AI is for Access: An Investigation of AI Adoption

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Abstract

As digital collections grow exponentially in scale and complexity, the archival profession must grapple with the opportunities and challenges presented by artifi cial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML). The AI for Access study seeks to understand how U.S. archival workers are currently using, or planning to use, AI/ML tools to facilitate access to digital archival materials. While AI/ML adoption in archives has thus far been limited to specifi c functions, the evolving landscape necessitates a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of these technologies.

This study comprises a literature review on AI/ML and generative AI applications in archival settings, as well as a survey distributed to archival professionals across the U.S. The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data on current and planned AI/ML adoption, as well as perceptions of these tools' potential benefi ts and limitations. Findings from this study will contribute to a white paper or journal article offering practical insights and recommendations for the archival community.

By demystifying AI/ML applications in archives, this research empowers practitioners to make informed decisions, advocate for responsible AI adoption, and address challenges that hinder implementation. The fi ndings will also contribute to broader advocacy efforts within SAA, particularly in crafting policies that protect archival work and labor in an AI-driven future. This session will present key takeaways from the study, highlighting how archives are navigating the intersection of AI and archival access while centering professional values such as equity, transparency, ethical implications, and environmental impacts. Speaker Biographies

About the authors:

Timi Adediran is the survey and statistical analyst of EpiStats Solutions, where they provide analytical and methodological support to public health agencies, research institutions, and private sector clients. With expertise in study design and data analysis, she works to provide data-driven, actionable insights to a variety of projects.

Dara Baker is a US federal government archivist, historian, and legislative researcher and recently became a supervisory librarian. Previous positions included archivist (US Naval War College and FDR Presidential Library) and digital format specialist and digital preservation analyst (US National Archives and Records Administration). Currently the Academy of Certified Archivists president, she previously served as regent for outreach (2018–2020). Her service includes the Society of American Archivists Task Force on Communications, Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference program committees, and the Digital Library Federation BDAWG

Visioning Access Systems group. She earned an MLS (University of Maryland, College Park) and an MA in history (Harvard University). She has been a certified archivist since 2012.

Christina Velazquez Fidler is the Head of Digital Collections at Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley. She has previous work experience as a software implementation consultant, as the museum archivist at the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at UC Berkeley, and prior to her current role, she served as the digital archivist at The Bancroft Library. Christina also teaches at Wayne State University and her research has been published in the Journal of Digital Media, Digital Library Perspectives and is a chapter co-author in the Society of American Archivists title, Museum Archives: An Introduction (3rd ed.).

Steven Gentry is an Archivist for Archival Processing at the University of Michigan's Bentley Historical Library (BHL) specializing in backlog reduction. His responsibilities include processing multi-format accessions, maintaining and refreshing the BHL's various processing documentation, and assisting with projects designed to systematically reduce the BHL's backlog.

Jen Wachtel Litwin, CA is an archivist at the National Archives and Records Administration, where she processes vice presidential records from 1993 through the previous presidential administration. She specializes in email and textual records as well as the application of the Presidential Records Act and Freedom of Information Act to the release of administrative records documenting U.S. history. Previously as an archivist at History Associates, Inc. she collaborated with other archivists and collections managers on archival arrangement and description projects for government and private clients. She also has experience processing audiovisual mixed-media collections and facilitating interdepartmental collections-as-data projects at the University of Maryland Libraries. Jen's views in this presentation are her own and do not represent the views of the National Archives.

Jamie Wiser is a Processing Archivist at the L.Tom Perry Special Collections Library at Brigham Young University. While she specializes in historic photographs and manuscripts, her work has covered audiovisual and born-digital materials as well. She received her master's degree in library information science from San Jose State University and is a Certified Archivist.