Deborah Ultan Boudewyns opened the session with a summary as to why zine culture is valuable to society as a whole, and why libraries should be interested in collecting them. It was also pointed out that libraries should share [the] processes for managing them and discerning their educational value. From the point of view of zine makers as to why they decide to make these alternative information objects independently, it was stated: Why find a publisher when you can make a zine yourself?

Marshall Weber started off the session with his unique point of view as a vendor of zines, as the Booklyn Artist Alliance was started to help zine makers sell their collections to educational institutions. Acutely aware of the social geography of these materials (what he called “locality”), he works with libraries and educational institutions to collect zines. Acknowledging the meaning libraries can have in preserving these collections and making them accessible, he also stated that collecting zines is a complete shift in paradigms for libraries, as they are now working with amateur producers of materials. It is his position to establish a dialog between librarians, students, artists, and bring knowledge from artists directly to educational institutions. Zines have “reinvigorated the culture” as the categories of what is a professional or amateur production matter little in today’s society. Weber said that the collection of alternative materials is a valuable addition to library materials, which is much different than the point of view 20 years ago. It is now possible to fit high and low culture into cultural institutions. At the conclusion of Weber’s discussion, he defined the zine as a mainly personal work that is usually serialized, and represents a particular community (such as music followers, religions, counter-cultures). They are most often used to share ideas, and provide very in-depth reporting and critiquing of modern society. Other
characteristics include give-aways, bartering between zine creators, and zines created under a service-oriented model. Susan Thomas continued the discussion with how to influence policies within academic libraries to facilitate collecting zines, mainly working with self-published art zines. She defined a zine as an inexpensive, self-published object. She provided videos of a few of the zines in her library. She stressed the fact that in addition to collecting zines from different eras, there was a need for collecting contemporary zines. Collections might, at least, consider collecting zines that are produced locally. Thomas showed citations of zines in student research reports, and mentioned that students are reading zines as contemporary primary sources. Exhibitions of zines also create measureable value for the library as they allow patrons to connect with the material. There are distinct differences between art zines and regular zines. Regular zines, for one, grew out of the fanzine subculture of the 1930s, as a way to make your own culture and stop consuming what is made for consumption. Features specific to art and design zines include not being very personal or political in nature (unlike regular zines), cost more to produce, and are not available for free or trade. But it is also important to not ignore the zines that are free. There is also a different category of independent art magazines, which are not zines, and are also mostly absent from libraries and difficult to acquire as they have little cataloging information. Yet they often have the same noncommercial spirit as art zines. At times, zines can even be included in these independent art magazines and pop magazines. There are many sources on the Internet to find and collect zines, but as some of them go out of print so quickly, it is very important to act promptly and actively collect – it is usually not feasible to wait for donations. In conclusion, Thomas emphasizes that zines are integral to academic library collections because they introduce students to print and visual culture, exemplify artists, designers, students, teenagers, fanculture... and everyone can learn from them.

Stephanie Grimm completed her minicomics project as a student at the University of Michigan. Her objective was to build a minicomics collection in the context of a large academic institution. She defines a minicomic not by its size, but by publication method: a democratic publishing by an artist individually. Grimm’s main challenge for the project was to determine what was going to be collected and the criteria to differentiate minicomics from zines. The distinguishing characteristics she sited were that minicomics are primarily graphical and contain panels and speech bubbles. The definition she admitted is fairly liberal, and that it may overlap with zines. The main goal of the project was to expand the collection of minicomics for the University of Michigan for teaching, research, and preservation, as it has large art and design departments. Although the library already had an extensive comic book collection, minicomics in particular were not being collected purposely. Yet due to the multiple perspectives and viewpoints of minicomics, as well as their experimental sizes and composition materials, they are important to collect in libraries. Different gender and political issues are not represented in mainstream media, making minicomics especially important to libraries. An interesting point brought up was the difficulty in distinguishing a minicomic from a regularly published comic, even if they have identical content. Depending on how the work was published (independently or formally,) it is only considered a minicomic if published independently. Grimm discovered that it was not feasible to buy every minicomic, especially with wanting to buy two copies, one for preservation and another for circulation. It was also necessary to narrow the scope. She developed a collection policy, purchased the minicomics, and cataloged them. Initially, she purchased a load of affordable minicomics from a conference in Maryland, which ended up doubling the entire collection at the University of Michigan. What was needed was a consistent system for acquiring minicomics, yet since there are no formal publishers of minicomics, that is a challenge. She was able to keep the scope sustainable by only looking for distributors of minicomics in the Southeast Michigan area, and worked closely with ordering and processing staff in the library. It was impossible and unsustainable to buy individually from artists, especially in terms of conducting invoices and ordering. She shared the collection policy of the library with the distributors, and they sent in whatever fit under the library’s scope. One particular distributor that was mentioned...
included the local Ann Arbor comic book store, “Vault of Midnight,” which featured locally-produced comics. To process the minicomics, which often did not contain standard cataloging information such as titles and authors, they used MARC records and listed them under the “Art, Architecture, and Engineering Library Minicomics Collection.” At times the cataloger would have to perform research to even locate the title of a minicomic, including having to search the artist's blog or through information at minicomic trade shows in order to contact the artist later. The collection is kept in local storage, and an RSS feed lets users know when the collection is updated. The minicomics are not labeled and stamped the way regular library books are, but instead put in archival folders and each receives a bookmark with its cataloging information. In order to promote the collection and keep it constantly growing and accessible, Grimm created a libguide and hosted special events in the library for public viewing. At one event, the students created a comic book by hand from start to finish. The event was advertised to art students, comic book stores, and general student listservs. It was an easy way to get into comic book creation, plus at the end the library gets a copy of it. Looking towards the future, Grimm suggests that there be more collaboration among universities to create a giant catalog of zines and minicomics.

Celina Williams & Leila Prererwaitaya of Virginia Commonwealth University started out their topic session stating their focus was on print media culture instead of digital. Artists and readers of zines want to remain in the physical world, and being able to hold the work in your hands is often a large part of the experience (unlike for digital photos, social media, and blogs.) Although many artists have an online presence, zines in their print form can create a sense of anonymity. These works can describe personal experiences, provide comments on world events such as the September 11th, 2001 attacks, highlight difficult topics such as drug addiction and sexual abuse, as well as cover political topics such as immigration and urban/rural topics. These underground primary documents provide the basis for unstructured archival collections, as archives can’t completely exist with the digital sphere. As echoed by the other panelists, Williams and Prererwaitaya warned to be prepared to tackle the question about the definition of a zine when creating a collection policy. Many contemporary zinemakers know that libraries are interested in collecting their material. At Virginia Commonwealth University, fanzines from the 1950s to 1990s are stored in a separate collection from zines, and usually covered fantasy and musical topics. The decision to keep book art separate from zines was a subjective one. The other option was to create a user-friendly guide to pinpoint where zines have been integrated into the collection. In terms of formulating the policy, it was decided that a permanent collection policy would be best. Collecting started with the student-based zines from the University itself. Subjects of these zines included women’s rights, the Occupy movement, and the anarchists party. Locations of where zines could be found were identified, such as coffee houses and local community attractions, where zine creators could be approached. The start of the collection began when the University became the repository for the zines of the Richmond Zine Fest. Zines were purchased from the Fest, as well as from Richmond’s local anarchist collective, The Wingnut. Other locations for building the collection included The Flying Brick, a local radical lending library. The University also hosted a “zine night” to allow students and faculty to experience the collections in a less intimidating environment, which also allowed attendees to contribute their own zines. They collaborated with online distributors to purchase zines (such as Things You Say, Stranger Danger, and Sweet Candy,) as purchasing zines through Etsy.com and personal artist websites is sometimes not feasible. Collecting local zines and minicomics on groups such as women, African Americans, the LGBT community, Hispanic Americans, and the Do-It-Yourself culture of creating zines, as well as zine reference materials were priorities. Rarely did they receive materials that were out of scope that needed to be discarded. But if needed, discarded items would be donated to other communities, libraries, or were given away as prizes at library events. The zines were housed in acid-free folders in archival boxes, based on research of how other libraries preserve their zines. They are organized by subject or genre, instead of title.
Inspiration for the cataloging strategy was taken from the Barnard Zine Library. As far as the best method for organizing and housing a zine collection, the panelists concluded that one must examine how they got there and how they will be accessed. They mentioned as an example the Duke University Library’s zine collection, which is housed as a separate manuscript collection since it had been donated all at once. The Virginia Commonwealth University’s collection, on the other hand, came piecemeal via donations. If there is no title, author, or date on the zine, it should be categorized as a manuscript, not individually. In conclusion, zines and collections of zines shouldn’t be a quaint and unidentifiable “others”.

At the conclusion of the formal panel presentations, the discussion was opened up to the audience for questions. Some of the questions included:

- As buying zines fits perfectly into the library model of purchasing materials, is there a way libraries can also fit into the gift culture of zine culture?
- It is possible to develop a free/barter model with the local community to share zines?

The point was made that since most special collections are all about donated collections, zine culture is actually not that far from the history of libraries.