

The University of Maryland Libraries Special Collections and University Archives began a two-year long assessment of all archival holdings from 2013-2014. For two years, project staff gathered key data about the location, size, existing documentation, and level of public access of all collections housed in the repository. While the work provided a wealth of data, a lack of standardization in the data meant that little more could be done without further analysis and evaluation. In 2016, the Special Collections Access Team spent extensive time standardizing this data and found new opportunities for its reuse and reapplication.

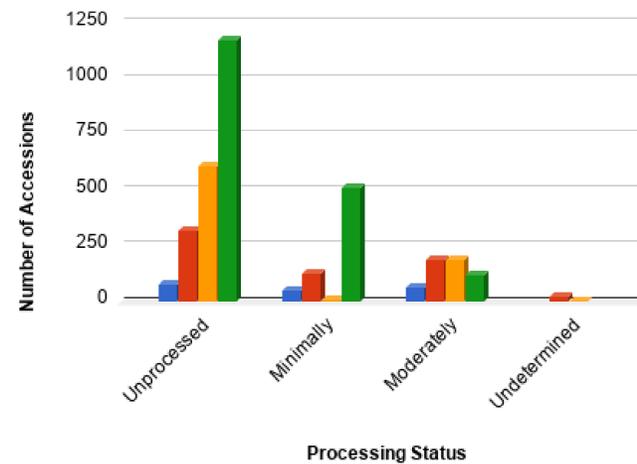
Aggregation & Analysis

After standardizing and cleaning the data, all of the raw data collected in 2013 could be aggregated and analyzed. Below is an visualization of that data that allows staff to see the state of collections across the repository.



- About 1,000 Linear Feet of Materials Processed in 2018
- New Standards Integrated into ArchivesSpace
- Groundwork for Iterative Assessment & Evaluation

Aggregated Processing Statuses



An analysis of the new standardized dataset confirmed several suspicions about potential problems in the workflow for processing and collection management. We noticed that nearly all of the largest collections in our repository (larger than 100 linear feet) lacked full finding aids. We also found that collections measured at the item level (almost always large collections of audiovisual materials) often lacked both inventories and online access points.

New Directions

In 2018, Special Collections and University Archives internally released over 100 pages of guidelines and standards for archival processing. The manual includes information on how to effectively implement minimal processing across collecting areas and how to record basic assessment information in newly adopted systems, like ArchivesSpace.

Between 2017 and 2018, the access team used curator's rankings in one collection area to prioritize collections to receive processing work over the course of a year. Prioritized collections had high research value and use among patrons, but descriptive information was not currently available online. Ultimately, the new assessment data helped direct work, making several hundred linear feet of material from multiple disciplines discoverable for the first time.

Understanding the Data



Older Dataset Compiled in 2013 and 2014.



Created from and Stored within "The Beast" (Microsoft Access Database)



Sketchy, Sometimes Incomplete Data Lacking Standardization

Setting Standards

Accession Number	Size	Inclusive dates	Processing Status	Documentation Types	Has inventory	Has abstract in ArchivesUM
LAB 2001-1	26.50 linear feet	1931-1985	Processed	Word	yes	yes
LAB	19.5 linear feet		Unprocessed	Excel	no	no
LAB	4.5 linear feet		Unprocessed	LAB Film-Video data script database	no	no
LAB 99-5	15.50 linear feet	1947-1999	Processed	Word	yes	yes
LAB	62 linear feet		Unprocessed	no	no	no
LAB	62 linear feet		Unprocessed	no	no	no
LAB	62 linear feet		Unprocessed	no	no	no
LAB	62 linear feet		Unprocessed	no	no	no
LAB 2014-181			Unpro books, serials	no	no	no
LAB			Unprocessed	Word	no	no
LAB 2005-106	4.25 linear feet	1908-1978	Processed	Word	yes	yes
LAB 2000-44	7.50 linear feet	1927-1979	Processed	Word	yes	yes
LAB 1998-27	153.75 linear feet	1916-1997	Processed	Word	no	no
LAB 99-88	5.75 linear feet	1924-1991	Processed	Word	yes	yes
LAB 2008-87	approx. 80 linear feet and 21 16mm films		Unpro audio, video,	no	no	no
LAB			Unprocessed	LAB Film-Video data	no	no
LAB 2001-53	50.50 linear feet	1974-2006	Processed	Beast	yes	yes
LAB 2004-31	125 linear feet	1920s-2004	Processed	Word	Beast	Beast
LAB 99-32	7.25 linear feet	1902-1975	Processed	PDF	yes	yes
LAB 2014-182			Unprocessed	no	no	no
LAB 99-31	3.50 linear feet including 71 photos and 4 videos	1936-1999	Processed	Word	yes	yes
LAB 2001-4	linear feet	1951-1993	Processed	Word	Beast	Beast

The raw data is depicted above. Note the variability in units of measure and inventory values. In order to create interoperability across spreadsheets for each collection area, project staff created new repository standards for measuring size and processing status of collections.



Too Much & Too Little

Large collections and collections with large amounts of A/V became one of our most important areas of focus. This meant that many of our most extensive and well-documented collections remained inaccessible to the public.



Just Right

Access as a whole is a problem for some collection areas. In one of our units, users could access just 23% of the collection. In response, the Access team used the data to create year long work plans and standardized guidelines.

Lingering Questions

After nearly five years of working of repurposing and recycling assessment data, the staff at Special Collections and University Archives began asking additional questions:

- What makes assessment data effective for repurposing and reuse?
- What assessment measures are most useful to keep up to date?
- What assessment measures can be recorded iteratively through automated systems?

