Society of American Archivists (SAA) Workshop
Arrangement and Description of Electronic Records (ADER)
23 May, 2012

This workshop, led by Christopher Prom of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, could easily have stretched across three days of interactive education. The material we covered was that rich, and was of much interest to the group who attended the session on Roosevelt University's campus that day. I have already implemented some of the practices discussed in the course for use in developing Dominican University's nascent effort to control its growing collection of born-digital content.

While the stated goal of the course was to introduce us to arrangement and descriptive practices for digital content much of our time was spent on developing a foundation for the collection of digital materials. As we discovered in introducing ourselves there is not a single local repository that has a fully-formed records management and retention program for institutional and other digital materials collected in the course of our work. Chris himself stated that this is all a work in progress, and that nothing he covered that day was definitive or final. We are all muddling our way through the process together.

Chris follows the broad outline for managing digital archival materials as described by the Open Archival Information System (OAIS), as developed by NASA some years ago. This involves the ingestion of content, often referred to as a Submission Information Packet (SIP) and the process of transforming an SIP into an AIP, or Archival Information Packet. In this way we can purposefully collocate the original digital content, the archival metadata, and, perhaps most importantly, the Preservation Description Information (PDI) in one wrapper. Understanding this process, and beginning the baby steps towards integrating these practices into our workflow, was the true focus of the session.

By the end of the day each participant gained some experience in the use of several open source software packages, such as NARA File Analyzer, DROID, and Bag-it, We learned too how to generate a Checksum register, how to process digital content without altering its integrity or evidentiary metadata, and why one needs to monitor file generation and characteristic data. While Chris does not explicitly promote any single tool in the process he did his best to guide us towards understanding the reasoning behind such practices. This was a remarkably useful and practical workshop, and I am grateful to LIBRAS for helping me in furthering my work with establishing a digital repository.

11 June, 2012
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