Overcoming Inertia to Jump In

Submitted by

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Technically, I am a millennial. But, I do not *feel* like a millennial. I did not have a computer at home throughout my childhood. I would rather meet up with my friends in person than talk on the phone or through Facebook. And, while I have an iPhone, iPad, 2 laptops, a desktop, and a Roku box at home, I am not a computer scientist. I always felt that as a younger, fairly tech savvy person, I should be able to do more in terms of electronic records management.

Much of my work experience prior to my first professional position in library and archives was with the analog: reel-to-reel tapes, records, and 19th and early 20th century collections. Now, as the Special Collections Librarian and University Archivist in a supportive but small liberal arts college, managing electronic records is one of my top priorities (Trinity University is a private, liberal arts institution with student enrollment around 2,500). Like some archivists, I was overwhelmed and did not know where to start developing an electronic records management program. My department is small, consisting of a 3-year term appointed project archivist and 5 student assistants. Finding the time to set up a program seemed impossible. I needed to carve out time in my already busy schedule to educate myself on the issues as well as establish and carry out a program. So, for the first two years in my current institution, establishing a program seemed out of reach. It was not until the OCLC report and the Jump In Initiative that I knew I could take those crucial first steps in establishing an electronic records management program.

The inventory conducted at Trinity University focused on the university archives and the rare books collection (see Appendix A). Since our collection is relatively small compared to other institutional archives, we completed the project by physically investigating each shelf and box of material in the collection. During the process of the inventory, the materials were not removed from their original location. I enlisted the help of 3 student assistants to conduct the inventory as I already rely on them to carry out other important functions in the archives (see Appendix B). Like any project, however, delegating work requires proper documentation and training to ensure accuracy and efficiency. The training included students educating themselves on the various types of media they would encounter during the inventory (see Appendix C). This proved to be a fun and educational experience for all involved.

In order to complete the inventory, I needed a tool that would allow multiple users to edit simultaneously so a spreadsheet on the campus network would not suffice. Instead, I created a shared Google Sheets spreadsheet to allow for simultaneous editing (see Appendix D). The shared Google Sheets spreadsheet also allowed me to view student work in real-time, making it easy to correct issues early in the project. Although not unique to Google Sheets, the drop-down list on the spreadsheet reminded the students of the media types they might encounter and assisted them in identifying items out of the ordinary.

As of May 1, we are almost finished with the inventory. Between now and the end of the spring semester we will finish the inventory, including assigning inventory numbers, and estimate the total amount of data in the collection. This summer I will prioritize conversion and begin transferring data to our campus servers later in the year.

Pledging to be part of the initiative was a positive experience. It provided a way to overcome inertia and created a sense that I was being held accountable. Although I did not use the listserv extensively, I appreciated the support it provided. I am proud my institution participated and is making real progress in the area of electronic records management.