra every step of the way. I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the deans, directors, and library professionals throughout the HBCU library community who agreed to share their time and experiences for the benefit of this study.

Foreword

As stewards of the cultural and historical records of African American experience, libraries at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have a longstanding tradition of developing collections with broad significance for a wide variety of research, teaching, and creative endeavors. These libraries' collections contain rare and unique materials with the potential to enrich current narratives about the history of American education; the scholarship, activism, and public service of HBCU presidents, faculty, and alumni; slavery, World War II, and the civil rights movement; the activities of African American religious organizations and leaders; African and African diaspora studies; and more. Chronicling nearly 300 years of the lived experiences and legacies of African Americans, these materials are vital to enriching our understanding of the achievements, influence, and global impact of African American people and communities.

Despite their unparalleled significance, substantial proportions of special collections and archives at HBCU libraries are not easily accessible to campus communities and the public. Significant talent and funds will be required to assess, house, describe, and digitize “hidden” materials so that they are widely discoverable and useful. This publication aims to bring long-deserved attention to this need and to make the case for large-scale investments in this critical work.

In 2020, building upon a national partnership formalized in 2019, the HBCU Library Alliance and the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) received funding from the Mellon Foundation to:

- build consensus around and articulate common values, priorities, and needs for describing and managing special and archival collections for the HBCU Library Alliance community; and
- document basic, minimal requirements that could inform a sustainable shared infrastructure for creating access to HBCU Library Alliance members' archival collections.

The partners used this funding to hire three experts to pursue two parallel streams of research activity, published as separate reports. Presented in the following pages, the first of these efforts involved a series of online focus groups with HBCU library directors and deans planned and facilitated by Sharon Freeman. Through a detailed analysis of the discussion transcripts, Dr. Freeman articulates the significance of special collections and archives for the institutional missions and aspirations of HBCU library administrators and identifies some of the obstacles and challenges affecting access to their materials. Her findings document a high level of interest in pursuing opportunities for collaboration among HBCU libraries to build capacity for

preserving and providing access to rare and unique collections. Participants' strong enthusiasm for working together, tempered by an appreciation of the complex challenges each organization faces, is reflected in their own words throughout the report.

The second part of the research project was undertaken by Portia Hopkins and Synatra Smith. Dr. Hopkins and Dr. Smith conducted a series of in-depth interviews with a select group of library staff at five HBCUs. These conversations enabled the team to formulate a series of recommendations for practical steps that HBCU libraries can take toward a shared approach for creating access. Because of the need to protect the privacy of the interview participants, the full report produced by Drs. Hopkins and Smith will remain unpublished. The team's major findings and recommendations have instead been appended in an executive summary (Appendix E).

This publication is designed to position the HBCU Library Alliance to combine resources and expertise within a focused, collaborative effort to assess, describe, and digitize special collections and archival materials with the potential for high scholarly and public impact. It is produced primarily for the benefit of directors, deans, and campus administrators at HBCU libraries; future funders of HBCU libraries; and the HBCU Library Alliance leadership. Secondary audiences include academic library administrators, digital library practitioners, and funders interested in supporting large-scale collaborative efforts to preserve and create access to distinctive collections.

The conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the urgency for making digitized archival collections widely available for research and online learning. Furthermore, increased national recognition of the importance of HBCUs in American life and culture has underscored the need for digitized special collections and archives that are broadly representative and accurately and authentically contextualized.

The HBCU Library Alliance and CLIR remain committed to working together to address this need. We hope that readers will heed the voices of the library leaders captured here and join us in advocating for the preservation of HBCU collections and for accelerating access to primary source materials that center Black lives and histories.

—*Charles Henry, President
CLIR*

—*Sandra Phoenix, Executive Director
HBCU Library Alliance*

Executive Summary

The key findings from this study relate to describing and articulating the significance of special and archival collections for HBCU libraries and their communities; the management and capacity of archives and special collections; and these libraries' values, priorities, needs, and aspirations. These findings also reveal additional information related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on HBCUs along with broader topics of significance, such as the trend toward having to share physical library space with other programs and services, that were not anticipated when the project began.

Description and Significance

Library deans and directors from 32 institutions participated in this study, representing about one-third of all HBCUs. Many of these participants describe their archives and special collections as containing materials documenting their historical affiliation with churches, African American history, the civil rights movement, and their own institutional histories. Most see the significance of their collections as serving the institution itself rather than extended communities. Still, some libraries' archives and special collections have nationwide and international appeal.

Management and Capacity

Almost all deans and directors expressed that they do not have enough resources to effectively maintain and manage their archives and special collections. This is evident in the number of comments related to staff shortages, inadequate space, and reliance on grant funding.

Values

Although the deans and directors tended to believe that their administrators shared their same values, they often reported that these values were not always displayed in the administrators' actions. Instead, they reported that administrators generally placed the library, and archives and special collections in particular, low on their list of priorities.

Priorities, Needs, and Aspirations

When asked about their highest priorities, deans and directors identified a desire for additional staff and adequate space. Others said digitization of their collections was a priority, as was the expansion of their collections. The need for a designated endowment to be used exclusively to support archives and special collections was also an aspiration.

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the way most libraries operated. Many libraries had to close their doors and limit in-person services. However, a few libraries were able to provide access to their partially digitized collections. Still, most deans and directors adjusted to their limitations by providing their services through electronic means. While a few libraries were able to provide access to their partially digitized collections, a more common service was to scan requested items and send them by email. For those libraries, that process was labor-intensive and emphasized the need for bulk digitization of whole collections rather than digitization on demand. Other libraries used the Zoom online meeting platform to share artwork and other artifacts. In general, the deans and directors believe everything will go back to normal when their campuses fully reopen. They intend to continue using some of their adjusted methods of delivering services as necessary.

Additional Challenges and Opportunities

For some participants, the focus group conversations were a rare opportunity to discuss library needs among their peers, and many articulated serious challenges in areas beyond preserving and providing access to special collections and archives. One finding was that some libraries are losing their space to other programs and services on campus. They are sharing their space with writing centers, tutoring centers, and sometimes even non-academic service areas such as the campus police department and information technology services. This trend does not bode well for some archives and special collections since the care of these materials requires substantial space.

There was general consensus that there is a need to educate presidents and administrators about the significance of archives and special collections so that these collections can get the necessary recognition and support. The issue of diversity, equity, and inclusion within organizational culture surfaced in addition to ongoing references to HBCUs losing their collections to well-resourced predominantly White institutions. Still, in the face of those issues, some deans and directors praised the support they have received from the HBCU Library Alliance. Overall, they hope to be able to continue this conversation; gain better exposure; and create ongoing, meaningful advocacy for their collections.

Institutional Categories

Institutions were categorized by geographic location, degree level, type, and size. None of these characteristics appeared to determine participants' responses. Institutions representing various categories shared some of the same experiences when considering the availability of resources, their priorities and needs, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The size of the institution did not factor into the responses when participants were asked if there were enough institutional resources to effectively maintain and manage archives and special collections. Although it may have been anticipated that participants from larger institutions would have answered in the affirmative, this was often not the case.

When asked whether their administration shared their same values about archives and special collections, participants from institutions of all sizes responded similarly. While most provided a “yes and no” response, some participants said “no,” or indicated that the answer depends on the administration at the time.

In terms of priorities, needs, and aspirations, participants’ responses were again represented across institution sizes. Participants from practically all institutions expressed the need for more staff and space, and for space better configured to accommodate both people and collections. Some also indicated that digitization was a priority for their institutions. Overall, there was no single response attributable to any institution type or even institution size. Instead, more common ground was found among the responses of the participants than there were differences. This suggests that although institutions may differ in terms of whether they are public or private, small or large, two-year or four-year, they tend to be faced with similar limitations and challenges that are relevant to each of them.

HBCU Library Focus Group and the ITHAKA Survey Reports

Recent nationwide academic library surveys conducted by ITHAKA S+R found that the highest priority for most libraries is student success. Few institutions indicated that they intend to devote additional staffing and budgets to rare, special, and distinctive collections (Wolff 2017). This finding is also true for HBCU libraries. The support HBCU libraries receive, which is usually inadequate, tends to be geared toward academic programs and less toward archives and special collections. HBCU libraries already face institutional funding challenges in general, so unless the archives and special collections are tied to academic programs or accreditation, there appears to be little indication that their level of priority will improve.

Nationally, about 75% of library deans and directors believe they and their direct supervisors share the same values (Wolff 2017). Only about a third of participants in this study could say the same. Many indicated they likely share the same values as their supervisors, but they do not see those values reflected in the financial support they receive.

In terms of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, most institutions indicated on the ITHAKA survey that there was no change in employees working in the areas of archives, rare books, and special collections, although some had to furlough employees and eliminate positions (Frederick and Wolff-Eisenberg 2020). HBCU library deans and directors did not report having to furlough or eliminate positions related to archives and special collections. To the contrary, many are still fighting for a single archivist position to serve in this capacity. Library professionals at HBCUs offering services in archives and special collections tend to already have other key roles, so the libraries did not report having to furlough or eliminate positions.

Recommendations

It appears that much more work needs to be done as it relates to archives and special collections at HBCU libraries. This observation was made based on repeated comments by the focus group participants passionately expressing the need to continue the conversation,

educate administrators, and invest in archives and special collections so that they can be preserved and honored for future generations.

This study appears to be one of few that document the needs of HBCU libraries as they relate to archives and special collections. The challenges that have surfaced definitely warrant a response, and this response should prompt ongoing formal studies to follow up on progress over time.

Introduction

Strengthening the overall capacity of libraries at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)—the staffing, space, collections, equipment, and other resources necessary to support research and learning—is no doubt critical. Even more critical, however, is the capacity of HBCU libraries to preserve and create access to their culturally rich archives, for these materials hold the potential to have even more widespread and profound impacts on the creation of knowledge. The ability of HBCU libraries to appropriately archive these materials for preservation and access can be limited and is inconsistent across institutions. Therefore, it is important to understand the current needs and capacities of HBCU libraries, as well as the technical planning occurring on their campuses.

The HBCU Library Alliance (Alliance) has set out to better understand the capacity of HBCU libraries as it relates to their archives. The Alliance aims to identify common values, priorities, and needs for existing archival collections. The Alliance also intends to gain a better understanding of the technical capacities of these libraries in order to anticipate shared technical solutions.

To maximize this opportunity, the Alliance has selected the focus group research methodology to achieve its goals. Deans and directors of HBCU libraries from institutions varying in size, location, and type were invited to participate in these focus group sessions.

Literature Review

Academic libraries, like all other campus organizations, deal with challenges and opportunities that emerge as the higher education landscape evolves over time. This focus group study references a national library survey administered in 2016 by ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to helping the academic community use digital technologies to preserve scholarly records and to advance research and teaching in sustainable ways. The ITHAKA survey examined strategy and leadership issues from the perspective of 722 academic librarians at not-for-profit, four-year academic institutions across the United States. Baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral institutions participated in the survey (Wolff 2017).

The survey points to several key findings related to academic libraries that provide a general understanding of the challenges and opportunities that academic libraries face. For instance, roughly half of the ITHAKA survey respondents anticipate that they will increase the allocation of resources in teaching, learning, and research services. Roughly 80% of the respondents indicated their highest priority was supporting student success. In relation to that priority, libraries

are becoming more interested in digitization and e-resources while becoming less reliant on print resources. As a result, library directors recognize they must shift their collecting practices and user services to match the need for new types of resources to support student success, teaching, learning, and research.

The ITHAKA survey also addressed challenges and opportunities related to special collections in academic libraries. When asked if their library is systematically increasing the staffing and budget devoted to rare, special, and other distinctive collections, just under 20% of bachelor's and master's institutions responded in the affirmative, while less than 40% of doctoral institutions indicated the same. Of all institution types, about 35% indicated they would add employees in this area (Wolff 2017).

When survey respondents rated specific library functions as high or very high priority, the differences were stark when comparing results from bachelor's and master's institutions to those from doctoral institutions. Less than 45% of bachelor's and master's institutions reported that building and maintaining unique special collections for research was a high or very high priority. This is in contrast to almost 80% of doctoral institutions reporting that building and maintaining unique special collections was a high or very high priority (Wolff 2017).

In a more recent nationwide survey, Frederick and Wolff-Eisenberg (2020) identified current challenges and opportunities for academic libraries as they coped with the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost three-fourths of library directors reported that they and their direct supervisors share the same vision for the library. In terms of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, 75% of bachelor's institutions, 65% of master's institutions, and 63% of doctoral institutions reported they are developing a new or refined strategic direction for the library in support of distance instruction or research, or both.

When asked about changes to employee positions in the areas of archives, rare books, and special collections, about a quarter of institutions reported having to furlough employees. About 15% of institutions eliminated vacant positions whereas 5% eliminated filled positions. Overall, roughly 63% of respondents reported no change at in employment at their libraries (Frederick and Wolff-Eisenberg 2020).

Although the library surveys conducted by Wolff and by Frederick and Wolff-Eisenberg have served as a source for understanding current trends and issues in academic libraries, they provide limited insight on what is occurring at HBCUs. This focus group study examines some of the current challenges and opportunities that exist for HBCUs in the areas of archives and special collections. The focus group format was selected because of its suitability for bringing together subject-matter experts to identify common values, priorities, and needs for existing archival collections.

Methodology

A focus group study is a form of qualitative research that is used to collect information from several individuals who can contribute to a shared understanding of a research problem. It is similar to a group interview in which participants are well-informed about the research topic. The sessions are conducted by a skilled interviewer in a con-

senting, relaxed environment. The interviewer asks a few questions and allows the participants to interact naturally by stating their views and drawing out the views of fellow participants (Creswell 2008; Denscombe 2008; Gall, Gall, and Borg 2003; Gay, Mills, and Airasian 2009; Krueger and Casey 2000).

Focus group research has become more popular over time and has been applied across various disciplines including the social sciences and applied sciences, and in all levels of education. This methodology is also used in conjunction with other quantitative research methods to produce a mixed methods approach to conducting studies (Cohen et al. 2004; Glaser 1999; Gwyer 2015; Nyumba et al. 2018; Onwuegbuzi et al. 2009; Poma et al. 2011).

The focus groups for this study took place online. Participants included mostly deans and directors at HBCUs, but a few other library professionals were also included. The sessions were designed specifically to elicit responses from participants about their archives and special collections. The intent was to build consensus around and articulate common values, priorities, and needs for describing and managing special and archival collections for the HBCU library community. It was anticipated that these discussions would provide a better general understanding of the significance of institutional archives and special collections and the related needs and aspirations at HBCU libraries.

Pre-Focus Group Work

Pre-focus group work encompassed the following activities:

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

IRB approval was obtained from the IRB at Mississippi Valley State University (MVSU) to conduct this study. The approval form was signed by the MVSU IRB Chair, Catherine Singleton-Walker, on March 29, 2021. This approval essentially states that this study uses the focus group research methodology and that participants will not be harmed through their participation. This approval also indicates that participants will consent to participate in this study and that they can choose to stop participating at any given time. Appendix A contains the MVSU IRB approval letter and accompanying human subjects application. Appendix B contains the focus group consent form.

Participant Identification

The executive director of the HBCU Library Alliance contacted deans and directors from HBCU libraries to identify individuals interested in participating in the focus group sessions. There were 33 participants from 32 institutions covering 13 states as listed in Table 1. As shown in Table 2, about 9% of institutions that participated in the focus groups were two-year colleges. The other 91% included institutions that offered bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees (Table 4). The group of participants was split evenly between public and private institutions, as shown in Table 3. Enrollment sizes ranged from very small to large based on the Carnegie classification categories in Table 5. A list of participating institutions is included in Appendix C.

Table 1. Number of Institutions by State

STATE	INSTITUTIONS
Alabama	5
Arkansas	1
Florida	1
Georgia	2
Louisiana	1
Maryland	2
Mississippi	3
Missouri	1
North Carolina	4
Pennsylvania	1
South Carolina	5
Tennessee	4
Texas	2
TOTAL:	32

Table 2. Number of Institutions by Level

INSTITUTION LEVEL	INSTITUTIONS
2-year	3
4-year, graduate, postgraduate	29
TOTAL:	32

Table 3. Number of Institutions by Type

INSTITUTION TYPE	INSTITUTIONS
Private	16
Public	16
TOTAL:	32

Table 4. Number of Institutions by Highest Available Degree

STATE	INSTITUTIONS
Associate's	3
Bachelor's	7
Master's	12
Doctoral	10
TOTAL:	32

Table 5. Number of Institutions by Carnegie Classification Sizes

SIZE	FTE ENROLLMENT	INSTITUTIONS
Very Small	500 or less	3
Small	501 to 1,999	12
Medium	2,000 to 4,999	10
Large	5,000 to 9,999	7
TOTAL:		32

Scheduling of Focus Group Sessions

The focus group facilitator compiled a list of dates from which participants could choose. Sessions were available on Wednesdays and Thursdays during the months of May, June, and July 2021, with options for morning and afternoon sessions.

Formal Invitations to Participate

Formal invitations to participate in focus group sessions were emailed to each participant. The invitation included a welcome message, the agreed-upon date of the focus group session, a statement regarding electronic consent forms, and a hyperlink to the assigned Zoom meeting. Consent forms (Appendix B) were emailed to each participant individually. Participants had the choice of completing them electronically through Survey Monkey or signing a hardcopy and emailing a scanned copy to the focus group facilitator. Reminders were sent via email one week and one day prior to the session date. Each reminder included details and directions for accessing the meeting using a Zoom hyperlink.

Focus Group Work

A total of five focus group sessions were conducted on May 5, May 6, May 12, June 30, and July 28, 2021. Each focus group lasted about 90 minutes. Participants had the option of participating with their video enabled or disabled. All participants were audio recorded for the purposes of preparing transcriptions of each conversation for later analysis.

A prepared script and format were used to conduct each focus group session. The welcome statement, consent statement, information about the focus group, ground rules, session logistics, introductions, and icebreaker were covered prior to launching into the question set.

The question set consisted of six primary questions with additional probing questions that could be used in case there was a need to elicit additional information. All six primary questions were asked in all five focus groups. There was no occasion where the use of the probing questions was necessary.

The Focus Group Discussion Guide, which includes the session format and the related scripts for each component, is provided in Appendix D.

Presentation of Findings

The findings from this focus group research are organized according to major question categories derived from the original HBCU Library Alliance and Council on Library and Information Resources proposal for the study. These categories include sections that describe and articulate the significance of special and archival collections; the management and capacity of archives and special collections; and library values, priorities, needs, and aspirations as they relate to archives and special collections. The questions also elicited responses related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as broader topics of significance to the participants that may not have been anticipated when the study was planned.

The findings are presented in a five-part format that includes: (1) the heading or general question category, (2) the question, (3) the response category, (4) a response category summary, and (5) a sampling of responses. To ensure participants' anonymity, these excerpts are followed by three descriptors to categorize the institutions by level of award, size, and institution type. The level of award descriptors use associate's, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral categories to indicate the highest degree that can be earned at the institution. The size descriptors use Carnegie classifications of very small, small, medium, and large. The institution type descriptors specify private or public to indicate the major source of funding and support for the institution. Not all responses from focus group participants are included in this section. Instead, a sampling of responses is presented to provide support for the response categories used to analyze this information.

1. Description and Significance of Archives and Special Collections

Considering the content of your archives and special collections, what do you think is their significance for your institution? What is their significance outside of your institution?

Church Affiliation

Of the 32 institutions represented in this focus group study, half are private institutions, and half are public institutions. Almost half of deans and directors from the private institutions described their archives and special collections as having affiliations with African American churches.

(This institution) ... was started with the (church) women's [group from] the White church; the (church) women decided that ... they needed a place for the women to be cultured. So that's how it started. —*Bachelor's, Very Small, Private*

It is based on the (church). We have a large collection of the (church) materials and the foundation of the church ... We also have a nice department of religion that teaches religion. So, you have a large number of (church) ministers, or those individuals who aspire to become a part of the (church) to come and to use that special collection.... It is a very rich collection, as well as having the papers of the former bishops of the ... church and the college of bishops.
—*Master's, Small, Private*

Not only do we collect the history of (this town), but we also collect information regarding the work of the (church) among African Americans from the start. So, we have like a dual function, and it is really something that is used quite often. Our students, once they come to school ... they do have to come to the library. We have a small museum, which starts talking about when we first started. Actually, it even goes a little before that, because before we bought the property, this was where (historic person) was for about two years during his time as a slave.... It's really interesting because the students find the museum quite, I guess, informative. —*Master's, Small, Private*

Civil Rights

When discussing the significance of their archives and special collections, the following participants provided descriptions of their collections that contain artifacts from the civil rights movement. The excerpts include statements from deans and directors at one associate's institution, one bachelor's institution, and one master's institution. There was an even mixture of responses from both public and private institutions.

[This institution] was a part of the civil rights movement ... the (person's name) library is a part of our campus. We have the (formal name) papers. I know that his granddaughter has a website, but we have some papers. And he was a Black congressman from (time period). We have the truth and reconciliation papers here ... there was only one other one, and that was in (country).... So we have some stuff in the archives that needs to be made public. —*Bachelor's, Very Small, Private*

We have (this town's) voting rights archives that's closely related to (this town's) bus boycott.... But it's basically an archive that's centered around (town) and the civil rights movement in (this town). So, all of the people who were necessary to the movement in (this town) (person's name) and those little-known heroes, (person's name), who was actually the first person to refuse to give up her seat. All of that is located in our archives. It's a rich little archives. And then we have the president ... who was also active within that movement, but he had to do it on the back-end because he was a president. The school was named after his daughter.... We have her archives that she wants held at (this institution). That's just very, very prolific, and people are



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King, date unknown. Silver gelatin developing-out print. Photograph by P. H. Polk. Courtesy of Tuskegee University Archives, P. H. Polk Family Collection.

really looking to get their hands on it to see what he actually did and all of his contributions, not only to the college, for the state, but just around in general. —*Associate's, Medium, Public*

I know many of our communities have experienced urban renewal and gentrification. And so just being able lately to document and have documentation on the history of that community, how this historical Black community was founded, having historical information about (this town), how faculty members, people who work at (this institution) actually built this community around the university and being able to have documentation on that, [including] photographs, and we have a rich photograph collection. We were able to get photographs—not only the early history of (this institution), but actually [works by] a well-known African American photographer, his family donated a photograph to (this institution) that documents not only the Black experience in (town), but he traveled with several of the people who were involved in the civil rights movement. So, we have some of those collections from his photographs as well... I think about the social activism that's on our campus ... it's in our newspapers that kind of highlight the campus life and the social life and the community life of our students. So, I think all of that is very important and very unique to (this institution). —*Master's, Small, Private*

African History

The collections at the following institutions have, in part, artifacts related to African history. Two institutions are master's degree granting institutions, and one is a bachelor's degree institution. One is public and two are private.

Our collection covers the institutional history as well as the students and faculty. But it was designed and developed to tell the story of our progress from Africa to America. So, I think it covers actually not just local (this town) but the nation and on an international level ... we have everything from the Harlem Renaissance ... as well as African materials. And it was built with the intent of encouraging African American students and to show our progress from Africa and through the struggles and persistence in America.

—*Master's, Small, Private*

We have an African collection of African artifacts that was donated—think it was 2015, before my time. I think that's most of what we have from the community aspect.

—*Bachelor's, Small, Private*

Our collection is important. One of several artifacts in our collection was donated to us by (person's name). He was well-known for his travels to Africa, and so we have a lot of indigenous pieces that tell about African American history and ancestry and some of our native traditions. Secondly, ... we have many items and pieces that tell about this city.... And at the same time, a lot of those documents are political. And so, it tells about education being available to minorities across (this state) ... not just on the city, more or less. And so that's the significance of our collections.

—*Master's, Medium, Public*

African American History

At least eight deans and directors indicated their archives and special collections contained particularly notable artifacts related to African American history. Although all institutions reported having documentation of their own histories in their collections, which can certainly be considered part of African American history, these institutions have additional artifacts and collections related to well-known African American historical figures and other key events in African American history. When considering civil rights as part of African American history, participants from all institution types mentioned having materials significant to African American history.

We get requests all the time from people working on dissertations, particularly those who are ... talking about segregation and higher education and all of those things. Our article collection is significant nationally, because it plugs in a gap where you talk about a history of higher education. ... A piece is missing because our archives is not well established. It's here and it functions, but there's a lot of work that needs to be done.... I've made it a habit of us doing some type of archival programming, where we bring in exhibits for faculty, staff, and students to get an understanding.

I think we've had our third iteration of an exhibit working with one of our former professors in the history department. We've brought in at least three exhibits to ... broaden the education of our students here.... One of our most significant [exhibits] was *The Color of Money*, [which] was all about money that was used by the Southern States during the slavery years. Each state had their own currency, and most of the time, the currency featured pictures of African Americans in the field. That [exhibit] was well attended and was well publicized in the local news. So those are the kinds of things that we have going on here. —*Master's, Medium, Public*

We have the (formal name) collection.... [He was] a photographer, and we have an outstanding collection of his work; ... he went over to be the assistant secretary of war for Negro soldiers or something like that.... We were very blessed to have had people over the years who saw the wisdom to collect and preserve, and because of that, we have an extensive collection. The archives are heavily used locally, but even more so internationally. We get inquiries, not only within the United States, but outside as well. —*Doctoral, Medium, Private*

Institutional History, Presidents, and Alumni

Deans and directors from each institution indicated their archives and special collections included documentation of their institution's history, and some contained a collection on each president. Their collections also included information on former students, faculty, employees, and alumni, especially in the form of yearbooks and printed programs. At some institutions, this is the only type of information contained in their collections, while other collections extend into areas such as community history, state history, African American history, and the civil rights movement. These institutional histories are integral to African American history. The following excerpts describe the range of collections contained in the archives and special collections at both public and private institutions.

We have a small archive as well. And we have information that pertains to, of course, the institution and information on accreditations, presidential correspondence and so forth, board meetings, catalogs, handbooks, and things of that nature. We do have a large photographic collection, and we've gotten grants to work with that to develop it, [putting] the photos in sleeves and so forth. It will really be centered toward the school as opposed to outside use. —*Doctoral, Small, Private*

We also have a ... scholar repository; that's the digital repository, and that repository tells the story of our faculty and student research collection, and our college, university activities; there are commencement programs. And one facet of it is the collection of yearbooks.... The yearbooks are used riercely because a lot of alumni want to find out infor-



An unidentified group of men. Silver gelatin developing-out print. Unknown photographer, n.d. Courtesy of Xavier University of Louisiana.

mation about their relatives and that kind of thing. They're used very much.... A lot of times, we have at least 8,000 hits to the repository for (this institution). So, we were really proud of that repository in which we work with other institutions. —*Master's, Large, Public*

The significance of it is more so to the college. Everything in our archives is all things (this institution), all things alumni, all things past presidents, commencement addresses, yearbooks; anything that was done relative to (this institution) is in our archives. We have alumni all over the country, so when, unfortunately, someone dies, their children will normally call and ask for pictures.... I just find it tasking sometimes because their archives are in—I don't want to say disarray—but they're not as organized as they could be. And that's why I was saying, getting them digitized so that folks could just access them online versus having to call us, [to] dig and find them, scan them, and send them. That's a chore sometimes, but the significance is definitely to the college. But then as I said, because we have alumni around the country, I think ... it has a worldwide appeal as well, because alumni also send their work. So, they send copies of their books to us; they send copies of their artwork or their prints or their scholarly works that they do. They'll send it to us and for that reason, I'm creating an alumni section in the library. So, students can see the variety of talent and scholarship that the alumni provide.

So that will be something that they can get motivated from and hopefully aspire to become a part of that collection in the future as well. —*Bachelor's, Small, Private*

2. Management and Capacity

Are there enough institutional resources to effectively maintain and manage your archives and special collections?

Yes ... and Sometimes, Yes and No

Only two library deans definitively stated they have adequate resources to effectively manage and maintain their archives and special collections. The others stated both yes and no. In some respects, they felt they had adequate resources, but ended up explaining more about what they were lacking. Of the participants who indicated they had nearly adequate resources, three were from doctoral-level institutions while one was from a small bachelor's institution.

The following excerpts include their perceptions of adequate resources to effectively maintain and manage archives and special collections.

I would say at (this institution), it is a yes. And I know we do have staff. We could use, always use, more staff as well. I think [that is] prevalent at all the libraries. We are a second thought, maybe a fifth thought when it comes to allocating funds to support the library and the archives, and the museum is even further down. So, yes, we could always use more funds. We could use funds. We ran out of space to house the collections. We have a website, of course, so you can easily search us, which means we get more than inquiries, but the answer is yes and no for (this institution).

—*Doctoral, Medium, Private*

We have adequate space. We have a beautiful office and facility for archives. We have the entire fifth floor as an archive floor, and we even have a nice exhibit room for archives, but we don't have enough staff. We have one archivist, and I did negotiate and get a graduate assistant this summer that will be with us through May. And I borrowed an intern from (local) college that also helped her out.... We still need a technology specialist, and we need that everywhere. We need personnel up there for digitizing. We have a huge collection. We need some things digitized at (this institution) because we have all dissertations, all theses. All projects for the entire institution are sent to archives, so we need some help. —*Doctoral, Large, Public*

I think we do need additional equipment to help us with that process, because there is a lot of work into that. And we need more scanners and things of that nature, we do. And we are successful in what we have, but I think we could really grow faster if we had just a few more resources there.... It'll be a little easier for people to go online and see what we have.... We are low on staff. Actually, we are lacking in all areas. Our staff helps out a lot in our archives collection. We only have one staff member. The librarian just recently retired.... So we're looking for someone to replace

in that area, as well as our reference area. So that pulls the other ones to those areas as well as our own. So, it's a very, very tedious situation that we have. So, as far as me, some days I split my week; some days I may be in archives; the next day I may be in reference to help cover those areas to assist our staff. Now we have very good staff, but even with the staff, you know, we need that extra help.... One of my biggest problems, as I stated, how we move from one area to the next area. And like (co-participant) said, due to the pandemic, we were not able to hire anyone. We have a lot of open positions out there; it's just a matter of getting them filled. Some of our areas as of now, just like our own special collection, there's only one staff person. —*Doctoral, Medium, Public*

No, There's a Staff Shortage

Almost 90% of the deans and directors participating in the focus groups indicated they did not have adequate institutional resources to effectively maintain their archives and special collections. Institutions across the board—both public and private, from associate's level to doctoral level—indicated that they have staff shortages. Many do not have an archivist at all, while others have library professionals who take on the responsibility of maintaining archives and special collections in addition to their primary duties.

We definitely are short-staffed. I am the only person that works in the archives. The archives are actually behind the library. [The archives are] not far, but I'm the only one that has a key.... I think [the administration] understands the shortcomings that we have for the archives, but right now there's just too many other, what they, I'm sure what they call, more important projects and priorities that need to happen, but I've been constantly letting my VP know I need help. I really need help.... I'm the only person for the past couple of years, [and] I've only had one staff person. Yes, we're a small campus. Yes, we don't have a lot of students, you know. When I say not a lot, I'm talking under 500, but how can one person manage the library? —*Associate's, Very Small, Public*

I concur with everybody. There are not enough institutional resources or bodies on hand to do what needs to be done relative to preserving our archives. They are in a separate room.... Yeah, they are accessible, but we don't have a dedicated staff for them. And when we have work-study students during the semester, we may have them do some sorting and labeling and that sort of thing ... But no, we do not have a dedicated person. And that's the key thing. We just work on it on the fly when we have some downtime or when we notice as we're going to retrieve something. So, it's a work in progress. And I really ... wish that we were able to digitize a lot of it because our community, our administrators, our alumni do request materials from our special collections often. —*Bachelor's, Small, Private*



Early photograph of the library. Silver gelatin developing-out print. Unknown photographer, n.d. Courtesy of the James G. Peeler Photograph Collection, Inez Moore Parker Archives at Johnson C. Smith University.

And so, about the African and African American studies program, everybody's excited about that. But what about the collection that's going to support those things? Can you get excited about that? Can you get excited about the funding that is necessary? It's very tiresome to continue to be advocates of these collections, because we know how valuable and enriching it is to not only our university, but to the kind of community that we'll often refer to.... But it's not important enough for you to support it. It's not important enough to you to see that we need manpower to process these collections so [they] can be even bigger and better. That fight has been a fight since I've been at (this institution). [For] all my colleagues, that has been the fight. And at some point, that conversation has to change.... If we're going to contribute to helping people understand who we are as HBCUs, who we can serve in our community [and] who we've been serving in higher education, then we have to support our archives. We have to support our library. That's where the records are, and they are at risk every day.
—*Master's, Small, Private*

No, We Rely Too Much on Grants

Library deans and directors from seven master's-level institutions indicated that support for their archives and special collections is tied to grants or soft money. This means the institution itself generally does not provide a dedicated budget line to support the effective maintenance of its archives and special collections. As

a result, these institutions must rely on grant-writing or are encouraged to write grants to get the funding they need to operate at desired levels. Here are some instances where institutions, all master's level and mostly private, share their thoughts as they relate to grants.

It takes time; it can become tiresome and burdensome. And then of course you have to have people on your team who have the skill set to write grants because it takes a lot. You just can't throw a grant in overnight. And so, you have to think about those things. And personally, in my library, ... we do our best, but I don't have the person who has the skill set. And then when we are asked to go to sponsored programs for assistance ... sometimes it seems that it's difficult getting assistance from them.... So, it's a lot, it's just more than writing a grant.... We need to be brought to the table, and that's not happening. —*Master's, Small, Public*

I want to go on the record too....When it's time to uplift the library or the collections or the exhibits and work that we do, everybody is the champion of the library at that moment. But when it's time to do some really innovative things with our collection, it's like crickets in the room trying to get money. And that has always been the fight. I say we have been very successful writing grants, but that can be tedious and tiresome to continue to always try to find grants, to support something that's so significant to the university. —*Master's, Small, Private*

I want to echo what she's saying as well for us.... We are a state institution, so most things that are part of the infrastructure, that are permanent, are funded by the state. Everything else is funded through grants and soft money. And so, in the 15 years I've been here, the archives has always been on soft money. So, every year we're finding grants to keep it funded, [and to] keep the projects afloat, but it is not a priority. —*Master's, Medium, Public*

No, Because ... It's Complicated

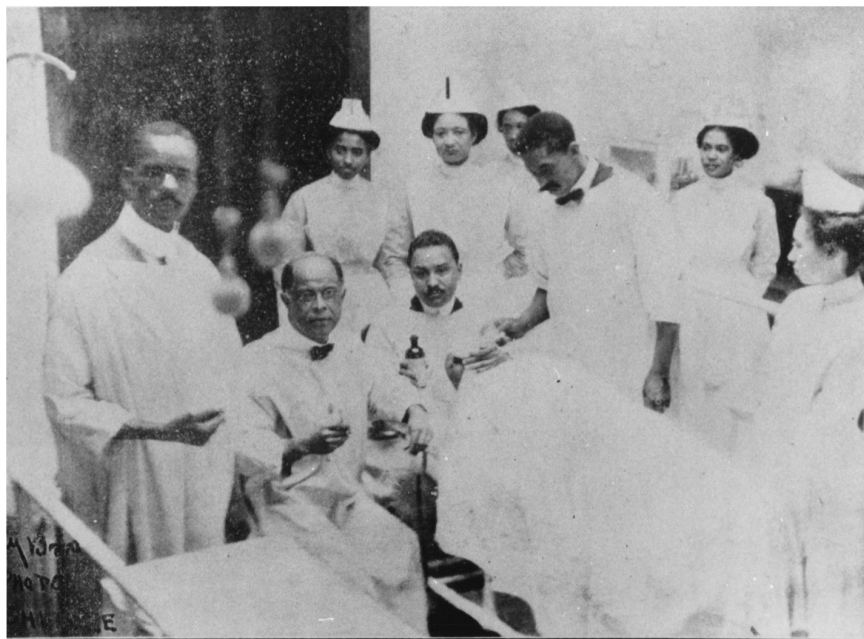
All other respondents indicated a variety of issues related to the lack of institutional resources to effectively manage and maintain archives and special collections. For instance, participants reported not having enough funds, staff, equipment, and proper space. They also indicated a lack of knowledge and interest by administrators in supporting their collections. The excerpts in this section represent all institutional categories, from public to private and from the associate's level to the doctoral level.

I agree. The money is a lack of resources at (this institution) as well as, I guess, having the archives as a priority for preservation. [Our work is about] preserving our history.... We have these special irreplaceable collections, but we do not have the funding. We do not have all of the necessary training as archivists [or] as preservationists for all of these most precious and priceless artifacts that we house at our institutions. And many times at these HBCU institutions, archives are not a priority. Or there is a need for ... ensuring that the campus or the institution is funded in the other

academic areas. But to focus a little bit on the preservation of the treasures or the unique collections, funding is often not available.... I've found if you have a president that's been a historian, that's my best friend when it comes to the archives. Because usually [a historian] will know the value, and it would be nice for it to be the vice president of academic affairs, whoever's over your area. But that president—that can make a real difference in funding and making sure at least you're acknowledged, and hopefully acknowledged financially. —*Bachelor's Small, Private*

I think that's the importance of the advocacy that we do as librarians, library directors, because we know that our institutions will not support it, because [of] their lack of knowledge and understanding of what goes into archives and what archives are truly about. It's not just about requesting a photo or requesting a manuscript or requesting a yearbook. There's just so much that goes within there. ... I think part of the lack of support in institutions is because every time you get [a] new administration, you have to teach that new administration, especially if archives or libraries are not in the forefront of their mind. They completely forget about it. So, it takes you two or three or years or whatever to get that administration to jump on your bandwagon. And once you get them on your bandwagon, they're gone and now you got to do it all over again. Every president, every administration, every provost that comes in needs to be educated. And if they're not, we need to educate them and let them know this needs to be done.... Bring us to the table.... Every discussion that [they're] having in any strategic plan for a university, we are supposed to be at the table because we speak to the historical documents. We speak to the history: We speak to what's already here, and we speak to how we're moving forward. So also bringing us to the table is something that the institutions keep missing, which will help them become knowledgeable so that we can continue to do this in the proper way. —*Master's, Medium, Public*

A resounding no for me. And I have to admit, I've worked long periods of time at different institutions, (another institution) for one, for 20 years.... I was the archivist, and I guess started the idea of fundraising to bring more attention and funding to the archives. And I always say the archives—not just the library because you can have a great library—but when it comes to special collections and archives, you really have to make a case for funding.... So, I've never worked anywhere where funding has been great for the archives, even if it's good for the library. You have to convince the library director, and having been there, ... I have a special place in my heart that I always give the archives first priority when it comes to funding. —*Doctoral, Small, Private*



First Operation in the George W. Hubbard Hospital, October, 1910

First Operation in the George W. Hubbard Hospital, October 1910. Courtesy Meharry Medical College Library and Archives (MMCL&A).

3. Values

Do you and the administration at your institution share the same values related to archives and special collections?

Yes and Sometimes No

Like the previous question about having adequate resources, this question elicited yes and no responses simultaneously for some institutions. Although the deans and directors believed their administrators shared their same values, the deans and directors reported not always seeing these values displayed in the administrators' actions. Instead, they reported that administrators generally place the library—and archives and special collections, in particular—low on their list of priorities. Institutions reporting yes and no represent all categories, from public to private and from the associate's level to the doctoral level.

Yes, my president is a history major, and he's very supportive and shares some of the same values that the library has. But having been a part of a very small HBCU, some of his priorities are more focused on other areas. He has given some of his aspirations of how he would like to see the archives continue to develop and has contributed some of the resources to that, but we still need some funding. But again, to answer your question, we do share the same vision, and he's very supportive. —*Bachelor's, Small, Private*

We have a new president, the first female in the history of (this institution). Yes, she is interested in history and, of

course, being the first, she wants to make sure that we are collecting. I don't get as much interest from the provost, but the president, yes. It has not led to any additional monies, ... but she recognizes the need. —*Doctoral, Large, Public*

Well, I think it's like a yes and a no.... When I got hired in (date) and they didn't have an archivist, that was the main goal. They wanted me to hit the ground running to find one, and I was able to hire one last year. But money-wise, no. —*Bachelor's, Small, Private*

I think the new president thinks that it's important, but as far as finances are concerned, I'm not real sure about that—what it would take to actually support the archives. —*Bachelor's, Very Small, Private*

Our president very much realizes the importance of it. It's just a mammoth task for an HBCU. So, I know that she shares it. I know that my director shares it, and I also know the importance of it, but it's just a long road to getting it done and putting it on the table where you actually address the concerns and issues that are needed. —*Master's, Medium, Private*

I want to tread lightly, but I want to be honest.... [Our] president sees the institution as a business ... , referring to students and external partners as customers, things like this.... So, I would say no, but that is also running on assumption because there's not been a lot of communication between particularly the utmost leadership in the library, but that being said, all of the other administration ... definitely shares our values. They're very supportive, always advocating in meetings. —*Associate's, Medium, Public*

Definitely No

Four deans and directors from all institutional levels indicated they did not feel their administrators' values were aligned with their values when it comes to archives and special collections. They do not feel that the maintenance of their collections is a priority, and that lack of support is clearly indicated in administrators' actions.

I can say that my leadership does not place the same value on the archives that I place on the archives. I have a very supportive dean of academics that sees the need for the archives, but I have had a vacancy for an archivist for the past three years. —*Associate's, Medium, Public*

I think it's also the relationship that you have with your administration. You have to be able to have that relationship where you are able to talk with that person, where they can bring you in and just sit down and ask you, "What are your needs?" And so that's why I would say no; I don't feel that ... my administrators and I share the same values when it comes to that. —*Doctoral, Large, Public*

Honestly, we've never really had a discussion. There is a lot of love for wanting to keep (this institution's) history, but there isn't an investment to keep (this institution's) history.

So, I question, Is it really a value and a love if there's absolutely no investment? Like, there is no archivist.

—*Bachelor's, Small, Private*

We need to be at the table, and we're not at the table. We're only at the table when they need something.... Or they need to check facts about the history and our facts about this, or they need a photograph of this.... So, no ... and I think (co-participant) said it earlier, and she said it best. It's like you build a relationship with someone ... your provost or whoever, your direct report, you build that relationship. And then, two or three years later, you have a new president or whole administration, and then you got to start all over. And then sometimes with the new administration ... they don't even bring you at the table. So, you can't even have a discussion with them. How can you come into a new university and you're in charge of—you oversee—the library, but you don't have a discussion about the library's needs—anything—which is mind boggling to me.... It is about relationships, but you can't build relationships when someone doesn't even just take the time to invite you to have a conversation. —*Master's, Small, Private*

It Ebbs and Flows

At least four library deans and directors indicated they were unsure whether their administrators shared their same values when it comes to archives and special collections. Some administrations were new, so it was hard to determine their positions. Other administrators had not communicated one way or the other their support for archives and special collections. Still, for other library deans and directors, given their comments, it was difficult to determine whether there was a similarity in values.

It's hard to get buy-in when your administrations keep turning over. So, the library falls under the vice president of academic affairs. I've been here two years, and I've had three bosses. So, I keep having to repeat myself. Now I know they share the same values when it comes to completing SACS accreditation and in filling out those IPEDS narratives and all that. We definitely need to show our work, so to speak, and explain ourselves and justify ourselves and then the library is so valuable. Of course, every time everybody or anybody comes to campus, they want to see the library because it's like the pillar of scholarship on campus. But sometimes when the budget starts to roll out and prioritize, things come out, we're not at the top, so it kind of ebbs and flows as far as their beliefs into our relativeness. We try to stay as relevant as possible, of course. —*Bachelor's, Small, Private*

I really don't know whether they are supportive or not. And so, I'm hoping they will [be]. —*Master's, Medium, Public*



Fisk University Bulldogs Football Team, 1897. Silver gelatin developing-out print. Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Fisk Photograph Collection [Fisk Football Team].

4. Priorities, Needs, and Aspirations

If funding were available, what would be your highest priority as it relates to your archives and special collections?

Staff and Space

The responses to this question were overwhelmingly similar. Seventy-two percent of library deans and directors indicated that their highest priorities, needs, and aspirations related to archives and special collections include the acquisition of staff and appropriate space to house their collections. In response to earlier questions, many deans and directors had already indicated they did not even have an archivist. Others have indicated the space for their collections is too small or in an awkward location. A sampling of responses follows.

Definitely more staffing; specifically, an archivist and then a technical assistant as well, who would be able to create a separate web page just for accessing our archives.... And of course, all of the equipment that would encompass ... I would definitely need that for support. And I would love to have some sort of area to display some of the, I don't want to say high-ticket items, but some more impressive items. So that'd be a great kind of show-and-tell display—museum type, if we had the space to accommodate something like that. So [we] have some of the major stuff on display because ... our archives is really not an area where you can go in and browse, and we really don't want that because it's not in that good of an order. So, if somebody walked away with something, we wouldn't necessarily know.... But I really

would like it to have ... a dedicated staff for the area. And then just a little bit more space to showcase some of the impressive items. —*Bachelor's, Small, Private*

Definitely reconfigure our existing space and make it more user-friendly and up to standards as far as the lighting and the condition and climate, but also hire archivists, definitely. I'd have continuous training and just be able to properly promote it to our different departments on campus. —*Master's, Medium, Private*

If we had unlimited funding, I would definitely add some staff, mostly for physical rearrangement, cleaning out material, and then also proper archival software.... If we could get something like an ArchiveSpace or something, you know, that needs some finances, and it needs a regular, a line item in the budget. That would be excellent.

—*Associate's, Medium, Public*

Digitization and Other

Some deans and directors mentioned that their priorities, needs, and aspirations included, at least in part, the digitization of their collections. Although these respondents mentioned digitization, that process is usually coupled with other needs that could be considered basic. All institution types are represented in the comments regarding digitization, except associate's level institutions.

I would set up a digitization process. —*Bachelor's, Very Small, Private*

It'll be digitization first and electronic resources—moving as much as we can to make materials available to our students online. —*Master's, Small, Private*

My highest priority would be additional staffing and to assist with them digitizing what we have so that we can preserve it: preservation. —*Master's, Medium, Private*

So, as we talk about space, our immediate needs, yeah, we need to get [our collections] off the floor and [out of boxes to] digitize [them]... [Create an] inviting area where [users] can come and do research. That's what I would add. —*Doctoral, Large, Public*

We recently just really started our digitization so thus far we've only been able to digitize our yearbooks, and we're in the process of getting all yearbooks digitized at this time. We digitized a few of the older curriculum guides that we had. And just like (co-participant) stated, we want to do other things like some of the research that has been performed here by our students. We want to get all that work, but in order to do that, we need the equipment and resources. —*Doctoral, Medium, Public*

Other Priorities, Needs, and Aspirations

Two deans mentioned some unique priorities, needs, and aspirations for their archives and special collections. At one master's-level private institution, the dean aspires to create an endowment where the funds generated would be used exclusively for archives and special collections. At the doctoral-level institution,



Classroom scene. Silver gelatin developing-out print. Unknown photographer, n.d. Courtesy of South Carolina State University.

the dean intends to expand their collection to meet the needs of students.

So, I think my dream is really to have an endowment for the library and archives that cannot be touched, okay. And the reason why I say that [is] because that will guarantee continued support for the library and the archives that they cannot touch to do other things, because you [can] put all the plans and stuff in place, but when it comes down to funding, that's really the bottom line at our institutions. So, if I had all the money, I would set up an endowment with the stipulations that it will go to always fund the library and the archives. —*Master's, Small, Private*

For me it would be growing and expanding our collection. We're one of, I think, three—maybe four—HBCUs in (this state), and based on our size and our location, I think that's an area that we really can fulfill in terms of being a regional collection for an African American collection. We're the largest HBCU in (this state), and probably in this bottom part of the southeast region, so I think that a really important priority for us is to have that collection available to meet not only our students' needs, but the needs of the region. And I see there's a need for us really to be collecting, again, sort of current materials from our African American communities.... That's an area where I just don't have the time and the resources ... but that's something that I would really like to have [the] opportunity to do.... We've digitized a few things out of our collection. We do have an institutional repository. And so, we have a person now who

is in charge of that. We really are not doing active and on-going digitization; we are mostly collecting some things that are born digital. And so getting that put in [our collection], which is important for us, and then we would like to ... expand that, in terms of being able to capture some of the research that our faculty are producing and some of the articles that they are writing, [which] ... would be for the institutional repository, as opposed to ... just being a digital collection of materials that are in the archives and special collections. But we have discussed working in partnership with the archives to put some of that material within that digital collection. —*Doctoral, Large, Public*

I think for me, it would also be making sure that a sustainable strategic plan is put into place. Just in case people leave, people retire, people pass, whatever. They can always pull the plan out, and based on the plan, keep the hope and the dream alive. What I find often in our archives is that there's no plan, right? So, we know digitization is a big move, especially connecting it to the arts and humanities. And there's lots of funding out there. But one of the things that they ask for is what is your strategic plan, right? Which ones are most important, which one speaks to this?... Oh, and I just wanna join (co-participant's) point, because even if you wanted to start an endowment fund for anyone to fund anything, they're gonna ask you, what's your plan.... And one more thing based on what (co-participant) was saying, if we don't tell that story, ... believe me, (other entities) are waiting to tell it in their way. And they're going to use our material to tell their own story of our history, and that's why you have so many PWIs eager to help. [They say,] "How can we help you with your archives? We'll give you people; we'll give you money. We'll give you digitization." [I] don't want it unless we're in there processing with you and telling you about what you're looking at so that you don't look at a photo and interpret it in your way, to tell our story in your way. So that strategic plan, it would speak volumes, and it can have a timeline and it can have everything, and then it can include the funding aspect. —*Master's, Medium, Public*

5. COVID-19 Impact

What do you anticipate will be the greatest impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on archives and special collections at your institution?

Increased Workloads and Delayed Response Times

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the way most institutions operated. For the following deans and directors, the pandemic increased their workloads and delayed their response times to patrons. These responses were similar for all institution types.

For us I would say the greatest impact was increased workload on our special collections and archives, with those

closing to the public and researchers not being able to travel. It was an increase in having to actually do the research and dig through the boxes and the folders for them, scanning it, and sending it to them. So that workload increased. I would say it was the greatest impact of COVID. —*Master's, Small, Private*

The only thing that COVID has done is it slowed the process because we started out working two days a week... If somebody asks for something ... I say the person is not in [the] office ... [so] we have to do it tomorrow. —*Doctoral, Small, Private*

We had a slight delay in being able to actually respond to some of the requests that we have, but we were able to do it. That's the importance of being able to scan in and submit, communicate your information that's being requested ... using ... technology. So, we were able to do that because of the staffing. And I'm the only person down here. I was able to come in anytime, so [by] not actually having to work from home, I could access the resources that were being requested and they pretty much kept pace with it all. We would actually communicate back that there would be a delay and ask for their understanding and patience in doing so. That's pretty much where we were. We are back to normal now pretty much, ... we're not doing a whole lot of the in-person visits though. We have to request and have it approved to actually come in and do some of those things. So, if they're requesting information ... I've been able to respond ... electronically. —*Master's, Medium, Private*

Relied on Alternate and Remote Methods of Service

Many deans and directors reported they worked from home and relied on alternate methods for providing services. These alternate methods included taking requests over the phone or through email and scanning materials and sending them through email or other electronic means. Some libraries never closed but limited the number of face-to-face visits. For some libraries, the requests for archives and special collections increased significantly because so many people were isolated at home and took that time to conduct research about their families. A sampling of responses follows.

We were closed, I believe, March through July. And so we worked remotely, but we came back to campus in July. And so even though we had a reduced student load and the majority of our students [returned] for online [classes], the library was still able to service them remotely through our chat with the librarian and through email and whatnot. And then of course, we still had students coming into our library. So, we really have still had student interaction. —*Master's, Medium, Private*

We have been closed since March 14, 2020. We will not physically reopen until August fall semester [2021], but we service the students and the faculty and staff with remote access to subscription databases and through virtual



Marching in support of “Free Huey” movement to release Black Panther Huey Newton from prison. Silver gelatin developing-out print. Unknown photographer, n.d. Courtesy of the James G. Peeler Photography Collection, Inez Moore Parker Archives at Johnson C. Smith University.

chat services, as well as doing information literacy classes via Zoom and things like that. —*Bachelor’s, Very Small, Private*

Same here for (this institution). We provided emails. We scanned things because basically after the first week and a half, we were back on campus ... at our offices. So, we're all back here at the library, but we limited the amount of contact ... with people coming in. So, we did a lot of scanning and sending out and emailing and things of that nature. And we did some Zoom calls and things like that, but basically we're back and still, you know, providing services. —*Bachelor’s, Small, Private*

Brought Other Issues to the Forefront

The COVID-19 pandemic brought some unforeseen issues to the forefront. According to one dean, the pandemic showed the library’s value in terms of what its services meant to the campus and the community. Another dean expressed that the pandemic highlights the unknown in that no one really knows how it will ultimately affect services in terms of the use of the library as a physical place. Yet another dean expressed that COVID-19 has brought to the forefront that libraries need to be documenting this time in history, especially as it relates to its impact on African American and local communities. Excerpts from deans and directors are included below.

Because people were home and they were trying to do some family tree research, they realized that there was a (this institution) connection. So, then they were trying to contact



Group photo with Bishop Robert E. Jones, Joseph C. Hartzell, and unidentified congregation at a Methodist Episcopal Church. Silver gelatin developing-out print. Unknown photographer, n.d. Courtesy of Xavier University of Louisiana.

us and because nothing is digitized, it was a lot of me ... mostly apologizing [and explaining that what they want] doesn't exist—[that we don't have anything for] the days, the years that [they] want, ... so I don't know what the overall effect is. It made me feel really ineffective. But it gives me some good data to go back and try to justify maybe bringing on somebody to do the digitization and that kind of stuff. —*Bachelor's, Small, Private*

I think the greatest impact for us was it showed our value. Our reference questions [doubled] because we were not able to be open and accessible. And even though items are digitized, they do not have the skill set to utilize the collections, even if [they are] online. So, it showed the value for our special collections and archives area. During this COVID time, they had ... time to sit back, think, and reflect what's important to you. —*Master's, Medium, Public*

For me, I would say what really is going on is the unknown. Our space was very important to our students, as a physical space, even though they had access to a lot of resources online. They certainly came in and used materials that are special collections, and they were really heavy library users, whether that was coming in to, you know, work with other students in study groups, to engage in social activities while studying, and some [were] just studying. It's going to be interesting to me to see what the impact of the pandemic is going to be. And I don't know if we will have those same demands on our space and on our physical collections in terms of people coming in the building to use

that or whether people are really going to stay away and be prepared to work more on the online side of the library. I don't have a theory about how things are going to change that, but I think things will be different, and it's just a matter of waiting to see how different they're going to be, or, or what that new normal is going to look like. —*Doctoral, Large, Public*



Brick mason class. Silver gelatin developing-out print. Unknown photographer, n.d. Courtesy of South Carolina State University.

6. Additional Challenges and Opportunities

Is there anything about archives and special collections that you think administrators, the HBCU Library Alliance, and CLIR (as representative and support groups) should know that we have not discussed today? What are the most important things that can be taken away from this focus group as it relates to your discussion?

Buildings and Space

Some deans and directors wanted it to be known that their physical space is being infringed upon. They are being asked to share their physical space with other functions on campus such as writing and tutoring centers. There is fear that their library space will become smaller and smaller as technology improves and that libraries will become less relevant on campuses. This appears to be the case in the public and private sector as well as across different institution types.

My library, too, is sharing space with other departments, partly because it's ... the newest facility on campus. They are about to break ground for another building, but again, we'll be sharing space with admissions, and ... the music

department, and administrators as well as the director of IT until that building is completed. Yeah. Juggling many things. —*Bachelor's, Very Small, Private*

Somebody spoke about space and sharing space. I want you to know that I share space with the math center, the writing center, IT department, and the police dispatcher. Now you know why I need a new facility, because I feel like we're sort of—like we're just building the houses, everybody. And we're three floors; we're pretty big, but we're small because we have all of those folks sandwiched in our space. —*Master's, Small, Private*

The recognition that the library is still viable as a place just because we functioned well under COVID with remote and the technology gives you the advantage to be able to not be there in person. The library as a place is still very important. And I'm not just talking about public libraries and school libraries and academic libraries—all libraries. A lot of building programs have stopped because of technology. I keep saying we're going to technology ourselves out of jobs. It still takes someone to navigate, and it takes a place to do the navigation. I definitely think that we need to lobby more to the powers that be, if it's a private institution, or the state local lobbyist, or senators, or whomever. I worked in California at a state institution for about 15 years. When I got there, I started lobbying for a building. [In] time, I guess within 10 years, I was blessed to be able to build a \$50 million building, and the archives had the penthouse and the best of everything. So, I definitely think the place piece is important. —*Doctoral, Small, Private*

Need for Funding, Equipment, and Other Support

A number of deans and directors used this opportunity to reiterate their need for additional funding, equipment, and other support. They recognize the significance of their archives and special collections and feel they simply have not been supported in the way they should. This sentiment is not limited to a specific institution type. It is expressed by deans at public and private institutions of all sizes and degree levels.

(This institution's) archives has information in it that should be publicized, should be digitized. It should be a part of the African American historical view because ... our students—not just (this institution's) students, but students at every HBCU—need to understand that they have a part in the history of us as a people. —*Bachelor's, Very Small, Private*

I would run out of fingers if I had to count how many times I've had a very important alum or important donor say to me, "Well I didn't realize you had this," or "I had no idea that this was all up here." And I'm embarrassed to say we don't have the ability to advertise it. The people in charge are not always interested unless it appeals to them personally. —*Master's, Small, Private*



Fisk Jubilee Singers Portrait painted in 1873 by Edmund Havel, Queen Victoria's court painter. Left to right (men): Benjamin Holmes, Isaac Dickerson, Thomas Rutlin, Edmund Watkins; left to right (women): Mabel Lewis, Minnie Tate, Ella Shepard, Jennie Jackson, Julia Jackson, Maggie Porter, Georgia Gordon. George L. White was the director of this group. Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Fisk Photograph Collection, No. 3288 [Fisk Jubilee Singers_FPC 3288].

We're all obviously facing similar issues, and funding and resources would change everything, overnight. I think that's just my biggest perspective. If we could get, even if it's not as much focus or spotlight from the administration here, just more resources, [it] would be a game changer. I think for the long-term preservation, archives are not a short-term job; they're there forever, and everything needs to be considered in perpetuity. And sometimes the resources aren't allocated that way or discussed that way.

—Associate's, Medium, Public

I was thinking more of professional development and areas and technology. —Doctoral, Large, Public

Need to Share About Collections

Some deans and directors feel that HBCU libraries need to share more about their collections. They feel their stories need to be told and should not be lost due to the lack of support or resources.

The place is important. We need to lobby that we have rich, unique collections housed at our institution, and the story needs to be told; the story needs to be shared. We need to find ways that we can share about our holdings that we have at the HBCU institutions. —Bachelor's, Small, Private

I welcome a collective partnership that addresses student success with the library at the heart. Our collection is a rich thing for the community.... We have to find a way of making sure that the community knows that we're here. I've been asking my archivists to go out into the community and capture those stories. It doesn't have to be somebody who's necessarily affiliated with the university, but just someone who has a rich history, because you just never know how something's going to play out. —*Doctoral, Large, Public*

HBCU Library Alliance Recognition

A few deans and directors expressed their gratitude for the HBCU Library Alliance. They shared about their experiences with the Alliance and how those experiences help to propel their work forward.

I have to give a shout-out to the HBCU Library Alliance. A lot of the training that I've had has come through the HBCU Library Alliance. I've had leadership training. I have had archivist training. So, a lot of the training that's been done for the HBCUs has come through that, the HBCU Library Alliance, and to have that piece for the archives [consortial support for HBCU library special collections and archives] put under there [the HBCU Library Alliance], I think that would be the most valuable way to handle it. —*Bachelor's, Very Small, Private*

At (this institution), we were able to participate in the HBCU digital library some years ago. And of course, what we did was we digitized one of our publications called the tablets.... On the website, people can go out and look at those tablets and so forth, and that had been very helpful.... Now there's a group of libraries that are part of the HBCU Library Alliance that are part of this digital library. I think we probably need to get more libraries incorporated into it.... I don't remember if (another HBCU) is a part of it or not, but from what I can tell, there's a lot that can be digitized. They [The Alliance] provided us with training, a scanner, a computer, the software, and so forth. And that would be great if we could do something like that again, to just further expand our reach. —*Doctoral, Small, Private*

May I add one thing about the HBCU Library Alliance? Again, I have a lot of appreciation for what they helped us with—the grant that we received because of the people coming in to talk about the environment and the air conditioning. We did get a new system put in two years ago. That was really the benefit, and it started because of the HBCU Library Alliance and the expert coming in and telling us what we needed to do.... And with the pandemic, it was a good thing that some of that had been done. I felt more comfortable coming into the building. And now I have in my room a monitor; I can see what the moisture level is as well as the temperature. So, they are monitoring that. So, for preservation going forward, that shouldn't be too much of a problem. There may be some adaptations that will need

to be made, but the college did act upon that. And I have to give credit to the HBCU Library [Alliance]. —*Doctoral, Large, Public*

Need to Educate Administrators

On more than one occasion, deans and directors mentioned the need for college administrators to be educated about archives and special collections. They feel that educating administrators would compel them to be more supportive when it comes to providing libraries with the necessary resources to maintain their collections.

I'd like some kind of awareness. Build some kind of a readiness program for our HBCU presidents and administrators, too, for supporting the archives, and explain the significant value of the archives, the history of the university and the community. Sometimes I think they don't hear enough from sources other than us ... asking for ... funds.... We need to share with them the needs of the archives.... We don't have the resources to put it out there and make it available for research so that people can write those new narratives or scholarly books about them, which is what they want. They want it to be available to the public, but we have collections that are unprocessed from the sixties and seventies. —*Master's, Small, Private*

PWIs Acquiring Collections

There was clear frustration about predominantly White institutions (PWIs) acquiring historical collections from libraries and from the African American community. Respondents feel PWIs are taking advantage of a vulnerability faced by many HBCUs in that they cannot afford to properly maintain their existing collections, not to mention any newly acquired collections. One dean expressed how trust has been lost from past experiences when PWIs offered to help with digitizing collections or with partnering in other ways. They feel this needs to change to improve the ability of HBCUs to maintain and manage their own archives and special collections.

I would just like to address the fact that we need resources to process what we have and to acquire new collections. All of our collections are going to PWIs.... It's our history, and it's being bought up, and we don't have the resources like they do. And if we do have an opportunity to approach someone to get their collection, the biggest rebuttal is that you don't have anything that's out there. —*Master's, Small, Private*

We have a history of our collections being taken for different reasons to preserve them when we didn't have the space, like the Booker T. Washington papers. The Library of Congress came down and got some and took it back, and we were supposed to get them, and we didn't. So, we finally got them in microfilm, but it was a chore. So, it's nothing new that we've been ravaged. —*Doctoral, Medium, Private*



George Washington Carver oversees a student conducting soil analysis, Tuskegee Institute (University), 1902. Silver gelatin developing-out print. Photograph by Francis Benjamin Johnston. Photograph courtesy of Tuskegee University Archives, Photographs Collection.

It happened to us. I can attest that [a PWI] bought the [name] collection, and it was housed at [an HBCU] at the time.... Back then, I think they put it on CD ROMs or whatever, and they started selling it and making money from it and that sort of thing. —*Doctoral, Large, Public*

We're in this position where we have inherited, in a lot of cases, very interesting special collections that go back, that really provide a historical context for HBCUs, how African Americans became educated and our access to education, after the Civil War. And yet, we don't ... have the staff [or] the funding to support digitizing these collections.... Getting preservation accurate and really appropriate preservation for these collections, that's an issue.... It's gonna be probably less of an issue for me I will say, but always my first priority is supporting the students' access to resources. ... The special collections come later. And I will say, I went to a special collections conference a couple of years ago, several years ago now. It was amazing to me that larger institutions like [a particular PWI] had a person whose sole job was to go around the country and purchase African collections. So, I find out that there was an independent African American filmmaker who had retired; he was in (local town). Somehow, a librarian in the Midwest found out about his collection, [and] they bought it out of his garage. Okay, and now his African American collection of films—and he was an independent filmmaker—is somewhere out in the Midwest. It's not even in (this state). I don't have the

staffing to have one person dedicated to going around the country collecting African American anything. As much as I would like to have that, I don't have the resources to have something like that. —*Doctoral, Large, Public*

Need to Continue the Conversation

A number of deans and directors expressed the need to continue the conversation about the needs and aspirations of HBCU libraries as it relates to their archives and special collections. They hope the focus groups are just a stepping-stone to making improvements in this area and that the conversation can continue in some way.

Yes, I agree with that. That was exactly my thought as well, because ... [as] (co-participant) said, ... it seems like we are in silos. We don't really connect with one another. And some universities may have more resources that they can work with, but I think it would be a great thing for us to continue in conversations like this so that we can kind of help one another. And that's what I have been seeing. We have our own major issue at our university just trying to keep our own archives afloat. We have not had an opportunity to connect with one another to say, "What can I do to assist you?" And so that's what I would like to see: more connection with each other. To just be able to help one another. —*Master's, Small, Public*

I agree with what everybody has said. I definitely think this is a transition point right now for our library and our archives, but I'm excited to see where it goes and definitely just making sure that we're able to serve the campus community. Also, that the archives continu[es] to tell (this institution's) story. —*Master's, Medium, Private*

What I've come to find out is that there are even times where we just need to get a name of the archivist at a specific institution.... And if we could just be completely united and then able to connect and advocate and support one another, I think we could then be prepared for the opportunities that come our way, but we're still very siloed. We're still very pieced in different areas. Some HBCUs are talking to some and are better off than some, so they're able to do more, be more, [and] get more; there needs to be a place where we are truly united so that we can support and help one another to take us to the next [level]. —*Master's, Medium, Public*

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion/Fairness and Equity in Support

The issue of diversity, equity, and inclusion was brought up by two deans, one from a public, medium-sized master's institution and one from a public, large, doctoral institution. They brought to the forefront the issue that smaller institutions are often left out of the conversation when it comes to accessing resources and assistance. The dean from the doctoral institution explained thoroughly how this inequity in access creates an information gap in terms of what



Group photograph of the wedding party of Marie Moss. Silver gelatin developing-out print. Unknown photographer, n.d. Courtesy of Xavier University of Louisiana.

libraries, students, and researchers have accessible to them. This dean called on organizations to really take diversity, equity, and inclusion seriously and not just make a statement on its importance. Further, organizations have to make an effort to close those information gaps.

Having access to resources that shed light on that type of story is valuable to not just African Americans, but the world over, so we will understand our history, we won't repeat our history.... I would still like CLIR, the Alliance, and all other parties ... to know that small regional institutions have some importance to archives and African American history. That should be known, and we shouldn't select the same university archives every time. If there is a grant opportunity that you're willing to share with your membership, it shouldn't only be the same institutions. Smaller institutions struggle just as much, or more so sometimes, than the larger institutions.... We ... still need funders to know that we exist and what the significance of our existence is. You know, writing a grant is not always the same as receiving the grant. —*Master's, Medium, Public*

I think they need to get serious about diversity, equity, and inclusion.... I've heard it referred to as sort of the information poverty gap, but it really becomes dependent upon the fact that the information you can afford to buy is what you buy. I don't think there have been enough efforts to

address the fact that HBCUs and other less well-endowed universities cannot continue to afford these astronomical prices that we are having to pay for top quality information. It really creates resource gaps that impact the quality of our educational experiences. Our programs support all of these different factors at a level that I think people just don't realize and don't recognize.... I don't see organizations finding ways to be more inclusive for institutions that don't have huge endowments, and I mean minority and majority institutions that don't have huge endowments. [Those institutions] just get left behind in terms of access to information, and I think that is something that ... libraries are always trying to address. I think some of these larger more influential organizations like CLIR really have to take up the banner and find some pathways for other institutions to participate as members to enjoy some of the benefits of the resources that become available when you have the money to be a member of some of these different groups. I don't know if we're leading this effort to have open education resources out there and open textbooks, but that really is not the same when it comes down to the type of research and information and subscriptions and resources that people are paying for. Even ... trying to purchase JSTOR ... collections can be expensive, and then you have the annual maintenance fee when you buy the collection, so still it's pricey for institutions to really have access to these resources. During the pandemic, that was the only thing that our students had to rely on in terms of access and resources. Some libraries ... did not close their physical building. The physical campus stayed open.... Ours did not. Our campus closed down completely in March of 2020, and we really did not open our building back up until August. Even during fall semester, our students were online.... How do I provide a quality educational experience in an online environment I'm really not prepared for? I am supporting the breadth and depth of programs at a research institution, but I can't afford access and subscriptions to the resources that other institutions are able to pay for because they're large, they're very well-funded, and they just have the ability to buy more than I do. I really am aware that there are yearly pricing increases in our cost for subscriptions. We don't see the library's budget growing in that area, so we're having to cut resources every year. We end up either getting some supplemental money through Title III, or we cut, because we can't afford the price increases.... It's like having a marriage with the devil. You're in an environment where we're a nonprofit, and we're a library, we're not at the top of the administration's priority list. They're trying to put resources into the areas that impact performance.... The organizations ... that are trying to support libraries really end up supporting large, well-funded research libraries and not really creating paths for smaller, less well-funded institutions to participate in the breadth and availability of resources that are out there.... In this age where we have all of these organizations

issuing statements on diversity and inclusion, ... it stops at the statement.... There really aren't a lot of pathways to grow diversity and grow the inclusiveness; I don't see that at all.

I was just recently approached to work on a project. The project was put together without any input from a librarian at an HBCU. The board, the members of I guess the governing committee had formed, had decided how they wanted things to go, again without any input on what the obstacles would be coming from an HBCU perspective.... I brought up some of the obstacles, you know, and one of the obstacles is trust—getting HBCUs to trust that this content won't be taken away from us. For example, we sent some items to the University of (this state), to get them digitized. We didn't have the equipment, and we didn't have the manpower. We're part of the state university system, [so] we sent our content to the University of (this state). They digitized it, gave us a copy, and then put the content on their website like they owned it. You would not know that that content was not their content, but we knew.... There have been some issues that have created distrust, quite frankly, in some of these relationships, or a lack of acting in good faith. The majority institutions don't seem to recognize that they have set that up.... They approached me again and said they wanted to partner, and my librarians were like, "There's no way we want to partner with them again. We remember what happened the first time we partnered with them on a digitization project; they can forget it." We will hold on to our stuff. We don't want to partner with them. I think some of these other organizations need to be made aware of how these partnerships should go, how there really has to be an understanding of the lack of resources that some of these HBCUs have. I know some of the smaller HBCUs would really have a hard time doing some of these projects. If you're looking at a large school like University of (this state), because of the salary differences in terms of how much my people get paid, it's not even a one-to-one count. Okay. You know I have one person, they have one person; there is a \$10,000 salary gap, so they're hiring people with higher skill sets, better technology skills, and who can carry out more comprehensive projects on their behalf. I don't; I might have access to some of the same people, but my people might not necessarily have the same skill sets, because I don't have the salaries that attract people with higher skill sets. All of those things become issues that impact your ability to do a project. Even though I might have dollars that I can throw at equipment, and I might have—in terms of the institutions that I've worked at before—I have a much larger staff, [but] it's still not quite the same. If we're looking at something sort of comprehensive, that would move us up a notch in terms of engaging in digitization activities.

I know that there are others—small academic libraries—that ... [have] to make some very serious choices in terms of what they can afford. As ... for staffing for infor-

mation resources for these ever-increasing subscription resources, especially not [being] able to join [consortial licensing] organizations [and] not able to purchase JSTOR collections, ... we just [need to] have some really serious conversations, and some problem-solving needs to happen in terms of access to these types of resources. The differences are just becoming more apparent to me as I've worked in these different environments. I'm concerned about it. Just be aware that as we have these conversations about diversity and equity, libraries always considered themselves to be very diverse and very equitable. We make resources available to people. But there are just a whole lot of different levels where we're not doing it, and we're not having conversations about how we're not doing it. We're just letting things sort of slide into the normal of what it's always been. You get to have and provide access to what you can afford. And for those of you who can't afford it, you're just left out.
—*Doctoral, Large, Public*

Conclusions and Recommendations

The focus group sessions revealed key insights about the special and archival collections at participating HBCU libraries. This report sheds light on what library deans and directors view as the significance of their collections and what these collections mean to the institutions, their students, faculty, alumni, community, and the world at large. These discussions highlighted what the deans and directors felt were their challenges when it comes to managing their collections and their capacity to do that well. Participants also spoke openly about the level of support they receive from their institutions.

This study created an opportunity for participants to express what they felt are their priorities, needs, and aspirations when it comes to their archives and special collections. Participants also revealed information about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as broader topics of significance that affect their collections.

Description and Significance

Many participants describe their archives and special collections as containing materials documenting their historical affiliation with churches, African American history, the civil rights movement, and their own institutional histories. Most see the significance of their collections as serving the institution itself rather than outside communities. Still, some libraries' archives and special collections have nationwide and international appeal.

Management and Capacity

Almost all deans and directors expressed that they do not have enough resources to effectively maintain and manage their archives and special collections. This is evident in the number of comments related to staff shortages, inadequate space, and reliance on grant funding.



Print of Meharry College, n.d.. Courtesy Meharry Medical College Library and Archives (MMCL&A).

Priorities, Needs, and Aspirations

When asked about their highest priorities, deans and directors identified a desire for additional staff and adequate space. Others said digitization of their collections was a priority, as was the expansion of their collections. The need for a designated endowment to be used exclusively to support archives and special collections was also mentioned as an aspiration.

Values

Although the deans and directors tended to believe that their administrators shared their same values, they often reported that these values were not always displayed in the administrators' actions. Instead, they reported that administrators generally placed the library—and archives and special collections, in particular—low on their list of priorities.

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the way most HBCU libraries operated. Many libraries had to close their doors and limit in-person services. However, a few libraries were able to provide access to their partially digitized collections. Still, most deans and directors adjusted to their limitations by providing their services through electronic means. A common strategy was to scan requested items and send them by email. For those libraries, that process was labor-intensive and emphasized the need for large-scale digitization. Other libraries used the Zoom online meeting platform to share artwork and other artifacts. In general, the deans and directors believe everything will go back to normal when their campuses fully reopen. They intend to

continue using some of their adjusted methods of delivering services as necessary.

Additional Challenges and Opportunities

Several additional issues were brought to the forefront as the deans and directors were invited to raise topics that had not been previously discussed. One finding was that some libraries are losing their space to other programs and services on campus. They are sharing their space with writing centers, tutoring centers, and sometimes even non-academic service areas such as the police department and information technology services. This trend does not bode well for some archives and special collections since adequate space is essential for preserving these materials.

Some deans believe that issues around diversity, equity, and inclusion should be brought to the attention of the HBCU Library Alliance and CLIR. One dean noted that it is now popular for organizations to develop and publicize statements about diversity, equity, and inclusion to make their positions known. However, the effort appears to end at those statements. Smaller institutions are often left out of the conversation when it comes to accessing resources and assistance. This inequity has created an information gap when it comes to what is accessible to those libraries, students, and researchers.

There was also consensus that there is a need to educate presidents and administrators about the significance of archives and special collections so that these collections can get the recognition and support they need. Deans made several references to HBCUs losing collections to well-resourced predominantly White institutions. Still, in the face of those issues, some deans and directors praised the support they have received from the HBCU Library Alliance. Overall, they hope to be able to continue this conversation; gain better exposure; and create ongoing, meaningful advocacy for their collections.

The Focus Group and the ITHAKA Survey Reports

Recent nationwide academic library surveys conducted by ITHAKA found that the highest priority for most libraries is student success. Few institutions indicated that they intend to devote additional staffing and budgets to rare, special, and distinctive collections (Wolff 2017). This is also true for HBCU libraries. The support HBCU libraries receive, which is usually inadequate, tends to be geared toward their academic programs and less toward archives and special collections. HBCU libraries already face institutional funding challenges in general, so unless the archives and special collections are tied to academic programs or accreditation, there appears to be little indication that their level of priority will improve at their institutions. Nationally, about 75% of library deans and directors believe they and their direct supervisors share the same values (Wolff 2017). Only about a third of participants in this focus group study could say the same. Many indicated they likely share the same values as their supervisors, but they do not see those values reflected in the financial support they receive.

In terms of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, most institutions indicated on the ITHAKA survey that there was no change in

employees working in the areas of archives, rare books, and special collections, although some had to furlough employees and eliminate positions (Frederick and Wolff-Eisenberg 2020). HBCU library deans and directors did not report having to furlough or eliminate positions related to archives and special collections. To the contrary, many are still fighting for a single archivist position to serve in this capacity. Moreover, HBCU library professionals conducting services in archives and special collections tend to already have other key roles, so the libraries did not report the need to furlough or eliminate positions.

Recommendations

Overall, it appears that much more work needs to be done as it relates to archives and special collections at HBCU libraries. This observation was based on the repeated comments by the focus group participants when they passionately expressed the need to educate administrators and invest in archives and special collections so that they are preserved and honored for future generations.

Some participants expressed the need to continue the conversation about the challenges and opportunities related to archives and special collections. One dean suggested adding a subgroup for archivists to the existing HBCU Library Alliance. This subgroup could continue to meet to learn about each other's digital infrastructure and digitization programs, and they could ultimately collaborate to address their shared needs. They could also become the primary advocacy group responsible for gauging and articulating the needs and aspirations of HBCU libraries' archives and special collections.

Many deans and directors also expressed the importance of educating their administrators about the significance of their collections. Because many administrators simply do not know or understand their significance, this creates a wonderful teaching opportunity for the advocacy group. They could schedule virtual tours of model archives and special collections at other institutions to demonstrate their own library's aspirations, or to highlight their disparities. The advocacy group could also partner with other organizations such as institutional boards of trustees who would also have a vested interest in maintaining these collections. Increased awareness and advocacy about the challenges and needs related to archives and special collections may lead to better financial support from administrators and related funding agencies.

This study appears to be one of few that document the needs of HBCU libraries as they relate to archives and special collections. The challenges that have surfaced in terms of advocacy and funding warrant a response, and this response should prompt ongoing formal studies to follow up on progress over time.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval



MISSISSIPPI VALLEY STATE
UNIVERSITY

Date: March 29, 2021
To: Drs. S. Freeman, P. Hopkins, & S. Smith
From: Mississippi Valley State University Institutional Research Board
Project Title: Creating Access to HBCU Library
Type of Application: Expedited
Action: Approved

Attention: Drs. S. Freeman, P. Hopkins, & S. Smith

The Mississippi Valley State University Institutional Research Board (MVSU-IRB) has considered your submission for the project referenced above.

The MVSU-IRB approved your Human Subjects Application

Good luck with your research and if the MVSU-IRB can assist you further, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Catherine Singleton-Walker".

Dr. Catherine Singleton-Walker, Chair IRB-MVSU
Chair/Associate Professor, Department of Social Work

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

MVSU 7293 | 14000 Hwy. 82 West | Itta Bena, MS 38941-1400
662.254.3365 Phone | 662.254.3771 Fax
www.mvsu.edu

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPLICATION

IRB Log # _____

Title of Proposal: Creating Access to HBCU Library Alliance Archives: Needs, Capacity, and Technical Planning

Principal Investigator: Dr. Sharon Freeman, Dr. Portia Hopkins, and Dr. Synatra Smith

MVSU Employee/Status: Dr. Sharon Freeman/Full-Time (Assistant VP for Institutional Research)

Department Address: MVSU, 445 Sutton Administration Building, Itta Bena, MS 38941

MVSU Phone #: [REDACTED] Home Phone #: [REDACTED]

Will this study receive any direct or indirect federal support? (Including use of federal facilities):
 Yes _____ No X _____ Agency _____

Type of review requested: Exempt Expedited _____ Full _____

Proposed start/completion date: May 1, 2021 / January 31, 2022

Composition of study group (age, sex, race, disadvantaged, etc.): HBCU University Library Deans and Directors

Name, MVSU Address, Phone of Co-Investigators and Students: Dr. Sharon Freeman, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Principal Investigator Assurance:

On behalf of my co-investigators, associated students, staff and myself, I agree: To perform the research according to the ethical principles of the Belmont Report, requirements of 45CFR46 to strictly adhere to the research protocol as it relates to human subjects, and to promptly report to the IRB any proposed change in the research activity, and to ensure that no changes be made in the activity without obtaining prior IRB approval (except that a change may be made to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject); to comply with any contingencies upon which approval may be granted; to promptly notify any member of the IRB verbally (with written confirmation) of unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or others and of any other adverse circumstance actions affecting the subjects that arise from the research.

Principal Investigators: Sharon Freeman | Portia Hopkins
Synatra Smith | 3-19-21

IRB USE: Exempt Expedited Full

Contingencies for Approval: _____

Re-review Frequency: _____

Approved/Disapproved: _____ / _____
 Signature (Chair) IRB, Date

MVSU INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD CONSENT FORM CHECKLIST

IRB Log # _____

Proposer: Dr. Sharon Freeman, Dr. Portia Hopkins, and Dr. Synatra SmithSignature:  | Portia HopkinsSynatra Smith _____ Date: March 19, 2021Proposal Title: Creating Access to HBCU Library Alliance Archives: Needs, Capacity, and Technical Planning

The primary investigator (PI) or Faculty Advisor (FA), if the investigator is a student, must answer following questions YES, NO, or NA and provide satisfactory explanation if answer is "NO"; Otherwise the Consent Form must be revised to eliminate "NO" answers.

- YES 1. Is the consent form written in "lay language" and presented in a way comprehended by the participant? (Explain on the reverse special arrangements for those unable to read the consent form).
- YES 2. Is it free of any exculpatory language through which the participant is made to waive any legal rights, including any release of the investigator, sponsor, institution or its agents from liability for negligence?
- YES 3. Will the participant be provided a copy of the consent document?
- NA 4. If the blood is to be withdrawn, is the standard blood withdrawal information included?
- Number of times; amount, period of time covered; minimal risk of "bruising, inflammation of vein, and infection?"
 - Have all personnel handling blood been immunized against Hepatitis B?
 - Does your laboratory have approved exposure control plans for blood-borne or other pathogens?
 - Has your laboratory conformed to all applicable OSHA regulations concerning blood-borne or other pathogens?
- NA 5. If children (individuals who have not reached the legal age of consent, 18 in Alaska) are participants, is provision made for securing the assent of the child and the consent of the parent or guardian?
- NA 6. If investigational drugs or devices are to be used, or if approved drugs or devices are to be used in a manner for which they have not been approved, are such drugs or devices identified as "experimental?"
- YES 7. Does the consent form include each of the following basic elements of informed consent?

Appendix B: Consent Forms

CONSENT DOCUMENT FOR ENROLLING ADULT PARTICIPANTS IN A RESEARCH STUDY

HBCU Library Alliance and the Council on Library and Information Resources

Project Title: Creating Access to HBCU Library Alliance Archives:
Needs, Capacity, and Technical Planning

Investigators:

Sharon Freeman, Mississippi Valley State University (Principal Investigator)

Protocol and Consent Title: Creating Access to HBCU Library Alliance Archives: Needs, Capacity, and Technical Planning

You are being asked to be a volunteer in a research study.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to build consensus around and articulate common values, priorities, and needs for describing and managing special and archival collections for the HBCU Library Alliance community. We expect anywhere from 10 to 50 subjects to participate in this study.

Exclusion/Inclusion Criteria:

Participants in this study must be 18 years of age or older, understand and speak English, and have access to an internet connection and a phone.

Procedures:

If you decide to participate in this study, you will participate in a focus group with other participants. The focus group will last no more than ninety minutes and will cover roughly ten questions about special and archival collections and/or related services you currently provide or might be interested in providing in the future. With your permission, I will record audio and video of the focus group responses. You may opt out of video recording by deactivating the camera on your system. Audio and/or video recordings will be used to create transcripts and to fact check the focus group facilitator's notes. The audio and video files and notes will be stored in a secure, password-protected cloud account, and deleted after the research and mandated retention period has ended. You may stop the focus group at any time and for any reason. The focus group facilitator will respect any requests made by you to withhold information revealed during the focus group. Your responses (and all others) will be analyzed and summarized in a report or article that may be made available in an open access institutional repository and/or submitted for peer-reviewed publication in an academic journal. Anonymized data from your focus group responses may be included as an appendix to the report/article.

Risks or Discomforts:

The risks involved in participating in the focus group are no greater than those encountered in everyday life.

Benefits:

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this focus group. We hope what we learn from this study will outline shared and diverging values, priorities, and needs among the HBCU Library Alliance members' leadership.

Compensation to You:

There is no compensation for participation.

Storing and Sharing your Information:

Your participation in this study is gratefully acknowledged. It is possible that your information/data will be enormously valuable for other research purposes. By participating in the focus group, you consent for your de-identified information/data to be stored by the researcher and to be shared with other researchers in future studies. Future researchers will not have a way to identify you. Any future research must be approved by an ethics committee before being undertaken.

Use of Photographs, Audio, or Video Recordings:

If you consent for audio and video of your participation in the focus group to be recorded, the recording will be saved under a code number rather than your name. It will be kept in a secure, password-protected cloud account and only the principal investigators will be able to access it. Audio and video recordings will be used for transcription and fact-checking purposes only and will be deleted after the research has concluded.

Confidentiality:

The following procedures will be followed to keep your personal information confidential in this study: Your privacy will be protected to the extent required by law. To protect your privacy, focus group notes and recordings will be saved under a code number rather than by name. Your name and any other fact that might point to you will not appear when results of this study are presented or published. The Mississippi Valley State University Institutional Review Board may look over study records during required reviews.

Costs to You:

There are no costs to you, other than your time, for being in this study.

Questions about the Study:

If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Dr. Sharon Freeman at

dr.sharonfreeman@gmail.com

Questions about Your Rights as a Research Participant:

- Your participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study if you don't want to be.
- You have the right to change your mind and leave the study at any time without giving any reason and without penalty.
- Any new information that may make you change your mind about being in this study will be given to you.
- You may print a copy of this form for your records.
- You do not waive any of your legal rights by choosing to be in this study.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact

Dr. Catherine Singleton-Walker, Mississippi Valley State University
Institutional Review Board Chair, at [REDACTED]

If you answer the focus group questions, it means that you have read – or have had read to you – the information contained in this document and consent to be a volunteer in this research study.

Consent:

I voluntarily agree to participate in this focus group according to the guidelines and procedures outlined above. I understand my rights and that I may stop participating at any time.

Name (Print or type): _____

Title: _____

Institution: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Participating Institutions

Albany State University Albany, GA	Lincoln University Lincoln University, Pennsylvania
Alcorn State University Alcorn, MS	Meharry Medical College Nashville, TN
Benedict College Greensboro, NC	Mississippi Valley State University Itta Bena, MS
Bennett College Greensboro, NC	Morehouse School of Medicine Atlanta, GA
Bowie State University Bowie, MD	Morgan State University Baltimore, MD
Claflin University Orangeburg, SC	North Carolina Central University Durham, NC
Clinton College Rock Hill, SC	Oakwood University Huntsville, AL
Denmark Technical College Denmark, SC	Philander Smith College Little Rock, AR
Elizabeth City State University Elizabeth City, NC	Shelton State Community College Tuscaloosa, AL
Fisk University Nashville, TN	Southern University New Orleans New Orleans, LA
Florida A&M University Tallahassee, FL	Talladega College Talladega, AL
Jackson State University Jackson, MS	Texas College Tyler, TX
Johnson C. Smith University Charlotte, NC	Trenholm State Community College Montgomery, AL
Lane College Jackson, TN	Tuskegee University Tuskegee, AL
Lemoyne-Owen College Memphis, TN	Wiley College Marshall, TX
Lincoln University of Missouri Jefferson City, MO	Winston-Salem State University Winston-Salem, NC

Appendix D: Focus Group Discussion Guide

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

HBCU Library Alliance and
the Council on Library and Information Resources

Focus Group Discussion Guide
Dr. Sharon Freeman, Focus Group Facilitator

Creating Access to HBCU Library Alliance Archives:
Needs, Capacity, and Technical Planning

Focus Group Discussion Guide

Project Title: **Creating Access to HBCU Library Alliance Archives: Needs, Capacity, and Technical Planning**

Overview: This focus group discussion guide is designed specifically to elicit responses from HBCU Library Association deans and directors regarding their archives and special collections. The intent of the focus group sessions is to build consensus around and articulate common values, priorities, and needs for describing and managing special and archival collections for the HBCU Library community. It is anticipated that these discussions will provide a better understanding of the significance of institutional archives and related needs and aspirations at HBCU libraries.

Participants: The participants in this focus group will be deans and directors of libraries in the HBCU Library community.

Pre-Focus Group Work:

Participant Identification: The Executive Director of the HBCU Library Alliance will contact deans and directors from HBCU libraries to identify individuals interested in participating in the focus group sessions.

Scheduling of Focus Group Sessions: The Focus Group Facilitator has compiled a list of dates below from which participants can choose. Sessions are available on Wednesdays and Thursdays during the months of May and June 2021 with options for morning and afternoon sessions.

<u>May 2021 Dates</u>	<u>Days</u>	<u>Times</u>
5-May-21	Wednesday	10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. CST
6-May-21	Thursday	10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. CST
12-May-21	Wednesday	10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. CST
13-May-21	Thursday	10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. CST
19-May-21	Wednesday	10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. CST
20-May-21	Thursday	10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. CST
26-May-21	Wednesday	10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. CST

<u>June 2021 Dates</u>	<u>Days</u>	<u>Times</u>
9-Jun-21	Wednesday	2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. CST
10-Jun-21	Thursday	10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. CST
16-Jun-21	Wednesday	2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. CST
17-Jun-21	Thursday	10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. CST
30-Jun-21	Wednesday	2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. CST

Formal Invitations to Participate: Formal invitations to participate in focus group sessions will be emailed to each participant. The invitation will include a welcome message, the agreed upon date of the focus group session, a statement regarding electronic consent forms, and a hyperlink to the assigned Zoom meeting. Consent forms (Appendix A) will be emailed to each participant individually and should be signed electronically. As each session approaches, a reminder will be sent via email one week prior and one day prior to the session date. The reminder will include additional details and directions for accessing the meeting using a Zoom hyperlink.

Welcome:

Good morning/afternoon and welcome to this focus group session. My name is <Dr. Sharon Freeman>. I am the Focus Group Facilitator, and I will be conducting today's session. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this very important and timely discussion.

Please oblige me for a few moments while I cover some information that will be important for today's session. I apologize in advance for reading this prepared material, but I did want to make sure that every group receives the same information and is operating from the same level of understanding.

The whole reason why we're here today is because the HBCU Library Alliance, in partnership with the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR), is steering this initiative in order to gain a better understanding of issues that are common, and perhaps even different, about your values, priorities, and needs for managing special collections and archives.

The HBCU Library Alliance and CLIR understand that HBCUs are the primary stewards of many cultural and historical records from the African American experience. Your libraries have a long-standing tradition of developing these collections and they are undoubtedly instrumental to research, teaching, and creative works that document the African American experience. Keeping that in mind, today we will allow you to share your thoughts and ideas about the significance of your archives and special collections and your related needs and aspirations.

Consent Process:

Prior to today's session, each of you should have received and signed a consent form (Appendix A). If you have not signed a consent form you may quickly do so by clicking on the link [\[REDACTED\]](#) in the Chat Box.

The consent form outlines the purpose, procedures, risks, use of information, confidentiality, and your rights as a participant in this focus group. Because you have already read and consented to participating in this focus group, today I will only review major components of the consent form as a reminder, and as an opportunity for you to opt out of this process if you choose to do so. With that said, the signed consent form indicates the following:

- ✓ *There are no risks involved in participating in this study.*
- ✓ *There are no costs, benefits, nor compensation for your participation in this study.*
- ✓ *The information you provide will be kept securely and confidentially and will only be reported in aggregate or in coded form.*
- ✓ *You do not waive any of your legal rights by choosing to be in this study.*
- ✓ *You are participating as a volunteer and you can stop participating at any time.*

If you have any questions about the consent process, I can be reached outside this session at <[REDACTED]>.

About this Focus Group:

Next, I would like to share with you a little information about this focus group. Your group is one out of approximately 10 focus groups who will be participating in this process. All focus groups consist of deans and directors, and perhaps other library professionals from HBCU libraries. Our aim is to have enough representation across these focus groups to gain a comprehensive understanding about your values, priorities, and needs for describing and managing special and archival collections.

This focus group session will last approximately 90 minutes.

Ground Rules:

In terms of ground rules, I ask you to remember the following guidelines as I pose questions to the group.

- *You are the experts, so we want to hear from you.*
- *We would like for everyone to participate.*
- *It is okay to abstain from discussing topics if you are uncomfortable.*
- *There are no right or wrong answers.*
- *It is okay to have different viewpoints and opinions. We are not trying to achieve consensus. We are trying to gain a better understanding of your viewpoints.*
- *What we say in this focus group is confidential so help us protect everyone's privacy. We want everyone to feel comfortable when speaking about sensitive topics.*
- *Again, participation is voluntary and you may choose to stop at any time.*

Session Logistics:

Next, I have a few logistics to discuss before we get started.

- *If you prefer not to be video-recorded, please disable your web cameras now. You will continue to be audio recorded for transcription and reporting purposes.*
- *Make sure your microphones are unmuted before speaking. If you anticipate outside noise or conversations that would distract other participants, please keep your microphone muted until you would like to speak.*

- *When I ask a question anyone who would like to respond can start by unmuting their microphone and speaking. To keep the process smooth and orderly, subsequent responders can join in like a natural conversation or you can click the “raise hand” option under the “reactions” icon to be recognized. Otherwise, I will ask for responses in the order I see participants on the screen.*
- *Please speak up and speak clearly so that your responses can be fully understood and recorded accurately. I may ask you to repeat your response if it is unclear.*

At this time, do you have any questions for me?

<Answer any questions>

Okay, great let’s get started!

Introductions and Ice Breaker:

First, let’s start with a combined introduction and ice breaker. You may tell us as much or as little as you feel comfortable telling us. After you provide your name, tell us ...

I’ll go first. My name is <Sharon Freeman>. I have over 20 years of experience working in higher education, mostly in institutional research and the area of data collection and analysis. Interestingly enough, I started out in higher education working in the library as a systems analyst, then went on to work in computer support, and finally in Institutional Research. <Ice breaker response>

Who would like to go next?

<Allow participant introductions and ice breaker responses>

<The facilitator will select one of the following>

- *If you could have any new skill instantly what would you choose?*
- *Tell me, what do you think is your “superpower” and why? Then, tell me what you think is your kryptonite?*
- *If money were no object, where would be the first place you would travel?*
- *If money were no object, what would be the first thing you would buy?*
- *If you could have any one fictional person as your best friend, who would it be?*
- *If you could have any one famous person as your best friend, who would it be?*

<Allow participant responses>

Great! Nice to meet everyone and again welcome to the focus group on creating access to HBCU library archives. Those were really interesting responses! Thank you for sharing that with us. Now, I hope we all feel a little more relaxed and open to sharing our thoughts and experiences.

Focus Group Questions:

Let's get started with our first question.

<It is anticipated that the responses to many questions will tend to overlap with responses of prior questions. In cases where the topic has already been discussed, a question does not need to be repeated unless it contains an aspect not covered in a previous question. Probing questions may be asked if it is determined that the primary questions have not elicited enough information.>

Description and Significance of Archives and Special Collections

Primary question 1: *Considering the content of your archives and special collections, what do you think is their significance for your institution?*

Probing question 1a: *What is their significance outside of your institution?*

Management and Capacity

Primary question 2: *Are there enough institutional resources to effectively maintain and manage your archives and special collections?*

Probing question 3: *What are the strongest and weakest aspects of your archives and special collections?*

Values

Primary Question 3: **Do you and the administration at your institution share the same values related to archives and special collections?*

Probing Question 3a: *Does your library have a mission statement, goals and/or objectives that include expectations for archives and special collections?*

Priorities, Needs, and Aspirations

Primary Question 4: *If funding were available, what would be your highest priority as it relates to your archives and special collections?*

Probing Question 4a: *What would you say are the greatest aspirations, beyond basic needs, for your archives and special collections?*

Probing Question 4b: **Do you anticipate your institution will invest more, or less, in digitizing archives and special collections over the coming years?*

COVID-19 Impact

Primary Question 5: *What do you anticipate will be the greatest impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on archives and special collections at your institution?*

Probing Question 5a: *What would you say is the general outlook for archives and special collections over the coming years?*

*Comparative information is available from the ITHAKA Library Survey.

Additional Questions

Primary Question 6: Is there anything about archives and special collections that you think administrators, the HBCU Library Alliance and CLIR (as representative and support groups) should know that we have not discussed today?

Primary Question 7: What are the most important things that can be taken away from this focus group as it relates to your discussion?

Session Closure:

This concludes our focus group session. I sincerely appreciate each and every one of you for participating today. We recognize the experience and insight you have brought into this conversation, and we know it will help us gain a better understanding of your needs, values, and priorities as they relate to archives and special collections. I look forward to compiling all the information from this group and other groups into a report that can be used to inform decisions about library archives and special collections. It was very nice meeting all of you. Again, thank you, and enjoy the rest of your day.

Appendix E:

Creating Access to HBCU Library Alliance Archives: Needs, Capacity, and Technical Planning, Internal Report, Executive Summary

(Companion to Focus Group Study)

Prepared on behalf of the partnership between the HBCU Library Alliance
and the Council on Library and Information Resources

by

Dr. Portia D. Hopkins

*CLIR/DLF Postdoctoral Research Associate in
Data Curation for African American Studies*

Rice University
Houston, Texas

Dr. Synatra A. Smith

*CLIR/DLF Postdoctoral Fellow in Data
Curation for African American Studies*

Philadelphia Museum of Art Library and Archives
Temple University Libraries Loretta C. Duckworth Scholars Studio
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Executive Summary

This report summarizes data gathered from five member institutions selected by the HBCU Library Alliance to participate in this study. The five institutions make up a sample that primarily reflects the needs of small and medium-sized institutions (Lincoln University of Missouri, Meharry Medical College, Southern University at New Orleans, and Xavier University of Louisiana) but also includes the perspectives of those working on one larger campus (Prairie View A&M University). Ranging in size and budget, the five institutions are situated across four states (Missouri, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Texas), and their unique collections encompass African art, narratives of the enslaved, the collected works of Langston Hughes, campus alumni history, and more. Taken together, these HBCU Library Alliance member institutions provide a rich yet manageable range of data conducive to analysis within the year-long timeframe for *Creating Access to HBCU Library Alliance Archival Collections*.

The goals for the study were to (1) build consensus around and articulate common values, priorities, and needs for describing and managing special and archival collections for the HBCU Library Alliance community; and (2) document basic technical capacities and user profiles that could be used to design sustain-

able shared technical solutions for creating access to the majority of HBCU Library Alliance members' archival collections. Researchers conducted interviews with individuals working at the five participating institutions to identify opportunities for improving support for creating access to special collections and archives across HBCU Library Alliance member organizations.

Major Recommendations

Most of the challenges articulated by the participants relate to the practical maintenance of their repositories and providing access to their special collections and archives. Workflows are not standardized across member institutions or even, in some cases, within institutions. Only one of the five participating institutions is actively collecting user experience data to confirm appropriate levels of support to researchers discovering special collections and archival records. For these reasons, the research team proposes two major initiatives. Each would require broad participation across the HBCU Library Alliance membership.

1. The HBCU Library Alliance should develop an extensive arrangement, preservation, and description guide based on existing DACS and OAIS standards to establish model workflows and appropriate tools suited to the realities of HBCU libraries; these may differ from those located at PWIs.
2. The organization could also facilitate a working group to develop and implement a user experience evaluation strategy to improve discovery and access for researchers.

Library leadership and the institutions' administrations can influence the resources available to support this work as well as ideologically steer digitization efforts and expectations. Developing policies related to collecting and acquiring new materials, deaccessioning records, environmental planning, and staffing and funding fall under the purview of leadership staff who may or may not participate in establishing protocols and workflows but are certainly responsible for enforcing policies. For these reasons, the researchers propose that the HBCU Library Alliance should support library directors by:

1. underscoring the role of libraries as a central hub for supporting the research communities;
2. advocating for the use of university resources to conduct outreach and enhance marketing efforts;
3. conducting research related to advancing the professional development of existing and emerging librarians and archivists, and;
4. facilitating an open dialog among member institutions.

Additional Recommendations

Drawing from their analysis of the interview data as well as an investigation into relevant policies and protocols for providing access to special collections and archival records, the research team proposes additional recommendations for three areas of work: maintaining reliable and trustworthy repositories, improving user experiences and discovery, and supporting other member institution priorities. The recommendations cover staffing, budgeting, establishing workflows and standards for digitization and access, evaluation, and addressing hardware and software needs.

Recommendations for Maintaining Reliable and Trustworthy Repositories

HBCU Library Alliance member institutions should be encouraged to adopt existing and updated practices, theories, techniques, standards, and tools in order to maintain reliable and trustworthy repositories. Efforts should be focused on preserving and creating access to unique, locally oriented materials rather than competing to provide parallel services unnecessarily. Recommendations in this area might be adopted by individual member institutions, across small cohorts of collaborating institutions, or across the entire HBCU Library Alliance membership:

1. Commit resources to developing multi-institutional digitization hubs similar to those at Prairie View A&M University and Xavier University of Louisiana, documenting practices so that they can serve as models for other collaborative endeavors.
2. Launch a collaborative initiative to inventory, clean, and reorganize rare materials in order to prevent environmental damage, degradation, and loss.
3. Prioritize the digitization VHS, microfiche, and other volatile analog materials at risk of degradation.
4. Dedicate at least one individual at each organization to digitization work and focus on supporting that person's professional development and growth, and create opportunities for them to share knowledge with others.

Recommendations for Improving User Experience and Discovery

Participants suggested three main recommendations dealing with user experience and discovery:

1. Launch initiatives to create and enhance finding aids so that researchers can better discover special collections and archival records.
2. Provide an online form, easily accessible from finding aids and catalog records, that would enable users to nominate materials for digitization quickly and easily.
3. Mobilize resources across organizations (e.g., university marketing, alumni outreach) to promote and support the libraries' efforts to better engage with faculty, students, and researchers.

Supporting Other Member Institution Priorities

Participants in the study identified additional challenges and obstacles they faced at their respective institutions, noting administrative support and advocacy as a priority for securing resources to sustain all library activities. Advocacy for libraries can benefit from attention at the local as well as consortial levels, through enacting some or all of the following recommendations:

1. The HBCU Library Alliance should develop a "State of the HBCU Library Alliance" address that can be shared widely amongst member institutions' administrations each year, helping institutional administrations better appreciate the larger undertaking HBCU

- libraries facilitate: to preserve and protect African American history and shape the documentation of African American legacies.
2. More local and national attention should be devoted to recruiting more young people of color into the fields of library and information science, special collections and archives, and information technology. BIPOC populations, and particularly African Americans, are an underrepresented group within each of these respective professions.
 3. Since very few library school programs are offered at HBCUs, the HBCU Library Alliance should facilitate a conversation amongst its member institutions to strategically and collaboratively address these career gaps for African Americans.
 4. The HBCU Library Alliance should endeavor to provide more face-to-face professional development and networking opportunities for member organizations with the goal of facilitating deeper and more extensive collaboration across organizations.

