

Repositories, Copyright, and Fair Use

Association of Research Libraries (ARL)

Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for Academic and Research Libraries (2012)

<http://www.arl.org/pp/ppcopyright/codefairuse/code/four-creating.shtml>

FOUR: Creating Digital Collections of Archival and Special Collections Materials

Description

Many libraries hold special collections and archives of rare or unusual text and nontext materials (published and unpublished) that do not circulate on the same terms as the general collection. The copyright status of materials in these collections is often unclear. Despite the investments that have been made in acquiring and preserving such collections, they frequently are of limited general utility because they typically can be consulted only on-site, and in some cases using only limited analog research aids. The research value of these collections typically resides not only in the individual items they contain (although such items are often unique in themselves), but also in the unique assemblage or aggregation they represent. Special collections can have a shared provenance or be organized around a key topic, era, or theme. Libraries and their patrons would benefit significantly from digitization and off-site availability of these valuable collections. While institutions must abide by any donor restrictions applicable to their donated collections, and they will inevitably consider practical and political concerns such as maintaining good relations with donor communities, librarians will benefit significantly from knowing their rights under fair use.

Presenting these unique collections as a digital aggregate, especially with commentary, criticism, and other curation, can be highly transformative. Works held in these collections and archives will serve a host of transformative scholarly and educational purposes relative to their typically narrower original purposes. Materials in special collections typically include significant amounts of primary sources and artifacts (correspondence, institutional records, annotated volumes, ephemeral popular entertainment) whose value as historical objects for scholarly research is significantly different from their original purpose. The new value created by aggregating related documents in a single, well-curated collection is also significant. In addition to access for scholarly purposes, digitization facilitates novel transformative uses of the collection as a whole—see principle seven below regarding digitization for search and other nonconsumptive uses.

Principle

It is fair use to create digital versions of a library's special collections and archives and to make these versions electronically accessible in appropriate contexts.

Limitations

- Providing access to published works that are available in unused copies on the commercial market at reasonable prices should be undertaken only with careful consideration, if at all. To the extent that the copy of such a work in a particular collection is unique (e.g., contains

marginalia or other unique markings or characteristics), access to unique aspects of the copy will be supportable under fair use. The presence of non-unique copies in a special collection can be indicated by descriptive entries without implicating copyright.

- Where digitized special collections are posted online, reasonable steps should be taken to limit access to material likely to contain damaging or sensitive private information.
- Full attribution, in a form satisfactory to scholars in the field, should be provided for all special collection items made available online, to the extent it is reasonably possible to do so.

Enhancements

- The fair use case will be even stronger where items to be digitized consist largely of works, such as personal photographs, correspondence, or ephemera, whose owners are not exploiting the material commercially and likely could not be located to seek permission for new uses.
- Libraries should consider taking technological steps, reasonable in light of both the nature of the material and of institutional capabilities, to prevent downloading of digital files by users, or else to limit the quality of files to what is appropriate to the use.
- Libraries should also provide copyright owners with a simple tool for registering objections to online use, and respond to such objections promptly.
- Subject to the considerations outlined above, a special collection should be digitized in its entirety, and presented as a cohesive collection whenever possible.
- Adding criticism, commentary, rich metadata, and other additional value and context to the collection will strengthen the fair use case.
- The fair use case will be stronger when the availability of the material is appropriately publicized to scholars in the field and other persons likely to be especially interested