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

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Processing for Archivists and Users

How do archivists make decisions, and how do users interact with collections?

What impact does processing have on user experience?

Lack of information about a collection and its contents can impede a researcher's use of a collection

Archivists are not impartial 'custodians' of history

The Nijinska Collection

- Originally a 300+ page finding aid with 21 series, duplicates between series

- Materials filed under wrong or unfindable titles

- Music Divisions most requested unprocessed collection

Literature of Archival Processing

- ► A post-MPLP world where different versions of minimal processing are applied, depending on the type of collection and the needs of the institution

- ► Discussions of processing rarely touches on the subjectivity of the archivists and how processing decisions are made

- ► Some archives have chosen to tailor their finding aids and descriptive material specifically for their user base

Literature of User Studies

► Betts Coup tested the usability of three levels of archival description, detailed, aggregate, and minimal. Tested users reported an easier time with the aggregate and detailed descriptions

► Researcher Elizabeth Yakel has suggested that archivists tend to overestimate how much users understand archival processing, which can lead to a disconnect between the two groups, as well as difficulties for users

Further Research

A pilot study that follows the decisions made by the archivist during processing, to the reading room, tracking user experience, difficulties users have with a collection, what parts of a finding aid they use, and how helpful users found the provided content information. This would be best performed at a larger institution that sees frequent user traffic.

Archivists Questions

► How do you decide on the quantity of description for collection material (series, folder, item, etc)?

► What language/ terms are used in these descriptions?

► Does your institution track user questions and resolutions for collections?

► Does your institution assess user experience?

User Questions

► What descriptive material did you use in you search/ research?

► How would you rate your understanding of the finding aid descriptions? (Likert scale)

► Did you have questions about the collection in your research? Did the institution have a mechanism to ask and resolve questions?

Goals

► Determine how accurately information produced by archivists is received by researchers

► Address gaps in user understanding of descriptive material

► Improve access and use of information for users

Thank You

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