



(Re)Designing a Processing Manual for ArchivesSpace at UMD

Presentation for ArchivesSpace Member
Match Program

November 4, 2021



Special Collections at the University of Maryland

- UMD Libraries are the largest university library system in the Washington D.C.-Baltimore area
- Located on the ancestral lands of the Piscataway People, land stolen by European colonists
- Charter member of ArchivesSpace at very large institutional level
- Special Collections refers to 2 departments:
 - Special Collections and University Archives and Special Collections in Performing Arts
 - Together, 26 staff members including curatorial/collection area staff, technical/processing staff, contractual staff, and graduate assistants
 - 88,698 linear feet of archival and manuscript collections, 35,089 films and videos, and 212 TB of digital content

Migration to ArchivesSpace

- Migrating from homegrown system
 - Microsoft Access database (accession records/locations)
 - EAD generated via java converter
 - Custom interface that had significant limitations
- ArchivesSpace benefits to UMD
 - Centralized data
 - API/systems integration
 - Widespread adoption and support
 - Flexibility
- Timeframe
 - 2014-2016: accession record clean-up
 - 2016-2018: accession imports/ead clean-up
 - 2018-ead imports/PUI preparation
 - Processing manual written between 2015-2017

Creating a processing manual for ArchivesSpace

- First processing manual created in 2009 to ensure standardized processing across Special Collections
- When launching ASpace in 2016, we needed to marry existing accessioning and processing workflows with ArchivesSpace data entry
- Goals:
 - Provided step-by-step instructions for using the ArchivesSpace staff interface
 - Documented decisions regarding how fields were migrated
 - Keep collections data as consistent as possible moving forward (always thinking of the next migration)

But why didn't we
just use the

ArchivesSpace

User Manual?

What changed and what didn't work

- Accessioning and processing work is now centralized with technical staff who work across all of our curatorial/collection areas
- Local ArchivesSpace practices have shifted as we have become more familiar with ArchivesSpace and have learned how to make it work for us
- New features or plug-ins have been utilized
- The emphasis on the “technical” without discussion on style or how an archivist’s own biases and privilege influence archival description

“Processing” Manual 2.0

- Not just about processing, not just about using ArchivesSpace
- Explicitly states who is responsible for what (e.g., curators must perform archival appraisal prior to accessioning)
- Less linear than the previous manual (e.g., how to properly enter dates is not explained in the inventorying chapter, again in the accessioning, again in the processing); instructs the archivist to jump to relevant proportions throughout the manual (this will make maintenance of the manual itself less burdensome)
- Including style guidelines
- What it means to be “owners” of ASpace at our institution

What we're still struggling with

- It's not done yet
- What to call the manual
- Where to save and maintain the manual
- How to make our manual applicable and useable for our colleagues in Special Collections in Performing Arts and how to best integrate them into our workflows
- Promoting collections after they're accessible in ArchivesSpace

Questions and Contact

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