
To understand the current state of accessioning procedures in manuscript collecting repositories, a study of the 97 American university members of the Association of Research Libraries was conducted. Results show that accessioning procedures are far from codified. While nearly all repositories report the existence of standard accessioning procedures, only 60% are documented in writing. Deeds of gift are employed by all respondents when acquiring a new collection from a donor; however, a formulaic approach to soliciting contextual information about the creator or donor is rare.

Headings:

Archives

Archival materials

Archive acquisitions

Archival processing

Manuscripts
ARCHIVAL ACCESSIONING AND DONOR-SUPPLIED INFORMATION: A PRELIMINARY SURVEY

by
Sarah J Bost

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Approved by

_______________________________________
Helen Tibbo
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**Introduction**

During the past decade, much of the archival literature has focused on repositories’ extensive backlog of collections while offering strategies that can be used to reduce them. There is a recognized need to process collections more efficiently so that they are available to researchers in a timely manner. As a result, many repositories follow established processing guidelines found in manuals. The publishing and sharing of these manuals has become common practice.

In order to continue to reduce the backlog it is important to understand the way that collections come to be in an archive. For collecting institutions, the material is discovered, selected, and acquired. As such, the archive bears responsibility for the backlog which is created when curators accession material at a pace faster than it can be processed. Since several studies have already made suggestions for improving processing efficiency, it may be helpful to turn our attention to acquisition and accessioning procedures in order to determine if similar methods can be applied in this area of the archival enterprise.

The Society of American Archivist’s glossary indicates that as nouns, acquisition and accession are synonymous, both meaning materials received by a repository as a unit. However, the terms differ when used as verbs. The glossary notes that “the verb accession goes far beyond the sense of acquire, connoting the initial steps of processing by establishing rudimentary physical and intellectual control over the materials by entering brief information about those materials in a register, database, or other log of the
repository's holdings.” Unfortunately, no general survey has been undertaken to assess the accessioning practices used throughout the archival community. Without this data, it is difficult to understand the state of current acquisition methodology or determine how accessioning strategies could be leveraged to benefit repositories and researchers.

The purpose of this study is to determine if repositories have implemented standard accessioning methods that are available to staff in written form like a processing manual. Of particular interest is the degree to which manuscript collecting institutions solicit donor knowledge and assistance both during accessioning and when arranging and describing material. In brief, do archivists ask donors for information that would lend context to the acquired documents but may not be found within them? If so, do they gather this information in a standardized format?

A greater understanding of current practices may uncover approaches taken at some repositories that could be beneficial to others. While many archives have published processing manuals, few have shared their accessioning guidelines. Once members of the community are aware of others’ methods, the sharing of ideas can begin, potentially leading to a set of best practices.

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Literature Review

Accessioning procedures have been largely ignored by the archival literature. When mentioned at all, accessioning is often given a cursory review as an introduction to processing techniques.

Theodore Roosevelt Schellenberg, known as “the father of appraisal theory in the United States,” was an important administrator at the National Archives into the 1950s. While his focus was on governmental records, he also reviewed the procedures for managing manuscript collections in his 1965 text *The Management of Archives*. He asserts the need for materials to be immediately registered in a log which should include the number assigned by the archives to each new acquisition, the date, the source from which it was obtained, the terms under which the records may be used, the name of the agency that created them, the place and date of their creation, and the quantity.

According to a 1968 article by Dennis R. Bodem, the Society of American Archivists (SAA) State and Local Records Committee’s Forms Manual Subcommittee solicited examples of accessioning and progress forms from archival agencies in the United States and Canada. Bodem states that most archival agencies use an accessions log or register which serves as a permanent record providing information on the receipt of all material. In Bodem’s opinion, an accessions log should include date, name and address of donor, explanation of type of holding (gift or loan), description of records, assigned number and location, and additional remarks. A collection should then be given

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an accessions form in order to document provenance, preservation, and arrangement before shelving. Bodem believes that at a minimum accessions forms should include an accession number, collection name, donor name, description, list of tasks accomplished and those still remaining, and dates of work accomplished. He advocates for a combined accessioning/processing form, which he calls an A and P control form, claiming that such a card or form functions as a transmittal or authorization control, an accessioning and work-in-progress control, and a permanent record of work completed to date. He stresses that simplicity is paramount and reminds users that forms exist “to make work easier, not add to it.”

Less than a decade later, Washington University in St. Louis’ School of Medicine Library published its Archives Procedural Manual with the hope that it would be helpful “to other archivists who might be considering setting up their own systems.” The manual points to Schellenberg’s text as “the most authoritative work” on handling manuscript collections and lays out guidelines for acquiring collections via donation. Included is a copy of the Archives Collection Donation form which acts as a standard deed of gift. Once a collection is received, a Processing Checklist should be completed which includes a summary description of the contents. It is noted that a “small collection…will be simultaneously recorded, processed, and examined, as this procedure…will minimize needless duplication of effort.”

In 1975 Kenneth Docket produced an oft-cited text called Modern Manuscripts. He devotes an entire thirty page chapter to the topic of acquisitions which includes a

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5 Bodem, “The Use of Forms in the Control of Archives at the Accessioning and Processing Level,” 368.
discussion of the importance of deeds of gift and a mention that some curators use tape
recorders to “assure that gift conditions or access restrictions are understood by both
parties” and “enable the curator to secure information from the donor which will be of
great use in preparing the accession record and in processing the papers.” This is the
first mention in the literature of gathering information about a collection from the donor.

In the late 1970s the Society of American Archivists published a Basic Manuals
Series of short titles on a variety of topics that could be collected in a three-ring binder.
Included in the series is a volume by Maynard Brichford on appraisal and accessioning.
Brichford defines accessioning as the establishment of physical, legal, and intellectual
control over the acquired material and notes that each collection has a price tag which
includes the staff time required for arrangement and description. He believes that each
gift should be accompanied by a document which legally transfers ownership to the
repository. During accessioning the archivist should identify record series or collections;
make recommendations about arrangement and description; suggest a processing
archivist, schedule, and sequence; note types of material included; estimate the amount of
time required to process the collection; assess the physical condition of the materials; and
make recommendations for preservation. In Brichford’s opinion it is the archivist’s duty
to promptly record the receipt of the materials and quickly create a permanent record.
Brichford heavily relies on Bodem’s 1968 paper when describing the types of accession
records that archivists should keep.  

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9 Kenneth W. Docket, Modern Manuscripts: A Practical Manual for Their Management, Care, and Use
10 Maynard J. Brichford, Archives & Manuscripts: Appraisal & Accessioning (Chicago: Society of
Also included in the Basic Manuals Series is a publication by David B. Gracy II titled *Archives & Manuscripts: Arrangement & Description*. Gracy describes arrangement and description as an iterative process in which the archivist begins by conducting a preliminary survey to analyze the collection for provenance, administrative history or biographical information, functional origin, contents, and type of material and to ascertain potential series and inclusive dates. Next the archivist sorts the documents into series. Once a final order is established the archivist can folder the material. Following Gracy’s suggestions, the archivist will have gone through the collection “at least three times” by the end of arrangement.¹¹ In the same vein, an institution should have three descriptive documents per collection, one each for internal control, in-house reference, and external publication. A worksheet and accession checklist provide elementary control and are only necessary if the archivist expects an extended period of time between accessioning and processing. The finding aid, which Gracy calls an inventory, should include an introduction, biographical or historical information, scope and content note, series descriptions, box and folder listing, the processing archivist’s name, and the date of completion. In rare instances, small and particularly important collections will include item listing and item indexing. Published versions of the inventory should add a preface which explains the institution’s policy on the production of finding aids. Collections should have both a preliminary and final inventory unless so small that a preliminary inventory is unnecessary.

In the early 1980s Karen T. Lynch and Helen W. Slotkin published several important texts on processing which stemmed from a 1978 National Endowment for the

Humanities (NEH) grant to support Massachusetts Institute of Technology Archives in processing its backlog. Their initial publication was the *Processing Manual for the Institute Archives and Special Collections M.I.T. Libraries* which includes in its preface a list of premises which the authors claim “will not be considered revolutionary.” These premises essentially argue for a more efficient approach to processing with a focus on the needs of the researcher. If possible, collections in process should be available for use by researchers. Quoting the Utah State University processing manual, the authors assert that “‘quality’ processing does not necessarily mean extensive arrangement and description.”

A year later the same authors published an article in the *American Archivist* explaining the rationale behind their processing manual and reiterating the premises included in the preface. They also discuss M.I.T.’s use of varying levels of processing, coordination of work, description shortcuts, preservation, and the use of student assistants.

Also in 1982 Karen T. Lynch published a paper written with Thomas E. Lynch on the subject of processing rates. After analyzing 55 National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) and NEH grants the authors suggest that processing between 0.5 and two linear feet of personal papers or two to four linear feet of government and business records per week can reasonably be expected of a full-time processor. Lynch and Lynch assert that “archivists must constantly balance the amount

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and kind of material taken into their repositories against the staff available to arrange, describe, preserve, and service it.”

An article published in 1985 sought to analyze and quantify archival processing rates at Washington State University Libraries. The repository had begun keeping an accessions register and using an accessioning and processing worksheet in 1975. With this data, the authors were able to determine that 25% of the University’s archival and manuscript material was unprocessed in 1982. Archivists were processing less than 40% of all accessioned material the same year it was acquired, leading to an ever-growing backlog. The average processing time was 25.2 hours per cubic foot, faster than the National Archives standard of 4.5 days per linear foot.

Archival backlogs received attention again in 1998 when the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) conducted a survey on the state of special collections in its member libraries. Respondents reported on average that 27% of their institutions’ manuscript collections were unprocessed.

In 2004 Pam Hackbart-Dean and Christine de Cantanzaro authored a paper on the management and processing of archival collections asserting, like Slotkin and Lynch before, that materials do not require processing at a uniform level of detail. Instead, the authors suggest a continuum approach of four levels of processing. Regardless of the level, processing includes seven critical stages which allow archivists to gain intellectual and physical control over the collection: background research, preliminary inventory,

identification of series and arrangement, review for weeding and sampling, physical arrangement and basic level of preservation, preparation of the finding aid, and creation of a catalog record. However, they suggest that each collection in the backlog should receive a basic catalog record before processing so that it can be located by researchers.\textsuperscript{18}

In a session at the Society of American Archivists’ 2004 annual meeting, Tom Hyry presented a paper on the use of minimum processing standards at Yale University. When Yale attempted to tackle its backlog in 2002, Hyry and colleagues determined that, even at a quick processing speed, they had over ten years of work. This led to the development of minimum standards which were to be used on the majority of collections. In this approach, a professional archivist develops a processing plan which is then carried out by a student with supervision from support personnel. As a basis for these standards, Hyry argues, like others before him, that neither all collections nor all parts of a collection need to be processed at the same level. He, too, advocates for making preliminary inventories available to researchers and choosing a processing level based on researchers’ needs. In the end Hyry found that the use of minimum standards most significantly impacted newly acquired collections. It became the policy at Yale to include more detail in the basic catalog records and box-level inventories which are created at the time of accessioning. Hyry also points to the occasional reliance on donors for rehousing, arrangement, and inventories.\textsuperscript{19}

In 2005 Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner published the results of their extensive study on archival processing in an article titled “More Product, Less Process:


Revamping Traditional Archival Processing.” Known throughout the field as MPLP, the article made many of the same suggestions as earlier authors but backed them up with a review of NHPRC grant files and surveys of users and archival repositories. The data was astounding: 34% of repositories have over half of their collections unprocessed while 60% have yet to process at least one third of their materials. In addition, 78% of repositories are acquiring more material per year than they can process, resulting in an ever-growing backlog. Of the forty grants analyzed by the authors, average processing time was nine hours per foot while the most frequently reported time was thirty-three hours per foot. On average, survey respondents felt that a professional archivist should be able to process one cubic foot of a large 20th century collection in 14.8 hours. In the end, Greene and Meissner recommend that archivists process at the “golden minimum” by answering the question, “What is the least we can do to get the job done in a way that is adequate to user needs, now and in the future?”20 In their suggestions for an updated model of description the authors call for finding aids to include “a brief note about the collection’s overall context - a biographical or historical sketch, preferably taken wholesale from background documents in the collection.”21 Greene and Meissner finally conclude that archivists should be able to process large collections of twentieth-century materials at an average rate of four hours per cubic foot resulting in four hundred feet per processor per year.

In an article published in 2006 Christine Weideman of Yale University reports on the application of MPLP standards to accession and process several collections. Though Yale had already conducted a backlog analysis and implemented minimum standards,

staff found that their new techniques did not do enough to reduce the backlog and keep up with incoming accessions. All collections in the backlog had a catalog record and minimum description, often at the box level. Staff now accept that for most collections this level of processing is sufficient and the material need not receive additional arrangement and description.

Weideman writes that “accessioning as processing is now the goal.”22 Whenever possible, collections are arranged and described at the time of accessioning so that they never enter the backlog. In order to achieve this, Weideman is upfront with donors about what types of material Yale would like to acquire. She describes ideal processing and, if that will not be achieved, describes how the materials will be handled instead. Occasionally donors have chosen to perform the “ideal” arrangement themselves before transferring the materials. Weideman also asks the donor if the collection includes “sensitive” items and discusses actions that can be taken both by the donor and at Yale to identify and segregate those materials. She has also occasionally asked donors who created the materials to write series descriptions after staff have created a collection inventory. With these techniques, Yale’s Manuscripts and Archives has achieved processing rates of twenty minutes per linear foot for a collection of organizational records and 2.5 hours per linear foot for a collection of personal papers.

In another reflection on MPLP, Stephanie H. Crowe and Karen Spilman sought to assess the impact of the recommendations made by Greene and Meissner through a 2009 survey of American archivists. They found that MPLP had been widely adopted with 78% of respondents applying the techniques to incoming collections and 79% using the

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strategy for collection backlogs. As a result, 65% of respondents indicated that their backlog had decreased since the adoption of MPLP practices. Most felt that researchers were helped rather than hindered by the new processing strategies.\(^ {23}\)

In 2010 Greene wrote an article which advocated for the expansion of MPLP to other aspects of the archival enterprise, including appraisal, preservation, reference, electronic records, and digitization. He briefly references Weideman’s article and mentions that his organization, the American Heritage Center (AHC), has had some success with asking donor to provide biographical information and box lists. Greene suggests that “It is, at the very least, worth broaching with donors.”\(^ {24}\)

Richard Cox proposes the method used at the University of Massachusetts, which he calls maximal processing, as an alternative to minimal processing. In this approach, each new collection is surveyed and the “pre-description” is made available through OCLC and the University’s OPAC. This pre-description is often aided by the considerable time that archivists spend with donors which provides an opportunity to gather basic facts and surmise the context of the collection’s creation. Cox distinguishes maximal and minimal processing with the assertion that “in maximal processing, making a collection publicly available is only the first stage in the process of processing, not the end - it is a step, not a goal.”\(^ {25}\) He believes that speed of access and depth of description are not mutually exclusive.


A 2011 article by Charles B. Stanford and Linda M. Meyer is the first to focus on donor assistance with managing collection material. In the two cases presented, the material consisted of organizational records. Members or officers of the donor organization approached the repositories to volunteer their assistance in processing the collections. The donor volunteers were permitted to aid with appraisal, arrangement, and description. Because of this attention, one collection received item-level appraisal, reducing its size from 100 boxes to 49. By the end of the volunteers’ project, the collection was arranged at the series level and had a box-level inventory. The authors derived multiple benefits from allowing trained donors to fully process archival collections. Firstly, the donor has greater familiarity with the subject matter in the collection. Secondly, the repositories reduced costs since paid staff was only required to oversee the work as opposed to conducting the work themselves. Finally, both institutions strengthened their relationships with the donor organizations which, in one case, led to increased financial donations. The authors also point to several challenges that must be considered when working with donors to appraise and process their collection material. As volunteers are donating their time, delays in their workflow may occur. In addition, the donors will probably require some initial training in the preservation and processing tasks specific to the repository.26

Besides journal articles and monographs, another source for examining the changing history of accessioning practices is SAA’s form manuals. The first, published in 1973 and prepared by the College and University Archives Committee, solicited examples of forms from 531 institutions. After collecting over 1,000 forms, the

committee selected and published 305 of the most representative, organizing them into fifteen groups. Of these, only two attempt to gather specific information from donors that could aid in the description of a collection. One, from Luther College, is a form letter which requests the recipient to supply the library with information entered into the form by the sender. The recipient is provided with a self-addressed stamped envelope and asked to check a box on the form if he or she lacks the information or does not wish to disclose it.\textsuperscript{27} The other example is an accession form from Queen’s University which includes space for birth and death dates, residence, and principal occupation.\textsuperscript{28}

Due to the first edition’s status as a “best-seller,” a revised manual was published by SAA’s Forms Manual Task Force in 1982, this time organized into five general categories.\textsuperscript{29} Only one form, the Acquisition Sheet and Instrument of Gift used by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, included a designated area for the donor to provide information about the collection. The form has space for the name of the creator, birthdate, death date, relationship to donor, positions held, and other information.\textsuperscript{30}

The latest edition, published both digitally and in print in 2002, was a joint endeavor of SAA and ARMA International. Thus, its scope was expanded to include forms related to records management. However, none of the forms provide space for information about the creator or contents of the collection which could be gathered from the donor and used in the description.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{28} College and University Archives Committee, \textit{Forms Manual}, 62.
\textsuperscript{30} Forms Manual Task Force, \textit{Archival Forms Manual},
As evidenced by the literature, accessioning has only come into focus as an activity separate from processing since the publication of Weideman’s article in 2006. Earlier literature often treats accessioning as the first step in processing and makes little comment on the role of donors in the transfer of materials to the archive.

Archivists’ predilection for forms is clear from SAA’s repeated publishing and updating of forms manuals. While these manuals provide examples of deeds of gift and transfer forms, no mention is made of documents used to gather contextual information about collections from donors.
Methodology

The Survey Population

This study was conducted using an online survey with the goal of providing a descriptive analysis of the current accessioning procedures at collecting repositories affiliated with American research universities. For the purpose of this study, American research universities were defined as university members of the Association of Research Libraries located in the United States as of January 2014. This definition created a list of 97 institutions (see Appendix A).

Determining which staff member at each institution should receive the survey was more difficult. Each library’s staff directory was reviewed with the aim of locating the person most likely to be in charge of accessioning archival material. Rarely was this obvious as very few libraries employ someone with the word “accession” in the job title. Thus, an employee with the title of curator or collecting archivist was typically selected. At some institutions job titles were very generic with multiple staff described as “archivist.” When this occurred, one person was arbitrarily chosen to receive the survey. Selecting the survey recipient was even more difficult at institutions housing multiple distinct collections, each with its own curator. In this instance the curator of the largest or flagship collection received the survey with the assumption that his or her responses would be indicative of the university’s overall policies.
All 97 survey recipients were sent an email on January 30, 2014 which described the purpose of the survey and explained how each recipient was selected. A link to the survey was provided at the end of the email. The recipient was asked to forward the email to the appropriate staff member if he or she was not the employee most knowledgeable about accessioning procedures. (See Appendix B for the survey recruitment email.) Non-respondents were contacted one week later with a reminder and the survey was closed on February 13, 2014.

Survey Questions

The survey instrument opened with an explanation of the purpose of the survey and instructions to restrict all answers to manuscript collections. Manuscript collections were defined as materials donated or sold to the repository by outside entities. Participants were instructed to exclude university archives transferred from departments within the institution.

Initial questions asked for the name of the institution, job title of the person primarily in charge of accessioning, and if that was the person completing the survey. Subsequent questions sought to collect information on the number of collections acquired each year and the repository’s use or non-use of a deed of gift. The heart of the survey asked the respondent about the institution’s accession records and donors’ involvement in generating collection description. Participants were also asked for the average length of time between accessioning and processing. Finally, respondents who were willing to be contacted with additional questions were asked for an email address. (See Appendix C for the full survey.)
Many of the questions in this survey were closed, offering the archivists few opportunities to explain their answers. However, several questions asked the participant to upload standard documents, such as a deed of gift or an accessioning manual. One of the last questions asked respondents to share any additional information about their institution’s accessioning process. The responses that this question elicited made clear many archivists’ discomfort at being asked to generalize or approximate. As one respondent noted, “The answer to any archival question is ‘It depends.’”

**Survey Analysis**

The research question around which the survey questions are organized essentially asks whether standardized methods are employed for accessioning manuscript collections and acquiring information about the collections from a donor. The hypothesis behind this survey is that codified accessioning guidelines combined with a greater reliance on donor knowledge can streamline processing and reduce the need for an archivist to thoroughly read and analyze a large quantity of collection material in order to produce useful description. In short, it is assumed that the efficiency with which a collection can be processed is a dependent variable explained to some degree by independent variables such as descriptive information collected from donors and details captured in the accession record.
Findings

The Respondents

Thirty-eight completed surveys were returned representing a 39% response rate. As none of the survey emails returned an “unknown sender” error, this response rate was calculated assuming that all of the surveys reached their intended recipients. Responses were received from 22 states and the District of Columbia.

When asked for the job title of the staff member primarily responsible for accessioning manuscript collections, answers varied wildly. Sixty-four percent of respondents selected “other” and wrote in the appropriate title while 18% indicated that this was a duty shared by more than one archivist. (See Appendix D for the list of job titles included in “other.”)

Table 1: Job Title of Staff Member Responsible for Accessioning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curator</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessioning Archivist</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing Archivist</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acquisitions

Respondents were asked to indicate the approximate number of new manuscript collections or additions to manuscript collections their repository acquired each year. The most frequently selected response was between ten and fifty. See Table 2 below for a complete breakdown of responses. An overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that less than 25% of their annually acquired manuscript collections are purchased while only two institutions report purchasing the majority of their materials. See Table 3.

Table 2: Approximate Number of Collections Acquired Annually

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 10 and 50</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 50 and 100</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 100</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Approximate Number of Collections Purchased from a Dealer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 25%</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 25% and 50%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 50%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Deeds of Gift

All repositories (n=36) have the donor sign a deed of gift when receiving a new manuscript collection. When asked to upload a copy, eighteen respondents did so. Overall, the deeds were remarkably similar legal instruments with the majority of repositories always or sometimes asking donors to transfer literary or copyright. At one institution, rights remain with the donor but the University is granted a nonexclusive right to authorize use for non-commercial research, scholarly, or other educational purposes pursuant to a Creative Commons Attribution, Non-commercial license. In only one instance does the deed of gift attempt to acquire information from the donor about the collection or creator and, in this case, only asks for the relationship of the donor to the creator.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accessioning Procedures

All collecting institutions (n=36) except one report that they have standard accessioning procedures. However, only 60% (n=35) have these procedures available in written form. At the remaining 40% they are verbally communicated to staff.
Ten respondents uploaded a copy of their institutions’ accessioning procedures. Those without written standards were asked to describe their procedures in a text box (see Appendix D for a complete list of responses). In many cases participants indicated that accessioning procedures are included in their repository’s processing manual.

At least ten repositories make use of the accessioning module in Archivists’ Toolkit while two employ Archon as part of their workflow. Universities that do not use either software application often record accession information in a spreadsheet or database.

Some institutions indicate that material is restricted until processed while others allow researchers access. Two repositories list the goals of accessioning in their manuals which can be particularly helpful in encouraging staff to focus on the desired outcome.

**Reliance on Donors**

Next, respondents were asked whether they attempt to gather specific information from donors when receiving a manuscript collection. Out of 37 responses, 86% answered yes. When asked if their institution seeks information from the donor that would lend context to the manuscript collection but may not be found within the material itself all but one respondent (n=37) answered affirmatively. However, over 76% of repositories gather this information verbally. For the eleven institutions that collect it in writing only three do so using a form. Of these three, two uploaded a copy of the form. One repository uploaded a second copy of the standard deed of gift. Incidentally, this is the university whose form includes a space for donor relationship to creator. The other form, provided by the Iowa Women’s Archive at the University of Iowa, is a two page
document titled Biographical Information Sheet which asks for extensive biological and
genealogical data about the subject’s parents, siblings, spouse(s), children, education,
occupation, childhood, and significant events or influences. Respondents are asked to
add more pages for additional comments. (See Appendix E for a copy of the form.)

Accessioning records are clearly useful resources for processing archivists as all
respondents except for one indicate that these records are referred to when arranging and
describing a manuscript collection (n=38). Unsurprisingly, the most important source of
information for processing a collection is the collection material itself. None of the
responding institutions rely on donor-provided information for the majority of the content in their finding aids.

Table 5: Percentage of Description from Donor-Provided Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 25%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 25% and 50%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 50%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Percentage of Description from Collection Material

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 25%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 25% and 50%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 50%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

32 Permission to identify and include this form was received from Kären M. Mason, Curator, Iowa
Women’s Archives, University of Iowa Libraries.
Slightly over half of respondents indicate that their institution occasionally asks donors to review the description of a manuscript collection while less than a quarter have ever asked a donor to write or be the primary author of the descriptive tool.

**Table 7: Donor Review of Manuscript Description**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, but less than 25% of the time</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, between 25% and 50% of the time</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes over 50% of the time</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 8: Donor Authoring of Manuscript Description**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, but less than 25% of the time</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, between 25% and 50% of the time</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes over 50% of the time</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Time between Accessioning and Processing**

The last metric sought was the approximate length of time between accessioning and processing of a collection. This is the question that most participants were hesitant to answer as reflected in the number of responses (n=34) and the content of the short answers at the end of the survey. (See Appendix D for the full content of short answer responses.) Responses varied widely with nearly one quarter of participants claiming that
there is a gap of over three years between the two activities. The most commonly chosen answer, with nine responses, was between one and two years.

Table 9: Time between Accessioning and Processing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 3 months</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 3 and 6 months</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 6 months and 1 year</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 1 and 2 years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 2 and 3 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 3 years</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is no time between accessioning and processing. Accessioning and processing occur simultaneously.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions

Processing methodology has received much attention in the archival literature. The publication of processing manuals has been common practice since the late 1970s. Since Greene and Meissner’s article was released ten years ago, processing has received renewed scrutiny. However, accessioning has not received the same attention. Though often lumped in with processing it is helpful to view this activity as separate. Instead of thinking of accessioning as the first step in processing it may be better understood as the gateway between donor and repository ownership. It is at this moment in time that the archivist has the opportunity to not only acquire the documents but also glean information about them. While it is certainly possible that the donor may know nothing about the contents or the creator, that is unlikely. The fewer collections a repository purchases, the more likely it is that the donor will have special knowledge of the collection. Since the majority of respondents state that most of their collections are not purchased, there is high potential for donor assistance.

It is clear from the survey results that a vast majority of repositories feel that donor-supplied information about a collection is helpful. However, very few gather such information using a standardized form. The archival profession prizes the use of forms as evidenced by the best-selling nature of SAA’s three forms manuals. Despite the importance of forms in many areas of the archival discipline they have not yet been widely implemented to solicit information from donors.
Though each collection is different, the use of a standard biographical information sheet like the one included in Appendix E is worth giving to most donors. Of course the collecting archivist must use his or her judgment. If a donor is suffering from memory loss, presenting such a form could provoke anxiety or be upsetting or the donor may supply incorrect information. In other instances, the archivist may realize that gathering contextual information from a certain donor would be more fruitful through a conversation or interview.

The profession has done an excellent job of streamlining processing workflow so that it is efficient and understood by all members on staff. It is now time to do the same for accessioning methodology by not only looking to donors but doing so in a uniform way. A consistent mode of documentation ensures that the processing archivist knows where to look for useful descriptive data and can successfully processes collections with efficiency.
Appendix A

List of Institutions Contacted to Participate in the Survey

University of Alabama
University at Albany, SUNY
University of Arizona
Arizona State University
Auburn University
Boston College
Boston University
Brigham Young University
Brown University
University at Buffalo, SUNY
University of California, Berkeley
University of California, Davis
University of California, Irvine
University of California, Los Angeles
University of California, Riverside
University of California, San Diego
University of California, Santa Barbara
Case Western Reserve University
University of Chicago
University of Cincinnati
University of Colorado Boulder
Colorado State University
Columbia University
University of Connecticut
Cornell University
Dartmouth College
University of Delaware
Duke University
Emory University
University of Florida
Florida State University
George Washington University
Georgetown University
University of Georgia
Georgia Institute of Technology
Harvard University
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa
University of Houston
Howard University
University of Illinois at Chicago
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Indiana University Bloomington
University of Iowa
Iowa State University
Johns Hopkins University
University of Kansas
Kent State University
University of Kentucky
Louisiana State University
University of Louisville
University of Maryland
University of Massachusetts Amherst
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
University of Miami
University of Michigan
Michigan State University
University of Minnesota
University of Missouri-Columbia
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
North Carolina State University
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Northwestern University
University of Notre Dame
The Ohio State University
Ohio University
University of Oklahoma
Oklahoma State University
University of Oregon
University of Pennsylvania
Pennsylvania State University
University of Pittsburgh
Princeton University
Purdue University
Rice University
University of Rochester
Rutgers University
University of Southern California
University of South Carolina
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Stony Brook University, SUNY
Syracuse University
Temple University
University of Tennessee, Knoxville
University of Texas
Texas A&M University
Texas Tech University
Tulane University
University of Utah
Vanderbilt University
University of Virginia
Virginia Tech University
University of Washington
Washington State University
Washington University in St. Louis
Wayne State University
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Yale University
Appendix B
Survey Recruitment Email

Dear Archivist:

My name is Sarah Bost and I am a second year MSLS student at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Information and Library Science. I am conducting research for my master’s paper which is on the subject of current archival accessioning procedures at manuscript collecting repositories associated with American research universities. As such, I am contacting a staff member at each of the Association of Research Libraries’ American university members to ask that he or she fill out a brief online survey estimated at 5-10 minutes.

Based on your library’s staff directory, I have identified you as the staff member most likely to be responsible for accessioning manuscript collections. If you are, I would very much appreciate it if you would take a few moments to fill out the survey at the link pasted below. If you feel that there is a staff member at your institution who has a more intimate knowledge of the accessioning procedures, please forward this email on to him or her.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or my advisor, Dr. Helen Tibbo (tibbo@ils.unc.edu) with any questions.

You are under no obligation to answer all questions included in the survey; simply click Next to skip a question. You may end the survey at any time.

Follow this link to the Survey:
Take the Survey

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:
https://unc.az1.qualtrics.com/WRAutdoorSurveyEngine/?SID=SV_8nZ8xKQLM1OnGrH&Preview=Survey;&_=1

Sincerely,

Sarah Bost
MSLS Candidate 2014, UNC-Chapel Hill
Graduate Assistant, North Carolina Digital Heritage Center
sjbost@live.unc.edu | 704.996.5147
Appendix C

Survey Instrument

Q1 INTRODUCTION While archival processing has received much attention in recent years, little research has been conducted on current archival accessioning methods. This survey aims to investigate accessioning practices of collecting repositories at American university members of the Association of Research Libraries. Please respond to all questions for manuscript collections ONLY. In this instance, manuscript collections are defined as those which are donated or sold to the repository by outside entities. Manuscript collections DO NOT include university archives transferred from departments within the university.

Q2 What is the name of the institution for which you are completing this survey? (ex. UNC-Chapel Hill)
_____________________

Q3 What is the title of the staff member at your institution who is primarily responsible for accessioning manuscript collections?
☐ Curator
☐ Accessioning Archivist
☐ Processing Archivist
☐ Other ____________________

Q4 Is the staff member who is primarily responsible for accessioning manuscript collections the person who is currently completing this survey?
☐ Yes
☐ No

Q5 Approximately how many new manuscript collections or additions to manuscript collections do you receive each year?
☐ Less than 10
☐ Between 10 and 50
☐ Between 50 and 100
☐ Over 100
Q6 Approximately what percentage of your new manuscript collections is purchased from a dealer each year (not purchased or received from the creator or a family member of the creator)?
   - Less than 25%
   - Between 25% and 50%
   - Over 50%

Q7 When receiving a new manuscript collection or an addition to an existing manuscript collection from a donor, does your repository have the donor sign a deed of gift?
   - Yes
   - No
   If No Is Selected, Then Skip To Does your repository have an alternate...

Q8 Does your deed of gift ask the donor to transfer literary rights or copyright to the repository?
   - Always
   - Sometimes
   - Never

Q9 Please upload a copy of your repository's standard deed of gift form.

Answer If When receiving a new manuscript collection or an addition to an existing manuscript collection from a donor, does your repository have the donor sign a deed of gift? No Is Selected

Q16 Does your repository have an alternate method for documenting transfer of ownership from the donor of the manuscript collection to the repository?
   - Yes
   - No

Answer If Does your repository have an alternate method for documenting transfer of ownership from the donor of the manuscript collection to the repository? Yes Is Selected

Q10 Please briefly describe the alternate method that your repository uses for documenting transfer of ownership from the donor of the manuscript collection to the repository.
Q11 Does your repository have standard procedures for accessioning a new manuscript collection or an addition to an existing manuscript collection?
- Yes
- No

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To Is there specific information that ar...

Q12 Are your standard procedures available in a manual or written documentation or are they verbally communicated to staff?
- Written
- Verbal

Answer If Are your standard procedures available in a manual or written documentation or are they verbally communicated to staff? Written Is Selected

Q13 Please upload a copy of your standard accessioning procedures.

Answer If Are your standard procedures available in a manual or written documentation or are they verbally communicated to staff? Verbal Is Selected

Q14 Please briefly describe your standard accessioning procedures.

Q15 Is there specific information that archivists at your institution attempt to gather from a donor when receiving a new manuscript collection or addition to an existing manuscript collection?
- Yes
- No

Q16 Do archivists at your institution ask the donor for information that would lend context to the manuscript collection or addition but may not be found within the material itself?
- Yes
- No
Answer: If there is specific information that archivists at your institution attempt to gather from a donor when receiving a new manuscript collection or addition to an existing manuscript collection? Yes Is Selected

Or do archivists at your institution ask the donor for information that would lend context to the manuscript collection or addition but may not be found within the material itself? Yes Is Selected

Q17: In what format is the information from the donor gathered?
- Verbally (the donor shares the information verbally and the archivist may take notes) (1)
- Written (the donor fills out a form or writes in essay format) (2)

If Verbally (the donor shares ... Is Selected, Then Skip To Do processing archivists refer to acc...

Q18: Does the donor fill out a standard form?
- Yes
- No

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To Do processing archivists refer to acc...

Q19: Please upload a copy of the form that the donor uses to communicate information about the manuscript collection.

Q20: Do processing archivists refer to accessioning records when arranging and describing a manuscript collection?
- Yes
- No

Q21: Approximately what percentage of description of most manuscript collections comes from information provided by the donor, either verbally or in writing? Description includes name of creator(s), administrative/biographical history, scope and content, custodial history, custodian or creator actions, and description of specific material within the collection.
- Less than 25%
- Between 25% and 50%
- Over 50%

Q22: Approximately what percentage of description of most manuscript collections comes from the collection material itself? Description includes name of creator(s), administrative/biographical history, scope and content, custodial history, custodian or creator actions, and description of specific material within the collection.
- Less than 25%
- Between 25% and 50%
- Over 50%
Q23 Are donors ever asked to review the description of a manuscript collection before the finding aid is published?
- Yes, but less than 25% of the time.
- Yes, between 25% and 50% of the time.
- Yes, over 50% of the time.
- Never.

Q24 Are donors ever asked to write or be the primary author of the description of a manuscript collection?
- Yes, but less than 25% of the time.
- Yes, between 25% and 50% of the time.
- Yes, over 50% of the time.
- Never.

Q25 Approximately how long is the period between accessioning and processing of most manuscript collections?
- Less than 3 months.
- Between 3 and 6 months.
- Between 6 months and 1 year.
- Between 1 and 2 years.
- Between 2 and 3 years.
- Over 3 years.
- There is no time between accessioning and processing. Accessioning and processing occur simultaneously.

Q26 Is there anything else that you would like for me to know about your accessioning process?

Q27 May I identify your institution along with your data in my published research?
- Yes
- No

Q28 May I contact you with any additional questions?
- No
- Yes (Please provide email address.) __________________________
Appendix D

Answers to Questions with Text Entry

Question 2: What is the title of the staff member at your institution who is primarily responsible for accessioning manuscript collections?

Acquisitions and Processing Archivist
Archivist
Archivist
Archivist(s)
Archivist (by area)
Archivist for Acquisitions
Assistant University Librarian for Special Collections, Archives, and Preservation
Collection Management Archivist--first incumbent to be hired shortly
Collection Management Specialist
Collections Archivist
Department Head
Department Head
Distributed responsibility; undertaken by collection group leaders who are all professional librarians
Field Archivist; however, many of our archivists accession manuscript collections
Head of Archives and Manuscripts
Head, Special Collections
Librarians--it isn't one person
Library Technician III
Manuscripts Librarian
Operations Manager
Registrar, Archivist
Shared duty of all staff
Special Collections Processing Coordinator
Technical Services Archivist

Question 14: Please briefly describe your accessioning procedures.

When a collection is brought into our repository, we immediately create both an accession record and a collection file. A deed of gift is prepared promptly upon receipt of the collection and sent to the donor. The accession record is entered into our Voyager database and also usually entered into Archon as well.

We are actually in the process of creating a manual that will cover acquisitions. Briefly, we attempt to survey a collection and cull unwanted materials before it is accessioned. This is not always feasible. Gift agreements are negotiated outside the department. We are only brought in if the donor requests something out of the norm. An accession record
is created in AT. For larger collections, we now create basic preliminary inventories that can be used by researchers. This also helps with later processing. Small collections are processed soon after acquisitions. Larger collections are placed in the backlog.

We create duplicate accession records in a three-ring binder with accession sheets, Archon, a spreadsheet, and then keep printouts and the original deed in an accession file.

Field representative acquires item and brings to archive/donor brings to archive. Items placed in 'accessions room' separate from other rooms in building. Items accessioned via customized Access database - this includes: being assigned an accession #; including all donor contact and bio info; box count; description of material; provenance; name of staff member who received item; group w/in archive to which it was assigned (manuscripts, A/V, rare books, etc.); any items transferred to other departments (A/V removed from manuscripts, for example.) Other info is included in a 'special notes' field as required. 2 copies of a standardized 'accession form' are printed. One placed in 'collection files' where all accessions, deeds, etc. are house. One boxed with the accessioned items and shelved until processing. Location is added to the record in database after shelving.

Physical receipt of collection; Deed of Gift preparation; appraisal and (sometimes) initial weeding in accordance with donor instructions for unwanted material; rehouse in archival boxes, label, and shelve (or move into processing queue immediately); create accession record in Archivists' Toolkit.

We have a custom, not a standard. Single items or small collections are placed on new acquisitions shelves for relatively quick cataloging. Large collections that are not being processed soon will get an accession number and shelved for later care.

Preliminary inventory, donor paperwork, fill out Accession Module in Archivists' Toolkit, shelve collection, make archivists aware of collection (if it's one that will be processed soon)

Fill out accession record state name & address of donor; title of collection (whose papers); extent; approximate dates; and description of material donated. Put summary of this information in our Accessions database. Label each box with name of donor, date received, and box number (e.g. box 1 of 3, 2 of 3, etc.). Mail copy of signed gift agreement to donor with acknowledgment letter.

The Assistant University Librarian is always brought in to discuss a potential accession to the manuscript collections. We meet with the potential donor to review the Deed of Gift document. Arrangements are made to either pick up or ship the collection to the Special Collections Department and a curator is assigned to create an accessions record on Archivists' Toolkit and execute the work to process the collection.

Record basic acquisition information (source, date, brief description of size & contents) in spreadsheet. Complete deed of gift & report gift to Development Office. If inventory
was not provided by donor, produce inventory. Schedule acquisition for full processing. If appropriate, work with Communications staff to publicize gift.

In process of getting a written procedure. Here are the bare bones:
Ensure that there is a certificate of gift or other agreement. Gather certificate, correspondence, and create control file. Complete donor information form and supply appraisal information to Libraries Advancement Office (for valuation) and Office of the Dean (for additional acknowledgment). Create data base record (details not supplied here). Rehouse as needed. Label boxes. Identify and move to shelving location. Amend accession record to reflect location. File control file.

**Question 26: Is there anything else you would like me to know about your accessioning procedures?**

Accessioning procedures are part of our processing manual.

All the archivists acquire and accession collections. Preliminary box level processing is completed by students. Higher level processing is conducted following a processing plan established by archivist and undertaken by an intern, graduate student or archivist.

Prior to 2007, when our department was part of another department, accession numbers per year were much lower. Since 2007, there has been a significant focus on acquisition of materials not necessarily present in the past. Our current practices are largely shaped by our use of Archivists' Toolkit, which was implemented in 2010. Therefore, our written documentation is part of larger manual (which I didn't upload, but would be happy to share). Prior to 2010, accessioning was done with a Word document template. Although we do not have a set list of questions for donors about materials they may be donating, we do not refuse any information donors may provide (though not all of it may make it to the finding aid).

I could not upload our accessioning procedures because it is in a wiki available to staff. Also, at times the answer I wanted to give was more nuanced than allowed, but I did choose the most appropriate in those situations.

Accessioning to processing time frames vary wildly, and did not feel comfortable selecting any of the provided answers. Processing prioritization is based not on a simple chronological accessioning of materials, but instead is based on a combination of factors including, but not limited to, significance, size, complexity, media, financial support, staffing, and time of accession.

I did not answer the question about when collections are processed as it is complicated. As I noted, small collections are processed soon after they are acquired. Larger collections will go into the backlog. Collections in the backlog are handled on a case-by-case basis. Several factors can determine when a collection is processed. Obviously, the importance of the collection and research demand for the collection play a part. Grants
and monetary donations play a role. We routinely ask donors for financial assistance. Other factors come into play. Additions are almost always processed soon after acquisition.

Many of my answers to the questions provided would have included all answers (either both ‘no’ and ‘yes’, or perhaps a wider variety of percentages.) Also, both the Registrar and myself hold primary responsible for accessions. I am only titled ‘archivist.’ Redundancy in accessioning allows for backup knowledge in case someone leaves the job permanently. Moving on: most archival processes are hard to quantify, and given in the case of our large institution it can be impossible in some cases. For example, the lag time between accessioning and processing varies widely. Like most archives, we have a large backlog (in our case, I would guess more than 6k linear feet.) Sometimes a collection gets turned around in a few weeks, sometimes a year, and in some cases I would not be surprised to find that we have decades-old collections that have not been addressed (although those would be few in number.) That being said, we process at a tremendous rate (not using MPLP) of hundreds of linear feet per year, and have for two years processed as many linear feet as we have accessioned. Lastly, a small portion of our collection level metadata is in part provided by our donors, when possible. That being said, the large number of donors we work with and collections that we receive mean that some collections will enter the building with little more than contact information and minimal provenance. And of course no donor is able to provide the final box count, administrative information, scope and content, series titles, LC subject headings, and the numerous other metadata that are included in a fully processed collection.

[Institution’s name] has just incorporated recommendations from the "Guidelines for Efficient Processing in the University of California Libraries," including the use of value scores to determine processing priorities. We do this during accessioning.

I did not answer the last question, because all apply. Sometimes a new acquisition is immediately cataloged--no significant accession work is done. Sometimes a new acquisition is processed within a few months, never getting an accession number. Sometimes a new acquisition is not cataloged for years and will probably receive an acquisition number.

While many of these questions are asked either/or, the reality is that not all accessions fall into either/or parameters. For example, some materials are processed at the time of accession (because the accession is small enough, or important enough, or is a rush, etc.), while other materials immediately go into backlog after accessioning (usually large accessions, but there are other factors as well). From there, some of these large accessions are processed as soon as someone is available to work on them, while others will stay in backlog for much longer. The factors determining processing have a great deal to do with content of the materials and processor availability. Working with donors during the accessioning process is also a bit more complex than many of these either/or parameters; in many cases, the answer to these questions is actually more than one of the tick boxes (such as gathering descriptive information from donors may likely happen with BOTH written narration from a donor and a verbal exchange--instead of either/or;
similarly, the division of how much of the descriptive content of a finding aid is donor-supplied vs. pulled from the materials is different for every single collection. And while we do not directly ask donors to author sections of a finding aid, we may use something they have written if appropriate; we may use a donor-supplied contents list if appropriate, etc.--but we may also opt NOT to use donor-supplied content and compose our own. It should be noted that [Institution’s Name] does not have any processing archivists; most processing is done by (non-library science/archives) student workers. Some library staff do a limited amount of processing, but processing is not the main responsibility of any staff member. We are also currently in the process of revising our deed of gift and re-writing all of our accessioning documentation, and as we have not agreed on "final" drafts yet, I'm not able to upload any documentation for you at this time.

Our accessioning process is somewhat complex and involves a number of people. Collections can arrive in a variety of ways, but we usually receive a gift form filled out by the staff member that accepted the collection. The gift form includes a very brief account of the material and the donor's name and contact information. Once we have that form, then we create a record in a paper book that includes the accession number (ex. 2014/01), collection title, extent (ex. 2.5 linear feet and 4 films), purchase number if applicable, and the manuscript number. We fill all of this information out on the Gift form as well and make a copy for the collection file. Our office administrator receives a copy of the Gift form and creates a deed of gift to be mailed to the donor. She is also responsible for ensuring that the signed deed of gift is sent to the development office for the University, along with any appraisals or tax forms. Once the donor returns the signed deed of gift, the original is placed in the collection file and the collection is moved to the processing queue. The accession information is also entered into Archivists’ Toolkit’s accession module. We have three different versions of the deed of gift based on the collection. One is a very simple historical manuscript instrument of donation that simply states that the ownership of the materials is being transferred to the University. The second is a more complex document that transfers ownership of the physical collection and intellectual property rights. The third is the most complex and involves transferring ownership of the physical collection and an outline of licensing rights that the donor is giving to the University, in this case the donor is maintaining the intellectual property rights. Our accession files are extremely important and are used by a wide variety of staff on a daily basis. We maintain electronic, paper, and legacy (index cards) accession records.

There are, of course, shades of gray that a survey can't capture; a few questions I would have liked to answer "it depends" or check both choices. Our curators handle most donor communications, and other technical services staff handle purchase paperwork; so I really focus on the description and physical housing of incoming collections. I will be very interested in what you learn! Hope you can make it public somehow. Thanks!

Our gift "template" is actually a series of paragraphs that can be employed in a modular form as needed in negotiating a gift instrument for a donor. (Most of the text is not employed but is available for use as needed). Our stance on securing physical ownership of donations is fairly strong; our stance on securing intellectual property rights in the
possession of the donor has traditionally been more relaxed but we are investing more of an attempt to secure those rights. In any case, we insist on latitude in order to have a clear right to present exemplars of the collection on our website pages and for publications issued by the [Institution’s Name].

You may identify my institution if you first contact me, because as you'll see below, the questionnaire required me to make categorical statements rather than answering in a way that reflects the diversity of practice inherent in dealing with archival collections. One size does not fit all. (Or, as you've probably heard: The answer to any archival question is ‘It depends.’) Do we ask donors to sign a new gift agreement? Not when we have one on hand, since all gift agreements are pretty recent ([Institution’s Name] was founded 21 years ago). Yes, if we think the new material requires a new agreement because it has special considerations of format, copyright, etc. In what format is information from donor gathered? Answer is both. Person accessioning the collection asks questions and takes notes at time of donation, or in initial phone calls, etc. But we have a biographical information form that donors fill out, too. This information provides context for the papers. How long is the period between accessioning and processing? Sometimes a week, sometimes years. Date of accession is only one consideration in when collections are processed. Other variables: researcher requests, size and complexity of collection, skills and knowledge of available processors, likely research use—all factors. Percent of description of manuscript collections from donor? Every collection is different: some collections would have no context without added information from donor, others are rife with such information. So these percentages are plucked from the air. Whenever possible, the information is taken from within the collections.

There are four of us who accession collections, so I tried to answer the questions from my point of view and workflow. I'm excited to see the results of this work, because as you say in the introduction, few studies look at the accessioning process.

Just as a point of clarification, many of our collections have NOT been donated to our institution. In many instances, we received them on deposit, so we don't technically own them, but they have never been demanded back by the donor either. Also, it is difficult to indicate, with the specificity that you ask, how long it takes to process a collection here after it has been accessioned. Sometimes our collections are processed right away and then sometimes they are shelved for some years. In the latter case, there are instances when we are waiting for more records before we begin processing a collection, which is one reason it may take an undetermined amount of time. That said, we have a backlog of collections that has gone unprocessed for many years, but in more recent years we have striven to process material more quickly after they have been accessioned as per some variation of MPLP methods.

We generally collect information from the donor via e-mail as well as verbally. The process is in flux; the [Institution’s Name] was created by combining two departments and we are still reconciling and creating new processes. Hope to hire a collection management archivist who will dedicate more time to accessioning rather than having a variety of staff work on their own records.
Appendix E

Biographical Information Sheet Submitted by Iowa Women’s Archive

IOWA WOMEN’S ARCHIVES
The University of Iowa Libraries
Iowa City, Iowa 52242-1420

Form filled out by_________________________________ Date_____________________

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION SHEET

Name___________________________________________________________

Date of birth_________________ Place of birth________________________________

Mother’s name_____________________________________________________

Mother’s date of birth________________ Mother’s date of death__________________

Mother’s place of birth______________________________________________

Mother’s occupation(s)______________________________________________

Father’s name______________________________________________________

Father’s date of birth____________ Father’s date of death___________________

Father’s place of birth_______________________________________________

Father’s occupation(s)_______________________________________________

Names & birthdates of siblings________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

If applicable:

Date of marriage____________ Spouse’s name____________________________

Spouse’s occupation(s)_______________________________________________

Children’s names and birth dates_____________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

[over]
Additional marriages (if applicable):

Date of marriage ____________ Spouse’s name __________________________
Spouse’s occupation(s) ____________________________________________

Children’s names and birth dates ________________________________

Education: (schools, training, college, as applicable):

Occupations: (include unpaid work such as child or elder care, homemaker, volunteer work)

Description of childhood:

Significant events/influences:

Add more pages for further comments.
Bibliography


