BRINGING COLLECTIONS TO LIGHT, PROJECT #RB-50072-09
INTERIM REPORT TO THE
NATIONAL HISTORICAL PUBLICATIONS AND RECORDS COMMISSION

PROJECT STAFF

The Briscoe Center hired Megan Mummey and Laurel Rozema into the NHPRC-funded half-time Archives Assistant positions. Ms. Mummey and Ms. Rozema already held ½ time Archives Assistant positions with the Briscoe Center, and their assumption of these positions offers us a quicker start to the grant, as well as continuity and fluidity to the project. In their permanent, Briscoe Center-funded, half-time positions, both Ms. Mummey and Ms. Rozema spend at least 10% of their time assisting Registrar, Evan Hocker, with basic processing of incoming archival collections.

Additionally, the Briscoe Center's Archives Intern, Chris Magee, spends at least 50% of his time (9-10 hours per week) working on this project. And temporary employee, Emily Rapoport, spent approximately 200 hours on the project during the fall semester.

Evan Hocker supervises Megan Mummey and Laurel Rozema, and accessions all incoming archival collections. He oversees the processing workflow, and ensures that all incoming collections receive basic processing so that our backlog of hidden collections does not continue to grow.

Stephanie Malmros, created and manages the Collection Survey Database, and supervises Mr. Hocker and Mr. Magee; she also supervised Ms. Rapoport during the fall 2009. She works closely with the project team to address issues that arise during the survey process.

Linda Peterson, the Briscoe Center's Photographs Archivist, spends at least 25% of her time incorporating basic processing practices into the photo archives unit. Between September 1, 2009 and February 28, 2010 she created 52 EAD records and 82 MARC records for existing "hidden" photograph collections.

We're adding additional staff to this project, and will account for them through cost sharing: a 19-hour per week intern, and a half- time archives assistant. These temporary positions will work exclusively on this NHPRC project through the end of the Briscoe Center's fiscal year, August 31, 2010. A more thorough discussion of this will take place in survey section.

Objective 1. Timely submission of complete reports and three copies of grant products as specified in NHRPC guidelines and the grant notification letter.

First interim report will be submitted on or before March 31, 2010. This report covers grant activities for September 1, 2009-February 28, 2010.

Objective 2. To manage new accessions more efficiently and prevent future backlog, prepare and make available A Guide for Donors to instruct donors of the Center's needs with regards to donated collections.

Our first step was to implement a completely revised accession database system. We modified our accession database fields to include language and data relevant to MARC cataloging and EAD mark-up. The goal was to capture MARC and EAD-relevant data in the very first assessment of an incoming collection, thus streamlining the process and eliminating duplication of work. We added MARC-related fields for main entry <100>, <110>, physical description <300>, restrictions <506>, content summary <520>, biographical note <545>, and various types of subject entries <600>, <610>, <650>, <651>, as well as the appropriate language fields and origin fields. The new field format also includes the corresponding EAD tags for each entry, such as <userestrict>, <accessrestrict>, <physdesc>, <scopecontent>, <bioghist>, <persname>, <corpname>, <geogname>, <subject>, etc. We have found that is it much easer and more efficient to begin the cataloging process at the very first stage of accessioning.

The second and most important step was to make a steadfast commitment to creating basic MARC and EAD records for every new accession. Indeed this change was one of our most daunting challenges considering the sheer volume of new material that we must absorb each year. To force ourselves to comply with this new mandate we drastically altered our workflow so that new materials cannot physically be moved from the new accession receiving area to a permanent archives shelf location *until* basic MARC and EAD records are complete. By implementing a physical barrier, rather than merely a policy barrier, we have had remarkable results. Since adopting our new workflow in September 2009 we have been hovering around a 93% completion rate for new accession MARC and EAD records. The remaining 7% represent collections with special considerations and they are being held temporarily while we resolve issues such as deeds of gift, appraisals, special donor requirements, or environmental quarantine for mold or insects. The strict space limitation in our receiving area is such that all new acquisitions, even those with special problems, will not languish for an extended period because the space simply will not accommodate them.

Work on the Guide for Donors will commence during the second year of the project.

Objective 3. Prioritize which 1500 of the estimated 4,500 hidden collections held by the Center will receive basic processing through the use of a collections survey and newly developed Preservation Assessment tool.

Survey

The collection survey portion of the project was slated for completion in the first three months of the grant period by the two half-time project archivists. However, progress on the survey has required more time than anticipated. As of the writing of this report, the survey is 89% complete, with 780 of 6971 collections left to survey. At the beginning of April an additional archives intern and an additional half-time project archivist will join

the project on a temporary basis (until August 31, 2010). With these additions, we expect to complete the collection survey by the beginning of May.

During the summer of 2009, using the PACSCL survey database as a model, Ms. Malmros created a FileMakerPro Collection Survey Database to capture and utilize data gathered during the survey. Archives staff incorporated data from two previous surveys into this project's Collection Survey Database. This information included the following: data from a 2005 survey of the Briscoe Center's printed finding aids, which sought to determine what collections had no EAD nor/or MARC record; and data from a 2008 survey of the Briscoe Center's Accessions database, which sought o determine which accessions remain completely unprocessed.

Project staff spent most of the first two weeks cleaning up the imported data in the database. The 2008 survey, in particular, often included multiple entries for a single collection (because of multiple accessions for a given collection) and sometimes the collections in the 2005 and 2008 surveys overlapped, which also created multiple entries for one collection. Project staff consolidated the records so that each collection would have only one entry in the Collection Survey Database. Concurrently, our temporary staff member searched for each collection on the Texas Archival Resources Online (TARO) and updated the survey accordingly to note whether or not an EAD record existed, and if so what components (Scope Content Note, Biographical/Historical Note, Subject Headings, Inventory) were present in the record. She also searched for each collection on the University Libraries' online catalog, and noted whether or not a MARC record existed (if one was not already noted in the survey).

As the actual survey commenced, project staff encountered numerous unanticipated issues: inconsistencies in conventions for collection titles and names; collections for which no holding record exists; holding records with no apparent corresponding collection; holding records for vertical files, individual broadsides, rare books, ephemera, and other material which had been previously separated to the Briscoe Center's Texas Collection Library; and multiple collections sharing one holding record. Staff also occasionally found collections on the Briscoe Center's master shelflist (which lists each box on the shelves in our archives stacks) that had no description of any kind and no holding record.

These discoveries gave us a new understanding of the content of our holding records. At the outset of the project, we believed that our holding records included one file for each archives or manuscripts collection. However, while talking with a retired, long-time employee of the Briscoe Center about some of the inconsistencies project staff were encountering, we learned that our holding records as they exist now were pulled together in the 1970's and include not only the administrative records for collections held by the Briscoe Center, but also correspondence files (some dating back to the 1920's and 1930's) that document communication with patrons and potential donors. The existence of the correspondence files explained many of the holding records for which we could find no associated collection material.

During the first months of the survey project staff created several tools to deal with and sometimes correct (as needed, and if it wouldn't take too much time) the inconsistencies and issues they were encountering. They created a workflow document to ensure that everyone working on the survey followed the same steps; a Holding Record Tracker spreadsheet to keep track of holding records for non-archival material and/or correspondence files (they are not included in the Collection Survey Database); a Problem Collections spreadsheet to keep track of problematic issues that need to be addressed, such as collection material that can't be found, collections with no holding records, discrepancies in locations, etc.; a standardized Memo to the Holding Record form; and an Archives & Manuscripts Renaming/Merging form.

Even though the survey has taken much longer than anticipated, it has proven to be a very illuminating and worthwhile undertaking. We have learned a great deal about our collections beyond what we expected. The documentation that we now have will allow us to address not only our hidden and unprocessed collections in a more organized fashion, but also to address other issues such as holes in our documentation, potential confusion created by previous recordkeeping systems, and standardization of collection titles. In hindsight, a test survey of a small sample of holding records to determine a more precise estimate of the time this particular type of survey might take, rather than extrapolating from other in-house surveys with some similar elements, would likely have led to a more accurate project timeline.

We approached our survey from a different direction than other similar surveys (such as the PACSCL survey), surveying our collections from the starting point of our holding records (administrative records) rather than with the boxes on the shelves. Because our collections are housed in multiple locations (from shared high density library storage, to stacks adjacent to our archives processing workspace) and portions of one collection may be stored on multiple floors or in multiple locations throughout Austin, this method makes sense for us, and has worked well so far. However, during the course of the survey, as mentioned above, project staff have encountered some collections that are accounted for only on our shelflist and have no holding record. Therefore, once the survey is completed, we will take the additional step of comparing the shelflists for our multiple storage areas to the survey database to ensure that we've accounted for all of our archival collections.

Preservation Assessment Tool
Brenda Gunn surveyed the SAA preservation section listserv for examples and received copies of and referrals to several articles and in-house tools. The responses I received were minimal, and the followup conversations with those members of the listserv let me to believe that this typed of tool is not readily available. Ms. Gunn also acquired a tool developed by Sarah Canby Jackson and Julie Holcomb in 2000 to assess conservation problems in manuscript collections. Ms. Jackson who is the archivist for the Harris County Texas (Houston), told me that she has used this tool consistently since its inception, with only a few adaptations. Additionally, Ms. Gunn has talked with conservator Karen Pavelka, about helping the Briscoe Center with developing this tool. Ms. Pavelka is a lecturer in the University of Texas' Preservation and Conservation

Studies Program within the School of Information and on the Board of Directors for the American Institute of Conservators.

Objective 4. Prepare MARC records for the 1,500 collections and contribute these to OCLC and UT Libraries local online catalog.

Even though the survey portion of the project has taken longer than expected and the prioritization and creation of EAD and MARC records for 1500 collections has been delayed, we expect that the added efforts of our temporary project staff will help get the project timeline back on track. As a result of our presentations to classes in the School of Information, we also have student volunteers ready and waiting to help with creating new EAD and MARC records. In addition, while the survey has been underway, our IT staff has been upgrading computer workstations in our Archives Unit so that individual workstations (MACs) have dual boot capability and can run Oxygen on the MAC platform and Connexion on the Windows platform. This added capability means that staff and volunteers can create both EAD and MARC records at their own workstation rather than having to wait for an opportunity to use one of two dedicated PC workstations that are shared by all archives staff and volunteers. As a result we can now accommodate more staff and volunteers, who can all be working on EAD and MARC records at the same time.

Despite the fact that the survey process is incomplete, Briscoe Center staff made progress on Objective 4: Linda Peterson created 82 MARC records for hidden photograph archives; and a temporary employee, Lauren Algee, created 50 MARC records for her project focusing on the Briscoe Center's energy history collections. These records have been uploaded to OCLC and the UT Libraries online catalog.

Objective 5. Prepare EAD records for the 1,500 processed collections and contribute these to the Texas Archival Resources Online (TARO).

See discussion above concerning the delay in selection of the 1,500 collections. However, Linda Peterson created 52 EAD records for hidden photograph collections, while Lauren Algee created 36 EAD records for her energy history collections. These EAD files now are part of the Texas Archival Resources Online website.

Objective 6. Promote the use of the project's method by posting the Guide for Donors, the grant's interim narrative and other relevant reports and updates on the Center's website.

A space on the Briscoe Center's website is in the planning stages and will be implemented during the upcoming quarter. Stephanie Malmros has been identified as the administrator for this project website and will be responsible for uploading the required reports and updates.

Objective 7. Promote the availability of the collections through an announcement on the Center's website, press release in a newsletter, at least two presentations made

to a local community organizations, professional groups, or schools, and messages posted to at least three list-servs.

Stephanie Malmros, Evan Hocker, and Megan Mummey have discussed the project with two different graduate student classes in the University of Texas at Austin's School of Information during a presentation on EAD and during a tour of the Briscoe Center during which discussions of administrative issues and challenges offered an appropriate opportunity for promoting Basic Processing and this project in particular.

Associate Director Brenda Gunn has begun work with the Briscoe Center's web staff to create a web space on which we can promote the project, as well as announce the availability of the collections as MARC records are uploaded to OCLC and EAD finding aids are uploaded to TARO.

The Briscoe Center's exhibits intern created a project sign for posting in the Center's reading room. A copy of the sign is attached.