ArchivesSpace to Primo Pipeline: Harvesting Finding Aids for Discovery

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The Goal of Greater Discoverability
WMU Libraries also wanted to create a greater discoverability of their collections. Even a robust collection-level record can be limited in the amount of description and access points provided. With the migration of our ILS and discovery layer in 2015, the Libraries now had the option of using OAI-PMH functionality to build a Pipe and harvest data directly into our discovery layer, Ex Libra Primo. A Pipe is a set of steps that the harvested data goes through to be turned into a normalized record that can be displayed along all other resources. Using Pipes to bring in content from digital asset and archival collection management platforms and our institutional repository, the Libraries achieved its goal of providing cross-platform discovery.

ArchivesSpace Configuration
An OAI-PMH interface for ArchivesSpace was included in v2.1.0, and was designed to not harvest unpublished and suppressed records. We assigned a metadata prefix for Dublin Core, oai_dc. WMU waited to harvest until v2.5.0 and the version’s inclusion of DACS content standard and EAD3 structure standard, can have a high level of description, and a manageable amount of records. The other levels of description used most often in our finding aids, file, and item, had inconsistent or generic titles and limited description and therefore did not have enough access points to add much for discovery.

Discovery Configuration and Pipe Construction
Primo can harvest records from an OAI repository like ASpace by creating a Pipe, which sends scheduled OAI-PMH requests.

Data Source: tells discovery layer where the data comes from and how to get it
Scope the Data: groups data as a ‘collection’ for searching
Normalize the Data: tells discovery layer how to handle data so it can be searched, displayed, and indexed with data from all other sources, including rules for:
  • resource type
  • which fields should be searchable
  • which fields to display
  • facets
When combined, this results in a Pipe* that feeds data from ArchivesSpace into the discovery layer to be displayed alongside all other materials.
*Actually three Pipes: one to harvest data, one to delete all data, and one to renormalize existing data.

Schedule the Pipe: WMU decided to harvest regularly once a month to catch ongoing changes and updates to our finding aids.

The Cross-platform Discovery
In this example, the collection-level MARC21 record is alongside the Caroline Bartlett Crane Collection finding aid. The resource type of Finding Aid is displayed along with the assigned icon.

Conclusion
We achieved our initial goal of creating more access and potential for discovery by harvesting finding aids directly into our discovery layer. To learn if our archival description is actually being discovered more than before, Google Analytics has been set up for ArchivesSpace.

In the first three months of tracking, Primo is listed as the top provider of referrals to ArchivesSpace, though the majority of traffic is still direct or from organic searches.

An interesting side effect of creating new finding aids directly in ArchivesSpace is the more expansive approach to multi-level description. Unlike a static document, all the resource records from collection down to item, can be discovered on their own, outside the context of the larger finding aid. It becomes more important to add creators, subjects, scope and content, and descriptive titles at every level of description, especially if that level was chosen for harvest into the discovery layer.

Next steps include loading record group inventories from the University Archives and adding more legacy finding aids.

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Links were provided in the MARC 555 and 856 fields on the collection-level record. Patrons viewing the record in WorldCat and the library catalog could now follow the link to the full collection description online in the ArchivesSpace public interface. Many legacy finding aids, often typed with pencil edits, were now easily editable, added to, searched, and sent electronically to patrons. Accessibility was increased.

On the Value of Online Finding Aids:
"...it gives us an opportunity to serve our patrons, namely our researchers, in the most efficient way possible. When I think about what we would have to do before ArchivesSpace, I was very time consuming to get information out to those who requested it. Now it's... accessible to anyone who can access it. It's a win-win situation for both the institution and the patron." — Lynn Houghton, Curator, WMU’s Regional History Collections