# More Than a Project: Case Studies on the Practice of Retrospective Accessioning

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**ABSTRACT**

This article supplements the professional discourse on accessioning and demonstrates the opportunities, benefits, and challenges of retrospective accessioning in different institutional contexts. Retrospective accessioning is a specific approach to archival collection management that seeks to establish baseline intellectual and physical control over archival material that lacks foundational controls typically required by most modern archives programs. Accumulations of such material are known as accessioning backlogs. In light of the resourcing challenges currently felt throughout the profession, it is prudent to consider retrospective accessioning as an effective tool for mitigating the varied operational effects of accessioning backlogs. This article untangles the origins and effects of accessioning backlogs and demonstrates the pragmatic benefits that retrospective accessioning can bring to a repository. Case studies from University of California, Los Angeles; University of California, Santa Cruz; and Wake Forest University show that retrospective accessioning can be successfully employed to enhance collection management conditions at a range of repositories. They also indicate that retrospective accessioning methods have evolved over time and reveal this work as a specialized and functional praxis within the archival profession. These case studies indicate that retrospective accessioning offers a proven way to reveal, understand, and pay down archival debt incurred by deferring the essential functions of accessioning, reappraisal, and deaccessioning over time.

 

**KEY WORDS**

Academic libraries, Accessioning, Collection management, College and university archives, Reappraisal

Retrospective accessioning is becoming more common as archival repositories address accessioning backlogs of all shapes and sizes. Archival holdings continue to grow on a national scale, while physical and digital storage spaces become increasingly inadequate and staffing resources fail to keep pace with demand. We therefore have a professional responsibility to attend to accessioning backlogs and consider emerging methods for ethically stewarding these materials. In light of the resourcing challenges currently felt throughout the profession, it is prudent to consider retrospective accessioning as an effective tool for mitigating the varied operational effects of accessioning backlogs.

This article features the stories of three archivists from American universities who are actively engaged with retrospective accessioning projects. At the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Accessioning Archivist Jasmine Larkin leads an intentionally designed, holistic retrospective accessioning project that is still in progress, working to improve intellectual and physical control as well as reappraise and deaccession. At the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC), Supervisory Archivist Kate Dundon surveyed unaccessioned physical and born-digital materials before designing a multi-pronged retrospective accessioning effort that helped to improve practices and policies for the overall stewardship of collections materials in all formats. At Wake Forest University (WFU), Collections Archivist Stephanie Bennett both benefited from and navigated a retrospective accessioning project begun in 2010 that never officially ended; the work, then considered more of a backlog project, has improved processing considerably while also complicating it on a practical level. These case studies supplement the professional discourse on accessioning and demonstrate the opportunities, benefits, and challenges of retrospective accessioning in various institutional contexts, including both large- and mid-sized public universities as well as a small private research university. The range of retrospective accessioning approaches employed at these institutions with varying levels of staff suggests that this work is evolving and can be customized to fit the specific needs and resources of any repository.

## Background

### What Is Retrospective Accessioning?

Retrospective accessioning is a specific approach to collection management that seeks to establish baseline intellectual and physical control over archival material that lacks the foundational controls typically required by most modern archives programs. It is rooted in the theory and practice of accessioning as a mode of ensuring downstream discoverability and access through identifying baseline information about collections. Calling this work "retrospective" is intentional. This

framing implies that accessioning is a default requirement of archival stewardship and must be addressed in the archival life cycle. Retrospective accessioning is generally approached in the context of a defined project, with the goal of accessioning un- or under-accessioned material in line with professional best practices, and is distinct from traditional processing, which involves deeper arrangement and description efforts that result in a finding aid.

## What Is an Accessioning Backlog, and How Is It Different from a Processing Backlog?

An accessioning backlog is an accumulation of collection material that has not been formally accessioned. Accessioning backlogs differ from traditional processing backlogs in that they lack the baseline physical control and description that is typically defined for accessioned materials, such as size, scope, source, and location. Colloquially referred to as "mystery boxes," "mystery meat," or "deepest part of the backlog," the accessioning backlog is the most neglected and invisible material in a repository's holdings. Drawing a distinction between accessioning and processing backlogs is useful because an accessioning backlog requires significantly more resources to assess and mitigate. It requires a broad approach to review and analysis, which is ultimately best completed when the material is acquired and contextual knowledge is fresh. Addressing an accessioning backlog requires an approach that combines elements of archival processing with accessioning, reappraisal, surveying, and assessment. Because this work often addresses large portions of, or even the entire, repository, it requires a type of "systems thinking and a cross-functional mindset"[1] not necessarily needed for processing backlogs. While the two types of backlogs are distinct, they are also intimately connected. Accessioning backlogs hamstring a repository's efforts to manage its processing backlogs and make material accessible to its users.[2] Defining an accessioning backlog is a step toward recognizing the interdependence of the various functions that make up a holistic archival collection management program.

## What Are Some Common Causes of Accessioning Backlogs?

Accessioning backlogs result from a variety of factors related to resourcing and planning that are common to many repositories. At the most basic level, they occur when a repository does not accession its collections, or when accessioning functions are deprioritized or inconsistently applied. Like processing backlogs, they tend to be a product of a repository collecting more material than it can reasonably steward. This disconnect between acquisition activity and stewardship capacity is pervasive and well-documented.[3] However, it warrants attention in the context of accessioning because it is interconnected with other factors that contribute to

accessioning backlogs. These include under-appraisal in the pre-custodial phase that leads to large volume collecting and deferring appraisal to the processing phase, lack of procedural documentation for accessioning, inadequate staffing for accessioning, persistence of traditional processing methods and a reluctance to adopt an extensible processing model, avoidance of data-informed decision making with respect to processing prioritization, reluctance to reappraise and deaccession low value collections, and a lack of understanding of organizational capacity and the operational impact of collecting and other stewardship functions. Combined, these elements form an environment that not only produces accessioning backlogs but also impedes the repository from stewarding collections in a holistic manner. In other words, accessioning backlogs are the result of maintaining the status quo. They are the logical result of thinking about collections on an individual basis rather than managing them holistically at a repository-wide level.

## Literature Review

Professional literature about accessioning has historically focused on defining the concept and its activities in a straightforward manner. In his 2015 book *Extensible Processing for Archives and Special Collections: Reducing Processing Backlogs,* Daniel A. Santamaria notes that "formal literature on accessioning is somewhat limited."[4] Until recently, there was a noticeable dearth of professional examinations of large-scale accessioning projects, retrospective or otherwise. Since 2015, the literature on accessioning, generally, and retrospective accessioning, specifically, has advanced—although as recently as 2020, Kara Flynn notes that "a relative lack of discussion surrounding [accessioning] as a key archival activity in the field persists."[5] This gap is actively being addressed by the National Best Practices for Archival Accessioning Working Group's[6] recent publication of the "Archival Accessioning Best Practices," and this special issue of *American Archivist* focused on accessioning, both of which contribute to the professional discourse about archival accessioning that is presently unfolding. As articulated in the Accessioning Best Practices, this discourse "articulate[s] the importance of accessioning and demand[s] a more sophisticated understanding of accessioning praxis."[7] This movement inspires a deeper examination of retrospective accessioning as a specialized exercise situated within the interrelated practices of appraisal, reappraisal, deaccessioning, extensible processing, and holistic collection management.

Retrospective accessioning is not new. Many archival workers conduct retrospective accessioning work but describe it as "collections assessments" or "processing backlog projects." Retrospective accessioning emerges from and is made possible by the discourse around collections assessment in the 2010s,[8] but we do not see the concept formally emerge in the literature until 2014. Santamaria dedicates an entire chapter to collection assessment surveys for backlog reduction in *Extensible*

*Processing*.[9] He suggests activities that could be part of a survey, many of which are associated with accessioning. In her review of *Extensible Processing* on the professional blog Chaos>Order, Maureen Callahan notes that a lot of the "processing" case studies could be considered "retrospective accessioning,"[10] thereby providing an early articulation of the concept. Matthew Gorham and Chela Scott Weber also made the distinction between unaccessioned and unprocessed backlogs in their 2017 case study at the Brooklyn Historical Society.[11] In the process of designing their project and determining their project goals, they began to reframe their backlog as "unaccessioned" instead of "unprocessed" as they realized gaining collection control was a goal of accessioning and a necessary first step in order to conduct processing.[12] In articulating this difference, Gorham and Weber introduce retrospective accessioning as a distinct collection management practice within professional literature.

The concept is articulated again and given more nuance in Weber's influential 2017 OCLC "Research and Learning Agenda for Archives, Special, and Distinctive Collections in Research Libraries." She suggests that many efforts "framed as minimal processing projects should instead be understood as retrospective accessioning projects."[13] Here, Weber calls for more work to be done around addressing accessioning backlogs (a.k.a. hidden collections) because they "are not just an issue of impeded access, they also prevent strategic collections management decisions, hinder informed collection development work, and complicate our ability to deal with increasing space constraints."[14] Rachel Searcy echoes this argument in "Beyond Control: Accessioning Practices for Extensible Archival Management," in which she defines accessioning as a confirmation of an institution's stewardship of the materials. Searcy identifies the distinction between unaccessioned and unprocessed backlogs, stating "the worst backlog is not merely unprocessed collections, but those that have not been accessioned, or were accessioned poorly."[15] In Weber and Searcy, we begin to see retrospective accessioning emerge as an essential element to holistic archival administration.

The role of retrospective accessioning in holistic collection management is explored further in Flynn's 2020 case study "Issues of Ownership: Leveraging Accession Documentation and Provenance Research to Improve Collection Access," in which she describes an accession documentation review as "a small-scale act of retrospective accessioning." Her work enhanced a large body of accession records, established more physical control over collection materials, and positively impacted access, use, and future collection planning,[16] thereby making a lasting impact on a range of collection management activities. Similarly, Audra Eagle Yun's 2021 *Archival Accessioning* examines accessioning through a holistic collection stewardship lens, and asserts the importance of retrospective accessioning, reappraisal, and deaccessioning in developing an extensible archival collection management program. She views retrospective accessioning as an essential activity "for any repository that

lacks a baseline description for every collection in its holdings" and suggests that institutions should embark on a retrospective accessioning project with the knowledge that this may be the only time a collection receives attention from an archivist.[17] Chapter 12 of *Archival Accessioning*, written by Weber, is entirely dedicated to retrospective accessioning. Like Yun, Weber upholds the importance of retrospective accessioning practice in collections management, as it "remedies inconsistencies with past practices by holistically identifying and attending to gaps in accessioning practice, establishing baseline controls, and documenting understanding of backlogs of un- and underaccessioned collections."[18] Weber provides straightforward guidance for designing a retrospective accessioning project that is "situated within a holistic archival management program."[19] Weber, Yun, and Flynn make evident that accessioning programs are likely incomplete without inclusion of some form of retrospective accessioning function.

Presentations by Rosemary K. J. Davis,[20] Kate Dundon,[21] and Jasmine Larkin[22] indicate that practitioners were applying theoretical principles established in the literature to integrate retrospective accessioning into their collection management programs from the late 2010s through the early 2020s. And in 2024, the SAA Committee on Ethics and Professional Conduct hosted a discussion on "Retrospective accessioning, reappraisal, and deaccessioning," during which speaker Laura Uglean-Jackson acknowledged a shift in the profession toward responsible stewardship and a greater acceptance of deaccessioning in the context of retrospective accessioning. It is clear that archival practitioners are interested in retrospective accessioning as professional values and approaches to collection management continue to shift toward the holistic. The case studies offered here advance this discourse by offering real-world scenarios that can motivate others to engage in retrospective accessioning and make this work visible as a distinct practice.

## Case Study 1: University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)

### UCLA Context

The Library Special Collections (LSC) repository at the UCLA Library was established in 1947. LSC was one of multiple collecting units at UCLA that was responsible for acquiring rare and unique collection materials to support the mission of the university. The other collecting units consisted of Biomedical History and Special Collections, University Archives, Center for Oral History Research, Elmer Belt Library, Arts Library Special Collections, and Music Library Special Collections. In 2009, all special collections units were merged into LSC in an effort to streamline collecting efforts and provide users with a centralized access point to the materials. This centralized special collections department became the LSC

that exists today. LSC's current collecting priorities include Los Angeles history and culture, rare books, manuscripts, history of medicine and the sciences, performing arts, visual arts, literary archives, oral histories, and university archives.

Prior to 2009, each of the special collections units operated independently and had different procedures for acquiring, processing, and describing collections. Over the years, this inconsistency culminated in a large, unaccessioned backlog of collections (approximately 11,663 linear feet) that is undiscoverable and inaccessible to staff and researchers. In 2018, the LSC archival team conducted a collection survey which resulted in a shared spreadsheet that documented collection names, accession and collection numbers, the quantity of boxes for each accession, and the box locations. This survey was useful for gaining a broad understanding of the accessioning backlog. However, it was not consistently updated as more collections were added to the backlog, and numerous collection names and accession/collection numbers were simply listed as "unknown" or left blank within the survey. This lack of data left LSC with a large, unaccessioned backlog, which made it difficult to understand what types of collections UCLA held. It also damaged LSC's relationships with donors whose collections remained hidden for years and hindered collection processing and digitization planning. In addition to the backlog, onsite and offsite storage space for collection materials was reaching maximum capacity. The combination of access and space issues created by the backlog led to LSC's retrospective accessioning project.

## UCLA Project Method

LSC's retrospective accessioning project was developed in 2019 by their accessioning archivist in collaboration with LSC's head of collection management, head of curatorial, and the digital archivist. The bulk of the project is currently being carried out by the accessioning archivist, the acquisitions and accessioning assistant, collection management student workers, one temporary accessioning backlog assistant, and two processing archivists.

The project's scope is limited to the unaccessioned materials stored onsite across our two main library buildings, Powell Library and the Young Research Library. Our goals are to have a baseline description for all accessions, physically stabilize materials, ensure all containers for every collection are trackable, and have all the collections reappraised against current collecting priorities.

The project originally consisted of three phases: (1) minimal accessioning, (2) reappraisal, and (3) accessioning for discovery and access. We tested the project phases with two collections. Both collections had received a high level of user interest, so LSC decided to prioritize them for testing to make them available as quickly as possible. After this pilot, revisions were made to the workflow to streamline certain tasks. Most workflow revisions were minor, but one significant change

made the step of creating a collection inventory optional in order to streamline reappraisal efforts. The project started in 2021, with an estimated completion date in 2036. However, as the project unfolded, revisions were made to the second and third phases to accommodate competing priorities within LSC; these revisions are discussed in more detail within the project outcomes section. The original project deliverables and workflows for each phase are as follows:

### *UCLA Phase 1: Minimal Accessioning*

All onsite backlog accessions undergo basic accessioning, ensuring a baseline of stabilization and description through the following steps:

1. The accessioning archivist and the acquisition and accessioning assistant create or edit unpublished, minimal records in ArchivesSpace. This always results in a minimal accession record, and often that accession record is linked to a minimal resource record. For this step, information from the 2018 survey is used to create or find the relevant records in ArchivesSpace. If there is no survey information for the materials, we check the department's collection files and the shared network drive for any acquisition documentation. If no acquisition documentation can be found, which is occasionally the case, a distinct LSC-9999 accession number is created for the accession record in ArchivesSpace to help us keep track of materials with unknown provenance. These 9999 accession numbers are formatted as LSC-9999-0001, LSC-9999-0002, etc.
2. The accessioning team, composed of the accessioning archivist, acquisitions and accessioning assistant, accessioning backlog assistant, and collection management student workers, rehouses materials into archival containers. The rehousing goal is simply to get materials into stable containers with secure lids. If mold or pests are found during rehousing, the materials are bagged and placed into the freezer or routed to UCLA Library's Preservation department. During rehousing there is no foldering, but framed items are de-framed in order to house these items more easily.
3. The accessioning team labels all containers with the accession number, collection number, collection title, and box number. We also indicate on the box label whether audiovisual or born-digital items are present inside the box. All containers are added to ArchivesSpace and linked to their corresponding records with specific shelf locations.
4. The accessioning backlog assistant and the collection management student workers count and record all of the audiovisual and born-digital items for each accession. This entails looking through all the boxes labeled as audiovisual or born-digital, counting each type of media, and recording the extents for each type within the corresponding record in ArchivesSpace.

5. The accessioning backlog assistant revisits all the collections with optical discs and items that are compatible with a standard-A USB 3.0 USB data connection. If there are fifteen items or fewer of this type of media and no commercial media, they assign unique identifiers to each item and transfer files off the media using TeraCopy Pro. File transfers are capped to fifteen or fewer due to project time constraints, and restricting to optical discs and USB compatible media eliminates the need for extra peripherals to access the media, simplifying the transfer process.
6. Every accession is recorded in the Airtable to track project metrics. Information gathered in these metrics includes linear feet, the quantity of each type of media, the number of hours spent performing different tasks, and which collecting area the accession is associated with. The accessioning backlog assistant and the collection management student workers are usually the ones adding accessions to the Airtable, but all project members frequently update the Airtable as needed.

### *UCLA Phase 2: Reappraisal*

After Phase 1, materials are reappraised by the curatorial team using LSC's appraisal criteria and reappraisal workflow. Included in this phase is deaccessioning and weeding. The Phase 2 workflow was originally intended as follows:

1. The accessioning archivist assigns each curator collections to reappraise based on their collecting area and the collection's subject matter. Collection reappraisal assignments are tracked in Jira.
2. The curators reappraise their assigned collections and fill out reappraisal forms. Digital files transferred off the born-digital items in Phase 1 are included in this step. As the curators conduct reappraisal, they weed out materials and fill out deaccession forms for any materials that warrant deaccessioning. The reappraisal form documents the curators' decisions to retain or dispose of materials based on whether or not the materials fit LSC's current collecting priorities and if they hold relevant research value.
3. Optional: curators may create an inventory of the materials.
4. Once reappraisal is complete, curators send their reappraisal forms to the director of special collections for review. Curators close out Phase 2 by marking their assigned Jira tickets as complete.

### *UCLA Phase 3: Accessioning for Discovery and Access*

Collection records in ArchivesSpace receive enhanced description, leveraging information gathered during reappraisal, and collections are made discoverable

to users and queued up for processing. The workflow for Phase 3 was originally intended as follows:

1. Once LSC's director reviews the reappraisal form and signs off on any recommended deaccessions, the accessioning archivist and the acquisitions and accessioning assistant revise the records in ArchivesSpace to meet LSC's accessioning requirements. This often entails updating extents, adding subject headings, updating donor information, and updating scope and content notes. When applicable, deaccessioning recommendations are implemented, and all deaccessioning actions are recorded in ArchivesSpace. Metrics in the Airtable are also updated during this step.
2. The accessioning archivist publishes a minimal catalog record and a finding aid for each collection so users can discover the materials. While not all collections will be immediately accessible after Phase 3, all collections will at least be discoverable.
3. Collections that need processing to be accessible to users are added to the processing queue by the accessioning archivist.

## UCLA Project Outcomes

As of September 2024, LSC has moved 266 accessions (1,869 linear feet) through Phase 1 of the project. Six accessions (14 linear feet) went through the entire original workflow. From these six completed accessions, one linear foot was deaccessioned, and three accessions (11.5 linear feet) skipped Phase 2 and Phase 3 so they could be made immediately available to users, repairing tenuous donor relationships. So far, we have counted 4,748 audiovisual items in 68 accessions and 1,097 born-digital items in 51 accessions. We transferred 1.2 terabytes from 100 born-digital carriers.

We are still working on moving materials through Phase 1 of the project, and originally intended for Phase 2 and Phase 3 to happen concurrently with Phase 1. However, due to staff vacancies, a mold outbreak, and a construction project, revisions to the project workflow ensued. Since the start of this project in 2021, the department has experienced vacancies for three curators, one archivist, the head of collection management, and the head of curators. Due to LSC's staffing shortage, current staff temporarily assumed additional responsibilities. Hence, staff no longer have the capacity to continue moving forward with Phase 2 as planned. In addition to staff vacancies, LSC experienced a mold outbreak in 2020 due to a burst water pipe. This incident occurred in a smaller storage space that is not located within the two main libraries. Hundreds of linear feet of materials were treated and transferred into LSC's collection storage space within Powell Library. The former storage space with the burst water pipe is now compromised and can no longer be used to store

materials. Lastly, our storage space in Powell Library will undergo renovations in early 2025. To prepare for these renovations, approximately 3,672 linear feet of materials will need to be rehoused and added to ArchivesSpace so we may securely transfer them to offsite storage before construction begins. All of these competing priorities impeded project progress, which resulted in revisions to Phases 2 and 3.

In September 2024, Phase 2 (Reappraisal) was revised to consist of processing and reappraisal and will be carried out by archivists instead of curators. All materials that were minimally accessioned through Phase 1 will be placed into the processing queue. As archivists process collections, they will conduct reappraisal and deaccessioning. Curators will sign off on deaccession forms and confirm materials are suitable for deaccessioning. Because all materials will be queued for processing after Phase 1, and deaccessioning activities will take place during Phase 2, it was decided to eliminate Phase 3 of the project. One consequence of this decision is that materials will remain undiscoverable to our users until they have gone through processing. Originally, the project was designed to at least make all collections discoverable, and some accessible, to our users. However, since reappraisal will now be conducted in processing, it is not prudent to publish limited records for collections that may eventually be deaccessioned. This revision to the project structure was necessary to maintain momentum. While the project will progress faster under this new workflow, the responsibility of reappraisal has unfortunately been shifted back to processing. The project was originally designed in part to serve as an opportunity for curatorial staff to collectively share in the labor associated with reappraisal, and for the long-term operational impact of under-appraisal to become more visible throughout the library. Nevertheless, we are hopeful we can still find ways to accomplish these goals with the new workflow.

This project is time- and resource-intensive. We have already dedicated over 3,500 hours on various tasks for this project and are planning to implement the revised Phase 2 of the project in 2025. With limited staff capacity and shifting priorities, it remains challenging to maintain momentum on a project of this scale. It will require continued investment from LSC leadership to ensure successful completion. Otherwise, the project scope and deliverables will need to be revised again. The accessioning backlog assistant is crucial for project progress, as this is the only position solely dedicated to working on retrospective accessioning. However, it is important to note that this position is temporary, which will eventually compromise the progress of the project.

Despite these challenges, LSC is already seeing the benefits of gaining minimal control over the accessioning backlog. Staff members are able to search ArchivesSpace and find specific locations for collections that have gone through Phase 1, making it easier to answer questions from donors and repair tenuous donor relationships. Curators are gaining a better understanding of where LSC's collecting gaps are, so they know where to focus future curatorial efforts. Collection

management is obtaining a more comprehensive picture of our backlog—how large it is, which collections lack deeds of gifts, audiovisual and born-digital extents—enabling LSC to make informed decisions about future processing priorities and digitization projects. LSC's director is able to point to concrete numbers regarding our backlog to advocate for more funds, staff, and permanent storage space. LSC's retrospective accessioning project will inevitably encounter new challenges as it moves forward. However, the benefits of the work are clear, and continued institutional investment is certainly warranted in order to maintain momentum and realize the goals of the project.

## Case Study 2: University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC)

### UCSC Context

The Special Collections and Archives department in the UCSC University Library was established at the inception of the library in 1965. Its collecting strengths include photography, fine press and artists books, experimental music, counterculture and social movements, local history, and the history of the university. The department hired its first permanent professional archivist focused on general processing and collection management in 2013, which prompted a repository-wide collections assessment survey in 2014. The findings of this survey and professional discourse on accessioning and extensible processing inspired several iterative collection control efforts, including parallel retrospective accessioning projects focused on physical and born-digital accessioning backlogs that began in 2018.

### UCSC Project Method

Phase 1 of this effort addressed a physical accessioning backlog of approximately 360 linear feet of unaccessioned holdings that had little to no gift paperwork, unclear provenance, and no public-facing discovery points. A survey of this material identified about 130 record groups, approximately 60 percent of which were stored offsite. Out of scope is a 200 linear foot accessioning backlog of the university archives, which is presently being addressed by the university archivist.

Phase 2 aimed to appraise, accession, preserve, and minimally describe digital content on physical media carriers in archival collections across the repository, including CDs, DVDs, floppy disks, Zip disks, and flash drives that required significant intervention from special collections staff to respond to access requests. The phase focused on preserving digital content from physical media, so born-digital content already on the library's server was out of scope.

### *UCSC Phase 1: Physical Retrospective Accessioning*

The project was conceptualized and executed by the supervisory archivist from 2018-2024 with support from the department head, the cataloger for special collections, and the public services coordinator. The work was initially structured into two stages, which were to reappraise material located on site first (roughly 120 linear feet), then recall and address the estimated 240 linear feet of material stored offsite. In practice, the stages occurred concurrently after an initial high-priority push to address material stored in individual workers' offices. The supervisory archivist created shared spreadsheets to serve as the primary tool to organize information about collections and track the reappraisal process, expanding upon existing survey spreadsheets created by colleagues prior to the inception of the project. Most survey work was executed directly in the stacks or storage rooms using a laptop and cart to limit physical movement of boxes. The workflow consisted of the following steps:

1. Survey and create a minimal box-level inventory for each record group.
2. Identify known or potential donor(s) and search donor files for extant paperwork. If no paperwork exists, research donors and their relationship to the university.
3. Make retention/deaccession decisions:
    a. If a signed deed of gift or letter of intent is on file: retain (in general). Weed out of scope material (high-level, when feasible), accession, and publish a collection-level catalog record. When possible, minimally process during accessioning.
    b. If no gift paperwork exists: reappraise in the context of the current collection development policy. If determined to be out of collecting scope, deaccession following documented deaccessioning policy and procedure.

### *UCSC Phase 2: Born-Digital Retrospective Accessioning*

In 2016, the special collections department began to develop a formal born-digital stewardship program, with the goal of building skills and capacity to process and provide access to born-digital records. A first step toward this objective was to survey digital holdings on physical carriers in archival collections. The initial survey was conducted in 2017 by student assistants under the direction of the university archivist, and approximately 470 carriers within 17 collections were identified. After this survey, the department undertook its first effort to process a born-digital collection to test and codify its emergent digital accessioning and processing procedures. After gaining this footing and discovering additional cashes of carriers not identified in the initial survey, the supervisory archivist initiated a

born-digital retrospective accessioning project in 2018. The workflow consisted of the following steps:

1. Appraise
    a. The student assistant pulls digital media carriers from the collections.
    b. The supervisory archivist and head of special collections undertake initial appraisal to weed carriers that likely contain out of scope content (such as design files for print materials included in collection, commercial films, or software) based on carrier labels alone.
2. Transfer
    a. The student assistant assigns a unique ID to each carrier and enters metadata into a survey spreadsheet.
    b. The student assistant transfers digital files from the carriers to the library server using Data Accessioner.
3. Appraise (again)
    a. The supervisory archivists undertake a second round of high-level appraisal to weed out of scope files.
4. Prioritize, Accession, and Process
    a. The supervisory archivist assesses each collection to determine its processing needs and priorities.
    b. The supervisory archivist accessions and minimally processes each collection following newly developed born-digital procedures.

## UCSC Project Outcomes

### *Physical Retrospective Accessioning Outcomes*

As a result of this effort, 56 collections (measuring a total of 150 linear feet) were accessioned and made discoverable with at least a collection level catalog record, and 23 linear feet of materials were integrated into existing collections. The project surfaced high-value material that aligns with UCSC's collecting strengths and exhibition program, including a collection of San Francisco counterculture ephemera and several runs of rare historic local newspapers.

This project also facilitated a much-needed reappraisal of the accessioning backlog and resulted in the deaccessioning of 84 record groups (measuring 173 linear feet). Notably, approximately 80 percent of the deaccessioned material was stored offsite at the UC Northern Regional Library Facility, which is used by five northern UC library campuses. This concentrated effort to reduce offsite holdings gave the department head an opportunity to pitch a pilot program to the facility that would incentivize similar reappraisal work in libraries across all UC campuses.

Now officially adopted into systemwide practice, this program has the potential to significantly impact the archival stewardship goals of the entire system and result in sizable storage space savings. There remains roughly 30 linear feet of material to review, primarily consisting of unaccessioned single items.

The supervisory archivist worked periodically on this project from 2018 to the time of this publication. Typical to most backlog projects, this work took a back seat to more pressing and visible efforts like grant-funded processing and digitization projects, born-digital and audiovisual stewardship infrastructure development, and student-focused programming. COVID also impacted progress by limiting access to storage spaces. The greatest successes occurred when internal benchmarks were identified, and the project was temporarily prioritized over other work to meet those benchmarks. In total, this project required approximately 280 hours of the supervisory archivist's time over a period of 6 years.

In addition to these tangible outcomes, this project facilitated several changes that will have a lasting impact on the operations of the department. Embarking on this work in earnest motivated the supervisory archivist and department head to create deaccessioning infrastructure, including a formal deaccessioning policy, a reappraisal and deaccessioning workflow codified in the departmental processing manual, and a deaccessioning form. This documentation ensures the library is operating in alignment with professional best practices, normalizes deaccessioning, and positions the work as standard practice rather than something to hide. Additionally, the deep engagement with collection files and donor correspondence in the reappraisal process expanded the departmental knowledgebase of early collecting strategies and inspired new methods of saving donor email correspondence to collection files. Finally, the project increased awareness throughout the department of the value of accessioning and the impact of under-appraisal and delayed accessioning. It made clear that accessioning backlogs are not just an issue for archivists performing accessioning; they have implications across all areas of a repository's operations, from public services to stacks management to exhibits and outreach.

### *Born-Digital Retrospective Accessioning Outcomes*

Over the course of this project, approximately 750 carriers were identified and assessed across 32 collections. Of these, 140 carriers were accessioned, and 360 carriers were deaccessioned. This effort resulted in 13 processed born-digital collections, which include 10,300 files measuring 106 gigabytes. The digital content preserved in this project includes important university history, as well as work produced from significant writers and artists working in the Western US. The department has since received multiple requests for born-digital content from faculty and researchers both within and outside of the university.

The project required about 200 hours of staff time over three years: 130 hours of the supervisory archivist's time, and about 70 hours from student assistants. The most time-intensive aspect was transferring files off carriers, which accounted for about 40 percent of the total time spent on the project. Appraisal was the second most time-consuming task, accounting for 20 percent of the time spent. This appraisal work took place during accessioning in an iterative manner. Notably, much of the appraisal work was accomplished remotely during shelter-in-place requirements, which was only possible because the transfer process was completed before the onset of the pandemic.

This effort helped to realize UCSC's burgeoning born-digital stewardship program[23] by providing a series of test cases, and encouraged a more resource-conscious approach to selection and appraisal. Because about half of the digital media carriers were deaccessioned, it became evident that not only is appraisal intervention possible in the pre-custodial and accessioning phases, but it is also necessary and desirable to implement it with an iterative approach. It also became clear that under-appraisal of born-digital acquisitions is ultimately a disservice to future processing archivists, users, and the creators and subjects represented in collections.

Perhaps the most valuable outcome of this project was a heightened knowledge of the operational impacts of born-digital accessioning backlogs. These include costs to recover and preserve at-risk content, greater processing effort required for un- or under-accessioned digital content, decreased efficiencies in collection management, and impaired capacity to advocate for necessary resources within the organization. By gaining a more informed understanding of the labor required to address a relatively modest born-digital accessioning backlog, it was possible to reframe previously held assumptions and expectations around born-digital acquisition, accessioning, and processing, which made room for a more holistic and intentional approach to born-digital care.

## Case Study 3: Wake Forest University (WFU)

### WFU Context

Wake Forest University is a private, doctoral university in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, established in 1834. Historical collections were acquired long before there was an official records caregiver; the first collections were maintained by librarian Ethel Taylor Crittendon and focused on Baptist history. While Crittendon's fingerprints remain on the collection, the longest caretaker of the Ethel Taylor Crittendon Collection of Baptist History, also known as the Baptist Historical Collection, was archivist John Woodard. Woodard was employed from

1964–2001 and accompanied by a number of assistants and coordinators over the years. A university alumnus and diligent collector, Woodard was involved with the Society of American Archivists, the Society of North Carolina Archivists, and other historical collections groups. He employed a primary accessions log that is still used as a reference, but there were few, if any, accessioning, appraisal, processing, or other processes in place. Like many repositories, manuscripts and a small number of literary collections were housed in a separate department overseen by a rare books librarian. The Rare Books department was headed by Richard Murdoch from 1978 to the early 1990s, and Sharon Snow from 1993–2009; under Snow, the Baptist Historical Collection and Rare Books were united as the Special Collection and Archives (SCA). SCA is housed in the university's main library, the Z. Smith Reynolds Library. Without staff or procedures to process incoming materials, the backlog grew tremendously after Woodard's retirement in 2001. In 2010, the department hired a two-year project archivist to assist with collections backlog, and in 2015, the department hired a permanent collections archivist; in between, archives workers tried to fit collections work into other responsibilities.

## WFU Project Method

### *WFU Phase 1: Initial Accessioning Work, 2010–2014*

In 2010, a two-year visiting faculty archivist and a graduate student archives assistant began a Herculean task: clearing out all the storage areas in SCA. At that time, archival boxes and stacks of papers had taken over much of the department's spaces, which consisted of at least nine offices and former classrooms and one stacks room with nine carrels. A 2009 consultants' report stated that a project archivist, perhaps with "a few English graduate students as student employees," should "process backlogged University Archives and other manuscript and archival collections, including some Baptist collections."[24] Interestingly, the report noted that there was "no systematic plan and method for obtaining and accessioning the permanent records,"[25] but did not address the large body of work that the suggested temporary worker would have to accomplish to get basic control over the materials before processing could begin. At the time, the profession did not use the term "retrospective accessioning," but this project ultimately fits that paradigm.

Some accessions consisted of full collections, boxed in cartons with labels identifying the collection name, listed in the primary accessions log. However, many more consisted of single folders gathered together in document boxes consecutively by number because the accessioning staff were not left sufficient context by their antecedents and did not have time to make sense of the maelstrom. These accessions were cobbled together from stacks of paper left on desks, shelves, or anywhere else there was room. More than 650 accession records were created in 2010, a high water

mark unmatched before or since; there are around 100 records total in ArchivesSpace dated in the five decades prior to 2010. Though the project lasted from roughly 2010 to 2014, the height of 2010's labor is obvious.

During the 2010 project, a small amount of weeding and reappraisal took place in addition to accessioning, but the work largely focused on logging the backlog and documenting locations. Documentation was occasionally included in the collection management files and provided some understanding of the materials. Though the collection management files rarely provide much acquisition context or note related materials, 2010 accession records may note the existence of a collections file or inventory, or lack thereof. For the most part, the content management system records are thorough, despite the fact that archivists were working with collections files and paper finding aids in binders. Grant funding—through IMLS, LSTA, and NC ECHO—meant that 428 EAD finding aids in Archivists' Toolkit could be searched and managed; these archivists were working to get them displayed online, among other responsibilities unrelated to accessions. Prior to these intellectual and physical controls facilitated through Archivists' Toolkit, most collections did not have documented locations, so locating collections for researchers relied on "oral tradition, [other employee]'s whims, and luck."[26] The impact was an immense leap towards control.

By the time the retrospective accessions stopped around 2014, the visiting archivist had long left her term position; the graduate student had become a full-time permanent library faculty member with an array of responsibilities beyond processing; student workers were finishing up bits of accessioning as they encountered materials; and the department had a new head. Due to these transitions, the project never officially stopped and was therefore never assessed; the workers freed up space and identified holdings, and then the department moved on.

### *WFU Phase 2: Retrospective Accessioning Stops, Collections Archivist Arrives, 2015–2024*

In 2014, the faculty positions of public services archivist and collections archivist were created, and the department moved further away from returning to make sense of the retrospective accessioning project. The former graduate student moved into the public services role, and the collections archivist began in January 2015. The collections archivist, the library's first permanent position devoted to processing work, was tasked with handling recent accessions dated 2013–2014 upon her arrival. From the start, it was clear that accessioning practices were not well-established or robust, and the new hire focused on the more immediate arrivals. Because the 2010 retrospective accessioning project had not been formally documented, assessed, or built upon, its impact and next steps were not immediately clear.

Over the next ten years, accessions documentation was improved thanks to the department head as well as the collections archivist and, later, a processing archivist. Any new accessions backlog was kept to a maximum of a few carts of well-labeled materials. The 2010–2014 materials caused a bit more trouble: while some manuscript materials had been condensed into one stacks area by collection number, their related accessions were not moved together as uniformly. Record groups had not been gathered without adequate swing room or labor, so accessions and processed materials were spread across four storage areas. Despite the guiding light of the ArchivesSpace locations records and documentation, finding all the pieces of each record group was time-consuming. Additionally, single-folder accessions remained organized by accession number, which meant that pulling materials for processing could require checking 10 or 20 separate locations.

Over the ten years of her employment, the collections archivist processed the 2010–2014 accessions when possible and took a particular interest in the university record groups since those materials were the least controlled. Unprocessed one-folder accessions were often condensed with other unprocessed or occasionally processed materials. Stacks moves also meant that some time was spent condensing or processing accessions when they might have otherwise gone untouched.

In summer 2024, the seasoned collections archivist proposed a third phase of the retrospective accessioning project in an attempt to finally make sense of the work completed since 2010 and the work that remained: a full appraisal of all holdings to provide an accurate overview of the current state of the department's collections and unprocessed accessions. What remained unprocessed? What had accruals to add? What collections were in need of reappraisal and weeding? What collection types would be the best investment of time, and where might additional staffing be best applied? Before this plan was implemented, the collections archivist took a new position elsewhere but left behind proposal documentation in the hopes that their archival inheritance would not be purely debt.

## WFU Project Outcomes

In the near-term, the retrospective accessions project was successful. The archivists cleared workspaces and reclaimed offices. They learned about the university and the holdings as they worked, which was especially valuable since both the project archivist and archives assistant were new to Wake Forest. The longer-term benefits are relatively obvious: today the department has a more complete record of our holdings and their locations, which is an immense improvement. There is also useful information about possible provenance or existing inventories in ArchivesSpace. Any context is a gift, and even incomplete inventories mean collections processing begins with an advantage.

It feels both ungenerous and incorrect to characterize the creation of 1,000 accession records as having downsides; the two archivists involved took on this work while also doing reference and digitization, creating an online finding aid portal, and working on other projects. They succeeded in creating a useful array of accession records with locations, no small feat given the limited capacity and support. However, without the investment of staffing resources and structure that the team needed to complete this project, unfortunate drawbacks continued to cause inefficiencies and frustrations.

After ten years as collections archivist, despite making progress in processing and co-locating accessions as much as possible, the project still was not fully completed or iterated upon in a coherent way. Instead of slowly pushing back against backlog issues in a more dispersed way, could the project have continued into a second phase of assessment and strategy? Considering the project archivist's two years of work and ten subsequent years spent trying to reduce the accessioning backlog, the 2009 recommendation that "a two- to three-year temporary project archivist is needed to help reduce the backlog while regular staff receive additional training, capacity, and direction resulting from the hire of a new department head"[27] demonstrates the impossibility of leveraging inadequate resources in the face of long-standing archival debt.[28]

Overall, what could have been done differently, knowing more in hindsight about the inherited wealth (and debt) of this project? It is important that, as the university's bicentennial approaches in 2034, collections work is approached more strategically and sustainably. Knowing more about the state of collections will allow for department advocacy, clearly identifying what research is being delayed by backlogs. This will all be possible because the 2010 accessioning project made a giant increase in control that the repository's collections had not seen from their prior caregivers and established a strong foundation for all the collections management and processing work that will follow.

## Case Study Analysis: Challenges and Opportunities

These case studies recount how archivists at three different university libraries used varied applications of retrospective accessioning to manage their accessioning backlogs, which had adversely impacted multiple functions of their operations, including space management, public services, collection development, and donor relations. While the projects were differently scaled, structured, and resourced, the archivists encountered similar staffing constraints and sustainability issues. Additionally, all three case studies point to how intentional approaches to acquisition, appraisal, accessioning, and deaccessioning will pay dividends in efficiency and effectiveness for any repository.

Despite differences in timeline, collecting size, staffing configuration, and resourcing, these retrospective accessioning projects have much in common. All three efforts were preceded by staffing changes, either the hiring of an archivist or a reorganization of the unit. In all cases, these personnel changes resulted in a refocusing of priorities which prompted a collections survey. All three of these surveys took place in the 2010s, which is likely common across the profession considering the popular emergence of collection assessments at this time. Additionally, lack of storage space for new acquisitions was another primary motivator at all three repositories, despite their varying original sizes. Inadequate storage negatively impacted the operations of these repositories by hampering their ability to plan for future acquisitions and even safely operate in their workspaces. As storage constraints will almost certainly remain an issue across the profession, retrospective accessioning may become an increasingly more common mode of archival stewardship.

The differing scales of these case studies indicate that accessioning backlogs are varied in size and age, but they likely exist and impose real operational burdens at most repositories. UCLA's Library Special Collections is approximately eighty years old and has a legacy of separate collecting units that were eventually merged into one department. They have a long-standing curatorial model and a mandate to collect on a variety of subjects. Their nearly 12,000 linear foot accessioning backlog poses a formidable challenge to the UCLA library and will require decades of investment from multiple workers and library leadership to address. UCSC's Special Collections and Archives department is sixty years old and does not have a strong tradition of a curatorial staffing structure. UCSC's accessioning backlog of 360 linear feet and 470 digital media carriers is small in comparison to others but nevertheless required more than half a decade for one staff member to reappraise. WFU began collecting widely on Baptist history roughly seventy-five years ago and, like UCLA, underwent a reorganization to merge collecting units in the early 2000s. Despite progress made on their 3,000 linear foot accessioning backlog since their 2010 retrospective accessioning effort, it is far from eliminated, and it will take significant effort to mitigate due to staffing challenges. While each repository is structured and staffed differently, the fact that they all developed accessioning backlogs over the last sixty or more years suggests these types of backlogs are likely present at most archival repositories in some form. A shared challenge such as this warrants further investigation and deeper conversations across the profession about retrospective accessioning methods.

These case studies indicate the importance of project planning and structure for any retrospective accessioning effort. UCLA's robust project documentation and infrastructure is essential given the size of their accessioning backlog and project timeline. WFU represents the other end of the spectrum, with less formal project documentation (perhaps reflective of the context of emerging collection assessment methodologies in the 2000s), and UCSC's project structure falls in the

middle between the two. Interestingly, these case studies show different models for addressing born-digital accessioning backlogs. UCSC developed parallel born-digital and physical retrospective accessioning projects, whereas UCLA designed their project at the outset to include born-digital materials in their retrospective accessioning effort, and WFU focused wholly on physical collections. All three approaches are valid and contextual to the needs and resources of the repository.

Notably, archivists at all three repositories needed to pivot from their original project designs to maintain momentum and achieve improved, if imperfect, access. This indicates that even with support from departmental management and planning infrastructure in place, archivists must operate flexibly and pragmatically as projects progress. It is particularly notable that all three retrospective accessioning efforts remain active to varying degrees since their inception. Despite even the most intentional project planning, the authors recognize it is entirely possible that these projects may never formally conclude as originally conceived, as organizations continue to face staffing shortages and, in some cases, new acquisitions are immediately added to the accessioning backlog. In this respect, rather than a discrete project that is accomplished in a linear fashion, retrospective accessioning could be more accurately conceptualized as a routine part of the archival stewardship lifecycle.

Inadequate staffing impacted progress in all three cases, which caused delays and inefficiencies that dimmed the projects' rewards. All three authors found it challenging to balance the demanding work of retrospective accessioning with their ongoing varied responsibilities of accessioning, processing, digital project management, and more. This is likely a shared experience at most repositories because retrospective accessioning is often carried out by archivists responsible for accessioning and processing, which are typically already impacted functions. It is notable that two of these projects partially relied on the labor of temporary workers. In one case, the project was led entirely by a temporary worker and a team of student assistants which, combined with staffing turnover, resulted in the project tapering out without an assessment or formal documentation. This phenomenon of relying on term labor for essential archival functions like accessioning is widely acknowledged[29] as damaging to workers, institutions, communities, and collections. In a 2019 SAA Issues and Advocacy Section survey regarding temporary labor, two-thirds of respondents holding term positions indicated that working with accessions and/or acquisitions was part of their responsibilities.[30] When the critical function of accessioning work, retrospective or otherwise, is relegated to temporary workers, operational functions of the repository are compromised. The 2022 "Best Practices for Archival Term Positions" explicitly notes that "term positions result in high staff turnover, low morale, and a loss of institutional knowledge, all of which directly impact an institution,"[31] which was seen first-hand at WFU and remains a concern at UCLA. Moreover, UCLA's reliance on a term position for a project that is estimated to take fifteen years to complete creates an unsustainable labor model which will

impede project progress. Archival leaders must continue to advocate for ongoing archival functions to be part of full-time, permanent workers' responsibilities in order to allow projects, workers, and organizations to succeed.

The immense labor costs of the projects in these case studies (for example, in the case of UCLA, 5+ staff members over a projected fifteen years) exemplify the concept of archival debt, which refers to the "resources owed to address problematic legacy issues in an archival repository resulting from past practices, policies, and strategies that prioritized the protection and validation of institutions over democratic access and responsible stewardship."[32] This debt compounds as time passes and more acquisitions are brought in without sufficient staffing and infrastructure to support holistic stewardship of all collections in the repository. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that many repositories have fewer processing staff and larger physical and digital collection footprints than ever before, as found in a recent analysis of the University of California libraries.[33] The impulse to collect without a realistic assessment of a repository's stewardship capacity and the dominant cultural bias that prioritizes acquisition over access is described by some as a "resource imbalance" that is "chronically embedded in the workplace norms of academic libraries."[34] This imbalance was manifested on a practical level for the practitioners in these case studies when more of their time was required for accessioning incoming accretions to existing collections than retrospectively accessioning their long-standing accessioning backlogs. This was, in part, because reappraisal and deaccessioning activities can be more time consuming than accessioning newly acquired material, particularly if the repository lacks a codified deaccessioning policy and procedure and/or there is a cultural hesitancy to deaccession. It is likely, if not certain, that a retrospective accessioning effort will necessarily result in deaccessioning, and this can cause discomfort. Fortunately, there is evidence that retrospective accessioning can provide an entree to building sustainable deaccessioning infrastructure, as shown by UCSC. In this case, leadership-level support for deaccessioning helped make their retrospective accessioning effort productive and resulted in significant improvements to their storage capacity.

## Conclusion: A Way Forward

The authors were often met with a similar sentiment when describing their accessioning backlogs to colleagues both within and outside of their institutions: "everyone has an accessioning backlog, it's not a big deal." Accessioning backlogs are indeed a shared challenge faced by many in the profession, but we feel this attitude fails to acknowledge the complex causes and implications of accessioning backlogs, which we believe are ultimately the result of a reluctance to embrace change. This cultural aversion to change is prevalent in academic archives, which is why it is particularly thought-provoking to consider case studies from three differently-sized

and -staffed academic repositories together. Case studies from UCLA, UCSC, and WFU show that in response to growing accessioning backlogs and persistent resourcing challenges, retrospective accessioning is being successfully employed by archivists at a range of repositories to efficiently improve access to these truly hidden collections. Moreover, they indicate that retrospective accessioning methods have evolved over time and reveal this work as a specialized and functional praxis within the archival profession.

These case studies suggest that retrospective accessioning is most successful when supported by organizational leadership. Without staffing, structure, and support, a retrospective accessioning effort may benefit the repository in some ways, but will leave in place weak spots that will continue to impair holistic collection stewardship and impede discoverability. This is especially true if acquisition practices are not examined in light of accessioning backlogs. In an age of resource constraints, acquisitions require thorough appraisal to ease downstream impacts. Indeed, the projects described here make clear the widespread imbalance in privileging the resourcing of acquisition over access, and the resulting operational debt incurred by this imbalance in a variety of institutional contexts. This dilemma of collecting versus capacity to facilitate access feels intractable and core to current professional anxieties concerning our desire to ethically care for our collections and communities. Retrospective accessioning offers a practical inroad to understanding this core tension because it makes evident the labor requirements of accessioning, reappraisal, and deaccessioning, and the debt that results from deferring these essential functions over time.

The case studies confirm that retrospective accessioning can be a considerably labor-intensive and expensive commitment. However, they also indicate that the long-term operational costs of ignoring accessioning backlogs are significantly higher and more difficult to predict and control than the labor costs of sustaining a standards-based accessioning program. Moreover, retrospective accessioning benefits the repository beyond simply cleaning up their backlog. This kind of work typically prompts the development of much needed collection management infrastructure, such as deaccessioning policies and born-digital accessing workflows, which can considerably streamline a repository's operations. Thus, retrospective accessioning offers a proven way to reveal, understand, and pay down archival debt.

These real-world case studies from large-, medium-, and small-sized repositories set in both public and private universities untangle the origins and effects of accessioning backlogs and demonstrate the pragmatic benefits that retrospective accessioning can bring to a repository, regardless of size or staffing level. All three institutions enhanced discoverability and accessibility of collections, made more efficient use of storage space, improved security and preservation, achieved greater transparency of accessioning work and its importance to the organization, and developed a shared knowledgebase of essential collection information. While

the projects described here remain ongoing, quantifying and laying bare their accessioning backlogs paved the way for incremental change and a more informed understanding of the personnel resources required to steward archival collections, which help current and future archivists and administrators work in a more efficient and sustainable manner. When executed in conjunction with a standards-based holistic collection management program, retrospective accessioning lays a foundation for future stewardship to thrive. This examination of three repositories with different national profiles, staffing levels, collection footprints, and cultures proves that one thing is true for all repositories of any size or shape: "it is never too late to accession."[35]

## Appendix

This table shows the Phase 1 deliverables of the UCLA Library Special Collections retrospective accessioning project, including the staff involved and the tools used.

| Phase 1 Minimal Accessioning: All onsite backlog collections undergo basic accessioning. This ensures a baseline of stabilization and description prior to moving into reappraisal. | |
|---|---|
| Deliverables | 1. Unpublished, minimal records of description are created or edited in ArchivesSpace<br>a. Minimal accession record<br>b. Minimal resource record<br>2. Materials rehoused into archival containers<br>a. No re-foldering<br>b. Framed items are unframed<br>3. Containers are labeled and are attached to corresponding records in ArchiveSpace with specific shelf locations<br>4. Assess materials for mold and pests<br>5. Record audiovisual and born-digital extents within records in ArchivesSpace<br>6. Files transferred off optical discs and media that is compatible with a standard USB 3.0 USB data connection max of 15 pieces of media<br>7. Check collection files for acquisition documentation |
| Staff involved | 1. Accessioning Archivist<br>2. Acquisitions and accessioning assistant<br>3. Accessioning backlog project assistant (1 year contract position)<br>4. Collection management student worker |
| Tools used | 1. ArchivesSpace: for accession record, resource record, and tracking container locations<br>2. Jira: for tracking collections as they move through the workflow<br>3. Confluene: for workflow documentation<br>4. TeraCopy Pro: for transferring files off media<br>5. Protected department shared drive: to temporarily store files transferred off media<br>6. Airtable: for tracking project metrics |

## Notes

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