ODNFest 2026

AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT: APPLYING AN ETHICS OF CARE MINDSET TO DIGITAL COLLECTION AND METADATA ASSESSMENT

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BRING ON TOMORROW

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Agenda

01 Context

02 Ethics of Care

03 The Approach

04 Next Steps

05 Conclusion

Public Domain, Indiana University

1.

CONTEXT

Institutional Context

- **Indiana University (IU) Indianapolis** (Formerly IUPUI—Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis)
  - R1 University (2025)
  - ~30,000 undergraduate/postgraduate students
  - IU system = 9 campuses

University Library, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IU Indy) campus, 1997



IU Indianapolis Image Collection, University Library Indianapolis Digital Collections, https://library.indianapolis.iu.edu/digitalcollections/uarchives/ua024.

Department Context

- **Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives**
  - Founded 1975 (University Archives)
  - German American Archives (circa 1970s, 1987)
  - Philanthropic Studies Archives (1990)
- **Center for Digital Scholarship**
  - Previously Digital Library Team
  - Manage the institutional repository and advocate for open access initiatives
  - Cultural heritage digital collection creation (digitization and community partnerships) since early 2000s

Shelves in Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives, December 2016

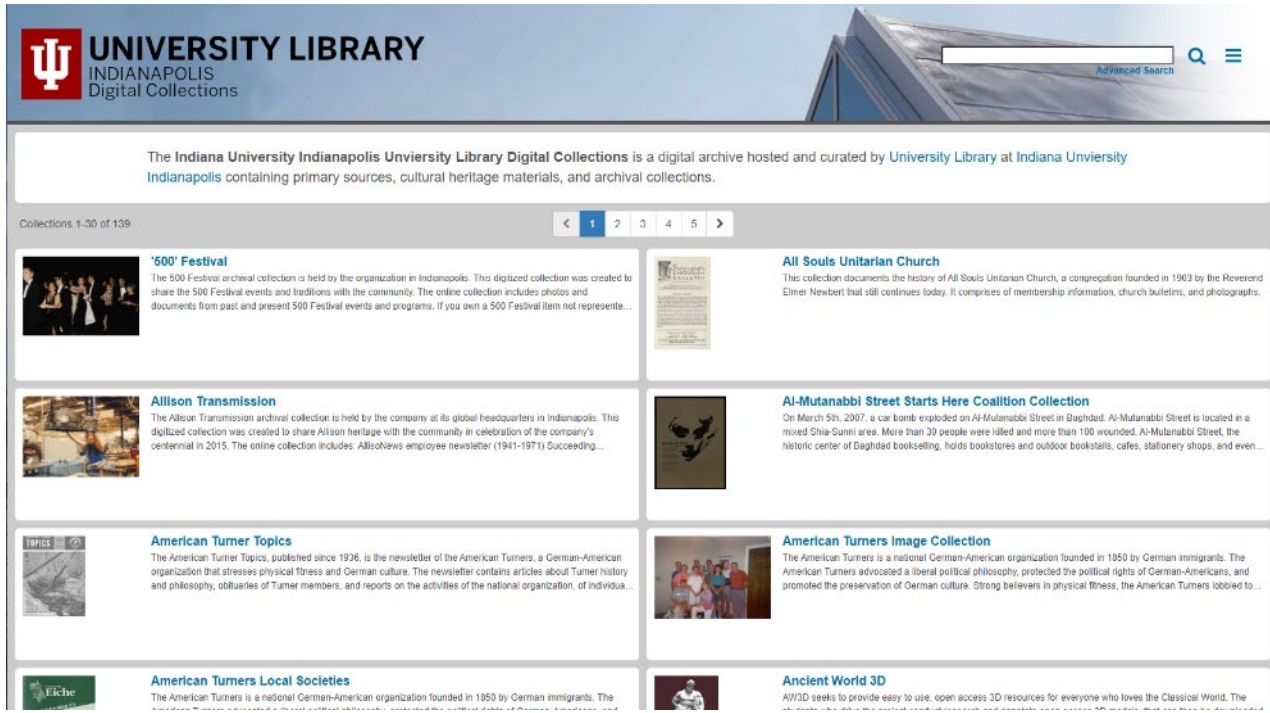


IU Indianapolis Image Collection, Indiana University Indianapolis University Library Digital Collections, https://library.indianapolis.iu.edu/digitalcollections/uarchives/ua024.

Position Context

- Digital Preservation and Digital Collections Archivist
  - New position (2025) created by merging old positions: *Digital Archivist*, *Outreach Librarian/Head of Digitization Services*, *Digital preservation* (responsibility)
- Reports to Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives
- Works on department and **library-wide initiatives**:
  - Born-digital collections and digitization special projects (Special Collections)
  - Cultural heritage digital collections and community partnerships (Center)
  - Digital preservation (Library)

Indiana University Indianapolis University Library Digital Collections



Indiana University Indianapolis University Library Digital Collections, https://iuidigital.contentdm.oclc.org/.

Collections Context

- **Digital Collections**
  - **147** cultural heritage digital collections (CONTENTdm)
    - Nearly 1,000,000 items
  - **167** born-digital collections (dSpace)
  - Excludes institutional repositories (dSpace)

- **Storage**
  - **83.93 TB** across **3 departments** (Special Collections, Center, Herron Art Library)
  - **On-site servers** and **Microsoft SharePoint**
    - Unreconciled across numerous locations
- **Preservation**
  - *Special Collections*: basic digital preservation metadata and packages created (BagIt) but no active fixity checks
  - *Center*: Past initiatives but no current practices beyond regular server backups

FEELINGS

I'm a bit *overwhelmed* by the work that needs done, and I'm *questioning* how things got to this point...

[*Enter cynicism*]

2.

ETHICS OF CARE

The Concept of Ethics of Care

From My Early Knowledge and Readings

- Many frameworks for ethics or morality are **rights-based**, centering on **independence** and personal rights
- **Feminist scholars** in the 1980s found that rights-based frameworks predominately echo masculine experiences, not those of women
- **Ethics of care** (Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 1982) emphasizes relationships and putting others first (connected web of relationships)
- The **archival application** puts others first in processing and administration tasks: ***record creators***, ***record subjects***, ***users and researchers***, and ***communities***

“

From the approach of a feminist ethics of care, *archivists are seen as caregivers*, bound to records creators, subjects, users, and communities through a web of mutual affective responsibility… *How would the archival conversation change if we shifted* from a rights-based model *toward a feminist ethics of care?*

– **MICHELLE CASWELL AND MARIKA CIFOR**, “FROM HUMAN RIGHTS TO FEMINIST ETHICS: RADICAL EMPATHY IN THE ARCHIVES,” ARCHIVARIA 81 (SPRING 2016): 24-25.

[EMPHASIS ADDED]

Applying Ethics of Care to Archives

Some Thoughts

- **Legal obligations** are not the only factors to be considered when making decisions
- Archivists are **caregivers** of the people in or connected to collections, not just the physical collections
- Archivists should have **radical empathy** (desire to understand or appreciate other people's experiences)
  - Taking the time to understand experiences leads to **context** and **knowledge**

ETHICS OF CARE
FEELINGS

Ethics of care focuses on external groups, but we should also apply it to internal groups—such as *predecessors* and *successors*—that have valuable contributions based on specific situations and context.

[*Deep breath, release cynicism*]

3.

THE APPROACH

Authentic Assessment

What is it?

- **Balancing work expectations** to keep personal life in balance
- Using **established and respected tools and frameworks** to assess the state of the work, *not* just your own knowledge and experiences
- **Documenting the past** for the future, *not* to prove someone right or wrong
- Understanding that collaborative work requires **empathy**, which leads to **better understanding and context**
- *Being honest and truthful while providing context*

Relationship Building

- Collaborate outside the workplace
- Reestablish relationships with individuals, departments, and groups
- Attend meetings across library departments that do similar work
- Work together to document the past
- **Ask questions not to get answers but to understand the story**

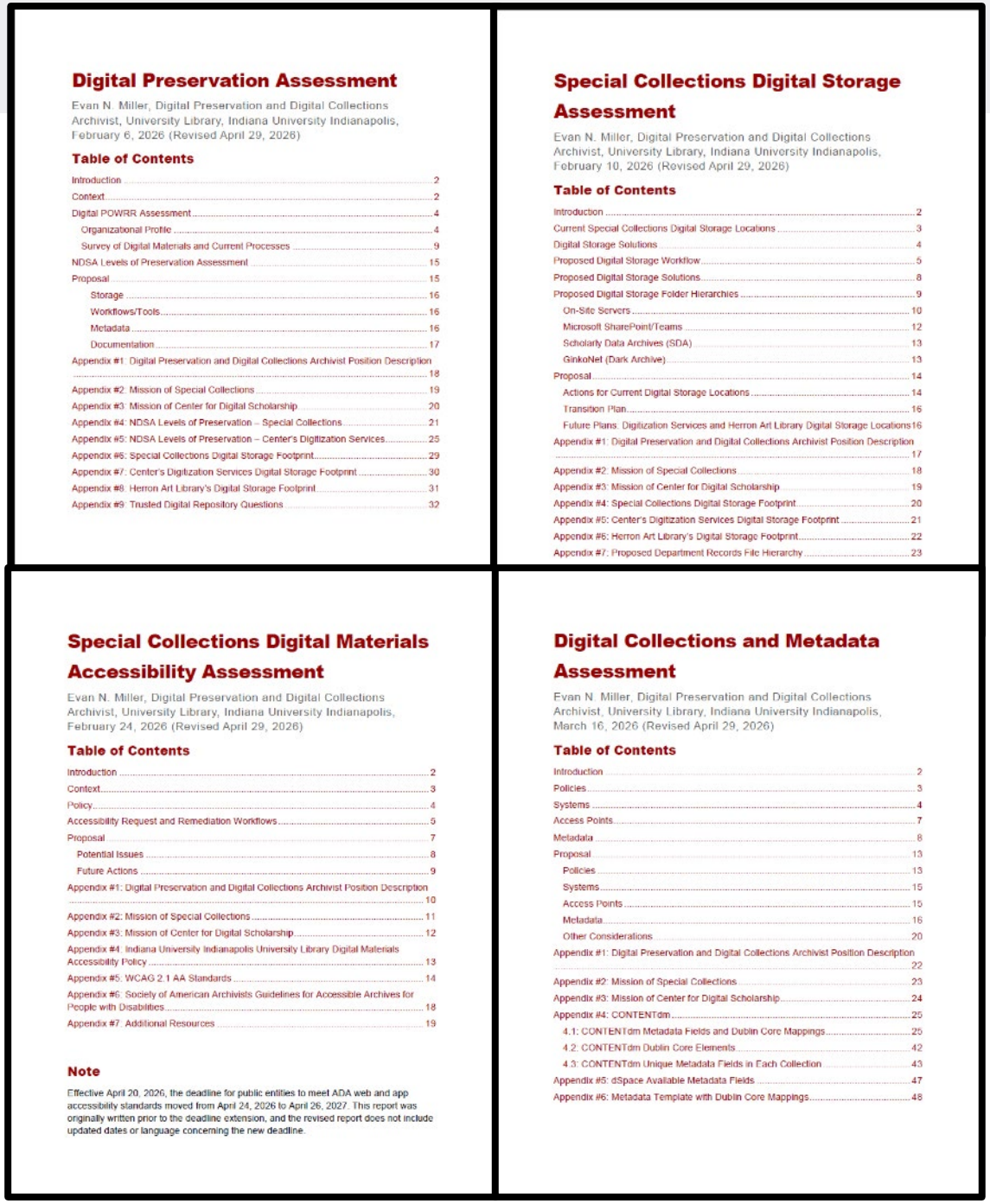
Volunteer Day, University Library Center for Digital Scholarship, Spring 2026.



Courtesy of Evan N. Miller.

Documentation and Assessment

- Focused on documenting state of collections and processes
  - Special Collections Website Proposal
  - **Digital Preservation** Assessment
  - Special Collections **Digital Storage** Assessment
  - Special Collections Digital Materials **Accessibility** Assessment
  - **Digital Collections and Metadata** Assessment
- Shared for transparency and advocacy



Digital Preservation Assessment

Evan N. Miller, Digital Preservation and Digital Collections Archivist, University Library, Indiana University Indianapolis, February 6, 2026 (Revised April 29, 2026)

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Special Collections Digital Storage Assessment

Evan N. Miller, Digital Preservation and Digital Collections Archivist, University Library, Indiana University Indianapolis, February 10, 2026 (Revised April 29, 2026)

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Special Collections Digital Materials Accessibility Assessment

Evan N. Miller, Digital Preservation and Digital Collections Archivist, University Library, Indiana University Indianapolis, February 24, 2026 (Revised April 29, 2026)

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Note

Effective April 20, 2026, the deadline for public entities to meet ADA web and app accessibility standards moved from April 24, 2026 to April 26, 2027. This report was originally written prior to the deadline extension, and the revised report does not include updated dates or language concerning the new deadline.

Digital Collections and Metadata Assessment

Evan N. Miller, Digital Preservation and Digital Collections Archivist, University Library, Indiana University Indianapolis, March 16, 2026 (Revised April 29, 2026)

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Digital Preservation

- **Document** the current state of the work and institutional/department resources
  - Staffing, Budgets, Mission
- **Assess** using established and respected tools and frameworks
  - National Digital Stewardship Alliance (NDSA) Levels of Preservation
  - Digital POWRR (Preserving Digital Objects With Restricted Resources)
- *Be honest and truthful but provide context*

Digital Preservation Assessment

Evan N. Miller, Digital Preservation and Digital Collections Archivist, University Library, Indiana University Indianapolis,
February 6, 2026 (Revised April 29, 2026)

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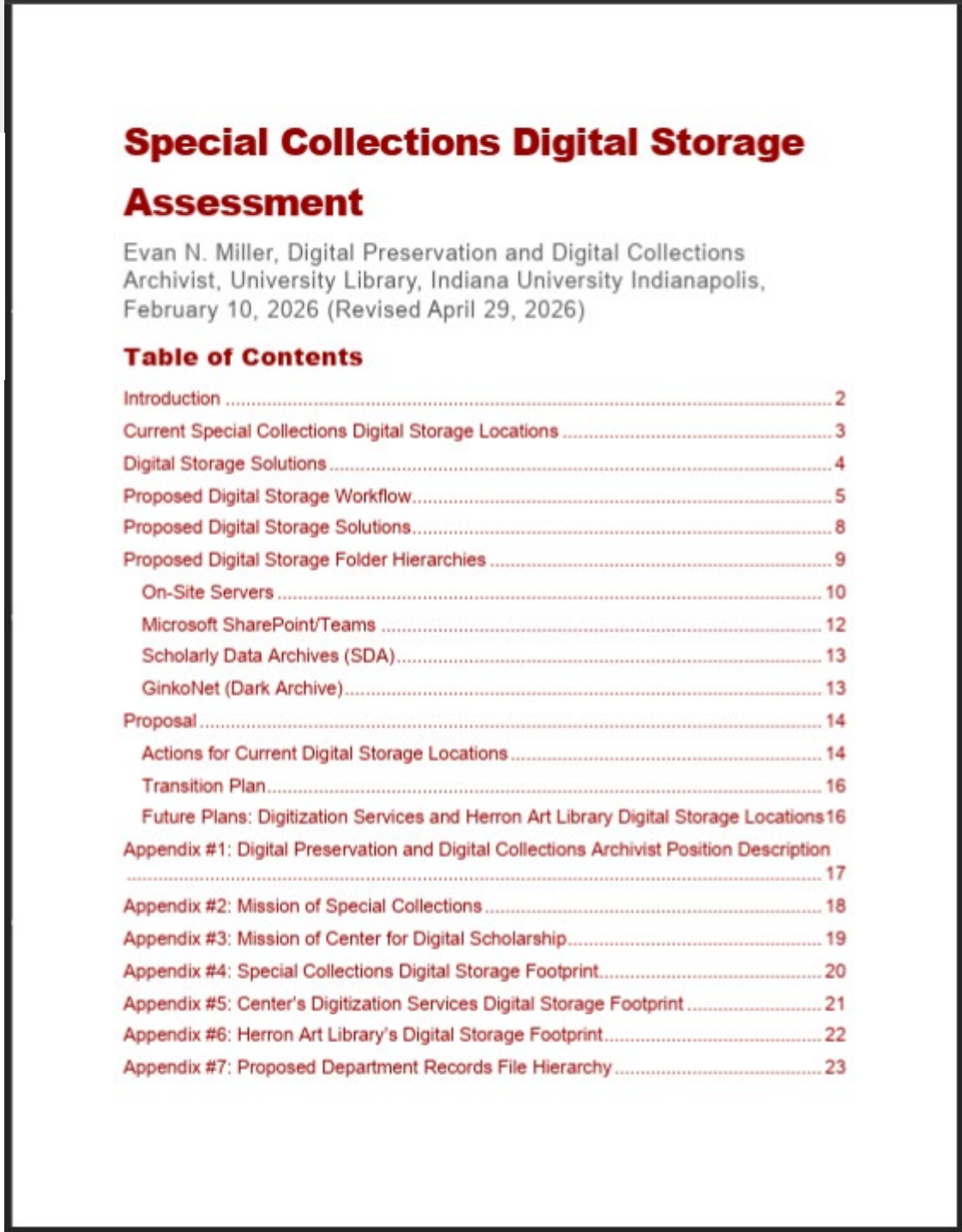
Digital Preservation, Continued

Findings

- **Institutional Budget** (2025-2026) – Department can't afford systems, but others can if prioritized
  - IU System: $4.5 Billion
  - IU Indianapolis: $1.9 Billion
  - University Library: $10 Million
  - Department: $0 (officially)
- **Staffing** – What roles have which responsibilities?
  - University Library: 66
  - Department: 7
  - Center: 8
- **Mission** – Preservation is not explicitly stated so why should it be prioritized?
- **Extent and files formats** of digital materials – A starting place for planning for reconciliation and remediation work
  - Special Collections: 20.5 TB
  - Center: 61 TB
  - Herron Art Library: 2.5 TB
- **NDSA Levels of Preservation** – Current state of work to explain needs to admin
  - Special Collections: Level 1 (partial)
  - Center: Level 0 (some level 0s and 1 level 2)

Digital Storage

- **Documenting** current practices
  - Focused on Special Collections; redirect to other departments after completion
- Outlining possible **storage solutions**
  - On-site servers, cloud, on-site "digital preservation" solution, consortium solution
- **Proposing new workflows** and folder hierarchies
- Providing a **transition plan** and ideas for the future
- *Be honest and truthful but provide context*



Special Collections Digital Storage Assessment

Evan N. Miller, Digital Preservation and Digital Collections Archivist, University Library, Indiana University Indianapolis,
February 10, 2026 (Revised April 29, 2026)

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Metadata and Digital Collections

- Recognize **successes** and **strengths**
  - Built community partnerships
  - Strong collections
- **Document** the past for the future
  - Position history and policies
  - Metadata fields and Dublin Core mappings
- **Define/Explain key points** for all to understand
  - "Digital Collections" vs. "Born-Digital Files"
- *Be honest and truthful but provide context*



Digital Collections and Metadata Assessment

Evan N. Miller, Digital Preservation and Digital Collections Archivist, University Library, Indiana University Indianapolis,
March 16, 2026 (Revised April 29, 2026)

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Metadata and Digital Collections, Continued

Findings

- **441 metadata fields** – Metadata was somewhat consistent but not interoperable between collections
  - 62% were unique/edge cases
  - 31% did not map to Dublin Core
  - No system-wide controlled vocabularies; only present on collection-level
- **50% of users had full or partial administrative privileges** – System management was not centralized, making consistency difficult
- **Many systems and access point with various, undefined purposes** -
  - System migration coming in the future and need to assess needs
- **Appendices with metadata fields and related information** – Documenting for future reference and institutional knowledge
  - CONTENTdm Metadata Fields and Dublin Core Mappings
  - CONTENTdm Dublin Core Elements
  - CONTENTdm Unique Metadata Fields in Each Collection
  - Metadata Template with Dublin Core Mappings

Long-Term Planning

Timeline

- *2026-2027*: Digital storage, policies, and workflow documentation
- *2027-2028*: Digital preservation initiatives and metadata remediation
- *2028-2029*: Metadata remediation, continued

Policies and Manuals

- Digital Preservation Policy
- Digital Collection Development Policy
- Digitization/Digital Collection Agreement Form
- Born-digital Processing Manual (update)

4.

NEXT STEPS

Next Steps

Relationship Building

- Collaborating on cross-department projects
  - Meeting compliance with ADA Title II accessibility compliance with web and mobile content across University Library systems

Digital Preservation

- Drafting first Digital Preservation Policy
- Awaiting completion of digital storage projects

Next Steps, Continued

Digital Storage

- Planning reconciliation project for on-site server and cloud storage locations
- Preparing more in-depth documentation for digital storage and project workflows in Special Collections
  - Accessioning/Ingest, Processing, Access, Preservation
- Creating first official Digital Asset Register

Metadata and Digital Collections

- Seek input on first draft of Digital Collection Development Policy
- Reestablishing Digital Collections Advisory Group, including creating charge and governance structure
- Planning for system migration in the near-ish future
- Continuing to assess metadata fields and finalizing metadata template and metadata crosswalk

4.

CONCLUSION

Reflection

Is my approach be replicated?

Detailed Documentation and Workflow Development	→	I would deem it crucial and priceless, and my supervisor and administration are supportive
Balancing Position Expectations	→	My supervisor and administration are understanding of my position being multiple combined
Long-Term Planning	→	How “long-term” is too long?
The Day-to-Day	→	A tenure-track faculty role provides lots of flexibility but draws one away from the daily work of an archivist
Other “Titles” as Assigned	→	Three positions is not equal to one, and director-level strategic planning adds additional weight

FINAL FEELINGS

If I'm empathetic to my predecessors, hopefully my *successors* will be *empathetic to me* and take the time to *understand why* I did what I did and with what resources.

As one of my mentors told me once: the goal is to *leave things better than you found it.*