Rare Book MARC Data as University Archives: New Directions for Special Collections Collaboration

JENNIFER KING, LEAH RICHARDSON and DOLSY SMITH

Abstract: This poster showcases a collaborative, year-long Collections as Data project to analyze the rare book holdings of the George Washington University Libraries. A team of four librarians from different units harvested MARC data from more than 70,000 rare book catalog records with the goal of learning more about the strengths, coverage, and gaps of the collection and to learn new technical skills related to writing code and data analysis. This poster will illustrate the steps of the project both technical and organizational: the technologies and skills we used and developed at each phase, the role of project partners, what challenges we encountered and how we adapted, and finally what we learned about our rare book collection and our ability to support collections as data research. What we learned about the collection that was most surprising was how much institutional history is contained in the descriptive catalog records for rare book holdings and how valuable this descriptive data is for researchers. The experience and findings of this project while informative and practical also revealed the immense potential of our collections and our colleagues: potential for cross-departmental collaboration, potential to learn new skills, and the potential for metadata to do more than describe.

About the Authors:

Jennifer King is the Collections Coordinator and Manuscripts Librarian at George Washington University. In addition to collection development responsibilities within the Washingtoniana division, Jennifer oversees the processing and technical services work for Special Collections.

Leah Richardson is the Research and Instruction Librarian for Special Collections at George Washington University. In addition to coordinating special collections’ public services, Leah participates in library-wide collection development and is a member of the scholarly communications team.

Dolsy Smith is the Collection Strategist and Humanities Librarian at the George Washington University. In addition to coordinating collection development for the library, Dolsy works across departments to support their use of data about collections and services.