Jump in Essay for Manuscript Repositories Section, Anne Thomason, Earlham College
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My efforts at inventorying and surveying born-digital content this semester have convinced me even more that Band-Aid solutions and experimenting are starters, but all institutions with born-digital documents need a formal digital preservation plan. Many institutions have arrangement and description manuals for their paper collections; why not do the same for born-digital content? Many of the same steps apply as far as appraisal, acquisition, description, and preservation. Creating a plan means talking to different stakeholders, learning about digital storage and access, and communicating well with people of all level of technical understanding.

I worked with two collections this semester. I should first confess I did not quite finish either collection, but did get started when in the past I found excuses to delay.

First, I received the hard drive of the college president upon his retirement. It came with a helpful note attached saying "Doug B to be archived." In many ways dealing with a hard drive is easier than dealing with media such as zip drives, floppies, etc, and we do have some of those I have yet to inventory. The file structure of the hard drive helped me to create the inventory. I was able to finally open up the mail files using Apple Mail on my laptop. Here I was sidetracked, as reading the president's email was a gold mine of fascinating college history! Once I got past the fascinating record of his presidency, we took an inventory of file names and file types. There were numerous duplicates. Fortunately the file types were mostly limited to Microsoft products, jpegs, and pdfs. While there were some Wordperfect documents and text files, they were converted from the original form as needed. We are keeping the originals as well. I found using excel for a spreadsheet to be most helpful.

The second collection is what we call Community Documents, or CDocs. CDocs is a collection of committee meeting minutes, governance documents, policies, and affiliated reports. The collection is born-digital, and several years ago we migrated it from a student created database to a course management system. For many institutions, this collection might be house in an institutional repository, or possibly a document management system. At Earlham, we have yet to implement a college wide system. The decision to put documents in the course management system was made by a small committee. While not ideal, this system does allow for fairly easy storage and access by community members to Earlham College governance documents.

While these files have been uploaded to Moodle, the course management system, we did not have an inventory. Files are uploaded regularly, so we needed a way to update the inventory over time. First, getting a baseline inventory was necessary. While looking back it would have made more sense to this at the beginning of the semester, in March we downloaded the files and the file structure, and created an inventory from this. At this time we also did maintenance on the file names and

types, as many had odd names and did not use the file type we request, which should be PDF. Our plan is to update the inventory once a month, either by an archive staff member or a student worker checking what new files have been uploaded. I don't think this is a perfect system, but it is start. We are also backing up the files in several places including a server, a laptop, and a workstation in the archives. None of this is the kind of digital preservation plan I would like to see us adopt, but is better than what we had before.

Working on these inventories has reinforced the need for a digital preservation plan, rather than piecemeal efforts. I think encouraging people to jump in is excellent. I also think we would all be served by creating a digital preservation plan, as many of us have processing plans or guides for archival description in our repositories. In the future, digital preservation plans that include recommendations for migration, long-term storage, access, and so forth are vital to preserving digital documents.