Archival Collections

This document provides guidance about policies and established standards and practices that should inform collaborative projects between various Library departments and affiliated units that oversee and facilitate digitization projects, including the Digital Studio, the Center for Digital Humanities (CDH), the Special Collections (RBSC) Public Services units, and the Archival Description and Processing Team (ADAPT), which manages the Library’s archival holdings. Collaborative projects do not include regular photoduplication requests. For the purposes of this policy document, “archival holdings” is defined as any resource described following archival principles, regardless of serialization, or encoding, format (i.e. EAD, MARC).

Workflow

When it is determined that a project entails the digitization of materials from archival collections, please contact the Interim Assistant University Librarian for Special Collections during the planning phase. They will oversee QA work for the applicable metadata in order to determine whether description should be enhanced or updated. This work should happen before materials are digitized.

Digital surrogates that are added to Figgy will be added to finding aids and will thus be accessible via the Finding Aids website (PULFA) along with any other platform in which the images are available, for example websites that are developed for digital humanities projects.

Distinguishing Features of Archival Description

Archival description privileges the description of context over the description of items. Context is information not stated on the resource itself that may be critical to discovering or interpreting the resource. This may include, among many other types of relationships, the membership of the resource in an intellectual or physical grouping. For that reason, archival description proceeds from a description of the perceived whole through a description of (ever-smaller) aggregates and may, but typically does not, include a description of the item. Examples of archival description in the form of finding aids include the following:

- Sylvia Beach Papers (Manuscripts Division)
- John Foster Dulles Papers (Public Policy Papers)
- Office of the President Records: William G. Bowen Subgroup (University Archives)

While the level of description between logical groupings of resources may vary as appropriate, it always dictates the level of processing across all other processing tasks and subsequent actions applied to the same body of materials. This means that a resource described at a particular aggregate level is physically arranged and digitized at that aggregate level.

Archival description is iterative. The level of detail to which a resource is described is informed by its sufficiency for supporting user tasks as well as by available resources in the Archival Description and Processing Team (ADAPT). As user needs, including those evidenced by proposed digitization projects, change and resources are available, the level of description may be adjusted correspondingly in accordance with archival standards. It should be noted that an adjustment to the level of description will often require a corresponding adjustment to the collection or materials’ physical arrangement.