

Archives Conservation Discussion Group 2015: The Effects of MPLP on Archives: 10 Years Later

ABSTRACT

The topic of this year's discussion was "More Product, Less Process," or MPLP. Over the past ten years, the archival profession has applied the methods advocated by MPLP to streamline processing practices and reduce collection backlogs, sometimes at the expense of preservation activities. To provide additional context for the discussion, co-chair Andrea Knowlton began the session with a short presentation on MPLP. Three panelists presented short talks on MPLP and related shifts in processing practices in their home institutions. All three talks emphasized the importance of collaboration between archivists and conservators to achieve both preservation and access. Following the presentations, the panelists answered questions and the audience participated in an open discussion.

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS

ANDREA KNOWLTON

AN INTRODUCTION TO GREENE AND MEISSNER'S "MORE PRODUCT, LESS PROCESS"

The concept of "More Product, Less Process," better known as MPLP, was introduced by archivists Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner in their 2005 article in *The American Archivist* titled, "More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing." The authors advocate for a more efficient alternative to established archival processing standards in order to address the problem of inaccessible collections in backlogs. To this end, they argue for a reduction

This open discussion took place on May 16, 2015, during the AIC 43rd Annual Meeting, May 13–May 16, 2015, Miami, FL. The moderators organized and led the discussion and recorded notes. Readers are reminded that the moderators do not necessarily endorse all the comments recorded, and that although every effort was made to record proceedings accurately, further evaluation or research is advised before putting treatment observations into practice.

in arrangement and description of collections as well as the considered elimination of many practices typically associated with preservation. These tasks include re-folding into buffered folders, removing metal fasteners, and providing additional housing for damaged or fragile items. What they instead propose is a minimal, or baseline, approach to archival processing.

Greene and Meissner specifically target preservation-related activities as a major point of inefficiency in archival processing, arguing that these actions force item-level handling of the collections (Greene and Meissner 2005). The overall effect of the argument is to position preservation and access as competing priorities (McCann 2013).

The authors are particularly concerned with the time and resources required for re-folding, and they return to this issue several times throughout the article. They report that replacing folders is among the most resource-intensive components of processing in terms of both materials and labor. They assert, "An unconscionable fraction of our limited and—all too often—declining processing resources are being badly spent on this and other extremely labor-intensive conservation actions" (Greene and Meissner 2005, 221).

For many institutions, resources are limited. Archivists recognize that compromises have to be made during processing in order to keep up with the volume of new acquisitions and make them available to researchers within a reasonable time frame. The result has been a shift in attitudes and practices across the archival field. Now, ten years after the original publication of Greene and Meissner's article, minimal-level processing as outlined by MPLP has become a widely accepted practice.

That does not mean, however, that minimal processing has been adopted across the board, and actually this was never the argument intended by Greene and Meissner. Anecdotally, many archivists report that this approach simply widens the range of options available, allowing the work of arrangement and processing to change depending on the needs of any given collection.

LAURA MCCANN

PARTNERING FOR PRESERVATION AND ACCESS

The NYU Libraries hold substantial collections of archival materials, which are housed both in Bobst Library and in an off-site storage facility. There are actually three separate archival repositories within the NYU Libraries: 1) the Fales Library and Special Collections, 2) the Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archive, and 3) the University Archives. Until very recently, each of these three repositories operated separately, with different programs, policies and workflows, including differing approaches to preservation and the selection of materials for conservation.

MPLP as it is applied at NYU Libraries can be better described as “contemporary archival collection management practice.” A practice, as opposed to a philosophy or methodology, is a way of approaching your work based on a set of core values. For contemporary archival practice, the core values are centered on the user, which Greene and Meissner emphasize repeatedly. From a conservation perspective, we consider both users in the reading room today, but also the students and faculty who will use collections far into the future.

MPLP advocates for responsible use of resources and a holistic approach to address collection needs without focusing on certain user groups or collections. The focus instead is on sustainable programs and policies that can be implemented across the board, such as baseline-level processing for all collections. To achieve a goal of sustainability, practices and workflows need to be data-driven. This means not only collecting statistics on use, but also understanding your inventory and your resources and using that data to plan and manage work responsibly.

These user-centered core values have been adopted by staff of the archival repositories at NYU Libraries, and the impact has been significant, including changes both to the organizational structure and to workflows. The largest change has been the establishment of a new department called Archival Collections Management. This department is responsible for accessioning, processing, inventory control, and data collection for all three archival repositories. In addition, a new preservation archivist position was created within the preservation department. This person essentially acts as a preventive conservator who works with archivists in each of the repositories to prolong the life of the collections. The work can include monitoring the environment, training staff on best practices for handling, and collection assessment. Survey data can be used to develop and inform preservation projects managed by the preservation archivist.

In the conservation unit at NYU Libraries, there has been a significant shift in the way materials are selected for conservation. Previously, materials were selected by archivists and curators based on intellectual interest or high monetary value. Today, use of the collections, coupled with condition

concerns, is the most important consideration, with particular emphasis on collections that are used in instructional contexts. Courses may be taught in special collections by archivists, librarians, and curators as well as by NYU faculty. Some courses are repeated regularly, and as a result, the collections used for these courses can receive repeated, heavy use. Work in the conservation lab has shifted to reflect these changes so that these heavily-used materials can be stabilized and rehoused to support their use in the classroom.

The most important change in the past ten years has been to develop a stronger partnership with archivists at NYU, and the preservation archivist has played an extremely important role in this. Close work with archivists has allowed the preservation unit to better understand the storage environments on-site and off-site, how materials are pulled from storage, and how conservation impacts housing and storage. This information has led to practical changes. One example is a change in housing practices. In the past, odd-shaped collections would be housed in unique, custom-sized boxes. It is now recognized that these odd-sized housings may not fit the usual dimensions of the shelves, which can result in handling challenges and improper shelving. To minimize these problems, the conservation unit now uses standard-sized boxes for housings whenever possible, with internal fillers and adjustments within the box to safely cradle the object.

Beyond Greene and Meissner, numerous articles and other resources from the archival community address the application of minimal processing. In addition to McCann’s own 2013 article, works by Christine Weideman and Thomas Hyry may be of particular interest.

Laura McCann, Conservation Librarian, New York University Libraries

MICHAEL SMITH

ACQUISITION, PRESERVATION AND IMMEDIACY:
A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO BALANCING THE DEMANDS OF
MAKING ARCHIVAL MATERIAL QUICKLY ACCESSIBLE

Library and Archives Canada (LAC) is a federal institution tasked with acquiring, preserving and making Canada’s documentary heritage known and accessible. Two recent large-scale digitization projects challenged LAC to adapt its normal processing and conservation treatment procedures, and required the institution to accept certain risks of physical damage, in order to make the material quickly accessible to researchers.

In September 2013, LAC acquired the Sir John Coape Sherbrooke Collection. Sherbrooke was an influential figure in the formation of Canada during the pre-Confederation era, serving as Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia from 1811–1816 and as Governor General of British North America from 1816–1818. The Sherbrooke collection consisted of 37

notebooks, 79 maps, 4 boxes of textual material, as well as paintings and various artifacts. Since this collection had not previously been accessible to researchers, digitization and access became predominant institutional priorities.

The Stewardship Branch of LAC was given a tight time-frame for making this collection digitally available online, with a total of two months allotted to complete processing, conservation treatment, and imaging. As a result, the usual processing and conservation procedures had to be modified to accommodate these deadlines. In LAC's normal workflows, the collection is processed and described by archivists shortly after it is acquired. Fragile materials and formats are noted, and the collection is conserved and rehoused if necessary. Digitization occurs once the material can be safely handled, usually after conservation treatment. Once digital images are made available online, the use of the physical collection is restricted. In some cases, is moved to LAC's high-density storage facility.

In preparing the Sherbrooke collection for digitization, LAC adapted these procedures in order to be able to treat, describe, and process the material concurrently. These modified processes required close collaboration with members of the LAC's Archival, Collection Management, Conservation, Digitization, Circulation, and Inventory Control teams.

Conservators assigned temporary numbers that allowed staff to keep the Sherbrooke records in their original arrangement as they were unpacked. These numbers also assisted archivists with tracking the objects at each phase, from processing through digitization, until permanent collection numbers could be assigned to the material. Archivists worked side by side with conservators, and, as the material was humidified, flattened, and safely unrolled, archivists began the descriptive process. Conservators and archivists also collaborated to determine what level of treatment was appropriate to ensure the collection could be processed in a timely manner and would be in the best possible condition for imaging. Once the material was described and authenticated against the inventory list, it was properly housed, barcoded, and digitized before going into storage. As a result of this successful collaboration, the entire collection was made available online for public access within the parameters of the deadline.

The second mass digitization project at LAC, which is still ongoing, is the imaging of military personnel files from the Canadian Expeditionary Forces (CEF), dating from World War I. The records hold attestation papers, medical histories, pay sheets, discharge certificates, casualty forms, and separation allowances from service members in the CEF. The 650,000 military personnel files in this collection reside in 10,702 containers and represent 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) of documents.

Imaging the CEF Files is a priority because it is one of LAC's most heavily used collections. For example, during 2011, 12,645 boxes of CEF documents were circulated. Of those, 3,439 were requested more than once. Prior to this

project, only items from this collection that were requested by researchers were imaged. The typical process is that a researcher orders the container for consultation, locates their file, and submits a digitization request. The entire container is then sent to the conservation lab, where the requested item is treated if necessary, then digitized, returned to the box, and sent to storage until it is requested again.

The CEF documents had been considered at risk for some time. The majority of the records were never fully processed, leaving the burden of discovery on researchers. In recent years, there was also increasing concern about this collection's deterioration, due to the high volume of consultation requests and the inherent vice of the material's acidic paper. Other preservation issues, such as fastener damage and inadequate housing were also cause for concern.

For the digitization of the CEF files, new workflows were created. One team is tasked with the preparation of the materials, such as fastener removal, review of objects needing conservation treatment, and mold identification. A second team concurrently completes conservation treatment.

In order to better meet the deadline, the methods used to digitize the collection were also modified. The bulk of the files were scanned on a high speed BancTec scanner, which uses a conveyor belt that employs suction to keep the documents in place as they are imaged. In light of the decision to use the BancTec scanners to digitize this collection, Library and Archives Canada decided that the records would need to be triaged prior to digitization. Items deemed too large or too fragile would be scanned in an upright, full flatbed scanner. After imaging the documents, the records are withdrawn from circulation and placed in high-density storage to preserve the original material. There was a small danger of physical damage using the BancTec scanners, but these risks are outweighed by the risks associated with cumulative damage from continued circulation.

Taken together, both of these projects underline the importance of collaboration between all stakeholders. LAC ensured that it had consulted with all colleagues involved about best practices for each project, as the success of these large digitization efforts depended on staff's openness to modifying existing procedures. As access remains a mandated priority for LAC, mass digitization projects like these will likely continue. In addition, LAC has recently opened a high-density collections storage facility, so it is feasible that use of original materials will be restricted in favor of access to digital surrogates. Based on the success of these modified workflows, LAC may consider adapting their processes for future digitization projects.

Michael Smith, Collection Manager for Textual and Cartographic Material, Library and Archives Canada

KIM NORMAN

MPLP AND CONSERVATION AT THE GEORGIA ARCHIVES

Making collections available to research patrons is the primary goal of the Georgia Archives. Many of the records acquired by the Georgia Archives are large, encompass a variety of formats, and are not always accessible without some intervention. Consequently, the Preservation and Archival Services Departments collaborate to ensure the best possible outcome with regard to both preservation and access. Based on observations from these collaborations, can we draw an analogy between MPLP and phased conservation? Both call for minimal intervention to meet immediate needs without closing the door to future actions.

Some conservators feel that the phased conservation approach means that items will not receive treatment beyond the initial basic stabilization; however, it is not always feasible to process, conserve, and rehouse entire collections completely. For example, a collection of county courthouse records were received in their original bundled packages and transport boxes. They could not be used by patrons in the current condition due to handling challenges presented by the tied bundles and tight folds of the paper. Providing digital scans or copies for researchers is a service provided by the Georgia Archives, so collections like these must be stabilized enough to ensure they can be safely handled, either in the reading room or during digitization. Stabilization may be considered the first phase of treatment.

Toward this end, archivists are trained to independently use some of the equipment in the conservation lab. It is possible for them to do light humidification, flattening, or other preservation activities as they process a collection. During this initial phase of treatment, archivists maintain the original order and humidify the documents in their original groupings. They also might create custom sleeves, remove fasteners, or rehouse parts of the collection.

It is vital that staff in both the Archival Services and Preservation departments agree about the limitations of the project and reasoning behind certain actions. A conservator might want to use a polyester sleeve to protect a document, based on its condition or vulnerability to future damage. An archivist, though, may decide to sleeve a document, but might make that decision based on its historical relevance and anticipated use. Both of these ways of approaching the material might have the same end result, but the decision making process is different.

At the Georgia Archives, phased conservation and MPLP strategies are less about streamlining treatment techniques and more about allocating resources to reach sufficient levels of processing and treatment to facilitate access to collection materials. Conservators are then free to identify items that require more intensive treatment based on condition or use.

Kim Norman, Preservation Manager and Conservator, Georgia Archives

DISCUSSION

After the presentations, the moderator opened the discussion period to the audience. Questions and comments are paraphrased below.

Commenter: This question is for Laura McCann, about boxes for odd-shaped items. Was that practice in place when you came to NYU, or was that something you had to implement? Did you have to retroactively move items from odd-sized or small boxes to standard-sized boxes, then follow up with changes to finding aids?

McCann: The need for standard-sized boxes is something that we started to understand about two years ago, by building strong relationships with staff and determining their concerns. Right now, our policy is to use standard-sized boxes going forward. We deal with a lot of off-site storage, and full records boxes are best for that. Odd-sized boxes are not a good use of off-site storage, because then you are paying for empty space. Calling back all of the odd-sized boxes from off-site storage is our next phase. We are going to be renovating our special collections in the next 5–7 years, so we will be looking towards that. The first stage will be putting things that aren't housed yet into standard-sized boxes, and then we can address the things in odd-sized boxes.

Commenter: Laura McCann, you mentioned both baseline processing and the importance of data to drive processing and preservation activities. Are you seeing collections that initially receive minimal or baseline-level processing return to staff for re-processing or re-housing at a later time?

McCann: This is iterative processing, something the archivists at NYU refer to all the time. I think that this is the goal. Our Archival Collection Management department is very young, and their plan at this point is for everything to be given an accession record and a basic level of preservation intervention at the same time. The preservation archivist defines what that level should be. Use of collections is tracked, so as collections are used, description can be enhanced as necessary, and materials can be flagged for further preservation if needed. The preservation archivist will assess collections, and objects can be identified that need to go to the Conservation Lab. This process is just getting started.

Norman: I would not say that things are coming back to us frequently. We treat items upon patron request. Sometimes a request develops into a larger project, and we continue if we see there is a need. One example is the courthouse documents I highlighted in my presentation, which began after a historic courthouse burned to the ground about a year ago. All of the courthouse records housed there were almost completely

burned, and very few could be salvaged. The Georgia Archives intended to make our records immediately accessible to researchers and citizens of the county where the courthouse had burned, so the Archive's large collection of courthouse documents were sent to the conservation lab. Treating large collections like this is a new workflow for us, and it is a bit early for us to see any repeated treatment of materials.

Commenter: At our institution we are seeing an enormous increase in the amount of audiovisual materials that are coming into the archival collections, at a rate that vastly exceeds our capacity to make them accessible or preserve them. We are doing minimal processing of these materials, with everything getting a label and a box list. There is little expectation that preservation money will be available for reformatting in the immediate future. For those materials that are unlikely to see heavy use in the next 5–10 years, we have begun to prep them for the move from the downtown library to a high-density storage facility, where we have very strict temperature and humidity controls. This should help to extend the useful lives of the materials, just as Greene and Meissner suggest, by providing the best environment that we can. This can be part of an iterative process. In the future, if someone requests these materials, we can process and preserve them at that point.

Commenter: I'm coming from a different angle. We have traditionally dealt with archives in our museum program, and there has been a lot of maximum processing done by curatorial staff. I am a curator, and I have an archivist on staff, but no conservator. We may eventually have a half-time archives technician. We have been looking at the issue of trying to implement MPLP locally. Our records are current resource management documents generated over the past 70 years, but there are a lot of other formats as well. Our clients are, for the most part, our own staff, although we do get some external researchers. We have a lot of inherent problems with our collections, so I'm trying to identify the best area to put our resources. We are trying to find the right balance for the formats that we have, the lack of conservators on staff, and the users of our collections. We'd like to develop a justified, thoughtful approach that balances use, but also accounts for those things that general environmental control is not going to solve for us. Have you thought about some of these things in more specific terms?

McCann: I think what I'm hearing here is, "How would you define the baseline, in terms of both archival processing and preservation management?" There are tools available. Many of us know of the Collection Care benchmarks—that is one I like. The Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) has some useful checklists. But descriptive processing is really resource-specific, so I'd look to the California

Processing Manual to see if it fits your needs. It's really about collecting data, understanding what your resources, staffing, and goals are, and deciding how quickly you want to attain those goals. You may start with a very minimal approach—every single collection is going to have an accession record, it's going to be in a sturdy box, and in folders that aren't falling apart. You might do that and then go back. That is the iterative process. If you don't have a lot of resources, set realistic, sustainable goals, and then reassess. Especially when you aren't sure of future staffing levels, it might be best to set a low baseline. Then make sure everyone understands that the initial baseline is not the end point. When you have met that initial benchmark, you can go back to target additional components.

Smith: At LAC, we are currently undergoing a major backlog project. For us, we want to make collections discoverable. That means we aren't necessarily describing to the item level, but we are making sure they have the right housing, dividing media up the best we can, and providing enough information that people can access the material they need. As a federal institution, we have private archival documents, but we get all of the government records as well. It's an ongoing fight just to try to keep up with the material we get on a daily basis and to try to make it available for people to find. It's much the same—trying to do the minimum amount of work just to make it discoverable.

Commenter: This is a comment about fasteners. I wonder if people will know what staples or paperclips are 100 years from now, and if we need to think twice about automatically removing them as part of the processing process. Once you dispose of that archival process, you lose that history of archiving and filing systems. This is a particular problem in the Early Modern period. There are wonderful filing systems found in the 18th century, but the filing strings have been removed from everything, they have been taken out of the wonderful canvas bags they were stored in, and there is very little evidence for recovering what those administrative processes were. At our institution, we've stopped removing fasteners for this reason, though we sometimes need to make sure they don't cause damage to other things. I hope that in these large collections you maintain some of the original filing processes so that a hundred years from now, or even sooner than that, people can remember how we did things.

McCann: They do tell a story, but in many of these big projects that promote access, you often have to take them out. I think that's where having selective documentation is important, and to make sure that the documentation is accessible to scholars and curators. It's also important to make sure the curators understand what you are taking apart.

Commenter: I'm located in the South and I have a lot of small institutions around me that don't have ideal climate control. Greene and Meissner's article seems fundamentally based on the idea that you have great climate control that mitigates all the other problems that might arise. That's what allows you to defer things like removing metal fasteners or other activities like separating media from each other. So, what do you do in terms of advising the local history collection or the small historic houses that have archival collections located in areas where we know they don't have good environmental control?

Norman: It is problematic, because climate control is one of the first lines of defense. We have to go back to our mission—what is it in our collections that our patrons or clients or visitors want? As a state archives, our visitors want access to our records, and by law, they have to have that. How does that figure in when the environment is not so great? It's hard to say where to begin. If I were to ask our facilities manager, I think he would say to tighten up the envelope of the building first.

McCann: This is one of the things I find frustrating with Greene and Meissner's original article, and even with the 2010 follow-up article written by Greene alone. They talk about environmental control, but they actually never specify what they mean. A library with an HVAC system can have environmental control, yet have uncontrolled relative humidity resulting in wide relative humidity fluctuations. Greene doesn't talk about climate control goals for collections, so he is putting out the idea without important details. One of the things we can all do, especially when you are working with or advising small institutions, is to communicate climate control goals while not overly focusing on strict environmental set points. We need to keep the focus on how to improve the environmental conditions with the resources available.

Commenter: The archives community latched on to what Greene and Meissner said about climate control because it's straightforward, much like the preservation world latched onto Garry Thomson when he recommended 70F/50%RH. What Thomson really said was 70F/50%RH is good in certain circumstances. Every institution is different and every collection has unique needs. However, it's often easier to teach one focused lesson that everyone can take away. For archivists, the easy takeaway from Greene and Meissner is that climate control is all that's required. Part of our job as conservators is to share the rest of the context, and to explain that very few institutions can realistically meet the goal of having environmental conditions that are so ideal you don't have to worry about anything else. What that means for a historic house in Virginia Beach will be different than for a museum in Denver, Colorado. Maybe there is no perfect answer and the reality is just doing the best that you can, given limits on money, time, and personnel.

Commenter: My thought about "More Product, Less Process" is that you're trying to reduce staff time spent on processing each collection in order to be able to keep up with newly acquired material. However, small historic houses or small museums don't usually have the volume of collections coming in that a bigger institution will have. They also often have a group of very dedicated volunteers. So my thought is, in that context, process as much as you want. I think that we as preservation specialists should know what the big picture is and what you are gaining and losing by making those choices. We have to acknowledge the article, but also explain that your context may be different. So, spend as much time as you want on the fasteners or the foldering, if that is what's meaningful to your institution.

Commenter: My question is about mold remediation and where it fits into the processing and digitization workflow. We do mold training for our graduate student and adjunct workers in our collections. They are the ones who process the collections, and contact me if they suspect a collection is moldy. We also have a quarantine room in our off-site facility, where these items can be stored until we are ready to address treatment. But, in processing the collection, mold remediation is a speed bump, and materials that go to the quarantine room often stay there for months. In your workflow, how did you handle mold remediation and did it slow down the process for you?

Smith: We built it into the workflow from the beginning. The team working on the CEF project was trained in mold identification, so by the time the material was sent to the labs, or frozen and sent out for treatment, it was a pretty seamless workflow. Day to day, it can definitely cause a delay in processing. If an archivist is processing a collection where mold is suspected, they contact me and I will look at the material. If the object is moldy, it will be frozen, treated, and then sent back to the archivist. We're quite lucky in that we have the resources to handle that in our building. We have freezers and conservation staff dedicated to mold remediation work, but it can definitely cause delays.

Commenter: We found it is not cost-effective to have staff do mold remediation, because it is so labor intensive. Things stay in the freezer or the fume hood for months or a year. We're experimenting now by doing a few pilot projects to have vendors do the mold remediation. We are finding that it's not that expensive, and we set aside money in the annual budget to keep that workflow seamless.

Commenter: What is the scale of those projects like?

Commenter: We had three pilot projects, and I think each had dozens of boxes, not hundreds. However, we did work with a vendor when we had a film project that was around 200 boxes, so it varies.

Commenter: We tend to come across just a few items at a time, very small scale. For larger projects, we try to utilize vendors as well.

McCann: Definitely, we have gained a lot of efficiency with the larger projects by using vendors, especially for the media collections.

Commenter: Do you have any recommendations for newly acquired collections where pest infestation is suspected?

Smith: We had a recent acquisition we suspected might be infested with silverfish. We rented freezer trucks and isolated the material in there for three weeks. After that, we placed the collection in our cold vaults on skids. We also placed traps around the skids to monitor until we were satisfied there was no pest activity. However, the length of time to freeze and monitor the collection really depends on the type of pest and its life cycle.

McCann: With new collections coming in with pests, we generally hire a contractor to examine and treat them, because we don't have the in-house facilities. I also want to refer everyone to museumpests.net. Their listserv is a great resource and they have specialists who are able to respond to more specific questions.

Commenter: We used the company Pests Unlimited, who was able to give us advice about recognizing particular kinds of insect damage and frass. Once we were able to do that, we could target the pests with pheromone traps. We've also used the Keepsafe anoxic system, particularly for large collections.

Commenter: I'm concerned that the workflows don't show the work schedules each step of the way. At our museum, especially with our archival and manuscript collections, which form the vast majority of our holdings, the schedule seems to be that everybody wants it now. I'm wondering how you negotiate those kinds of time pressures in your institutions? How do you negotiate, and who drives those pressures and the resulting work schedule?

Smith: For the kinds of projects that I have talked about, we're not normally in a position to say no when we are given a deadline. We are told this has to happen, and we try our best to make it happen. We are fortunate, maybe as opposed to some of the smaller museums, that we do have a budget. Sometimes we have money available to hire extra staff for large projects, which is what we did for the CEF records. It is always a negotiation to make sure that we can meet the deadline, and to make sure that management is aware that there might be potential risks to the collection. An example is the decision to use the BancTec scanners for the mass digitization

project, to make sure it was digitized quickly. But we also let them know that there was a chance that some material could be damaged when we did this, so we could make sure they are comfortable with the risks involved.

Norman: I would say that, at the Georgia Archives, our workflow is more fluid than that. We do respond to patron requests, and that is part of what drives our schedule. One of the things that can really strain our schedule and resources would be a large state legal case. It is not uncommon for attorneys to come in and request everything in a collection so they can have a reference copy to determine what is important to their case. Those are the moments when things get really tight for us.

McCann: Our schedules are driven more by instructional needs than digitization or exhibition programs. I think that allows for reasonable lead time on projects. One factor that also helps is having the preservation archivist, who is proactively working in the collections and with staff. He is working really closely with me in the Preservation Department, but also partnering with the archivists. This way, I know what's coming early in the process, and I know what kind of time constraints to expect. Good communication between departments helps me to know what's happening and what classes might be taught in the near future. Getting collections ready in time for classes in September can be really challenging. So in January, when a class is over, we try to get the object into the lab right away if they want to have it treated for the next class the following September.

Commenter—NYU Preservation Archivist: As a large, private university we have a very internally-focused user base, so we don't have outside deadlines that other institutions face. Our timelines primarily come from the curators of our special collections. My job is to be that link between the preservation department and curatorial departments. Conservators don't say no—we make it work. But occasionally you have to say no. That's what that relationship is about, as well as building trust. When we say we can't do something, or warn that it might be destructive and damaging, that trust supports the conversation and sets a context for negotiation.

Commenter: What we are describing here is an approach that forces a choice among competing priorities with limited resources—we can't do this if we also want to do this. Some management philosophies argue for an alternative approach with a positive spin—how can we make it better? If you want to achieve a new goal, what resources can you offer to make it happen? Can additional money, staff, or space be made available? How can staff collaborate in unique ways to complete projects? That can be on a large scale or on a small scale.

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FURTHER READING

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