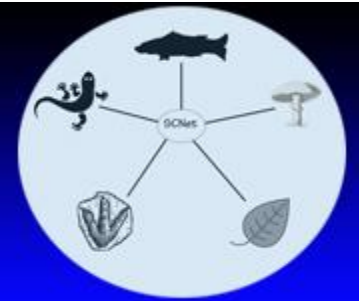




Small Collections Network

Serving, Supporting, Connecting Natural History Collections



**Texas Oklahoma Regional
Consortium of Herbaria**




TORCH challenges in interacting with small collections

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University of Oklahoma

Small Collections Digitization Workshop
Central Michigan University, 8-9 April 2014

TORCH – a regional digitization and herbarium network

- Herbarium network representing 49 herbaria in Texas and Oklahoma (36 in TX, 13 in OK)
- Annual meetings/workshops/symposia since founding in 2006
- NSF funding to support 3 Digitization & Specify 6 workshops
 -  PI's – Amanda Neill, Botanical Research Institute of Texas (BRIT)
Wayne Elisens, University of Oklahoma (OKL)
- Major herbaria in region drive digitization & coordination efforts

University of Texas, Austin	>1 million specimens
Botanical Research Institute of Texas	>1 million specimens
Texas A & M University	350,000 specimens
University of Oklahoma	250,000 specimens
Oklahoma State University	180,000 specimens

TORCH outreach to small herbaria

Recruiting & retaining

- Identify every herbarium of any size in TORCH region
- Co-Organizers personally invite each curator by letter
- Listserv and drupal-enabled website www.TORCHerbaria.org
- Annual meetings at different venues at end of AY (May)

Supporting: Networking & face-to-face contact

- Meetings have no or minimal fees and subsidized travel (3X)
- Meetings nested 3X within regional conferences to encourage attendance and travel opportunities (SWAN – 2X; SPNHC – 1X)
- Keynote speakers provide national perspectives and outreach
- Fieldtrips allow collecting and promote contact (“*value-added*”)

Reinforcement: Institutional recognition of effort

- Certificates, awards, & event titles important at home institutions

Common challenges identified by small collections in TORCH

- 1. Professional & administrative disenfranchisement**
 - curators often feel “*abandoned and isolated*” professionally and grossly unappreciated by chairs/deans or scientific peers
- 2. Lack of critical infrastructure**
 - Staffing, computational, space, & imaging infrastructure often limiting at smaller collections (but not student opportunities)
- 3. Lack of time & money**
 - Heavy teaching and mentoring loads limit time availability
 - Limited internal funds to support digitization and curation
- 4. Little or no recognition of effort**
 - Curatorial efforts often ignored or minimized

Challenges among larger institutions in TORCH outreach efforts

- 1. Digitization/curation/workload issues**
 - time, money, cyberinfrastructure, position constraints, and staffing concerns operate at all scales
- 2. Funding**
- 3. Coordination among collections (L/L, L/S, S/S)**
 - at institutional, personal, and infrastructural levels
- 4. Empowerment of small collections**
 - how best to support small collections in-house and nationally
- 5. Sustained involvement of small collections**
 - personnel loss, administrative change, orphaned collections, and neglect complicate efforts to reach out to small collections

TORCH approaches to address challenges interacting with small collections

1. Organize & engage L \leftrightarrow S collections
2. Host professional development events at smaller institutions (workshops, symposia, colloquia, curator's meetings, etc.)
3. Provide opportunities for contributed presentations
4. Develop mobile imaging stations
5. Juxtapose collections- and curatorial-based sessions in commonly attended regional meetings (SERNEC/ASB model)

TORCH VI meeting and symposium at
Jarvis Christian College, Hawkins, TX



Positive reinforcement for large/small collection interactions

- Value enhancement for larger collection's staff and resources
- Broader base of biocollection data availability
- Involvement of local and specialized collections
- Enhanced opportunities for training next-gen curators
- Increased prospects for involvement of under-represented groups
- Broadens significance of small collections and their recognition

