

April 12, 2013

Extra special: merging special collections with university archives

Delinda Stephens Buie

Caroline Daniels, *University of Louisville*

Rachel I. Howard, *University of Louisville*

Elizabeth E. Reilly, *University of Louisville*



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons CC_BY-ND International License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

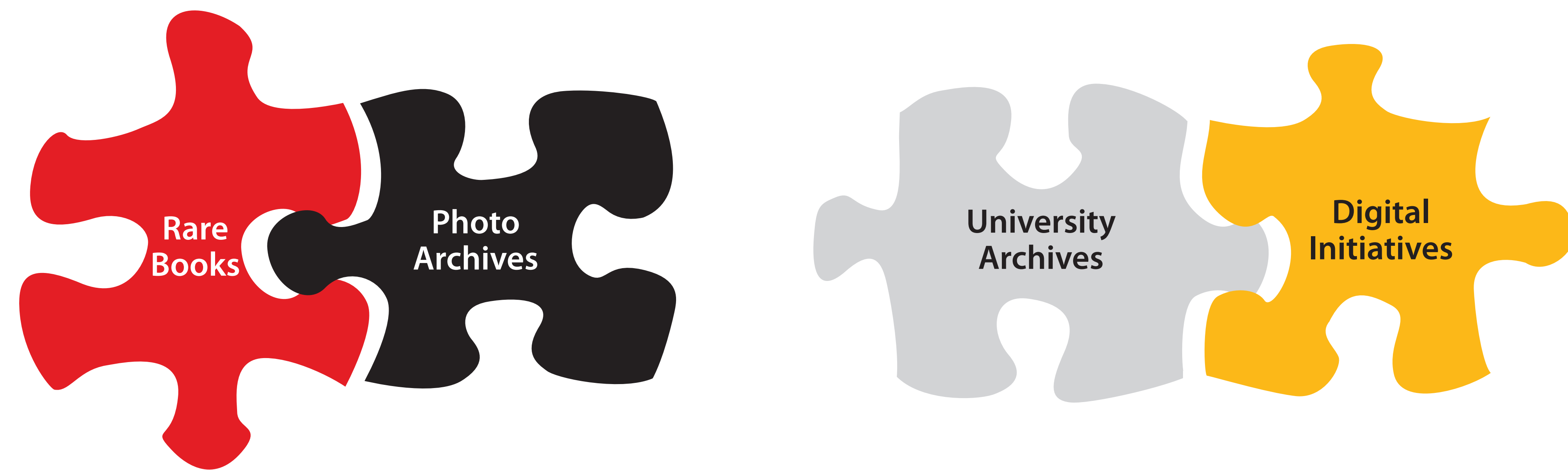


SELECTEDWORKS™

Available at: <http://works.bepress.com/elizabeth-reilly/9/>

Introduction

With budget constraints and hiring freezes becoming the new normal, and users expecting more open access to libraries' unique primary source materials regardless of their physical location, university libraries must do more with less. Special collections and university archives departments that have been administered separately for decades are now merging in order to share service points, staffing, and climate-controlled storage – as well as digitization services. The benefits of undertaking this organizational change are offset by the challenges of merging different organizational cultures and the logistics of modifying things like public spaces and signage. This is the experience at the University of Louisville when the heads of Rare Books (est. 1957), Photographic Archives (est. 1962), University Archives and Records Center (est. 1973), and Digital Initiatives (est. 2006) decided to merge.



Issues

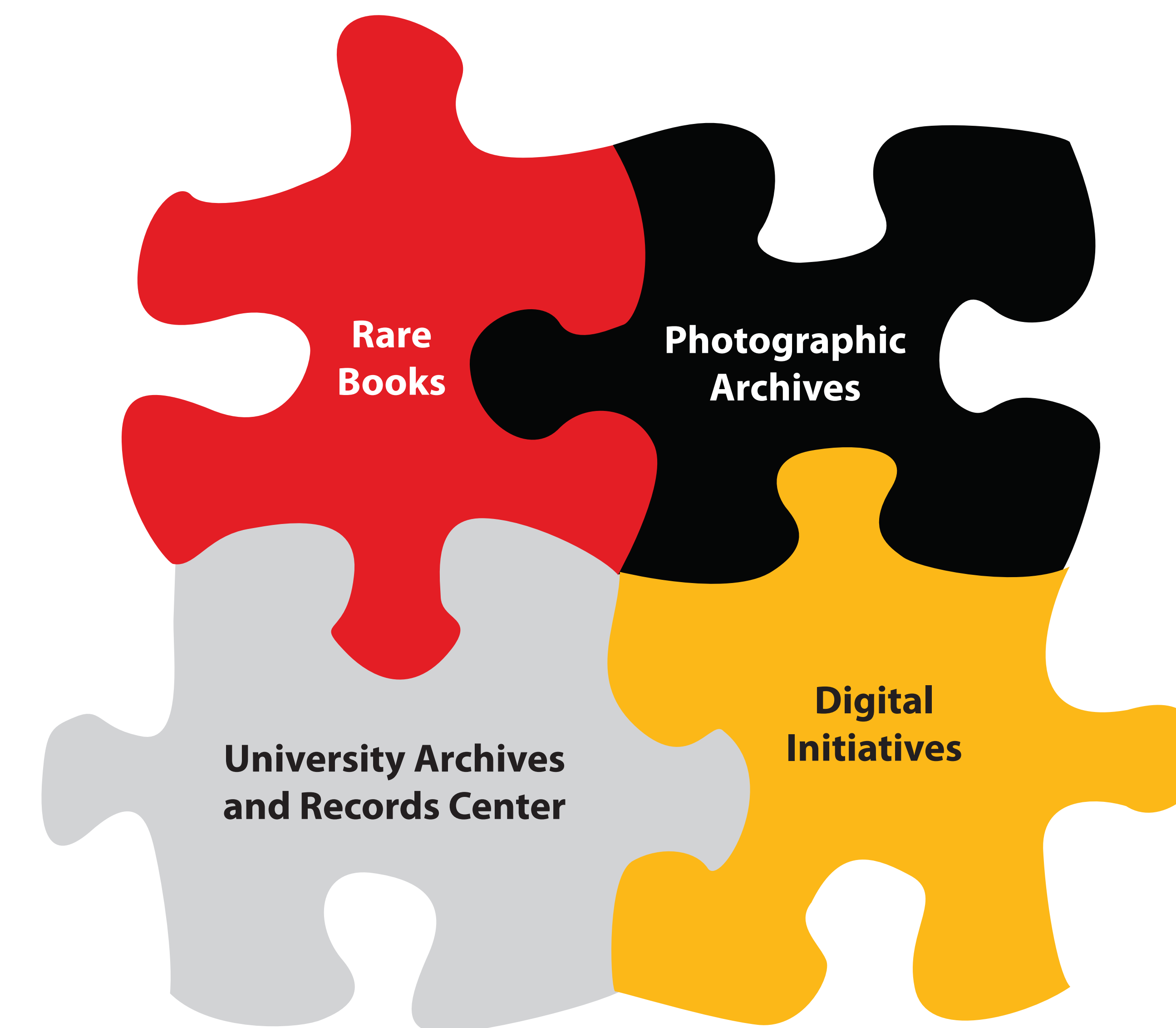
- Users forced to move between floors and consult different specialists
- Budget constraints
- Historic competition and anxieties among higher ups
- Units struggling to maintain distinct identity and archival mission within library structure
- Confusion for donors of shared collections
- Paucity of resources, especially climate controlled space
- Cultural differences

Opportunities

- Increasing emphasis on digital resources
- New dean; new director; new curator
- History of shared projects and friendly relations in lower echelons

Approaches

- Survey of practices and experience at other institutions
- Leadership team
- Decision to maintain collections in existing, separate storage locations
- Decision to convert one reading room to dedicated teaching space
- Joint meetings to address practical and emotional concerns
- Donuts!
- Work groups to address issues identified in joint meetings
- Consensus on integrated name: Archives and Special Collections (ASC)
- "ASC 101" sessions for cross-training
- Proposal to clarify plan for dean and other library heads
- Communications plan for user communities



Survey

Primary Concerns:

- New shared identity
- Reporting structure
- Paging materials from storage
- Shared services; reference
- Outreach
- Announcing merger; communication
- Desired building redesign

1. Has your library merged Special Collections and University Archives units, two formerly independent departments now working as one?		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	67.5%	27
No	32.5%	13



Results

- Professional development and learning via paired reference teams
- Economies of scale with unified service point, policies, and forms
- Flexible staffing
- Heightened presence and visibility on campus and in community
- Convenience for users
- Increased access to range of subject specialists and collections

User Comments:

"This should have been done long ago!"

"More welcoming environment and good to have everything located in a central area."

"Would be helpful if collections were all on the same level to allow quicker retrieval time."

"I like having archivists behind the desk and directly available to help and being very helpful. Thank you!"

"The [dedicated teaching] space was more conducive for academic conversation since it was separate from the 'administrative' space."

"Much better, having expertise in one place (even if not the materials); better user experience."