Research and Publishing
As An Archivist

Publishing As A Co-Author

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Case Study: the Usability of Online Finding Aids

• What prompted the article
  – POLARIS Project at Pepper Library
  – Need to analyze research usability of Pepper Collection finding aid in the online environment

• Activities Undertaken
  – Lit Review
  – Canvassing SAA Listserv
  – Survey researchers in history, poli. sci, gerontology
  – Used graduate statistics students to create focus group
  – Measured user feedback after public release
Print Publication vs. E-Book

• Professional Development Leave – Fall 2009
• Goal was a processing manual
• Ultimately selected SAA as venue as they saw need for it
• Steps involved in publishing
• Collaboration – conference calls, divided up content, posted for discussion using PB Works
  http://pbworks.com/
Reactions: Fall 2009-Spring 2010

• Board felt very useful to profession, particularly to small repositories
• Need for newer and minimalist approaches to processing
• Held great promise for practitioners and archival faculty
• Liked idea of decision trees, sidebars, various approaches to apply to single collections
• Suggested need for feedback from corporate, religious, museum, government archives
Reactions (2)

• Consider collections with mix of AV, electronic, and photographic materials, not just standalone
• Don’t make too rigid a distinction between “classical” and “minimalist” approaches – many places employ both
• Need to reach out to variety of repositories – not just college and universities
• Board would like to see entire book before an external review
• Arrangement and description more fluid, not linear
Outcome: Summer 2010-Spring 2011

- Change to Case Study Approach: “Archival Processing in the 21st Century”

- Decided to create an E-Pub with core of case studies for comments and additional content, using SAA’s Drupal content management system.
Reactions: Nov. 2010

- Concern about whether SAA can maintain a truly interactive resource
- Need to see template of elements we’d like contributors to include in each case study (like “Campus Case Studies”)
- Need to see a plan for adding and editing additions to the E-Book
Reactions: March 2011

- Case Studies didn’t appear challenging enough to generate discussion and interactivity
- Need for richer contextual info about different repositories
- More discussions and thought processes that go into individual processing decisions
- Geared almost exclusively to archivists with minimal training working in small institutions
Reactions: March 2011 (2)

- Very little introduction given to readers about basic arrangement and description standards, or explanations of how archivists integrate standards into their work.

- Sustainability – big investment in design, quality control procedures, and interactivity with no prospect of funding to offset expenses.

- Project really more appropriate as a feature for SAA’s Description Section website rather than full-blown publication.
Co-Authors’ Final Decision

• Create a wiki based on original concept of core case studies and interactivity

• Still a work in progress
Questions?

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