

Good Enough Practice? Providing Access to Unprocessed Archival Materials

LESLIE THOMAS-SMITH

Abstract: Many institutions have processing backlogs and much work has been done in the archival field to provide potential solutions. Western University Archives (London, Canada) is a medium sized institution collecting a variety of records. There is a significant processing backlog due to a lack of human and financial resources to dedicate to this activity. After years of posting only finding aids that were completed to standard, the Archives began to make widely available what they call preliminary finding aids. Many of these documents were completed before standardization of archival description, as student projects or were simple content lists. These finding aids were posted with a disclaimer beginning late in 2016. A review of requests covering 2016 and 2017 was undertaken and initial results were inconclusive due to a number of factors. While best practice is the goal in archival work, is “good enough” practice acceptable and can we continue without strong evidence of its efficacy. What are the risks in providing non-standardized information to researchers? This presentation will explore the effectiveness of providing less than ideal documents to aid researchers in accessing archival material.

About the Author:

Leslie Thomas-Smith has worked as an Archivist at Western University since 2001. She received her MLIS from Western University in 1996. Leslie has research interests in the areas of effective archival processing, access, and the lack of diverse communities represented in archival collections.