Archival Management Systems at The Ohio State University

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Collections Management Tools Roundtable.
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Overview

- Explanation of context at The Ohio State University
- ArchivesSpace: selection, implementation, and suspension
- Current Strategy: Archivists' Toolkit
- Suggestions for improving collection management tools

Disclaimers

- This was our experience; this is not the only experience
  - Some of the problems noted here are resolved
- Some views are mine, and not the official position of The Ohio State University, or those of my colleagues

Selection Process: Centralizing Processing Program

- Administrative decision to move towards centralizing archival process in technical services
- September 2013: Special Collections Processing Coordinator appointed

Before

- Each collection responsible for their own processing
- Many tools and practices, even within the same unit collection

Departmental Assignments to Divisions

Director of University Libraries
Damon Jaggars

Development Officer

Associate/Assistant Directors

Associate Director for Collections, Technical Services and Scholarly Communications	Associate Director for Information Technology	Associate Director for Research and Education	Associate Director for Special Collections and Area Studies	Chief Administrative Officer
• Acquisitions • Circulation (Including Depository) • Collection Description and Access Development • Collection Development • Copyright Resources Center • Digital Content Services • Interlibrary Services • Preservation & Formatting • Special Collections Description and Access	• Applications Development and Support • Digital Initiatives • Infrastructure Support	• Department Libraries Architecture Biological Sciences & Pharmacy Fine Arts Food, Agriculture & Environmental Sciences Geology Music/Dance Science & Engineering Vet Med • Outreach and Engagement • Reference and Research • Regional Campus Liaison • Teaching and Learning	• Area Studies East Asian Eastern European & Slavic Jewish Latin American Middle Eastern • Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum • Byrd Polar Research Center Archival Program • Hilandar Research Library • Lawrence and Lee Theatre Research Institute • Ohio Congressional Archives • Rare Books and Manuscripts • University Archives	• Admin Support • Business Operations • Communications • Event Coordination • Facilities / Security • Human Resources

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Selection Process: Changes in IT Environment

- April 2013: Terry Reese appointed Head of Digital Initiatives and begins the work of building a new digital infrastructure
- June 2013: Special Collections Archival Collections Management Systems Retreat
  - Discovery of Special Collections not optimal
  - Many different practices, tools, systems, etc.
  - Began exploring functional requirements

Selection Process: Product Selection

- September –December 2013: Archival Collection Task Force
  - Defined functional requirements
  - Some product evaluation
  - Identified opportunities and challenges
  - Recommended implementing ArchivesSpace

Deciding factors

- Deciding factor 1: goal of consolidating practices and archival metadata for all of the OSUL Special Collections
- Deciding factor 2: ArchivesSpace meets criteria of OSUL Digital Initiatives Program Guiding Principles
  - We build services, not products
  - We carefully weigh when to Build versus Buy versus Borrow
  - We develop modular services, not monolithic systems
  - We develop for change
  - We work with partners
  - We strive to stay grounded in the real world
  - We are driven by standards

Planning

- ArchivesSpace Implementation Task Force
  - May-July 2014
  - Inventoried sources of data for migration
    - Many: PastPerfect, finding aids and inventories in all formats (paper, HTML, PDF …), spreadsheets, databases, etc.
  - Reviewed AS configuration
    - Identified some local customization, such as auto-increment of accession numbers
  - Proposed training
  - Some test data entry begins

Implementation

- Lyrasis delivered two days of training in September 2014
  - Re-sequencing of some elements was noted and discussed
- ArchivesSpace Implementation Working Group convened in October 2014
- Production instance of ASpace installed in October 2014
  - New data entry begins at this time for accessions and new finding aids
  - Began migrating existing data

Community Participation

- Technical Advisory Committee
- Public Interface Enhancement Project
- Developers formally accepted for code contribution

Problems …

By December 2014, we were concerned …

- Serious system performance problems
- Unexplained data loss
- Migration of most data determined to require local development, which was not anticipated
  - ASpace recommending using Archivists' Toolkit for as a migration tool
- IT spending most of the allocated time to keep system up, not enhancing it as we had anticipated

Things get worse …

Spring 2015:

- Major data resequencing
  - Components shuffling themselves
  - No apparent pattern or predictability
- Oops, I deleted an entire resource record …
- Work arounds
- Frustration
- Convened a meeting of the stakeholders within Libraries
  - IT developed internal response plan
  - Lyrasis began to work more closely on our issues

And even worse …

- By summer 2015, widespread complaints relating to performance and resequencing in the community
  - Joined with other institutions in conveying concerns to Lyrasis
- Several releases do not offer promised fixes, and sometimes introduced new problems

It's not you, it's me …

And progress was slow from our end too …

- IT resources devoted to just keeping the system operating
- Three developers left over the course of the project
- No legacy data migrated, and the path to migration depended on local developer resources
- Over 5,000 staff hours, 134 major IT tickets, and only 275 resource records, none of which had been made public

Good news:

- Successful project to work with a vendor to rekey paper inventories where were ingested into AS

Turning Point

- Lyrasis begins losing developers
- Met with several ASpace users at SAA
- IT observation of tasks
- Head-to-head testing of Archivists' Toolkit and ArchivesSpace

Decision: Suspend AS

September 2015: Decide to suspend our AS implementation and use Archivists' Toolkit for the following reasons:

- Cannot effectively manage data in ArchivesSpace
- ArchivesSpace cannot provide timelines for necessary system development, and is relying heavily on community-contributed development for system advancement without organized community commitment
- Work will not be completed on the migration tools we will need to utilize for a move into ArchivesSpace

The Archivists' Toolkit Strategy

- ArchivesSpace is recommending the use of Archivists' Toolkit as a step in the migration path
- A move to Archivists' Toolkit will allow us a stable workspace to migrate all of our currently scattered data for cleanup, etc.
- Public access can be provided through the OhioLINK EAD Repository and existing webpages. The current public interface to ArchivesSpace is less satisfactory than these options, and while work on public interface enhancement is underway, it is at least six months, and more likely a year, away from release.

AT: The Medium View

- We view AT as an interim solution
  - Data normalization and consolidation
  - Currently stable with low maintenance burden
  - Drawbacks include lack of integrated public interface
  - Not a long-term technical solution

- Anticipate a re-examination of functional requirements and tools when we further along in data migration

AT: The View from IT

Pros

- Happy we are stable
- Backend uses familiar technology for them

Cons

- Main concern is about maintaining Java version compatibility
- Client/server architecture is not preferred
- Not in alignment with their vision of open, interoperable systems

What we learned

- Should have done much more rigorous testing before product selection, and gathered more information from other users
- ASpace is maturing, but managing that along with our complex local data was more than we could manage with our resources
- This will take longer than we hoped, no matter what tool we are using
- Following standards all along would have helped

Where are we now? July 2016

- Expect to spend the next year (or more) on data migration and normalization in AT
- Publishing finding aids from AT on our webpages
- Art and Artifact Management Task Force currently exploring functional requirements
- Pleased to hear about significant progress on ASpace
- Internal IT environment
  - Also maturing
  - Staffing situation more stable
  - … but several other major initiatives underway

ASpace in the Community

- Has been successful for some people, depending on
  - Complexity
  - Expectations
  - Hosting situation
  - Resources (developers, budget to contract out work, etc.)
- Information can be hard to get before training
- Appreciate the great contributions of other institutions

Moving Forward: ASpace

- Coordinated development
  - Lyrasis has limited developer capacity
    - The one full-time developer on Aspace left in spring 2016; hours for public interface developer reduced
  - Pooling the resources will advance us all together
  - Value proposition of Lyrasis membership should be in the coordination not privileged access
- Information sharing
  - Realistic discussions
  - Lessons learned should be lessons shared

Moving Forward: Profession

Finding balance:

- Unlikely that one solution will work for everyone
- Focus efforts on standards, and holding our systems to compliance

- Don’t settle
- Recognize that it can’t all happen at once

Questions? Comments?

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