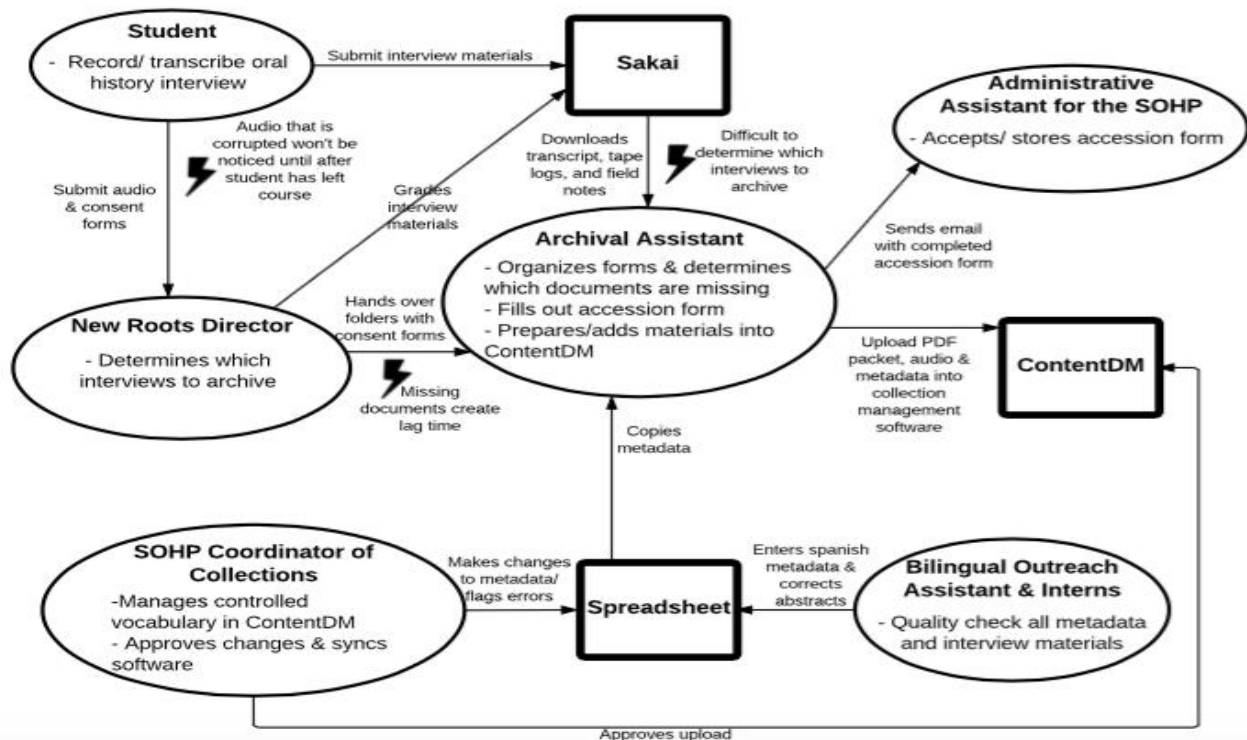


A look at "accessioning" in New Roots/Nuevas Raíces

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At New Roots we are constantly looking for ways to improve access to a growing collection of oral history interviews related to Latin American migration that provide first-hand accounts of the demographic changes that have occurred in this state over the last 20 years. This semester I had the opportunity to examine one of the core functions of archival practice and collection development: accessioning. For those who are not familiar with archival parlance, accessioning means “to take legal and physical custody of a group of records or other materials and to formally document their receipt” (Pearce-Moses, R., & Baty, L. A., 2005). Accessioning is an essential first step that allows the archivist to gain intellectual control over the materials by knowing what is to be included in the collection and which restrictions apply for access.

As part of a course project for the Systems Analysis class I took last semester, our team conducted semi-structured and contextual interviews with several members of the New Roots staff. Our goal was to examine the current system for adding oral history interviews to the archive and provide recommendations that can help streamline the process. The investigation revealed that audio corruption, missing documents, and issues with the artifacts used to collect interviewee’s personal information caused the greatest backlogs in the system. Looking at our approach through the lens of systems analysis allowed me to step back from the daily work of describing and arranging these interviews and deeply examine the process holistically. The flow model below summarizes how information is transferred across the organization and identifies the specific breakdowns we aimed to remedy:



Taking into consideration the varying availability of resources, we proposed two improvement options for the system. Both options focus on increasing the students' involvement in complete interview packet preparation. Such an approach intends to prevent human error rather than correct it. The main difference between the two options is the recommended data transferring method. Option 1 recommends an easily implementable hard drive-based approach, while option 2 looks into a fully digitized data transfer system using the MediaCore add-on, which provides a secure, private cloud based platform that allows instructors and students to upload multimedia content through Sakai.

Option #1

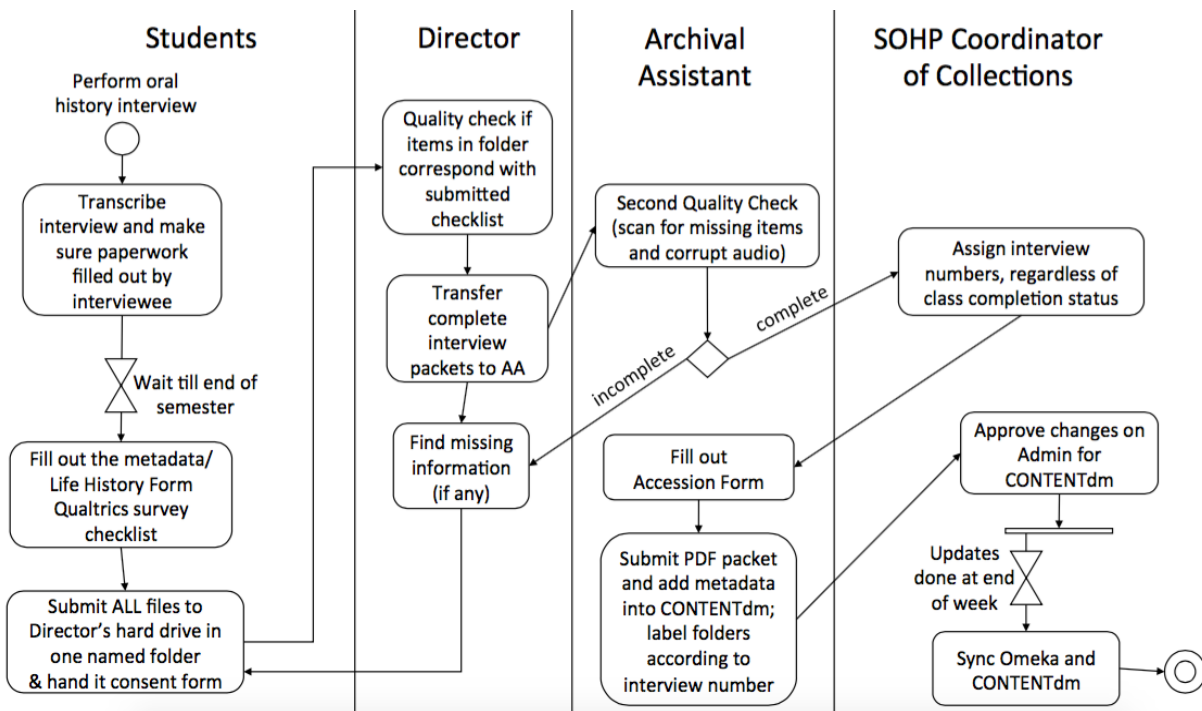
To shorten the accessioning timeline and improve information flow, we recommended three changes to the current system:

1. Split up interview batches and archive interviews on a regular basis.
2. Collect all final interview materials through an external hard drive rather than a combination of Sakai and hard drive.
3. Edit and digitize the Metadata/Life History Form.

Although accessioning interview batches at the end of the semester has the benefits of maintaining continuity and makes it possible to assign consecutive interview numbers, we found the process to be a primary reason for the lag time. While some interviews may have all components necessary for submission into the archive, others may be lacking important elements that prevent the batch from being accessioned. The best approach would be to establish a monthly or a bi-monthly schedule of accessioning interviews regardless of batch completeness.

Because students submit various parts of their interview packets at different times and through different data transfer mediums, some forms can be misplaced or difficult to identify. To best prevent this from happening, we recommend students be required to submit all of their final interview packet elements in a single folder labeled with their full name in a standardized format, like "LastName, FirstName". Given that the current system already requires audio file submissions in this manner, we predict that changing the requirement to a submission of a folder containing both audio and written materials will be easy to implement. Additionally, it will become easier to identify all submitted elements by student and do a quick quality check of interview packet elements upon submission. This will allow for a timely identification of missing forms and decrease the current workload.

The last change is currently being tested at New Roots. In previous semesters students needed to fill out a physical Metadata/Life History form for each interviewee. Digitizing this component can facilitate addition of metadata to ContentDM and prevent the loss of data if the paper form goes missing or is disconnected to electronic components such as transcripts, abstracts, tape logs and field notes. Students would have to complete a Qualtrics survey with all the pertinent data before submitting their final folder to the director's hard drive. Before entering metadata, however, students would have to go through a checklist of items to be included in their final submission. The checklist would then be verified by the course instructor in real time, as students submit their interview packets. This additional gate would further decrease human error by preventing students from making their submissions without a complete list of necessary items.



Option #2

For the second option, the team proposed a Sakai module expansion with an add-on called MediaCore. After speaking with Aaron Brubaker, the Director of Information Technology at the School of Information and Library Science, we accepted this option as a possible alternative to the use of an external hard drive for transferring materials. Implementing a module expansion would simply require receiving permission from the Sakai admin. By enabling the MediaCore add-on, the Sakai site will have the capability to store student audio files of interviews. A Sakai site without the MediaCore add-on only has a limited storage space of 2 GB, which would not be able to handle any type of media-rich content.

Although MediaCore is not currently in use by instructors for audio purposes, it is enabled upon request for courses that require the submission of video files. The add-on has proven successful in these cases and is a great option for this project moving forward. Our team is confident with proposing this option given its capabilities and the advice from the Information Technology Director at SILS.

To read more about the capabilities of MediaCore, follow this [link](#).

While option 1 is easily implementable and would successfully remedy the identified breakdowns in the process, option 2 offers the increased convenience and security of maintaining interview audio files on the Sakai server rather than relying on the physical storage of a hard drive. A combination of the two methods would likely yield the best results for New Roots as we continue building a digital collection of oral histories that tell such profound stories about some of the people who call North Carolina home.

Reference:

Pearce-Moses, R., & Baty, L. A. (2005). A glossary of archival and records terminology. Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists.