Simple and Expedited Digital Appraisal/Processing - Testing Software and Developing a First Simple Workflow

SUSANNE BELOVARI

Abstract:
Although most archives are responsible for digital records, regular archivists often lack the resources (time, money, hardware, labor, skills etc.) as well as simple and tested software to appraise them.

Digital collections are typically huge, unstructured, contain many duplicates, non-essentials, difficult formats, and imprecise metadata. Appraising such 'collections' is therefore essential in reducing their size and complexity and in helping future researchers to locate what they need. Because digital appraisal/processing is done partially or largely using software, we and our professional organizations have to start testing and evaluating those in order to assure that the software actually and reliably execute and document said interventions.

In cooperation with the State Archives Baden-Württemberg/Staatsarchiv Ludwigsburg, Germany, I developed a first simple approach and workflow to appraise and process digital collections quickly and with little and simple software. I first tested 10 deduplication software repeatedly against a representative sample of files. Only one software was able to identify and deletee duplicates reliably and verifiably and was also user friendly and inexpensive. In a second test I tested this software and second one as regards to correctly identifying and removing empty files/folders. Once again the same software produced the best results.
With the help of the software and *Preview/Icon View* (PC and Mac) I then developed a quick workflow for appraising 677 GB of files from a school of the hearing impaired (80% image and video files). I removed duplicates, empty and temporary files, and then qualitatively appraised the material. Within 4 days I was thus able to reduce the collection to 10% of its original size, folder and file numbers.

About the author:

Susanne Belovari is the archivist for faculty papers and an assistant professor at the University Archives, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Her previous positions include working as Holocaust restitution historian and archivist for the Jewish Community of Vienna, Austria, rebuilding its archives, which had been closed by the National Socialists in 1938. Her recent research and publications have concentrated on international archival topics and history, practical approaches to digital issues, as well as culinary history, Holocaust restitution, and the history of anthropology. Other recent research has focused on developing simple and quick approaches to appraising and processing digital records and collections.