

Official Publications at Texas A&M University: A Case Study in Cataloging Archival Material

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Abstract

Institutional reorganization and staffing changes at Texas A&M University's Cushing Library, which houses the university's archives, made necessary the cataloging of a substantial number of publications produced by different university agencies and departments, publications which had previously been largely inaccessible. The authors designed and implemented a plan to catalog thousands of pamphlets, reports, newsletters, conference proceedings and other material; a project that resulted in increased exposure and usage. This article outlines the development and ongoing refinement of the project. Undertaken in a cooperative spirit aimed at creating an integrated catalog of information resources, this project illustrates ways in which local practices can be improved through the use of technology.

Institutional archives inevitably acquire published materials as part of the records of their institution. The best way to provide intellectual access to these materials, which are in many ways more similar to library materials than archival materials, is problematic, however. The staff of the archives of Texas A&M University developed a plan for cataloging a large body of diverse university publications emanating from many different units within the university. This article will review the background and execution of this project in the hope that it may prove useful to other institutional archives seeking to gain better intellectual control over their publication collection.

Literature Review

The classic literature of archival management is largely silent when it comes to handling published material and what it does say is often inconsistent. Hilary Jenkinson in *A Manual of Archive Administration* acknowledges the existence of printed matter in archives and discusses the difficulty in precisely defining a

“document” given the many different formats and objects which can be used to convey information.¹ However, he makes no special provisions for dealing with printed material; but rather, he sees it as a subset to the larger body of “documents.”

Writing specifically about government documents, Margaret Cross Norton noted, “In no other field do archival and library interests more overlap than in that of public documents.”² She described procedures in the Archives Division of the Illinois State Library, where two copies of such public documents could be retained, an official copy with the archives of the department which issued it and a second copy as part of “what is known as the document archive.”³ In *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques*, T. R. Schellenberg suggested that “library techniques of cataloging and indexing . . . can be applied, with some modification, to special types of materials that consist of discrete items, such as maps, charts, motion picture films, still pictures, and sound recordings.”⁴

In *The Management of Archives*, Schellenberg acknowledges the historical relationship between the development of library and archival methodology, stating “since librarians have often interested themselves in the development of the archival profession, archivists should reciprocate and interest themselves in library techniques.”⁵ However, he does make a distinction between archival techniques, which are mainly related to records, and library techniques, which mainly relate to publications.⁶ Schellenberg also makes the distinction between publications and records, stating “the techniques that are applicable to publications are not applicable, without modification, to records,”⁷ and underscores the differences in their manufacture, subject matter, uniqueness, and use. While he explicitly states the maxim “archival principles and techniques should be applied to records that are deposited in libraries,”⁸ he does not state that publications deposited in archives should be handled using library methods.

Clearly, the literature of archival theory has mostly been concerned with the large, organic collections generated by bodies in the course of their business. Even the Society of American Archivists, in its Code of Ethics for Archivists, states that archivists “establish intellectual control over their holdings by describing them in finding aids and guides to facilitate internal controls

¹ Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration*, rev. ed. (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co, 1937), 5.

² Thornton W. Mitchell, ed., *Norton on Archives: The Writings of Margaret Cross Norton on Archival and Records Management* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975), 98.

³ Mitchell, *Norton on Archives*, 101.

⁴ T. R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 24.

⁵ T. R. Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 4.

⁶ Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives*, 4–5.

⁷ Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives*, 67.

⁸ Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives*, 69.

and access by users of the archives.”⁹ The commentary that follows this point further states, “description is a primary responsibility and the appropriate level of intellectual control should be established over all archival holdings.” The emphasis has been on providing control over collections, rather than items, as is traditionally the case in library practice.

In recent years, the archival community has given much attention to the idea of adapting standard bibliographic cataloging processes in order to describe the kinds of materials often held by archives and other depositories. This adaptation has become increasingly common in recent years, as the special MARC AMC format was eliminated in favor of a single bibliographic format for MARC records that describes all formats of materials and the underlying and unifying principles that can be used to describe both published and unpublished materials. The introduction of Encoded Archival Description as an electronic standard for display of finding aids on the World Wide Web has not diminished the importance of bibliographic cataloging, especially in institutions with collections including archives, published material, and other formats. Publications such as Steve Hensen’s *Archives, Personal Papers and Manuscripts*¹⁰ serve as useful guides for those who are unfamiliar with cataloging conventions and have very specific, institutional needs in handling archival or manuscript collections.

Nonetheless, even as archivists embrace the practice of cataloging their unpublished collections, less attention has been paid to what other types of materials they may wish to catalog. For professionals who historically have little experience in cataloging, learning to provide standardized access to published materials in accordance with cataloging conventions may be just as challenging, if not more so, than adapting those conventions to serve the archival community.

Therefore, a general knowledge of cataloging practice is essential in tackling a project such as that at Texas A&M. Standard sources include *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules*¹¹ and the documentation for whatever database system or utility is being used. In addition, standardized thesauri to provide headings for subjects and forms are just as essential, if not more so, in cataloging archival collections.

Background

For four decades, the University Archives at Texas A&M functioned as a department within the administrative purview of the university library. At most,

⁹ Available on the SAA’s website at <http://www.archivists.org/governance/handbook/app_ethics.html>.

¹⁰ Steven L. Hensen, *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts: A Cataloging Manual For Archival Repositories, Historical Societies, and Manuscript Libraries*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1989).

¹¹ *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules*, 2nd ed., 1988 revision (Chicago: American Library Association, 1988).

its staff consisted of two archivists, two clerical staff, and multiple student assistants who maintained the archives, assisted researchers, and processed collections as time permitted. Collections were accessed by location, which was recorded in a card catalog, or by the extensive corporate memory of the archivists and staff. This system worked satisfactorily for the majority of the archives' holdings, but there were exceptions, which caused frequent access problems and great frustration for staff and library users.

One such exception was a collection of pamphlets, newsletters, progress reports, and other publications that were published by the different departments, colleges and University System components that make up Texas A&M. Known to staff members as the "official publications" of the university, this collection was housed in five-inch archival boxes and arranged alphabetically by the name of the originating agency or the title of the publication. While this arrangement seemed straightforward to those who created it in the early years of the university archives, it was far from transparent to any newcomers, and as a result access suffered. Additionally, departmental and agency name changes, the discontinuation of publications, publication title changes, series numbering changes, and multiple publications with the same title (such as the ever-popular *Annual Report*) complicated the system and caused filing problems. These filing problems multiplied over the years, making the collection difficult to use.

Factors That Led to the Cataloging Project

In 1993 there was an institutional reorganization that merged the University Archives with the Special Collections Department. In anticipation of the renovation of the building which held the archives, its most heavily used materials were moved to the space that housed the Special Collections Department, and the remaining materials were moved to an offsite storage facility. The merger and move immediately created a space problem. Better organization and arrangement of the collections became a priority, not only to make the most efficient use of the limited, easy-access space, but also to give the merged staff of the newly created Cushing Library a better idea of their combined holdings.

As part of the goal of organizing and gaining control over the newly merged collection, it was decided that bibliographic records would be added to the library's on-line system (NOTIS) for those materials that were not already cataloged in the system. Because of a relatively constant cataloging staff in the Special Collections Department and a number of retrospective conversion projects, the majority of the book collections were cataloged. Neither the archival and manuscript collections, nor the published materials and other types of documents housed in the former Archives had ever been cataloged, and therefore, records for them did not exist in the library's shared catalog.

The “official publications” of the University, which were requested by users in the library’s reading room on a daily basis, seemed like an obvious place to begin the cataloging process, and a new sub-collection (the Texas A&M University Collection, coded TAMU) was created to receive them. These publications were heavily requested by patrons, poorly organized because of the filing problems mentioned above, and also occupied huge amounts of shelving. In addition, unlike cataloging archival collections, creating and editing records for the serial and monographic publications of the university would be familiar work for the cataloging staff and would require no special training.

Steps in the Process

The first step in cataloging the university publications was the close examination of the over six hundred five-inch boxes of materials. To gain space and achieve a sense of the scope of the project, the contents of boxes filled with fewer than five items or issues were removed from their boxes, given accession numbers, and added to a searchable Microsoft Access database created by the staff for this project. Each piece was given an accession number and a brief record, so that the originating body, title, or year (for serials, reports, etc.) could be searched. This database was originally located on one computer for staff use, but with the implementation of a library-wide LAN, it became accessible to multiple staff users. Eventually it was converted into a Web-based database for both staff and patron use.

This was merely a temporary measure undertaken by archives staff until a cataloging plan could be developed. This separation, begun in the summer of 1996, resulted in two sets of materials: the serials, or Group A, and the other titles, Group B. The serials in Group A, were housed in five-inch boxes, consisted of many issues or volumes of the same title, and had no on-line access until cataloging. Group B, which was accessible to the staff through the in-house database, consisted of short-runs or single issues of serials, monographic series, and individual monographs. Although no exact statistics were kept, it is estimated that there were approximately four hundred serial titles in Group A and close to five thousand titles in Group B.

At one point, the suitability of these materials for a retrospective conversion project was discussed. Since many of the titles were extremely local in nature, however, the likelihood of an outside vendor finding bibliographic records for obscure titles such as departmental newsletters was not promising. In addition, the staff of the official archives of the university, able as they were to consult historical sources and corporate memory, seemed much better suited to solving problems of changing agency names or uncertain publication dates than an outside source.

A rare surplus of student labor in the Cushing Library’s cataloging unit allowed preliminary searching to begin. Group A and Group B titles were

searched both in the library's local on-line catalog, NOTIS, and, if records were not in the catalog, in OCLC. Many of the titles initially searched were in fact in NOTIS, as they were held by the main library or the library's Texas documents collection. When bibliographic records were found in other library collections, the student assistants were able to simply add the archives' copy as an added copy. Of course, not all of the materials in the archives were "duplicates;" the university archivists actively pursued these publications for decades, and many that they found were never part of the Texas documents depository program or any other widespread distribution plan. In fact, as the catalogers began to "track down" the information needed to properly catalog the items, they found that even some of the corporate bodies responsible for the creation of the publications did not maintain older publications. For this reason, accurately representing the archives' holdings on the library system became even more important. The TAMU collection copy would not circulate outside of the Cushing Library reading room, and would therefore be permanently available to document the history of the university.

The first materials tackled were the long runs of serials in Group A. Most of these documents had been in publication for decades and were relatively consistent in nature; most of them originated from the larger agencies affiliated with the university and the TAMU System, such as the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station (TAES), Texas Agricultural Extension Service (TAEX), Texas Engineering Experiment Station (TEES), Texas Engineering Extension Service (TEEX), and the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI). Cataloging copy was readily available for these titles as they were broadly distributed both in and beyond Texas A&M University. Therefore, student assistants simply added another holdings statement to the system record, marked publications with a common call number for the entire serial, recorded volume holdings according to the Z39.71 MARC for Holdings Data standard, and sent them to the stacks for shelving.

The student assistants were also able to isolate those titles that needed to be handled by staff catalogers. These titles were transferred to catalogers for creation, enhancement or upgrading of OCLC records as needed. Usually record improvement involved adding a Library of Congress call number and occasionally editing corporate body names to reflect the proper form. A decision was made early on to classify materials with their subject matter as much as possible, since the LD5309 range (set aside in the LC classification scheme for Texas A&M University) was already "crowded" with histories, pictorial works, and other books and serials relating to the entire university. This meant that a newsletter dealing with an academic department would be classified with the matter of the discipline (and often further classified by geographic area) rather than with the larger university body. While more time consuming initially, this made it possible to avoid extremely long and confusing call numbers which would have made accurate shelving and retrieval of items much more difficult.

During the summer of 1997, four serial titles from Group A, comprising together 416 total pieces, were added to the catalog.

A small percentage of the titles from both Groups A and B did not have matching copy in NOTIS or OCLC, and so required time-consuming original cataloging. Contrary to the system that had existed in the archives, where changing names of bodies or even changing titles were simply ignored in what was hoped would be a continuous filing arrangement based on the original name, corporate body names had to be handled very precisely in the cooperative bibliographic cataloging environment. The Texas A&M Libraries had recently become participants in NACO (the name authority program component of the Library of Congress' Program for Cooperative Cataloging), which allows member institutions to contribute authorized forms of names to the larger national authority database for shared use among libraries. It was clearly to the advantage of both the library and the larger library world for Cushing to assign authorized headings for those bodies within our university system. Because of frequent name changes and reorganizations among departments and bodies, the authority control process quickly became the most time-consuming part of cataloging the publications.

The second phase of the project addressed the Group B publications, which had been given brief database records. A different methodology was applied because these titles were in no specific order and included both serial and monographic works. A trained student assistant was able to sort through many of the publications and find longer runs of serials or other similar pieces. For the sake of morale, these long runs were tackled first, as many shelves of items could be completely cataloged and processed with little effort. In addition, the somewhat arbitrary test of permanence was applied in the initial searching, as experience had shown us that titles with hard covers or glue bindings were more frequently cataloged in OCLC than those more ephemeral pieces in spiral bindings or staples. In the midst of the process, dozens of boxes of university publications were located at our off-site storage facility, given short database records, and added to Group B.

Results of the Project

As Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate, a huge increase was made in the volumes being cataloged in the first two years of the project. The Texas A&M Collection was a very high priority during this time for the cataloging staff, not only because of its high demand, but also because many of the library's book backlogs were eliminated and skilled student workers were available to work on the project.

The two phases, searching Group A and Group B, are currently being undertaken simultaneously. What seemed like an easy starting project to begin the arduous task of organizing and providing access to the entire archives col-

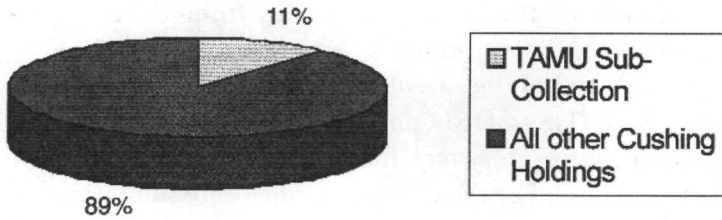


FIGURE 1. Volumes Cataloged 1997

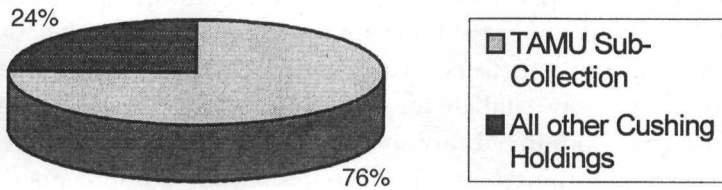


FIGURE 2. Volumes Cataloged 1998

lection has turned out to be much more challenging than anticipated. In addition, new staff responsibilities and turnover among student assistants has reduced the time available to work on this project, because keeping up with new acquisitions is the top priority of the cataloging unit. As of 1999, we expect both phases to continue as a long-term project, although the serials in Group A are much nearer to being completed than the Group B titles. Approximately one hundred Group A titles remain to be cataloged, although the actual number of issues represented by these titles is not known. The “temporary” database of Group B currently holds over 4,300 records for uncataloged titles. Although titles are removed from the database as they are cataloged, the database will most likely continue to be necessary for the near future.

If this project were to be redone, we would make two major changes to our process. First, exact statistics would be kept, rather than recording items cataloged as part of our normal cataloging statistics, so that we could isolate the progress of this project from other workflow. Additionally, we now realize that while the separation of some of the publications into Group B and their entry into the temporary database did provide reliable electronic access to the holdings at a time when the archives lacked the cataloging staff to do it “properly,” it was probably not the most efficient way to handle the material for this type of project. The amount of time spent entering records into the database could have been used more efficiently to simply enter brief records into the library’s NOTIS system. Confusion results from having to check in two places to find a particular title.

Nonetheless, even in its incomplete status, this exercise has been very helpful to our patrons and to the archives. The improved access to holdings information has provided a much clearer picture of the holdings of the entire university,

and it has allowed our users to search our holdings remotely, which has proven to be valuable. In the past, researchers would become frustrated if after following security and registration procedures necessary to enter the library they were informed that the library did not possess the particular issue of the serial they needed. That information is now readily available for the cataloged titles.

Another result of the project is an increase in staff knowledge about this highly used collection. Initially, after the departmental merger, only a few staff members could be counted on to decipher the filing system used for the official publications. Now, even cataloging personnel, who had previously worked exclusively with the book collections, can be counted on to locate materials because of their greater familiarity with the collection, the institutional structure of the university, and its publishing history.

Physical access to materials was improved; holdings were compressed and now occupy much less space. A consistent filing order (LC call number) allows like materials to be filed together. Although Cushing is a closed-stack library, it is convenient for the staff to find similar materials close together, and it increases the chances that serendipity will point us to new resources, both for our patrons and ourselves.

Finally, usage of these materials has increased, even over the short time span examined. Figures 3 and 4 reflect the greatly increased usage for Texas A&M materials (the TAMU collection) as a portion of the total circulation of the Cushing Library collections. As time passes, researchers both within and outside the university will learn that the official archives of the university houses many University System publications and it is likely that usage will continue to increase.

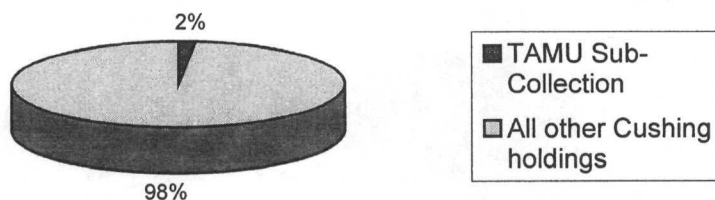


FIGURE 3. Volumes Circulated 1997

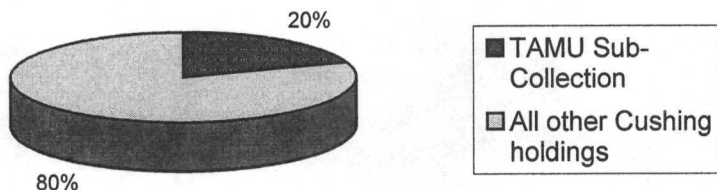


FIGURE 4. Volumes Circulated 1998

Conclusion

The multiple-year project to catalog official publications at Texas A&M University's Cushing Library has proven to be a challenge worth undertaking. Over the long term, the effort made to integrate these holdings into the entire library system's catalog will prove invaluable. While technology continues to change the way librarians and archivists think about providing access to the collections in their care, the introduction of bibliographic records for material that before had only incomplete manual access will ensure that these records continue to be migrated and transformed along with the entire library catalog. Further progress toward the goal of an integrated catalog can only be beneficial to our patrons and our staff.