

## **Preservation Alumni Help Diversify the Avery Library Collection: Survey Findings March 8, 2024**

In response to a number of questions raised during meetings with Avery Library staff, the Anti-Racism/Equity Initiative of Preservation Alumni created a survey. The purpose of the survey was to involve PA members in the support of the work that Avery Library is doing to diversify the collection.

A link to the survey was sent to members in the fall of 2023. 55 members responded, although not all respondents answered all questions. A modified version of the survey was also sent to current students. One student responded.

This report contains a summary of key findings, as well as the specific results for each question asked. No attempt was made to edit any of the responses, except for the exclusion of people's names and/or email addresses where they were provided.

### **Introduction that was included with the survey form**

The Anti-Racism/Equity Initiative of the Preservation Alumni Board is engaged in on-going discussions with Avery Library staff to develop ways that our organization can assist the staff as they try to diversify the collection. The goal is for the collection to more equitably represent the diversity of individuals, communities, and the built environment in order that students, faculty, historic preservation professionals, and other researchers will have improved access to our complex and multi-layered history.

We appreciate your help in closing some of the gaps by completing this survey. It should take approximately 10-15 minutes to do. You can skip any questions you do not want to answer. Responses will be aggregated and then shared anonymously with Avery Library.

The survey must be completed by November 21, 2023 for your voice to be heard.

*Please note! We appreciate and value your input whether or not you are an active user of Avery Library's resources.*

### **Some Key Findings**

A large majority of respondents rely on digital resources for their research either most or all of the time, with another sizable group using both digital and in-person resources. Very few people mostly (or only) use in-person resources.

There was general agreement that the Library staff should provide targeted training to educate and inform students about the range of resources that might provide them with a more diverse and accurate representation of architectural history, including what the Library has and how to access those resources as well as about other relevant repositories that are available to students both online and in person.

More than half the respondents believe that it is more important that Avery add new materials to fill gaps and create a more diverse collection than to revisit/reclassify the current collection to address unconscious bias in cataloging. Almost all of the remaining respondents feel that addition of new materials is at least as important as revisiting current classifications.

Respondents provided a number of suggestions about other repositories that have holdings that would complement and supplement Avery's offerings, with the idea that Avery should provide links on their

website to these repositories to encourage researchers to investigate a more diverse range of resources. (See full survey findings for specific responses.)

Respondents had several suggestions as to where Avery staff might try to find new books and other types of documents and media to diversify the collection. (See full survey findings for specific responses.)

To help Avery set priorities for new acquisitions, respondents mentioned a wide range of topics and themes they are researching now and/or expect to be researching in the near future. (See full survey findings for specific responses.)

Respondents were evenly divided as to whether Avery should have a New York-centric collection or if the staff should work to broaden the geographical range. Respondents were equally passionate on both sides of this issue. (See full survey findings for specific responses.)

More than half of the respondents reported that they were surprised and disappointed by the inaccessibility of many of Avery's online resources after graduation, stating that before enrolling and/or while at the HP Program, they were led to believe that much more of the collection would be available to them. There was a strong sentiment that prospective and current students should receive a more detailed explanation of what to expect post-graduation. There was also a strong sentiment that more online resources should be available to graduates. Respondents gave suggestions as to what they felt would be most useful. (See full survey findings for specific responses.)

Several respondents are interested in donating ephemera that they believe would help to diversify the Library's collection. Further conversations will be held to find out what types of ephemera might be available from these respondents as well as what types of restrictions Avery/Columbia might place on these types of donations.

Based on the number of respondents who do most or all of their research using digital resources, the digitization of relevant documents to make them more accessible appears to be a priority. Several respondents expressed interest in assisting Avery in the digitization efforts. Further conversations will be held with Avery staff about the possibility of engaging volunteers in this effort.

At the conclusion of the survey, respondents were invited to add other comments. (See full survey findings for specific responses.)

## **Specific Responses to Survey Questions**

### **I use Avery Library as a resource.**

Frequently - 3

Occasionally - 32

Never – 16

### **How much of your research is done using digital resources instead of in-person materials at repositories?**

All in person - 1

Mostly in-person - 3

About equal - 11

Mostly digital - 28

All digital – 7

**Do you use social media when you are performing research?**

*Post-survey note: The purpose of this question was to learn to what extent social media postings are used as a research tool. However, respondents may have thought that we wanted to know if they posted to social media while doing research. Follow up is needed for the answers to be more useful.*

Yes - 17  
No – 34

**Avery should create more targeted training sessions for students, to increase awareness about resources that provide a more diverse and accurate representation of architectural history.**

Strongly agree - 27  
Somewhat agree - 12  
Somewhat disagree - 2  
Strongly disagree - 2  
No opinion – 7

**Which do you think is more important for Avery to pursue in the effort to assist with more diverse research opportunities that better represent the full spectrum of architectural history?**

Adding new materials to fill gaps and create a more diverse collection. - 27  
Revisiting/reclassifying the current collection to address unconscious bias in cataloging. - 1  
They are equally important – 22

**There are many repositories with important collections that help us uncover the histories of underserved communities. Rather than ask Avery to duplicate these resources, we have asked Avery staff to provide more links on their website to resources that will complement and supplement Avery's offerings. What repositories and resources do you think Avery should provide links to? Please be as specific as possible. Example: The African American newspaper collection at the New York Public Library.**

Historic Weeksville, Green-Wood Cemetery digital archives, sanborn maps, Sandy Ground Historical Foundation, Staten Island Museum and Richmondtown archives

Schomburg Center

Am not aware of such resources---need further knowledge.

Don't know enough to answer this question.

I don't know, but in NY it seems to make sense to partner rather than reinvent the wheel

I don't do research right now, so I can't say.

We used to have access to New York Amsterdam News and the Chicago Defender plus other Black newspapers through Proquest Historic Newspapers but that access was cut off after graduation. Can this access be reinstated? It is useful when researching and writing historic context statements pertaining to the Black community. The Getty is currently compiling the Johnson Publishing archives, that and other publications such as the Crisis would be helpful if they can locate the archives

Architecture and engineering related - past and present

I believe that CU already has access to African-American newspapers and other similar databases, so linking to the NYPL databases doesn't make much sense. See <https://guides.library.columbia.edu/c.php?g=318474&p=2129360> and [https://library.columbia.edu/about/policies/collection-development-policies-strategies/subject/african\\_american.html](https://library.columbia.edu/about/policies/collection-development-policies-strategies/subject/african_american.html) However, most states have African-American resources linked through their SHPO and state library systems. Same for Latino, Asian, Native American resources. I'd suggest Avery seek out grant funds (Mellon, Kaplan, NPS, etc.) for a program to consolidate links to the resources. Its a tall order!

FREE ACCESS to Proquest Historical Newspapers + Avery Index

Library of Congress, Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of African American History & Culture Collection, Chicago's Black Metropolis Research Consortium

African American newspaper collections in other cities too! IE Chicago Defender.

Avery [and Columbia writ large] should have an institutional subscription to Newspapers.com, which affords broad-reaching access. Avery should also maximize its Hathi

The Museum of the American Indian, the Bishop Museum, the British Museum, The Huntingdon Library, JTS, UTS

Online Archive of California's Bancroft Library access

The Georgetown University Slavery Project and related Special Collection

NYPL digital resources such as New York related maps.

There are a lot of city-specific websites related to redlining - buffalo and boston for example.

I believe there is a need for an expanded array of resources focusing on the integration of VR/AR in architectural heritage. This would enable students to closely follow the intersection of digital technology and heritage preservation. Also, as the design discipline is developing, there are new fields like interactive design and social design appearing. I think we need more resources related to these new design fields.

**Avery staff have told us that it can be difficult for them to acquire books, documents and other resources that are outside of their focus to-date because the book dealers that they typically work with don't offer the kinds of resources that would help close some of the significant gaps in the collection. The staff are willing to work with new dealers and other sources, and have requested assistance in finding new places to look for a more diverse range of resources.**

**Where should Avery look to acquire a more diverse range of resources? Answers can include, but are not limited to: companies, individuals, directories, or other avenues.**

Alumni publish books, reports and studies that might be highly valuable to researchers at Avery. Issue a call for new deposits to the library from Alumni I am certain they will respond with plenty of materials and reports written for clients and non profits paid for with public money that are in NO repository

Souls Grown Deep Foundation

Again, have no such information.

All the above; I don't know specific resources.

Share resources unless there is a specialty at Columbia

I don't know but I hope that PA will reach out to other researchers not just to PA members, to ensure a wide variety of answers.

This is a great question but I unfortunately do not know where to look for this either

I trust the staff to investigate and keep building the world's premier art and architecture and preservation collection with its much needed focus on New York and the US.

Avery's focus should remain architectural, architectural conservation, historic preservation and engineering, past and present

Cultivate relationships with minority owned design firms and practitioners early to better obtain donations of archives and material. Develop relationships with professional organizations, eg National Org of Minority Architects.

Avery needs to drop the book dealer source for resources, and go directly to the source and ask state SHPO and HBCU and historical societies to recommend titles, and to donate or sell to Avery. For example, on my shelves is "Galveston's African American Historic Places and Pioneers" and "A brief history of the Hampton University Memorial Church", which I'd happily donate to Avery, and there are 100s of similar titles scattered all over the US.

Perhaps all graduates need to be recruited to be on the lookout.

GenealogyBank.com (with FREE ACCESS); partnerships with The Morgan Library & Museum, The General Society of Mechanics & Tradesmen of the City of New York, The New York Public Library, The National Archives, Argosy Book Store

Cooperative agreements with other archives might be an option, as it may be less extractive. Likewise, digitizing existing resources could enhance access and representation (purchase is not the only avenue). It would be fantastic if Avery developed a cooperative agreement with the NYC municipal archives, for example, to digitize more built environment related records as a prototype collaboration

Private sector, collectors, museums, and other educational institutions

I think Avery should seek a consultant or adviser to identify resources since it seems to be a narrow skill set.

**We acknowledge that closing the gaps in the Avery collection is a daunting task. There are many important avenues that the Avery staff might pursue. Avery staff have asked us to tell them more about what topics and themes we are researching now, and what we expect to be researching in the near future, to help them set priorities.**

**What do you want Avery to focus on – in what categories are you discovering gaps in what you hoped to find? Answers can be varied, including but not limited to: general topics, specific locations, specific communities, specific events, or periods of history.**

Preservation planning topics, easements , revolving loan funds, interpretive plans for historic sites, sample documents

African-American architects

I am not a historian or researcher; I think background on the recent past in NYC and surrounding areas regarding housing, racial inequity, development, even on historic preservation movement is needed - how it has evolved both philosophically and physically.

History of technology beyond the contributions of white Europeans and early white Americans; reasons for choices sources of materials; inequitable labor practices in manufacture of building materials.

Time period I am interested in for research: 1900-1970

Redlining

Black owned businesses

Black run banks

Homeownership by the Black community

Historic resources in Black communities

Restricted neighborhoods

Historic Context Statements written about Black communities (SurveyLA and Santa Barbara have this I am sure there are others)

Asian architecture and related building culture

As a preservation activist and scholar I'm fine with New York and New York State centrism as a basis. What's important is for the library to have help desk staff to guide students in searching for books and periodicals within and remotely without the library.

Avery library should remain devoted to architecture and related subjects

Gaps include non English language materials that document the professional life of immigrant workers and designers in the US, eg German immigrant architects, builders, and engineers working in the US between 1848-1900.

That's a tough one. My own research is tangential to Avery's collections, but mostly I use local archives outside of NYC, or digital resources (Hathi, Archive.org, NYPL).

There should be an archives set aside in Avery for Hispanic American architecture, with a focus on local Puerto Rican architects and architectural firms over the last century. There should be an accessible and comprehensive African American architectural archives that sets a new national standard. Researchers, scholars and archivists of color and Hispanic heritage should be given free and easy access to Avery.

Jewish culture and contributions to the built environment

There are a significant number of Black and Latinx modernist architects (especially practicing in the Midwest) that I had never known of before - I think broadening the understanding of modernist

architecture to include more practicing architects at the time will lead to a diversified understanding of that era specifically. I'm sure the same can be said for other architectural styles, artistic movements, etc.

NYC Latine community histories

More varied forms of traditional architecture, building materials and techniques and how they are used today

African-American slave craftsmen. Any mentions in slave auctions? Last wills?

More emphasis on building technology

Federal historic preservation law, state and local zoning, information on real estate and preservation.

Resources on underrepresented groups and cultural history in NYC neighborhoods.

For National register nominations, buildings in the 1960s and 70s are now eligible so looking at different building types, locations and areas of significance

**We have heard from a number of PA members that they feel that Avery's collection is too New York-centric. Do you agree with this statement?**

Yes - 16

No - 14

I don't know – 7

**If you answered yes, what do you see as critical gaps?**

**Answers can include, but are not limited to such things as: regions of the United States, other countries, specific groups of people, and specific types of architecture or materials.**

*(Note: answers came from people who answered no as well as yes)*

It should be NY centric

New York Centric: Bring It On. Far better to focus rather than scatter too much; besides Columbia U sits smack in there within New York City.

Better if there were basic info about each state such as architectural history

California architecture and history - they have some of this in their collection but most of it can't be viewed online now that we have graduated.

Asian works are not so up-to-date

A New York centric library seems natural and right for obvious reasons. Students come to Columbia University School of Architecture Planning and Preservation to be in New York and to benefit from Columbia's libraries, professors and courses.

The New York metropolitan area should remain the focus.

Being based in NY, a NY focus is appropriate.

Non-canonical buildings, the Southern US, Southeast Asia, the Americas. But those are areas I research, so its a limited set.

Avery's archives should include and encompass outlying states and regions, nationally and internationally. A comprehensive, representative and equitable fine arts and architectural archives must offer holdings and resources that collectively gather, offer and reflect the historically multicultural American architecture canon.

I have lived and worked in the southwest for many years and remember Avery to be lacking SW Native contributions.

Yes, BUT I think its worth while to focus on local histories, perhaps linking and sharing access to other university or institution's databases or online resources would help close gaps.

Regions of the US, Native American and Pacific Islander

European trades catalogues and suppliers. Lumber and building info coming out of the Pacific Northwest.

Regions of the United States, other countries (particularly those outside of Western Europe!)

Federal historic preservation law, state and local zoning, information on real estate and preservation, information on Tribal law and preservation.

Vernacular building and 20th century cultural history in NYC. It's hard to research recent history of underrepresented groups and neighborhoods in NYC.

It's hard to say but in general I just don't turn to Avery anymore living outside the city even in the northeast

Chinese architecture, landscape and urbanism. Although there are links to some Chinese database, many links seem invalid.

**If you answered yes, do you believe that Avery should try to acquire more resources or should they instead strive to provide more links to other repositories that have more comprehensive information about areas outside of New York?**

Acquire more resources - 2

Provide more links to other repositories - 6

Both – 17

**We have heard from a number of PA members that they were surprised and disappointed by the inaccessibility of many of Avery's resources after graduation. Some members feel that they were misled as to which / how many of Avery's resources would be available to them post-graduation.**

**Do you feel that the resources available to you after leaving Columbia are more limited than what you were told before you entered or when you first entered the HP Program at Columbia?**

Yes - 23

No - 8

I don't know because I don't use Avery Library resources – 7



**If you recall that you were told at some point prior to leaving the HP Program that a wide range of Avery Library resources would be available to you after leaving, it would be useful to learn when and in what forums you were told this. For example, was it told to you during a prospective student event and/or during an Avery Library orientation, and/or by a professor? Please list whatever you remember.**

Prospective student

Prospective student event(s)

Orientation and then expectation

Prof

I don't believe I was told what would be available; I think I knew I could come to the library and use it if needed, but unclear about the online resources, which were more limited when I was there. A broad-based info program to all PA should be given, updating us on what collections the library has (many of us graduated decades ago) and what is available, both online and in person.

n/a

Avery staff led me to believe that much more would be available to me online.

I was told at orientation and throughout the program that I would have an advantage in the professional market due to my "lifetime access to Avery." Unfortunately, the only thing I can access that employers covet is the Avery Index. All the valuable research tools were cut off upon graduation. The lack of online access to research tools after graduation was shocking and disappointing.

From schoolmates. People were saying different majors may have different access levels; others were saying because of COVID, we would still be able to use the digital library resource after graduation

was 1982 and I had and used my Avery library Card while I lived in the NYC area

I really miss Avery periodicals which included the old architectural and engineering magazines from the late 19th and early 20th century, These magazines are so very important to preserve.

Common sense. Alumni of the HP program should be allowed access to Avery's resources.

I do remember when wanting the library resources after graduating, I did know enough to get a letter to then present in order to get access.

Professors reminded students often that access to Avery post-graduation is one of the main reasons for attending the program. This was inaccurate, insulting and insensitive to many of us. Of course the HP alumni's promised full access (physically, at the library, or via the library's online resources) was/is not totally accessible, seamless, or transparent. This needs to change.

No memory of specifics

If I recall correctly I believe it was during the Avery Library orientation.

I remember hearing this when we toured the library during the first few weeks of year I studio.

Library staff

During Orientation, throughout my education at Columbia

I don't really remember, but I definitely was expecting access to digital collections.

Avery Library Orientation

I remember this a prospective student and it being referenced throughout my time there

If you no longer attend Columbia and you are disappointed by the inaccessibility of many of Avery's resources, which do you most wish were still available to you?

all of it on site and all access to on line a shelf for alums with legiti book contracts

Having access like offered at other university's such as Penn if you are an alum and need access you can get it

Everything!

It would be great to have digital access - assume most items are scanned at this point

Inter-library loan & digital scanning. More access to Sanborn maps.

Proquest Historical Newspapers, Ancestry library, Fire Insurance Maps Online, ebooks

My academic path got cut out after graduation since I left the city. I have no access to these fabulous academic resources!

yes

Clio, periodicals, all digital resources

Access should be to 100% of holdings and digitally accessible material

Access to digital repositories of historic newspapers and trade lit across various platforms.

As far as I can tell, the only real limits are to databases that CU does not alumni access to. Otherwise, any alum can browse the shelves, use databases in the library, use rare books and the drawings collections. Or am I missing something?

The Avery Index, primarily. But semesterly symposiums, talks and debates at the library's main meeting spaces are also fully accessible and seem to be on topics that have weak connections to underrepresented, overlooked, and closed out communities of color and Hispanic lineage. It has always felt like a missed opportunity for Avery and one that we thought was permanent, so seeing this attempt to shift course is welcomed enthusiastically.

Archeologic materials

Some of the database resources like access to digital copies of Architectural Record, among others.

Online collections and data resources - including sources like WorldCat and JStor

Trade catalogues. Building details from trade publications.

Accessing the building!

JStor and the newspaper archives.

The ability to borrow without having to pay a monthly borrowing privilege fee. As a graduate of the program, having paid the hefty cost of admission, lifetime access to borrow should be granted to alumni.

I wish I could remove my thesis so it's not accessible.

Architectural record, more digital maps, newspapers etc

**There have been discussions among PA members about helping Avery expand their ephemera collection. Do you think there are significant gaps in the diversity of the current ephemera collection?**

Yes - 9

No - 3

I don't know because I do not use the ephemera collection. - 24

**How important is diversification of Avery's ephemera collection to your work?**

Very important - 7

Somewhat important - 7

Not very important - 5

I don't use it. - 15

**If you believe that there are gaps in the diversity of the ephemera collection, please let know what you believe are the most significant gaps.**

ephemera connected to anyone that isn't white.

Bring it back on New York City and State... Huge work and some progressive reversals to do here in the city and State and Preservation students can participate to get their start. Keep the school New York centric, encourage applications from all over, but keep the studio first year focused on this great city. From there/here students can branch out with a basis of a centric understanding of how preservation works here. As it was with Deans Fitch, Stern when there was rigor and huge attention to students knowing architecture and preservation history so they go on to advocate, understand architecture and what it represents; plus, of course best practices in conservation, preservation even restoration. Lead away from ephemeral subjects: smell, dust, air --- put these in the art department. Let's get back to the objects and what is there in front of our eyes or the best of what isn't there that was built.

There are no gaps, this is left wing nonsense.

Ephemera in languages other than English. Postwar and contemporary ephemera.

Local pamphlets and booklets on local topics, and modern era trade catalogs.

Puerto Rican and Black ephemera is also mostly absent in Avery and other similar archives.

It's not important to MY work specifically, but it's important to make sure that we diversify the collection. Columbia's HP program isn't the go-to that it used to be for many students and we need to do what we can to make it a competitive program again.

**Do you have ephemera that would assist with Avery's efforts to diversify the collection that you would consider donating?**

Yes – 6 (Note: contact will be made separately with those who provided email addresses.)

No – 42

**I would be interested in helping Avery Library digitize relevant documents to make them more accessible.**

Yes – 7 (Note: contact will be made separately with those who provided email addresses.)

No – 43

**Please let us know your relationship to Columbia's Historic Preservation Program.**

I attended the Historic Preservation Program. – 36

I am interested in this topic however I did not attend the Program. - 2

Student - 1

**General Comments and Suggestions (at end of survey)**

My office may be interested in donating files from past projects.

Perhaps you ought to ask the question about ephemera as if you found ephemera would you consider acquiring it and donating it.

This survey was difficult to answer since the pandemic made access to Avery difficult and especially for alumni. May I assume that it is now available both online and in person? I had so much difficulty with both that I moved on to more accessible institutions including the New York Public Library and the library at the Metropolitan Museum. Both seemed to have more liberal policies during the pandemic while Avery seemed intransigent to the point that I lost interest. I am all for Anti-racism / Equity Initiatives, but frustrated that it has been so difficult for all researchers including the marginalized to get access! This Anti-racism initiative seems to be playing around the edges when Avery's core mission was compromised for so long while other comparable institutions moved on and found ways to accommodate everyone sooner and more efficiently.

It is often difficult to access Avery's collections that require an appointment. I would suggest making that process easier and more timely.

As you might remember from the fall, I spoke about the need to diversify the collection and that alumni might be very helpful in that effort, especially those of us who graduated in the 1970s and 1980s.

I don't know for sure but it's possible that people who are doing research on small towns are more likely to need to do research at repositories as opposed to online because fewer of the records tend to be digitized.

I am grateful that Avery is carefully considering the need to be more inclusive and diverse.

I hope traditional design can be prioritized as an option in dealing with new construction and that the relentless focus on modernism might be reconsidered.

I live in San Antonio, TX. We are a minority/majority city. Although it has been a long time since I was in the Avery library, I remember arriving in Texas unprepared for the rich and diverse Spanish Colonial architectural history found in South Texas. (East Coast bias?) I remember trying to write a paper on adobe preservation and was quite stumped by the lack of resources at Avery. I would encourage you not to forget about Hispanic/Latino history in your endeavors. And to understand that there are many diverse regional architectural responses within the broader Spanish Colonial style. Spanish and Mexican contributions across the U.S. southern borders should not be lumped into one amorphous category in your cataloging.

I would like more information about where the gaps exist, specifically. Trade catalogues and pattern books were geared towards materials. I'm not sure where those were focused on race. I'm confused by where the gaps in diversity exist.

It has been many years, but I disagree with the notion that Avery Library had bias in their system when I was a student. The nature of ephemera survival is that it often reflected the tastes and fashion sensibilities of the affluent - they were the financiers and the most able to keep "superfluous stuff". But in acknowledging that bias, we also understand that those trends and tastes were often imitated to the best of one's budget. Such imitations were not as well marketed, nor valued (who wants to admit to a cheap knock-off?), so they do not survive. Inferior (if affordable) artefacts do not generally survive in the built environment so there cannot logically be a bias for or against what cannot survive. The Library has done an excellent job at acquiring and cataloguing primary sources of ephemera; it is up to the students and professionals to continue to record and supplement what has actually survived in the built environment and fill in the rest of the picture.