Potential Crises in Reading Rooms -

Privileged Readers and Visiting Dignitaries

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The Special Collections Reading Room



Even the best run and seemingly most secure Reading Rooms and institutions have been subjected to thefts and vandalism of their materials. Regrettably, all the security in the world is not going to stop all the thieves all the time.

Guide to Security Considerations & Practices for Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collection Libraries

What types of readers do we have in our reading rooms?

- general readers with no special needs
- aggressive readers
- over-friendly and talkative readers
- privileged readers
- distinguished and demanding scholars
- visiting dignitaries

Over-friendly and talkative readers

- these readers can be first time visitors and non-academics who have not studied rare materials in a special collections reading room before
- may need extra help and information on how to handle books, manuscripts or other materials
- may have several questions to ask of the desk staff and will go back and forth to the reference desk and can take up the desk staff's time
- can take the desk staff's attention away from the other readers

Privileged readers

- readers we have come to know and would like to give extra service
- since we have come to know them as nice and knowledgeable readers we want them to like us and be very content with the service we provide
- can lead us to forget our regulations and guidelines and make it easier for them to commit thefts or vandalism

Distinguished and demanding scholars

- important readers we would like to give the best service
- readers we want to like both us, our collections and our services
- we want them to be very content with the service we provide so they will refer us to other distinguished scholars

Visiting dignitaries

- persons who visit the reading room with library's directors and senior management
- can be readers who need to study material
- can be visitors who are shown rare and precious books, manuscripts or other objects in reading room or in another room
- can make reading room staff break regulations and guidelines to accommodate directors' and visitors' wishes
- can take reading room staff's attention away from other readers if visit has not been planned ahead

Useful literature:

- Guide to Security Considerations & Practices for Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collection Libraries, compiled & edited by Everett C. Wilkie. Chicago, Association of College & Research Libraries, 2011.

- ACRL/RBMS Guidelines Regarding Security and Theft in Special Collections. Association of College & Research Libraries. http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/security_theft

- Walch, Timoty. Archives and Manuscripts: Security. Society of American Archivists, 1977.