

## Archives Management Roundtable Newsletter

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This has been a challenging year for all of us. And, we are all working under additional stress. Recognizing this, the program for the AMRT meeting will provide a forum for talking about successful ways of negotiating this rocky environment. Thanks go to Rosemary Pleva Flynn and Caryn Radick. The AMRT meeting is once again at a tricky time, but we encourage you to come and share good conversation with colleagues, and snacks to keep you going until a late supper. We are looking forward to seeing those of you

traveling to Austin. And, for those of you who won't be with us this year, let's stay connected via the virtual networks. We'd like to thank our AMRT web liaison Kate Rogge for her work in making that happen.

Come to the Archives Management Roundtable meeting on Wednesday, August 12, 2009 from 5:30 pm - 7:30 pm and reconnect with your colleagues.

Our very best,

*Daria and Lois*

([daria.dariento@live.com](mailto:daria.dariento@live.com)) ([hamilll1@nku.edu](mailto:hamilll1@nku.edu)) [3 letter "L"s followed by the numeral 1]

### SAA 2009 ARCHIVES MANAGEMENT ROUNDTABLE MEETING

August 12, 2009  
5:30 pm – 7:30 pm

#### Order of Business

1. Welcome from Lois Hamill and Daria D'Arienzo, Co-chairs.
2. Introduction of attending members.
3. Virtual AMRT: Update on the AMRT web site.
4. Report from the AMRT and RMRT joint committee on issues facing physically challenged staff and researchers- Casey Greene (AMRT) [cgreene@rosenberg-library.org](mailto:cgreene@rosenberg-library.org) and Debra Kimok (RMRT) [debra.kimok@plattsburgh.edu](mailto:debra.kimok@plattsburgh.edu) , Co-chairs.
5. SAA 2009 Program: "Strategies for Accommodating People with Physical Impairments and Disabilities in Archives" # 307 will be held on Friday, August 14 from 8:30-9:30. This program is an outgrowth of the joint committee work.
6. Program Ideas for 2010: Visit from Program Committee representative; AMRT needs an idea coordinator volunteer.
7. Comments by from Lee Miller, SAA Liaison

8. Update on AMRT activities: How shall we continue?
9. Election
10. Program - "Less with Less: Today's Reality"- Rosemary Pleva Flynn (University of North Dakota) [rosemary.pleva.flynn@gmail.com](mailto:rosemary.pleva.flynn@gmail.com) and Caryn Radick (Rutgers University) [cradick@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:cradick@rci.rutgers.edu) will discuss the practical implications of coping with diminished resources without losing spirit. The current economic situation has impacted all archives and archivists both professionally and personally. How can we say no to overburdening demands, stick to our priorities and survive in today's environment? Join your colleagues for this presentation and discussion.
11. Wrap up

## ARCHIVAL DATABASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM UNDERWAY AT CANADAY CENTER

*Arjun Sabharwal, Digital Initiatives Librarian, University of Toledo, OH*

The Ward M. Canaday Center for Special Collections at the University of Toledo is in the process of deploying a relational database management system (RDBMS) to manage archival collections, monitor usage, and develop a reporting mechanism. Microsoft Access has proven to be a powerful database application for the management of information in governmental, business, academic, and military organizations. Its efficacy rests on the flexible design that allows customized databases and/or the use of existing datasets for common office and individual uses. Because no two archives (or their collections or patrons) are alike, directors may see an advantage in the adaptability of MS Access to unique solutions for unique problems. Canaday Center needed to create a multi-purpose database to replace an existing process comprised of paper (forms) and electronic components (spreadsheets, documents, tables). RDBMSs like Access are designed to manage data in multiple interrelated tables, and generate queries and/or reports to support decision making and strategic planning.

In its present proposed form, the database is designed around three tables: a patron data table updated each time a patron completes and submits an electronic form; a request log updated by staff handling patron requests; and an inventory table with collection information, barcode number, and vault location using a simple coordinate system that helps new staff (including student assistants) locate items. Future modifications to the design are possible through the addition of tables imported into Access from such applications as Excel and Word. Therefore, it is important to keep the database design flexible and robust.

Databases have a significant advantage over spreadsheets, as they are dynamic in design and can update automatically when new collections are added to the repository. In addition to the aforementioned tables, it is possible to expand databases with accession logs, records management (e.g. life-cycle) information, and staff annotation, which is a long-term aim of this project. Relational databases allow the combination of several datasets from multiple tables into complex queries which are the foundation for generating sound reports needed by top-level management. Short object-oriented programs called macros can help automate the workflow, granted that all the tables are updated and verified. Maintaining this system requires staff (archivists and/or support staff) to update the database on a regular basis in order that directors can submit accurate reports to higher offices in their organizations.

Designing a workflow is just as important as designing the database itself, as the two components are mutually reliant. Thus far, patrons have been asked to complete a paper form upon entering the facility for the first time. An electronic form with similar questions will replace the paper one. Once the patron submits the completed electronic form, the system will store the data in

a separate, secure, online database, from which it can be imported into Access. The staff managing the request log will scan the barcode for requested items and complete the record for each request. An annotation (or comments) field will allow staff to share personal knowledge (such as preservation alerts, unique information, and other data knowledge management calls “tacit knowledge”) with others in the organization. Some fields are dynamically linked to other tables, so this routine may be free of most data entry errors.

Here is a scenario demonstrating the value of this database. In a perfect world, patrons are meticulous about putting folders back into the boxes where they belong, but in reality that is not the case. Folders are often filed in boxes other than the ones to which they belong, especially in collections with multiple similarly named series and sub-series. Although usually unintentional, even a minor mishap will hinder future discovery of information in the affected collections, and staff will be tasked to trace it back to prior requests. How? Intuitive queries will help staff locate prior requests in the database and determine what other boxes were requested by the same patron at the same time as the affected collection (with the missing items). Chances are that the missing item(s) can be located and repatriated. In an economic environment with reduced staff, budget cuts, and increased accountability, such remedial actions will unnecessarily take away staff and time from more important services. A director’s ability to use staff time efficiently can be greatly enhanced through database technology. A “comments” field will allow staff to add special instructions, short memos, or alerts for directors or other staff to follow up on.

Thus, a robust database can also serve as a knowledge management tool to inform decision-making and strategic planning as far as preservation, staffing, training, and budget are concerned. It would certainly allow directors to attain a higher degree of knowledge about traffic in the facility and issues directly affecting the collections. For example, the data would show what collections have been used extensively over any given period of time, prompting directors to have items from those collections (or, for that matter, the whole collection) digitized and added to a digital archive to prevent further deterioration from wear-and-tear. While using such a system may have obvious benefits, a concern may be that using such a system effectively would require Access competency among staff. Archival programs which do not include Access training will require extensive on-the-job training to developing those skill sets. The concrete data obtained from a robust database system will always be useful ammunition for directors requesting more funding and staffing for their facilities. The steadily changing information ecosystem surrounding archives and libraries also dictates a long-term investment in technology and staff training, though with a reasonable expectation for favorable outcomes.

## ASC IMPLEMENTS WIKI AS MANAGEMENT TOOL

*Ed Galloway, Head – Archives Service Center, University Library System, University of Pittsburgh*

The [Archives Service Center \(ASC\)](#) at the University of Pittsburgh Library System implemented a wiki hosted by [PBworks](#) to better track and manage projects within the department. The ASC consists of five full-time archivists, two part-time archivists, two support staff and many part-time student assistants. Rather than relying on a whiteboard, email exchanges, or trail of Word documents, we needed a better way to know what projects are in the pipeline, their status and completion dates. Our wiki allows everyone in the department to read and update pages, including students, but it is not publicly accessible since it contains information on unprocessed collections and is designed to be used as an internal management tool.

Our wiki is divided into five sections. The Finding Aids section tracks what collection guides are in the process of being created, if they have been reviewed and by whom, if they are

ready to be encoded, if they are encoded and ready to be mounted online, and if our [ASC News](#) page needs to be updated to announce the release of new research collections. This section also includes a workflow for creating a finding aid and moving it through the appropriate steps to completion, including EAD mark-up.

The Collections section contains an inventory of unprocessed collections. While we are moving to implement Archivists' Toolkit later this year, in the meantime this inventory has provided us with a snapshot of collection descriptions and processing tasks. Students conducted this inventory and entered the data in a template in the wiki. As a result of the inventory and storing the data on the wiki, the collection information is now accessible to everyone in the department. Previously, this information existed in three different places.

The third section of the wiki comprises Student Projects where anyone can share project ideas for undergraduate student interns (History majors) and graduate library school students. The ASC frequently employs 10-12 students per year who work on a variety of processing and other projects. We need to always be generating project ideas and needs.

The Use of Collections section is designed for staff to briefly describe interesting encounters with patrons or research requests or uses of our collections. We're always seeking anecdotal information to share with administrators about how our collections are used. This wiki tool enables staff to easily record this information for everyone to see.

Lastly, our wiki contains a section on Digitization Projects where we list the description, scope and status of all scanning projects. The staff who play a part in our digitization program update the wiki every time material is transferred to/from the digitization department. We list ideas that we think would make good scanning projects. Our guidelines for creating metadata for digitization projects are included on the wiki, again so that every member of the department has access to the same document at any time.

We will likely come up with other uses of the departmental wiki. For now, it has been an important management tool to track numerous projects and add a layer of transparency to all that we do. As a result, it has helped us be better organized within the department and build a sense of teamwork.

## A YEAR OF MONDAYS: THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON UPDATES PROCESSING MANUAL

*Ann Hodges, Special Collections Program Coordinator and Brenda McClurkin, Historical Manuscripts Archivist, Special Collections, University of Texas at Arlington*

You've heard of a "month of Sundays"? Well, how about a year of Mondays? That's about how long it took Ann Hodges and Brenda McClurkin of The University of Texas at Arlington Library Special Collections to revise UT Arlington's *Archives and Manuscripts Processing Manual*. The 5th edition of the publication, which originally was authored by Gerald D. Saxon, Marcelle Hull, Jane Boley and Shirley Rodnitzky in 1995, was finished in January 2009. It never would have happened had not Ann and Brenda spent nearly every Monday of 2008 working at Ann's house, away from the distractions of the office. (OK, so it wasn't really 365 Mondays, but it felt like it.)

This excruciating but worthwhile effort was long overdue. The *Processing Manual* is not only the backbone of Special Collections' processing efforts but the authoritative source governing and guiding decisions made at UT Arlington concerning how collections are managed. It also is used to train students in UT Arlington's archival management courses and the Graduate Research Assistants who gain experience through temporary employment in Special Collections. It is a

critical management tool whose revision was sorely needed to ensure the proper administration of collections at UT Arlington.

The usefulness of the *Processing Manual* had been seriously undermined since its last revision in 2001 because of changes in descriptive practices. UT Arlington's admission to TARO in 2002 also resulted in substantial alterations to Special Collections' policies and procedures relating to the administration of archival and manuscript collections. These changes needed to be reflected in written documentation. Consequently, the revisions made to the *Processing Manual* were exhaustive, amounting in essence to a rewriting of the manual.

The *Archives and Manuscripts Processing Manual* is expected to become available online but at present is available only in paper. Please contact Ann Hodges at [ann.hodges@uta.edu](mailto:ann.hodges@uta.edu) or 817.272.7510 to inquire about obtaining a copy.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

As part of its scientific records appraisal process, the U.S. Geological Survey's Earth Resources Observation and Science Center has updated the tool used to document collections. Located online at <http://eros.usgs.gov/government/ratool/> this tool builds a text file used to note mission, access, physical, cost, metadata, and other collection characteristics. For more information contact John Faundeen, Archivist, at 605-594-6092 or [faundeen@usgs.gov](mailto:faundeen@usgs.gov)

Program Officer Jennifer Schaffner recently published a white paper about a review of user studies for archives and special collections which is available at <http://www.oclc.org/programs/publications/reports/2009-06.pdf> For more information, contact Jennifer at OCLC Research/RLG Partnership, 777 Mariners Island Blvd., Suite 550, San Mateo, California 94404 telephone (650) 287-2140 <http://www.oclc.org/programs/>

SAA's Committee on Education (CE) holds Open Forum.

What is the relationship between SAA and graduate education? How can the CE best accomplish its mission to prepare and promote standards for archival education programs? How should the GPAS (Graduate Program in Archival Studies) guidelines be updated or revised?

These questions and others will be discussed at the CE Open Forum on Wednesday, August 12, from 8:00 to 9:00 pm. CE members will provide information about their decision to recommend that SAA not pursue development and implementation of an accreditation program; Jeanette Bastian will present results of a new survey of graduates of archival education programs in the United States and share ideas about what it means to graduate someone as an archivist today; and SAA staff will discuss changes to and solicit ideas about the Directory of Archival Education.

Come and share your thoughts and ideas with the Committee! CE members in attendance will include Donna McCrea (outgoing chair), Katie Salzmann (incoming chair), Amy Cooper Cary, Patricia Galloway, Amber Cushing (student intern), and Solveig DeSutter (SAA Education Director)

## ARCHIVES MANAGEMENT ROUNDTABLE WEBSITE

Our web liaison, Kate Rogge, can be reached at: [krogge@kshs.org](mailto:krogge@kshs.org) The Roundtable's website is located at <http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/archgmt/>

The unabridged version of the last update from the Archives Management Roundtable and Records Management Roundtable's Joint Task Force on Diversity is on our website at [http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/archmgmt/df\\_110108\\_article.pdf](http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/archmgmt/df_110108_article.pdf) with additional information at <http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/archmgmt/diversity.asp>

#### ARCHIVES MANAGEMENT ROUNDTABLE LISTSERV

You may send questions, announcements or other messages to members of the Roundtable's listserv at: [archmgmt@forums.archivists.org](mailto:archmgmt@forums.archivists.org)

To unsubscribe from this list, please visit:

<http://saa.archivists.org/Scripts/4Disapi.dll/4DCGI/person/ListServ.html>

To log into the SAA Archives Management Roundtable Discussion List forum, visit:

<http://forums.archivists.org/read/?forum=archmgmt>

and enter your email address and your SAA password.

#### SAA COUNCIL LIAISON

Our Roundtable liaison to SAA Council is Leon Miller of Tulane University. His term of office ends Aug 15, 2009. Until then, should you have questions or concerns about this Roundtable or other matters, you may contact him at [lmiller@tulane.edu](mailto:lmiller@tulane.edu)