

2014

# We Are Not Hiding So Why Can't You Find Us? Attracting Users to Special Collections & Archives

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A magnifying glass is positioned over several pieces of aged, yellowed paper with handwritten text in cursive. The text includes phrases like "Santo en comp...", "tu estimada madre", "tus hermanos tu amiga", "te quer...", "Barcelona", and "Joaquim Bond". The magnifying glass is held by a hand, and its handle is visible in the lower right. The background is a wooden surface.

# We are not hiding so why can't you find us?

Attracting Users to Special Collections & Archives

Margaret Kidd

Elizabeth McDaniel

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Postcards\\_and\\_magnifying\\_glass.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Postcards_and_magnifying_glass.jpg)

# What does our title mean?

- ❑ A nod to the “hidden collections” problem
  - ❑ Report of ARL Task Force on Special Collections, 2006
  - ❑ Barbara M. Jones, "Hidden collections, scholarly barriers: creating access to unprocessed special collections research materials in America's research libraries." RBM, 2004
  
- ❑ Is there more to issues of awareness and use beyond hidden collections?

- ❑ 5,500 linear feet of manuscript & archives materials
- ❑ 50,000+ volumes
- ❑ Collection area: 20th/21st century Richmond and Central Virginia, focus on underdocumented communities, book arts, comic arts

## James Branch Cabell Library Special Collections & Archives

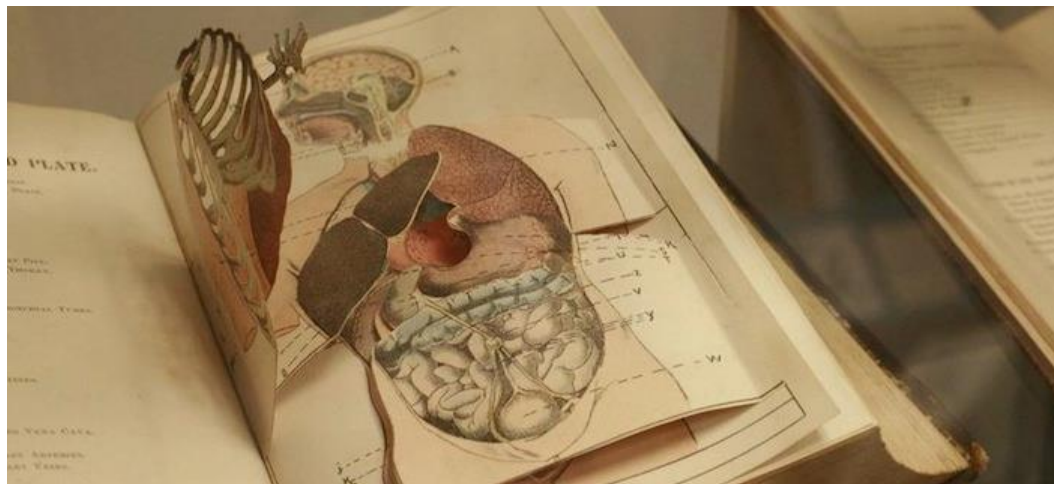


Book art from the Cabell SC&A collection



## Tompkins-McCaw Library for the Health Sciences, Special Collections & Archives

- ❑ 2,576 linear feet of manuscript & archives materials
- ❑ 5,955 artifacts
- ❑ 11,000+ books & journals
- ❑ 10,000+ photographs:
- ❑ Collection area: materials related to the history of health care in Virginia



Pop-up anatomy book from TML Collection



[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Question\\_mark\\_\(3534516458\).jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Question_mark_(3534516458).jpg)

# The Questions

- Do students know we exist?
- Can they find our materials?
- Do the faculty tell students about us?
- Could we be doing more?

# The Process

## Institutional Review Board (IRB)

- ❑ Completed CITI training on Basic Human Subjects Protection in Social and Behavioral Research
- ❑ Complete application for Exempt Review
- ❑ Included in our submission was the questionnaire, method of delivery, and text of emails and advertisements about the survey



Monty Python's Flying Circus



# Survey

- Created questions based on what we wanted to know
- Different questions asked based on answer to 1<sup>st</sup> question: Have you visited/used VCU SC&A before
- Used REDCap to create questionnaire and to collect data
- Distributed to select student group leaders and professors who forwarded to members/students

VCU Special Collections and Archives Use Survey RESIZE FONT

Please complete the survey below.  
Thank you!

Page 1 of 1

The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect information about whether or not you have visited or used Special Collections and Archives located at James Branch Cabell Library or Tompkins-McCaw Library.

The information we collect will be used in a presentation about Special Collections and Archives and to determine how we can better serve your needs in the future.

Please answer all questions to the best of your ability. Participation is voluntary and the data will remain anonymous. If you do not wish to participate you may close the questionnaire at any time to end it.

Have you visited or used materials from Special Collections and Archives at James Branch Cabell Library or Tompkins-McCaw Library?  Yes  No  
\* must provide value reset

Please add any other comments you may have about using Special Collections and Archives or your perceptions.  
  
Expand

Ex. Is it easy to use? What do you expect to find?

Please indicate your status at VCU.  Undergraduate student  Graduate student  
\* must provide value reset

What is your major/program/department?   
Ex. History, Interior Design, Gender Studies, etc.

What are your research interests? Please be as specific as you can.   
\* must provide value reset

Ex. Richmond history, 19th century architecture, history of medicine, etc.

How long have you been at VCU?  One year or less  Two years  Three years  Four years +  
\* must provide value reset





# Survey Results

Have you visited or used materials from VCU Special Collections & Archives at either JBC or TML?  
Survey says...

Counts/frequency: Yes (19, 51.4%), No (18, 48.6%)

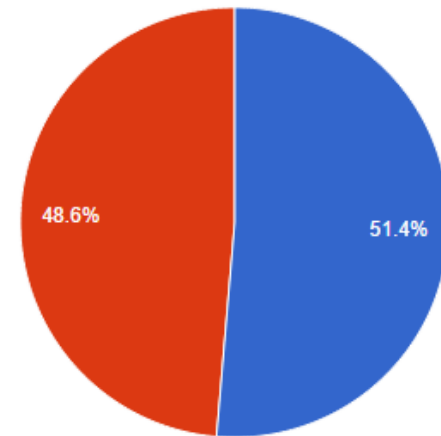


Image: <http://www.foresee.com/survey-says/>

# Respondents who answered NO

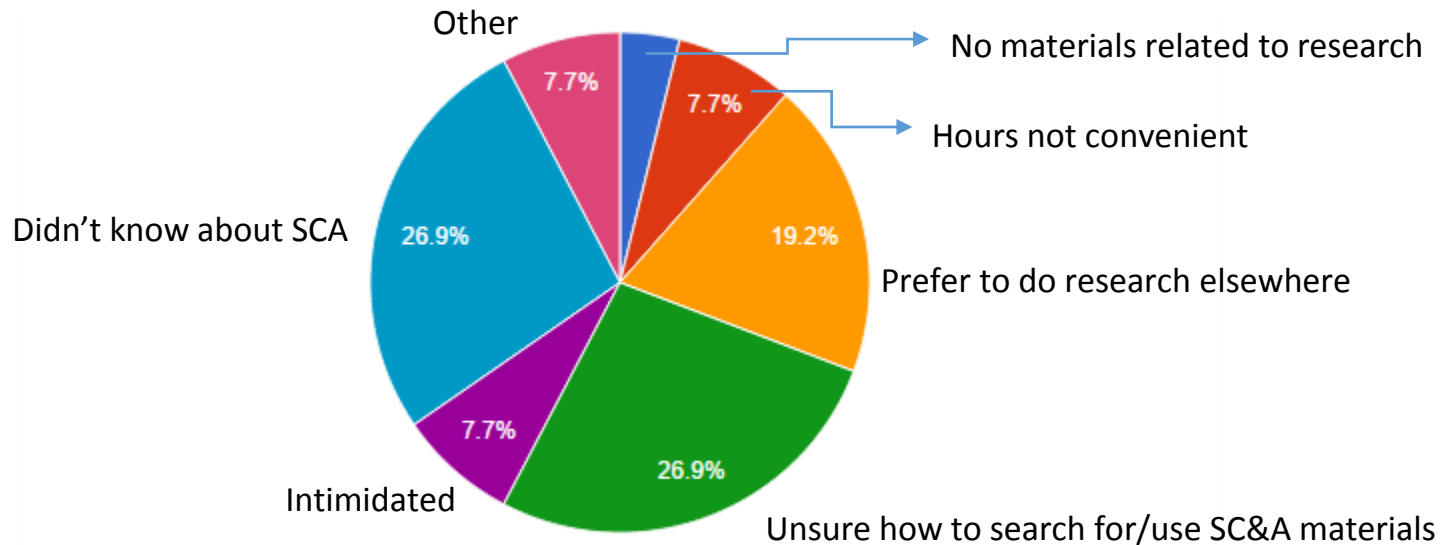
Those who answered no were asked four additional question in addition to demographic questions asked of all respondents



Image: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:No\\_sign.svg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:No_sign.svg)

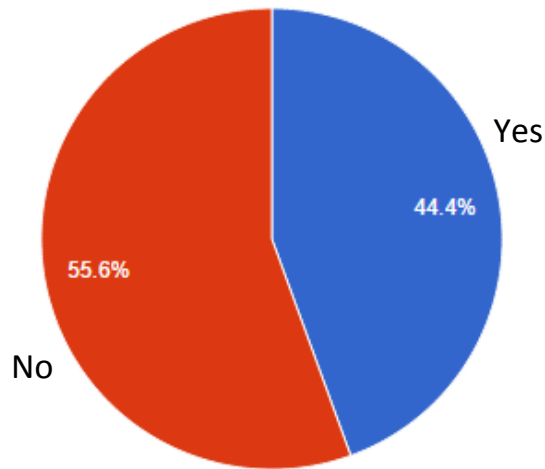
# Why have you not visited SC&A before (check all that apply)

Counts/frequency: SCA does not have materials related to my research. (1, 5.6%), The hours/location are not convenient. (2, 11.1%), I prefer to do research elsewhere. (5, 27.8%), I am unsure how to search for and/or use SCA materials. (7, 38.9%), I find it intimidating. (2, 11.1%), I didn't know about SCA (7, 38.9%), Other (2, 11.1%)



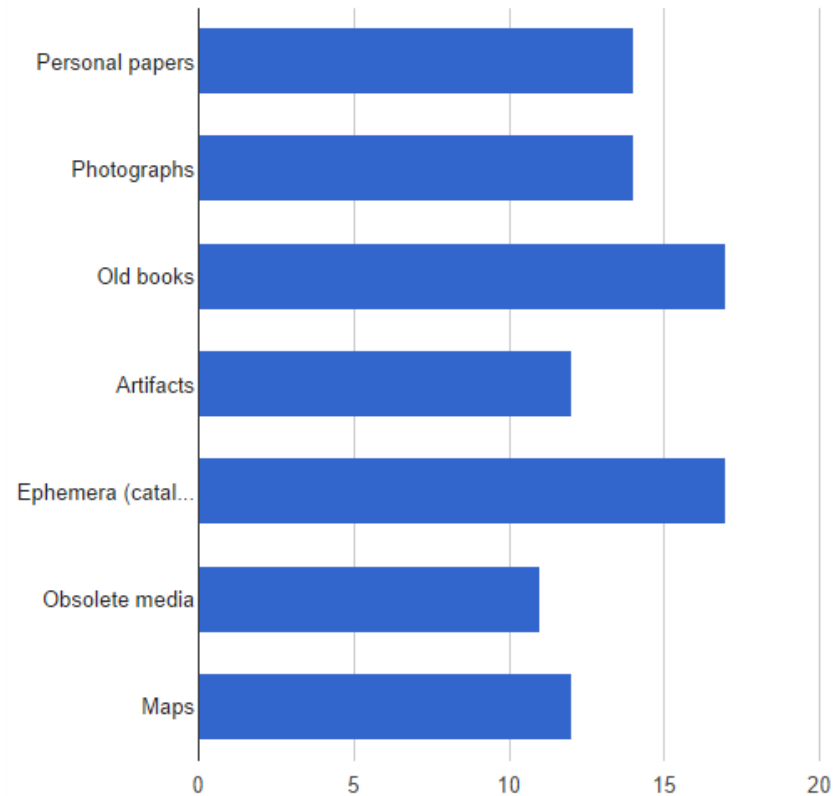
# Did you know that SC&A is open for use by anyone?

Counts/frequency: Yes (8, 44.4%), No (10, 55.6%)



What kind of resources would you expect to find in VCU's SC&A (check all that apply)?

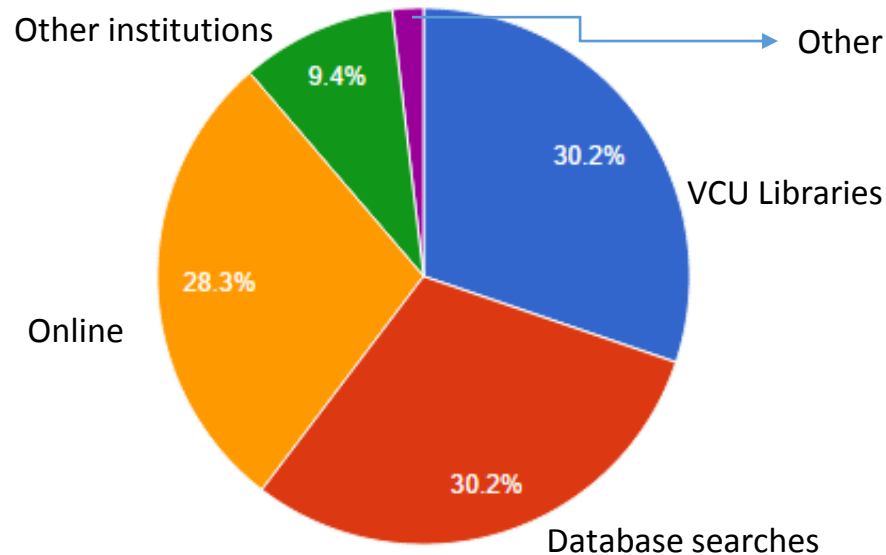
Counts/frequency: Personal papers (14, 77.8%), Photographs (14, 77.8%), Old books (17, 94.4%), Artifacts (12, 66.7%), Ephemera (catalogs, cards, brochures, pamphlets) (17, 94.4%), Obsolete media (11, 61.1%), Maps (12, 66.7%)





# Where or how do you conduct your research (check all that apply)?

Counts/frequency: VCU Libraries (16, 88.9%), Database searches (16, 88.9%), Online (15, 83.3%), Other institutions (e.g. Virginia Historical Society, Library of Virginia, etc.) (5, 27.8%), Other (1, 5.6%)



# Respondents who answered YES

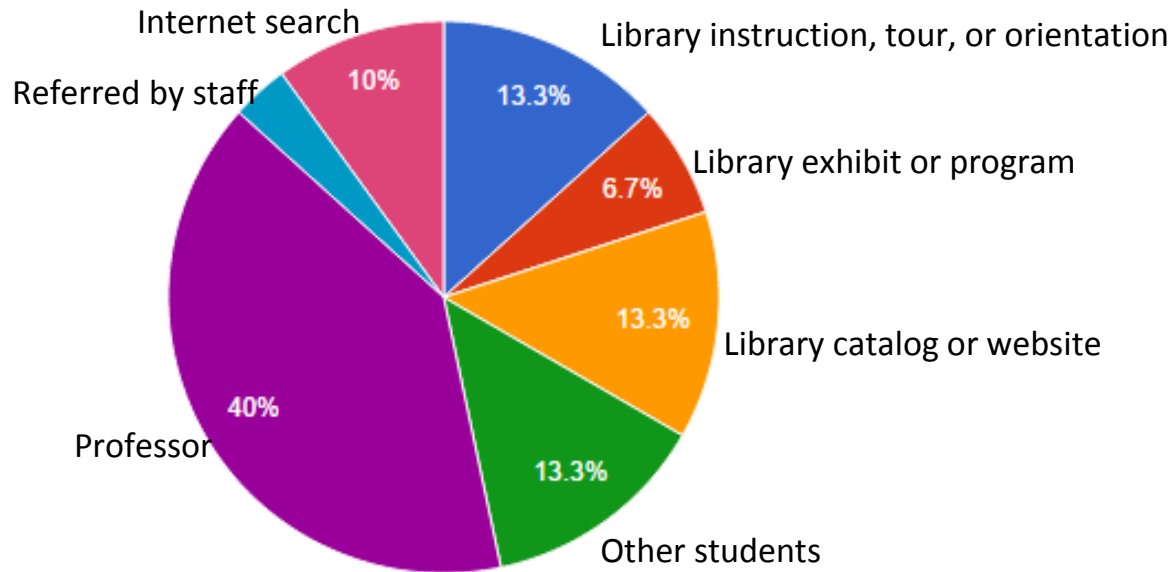
Respondents who have visited Special Collections & Archives before were asked seven other questions in addition to the demographic questions asked of all respondents.



Image: <http://pixabay.com/en/approved-button-check-green-round-151676/>

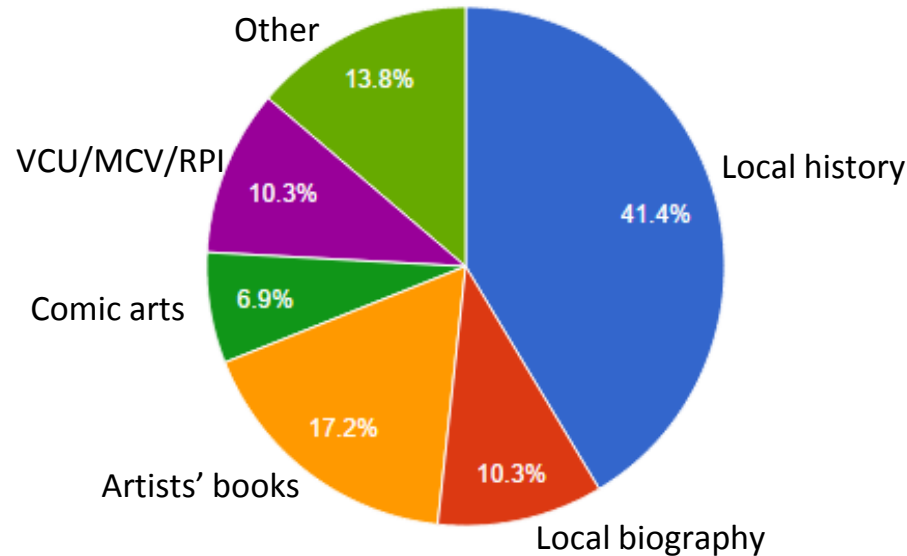
# How did you learn about VCU SC&A (check all that apply)?

Counts/frequency: Library instruction, tour, or orientation (4, 21.1%), Library exhibit or program (2, 10.5%), Library catalog or website (4, 21.1%), Other students (4, 21.1%), Professor (12, 63.2%), Referred by library staff (1, 5.3%), Internet search (3, 15.8%), Other (0, 0%)



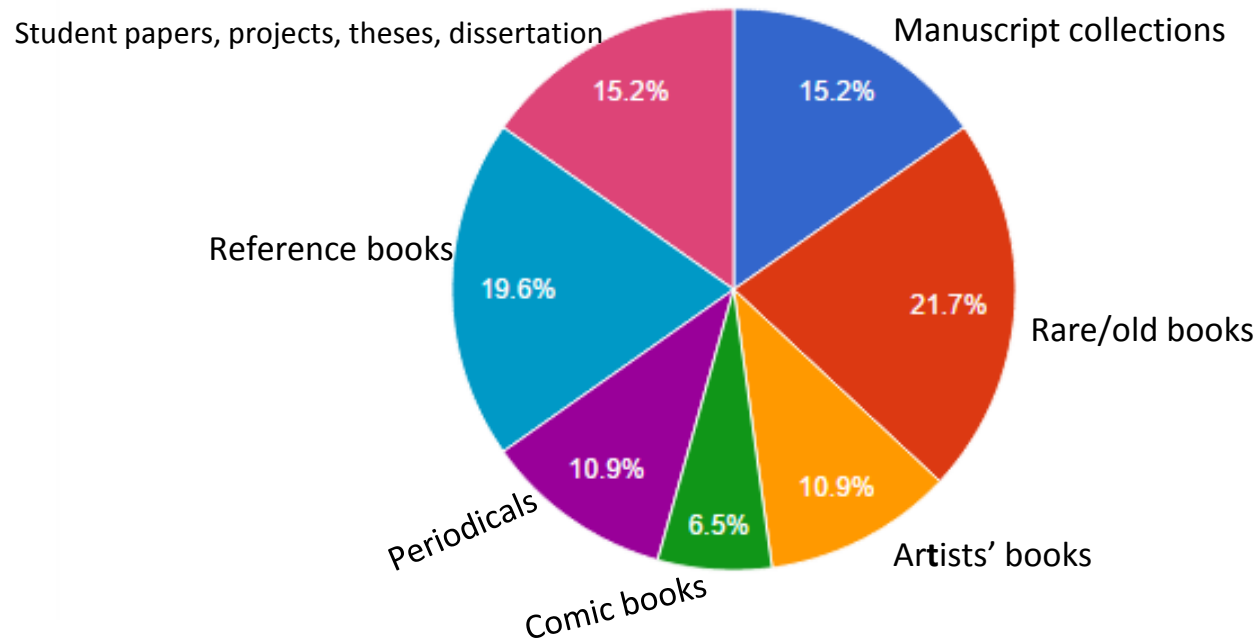
# What kinds of topics have you researched in VCU SC&A (check all that apply)?

Counts/frequency: Local history (12, 63.2%), Local biography (3, 15.8%), Artists' books (5, 26.3%), Comic arts (2, 10.5%), VCU/RPI/MCV (3, 15.8%), History of medicine (0, 0%), Healthcare in Virginia (0, 0%), Other (4, 21.1%)



# What types of materials have you used in VCU SC&A (check all that apply)?

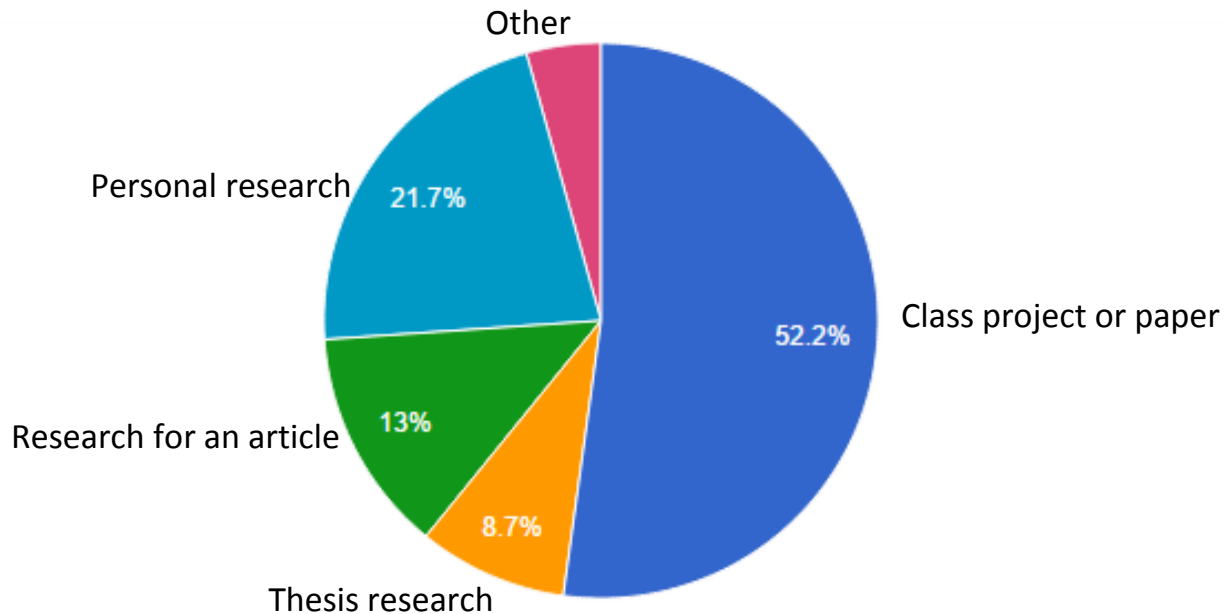
Counts/frequency: Manuscript collections (7, 36.8%), Rare/old books (10, 52.6%), Artists' books (5, 26.3%), Comic books (3, 15.8%), Periodicals (5, 26.3%), Reference books (9, 47.4%), Student papers or projects, including theses and dissertations (7, 36.8%)





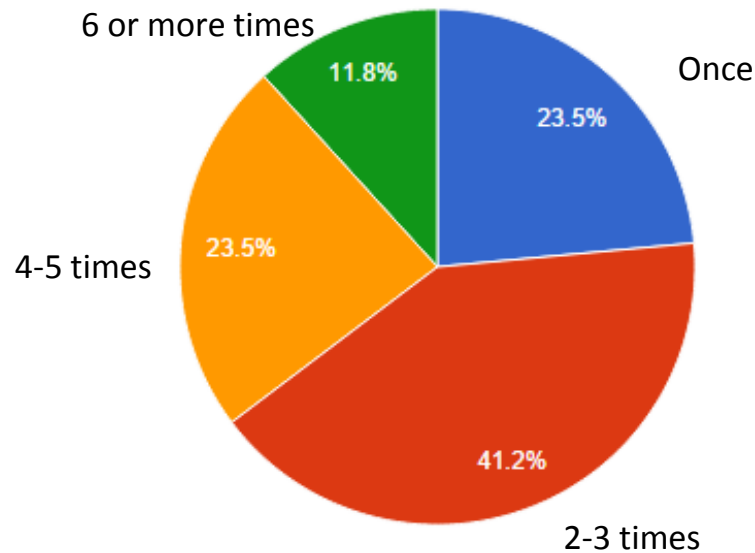
# What was your purpose for using SC&A (check all that apply)?

Counts/frequency: Class project or paper (12, 70.6%), Dissertation research (0, 0%), Thesis research (2, 11.8%), Research for an article (3, 17.6%), Genealogy research (0, 0%), Personal research (not school related) (5, 29.4%), Other (1, 5.9%)



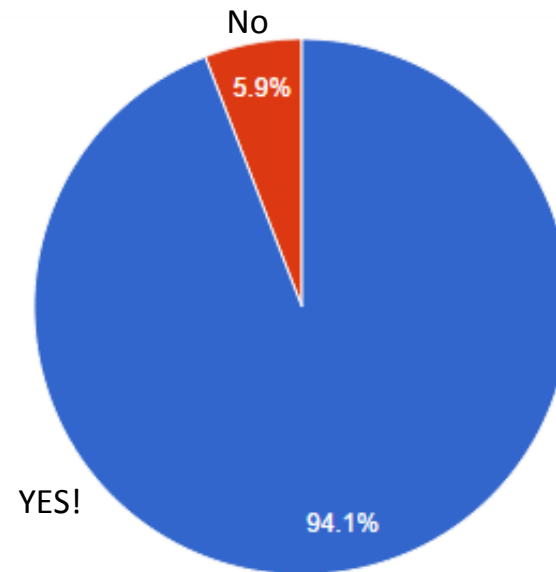
# How many times have you used SC&A materials?

Counts/frequency: Once (4, 23.5%), 2-3 times (7, 41.2%), 4-5 times (4, 23.5%), 6 or more times (2, 11.8%)



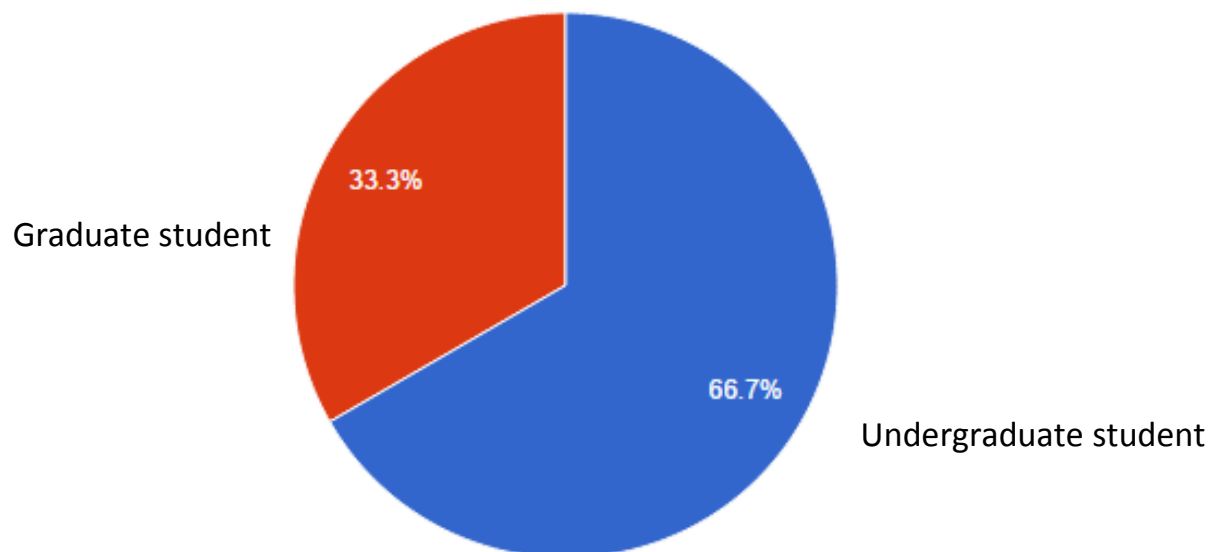
# Would you use SC&A again when doing research?

Counts/frequency: Yes (16, 94.1%), No (1, 5.9%), Not sure (0, 0%)



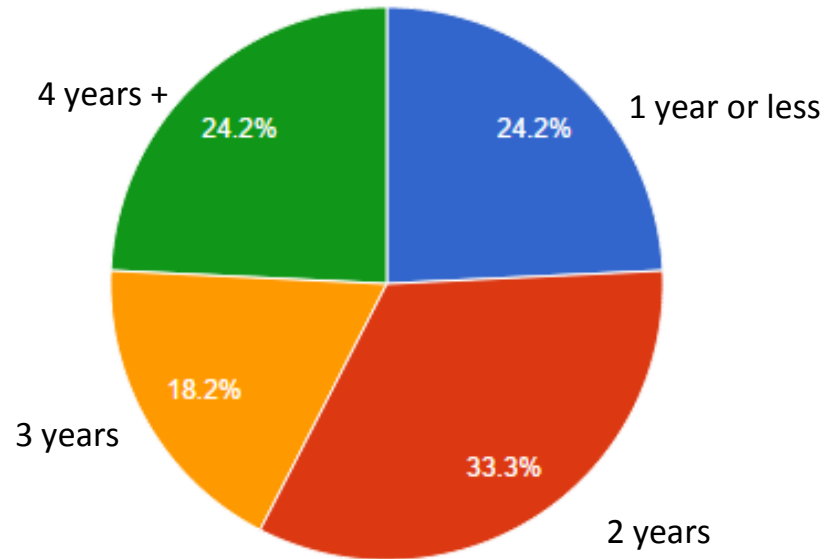
# Graduate or Undergraduate?

Counts/frequency: Undergraduate student (22, 66.7%), Graduate student (11, 33.3%)



# How long have you been at VCU?

Counts/frequency: One year or less (8, 24.2%), Two years (11, 33.3%), Three years (6, 18.2%), Four years + (8, 24.2%)





# Additional comments

Special Collections has many helpful resources, but it is not always easy to use the online catalogue to search the collection

I have not used materials from these two areas of the VCU libraries, but I am aware of their relevance. Unfortunately, my area of research is not represented. It would be nice if VCU could acquire or receive through donations more materials (specially manuscripts) related to the history of Colonial Latin America.

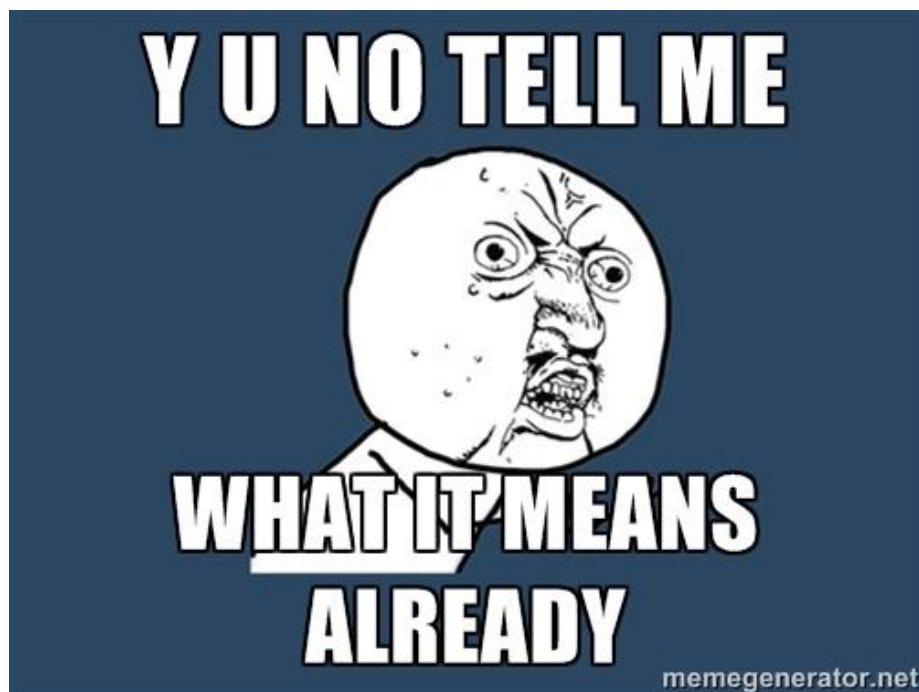
For my art project my professor brought us in to see some artists' books, and they were awesome! They definitely gave me some ideas and inspiration for the project and in general.

Thought it was interesting that the library has more than books

Ray Bonis is Terrific



# What does it all mean?



# The Dilemma: Special Rules for Special Collections!

- Access
- Inconvenience
- Intimidation

Balancing act...

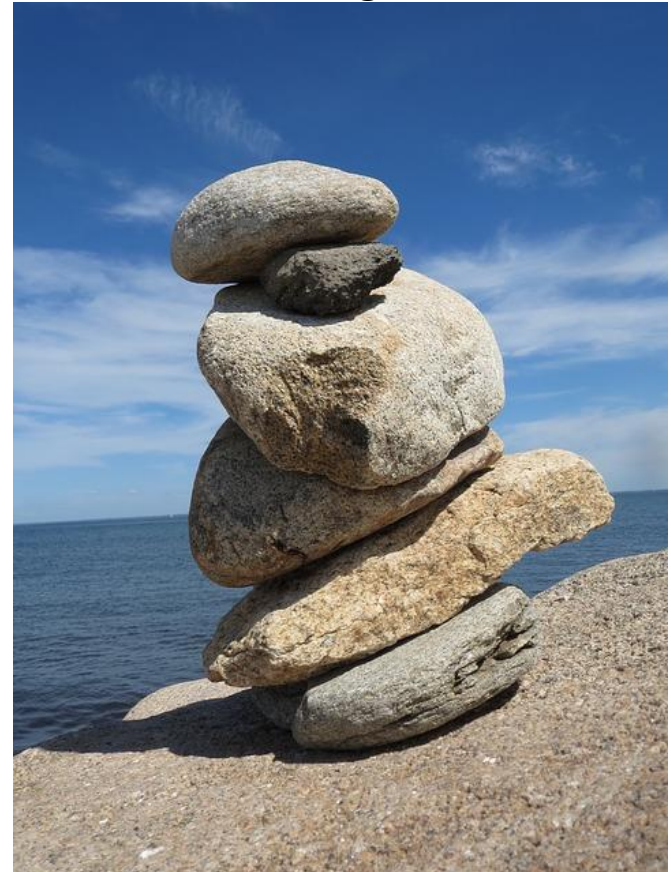
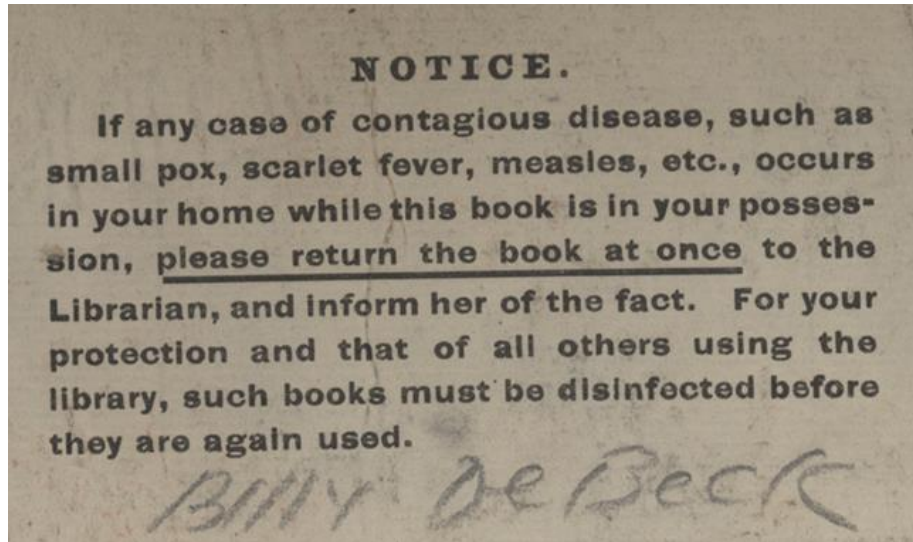


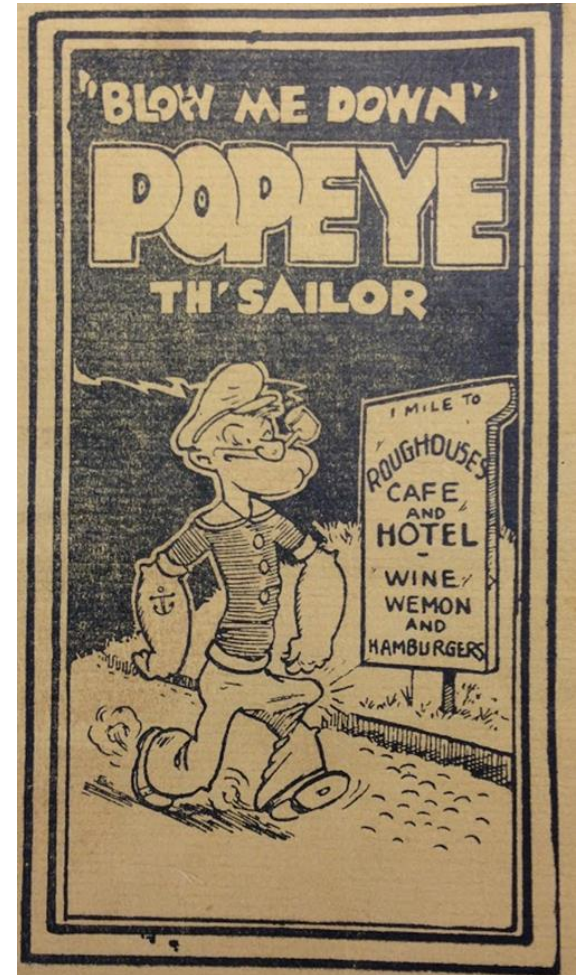
Image: <http://pixabay.com/en/balance-rocks-beach-sky-summer-174328/>

# Strategies to increase awareness and use

- ❑ Collaborate with liaisons



Bookplate signed by Billy DeBeck, inside of front cover, *His Vanished Star* by Mary Noailles Mufree, 1894., "VCU Libraries Gallery



A Tijuana bible from JBC Special Collections & Archives




# Strategies to increase awareness and use

## Improve catalog access

Show only [Books and Media \(30\)](#) | [Peer-reviewed Journals \(996\)](#) |

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 [☆ Papers of Evelyn \(Crary\) Bacon , 1936-1997.](#)  
Evelyn Crary Bacon 1916-1997  
1936  
**Unavailable**

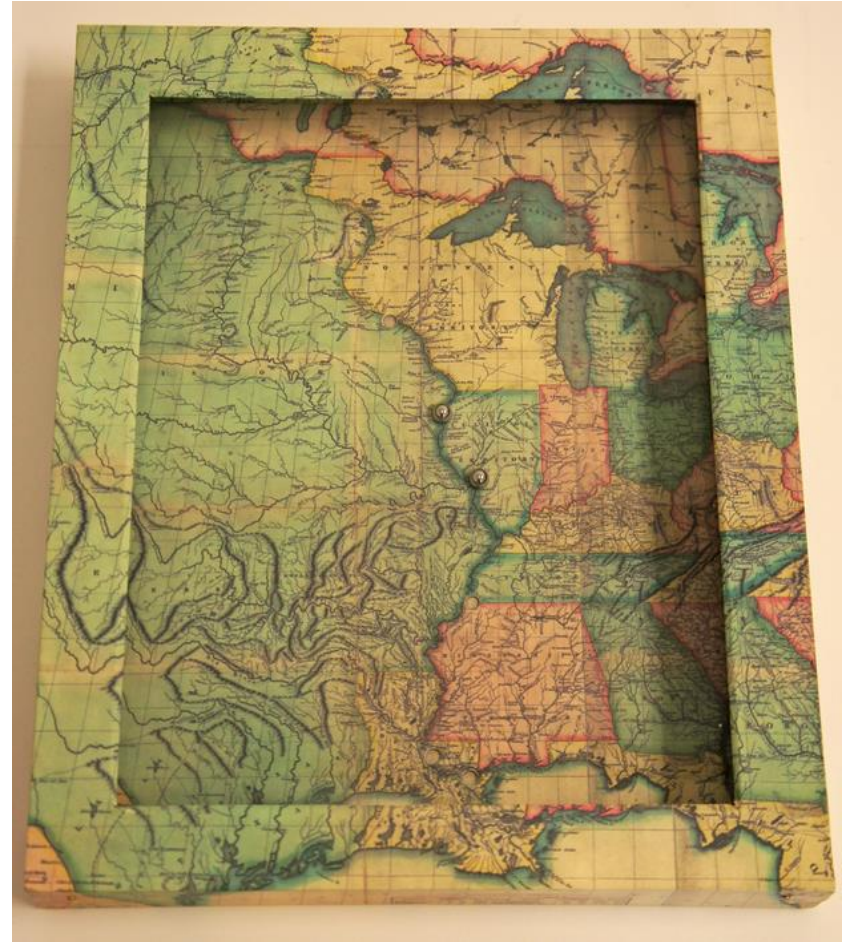
Other

[Find or Request](#)   [Details](#)   [Reviews & Tags](#)

---

# Strategies to increase awareness and use

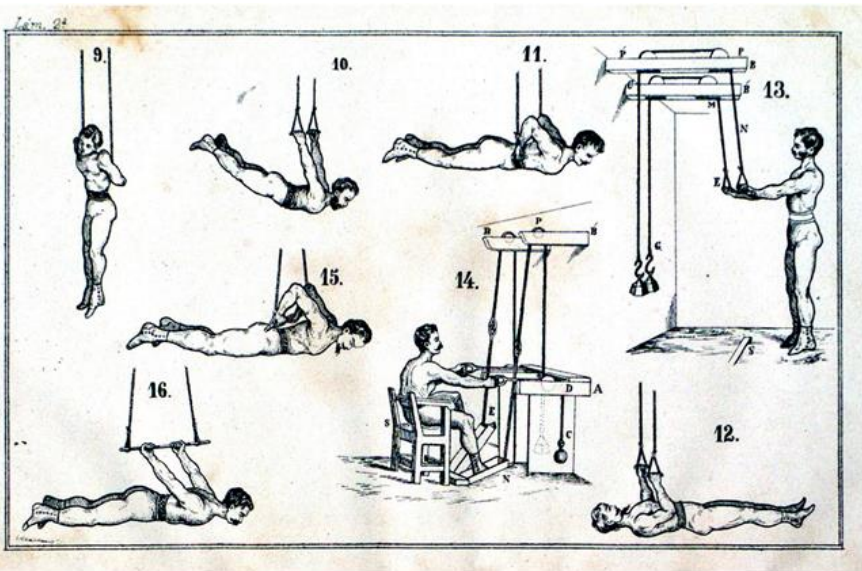
- Approachability
- You can look and touch!



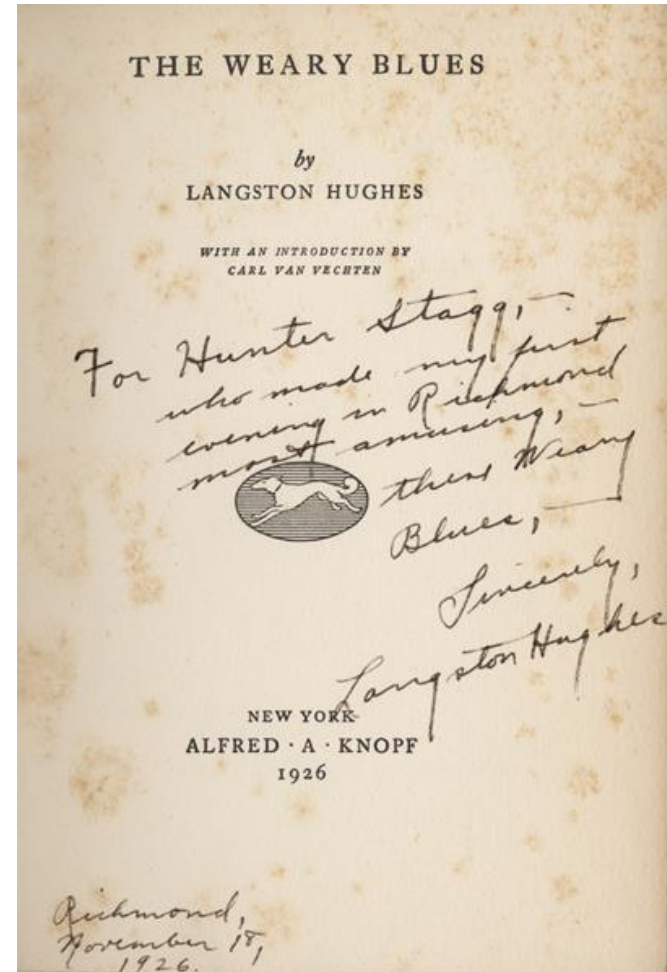
"Big River," by Karen Hanmer, JBC Special Collections & Archives

# Strategies to increase awareness and use

## □ Adopt-an-artifact



"El Gimnasio, plate 2," by D. Salvador Lopez Gomez, VCU Libraries Gallery



Hughes, Langston, "Inscription to Hunter Stagg by Langston Hughes, title page, The Weary Blues by Langston Hughes, 1926," VCU Libraries Gallery



# Strategies to increase awareness and use

## ☐ Web/Social Media

- Blogs
- Facebook
- Flickr
- Instagram
- Omeka
- Tumblr
- Twitter
- Wikipedia


 **VCU Tompkins-McCaw Library** Like Page  
July 31 · 🌐

In May 1922 Richmond hosted a lavish week-long event, the Virginia Historical pageant. It included daily parades and a pageant all of which highlighted various historical periods and events in Virginia's history.

The Medical College of Virginia participated, entering a float that was a replica of it's most recognizable feature, the Egyptian Building. The float appeared on May 26, 1922 in the parade honoring Spanish-American and World War veterans. The horse-drawn float includ... [See More](#)



877 people reached Boost Post

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# Questions and Discussion

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## **We Are Not Hiding, So Why Can't You Find Us? Attracting Users to Special Collections & Archives**

**Presented at the Virginia Library Conference, October 23, 2014 in Williamsburg, VA**

### **Session Description**

Special Collections & Archives have become the focal point for many research libraries due to the unique materials. However, there are still many faculty and students who are unaware of the potential research value of these collections. This session explores strategies to improve awareness and use

### **Presentation Notes**

#### SLIDE 1

Overview:

- Provide a little info about us and SCA
- How this idea came about
- Our survey: designing it, administering it, results
- What we learned and strategies going forward
- Questions/discussion
- 

#### SLIDE 2: WHAT DOES OUR TITLE MEAN

- Report of ARL Task Force on Special Collections discussed problem of unprocessed/uncataloged collections not discoverable through usual library tools
- related security issues - hard to claim if stolen, prone to theft or damage if no inventory
- Our library is addressing this issue by hiring archivists to help with the backlog of unprocessed collections and by hiring a Special Collections Cataloger...this is why we have our jobs!
- 

#### SLIDE 3: ABOUT JBC

#### SLIDE 4: ABOUT TML

#### SLIDE 5: THE QUESTIONS

- What were we interesting in learning from this survey?
- We think that we have a decent amount of awareness and use, but do we really?
- No quantifiable data, so this is our 1<sup>st</sup> attempt
- 

#### SLIDE 6: THE PROCESS

- If you are doing formative assessment then this is not necessary; however, for us since we were planning to present our results we needed receive approval from the Institutional Review Board
- Good learning experience
- Timeline:
  - June: Completed CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) training course
  - July: Created the questionnaire, filled out the required study application for the IRB

- August: submitted study to IRB for approval on Aug 2, we had to make some changes (answering some additional questions e.g. like how we would keep data confidential, submitting survey flyers and email script), final approval on Aug. 21.

#### SLIDE 7: SURVEY

- REDCap: a secure, web-based application for building and managing online surveys and databases.
- We used this because it was approved by VCU for research with humans and it more than met our needs.
- Distribution:
  - leaders of student organizations in history, art history, and urban planning to distribute to members
  - faculty members the we knew to be users of SCA collection asked to send to students
  - Given to Cabell Library Undergraduate Advisory Committee (CLUAC)
  - Paper version of the survey available in JBC Special Collections
  - The survey was active for the entire month of September
- LESSONS:
  - Better to compile our own mailing list and sent the survey via REDCap so we could determine the response rate and send follow-up reminders
  - Paper survey should have picked higher traffic window of time and distributed ourselves instead of relying on others.

#### SLIDE 8: SURVEY RESULTS

- Now for the results. Yes, we are going to show you the data for all of our questions, but don't worry it will be quick!
- We had a total of 37 respondents...not as many as we hoped, but it is enough to work with
- Remember our first question determines the set of questions to come after...
- 

#### SLIDE 9: NO RESPONSES

#### SLIDE 10: WHY HAVE YOU NOT VISIT SCA BEFORE

- Respondents could check more than one box, so % of people and % of answers do not quite match.
- About half said that they didn't know about SCA or they didn't know how to find SCA materials. This should be easy to fix.
- 

#### SLIDE 11: DID YOU KNOW THAT SCA IS OPEN TO ALL?

- Unfortunate, but easy to fix with better communication/outreach

#### SLIDE 12: RESOURCES

- Answered as expected

SLIDE 13: WHERE OR HOW DO YOU CONDUCT RESEARCH

- Not all that surprising, about what we expected.

SLIDE 14: YES RESPONSES

SLIDE 15: HOW DID YOU LEARN ABOUT VCU SC&A

- Over half said professors or other students. Thanks for spreading the word!
- Again it shows we need to be better communicators and promoters

SLIDE 16: WHAT KINDS OF TOPICS HAVE YOU RESEARCHED...

- We're not sure how this aligns with what we perceive to be our collecting strengths.
- We had mostly history students respond to our survey, and the most common answers seem like topics that would be of interest to history students.
- Our library emphasizes our comic arts, book art, and history of medicine collections; the users are scattered among various degree programs so it is harder to target them for evaluation
- Mention graphic design classes use of book art, history (material culture) and medical artifacts, comics and creative writing.
- 

SLIDE 17: WHAT TYPES OF MATERIALS HAVE YOU USED...

- We wonder what respondents thought when we said "reference books." The reference collection is really small. Perhaps patrons used books that they didn't perceive to be rare or old?
- Lesson: be sure that your definition is the same as theirs

SLIDE 18: WHAT WAS YOUR PURPOSE FOR USING SCA

- About half said "for an assignment", which was expected.
- It's disappointing to see that only 2 students said "thesis research" and no one said "dissertation research." VCU offers BA and MA in history, no Ph.D. Of course it could be that those who have used our collections for thesis and dissertation research did not answer this survey
- It is interesting that 5 students did list personal research (not school related)

SLIDE 19: HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU USED SCA MATERIALS

- A nice mix, excited by that so many have visited more than once

SLIDE 20: WOULD YOU USE SCA AGAIN...

- A very reassuring slide.

SLIDE 21: GRAD OR UNDERGRAD

- Now for some demographic info.

SLIDE 22: HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN AT VCU?

- Again a nice mix

#### SLIDE 23: COMMENTS

- Go Ray! He's a great resource.
- Not always easy to use the catalog - there is no way to limit to SCA materials.
- Does not have stuff in my research area - no, the collection is small and purchases are not directly linked to supporting instruction/research in VCU programs.
- Need to educate as to why we collect what we collect and explain that just because we may not have what you need to write a dissertation, we may have something you need for your course work, or personal research

#### SLIDE 24: RESEARCH INTEREST AND MAJORS

- We also collected info on majors and research interest and thought a word cloud was an interesting way to display them
- Notice we had a mechanical engineering major and a biology major respond to the survey!

#### SLIDE 25 WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

- So what can we learn from all this?
- We can conclude from our data that to some extent we are hiding...
- The good news is that most of the issues are fixable through outreach, education, and better communication

#### SLIDE 26: THE DILEMMA

##### Access

- SCA hours vs 24/5 hours for JBC
- Security
- Catalog
- Institutional memory

##### Inconvenience and Intimidation

- Procedures for using the collection
- No eating/drinking
- No browsing

#### SLIDE 27 – Strategy one

- Start in the library, collaborate with liaisons in academic outreach
- Bookplate, public library book: public health student may be interested in something like this; history of contagious disease, draw comparisons between then and now (e.g. think about our current issues with Ebola)
- Tijuana Bible (aka porn) 8 pages, fl. 1930s – Gender/women's studies, Media, Art, and Text students could find this material interesting, possible research project

#### SLIDE 28 – Strategy 2

- We have a diverse materials ranging from manuscripts, artifacts, maps, serials, art, and books.

- Primo enhancements
- Found that Primo was displaying our SCA records correctly...imagine a student getting a search result that says it is “unavailable.” In fact it is available, just does not circulate...had to do some behind the scenes work to make it display with info “Available at Tompkins-McCaw Library Special Collections and Archives – Manuscripts)
- Still working on other enhancements (e.g. an icon for manuscripts instead of “other”)

#### SLIDE 29

- Improve our bedside manner, make sure that we make users, especially newbies, comfortable
- You can’t checkout, but you can use and we want you to...we have a flat book scanner and we allow digital images (for educational and personal use)
- Explain image – book art that is meant to be played with, you have to touch and interact with it.
- 

#### SLIDE 30

- Gymnastic image from “El Gimnasio” Flax Collection, interesting to physical therapy or sports medicine student
- Langston Hughes – in JBC SCA collection, Hunter Stagg and Hughes were friends; potential to explore the friendship between the two or the writing community in Richmond and New York during the 1920s
- This helps us reach new and non-traditional users

#### SLIDE 31

- Social media is an easy way to promote ourselves, we can build on what is already established
- Tumblr
- Twitter (VCU Libraries, TML Library, VCUExhibits)
- Facebook (VCU Libraries and TML Library)
- Instagram
- Flickr (VCU Libraries)
- Omeka
- Wikipedia
- Blogging
- The image shows a Facebook post with an image from TML SCA used for Throwback Thursday post. Throwback Thursday posts have been very popular with our users, this particular post has reach more people than any other post of any type on our TML page to date. It was also shared 11 times.
- Using Twitter and Tumblr to specifically promote exhibits (physical and online) and highlight items in our collections