

Jump In, Too/Two Essay

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For a number of years I have been perplexed by digital records, primarily born digital-materials. As I began this project, I felt that I had a leg up in two areas. First, my predecessor established a record group for media, which holds all of our videocassettes, cassettes, reel-to-reels, films, etc. As collections have been processed, all media are removed and stored in this central location with a cross reference in the collection inventory. This collection is well described and inventoried, so we have reasonable intellectual control over these materials. Second, as collections are processed, we have downloaded or printed materials on flash drives, data discs, etc. These precedents eased my concerns that we had a significant number of computer media in our collections that were running the risk of extinction.

Without a significant number of computer media to inventory, I decided to focus on born-digital records. As the college has moved from print to electronic formats in its publications, minutes, reports, etc., our collections have been significantly impacted. My main areas of concern are committee minutes, strategic plans, class schedules, assessment reports, handbooks, and press releases. These records provide important information about the mission, decisions, and happenings at the college, thus they have a great deal of value. Unfortunately, now that these records are now only in digital form, they are rarely directly deposited in the archives. An additional complication is that we do not have the resources to fund digital capturing/preservation tools (e.g., Archive-It or Preservica). Rather, I am responsible for navigating course management systems, portals, and websites to search out and capture these materials on my own. While I have been capturing these records already, I had not yet developed an inventory of these materials to document their location and frequency of publication. This Jump In, Too/Two project provided the perfect opportunity to complete this needed documentation and to begin developing workflows for accessioning these records in a more consistent manner.

To complete my inventory of these records, I combed through the finding aids of each record group to first determine if any of the record series had migrated to a digital format. The inventory logs the titles of the series and subseries, locations of the digital files to be captured, the frequency of publication, and any notes about that particular record series. The inventory took me approximately twelve hours to complete. This time estimate includes numerous phone calls to discuss records with their office of origin as well as digging around online to figure out where the records are located.

My findings from the inventory quelled some of my concerns about these records. Foremost, I learned that these records were not as out of control as I have originally feared; the record series that I need to focus on were fairly easy to isolate. Only seven record groups (approximately one fifth of our collections) have records represented in the inventory, which is much more manageable than I had anticipated. Second, this project allowed me to specify dates when the transition from print to digital occurred. This information will help in determining any gaps we may have in the records. Finally, this inventory will serve as a useful tool as I integrate this capturing process into our existing workflows.

This project did bring to light future next steps. As noted, the inventory will be a helpful tool to ensure that these important records are preserved into the future. An additional concern I have for these records is access. I have been thinking about how to integrate these digital records into our collections, primarily in our online catalog, so our electronic holdings are accurately documented. Further, these records should be included in our digital repository with links to finding aids. Identifying these records will help me create collections in our content management system in order to provide the best access possible with our available resources. Overall, I appreciate the motivation that the Jump In, Too/Two initiative provided to better manage our born-digital materials; this project settled my anxiety in that I feel I have more knowledge about and control over these records.