

Documentation at Risk?

CONSERVATION DOCUMENTATION
PRACTICES IN ACADEMIC
RESEARCH LIBRARIES

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Case Study: NYU Libraries

CONSERVATION DOCUMENTATION PRACTICES

The conservation documentation created at NYU Libraries consists of entries into a database (MSAccess) and digital images (TIFF). The files are associated by a unique number assigned by conservation staff. Paper reports are generated from the database and stored in files with inkjet prints of the associated digital images. The database is stored on a local server and the digital images are stored on an external hard drive. Both the database and image files are backed up onto external hard drives. Conservation documentation prior to 2006 is recorded on paper forms and 35mm transparencies. In 2011 conservation staff began the process entering the data from the pre-2006 records into the database.

DEPOSITING DOCUMENTATION IN THE UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

In 2011, New York University (NYU) Libraries' conservation staff collaborated with the University's archivists to develop policies for the long term retention and preservation of conservation documentation. The paper records from 2004–2009 were arranged, described and deposited in the University Archives with the assistance of an NYU Archives and Public History Program student. The next project phase is the transfer of the digital image files to the University Archives and into NYU Libraries Digital Repository. The final phases will involve depositing conservation documentation produced before 2004.

The NYU Libraries conservation documentation is organized in the finding aid linked below.

<http://dlib.nyu.edu/findingaids/html/archives/prescon/dscref263.html>



USING THE MARC 21 FIELD 583

NYU Libraries has a current pilot project to record conservation information directly into item records within the library catalog. All NYU Institute of Fine Arts (IFA) Library books that receive conservation treatment contain a note that includes: the conservation action and date; the unique identification number assigned by the conservation unit; and, information about how to access conservation documentation. These notes are entered directly in the 583 field of the Machine-Readable Catalog (MARC 21) Holdings Record. In accordance with the MARC 21 Holdings Standard the 583 field contains preservation notes and actions.

“Within institutions, conservation documentation should be regarded as part of the institutional archives, and conservation professionals should work with archivists and records managers to develop sound policies for their permanent retention.”

—Commentaries to the Guidelines for Practice of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works, Commentary 28—Preservation of Documentation, C. Recommended Practice

Introduction

Conservation documentation preserves data of enduring value to a variety of library activities. Too often methods and systems of recording and managing conservation documentation can isolate and restrict access. The present research examines the management of conservation documentation in academic research libraries.

Data collected from a survey implemented in 2011, indicates that the respondents (conservation professional working in academic research libraries) routinely create and manage conservation documentation. The majority of the respondents, however, were not in compliance with a recommended practice for the preservation of conservation documentation as described in the commentary to the *AIC Guidelines for Practice*. The data suggests that conservation documentation is rarely deposited for permanent retention in institutional archives of academic research libraries.

Methodology

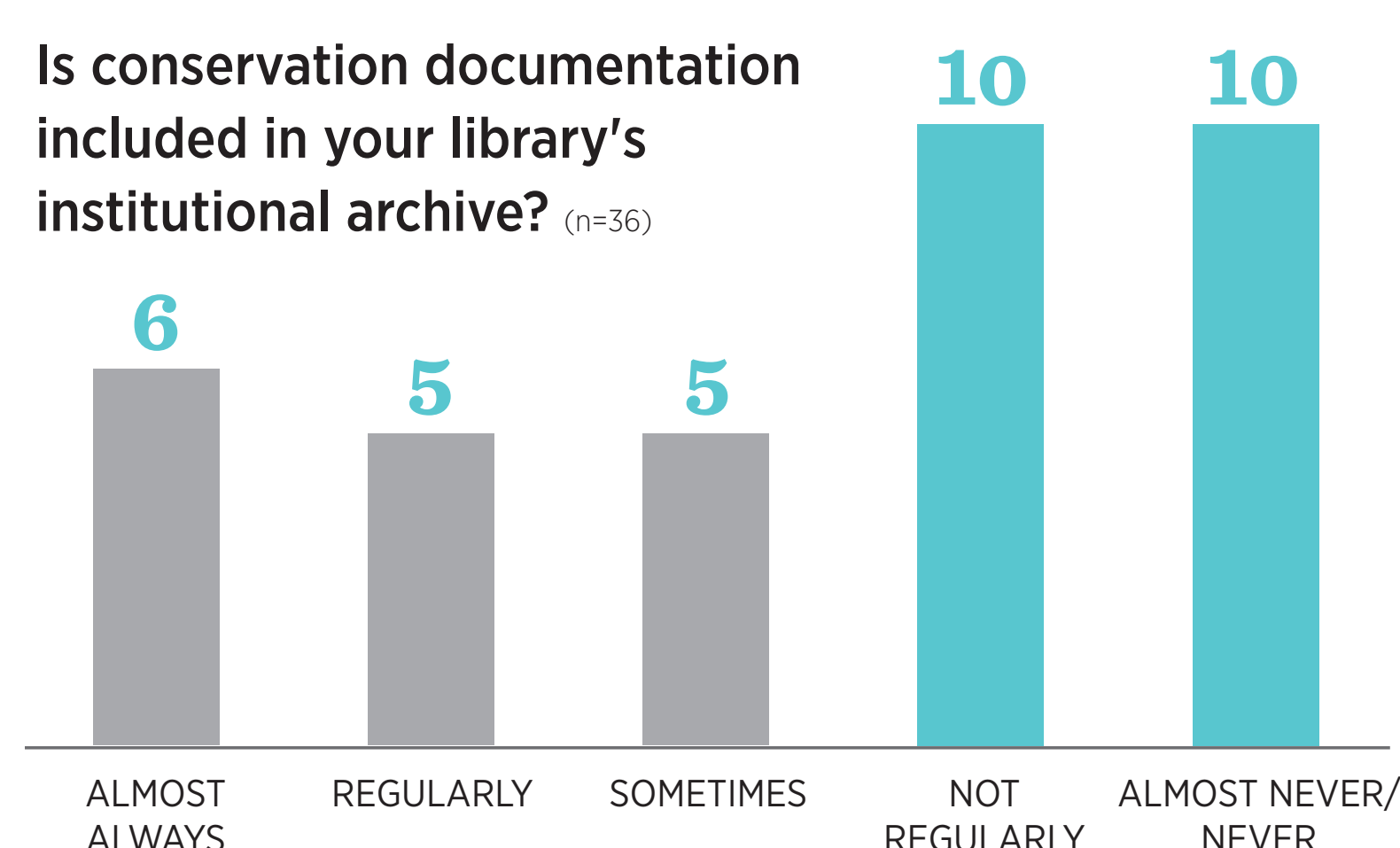
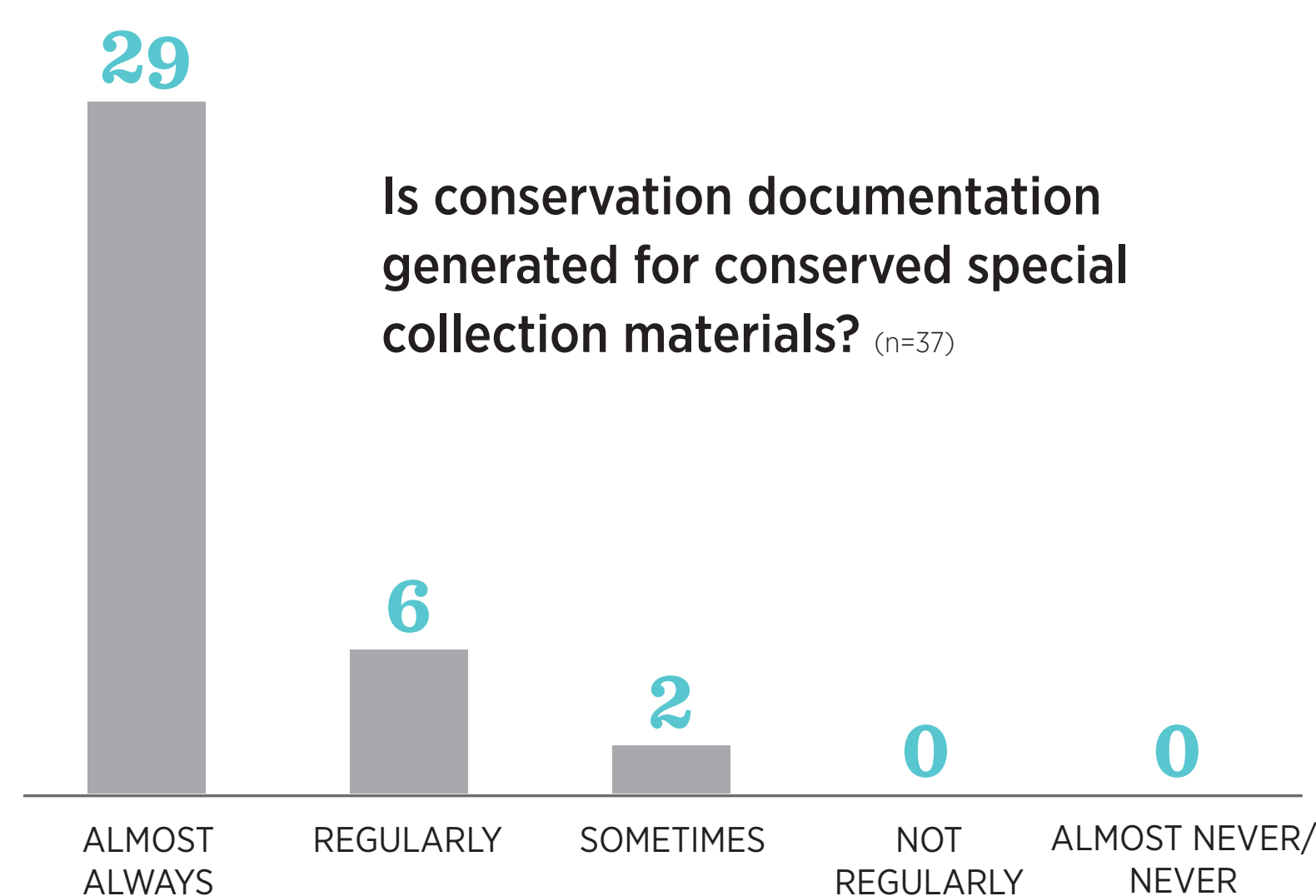
The American Research Libraries (ARL) preservation statistics were used to identify academic research libraries with established preservation programs. A list of names and email addresses of 69 conservation professionals working in 42 academic ARL member libraries was assembled using library web sites and reference services. After testing, the survey was distributed directly via email using a web-based survey software program. A total of 37 respondents completed the survey (response rate=54%), and 25 participated in follow-up phone interviews.

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Results

Survey and interview data confirm that respondents routinely produce and retain special collections conservation documentation in both analog and electronic formats, but infrequently deposit such documentation into institutional archives. Fewer than half of the respondents reported working with their institution's archivist to manage the ongoing preservation and access to conservation documentation.



DOCUMENTATION TYPE DESCRIBED IN INTERVIEWS

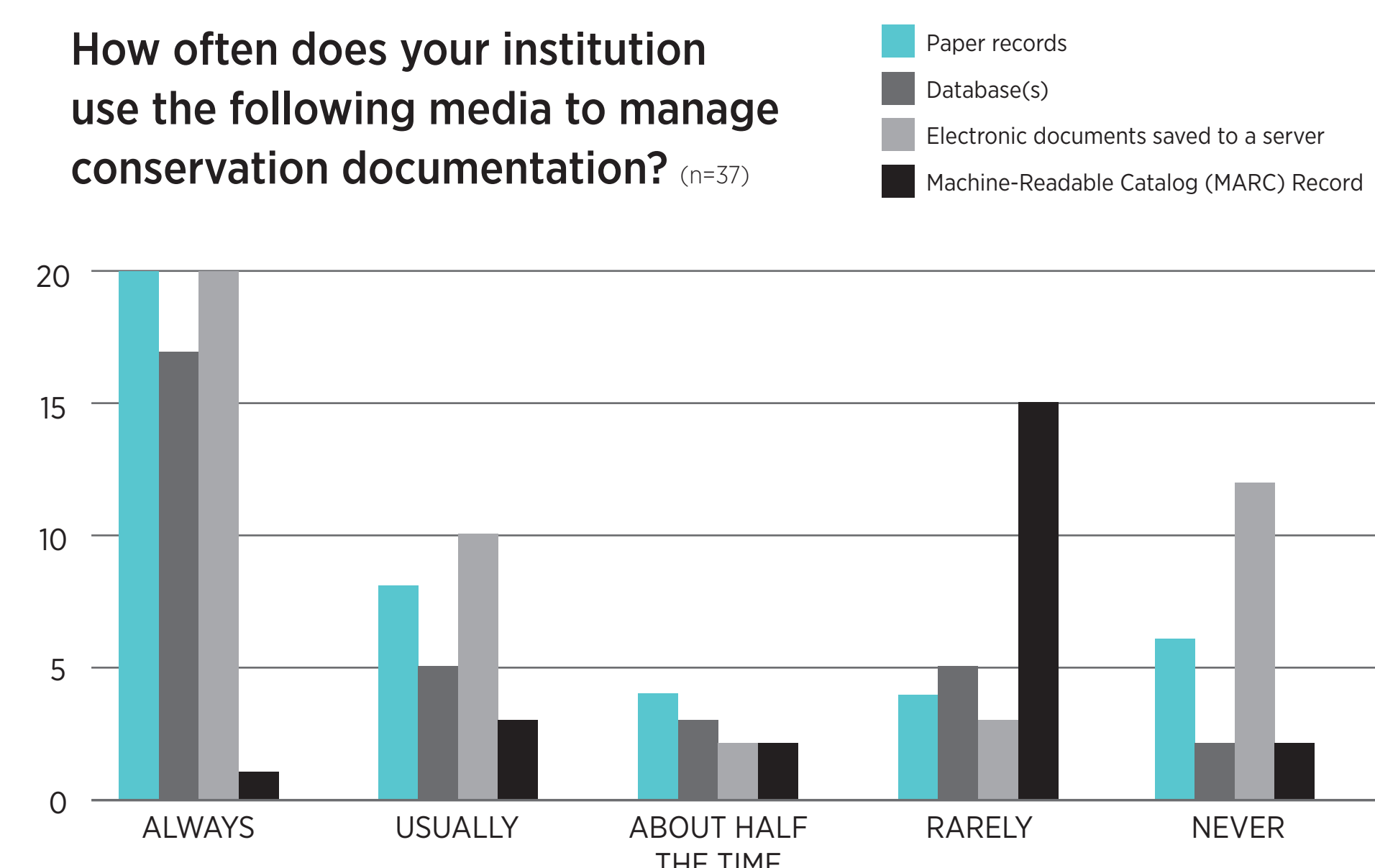
Digital:

Local databases (MSAccess & FileMakerPro)
Spreadsheets (MSExcel)
Word Processed Documents
Image Files (TIFF, DNG, JPEG, raw file)
PDFs from databases and word processed documents
MARC 21 Field 583
Notes in an Integrated Library System (ILS) interface

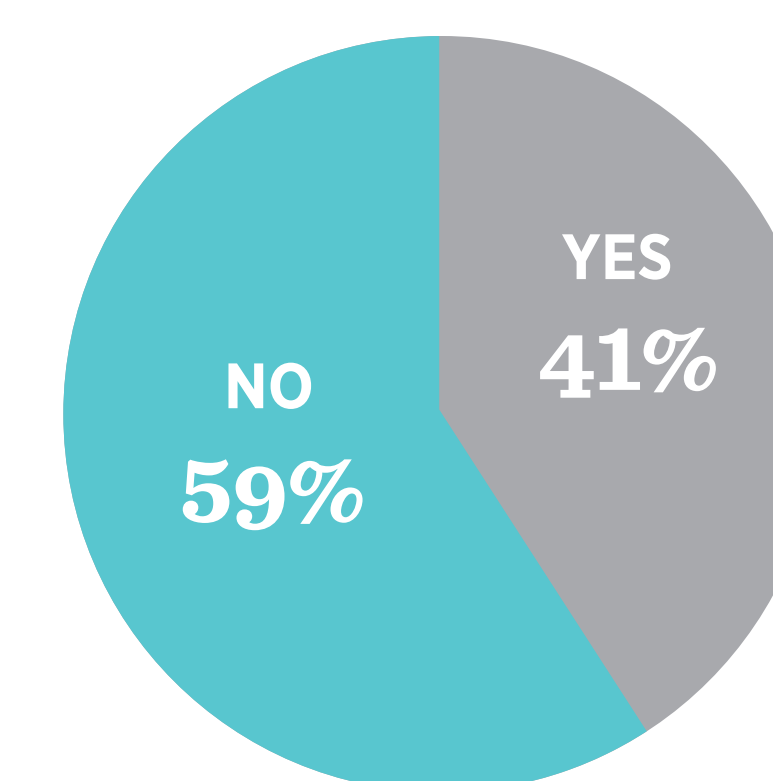
Analog:

Paper Forms
35mm transparencies
Printed images from electronic image files
Printouts of database reports and word processed documents

How often does your institution use the following media to manage conservation documentation? (n=37)



Do you work with archivists and/or record managers to develop sound policies for the permanent retention of conservation documentation? (n=37)



Recommendations

To achieve compliance with the *AIC Recommended Practices for the preservation of conservation documentation*:

Partner with archives staff to develop policies for the creation and maintenance of conservation documentation.

Create a **phased** plan for the transfer of conservation documentation into institution archives.

Use the *AIC Guide to Digital Photography and Conservation Documentation*.

Recruit interns from archives graduate programs to organize conservation documentation records.

Consider recording data about conservation into the catalog record.

