

Simple and Expedited Digital Appraisal -- an MPLP type approach for hybrid collections

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Abstract: Based on a research project at the German state archives Ludwigsburg (2018), the author developed a simple and generalizable workflow for appraising hybrid collections (HCs) that pose particular appraisal challenges. For these HCs, old and labeled digital carriers (DCs) of small storage extent are scattered across analog materials; migration of DCs takes time and resources; DC location, labels and inserts are essential metadata for qualitative appraisal; and DCs do not have a consistent hierarchy or folder titles. Experimenting with seven appraisal approaches, the appraisal workflow aims (1) to reduce the number of DCs to be migrated (migration takes 10-20 times longer than appraisal), handled at all/or how often, and to be appraised qualitatively; (2) to reduce staff participation and the need for tracking complex metadata; and (3) to clearly indicate when archivists need to be involved. Ideally one and the same archivist appraises analog and digital files; sets a priori appraisal criteria and format/migration criteria to reduce the number of DCs to be migrated; appraises DCs after analog materials have been processed to permit their appraisal within relevant analog contexts; and simplifies the process so as to avoid having to track labels, inserts, titles of un-appraised DCs (which is near to impossible and akin to creating in-depth finding aids for un-appraised analog records). Qualitative appraisal of digital files cannot be left to IT staff who are unaware of record creators, appraisal approaches, collection policies, and the whole universe of contextual knowledge that archivists bring to selecting materials for retention.

About the Author:

Susanne Belovari is Assistant Professor and Archivist for Faculty Papers at the University of Illinois Archives. Among previous positions, she also worked as Holocaust restitution historian and archivist for the Jewish Community of Vienna, Austria. Since the 2000s, she has served on the section bureau and held numerous offices of the International Council on Archives – Section of University and Research Institution Archives (ICA-SUV). Her recent presentations and publications include working with donors, digital appraisal and international archival issues, archivists as historical agents, processing ‘archives under siege,’ and Viennese culinary history before Hitler. Her academic background is in Latin American studies, gender and international ‘development,’ and the history of colonialism, science, and scientific representations of people and indigenous peoples.