DESCRIPTIVE NOTES

STANDARDS

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The SAA Description Section provides a forum for the exchange of information and ideas about all aspects of archival description among those responsible for, involved in, or interested in description projects, standards, and systems.

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> *Description must be iterative. It continually reflects deeper understandings of agents, records, activities, and the relationships between them. It is responsive to users. It is flexible, reflecting changes in knowledge, practice, and values.*
>
> **DACS Principle 11**

SECTION LEADERSHIP

Chair	Cyndi Shein
Vice-Chair	Katie Duvall
Immediate Past Chair	Elizabeth Wilkinson
Council Liaison	Audra Eagle-Yun
Secretary	Sarah Jones
Member-at-Large	Helice Koffler
Member-at-Large	Katy Rawdon
Web Liaison	Scott Kirycki
Newsletter Editor	Lori Dedeyan

FROM THE CHAIR & VICE-CHAIR

Cyndi Shein and Katie Duvall

Hello, Description Section members!

During the past six months, the Description Section Committee focused its attention on responding to the needs and preferences you expressed in your responses to the Section's 2019 member survey. (Survey responses were reported in the last newsletter.) As suggested by the survey responses, we are planning a joint meeting with the Metadata and Digital Object Section at the 2020 meeting in Chicago. The session will be a marketplace format that will support exchange of information on many of the topics that rose to the top in the survey. The Committee is also exploring suggestions made by members during the 2019 meeting, such as the possibility of delivering the Descriptive Notes newsletter in a different format in the future.

One topic touched on by the member survey was the Description Expo, which was active from 2005 through 2013. The Description Expo provided a platform for links to finding aids and summaries of innovative descriptive projects and tools. There has since been a shift in the use of communication platforms, leaning toward blogs, social media, newsletters, listservs, and open access journals—which collectively meet the needs previously served by the Expo. Therefore, after thoughtful review of the content in the Expo, the Description Section Committee agreed to keep past Expo content online, but not to bring the Expo out of retirement. Instead, the Committee will focus its energy on building a Description Portal, which will host guides and manuals about archival description.

Thanks largely to the efforts of Scott Kirycki and Rachel Searcy, the Portal development is well underway! For a sneak peek, see Description Section Documentation Portal. You can help by sharing your documentation. The Portal will host documentation about archival description in a broad sense, ranging from traditional processing manuals to local style guides and guidelines specifically created for the description of distinct formats. Please consider submitting your description documentation. We welcome PDFs, Microsoft Word documents, LibGuides, websites, GitHub repositories, and blogs. Please ensure that links are active and not restricted to users at your institution. For those of you who have shared your documentation on members-only sites, please consider making your documentation open to a broader audience by submitting it to this Portal as well.

Thank you to community members who have already submitted content for the Portal—Sarah Cogley (SUNY Buffalo), Sarah Quigley (Emory University), Steve Duckworth (Oregon Health and Science University), Andrew Harman (Chapman University), Marty Blackson (Central Washington University), Rachel Searcy (New York University Libraries), and Alison Clemens (Yale University Library). To submit documentation please email Scott Kirycki skirycki@nd.edu. Include a link or attachment of your documentation, your institution's name (and repository, if appropriate), and a summary of your documentation.

In addition to responding to member needs, the Description Section Committee is doing a little housekeeping—updating the Standing Rules and improving our recordkeeping to support the Committee's continuity from year to year. We will share updates as they occur via the listserv.

In closing, we would like to express great appreciation to Elizabeth Wilkinson (Immediate

Past Chair), under whose leadership many of our current initiatives were launched! We thank our fellow Committee members, Sarah Jones (Secretary), Helice Koffler (Member-at-Large), Katy Rawdon (Member-at-Large), Lori Dedeyan (Newsletter Editor), and Scott Kirycki (Web Liaison)—all of whom have been generous with their knowledge and time. Thank you also to Felicia Owens and Audra Eagle Yun, our liaisons with SAA. Serving on an SAA committee provides opportunities for individuals to build leadership experience and develop connections with colleagues across the nation. When we call for nominees in the spring, I encourage you to volunteer!

Sincerely,
Cyndi and Katie

Description Section Documentation Portal

Steering Committee Roster

Welcome to the Description Section Documentation Portal

SAA SOCIETY OF American Archivists

Description Section

This site hosts documentation related to archival description as a resource for archivists. Documentation includes traditional archival processing manuals, workflow checklists and templates, descriptive style guides, and guidelines for describing specific formats.

Description Section

RESOURCES

Description Section Documentation Portal

We accept documentation in all formats, including but not limited to PDFs, Microsoft Word documents, LibGuides, websites, blogs, and GitHub repositories. Please ensure that links are active and not restricted to users at your institution. The Description Section will review the portal annually to identify and remove broken links. The section's Web Liaison can also be notified with changes to submitted documentation.

To submit documentation please email Scott Kirycki (skirycki@nd.edu) with a link or attachment of your documentation and the following information:

Institution (and Repository, if appropriate):

Summary of Documentation:

Thank you for sharing your resources with colleagues across the profession!

Available Documentation:

- Archival Processing Manuals

- Checklists and Templates

- Guidelines on Specific Formats

- Comprehensive Documentation Sites

Complementary Resources:

- Describing Archives: A Content Standard

IMPLEMENTING THE NEW DACS PRINCIPLES: A CASE STUDY FOR PRINCIPLE 9

Sue Luftschein

The Society of American Archivists approved the new Statement of Principles for Archival Description in May of 2019. The Statement was developed by the members of the Technical Subcommittee for Describing Archives: A Content Standard (TS-DACS) over the course of two years and involved the input and participation of archivists from across the country. The revised principles are especially notable for their user-centered approach. As the introduction to the Statement of Principles states, "Archival description exists to facilitate the use of archives by people in order to understand the past through traces in records" ("Introduction", DACS Statement of Principles).

Prior to their approval by SAA, members of TS-DACS beta tested the principles at their home institutions. Some of us presented our work in Washington, D.C. at the 2018 SAA meeting. I presented on the work started at the University of Southern California, (USC) to implement Principle 9: "Each collection within a repository must have an archival description." This principle is at the core of the revised principles' user-centered focus. It is also the backbone for Principles 2 and 10: "Users are the fundamental reason for archival description" and "Archivists must have a user-driven reason to enhance existing archival description." Keeping our users at the forefront of our mission requires that our materials are discoverable and accessible. At a minimum, therefore, all collections need to have some kind of description, ideally a DACS-compliant single level description.

At USC, we have a significant backlog of undescribed, and therefore inaccessible, materials.

Low staffing levels, insufficient resources, and historical and legacy practices all contributed to this backlog. When I joined Special Collections at USC, one of my responsibilities was to tackle this backlog. Obviously, processing tens of thousands of linear feet of material was not feasible; even with MPLP it was impossible to make all of this material accessible. I began, however, to implement accessioning-as-processing principles to make newly acquired collections immediately accessible, and the workflows and procedures that guided this practice gave me the tools to tackle this backlog of description. Principle 9, along with Principles 2 and 10, empowered me to make decisions about how to tackle this project.

When surveying our collection records in ArchivesSpace, our collection management system, I discovered 407 collections with unpublished records, all of which needed updating in order to adhere to Principle 9. The records for these 407 collections are in no way DACS-compliant and, as such, they suffer from a severe case of underdescription—the majority of them have almost no description at all (usually just a title). While we do not advertise these collections, we also do not restrict access to them. However, because they are essentially undiscoverable, researchers need to do too much legwork to become aware of them. The goal of this description project was to bring all of these collection records into compliance with the requirements for DACS single level description so we can make them discoverable in ArchivesSpace and allow researchers to discover the breadth of our holdings. The project will also allow us to gain better physical and intellectual control over

these collections so that we can figure out in some meaningful (rather than anecdotal) way how our collections are used and establish realistic processing priorities based on those uses. When I began this project, we were establishing processing priorities based on our best guesses about research, teaching, and learning value, among other criteria; in other words, we have been trying to second-guess user needs. Better information about use will allow us to adhere to Principles 2 and 10. We can then use this new information to establish processing priorities, thus placing users at the center of our archival processing program.

The requirements for a DACS- compliant, single level record are not onerous. Such a record requires a title, reference code, scope and content note, date, creator, conditions governing access note, extent, language, and name and location of repository. When using a collection management system like ArchivesSpace, much of this information is entered systemwide, so it does not need to be re-entered for every single record.

We started with the small (1-2 box) collections that could be described quickly and easily. At the end of the project (which is ongoing), these collections will still be unprocessed, but they will have DACS compliant description that will make them more discoverable and provide us with better intellectual and physical control.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate what a record for one of these newly-described collections looks like in our version of the ArchivesSpace public user interface (v 2.5). When a researcher locates a record, they immediately see the majority of the elements required for single level description, all of which, with the exception of elements 3.1, 2.6, and 4.1, are required in ArchivesSpace.

Element 2.2 (Name and Location of Repository) is hard coded into ArchivesSpace when the system is set up, so repositories using this particular CMS will have this element created automatically. Element 4.5 (Languages and Scripts of the Material) is now apparent in the public resource record with ArchivesSpace v 2.7. The administrative information provides an indication of the collection's unprocessed state. All records also have a reference code (Element 2.1), as an ArchivesSpace record cannot be created without one, and

Figure 1. ArchivesSpace record with DACS single level elements

Figure 2. ArchivesSpace record with DACS single level elements, continued

and we have standard language for our Conditions Governing Access notes (Element 4.1).

Elements 2.3 (Title), 3.1 (Scope and Contents), 2.4 (Date), 2.6 (Creator) and 2.5 (Extent) remain to be addressed. We are checking each record to ensure that the title element conforms to DACS; most already do. The majority of these collections also had existing basic scope and contents information. This information had been added to our original Microsoft Access database, which itself had been migrated into Archivists' Toolkit when we began using that system. This meant that some of these undescribed collections actually had enough information to write basic scope and contents notes. For those that do not, however, we spend a little time doing a quick look through the boxes to get enough information to write a basic scope and content note. This quick examination also allows us to estimate dates and to determine creators where there is no existing information.

Fortunately, I barcoded all of these collections'

boxes a number of years ago, so our ILS contained the necessary metadata to identify the number of boxes in each collection, from which I could also estimate linear footage.

Given that this project encompasses creating metadata for over 400 collections, which range in size from one 2.5-inch document box to 2500 boxes, this project will take some time. But we are slowly making progress, and for each record that gets updated, we come that much closer to adhering to the new Principles.

Additional Resources

Describing Archives: A Content Standard
https://saa-ts-dacs.github.io/

Sue Luftschein is the Head of Special Collections in the USC Libraries, University of Southern California. She is co-chair of SAA's Technical Subcommittee for Describing Archives: A Content Standard (TS-DACS).

COOPERATING ACROSS DEPARTMENTS: PROCESSING THE HERWITZ ARCHIVE AT THE PHILLIPS LIBRARY AND PEABODY ESSEX MUSEUM

Tamara Gaydos

The Phillips Library is the research library of the Peabody Essex Museum (PEM) in Salem, Massachusetts. The Library holds a rich collection of print volumes, manuscript collections, photographs, maps, and ephemera. In an unprecedented collaboration, the Library is working with the museum's Registration department to make the papers of two prominent art collectors, Chester and Davida Herwitz, available to research. Before this project, the papers had been held in the Collection Documentation Center, a repository for museum object documentation, and made available to curators and interested parties via the Registrar.

Chester and Davida Herwitz travelled to India in 1962 as part of a world tour for their handbag and accessories business. They fell in love with the art and culture there. On subsequent trips, they started buying work by M. F. Husain and other artists and bringing it back to their home in Worcester, Massachusetts. Eventually, they amassed over 3,000 works of art and exhibited pieces in museums worldwide. Chester became an authority and lecturer on Indian art. Their collection represented a unique, encyclopedic survey of 50 years of contemporary painting in India.

After their deaths in 2002, the Herwitz estate donated 300 works of art to the Peabody Essex Museum, along with a large archive of correspondence, exhibition catalogs, news clippings, notes, photographs, slides, and thousands of art books. This donation of world-class art vaulted the PEM into the top tier of museum collections of modern and contemporary Indian art.

In June 2020, the PEM will open an exhibition of paintings in the Chester and Davida Herwitz Gallery as a core component of its Indian and South Asian art galleries reinstallation. Next door, the Phillips Library Gallery will be displaying part of the archive. It is fairly unique to have a museum gallery devoted to library and archival materials. In preparation for the exhibition, I am working with curatorial, exhibition design, and interpretation staff to select materials for the library gallery. I have recently processed the collection and it will be available to the public via the library's catalog and in the Reading Room.


Chester and Davida Herwitz

The challenges of processing this material, which was rehoused, moved, expanded, and moved again, were many. The registration department had used the Herwitz files on contemporary Indian artists

for their own research; material had been added to the physical files so that it became difficult to discern which were the originals and which were additions. Original order was also impossible to ascertain because many interns had had their hands on this collection since 2002. Some photographs had been sleeved in questionable enclosures and others were left in file boxes or paper envelopes. There were also hundreds of photographic slides, housed in various kinds of containers.

In the end, I removed as much of the added material as I could deduce; kept the order the files were in (assuming it reflected the creators' order); sleeved artwork, photographs, and negatives appropriately; moved the exhibition catalogs to be cataloged in the library; and moved the slides to file cabinets. After processing, the collection inhabits 33 boxes and 10 flat file drawers and measures 15.25 linear feet. The art books were cataloged by the library in 2013. The 15-page finding aid will soon be available on ArchivesSpace (as soon as we convert our other 722 finding aids to that new system) and requestable via Aeon, which we've named Philcat. The collection will remain physically in the Collection Documentation Center and, for the first time, it will be paged to interested patrons via the library. Curators have used the collection since its acquisition and will continue to use it for research on Indian artists for years to come. This was a fascinating collection to process and I think it will be valuable to all kinds of researchers in the future.
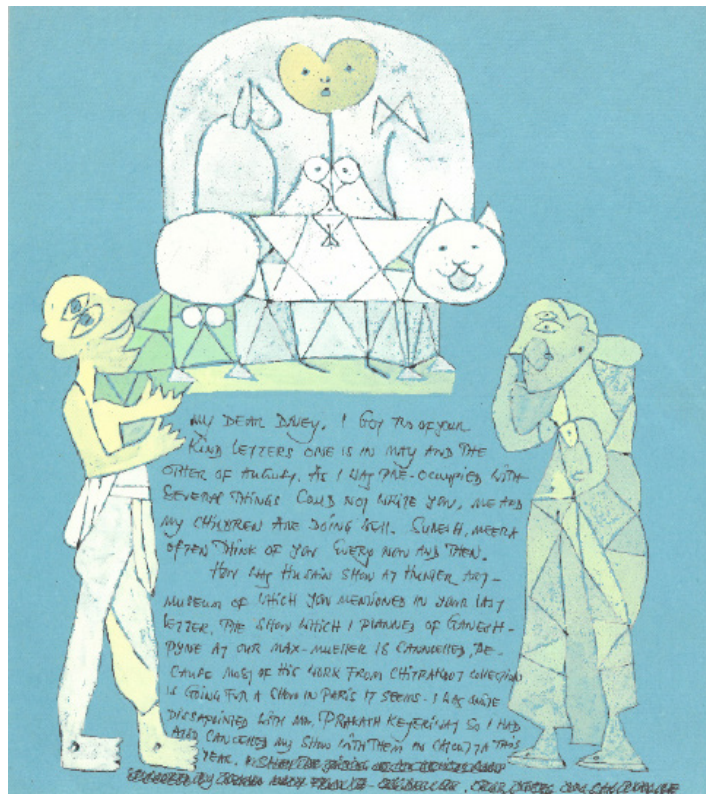
Tamara Gaydos is the Manuscript Librarian at the Phillips Library.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Francesca Pitaro and Sarit Hand, archivists at the Associated Press Corporate Archives, recently published "When Archives Have Artifacts: From Inventory to Cataloging at The Associated Press Corporate Archives" in the *Journal of Archival Organization*. The article grew out of their presentation on the same topic at the Description Section meeting during the 2018 SAA Annual Meeting. The artifacts collection is one of over 300 collections in the AP Corporate Archives. It includes 275 objects that document the history of AP news technology and tell the stories of its staffers. The aim of the project was to secure, describe, and catalog the artifacts, facilitating discovery for staff and outside researchers. The article examines the processing and description of this collection, from preliminary spreadsheets to cataloging in ArchivesSpace and the creation of a digital image for each item.

ANNOUNCEMENTS (continued)

Description Section & MDOS Joint Session at Annual Meeting

The Description Section and Metadata and Digital Object Section (MDOS) are holding a joint meeting at SAA's annual meeting in Chicago on Wednesday, August 5th, 2020. We are looking for facilitators to participate in a "marketplace of ideas" regarding aspects of archival description, metadata, and digital object curation. Each facilitator will introduce their chosen topic (5 minutes) and lead a small group discussion for the remainder of the time block (15 minutes). Facilitators will lead discussions through four 20-minute rotations.

To encourage active and inclusive discussion, facilitators are expected to embrace the Anti-oppressive Facilitation for Democratic Process guidelines.

Please submit proposals using the following Google Form by Friday, March 20, 2020.

https://forms.gle/5mo5VdLPAKv26iYC8

We welcome facilitators with a variety of experiences, perspectives, and skill levels. If you have any questions, please email Scott Kirycki (skirycki@nd.edu) and Elizabeth Wilkinson (ewilkinson@virginia.edu).

Updated DACS Principles available on new website

The Technical Subcommittee for Describing Archives: A Content Standard (TS-DACS) is pleased to announce that you can now consult the updated DACS principles and the current version of DACS on a dynamic, user-friendly website: https://saa-ts-dacs.github.io.

TS-DACS maintains the standard, documents versions, and tracks requests for changes using a GitHub repository. While GitHub does a great job for that purpose, the user community requested a friendlier way to consult DACS and the new principles. The new site will be updated whenever changes are made to the DACS Github site.

We welcome your feedback on usability and suggestions for improvements!

Find more information about TS-DACS at our microsite and follow us on Twitter @TS_DACS.

The Winter 2020 Issue of *Descriptive Notes* **was designed and edited by Lori Dedeyan. Send submissions and proposals to Lori at Ldedeyan@mikekelleyfoundation.org**