

State of the Collections: Measuring the Baseline Discoverability and Accessibility of The Huntington Library's Archival Collections

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Abstract:

Until 2022, The Huntington Library did not have a comprehensive overview of the size of its archival processing backlog, which collections were in the backlog, or a breakdown of the discoverability and accessibility of its collections. This lack of information inhibited the library's ability to make fully informed decisions related to processing, collection management, acquisitions, and staffing as well as assess levels of demand for unprocessed collections. Library patrons were also unable to fully search the library's archival holdings. As an institution that has been collecting and describing its collections for over 100 years, the concept of a backlog and how to assess it was complicated by huge shifts in standards, practices, and systems and tools that occurred over decades and piecemeal retrospective projects. Recent professional conversations about sustainability in stewardship, such as the 2021 OCLC "Total Cost of Stewardship" report, highlight that without an understanding of our backlog, the library could not assess the rate of acquisitions coming in annually against collections being opened for research or understand how or if our backlog was changing over time. This poster provides an overview of the strategies used to create a snapshot of the baseline discoverability and accessibility of the archival collections held at The Huntington Library, which included updating our extent standards and a multi-year survey that a number of staff members participated in, as well as known remaining gaps in the data and the work to maintain and improve the integrity of the statistics. In addition to featuring core findings, this poster also presents projects that have been undertaken to strategically improve baseline discovery and accessibility of collections, as well as future potential projects.

About the author:

Maggie Hughes is the Archival Processing Manager at the Huntington Library in San Marino, CA. She leads and manages a team of archivists dedicated to arranging and describing archival collections, manuscripts, and visual materials. She's previously held positions at UCLA, Getty Research Institute, and UCSF. She earned a Masters in Information Science from the University of Michigan and she's active in the profession, currently serving in roles in SAA, SCA, and ArchivesSpace.