The Forman Library
Over the course of 2010, the Queens College Special Collections and Archives acquired the personal library of James Forman (1928-2005), the influential civil rights leader, writer, and academic. The collection includes over 1,500 books, over 2,000 pamphlets and printed ephemera items, and several feet of FBI files obtained through the Freedom of Information Act.

Job Well-Done
Department Head Ben Alexander notes the tremendous contribution that Annie Tummino has made to the progress of the Civil Rights Archive. “Annie has combined the interests of Alumni, current faculty and students, and the College generally to further an already estimable project.”

Civil Rights Fellows: This semester, the department is pleased to have Library and Information Studies graduate students Amber Loveless and Andy McCarthy processing civil rights materials and contributing to our digital presentation at www.archives.gslis.net. Their work, along with that of all Fellows, has made a profound contribution to the College.
Queens Memory Project: Collaboration and Expansion

Project Overview
In October, the Department of Special Collections and Archives was awarded a METRO grant to initiate a digital archive called the Queens Memory Project (QMP) with the Archives at Queens Library. Project Director Natalie Milbrodt (GSLIS Student and Special Collections Fellow) explains that the goal of the project is to “document the complex ethnographic and socio-cultural evolution of the most ethnically diverse county in the world.” Department Head Ben Alexander adds “this really is a cutting edge initiative to capture the American experiment as it evolves, literally, in our back yard. Natalie is combining cutting edge technologies as well as a sensitivity to capturing memory across a breadth of linguistic, cultural and ethnic boundaries. She has initiated a remarkable project.”

The QMP is a collaborative effort with the Archives at Queens Library. As of May 2011, the team has cataloged over 200 digital records including oral history interviews and photography documenting contemporary Queens, as well as historical photographs, maps, news clippings and ephemera. This monument to the collective memory of life in Queens will go live in October of this year.

New Partners
Recently, the StoryCorps organization, the Queens Council on the Arts, and the not-for-profit EarSay (the team who produced the landmark “Crossing the Blvd” project) have agreed to collaborate with the QMP by donating their records to the digital archives.

The Queens Memory Project’s estimable Advisory Board includes Jack Eichenbaum, Queens Borough Historian; Robert DeCandido, Database Coordinator at the Pierpont Morgan Library; Anne Gilliland, Professor and Director of Archival Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles; Beth Yakel, Associate Professor at the University of Michigan School of Information; and Richard Hourahan, Curator and Collections Manager at the Queens Historical Society.

Queens Memory Project Advances the College Curriculum
This April, Professors Bette Weidman (English/American Studies) and Ben Alexander won a competitive scholarship from The Asian/American Center to develop a team-taught course devoted to oral history theory and methodology. Weidman and Alexander’s students will work with QMP Project Manager Natalie Milbrodt to document communities in Flushing, Queens for the QMP.

In addition, Kyoko Aoki, a graduate student in the Library and Information Studies program at UCLA, will be completing a month-long practicum this summer implementing various aspects of the project’s operations.
Department Receives Prestigious NEH Preservation Grant

The Department of Special Collections and Archives announces the receipt of a prestigious National Endowment for the Humanities Grant. The proposal was authored by Katie Hughes (former Special Collections Fellow and Adjunct Archivist) and Benjamin Alexander (Assistant Professor GSLIS & Head of Special Collections & Archives), and is currently administered by Evelyn Leahy (Collections Manager). The grant will support the services of a professional consultant, who will provide a thorough preservation assessment of the department’s collections, including institutional records and manuscripts, college memorabilia, photographs, rare books, art objects, digital materials and other historical objects. The appointed conservator will conduct a site visit at the Department of Special Collections & Archives at Queens College, and will prepare a proposal detailing preservation methods, access policies, practices and other recommendations for the future. It is expected that this grant will serve as a foundation for additional funding to provide ongoing conservation and preservation treatment to the College’s expanding collections.

Unearthing the College’s Rare Book Collection

Though not well-known, Queens College owns an estimable collection of rare books that documents the history of print culture over that past 600 years. Highlights from the Collection include a 14th century manuscript copy of the medieval Persian poet Sa’di’s The Gulistan, 11 editions of Cervantes’ Don Quixote de la Mancha including the first edition printed in English in 1620, and three part-publications of Dickens’ novels including Dombey and Sons (1848). Other strengths of the collection include late 19th century American dime novels, juvenile fiction, expedition reports from the American West, and first editions of the works of Lord Byron, Victor Hugo, and D. H. Lawrence.

This semester, the department recruited conservator Erin Albritton to conduct a survey of the collection and make recommendations for its future care and preservation. Additionally, the department is pleased to have appointed Johnathan Thayer (GSLIS student, Special Collections Fellow) as a Rare Books Assistant. The department continues to seek funding towards making the rare book collection accessible to Queens College students and researchers. As Thayer explains, “While many of these books are priceless items, the true value of the rare book collection lies in its capacity to teach about the history of culture through study of the publication and dissemination of the written word.” “These materials only fulfill their historical and intellectual purpose when they are in the hands of students and researchers,” explains Ben Alexander. “Jonathan is doing a tremendous job of gaining an intellectual and physical control of a body of materials the Department is committed to integrating into the College curriculum.

14th century manuscript copy of the medieval Persian poet Sa’di’s The Gulistan

Charles Dickens’ Dombey and Sons (1848)
Across the last academic year, Department Head Ben Alexander has accepted invitations to speak and lecture on the College’s unique Special Collections materials to students and faculty in Beijing, Glasgow, London and Holland. “My interest in establishing an international presence is to expose the College’s tremendous history to an expanding audience and pave the way for our students to have opportunities to learn about Special Collections in other cultural contexts. Such experiences will serve our graduates as they pursue careers in an increasingly globalized world.” Alexander also notes that the Queens Memory Project and the Civil Rights Archive in particular are attracting close attention. “I would love to send both Annie and Natalie overseas to share their remarkable work and describe our practice of combining academic learning with professional exposure for our students.”

Barham Rotunda Exhibit

In commemoration of the 96th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, the Queens College Libraries are proud to present a variety of documents from the personal library of Hratch Zadoian, former Vice President of Queens College, who now teaches in the Political Science Department. Professor Zadoian has graciously loaned his unique collection of books, photograph, posters, and primary documents attesting to the very first genocide of the twentieth century. Additionally, Mr. Zadoian recently donated unique titles on the Armenian genocide to the library, as well as a collection of college records and memorabilia to the Department of Special Collections & Archives. Please take a moment to stop by and review the remarkable collection of materials, which includes personal photographs from the 1920s. The exhibit was curated by Hratch Zadoian and Evelyn Leahy.