

Integrating the UC Guidelines with Accessioning and Processing Procedures at UCI

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The Special Collections and Archives department at the University of California, Irvine (UCI) Libraries documents its archival workflow via accessioning and processing manuals. In addition to standardizing archival practice within the department, these manuals function as living documents that respond to changing trends and innovations in the profession.

Minimal processing as codified in Greene and Meissner's "More Product, Less Process" article is the latest innovation to have an impact on UCI's, and the larger University of California (UC) library system's, archival procedures. Archivists throughout UC developed a report entitled [*Guidelines for Efficient Archival Processing in the University of California Libraries*](#), (UC Guidelines), part of a system-wide, multi-year collaboration to redesign technical service workflows known as Next Generation Technical Services (NGTS). The UC Guidelines provide recommendations aimed at exposing all archival holdings and processing collections to an appropriate level in order to expedite user access and maximize institutional resources. The guidelines also emphasize tracking processing metrics for heuristic purposes and provide a template for local adaptation.

In 2013, the department's manuals were revised to incorporate those elements of the UC Guidelines pertaining to the evaluation of processing priorities and recommended levels of work. The cornerstone of the guidelines is the concept of the "value score" – a number between 4 and 20 that corresponds with processing levels ranging from Minimal to Highly Intensive. The value score, derived from a set of four criteria including user interest, quality of documentation, institutional value, and object value, represents the processing priority of an archival collection and thus serves as a powerful decision-making tool for processors grappling with competing priorities.

The assignment of value scores was added as a routine step in the department's accessioning workflow. At the point of accession, new collections or additions are evaluated using the defined criteria, which were inserted directly into the accessioning manual with slight modifications to suit local needs. The value score and corresponding processing levels are recorded in the accession record, with the number given to each of the four criteria documented to give future processors insight into the rationale of the overall score. For legacy accessions acquired before implementation of the guidelines, the manual instructs processors to assign "retroactive" value scores, with procedures varying based on single or multiple accessions and whether a collection is processed or unprocessed. Assigning value scores is covered in Section 13 of the accessioning manual.

Special Collections and Archives often receives accruals to existing collections, presenting processors with "multiple-accession" dilemmas. Familiar questions of how to process wholly unprocessed and semi-processed collections comprised of multiple accessions, as well as additions to previously processed collections, were made all the more complex when value scores were added to the workflow. The UC Guidelines' discussion of working with multiple accessions at different processing levels provided a valuable strategy for processing, but a plan for encountering multiple value scores during pre-processing

was needed. Instructions were developed for the various scenarios, the common rule being to take the highest value score and apply it to the collection or addition(s) to the collection as a whole. This accommodates both higher and lower levels of processing and provides processors with the flexibility needed to select the best solution for their particular collection. Working with multiple accessions is addressed in Section 5.1.2.1 of the processing manual.

The guidelines' recommended activities for each processing level were also integrated with the department's processing manual. Using the assigned value score, processors create a processing plan that applies the prescribed levels of control based on collection survey findings. The breakdown of tasks for Minimal to Highly Intensive processing results in a much more structured processing plan from the start, requiring the processor to think of each collection component as an aggregate of physical and intellectual tasks rather than a rough draft arrangement proposal with to-be-determined granularity. While flexibility is always critical, the value score demands more upfront detail, which in turn aids the processor in tracking processing metrics. The department's processing plan template is in Appendix F of the processing manual. A sample processing plan is provided in Appendix G.

The processing plan also records the estimated number of processing hours as set by the UC Guidelines. Actual hours are documented to the nearest half hour in the UCI Libraries Archival Processing Metrics Worksheet, the department's local adaptation of the guidelines' template. Tracking is only being done for processing activities, not accessioning, surveying, or any other preliminary actions undertaken before the start of processing, including preparation of a processing plan.

To simplify the documentation of metrics, tracking is done at the collection or component (series, subseries, file/filing unit, or item) level as determined by the granularity of the processor's work. When doing minimal processing, processors track at the collection level; for low through highly intensive processing, tracking is at the component level. Thus, all work performed at a particular level throughout the project is represented with one entry in the worksheet and all hours associated with that level in one total value. The same is done when measuring pre-processing extent. The processor calculates the total extent of materials being processed at the collection, series, subseries, file/filing unit, or item levels during the project and records the number in the single entry representing that level of work. Discussion of processing hours and metrics is covered in Section 4.5 of the processing manual.

UCI's integration of the UC Guidelines with accessioning and processing procedures is in its trial stage, and evaluation and improvement of the department's policies are ongoing. Nonetheless, the benefits of upfront decision-making facilitated by the use of value scores are already evident. Assessing materials during accessioning answers many administrative questions at the beginning of the archival workflow, the most important being the priority collections should receive. It allows processors to build upon an existing processing strategy and eliminates the need to start from scratch, incentives that are critical when time and resources are limited.

The accessioning manual, processing manual, and UCI Libraries Archival Processing Metrics Worksheet are available [here](#) under the heading "Technical Services."