Course Syllabus, Fall 2019

Advanced Archival Description (HIST-GA.2031), New York University College of Arts and Sciences

Tuesdays, 4:55-7:35
King Juan Carlos Center, Room 717

Instructor Information
Weatherly Stephan, email: weatherly.stephan@nyu.edu *Please put HIST-GA.2031 in subject line of all course-related emails* Office hours are by appointment; please arrange in advance by email. I encourage you to contact me if a conversation during office hours can be helpful to you. Office is in the King Juan Carlos Center, room 704.

Course Description
This course explores the purposes of archival description and the place of description in the continuum of archival practice, especially the relationship to arrangement, and to discovery and reference. The course exposes students to the application of archival description and introduces the tools used to create description: content and encoding standards, controlled vocabularies, content management systems. The course also emphasizes the importance of understanding our users and applying this knowledge to influence descriptive practice, local practice and implementation, and online discovery environments.

Learning Objectives
● To understand the relationship between archival arrangement and description, and apply this to create description which accurately reflects the structure, content, and context of collections.
● To understand and apply the principles and methods of archival description in accordance with standards adopted by the US archival community.
● To understand the importance of evaluating user communities and user needs, and apply this knowledge to the creation of archival description and access systems.
● To understand the principle of interoperability of metadata, and use this knowledge in creating archival description and making descriptive system decisions.

Methods
Each class will be a combination of short lecture, and discussion or activity. Students will be expected to actively engage in all discussions and activities; completing reading assignments before coming to class is expected and will be critical to this participation and engagement. To support this participation, all
students are expected to post two questions or points for discussion brought up by the week’s readings on the NYU Classes discussion board prior to the beginning of each class.

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosecsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

Textbooks and Readings


You will need access to *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (DACS), Second Edition. While it is available online (http://www2.archivists.org/standards/DACS) and for purchase (https://mysaa.archivists.org/productdetails?id=a1B0b00000el19vEAA) from the Society of American Archivists, we will also read portions currently only up to date on GitHub (https://github.com/saa-ts-dacs/dacs).

Additional readings are cited in the syllabus below, listed during the week in which they will be discussed. Unless otherwise noted, all of these articles are available on the open web or in journals which the NYU library subscribes to and are available to you full-text through BobCat. Articles not available through BobCat will be posted on the NYU Classes site.

Grading

- In Class Participation, In Class Exercises, Discussion Board Postings 20%
- Reaction Paper 15%
- Processing Plan 20%
- DACS assignment 15%
- Final Paper Proposal 2.5%
- Final Paper Outline 2.5%
- Final Paper 20%
- Presentation 5%
Assignments

In-class participation and exercises: 20 points
Class participation is vital to your learning experience. All students are expected to come to class having completed the readings for the week, and to contribute meaningfully to class discussion. To support class discussion, students are required to post two questions or points for discussion each week on the NYU Classes discussion board, brought up by the weeks’ readings. Postings must be submitted two hours prior to the beginning of class at the very latest, though earlier posting is strongly encouraged. We will work through a number of activities and exercises as a group in class throughout the semester, designed to help you understand the ideas and tools presented in the readings. You must attend and participate in class in order to benefit from these activities; participation will be evaluated on quality, not quantity.

Reaction Paper: 15 points
You will write an 1100-1500 word paper reacting to one or more of the articles assigned in week 2 and 3 readings. Summarize what you believe to be the author’s arguments, and then write about your own reaction to the readings. You may bring in ideas from other class readings or your own practical experience. Further instructions will be posted to NYU Classes site.

Processing Plan assignment: 20 points
You will be given time in class during week 4 to examine a collection held in the NYU Special Collections, and should complete a processing plan for the collection and a short paper reflecting on the process. A processing plan template and further assignment details will be posted on NYU Classes. Please note, you will need to make additional time outside of class to examine the collection during Special Collections’ open hours.

DACS assignment: 15 points
You will create a multilevel, added value, DACS compliant description for the same collection assigned to you during the Processing Plan assignment. Annotate each part of your finding aid with the DACS rules you used to create each part, and an explanation of choices made in applying the rule. An assignment template, and further detail and instruction will be posted on NYU Classes.

Final Paper: 20 points + 2.5 points each for proposal and outline
You will write a 3500-4000 word research paper exploring an issue or idea related to archival description, representation, and access. This should be taken as an opportunity to delve more deeply into any of the topics we cover over the course of the semester. A paper proposal and outline are due on incremental dates throughout the semester. Further detail and instruction will be posted on NYU Classes.
Final Presentations: 5 points

You will give a 5 minute lightning talk during the last class, presenting and distilling the major ideas from your final paper. You will have access to a computer and projector if you have slides to accompany their presentations; please bring these on a USB flash drive to load onto the classroom computer.
## Course Schedule Outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>September 3</td>
<td>Ethics of access and the purposes of archival description</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>September 10</td>
<td>Archival representation; User information seeking behavior</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>September 17</td>
<td>Description in the continuum of archival practice; Accessioning</td>
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<td><strong>Reaction paper due at beginning of class</strong></td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>September 24</td>
<td>Relationship of arrangement and description</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>October 1</td>
<td>Relationship to reference</td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>Final Paper Proposal due via NYU Classes on October 4th by midnight</strong></td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>October 8</td>
<td>NO CLASS: Work on Processing Plan assignment.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>October 15</td>
<td>NO CLASS: Classes on Monday schedule. <strong>Processing Plan assignment</strong></td>
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<td><strong>due via NYU Classes on October 18th by midnight</strong></td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>October 22</td>
<td>Writing the finding aid; Transparency; Archivist as actor on collections</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>October 29</td>
<td>Description as data: Metadata, standards, structured data, controlled</td>
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<td>vocabularies</td>
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<td><strong>Revised Collection Description from Processing Plan due at beginning of class</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>November 5</td>
<td>Content standards: ISAD(G), ISAAR(CPF), DACS</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>November 12</td>
<td>Encoding standards: EAD, MARC, EAC-CPF</td>
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<td><strong>DACS assignment due at beginning of class</strong></td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>November 19</td>
<td>Interoperability; Data and power</td>
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<td><strong>Final Paper outline due at beginning of class</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>November 26</td>
<td>Archival description on the web; Usability</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>December 3</td>
<td>Decision making, priority assessment, and the descriptive program</td>
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<td><strong>Final Papers due at beginning of class</strong></td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>December 10</td>
<td>Final Presentation Lightning Talks; Wrap-up discussion</td>
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<td><strong>Final Presentations given in-class</strong></td>
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Class 1: Ethics of access and the purposes of archival description

In class readings to be distributed.


Class 2: Archival representation; User information seeking behavior

**Read:**


Class 3: Description in the continuum of archival practice; Accessioning

**Guest Speaker:** Rachel Searcy, Accessioning Archivist, Archival Collections Management, NYU.

**Read:**

- Kathleen Roe, “The Practice of Arrangement and Description,” in *Arranging & Describing Archives & Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2005), 45-88. (selections of chapter; available on course reserves)
Class 4: Relationship of arrangement and description

**Guest Speaker:** Anna McCormick, Librarian for Archival Arrangement & Description, Archival Collections Management, NYU.

**Location:** Class will meet in Bobst Library Special Collections, 2nd Floor.

**Read:**

**Skim:**
- “Arrangement and Description” and “Cross-Program,” Archival Collections Management LibGuide, [https://guides.nyu.edu/archivalcollectionsmanagement](https://guides.nyu.edu/archivalcollectionsmanagement). Review range of resources and documentation provided for processing staff.

Class 5: Relationship to reference

**Guest Speaker:** Tal Nadan, Reference Archivist, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

**Location:** Class will meet at the New York Public Library Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, 42nd Street and 5th Avenue.

**Read:**
Class 6: Writing the finding aid: Transparency; Archivist as actor on collections

Read:

- Daniel A. Santamaria, Extensible Processing, Appendix E (pages 191-200)

Skim

- Finding Aid examples posted to NYU classes site

Class 7: Description as data: Metadata, standards, structured data, controlled vocabularies

Read:


● Jenn Riley, Seeing Standards: A Visualization of the Metadata Universe, 


Skim:

● Library of Congress Subject Headings: http://authorities.loc.gov

● Art and Architecture Thesaurus: http://www.getty.edu/research/tools/vocabularies/aat

Class 8: Content standards: ISAD (G), ISAAR (CPF), DACS

Read:


● Daniel A. Santamaria, Extensible Processing, Chapter 6, 69-84.

Skim:


Class 9: Encoding standards: EAD, MARC, EAC-CPF

Read:

● Sara Allain. “Archival description technology: a part of our history”. Lightning talk at Code4Lib 2017. https://youtu.be/xRuPSyYelm4?t=2h16m15s Slides at https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1n-0bpqM6MC1B_ZKOWvu714c4pk-ksL51pm05B0wWQhy/edit


Skim:
- EAD Tag Library http://www.loc.gov/ead
- Spend some time looking at the SNAC website https://snaccooperative.org/, both reading documentation and performing searches.

Class 10: Interoperability; Data and power

Read:
Skim

- Crosswalks on the EAD Tag Library website: [http://www.loc.gov/ead/tglib/appendix_a.html](http://www.loc.gov/ead/tglib/appendix_a.html)

Class 11: Archival description on the web; Usability

Read:

- Steve Krug, *Don’t Make Me Think Revisited*, pages 11-100.

Class 12: Decision making, priority assessment, and the descriptive program

Read:


Class 13: Final Presentation Lightning Talks; Wrap-up discussion

Lightning talks presented in class. No readings.