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A Holistic Approach to Designing Digital Archive Collections

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A Holistic Approach to Designing Digital Archive Collections

Dr. Natalie Edwards Bishop



GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY
ARCHIVES

Session Focus

- Managing Platforms & Digital Surrogates
- Digitization & Design Stumbling Blocks
- User-friendly digital archival design

Think holistically. This involves considering your role as the archivist in the workflow as well as creating a user-friendly experience for users.

Setting the Stage

Analog Archival Collections

“Analog” content is any archival medium produced non-digitally.

Analog collections are our wheelhouse - we know what to do with them.

We have long standing professional standards that inform how we handle **provenance, physical condition, housing, and preservation.**

Transitioning to Digital Archival Collections

Digital preservation is not just a couple of archivists, a scanner, and a dream.

Once an analog item is digitized, the digital space no longer requires us to consider that item’s physical housing, condition, material type, or preservation needs.

This opens up new **conversations** and **challenges** for how we treat digital spaces as a profession.

Platforms & Digital Surrogates

The “Processing Room” of the digital space



Digital Processing Room

Repository

The front-facing home of your digital archive.

User-driven design.



Workspace

The collaborative / preparatory space: metadata creation, repository build-out plans, finding aids, temporary file storage.

Archivist-driven design.



Storage Facility

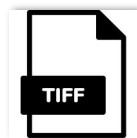
The “home base” for all preservation master scans.



Surrogates & Derivatives

- **Digital Surrogate** - “any digital copy of a record on any analog medium, such as paper, parchment, motion-picture film, analog audio, and analog video” (SAA, 2021)
- **Digital Derivatives** - a derivative file produced from your master digital surrogate file.

Consider **storage capacity**, **collection condition**, and **user need** when choosing your preservation master file and derivative files.



Hierarchy Is Essential

Analog Collections

- Collection
 - Series
 - Subseries
 - Item

Digital Collections

- Collection
 - Series
 - Subseries
 - Item

Organize your digital workspace to mirror the physical collection. In the “workspace” you are designing for yourself.

File Naming at the Item Level

What comes first in your hierarchy? How do you want your files to be displayed in your repository? Consistency is essential. Consider your end-user.

Material Type

Date

Title/Description

Photograph -

Correspondence -

News Clipping -

Deed -

1898 -

1777, August 15 -

Undated -

1872, November 11 -

William Putnam Family

Thomas Gilchrist

<Article Title>

Dr. William Perry Andrews

Photograph - 1898 - William Putnam Family

Deed - 1872, November 11 - Dr. William Perry Andrews

Repository Design

**Creating a User-Friendly Digital
Archive Space**



Bridge the Gap

As you design digitally, think about how you engage with users who visit your archives.

How do you help them use and understand archival collections?



Navigation & Exploration

- Google is often the main point of entry
- Create an easy-to-navigate structure

Users can “enter” our collection from any entry point. Create a pathway for them to access additional collection content.

This may mean breaking away from the physical arrangement of the collection and creating an arrangement designed for an online space.

Creating Digital Arrangement Conventions

- Reduce clicks and unbury content
- Logical combinations of Series and Subseries
- Think beyond the analog medium

Consider the flexibility of your digital surrogates (JPED, PDF).

[Zion Baptist Church Collection](#)

[Brittain Presbyterian Church Collection](#)

Provenance Matters

Tackling provenance within a collection can still be tricky. Sometimes there is an easy fix...other times, not.

[Fay Webb Gardner - Desk Contents](#)



Let's review some concepts

Digital Workspace

Consider your digital workspace/s. How will you use them? What is the capacity and function?

Reduce Clicks

Make logical changes to collection arrangement in the digital space to reduce clicks.

Don't bury your collection.

Hierarchy

Hierarchy is a huge part of digital design. Decide how files will be named and stick with it!

Create Pathways

Add cross links to help users discover and navigate to related parts of the collection.

Descriptive Titles

Name items so that the title clearly indicates what a user might find.

Build in the Archivist

Find creative ways to be "present" to the user in the digital collection.

Bridge the gap.

Thanks!

Any questions?

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- [Digital Commons @ GWU](#)
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