

# Archives and Special Collections Strategic Plan – 2020-2025

## Introduction

With our previous strategic plan (2013-2018), we began by articulating our primary role as a facilitator of thoughtful access to rare and unique material, and we stressed the value we place on providing high quality service to our communities of users. With this plan, we reaffirm that the Archives and Special Collections Department (A&SC) views both access and service as our core responsibilities, and all other activities are recognized as means toward those ends. While it is vitally important that we preserve college records and other materials in order to document past activities and educate future generations, it is the interaction between patrons and the content they examine that truly gives the materials value as resources for increasing knowledge and understanding.

Our previous strategic plan focused heavily on enhancing our online presence and ensuring that our collections fit the needs of our users – most particularly, the Dickinson College community. After listing our many accomplishments under that plan, we reflected in our conclusion that there is now a need to refocus our attention on some of the foundational work that is necessary to make resources more accessible to our patrons. Being able to locate documents and other materials that are needed by researchers requires careful processing – properly inventorying, describing, cataloging, housing, and storing content so that it can be identified and retrieved for onsite use by students, faculty, administrators, and other patrons. Processing is also required to make materials ready for sharing online with a global community of interested users, since the search and discovery process is driven by quality metadata. New materials are constantly being added to our archival and special collections, in both physical and electronic formats, and it is incumbent upon us to ensure that this content can be organized and incorporated into our holdings so that they are searchable and accessible for use.

This strategic plan serves as a statement of the principal responsibilities and aspirations for A&SC as we honor our mission through our strong commitment to access and service.

### **Goal 1: Increase intellectual control over existing holdings.**

A&SC holdings are cataloged and described in a variety of ways. Inventories, finding aids, indexes, and full-text transcriptions are created and maintained in different paper and electronic formats, and they are used by staff and patrons alike to facilitate the search and discovery process. Our ability to quickly and accurately locate sources that are needed to answer any given research question is directly impacted by the degree to which we have descriptive information about our holdings readily accessible.

By creating descriptive tools for all materials, we seek to improve our knowledge of our own holdings so that content is more easily discoverable and retrievable.

- Objective 1: Ensure that we have at least rough inventories prepared for all collections.
- Objective 2: House and label all materials appropriately and map their locations carefully.
- Objective 3: Name and file all electronic resources and guides consistently.

## **Goal 2: Improve accessibility of materials.**

As we have moved to a more “extensible” approach to collection processing (meaning that we process collections in various stages, from more minimal inventorying up to detailed item-level description and cataloging), we have not similarly developed a consistent process to ensure that inventories, finding aids, and other tools are made available to researchers in a timely manner. If the finding tools are not available, the materials they describe are largely inaccessible.

Additionally, we have prepared various forms of content for online delivery but have not yet been able to make as much of that content accessible due to limitations in staffing and technology. We wish to address some of this backlog in areas where reference statistics indicate a strong interest in having more content readily accessible online.

In order to make our resources more discoverable, we plan to make more finding aids and inventories, as well as more digitized content, openly accessible via our website.

- Objective 1: Increase the volume of online content related to the LGBT History Project.
- Objective 2: Upload additional content to the Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center.
- Objective 3: Ensure that all collection inventories and guides are available online.
- Objective 4: Make audio/visual resources available online.

## **Goal 3: Enhance description for select content.**

Full-text search tools and technologies have caused a shift in how people conduct research. Archival records that are processed and inventoried according to traditional standards provide relatively few textual anchors, particularly in cases where content was largely described by type rather than subject, or described by very broad subject areas versus more granular sub-categories and niche topics. More detailed description, even to the item level in some cases, is necessary to make unique content findable and useful in an online search environment.

As a way to highlight valuable but largely hidden materials, we will describe select content in greater detail so that it is more easily discoverable both by our immediate campus community, but also by our global research community.

- Objective 1: Explore item-level description for select collections or record series.
- Objective 2: Process and describe photographic materials.
- Objective 3: Reprocess select collections in order to improve upon existing description.
- Objective 4: Review locally-created reference resources to update content as appropriate.

## **Goal 4: Refine guidelines and practices for providing services and managing content.**

As the variety of reference requests has grown increasingly complex, driven in part by technology and in part by changing patron expectations, we increasingly find ourselves working in a “case-by-case” fashion and being challenged to respond to patrons and clients as rapidly as we are accustomed. In addition, some formerly “case-by-case” activities that have become routine standard practice are not yet codified in writing.

To ensure that all patron and client needs are handled expeditiously and consistently, we plan to review, revise, and document our procedures.

- Objective 1: Review procedures for providing reference services for off-site patrons.
- Objective 2: Provide more information on our website about patron services and policies.
- Objective 3: Refine workflow for managing new accessions and donations.
- Objective 4: Update practices for sharing content electronically.
- Objective 5: Codify internal records management processes.

**Goal 5: Ensure optimization of web presence.**

Digital technologies continuously evolve and develop, as do the best practices and user expectations related to the sharing of content in an online environment. Replacing hardware and upgrading software are both necessary for the ongoing basic maintenance of existing resources. Exploring new tools, improving existing implementations of older tools, and planning for future needs are important in order to continue meeting user needs while also ensuring that we manage our digital activities effectively.

As resources permit, we aim to maintain and develop our web presence to optimize the user experience and improve operational efficiencies.

- Objective 1: Upgrade Archives website to newer version of Drupal.
- Objective 2: Upgrade Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center to newer version of Drupal.
- Objective 3: Explore new and/or improved modules and plug-ins for existing online platforms.
- Objective 4: Identify and evaluate additional platform options for hosting online content.