The Processing Manual as a Tool for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

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“When archivists and their institutions acknowledge the marginalization or absence of the oppressed they must respond through establishing a reparative archive that engenders inclusivity. Reparative archival work does not pretend to ignore the imperialist, racist, homophobic, sexist, ableist, and other discriminatory traditions of mainstream archives, but instead acknowledges these failures and engages in conscious actions toward a wholeness that may seem to be an exercise in futility but in actuality is an ethical imperative for all within traditional archival spaces.”

-- Lae’l Hughes-Watkins, *Moving Toward a Reparative Archive: A Roadmap for a Holistic Approach to Disrupting Homogenous Histories in Academic Repositories and Creating Inclusive Spaces for Marginalized Voices*
Defining our Terms

Reparative Archival Work

“When archivists and their institutions acknowledge the marginalization or absence of the oppressed they must respond through establishing a reparative archive that engenders inclusivity. Reparative archival work does not pretend to ignore the imperialist, racist, homophobic, sexist, ableist, and other discriminatory traditions of mainstream archives, but instead acknowledges these failures and engages in conscious actions toward a wholeness that may seem to be an exercise in futility but in actuality is an ethical imperative for all within traditional archival spaces” (Lae’l Hughes-Watkins)

Social Justice

“... social justice is both a process and a goal. The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are psychologically and physically safe and secure.” (Lee Ann Bell, Theoretical Foundations for Social Justice Education, 2013, p. 21)

Anti-oppressive Archival Work

“Anti-Oppression work seeks to recognize the oppression that exists in our society and attempts to mitigate its effects and eventually equalize the power imbalance in our communities.” (Anti-Violence Project, Univ. of Victoria, BC)
SAA Core Values Statement & Code of Ethics

Our goals and practices in the processing manual are in line with these principles:

SAA Core Values Statement and Code of Ethics:

- Expand access and usage opportunities for users, and potential users, of archival records.
- Develop and follow professional standards that promote transparency and mitigate harm.
- Respect the diversity found in humanity and advocate for archival collections to reflect that rich complexity.
The Manual’s Goals and DEI Practices

1. Use MPLP processes to increase access to collections
2. Increase transparency around archival practice and decision-making
3. Provide accurate description while mitigating harm
4. Responsibly maintain privacy and confidentiality
5. Acknowledge creators, complex provenance, and lift up marginalized voices
Goal 1:
Use MPLP Processes to Increase Access to Collections

How do we create a system for implementing extensible processing with MPLP workflows, while also favoring anti-oppressive work?

*Apply targeted MPLP at some steps of processing, and add work on DEI-focused tasks in other parts of the workflow. Empower ourselves to commit to iterative processing.*
Goal 1:
Use MPLP Processes to Increase Access to Collections

Changes to Practice:

○ Redistribute the weight of labor throughout the workflow
  ■ Increase work done during accessioning
  ■ Less physical preservation/processing and detailed inventory work

○ Increase labor to support reparative processing
  ■ Favor narrative description - provides more opportunities for DEI-related work

○ Focus on Iterative / Extensible Processing
  ● Created a Levels of Processing Decision-Making Chart and Levels of Processing Matrix
  ● Use worksheet to keep track of iterative work steps
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Processing</th>
<th>Arrangement</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Housing and Preservation</th>
<th>Restrictions / Privacy Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td><strong>Intellectual:</strong> Identify signs of overall intellectual arrangement present, if any. <strong>Physical:</strong> Retain order in which collection was received, which may or may not be original order.</td>
<td>Collection-level finding aid in ArchivesSpace with basic Scope &amp; Content note. Retain existing folder titles.</td>
<td>Review collection for immediate preservation threats like insects, mold, fragile materials. Rehouse only if the housing is unstable. Refolder only if severe condition issues are present.</td>
<td>No review at this level but refer to donor agreement, statements, or record type to alert to issues. 1. Restrict at collection level. 2. Include Conditions Governing Access Note in finding aid and review collection for access on-demand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td><strong>Intellectual:</strong> Identify whether boxes have themes (Example: Box 1 is Correspondence; Box 2 is Diaries; etc.). <strong>Physical:</strong> Box order can be changed to bring together related materials. Otherwise, retain order in which collection was received.</td>
<td>Box-level descriptions for finding aid in ArchivesSpace or spreadsheet with Scope &amp; Content note and all other relevant notes. <em>(Box-level description is defined as a high-level listing of the contents of each box, ideally summarized.)</em> Retain existing folder titles.  <em>Express box dates in decades.</em></td>
<td>Review collection for immediate preservation threats like insects, mold, fragile materials. Rehouse only if housing is unstable. Refolder only if severe condition issues are present or if labels are no longer useable. Folder loose materials. Remove rubber bands if easily accessible.</td>
<td>Conduct brief review at this level and refer to donor agreement, statements, or record type to alert to issues. 1. Restrict by the box. 2. Include Conditions Governing Access Note in finding aid and review box for access on-demand.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Levels of Processing: Decision-Making Chart

**Hint:** Not all attributes must be met to decide on a processing level for a collection. In most cases one particular attribute will be the deciding factor over others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Processing</th>
<th>Condition / State of Collection upon Receipt</th>
<th>Value Attributes of Collection upon Receipt</th>
<th>Resource Attributes of Collection upon Receipt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>Few preservation issues.</td>
<td>Collections with low research value or little expected use.</td>
<td>Labor - Most likely to be performed by Collection Managers or students with limited project durations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 Collection Level</td>
<td>Few preservation issues.</td>
<td>Quality of Documentation - Collection is duplicative of holdings at peer institutions.</td>
<td>Collection is part of the backlog and not on the priority list.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collections with simple existing organizational schemes, and/or are small enough for users to review easily, around 2 linear feet or less.</td>
<td>Object value - Collection contains materials of low cultural/historical value. Description at the minimum level will provide enough information for value assessment. Materials are unlikely to be exhibited, and have no particular need for security tracking.</td>
<td>Little or no funding available to support processing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is existing quality description on key individuals, organizations, and topics to use in finding aid notes, or, these descriptions can be created without an in-depth survey. This will provide good keyword searchability.</td>
<td>Collection peripherally relates to Brandeis University’s collecting mission and/or has some relevance to institutional memory.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Few access or privacy concerns.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Requires few deaccessions, or research accessibility will not suffer from lack of deaccessioning.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Goal 2: Increase Transparency Around Archival Practice and Decision-Making

- “The [archival] profession preaches the merits of accountability through good records to any who will listen..how accountable are archivists willing to be through keeping good records about themselves about what they do and making these records readily available?”

- “paternalism
  - decision-making is clear to those with power and unclear to those without it
  - those with power think they are capable of making decisions for and in the interests of those without power
  - those with power often don’t think it is important or necessary to understand the viewpoint or experience of those for whom they are making decisions
  - those without power understand they do not have it and understand who does
  - those without power do not really know how decisions get made and who makes what decisions, and yet they are completely familiar with the impact of those decisions on them”
  (Tema Okun, white supremacy culture, 1999)
Goal 2: Increase Transparency Around Archival Practice and Decision-Making

- DACS 7.1.8 recommends the Processing Information Note be used to:

  “Provide information about actions of the archivist, custodians, or creators of the records or conventions in the finding aid that may have an impact on a researcher’s interpretation of the records or understanding of the information provided in the finding aid. Actions and conventions include but are not limited to reconstruction of provenance, maintenance, reconstruction, or alteration of original order, devising titles for materials, weeding, and maintenance or provision of control numbers or container numbers.”

- Our manual requires use of the Processing Information Note to record the following:
  - Previous processing work
  - Changes to the physical arrangement
  - Restrictions work performed
  - Research into complex provenance
  - Appraisal actions taken
  - The presence of devised vs. existing titles
Goal 2:
Increase Transparency Around Archival Practice and Decision-Making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Survey &amp; Processing Plan</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>MINIMAL-LEVEL SURVEY &amp; PLANNING</strong></td>
<td><strong>FULL-LEVEL SURVEY &amp; PLANNING</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Processing Level 1)</td>
<td>(Processing Levels 2-5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Document Review Notes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Deed of gift:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Deed of gift:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Who or what does the collection document?</td>
<td>Who or what does the collection document?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Who donated the collection?</td>
<td>Is there a summary of the contents of the collection?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Who donated the collection?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Has anyone identified any restricted materials?</td>
<td>Has anyone identified any restricted materials?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><strong>Donor/Transfer correspondence:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Donor/Transfer correspondence:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Are they organizational records or personal papers?</td>
<td>Are they organizational records or personal papers?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Who were the creator(s) of the collection and its materials? [For University records name the department and any major creators of materials in the collection]</td>
<td>Who were the creator(s) of the collection and its materials? [For University records name the department and any major creators of materials in the collection]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Was the collection created or compiled? [University records answer is always &quot;created&quot;]</td>
<td>Was the collection created or compiled? [University records answer is always &quot;created&quot;]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>When were the materials created [or for compiled collections, when was it compiled by the donor]?</td>
<td>When were the materials created [or for compiled collections, when was it compiled by the donor]?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Is there a summary of the contents of the collection?</td>
<td>Is there a summary of the contents of the collection?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Is there any mention of confidential or restricted materials?</td>
<td>Is there any mention of confidential or restricted materials?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td><strong>Collection inventories:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Is there a full or partial inventory of the materials?</td>
<td>Is there a full or partial inventory of the materials?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Goal 3:
Provide Accurate Description While Mitigating Harm

Changes to Practice:

- Increase our use of descriptive notes (including the Processing Information Note and Custodial History Note)

- Focus on the language, voice, and style of description as described in the Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia: Anti-Racist Description Resources

- Prioritize honesty over neutrality in language

- Have care in how we describe people and the records of people’s lives, seek out community-based sources of information
Goal 4: Responsibly Maintain Privacy and Confidentiality

- Consent and protection of activist identities and strategies in collections

- Protection of student’s identities and political freedom in University Archives
  - Beyond FERPA (Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act)
  - Named individuals have named themselves
  - Use Policy on University Photographs with Students
Brandeis Use Policy on University Photographs of Students

“We apply the following restrictions on use of photos obtained from the University Archives:

1. Photos created more than 40 years ago may be used in any manner not prohibited by copyright law.

2. Photos taken 40 years ago until today may be available for public use or publication not prohibited by copyright law only if the following is true:

   a. It is clear from the image that it is a posed publicity photo, or,
   b. Individual students cannot be easily identified in the photograph, or,
   c. The content of the photo does not require consideration for privacy, or,
   d. Permission from all living individuals in the image has been obtained.”
Goal 4: Responsibly Maintain Privacy and Confidentiality

Changes to Practice:

- Early and iterative restrictions work
  - Minimal, moderate, maximum level restrictions review workflows
  - Detailed written screening criteria
- Adding a clear detailed and PUBLIC restrictions note
  - Whether a review has been conducted
  - Whether or not restrictions have been identified
Goal 5:
Acknowledge Creators, Complex Provenance, and Lift Up Marginalized Voices

What actions are included in our manual’s definition of Provenance?

- Creation
- Use
- Appropriation / Loss
- Compilation
- Donation

When does Provenance get complex?
Goal 5:
Acknowledge Creators, Complex Provenance, and Lift Up Marginalized Voices

Common examples of complex provenance:

- Collections created by a particular community, but compiled by an outside individual
- Abandoned student work compiled by a professor or academic department
- An organizational merger which transfers ownership of one organization’s records to a second, different entity
- A collection of materials collected from various sources around a specific subject
- Legacy collections for which there is limited provenance information, or the information has been found to be false or incomplete
Goal 5: Acknowledge Creators, Complex Provenance, and Lift Up Marginalized Voices

Changes in Practice:

- Provenance and custodial history should be more robust and extensive
- Expand the traditional archival concept of “provenance” to include all aspects of content creation, not just how the collection itself was created
- Repurpose the Custodial History Note to include full expanded provenance
Recreated Custodial History for The Gordon Fellman Papers

Custodial History

The provenance and custodial history of this collection is varied, as some materials were created by Gordon Fellman but many were not. Specifically, the materials on the Ford Hall Takeover of 1969 and the National Strike Information Center were largely created by the Brandeis students involved in those efforts. The majority of the National Strike Information Center materials consist of items left behind by the student activists who had been doing their work in the Sociology Department offices. The Ford Hall Takeover materials have various creators, including students from both inside and outside of the movement, administrators, faculty, and other community members. The materials documenting Ford Hall were sought out, collected, and then curated by Gordon Fellman for many years before they came to the archives, and have become inseparable from his personal files.

This provenance and custodial history was reconstructed and compiled through informal interviews with Gordon Fellman in 2018 by the University Archivist.
Sources


Contact:

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