“Keep it Simple” Accessioning: 
Taming the Trickle of Institutional Records

I. Abstract
Existing procedures for university records inadequately met the demands of increased scrutiny and expectations for records acquisition by masking the amount (and sources) of material reaching University Archives, creating accessioning and processing backlogs*, and underrepresenting the amount of staff time spent in processing university records. The frequency and small size of most DPUA* transfers (the “trickle”) stymied typical accessioning procedures. New procedures were needed that neither under-nor over-reported accession and processing data, and more clearly identified the record creators making transfers to University Archives.

II. Context
Though typical procedures included accessioning and collecting statistics on processing (extent added to collection, staff time, total extents processed), they had been inconsistently applied to university records.

DPUA accessions appear moderate leading up to the Compliance mandate, though these figures do not account for:
- The high rate at which DPUA materials actually arrived in the department.
- University publications, ephemera, etc. filed without accessioning or collecting processing data.
- Unknown amount of accumulated university records that had never been accessioned nor processed.
- An existing backlog of approximately 93 LF, dating back as far as 1989.

The limited size of DPUA transfers had likely contributed to the lax application of accessioning procedures.
- Should single publications or documents arriving in the department be accessioned?
- How should repeated, small transfers from a single office be treated?
- Should small transfers be filed immediately, or should backlogged materials be processed first?

There were no standard answers...

III. The Solution: Three Acquisition Streams, LIFO Processing Implemented in 2014
Focusing on core data requirements (use of staff time, depth of engagement with record creators, extents processed), developed format-based procedures.

IV. Outcomes

Tangibles
- Compliance-mandated reporting includes substantially more accurate figures about the number of transfers and extent of university records acquired by SPCA.
- Staff time spent in processing all types of university records is now accounted for.
- Despite substantial growth in DPUA accessions, in 2014 all 2013 accessions were processed, as well as approximately 10 LF of backlog.

Intangibles
- Standardized procedures have reduced staff confusion about handling incoming records, and prioritizing processing activities.
- A rational process has improved stewardship of records (being able to answer, Where is it?).
- Staff are in a much stronger position when “selling” record creators on University Archives as a safe, viable option for historically significant records.