Managing Archival Content
at the L. Tom Perry Special Collections

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This poster discusses the importance of workflow management systems, archival content management systems, and training programs. It highlights the way in which these have been used together in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections in the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University.

Workflow Management

A workflow is:
• the movement of tasks through a business process
• a sequential progression of work activities or set of processes taking place concurrently and eventually impacting each other according to a set of rules, routes, and roles

Workflows are:
• linear: work activities or tasks are passed along in a linear fashion
• distributed: multiple activities or tasks may be worked on by multiple individuals in a non-linear fashion

Workflows can be automated using Workflow Management (WFM) Systems to obtain greater efficiencies in accomplishing the assigned tasks and tracking their completion.

WfM Systems in Special Collections

Special Collections utilizes a distributed workflow to leverage the different skill sets of our employees. In 2008 the department began investigating WFM systems in order to automate our workflow. WFM systems provide the following benefits:
• guide users through the defined process and provide controls to ensure that each task is performed according to the process model
• allow us to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of the process

We selected ProcessiSmart (an open-source tool) as our WFM system, and created two customized workflows for basic and value-added processing. We have been very satisfied with its workflow management functions, but less so with its ability to generate reports.

Archival Content Management

Using archival content management (ACM) software in the department’s workflow assists Special Collections in providing access to collections. ACM tools support archival functions, including appraisal, accessioning, arrangement, description, and collection management. Using ACM software can also reduce training requirements, allowing processors to focus on content creation.

Various ACM software systems are available, including both proprietary and open-source systems.

ArchivesSpace

The open-source ACM system ArchivesSpace (ASpace) was implemented by Perry Special Collections in June 2014, migrating from the Archivists’ Toolkit to a self-hosted instance of the new software. The installation uses the repository function to separate each collecting area of Special Collections and restrict access to appropriate processing staff.

Within ASpace, information about archival materials and their creators is recorded through simple, Web-based forms. Record types include:
• Accessions records for newly acquired, unprocessed material
• Resource records for processed materials
• Agent records for creators and donors

Records are linked to each other, documenting relationships between accessions, resources, and related agents, or installment to the resource record.

Within the Resource record, archival data elements are broken into the following sections:
• Basic information
• Dates
• Finding Aid Data
• Related Accessions
• Agent Links

In addition to the primary record types, repositories can also create and manage Digital Object, Subject, Event, and Location records. Locations and Instances are linked together at the lowest level of description.

Training

With the necessary workflow and tools in place, the final step in managing archival processing is the development and implementation of a standardized training program for curators and students. In order to be effective, this program needs to be comprehensive and address process procedures, standards, workflows, and tools.

Manuals and Tutorials

The training program in the Perry Special Collections includes three components: a handbook (processing manual), online tutorials, and an in-person training regimen. This approach is meant to provide documentation, while supporting training for visual, aural, and tactile learners.

Using the handbook and tutorials, initial training of processing staff can be done asynchronously. Consistency is enhanced through required participation in ongoing training activities, such as weekly reviews and quizzes. Instituting standardized training has allowed us to make our processing work more consistent, while being responsive to developing individual training needs.