

Discord in Archival Description? Evaluating DACS Compliance and Best Practice through Document Analysis of Finding Aids for Music Materials

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Abstract: DACS provides archivists with best practice guidelines for creating finding aids with archival description in the United States. However, DACS offers archivists little guidance when they describe archival music materials because it does not clearly address all the unique qualities of music collections. Because DACS was devised generally with text-based archival records in mind, it does not directly incorporate these qualities, thereby challenging archivists to describe music materials consistently using the standard.

This presentation will summarize the preliminary results of a 2016 study addressing the issues surrounding standardized description of music materials, including recommendations for aligning this description with DACS. Based on an examination of existing finding aids on the web using document analysis, the study's results show how similarly archivists describe music materials, and to what extent this description aligns with DACS. Given the nearly twenty-year history of EAD and the decade-long history of DACS, many existing finding aids for music materials have been encoded using these specifications. Unfortunately, their application has not been consistent, and many finding aids for music materials have been published online without being encoded using EAD. The results of this study offer helpful suggestions that can be utilized in devising a supplement for DACS for the description of music materials.

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About the Author:

Elizabeth Surles has been Archivist at the Institute of Jazz Studies since January 2014. Prior to joining the Institute, she was Digitization Archivist and then Library Director at the American Alpine Club Library in Golden, Colorado. She formerly worked at the Sousa Archives and Center for American Music and the Office of Collections in the library of the University of Illinois, where she earned master's degrees in musicology and library and information science and a certificate in special collections. Before her time in Illinois, Elizabeth was the Starr-Gennett Foundation's Project Coordinator in Richmond, Indiana, where she worked to promote

the history of Gennett Records. She serves on Music Library Association's (MLA) Archives and Special Collections Committee and co-chairs the MLA Working Group for Archival Description of Music Materials. She is also a tri-chair of the local arrangements committee for the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference's (MARAC) Newark 2017 meeting and is a member of MARAC's Arline Custer Memorial Award Committee. Elizabeth served as a member of the Society of American Archivists' Performing Arts Roundtable Steering Committee from 2014-2016. Her research interests include early jazz vocalists and description of archival music collections. She holds a bachelor's degree cum laude in music and history from Lawrence University, where she studied piano performance and the history of vernacular music in the United States.