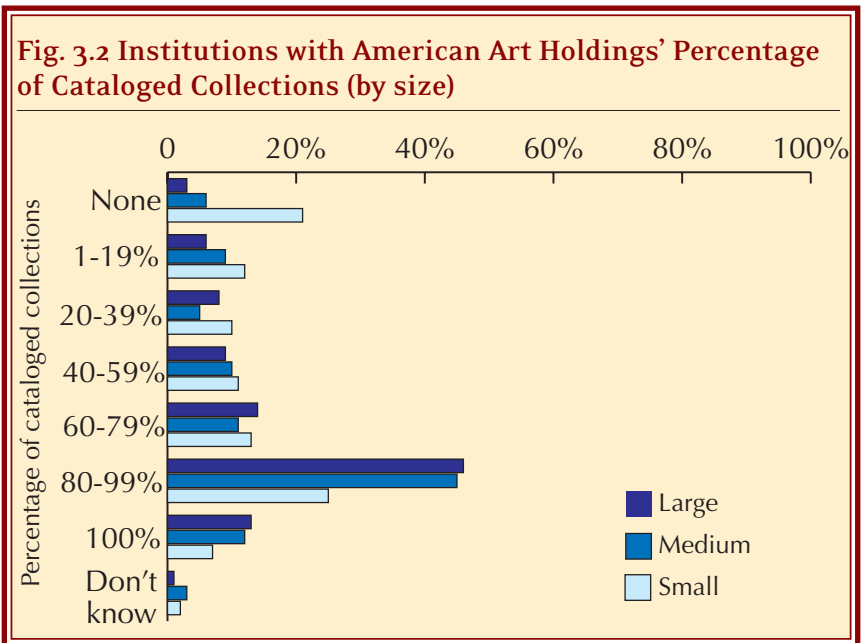
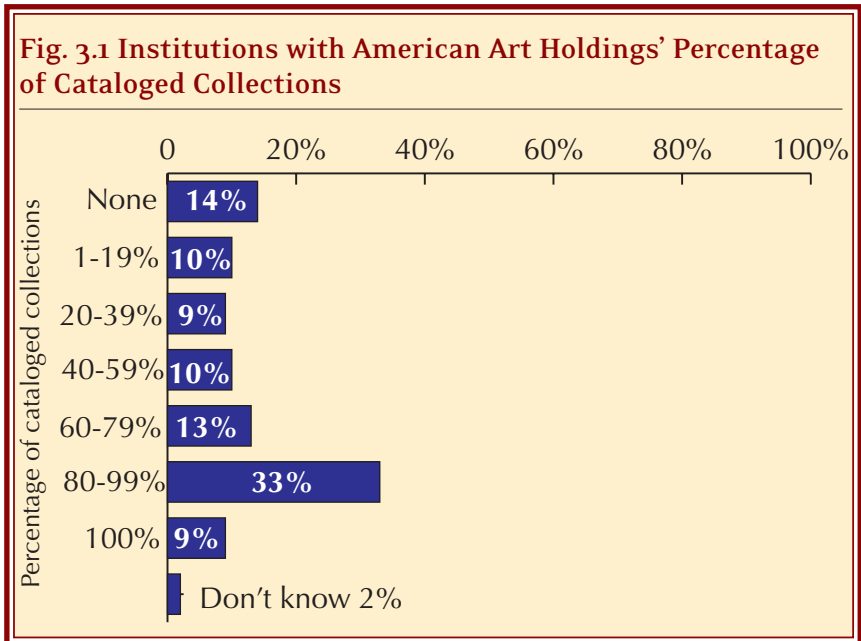


## Chapter 3: Intellectual Control and Assessment

Although intellectual control of collections is not a preservation activity per se, it is a vital prerequisite. The Heritage Health Index shows a serious backlog in cataloging collections; 39% of institutions have less than 60% of their collections accessible through a catalog.<sup>1</sup> At institutions holding American art collections, the figure is 43%, and 14% claim to have no collections cataloged at all (figure 3.1). With a limited understanding of what it has, how can an institution know how to provide the best care for its collections? Twenty-four percent of institutions holding American art cite an urgent need for finding aids and cataloging collections, and 79% cite a need or urgent need for this activity.

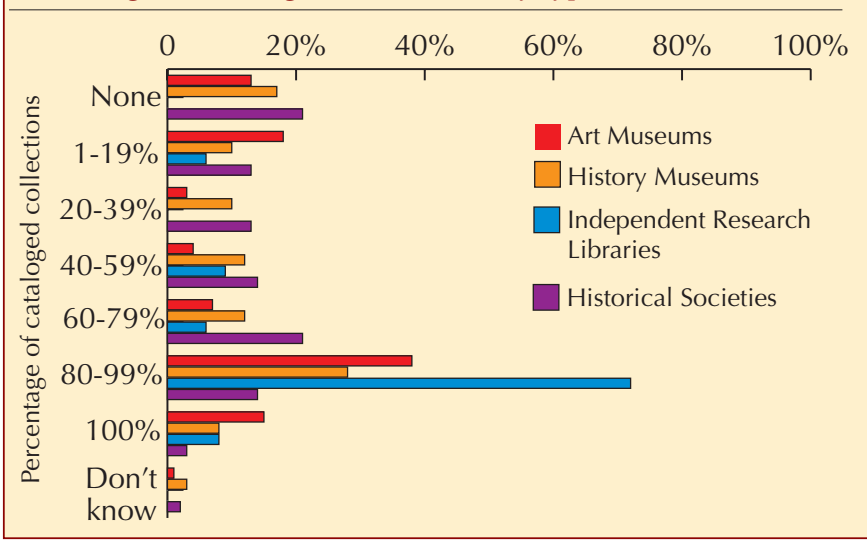
The rate of intellectual control is directly related to size of institution, with smaller institutions more likely to have none or few collections cataloged. However, 26% of large institutions have less than 60% of their collections cataloged—

1. A broad definition was used for “catalog”: research tool or finding aid that provides intellectual control over collection through entries that may contain descriptive detail, including physical description, provenance, history, accession information, etc.



The International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art – North America (INCCA-NA) is a membership organization devoted to the collection, sharing, and preservation of knowledge needed for the conservation of modern and contemporary art. A regional affiliate of a worldwide organization, the North American group was launched in January 2006 under the guidance of a steering committee of conservation professionals from institutions such as New York University, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Museum of Modern Art. Members are required to contribute records to the Database for Artists' Archives, which includes information such as artists' interviews, installation protocols, and scientific materials research and is accessible to members on the INCCA Web site. The North American group is currently developing membership, organizational structure, and fund-raising for staff and programming.

**Fig. 3.3 Institutions with the Largest Number of Art Holdings' Percentage of Cataloged Collections (by type)**



a significant backlog (figure 3.2). Among those institutions with the greatest number of art holdings, 13% of art museums, 17% of history museums, and 17% of historical societies have no collections cataloged (figure 3.3). Only 53% of art museums have 80% to 100% of their collections cataloged. Independent research libraries—like almost all libraries—have virtually all of their collections cataloged.

Two follow-up questions asked if institutions have made collections catalogs available online (whether for internal staff use or for the public) and whether any collections content was available online (figure 3.4 and figure 3.5). This data helps ascertain the degree to which collections information is readily accessible. More than half of institutions (58%) have no collections cataloging online, and only 18% have almost their entire catalog online. However, almost a third provide some content online, and 11% say they will make some collections available online within the next year.

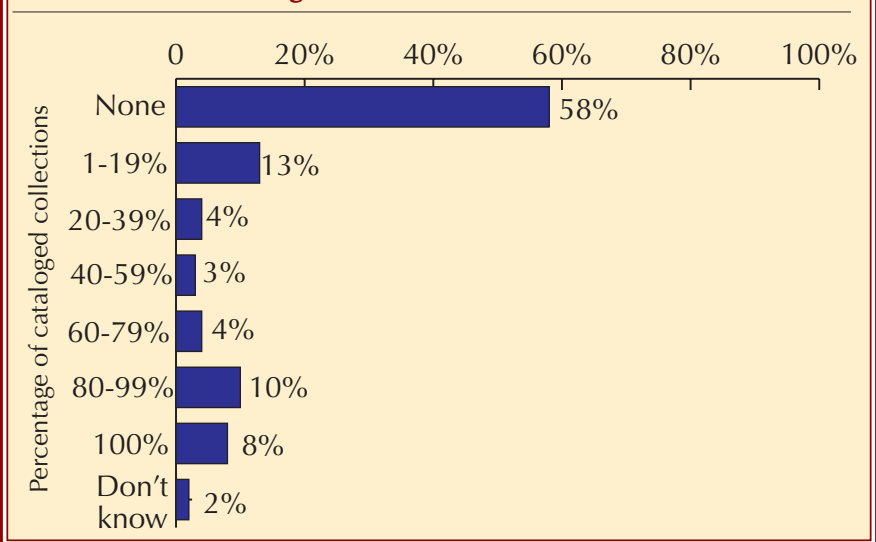
The American art committee remarked on the findings for cat-

aloging and online access, noting that thorough information about collections objects has the positive benefit that collections need to be handled less. If cataloging information is lacking, one wonders whether other background research may be unavailable as well. Documentation is essential when a conservator undertakes a treatment project.

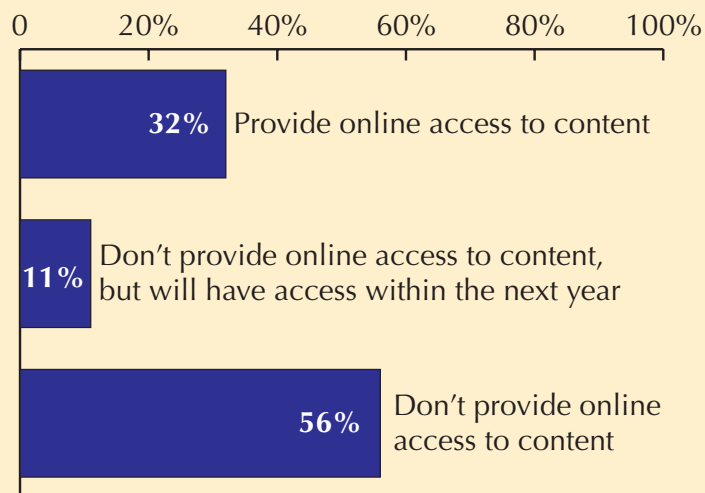
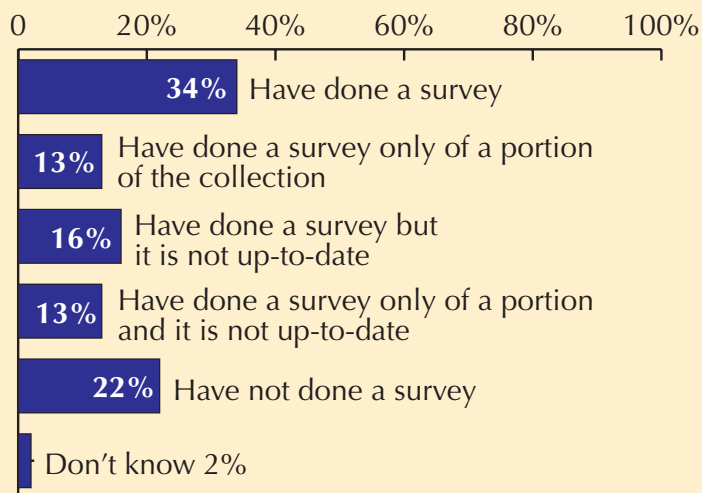
The Heritage Health Index asked institutions whether they had conducted a condition survey<sup>2</sup> of their collections. Such surveys are useful for prioritizing collections treatment or

identifying a holistic change to improve the care of a number of collections. About one-third of institutions holding American art have done such a survey—a slight improvement over the Heritage Health Index figures overall (figure 3.6). Another 42% have a partial or outdated survey of their collections, while 22% have not done any survey at all (15% of art museums have done no survey). This data point does not show much variation when considering the size of institutions; 29% of large institutions have a recent survey of all their

**Fig. 3.4 Institutions with American Art Holdings' Percentage of Collections Catalog Online**



2. Survey of a general condition of collections was defined as an assessment based on visual inspection of the collection and the areas where it is exhibited or held.

**Fig. 3.5 Institutions with American Art Holdings That Provide Online Access to the Content of Their Holdings****Fig. 3.6 Institutions with American Art Holdings That Have Done a General Collections Condition Survey**

collections, compared to 37% of medium-sized institutions and 34% of small institutions. Nineteen percent of large institutions have no collections assessed, which is close to the figures for medium-sized institutions (23%) and small institutions (22%). Condition surveys/assessments are among the most common needs cited in the survey, with 21% of institutions having an urgent need and 79% having a need or urgent need for them.

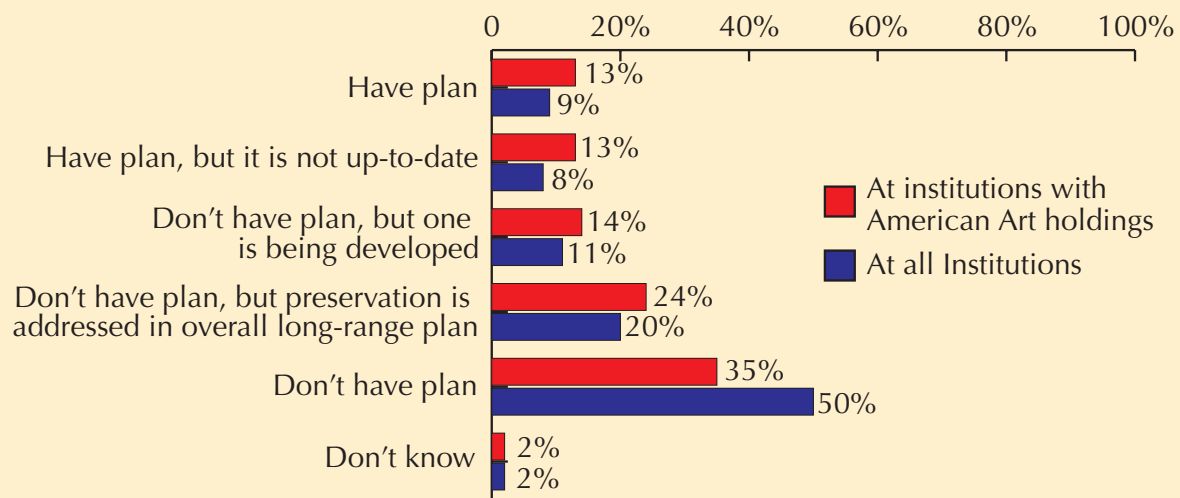
Institutions holding American art are more likely to have a written, long-range plan for the care of collections (figure 3.7) than institutions

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri, has had a paintings conservator on staff for close to 60 years, and the paintings collections have been well maintained. However, the objects conservation department was only established in 1989, resulting in an alarming 70-year backlog in the American decorative arts collection, due in part to a lack of funding, a lack of space, and conflicting curatorial priorities. The recent arrival of a curator of decorative arts has been the impetus for a renewed focus on an important, but little known, American collection. Building on a comprehensive conservation survey of the American furniture and period rooms done in 1992, more surveys for treatment prioritization are in the works. At least 600 objects are in need of minor treatment, while about 100 need further evaluation and possibly major treatment before they can be considered for display. It is anticipated that many treatments will require funding beyond the general operating budget, especially those that require the expertise of outside consultants. For example, the museum is currently seeking \$25,000 for the conservation of an important upholstered Renaissance Revival settee.



*This Charles A. Baudouine (American, 1808-95) Renaissance Revival settee from about 1850 is in need of treatment to remove inappropriate upholstery, strengthen the frame, replace lost veneer, and re-upholster with historically accurate materials.*

**Fig. 3.7 Institutions with American Art Holdings with a Written, Long-Range Plan for the Care of the Collection**



overall, and yet the figures are not ideal. Only 13% have a plan, and another 13% are operating on an outdated plan. Many rely on an institutional long-range plan for setting preservation goals (24%), but the highest percentage has no

plan at all (35%). Larger institutions are more likely to have a current, written plan (19%) but 28% still report that they have no long-range plan for the care of collections—not even as part of an institutional plan. ♦