

TRENDS IN
ARCHIVES
PRACTICE

MODULE 3

**DESIGNING
DESCRIPTIVE AND
ACCESS SYSTEMS**

DANIEL A. SANTAMARIA



SOCIETY OF
**American
Archivists**

CHICAGO

Shelby White and Leon Levy Archives Center, Institute for Advanced Study

by Christine Di Bella

Background

Formalized in 2009, the Shelby White and Leon Levy Archives Center serves as the repository for the historical records of the Institute for Advanced Study. The Institute is a private academic institution located in Princeton, New Jersey, that exists to encourage and support fundamental research in the sciences and humanities. Work at the Institute takes place in four schools: Historical Studies, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, and Social Science. The Institute's most famous affiliate, past or present, is Albert Einstein, but more than thirty Nobel Laureates and nearly three-quarters of those awarded the Fields Medal have been associated with the Institute. The Institute is and has always been independent from its much larger neighbor, Princeton University.

The Archives Center collection dates to the founding of the Institute in 1930 and includes official correspondence of the Director's Office, minutes of meetings of the faculty and the Board of Trustees, correspondence concerning past faculty and members, records of the Electronic Computer Project, and the papers of select faculty members. This portion of the collection totals approximately 850 linear feet; other materials include the Institute's photograph and oral history collections, as well as a number of art and artifacts.

The Archives Center is a unit within the Historical Studies-Social Science Library at the Institute. It has two full-time staff—a professional archivist and a paraprofessional archival assistant. A part-time consultant conducts oral history interviews throughout the year. The Archives is not permitted to host volunteers or interns but receives temporary paid assistance from college students in the summer through an institution-wide employment program.

Like most repositories, we face a number of challenges in managing the material in our care and making it available to researchers in a timely fashion. Our greatest access challenges, far from unique among institutional archives like ours, include the following:

- Although the presence of a full-time archivist at the Institute is a relatively recent phenomenon, use of our collections is not.

In addition to significant outside research, there is heavy use by internal constituents at the Institute, resulting in a substantial administrative reference load for the two staff members.

- As the only unit at the Institute responsible for preservation of its cultural heritage, we manage not just archival material but also nearly 1,000 works of art and artifacts.
- While the Institute itself has excellent IT support, there is none designated solely for the library and archives, and the Archives Center must vie for these limited resources with other units on campus with more pressing day-to-day requirements.

Our primary access objective in the Archives Center is to support our internal constituency to the greatest extent possible, but with an eye toward making our collections and resources discoverable by those outside the Institute with related professional or personal research interests.

Description and Access Activities

Pre-custodial/Pre-accessioning

The Archives Center acquires collections from Institute offices, from Institute affiliates such as faculty members, and from private donors outside the Institute. Instructions for transferring administrative records and general guidelines for private donations are available on the website for the Archives. Offices at the Institute are strongly encouraged to submit box lists created in Excel listing the contents of transfers. On the other hand, we get a wide variety of information relating to privately donated material, ranging from detailed contents lists to verbal descriptions of collections. In most cases, if no contents list is available from the donor, we create one in Archivists' Toolkit at the time of accessioning, using information available within the collection.

Tools Used: website, Microsoft Excel

Accessioning

Archivists' Toolkit (AT) is our primary collection management system for archival collections. (As the Institute had no formal accessioning program for archival collections before 2009 and all documentation was

paper-based, our implementation of this system in 2009 was a major step forward in the professionalization of the Archives.) At the time of receipt, we create an accession record in AT. We create accession records for both analog and digital collections. For digital collections, we take the additional step of processing the files using Duke's Data Accessioner and storing the resulting files and metadata on our shared file server.

PastPerfect is our primary collection management system for art and artifacts. The license for this system was purchased before 2009, and as it has proven inexpensive to maintain and better suited than the AT for these types of materials, we have continued to use it. We acquire art and artifacts less frequently than archival material (most of our cataloging in PastPerfect has involved documenting acquisitions retrospectively), but when we do, we create a record in PastPerfect.

Tools Used: Archivists' Toolkit, Duke Data Accessioner, and PastPerfect. At this time, we are considering using Archivematica to accession digital records in place of the Data Accessioner, because future releases are expected to provide capability to integrate with our system for access, CONTENTdm.

Description

Creating New Data. We create new data for archival collections in AT. For art and artifacts, we create data in PastPerfect. Over the last two years, our summer student workers entered folder-level information in AT for nearly all collections that did not have it from another source, and a temporary employee cataloged most of our art and artifacts in PastPerfect. In addition to creating contents lists as needed, prospectively, when we receive a contents list from an Institute office or individual donor, we encode it in EAD and import it into AT for inclusion in the resource record.

At this time, we do not create MARC records for our collections. Because we take an iterative approach to description, we find it burdensome to make changes in multiple places given our staffing level.

Legacy Data. Though not formalized until 2009, the Institute has managed archival collections since the mid-1980s. While only one collection had a traditional finding aid before 2009, detailed folder-level MARC records had been created for some of the most heavily used collections and individual items (such as photographs); this

work was completed years earlier in a staff-only database in the library's online catalogue, Horizon. With the help of the Institute's Historical Studies-Social Science librarian, who used BibBase (the predecessor system to Horizon at the Institute) to convert MARC records to files that could then be encoded in EAD, we were able to import information from the catalog records into AT records.⁶³ We also sometimes use the tab-delimited text output of MarcEdit for this purpose, because the software is free and well known to the staff in the Archives. The cataloging in Horizon is very detailed but inconsistent, often containing dozens of added name and subject headings. We decided not to carry these over to AT, but staff consult Horizon on occasion, to answer certain types of reference questions.

Tools Used: Archivists' Toolkit; Microsoft Excel for encoding contents lists received from offices; PastPerfect; MarcEdit; Horizon/BibBase

Delivery and Patron Access

Descriptive Data. To deliver descriptive information to our users, we use a slightly revised version of AT's HTML report for finding aids, which we paste into a Drupal-based institutional Web template. All finding aids are linked from the Archives website. The Institute website has a Google site search box, and the contents of the finding aids are discoverable via either that search box or search engines outside the Institute site. (There is no Archives-specific search engine for this material.)

Digital Objects. In 2001 we purchased a license for CONTENTdm to deliver our digital content. The system is locally hosted and maintained. In addition to the records for digitized images and documents created from scratch or adapted from AT or Horizon records, we imported data and images from PastPerfect to provide digital representations of our most noteworthy art and artifacts. We made the decision to buy an off-the-shelf product because our needs were sophisticated enough that we found we needed a content management system. We did not want to continue posting individual files on our website, but we knew

63 Generally we export titles and dates from the MARC 245 and 260 fields and convert them to EAD <unittitle> and <unitdate> elements. Other fields exist in the MARC records, but because they are inconsistently encoded, they would require significant manipulation and cleanup if they were to be converted to EAD, which is not possible for us at this time.

our limited claim to internal IT resources would make building our own system with an equivalent level of functionality challenging.

We provide links to digital objects in CONTENTdm from finding aids, and links to finding aids from CONTENTdm records. Because the online finding aids predate the CONTENTdm records in most cases, inserting these links in both places is a manual process. As we accumulate more and more digital content as a result of scanning projects and routine patron scanning and as our use of both AT and CONTENTdm matures, we are considering using the Digital Objects module in AT and delivering the finding aids themselves as EAD in CONTENTdm but have not yet made that move.

CONTENTdm provides options for enabling printing and downloading of images, documents, and other digital content. We have enabled printing for all records regardless of format, and we enabled downloading for documents. Though we currently fulfill most image and document requests via e-mail, by enabling the download functionality, we are able to use CONTENTdm to deliver large files (which exceed our e-mail system's attachment size limit) to patrons.

Crowdsourcing. CONTENTdm provides options for enabling rating, tagging, and commenting on images and other digital objects. We have enabled tagging and commenting on many records in CONTENTdm, though staff are currently the primary users of these features.

Tools Used: website; CONTENTdm

Evaluating Access Systems and User Services

To track reference requests, we designed a two-table Microsoft Access relational database and enter information about every request, including the amount of time to answer and the collections used. In this database we also track reference-associated scanning and photocopying.

Because active use of our access systems is relatively recent (less than three years old) at the time of this writing, we have not yet undertaken a formal usability review but will likely do so in the future as use of our system matures.

Tools Used: Microsoft Access