Revisiting Backlog Processing with MPLP

More Product, Less Process and the American Federation of Teachers Backlog Project

Stefanie Caloia, AFT Project Archivist, Wayne State University

Processing 1700 Linear Feet in 18 months

15 Collections from the American Federation of Teachers national office and local affiliates

Processing at various levels (see Methods) based on collection and researcher needs

Collections range from well organized with box inventories to unfolded documents with no inventories

Accessions from 1970s-2000s; records from 1916-2005

1700LF/18 months = ~1.7 hours/LF

Project runs August 2014-February 2016

Methods

Greene & Meissner's More Product, Less Process

Process according to needs of the collection, and determine "the Golden Minimum"

Average linear foot should take 4 hours to process

The Reuther Library's Processing Guidelines

Level I – Folder-level arrangement – closest to traditional processing

Level II – Series-level arrangement, minimal description

Level III – Box level – no arrangement, just inventory

Levels II & III expected to take 1-2 hours/linear foot; Level I: 4hrs/LF

Reflect

Adapt

Outcomes (so far)

Processed 8 Collections/980 LF in 12 months

12 months/980 LF = ~2.15 hours/LF

Researchers are already using processed collections – sometimes asking for them before they are complete.

Conclusions

Space

Weeding was not done at single page level. Large groupings of duplicate material, government and other unannotated publications, large groups of newspaper clippings, and binder clips were removed. Folders shifted and boxes condensed where possible. 91 LF of space saved so far.

Preservation

Quickly flipping through folder contents can reveal major problems that need addressing. The biggest problems with these collections are acidic and thermal paper. Some preservation photocopying was completed.

Access

Description was added to make up for less-detailed arrangement. For example, an explanation of why items are arranged a certain way that may not be immediately obvious to researchers but can help them navigate records. More description on scope and content, less in administrative histories.

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Ongoing Challenges

Refolding

Some folders always need to be replaced, such as hanging file folders.

Sensitive material

Having a thorough understanding of a collection allows sensitive items to be identified. Project archivists need time to get up to speed on this but talking with senior members of staff or reading literature on similar collections can help. Skimming documents to locate information that requires review and removal

Reference:


Contact:

Stefanie Caloia, AFT Project Archivist

Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University

SCaloia@wayne.edu