

Impact of Archival Processing Decisions and Procedures on User Experience: The Library of Congress' Bronislava Nijinska Collection

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Abstract:

Archival processing functions, in many ways, to serve as the language archivists use to communicate with researchers and the public. Through description and organization, archival institutions inform the public as to what materials they have, and do their best to convey the relevance of that material to the user's research. The relationship between archival processors and researchers is one of the most important elements of archival practice. Yet archivists have little understanding of how the processing procedures and the tools they provide for collections actually end up being utilized or understood by users. Research on the impact of processing decisions procedures upon the research experience are quite limited. This platform presentation will assess how processing decisions may impact the utilization of collections for users, using an example from the Library of Congress: the Bronislava Nijinska Collection. Significant for innovative work in ballet choreography and as a ballerina, the LOC acquired numerous manuscripts, correspondence, musical scores, costume designs, and other materials documenting her life in dance and choreography. However, the collection processing was incomplete and included different individuals and various levels of description, including a finding aid over 300 pages long and too unwieldy to be of use to any but the most knowledgeable Nijinska scholars. Between 2015-2022, material from the Nijinska Collection was requested an average of sixty-five times a year, making it the most requested unprocessed collection of the Library's Music Division. This presentation proposes further research into the decision making behind processing and its effect on users. By examining the processing decisions and practices utilized in this collection, this presentation will highlight the potential impact on the value and utility of such decisions and practices for users.

About the author:

Kaitlyn Morrill is a recent graduate of the University of Maryland at College Park. Having previously obtained a Master's degree in Art History from the University of Glasgow, Kaitlyn has used British and American archival collections extensively for various research projects. This interest led her to pursue a Master's degree in Library and Information Science. She has been volunteering at the Jane Sween Research Library and Special Collections since 2020, where she has worked on various collections related to the history of Montgomery County, Maryland. Kaitlyn is also interested in improving access and diverse representation in archives and museums, and has been working on a new framework for the development of collection management policies. Focusing on archival access and the many forms that access can take, Kaitlyn interned at the Library of Congress, helping to reprocess the Bronislava Nijinska Collection, to allow for a wider range of access to and use of the collection. Kaitlyn is eager to continue her research into historical areas of interest in the Nijinska Collection, as well as the importance of acknowledging the subjectivity of archivists and its impact on researchers.