

## Making Special Collections Accessible to Users: Finding Aids<sup>1</sup>

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### INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon, thank you for having me. My name is Clayton McGahee and I am the Archives Manager for Emory. My colleagues refer to me as the “Roving Archivist” in that I currently work in four archival repositories throughout Emory each week. These four areas consist of the Woodruff Health Sciences Library, Oxford College Library, Pitts Theology Library, and the MacMillan Law Library. I’ve been at Emory since 2013, and among my duties is that I am responsible for the creation and upload of finding aids for WHSCL, Law, and Oxford College archives.

My previous experience is heavily tied to working with finding aids. Prior to Emory, I worked at Yale University’s Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library where I was responsible for the editing and uploading of all Beinecke finding aids each week into the Yale Finding Aids database. I was at the Beinecke from 2007–2013. Prior to my time at Yale, I worked at the Virginia Tech Special Collections department where I also managed the creation, editing, and upload of all finding aids into the Virginia Heritage Project database.

### FINDING AIDS: OVERVIEW

For those of us who are unfamiliar with finding aids, it’s important to examine the definition of a finding aid provided by the Society of American Archivists. Broadly speaking, it’s a “tool that facilitates discovery of information within a collection of records.”<sup>3</sup> But more specifically, it’s “a description of records that gives the repository physical and intellectual control over the materials and that assists users to gain access to and understand the materials.”<sup>4</sup> I like to think of finding aids as inventories, indexes, or guides that are created by archival repositories to provide information about specific collections. This information includes biographical statements, the scope and content of the material, how the material is arranged, and so on.

### FINDING AIDS: THE EARLY YEARS

It’s helpful to take a moment to look back to the early development for finding aids and how that legacy impacts our professional landscape today. As many would expect, paper finding aids were once the norm, and this was the case up until about 1998. This makes sense in that libraries and special collections had boxes upon boxes of archival collections and needed to give a description to it. This took the form of a finding aid, or inventory, which often served as the sole researcher access tool. The way in which finding aids and archival collections were accessed was through a reference librarian, who was often the sole bridge between researcher and collections. The

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<sup>1</sup> This is the text of an oral presentation made at International Association of Law Libraries 36th Annual Course on International Law and Legal Information, *Civil Rights, Human Rights, and Other Critical Issues in U.S. Law*, Atlanta, Georgia, USA, October 22–26, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> © Clayton McGahee 2018. The author is Archives Manager, Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>3</sup> Society of American Archivists. “A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology.” SAA finding aid. <https://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/f/finding-aid> (accessed October 20, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

librarian provided access to the collections, as well as what was likely the sole copy of the finding aid. Rather than navigating through a vast database, any discovery that would be made on part of a researcher would often have to go through an archivist or librarian.

Although there was a finding aid or inventory for the researcher to use, over time these paper finding aids had outdated information and errors, and libraries often had to go back and reprint (or retype) portions of a finding aid to ensure accuracy. It was much more labor-intensive to keep finding aids accurate, especially for collections that took on additional accessions, which is commonplace in archives.

For those of us who've worked in libraries since the 1990s, the sight of numerous shelves of finding aids was common. Before the days of databases and online researcher access tools, this was what we had in terms of finding aids. And it took quite a long time for all libraries and archives to steer fully away from paper-copy finding aids. Much of this had to do with researcher demands and those who wanted a physical finding aid in their hands to flip through, rather than something that is online. This is still seen today in Emory's online finding aids, which has a "Printable PDF" link at the very top of the finding aid.

### **FINDING AIDS: FROM PAPER TO ELECTRONIC**

Paper finding aids were a good, serviceable option for many years, but the transition from paper to electronic finding aids was essential in libraries and archives. Now that institutions were producing their finding aids digitally and getting them online, the need for standards became quickly apparent. Databases were being developed that combined resources from various archival repositories; we have an example of this here at Emory in that the finding aids for all our repositories can be found centrally in our Emory Finding Aids Database.

### **FINDING AIDS: STANDARDS**

To keep digital finding aid creation from becoming vastly disorganized with repositories all implementing their own processes and procedures, here in the United States Encoded Archival Description, or EAD, was created in 1998. Similar to MARC for catalog records, EAD is a standard for the encoding of finding aids for use in a networked, or online, environment. EAD essentially tells archivists how they can describe their archival collections in a way that is consistent with national standards.

I want to emphasize that EAD is a standard for encoding finding aids, it is a data structure standard and not a content standard. Our content standard that we use in the United States is called Describing Archives: A Content Standard, or DACS, which I'll provide an example of a bit later.

### **FINDING AIDS: EAD**

This is an example of EAD, taken from the EAD3 tag library, which is produced by the Library of Congress.<sup>5</sup>

This is the EAD for one of the most common tags: the <unittitle>. You'll see the information given to ensure that it's being used appropriately. It also cautions against using it incorrectly and gives an example of how it could be used in an incorrect manner. For instance, a <unittitle> tag is used to describe the title of a folder in an archival collection, and not formal names of works such as monographs. That would require a <title> tag and not a <unittitle>.

Ultimately, EAD ensures that things are described properly from a data perspective.

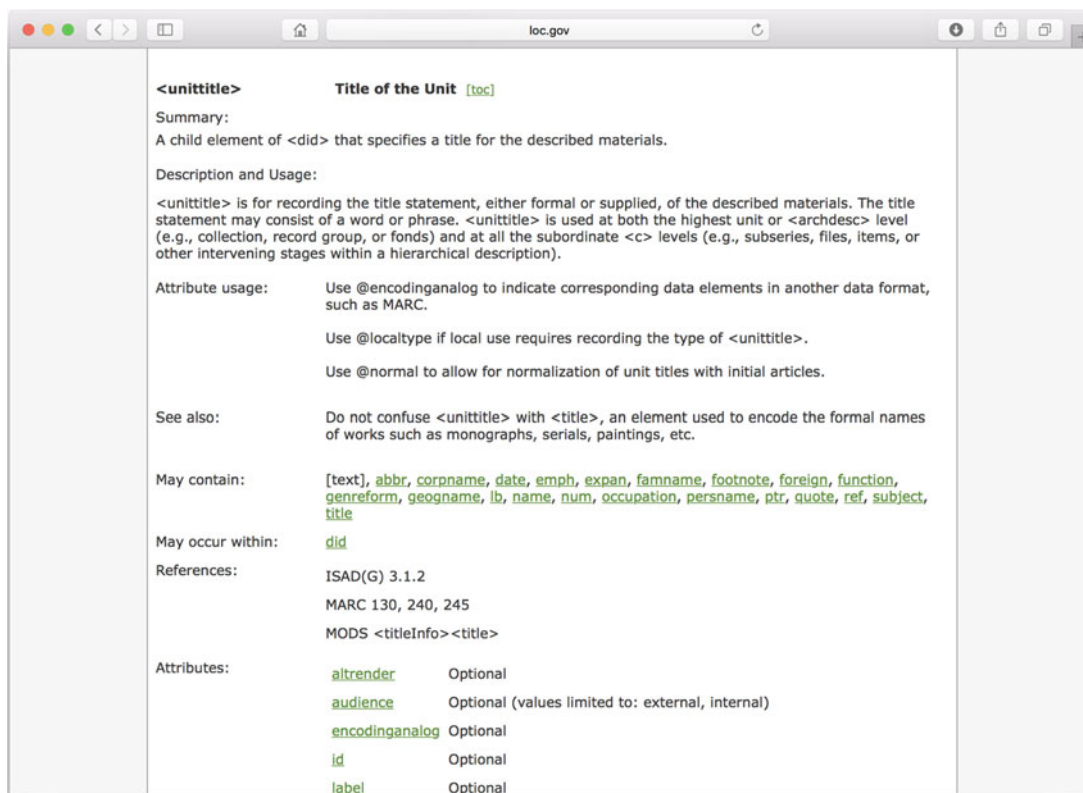
### **FINDING AIDS: DACS**

This is what a title looks like from the DACS side of things.<sup>6</sup> As you can see, it's not about the data but the description. It demonstrates how a title should be described intellectually.

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<sup>5</sup> Library of Congress. "Encoded Archival Description Tag Library – Version EAD3." <unittitle>. <http://www.loc.gov/ead/EAD3taglib/index.html#elem-unittitle> (accessed October 20, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Society of American Archivists. *Describing Archives: A Content Standard, Second Edition (DACs)*. Chicago, Society of American Archivists, 2013.



DACS also indicates whether or not a field is required, which is helpful when you are looking to design a template for your institution, or if you don't have a template to work with.

## FINDING AIDS: CREATION

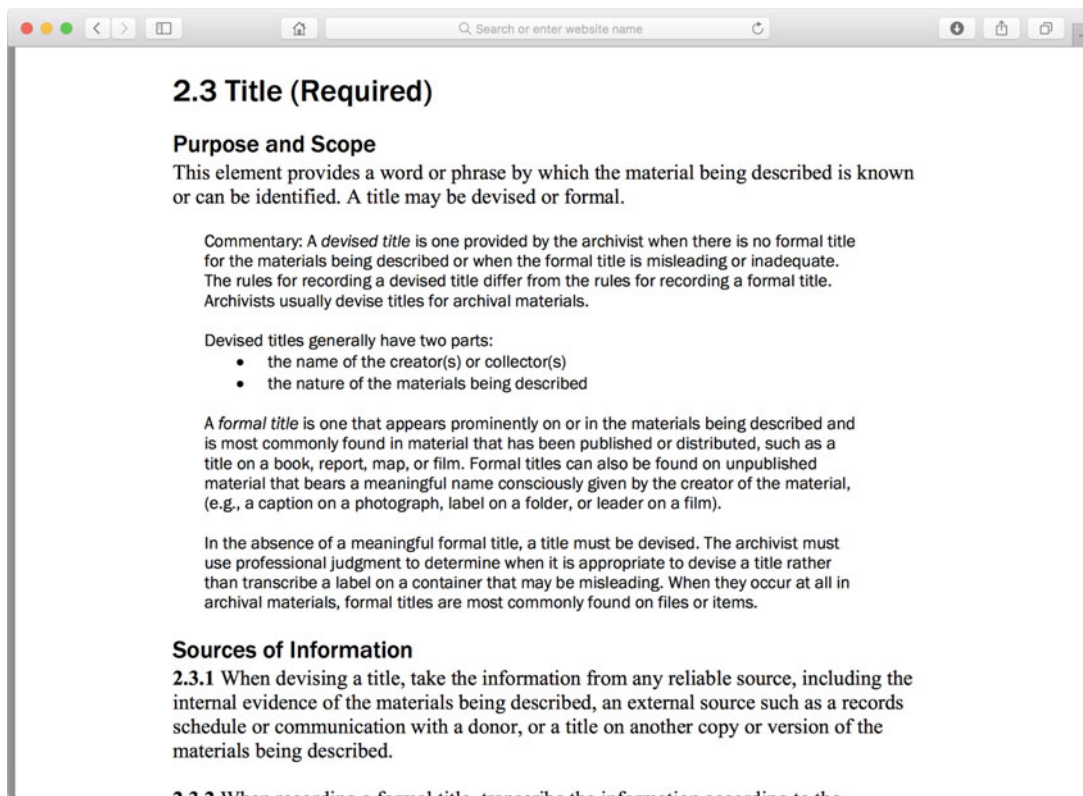
For a current overview of how finding aids are created today, ArchivesSpace is a widely used information management system in the United States. ArchivesSpace is an open source information management application that provides web access to archives, manuscripts, and digital objects, and can be used for finding aid creation, an accessioning tool, and other functions. ArchivesSpace also shares a robust support base with many of its institutions, and from an archivist's standpoint, it is straightforward and easy to use.

Emory is headed toward implementing ArchivesSpace in the near future, this is an exciting transition for us at Emory and it will undoubtedly improve our finding aid workflow.

## FINDING AIDS: EMORY'S WORKFLOW

In contrast to ArchivesSpace, Emory University currently uses Oxygen XML editor and it is the tool I use to create and encode finding aids. The background of why Emory's finding aid system is structured this way goes back to when the Emory Finding Aids Database was created. This was implemented and completed by staff at the Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library.

The Rose Library, or Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Library (MARBL) as it was called at the time, had numerous finding aids all in Microsoft Word, but the database wouldn't accept Word files since it's not encoded in proper markup language. To work around this and to prevent staff from going back and manually encode all their finding aids, Rose Library worked with a programmer to create a PerlScript to wrap XML around these Word finding aids. The script was quite strict and Word files needed to be perfectly in line with the parameters of the script. At the



time, Emory did not have the resources to convert their Word files to XML manually, and so this was a good, serviceable alternative for the Rose Library and the other archival repositories across Emory.

#### FINDING AIDS: ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

As far as the overall structure of a finding aid, it can be divided into four distinct parts. This is a screenshot of the Catherine Roraback papers, which I had the privilege of working on a few years ago.<sup>7</sup> Catherine Roraback was an attorney and civil liberties activist, and these papers are housed here in the MacMillan Law Library archives.

From the top we have the most essential information: collection title, date span, owning repository. One can also see the “Printable PDF” link that I mentioned earlier. The table of contents and description of series will get you immediately where you need to go throughout the finding aid, which is useful for our most lengthy and complex files. The description of series is an overview of the collection from a high-level, series perspective.

#### FINDING AIDS: DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY

Going one step down the finding aid, the descriptive summary<sup>8</sup> will look similar to the catalogers in this room. We have the creator of the collection, or 110 MARC field; the title of the collection, or 245; the call number, extent, and the abstract, which is the 520 MARC field. There are other important elements in this section as well; we have the source (or 541); restrictions on access which is the 506, and citation (the 524).

<sup>7</sup> EmoryFinding Aids. “Catherine G. Roraback Papers, 1900-2010, undated.” EmoryFindingAids database. <http://pid.emory.edu/ark:/25593/d6p39> (accessed October 20, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

The screenshot shows the Emory FindingAids website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Emory Libraries & Information Technology logo and the text "EmoryFindingAids". Below this is a secondary navigation menu with links for HOME, ADVANCED SEARCH, REQUEST MATERIALS, CONTRIBUTORS, SEARCH TIPS, FINDINGAID FAQ, and FEEDBACK. The main content area displays search results for "RORABACK, CATHERINE G., 1920-2007." and "CATHERINE G. RORABACK PAPERS, 1900-2010, UNDATED". It provides contact information for Emory University, Emory Law Archives, and Hugh F. MacMillan Law Library. A permanent link is provided: <http://pid.emory.edu/ark:/25593/d6p39>. There is a "Printable PDF" button. The main content is divided into two columns: "TABLE OF CONTENTS" and "DESCRIPTION OF SERIES".

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

- > [Descriptive Summary](#) 3 matches
- > [Administrative Information](#)
- > [Collection Description](#) 8 matches

**DESCRIPTION OF SERIES**

- > [Series 1: Biographical material, 1971-2001, undated](#) 2 matches
- > [Series 2: Case Files and Legal Documents, 1942-2010, undated](#) 1 match
- > [Series 3: New Haven Black Panther Trials, 1967-1992](#) 1 match
- > [Series 4: Publications, 1942-1989](#)
- > [Series 5: Subject files, 1965-1993](#) 1 match
- > [Series 6: Photographs, circa 1900-1990, undated](#) 7 matches
- > [Series 7: Awards and Collected Material, 1975-2001](#) 3 matches
- > [Series 8: Audiovisual Material, 1971-2004, undated](#) 3 matches

## FINDING AIDS: COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

Now we get to the biographical note and scope and content.<sup>9</sup> The biographical note provides historical context of the title subject or creator, and the scope and content note gives a descriptive overview of what is in the collection. We also have an arrangement note which gives a structural layout of the boxes in the collection. And finally, this didn't make it into the screenshot unfortunately, but we also have the selected search terms or <controlaccess> headings. These terms are linked within finding aids, so clicking on any heading will give you all the other Emory finding aids which has this same search term, and this is repository-wide.

## FINDING AIDS: CONTENTS LIST

The contents list is likely where an archivist will spend most of their time. This is where the researcher will be able to find specifically what they're looking for. Material is divided by series and arranged at the box and folder level.<sup>10</sup>

There are different levels of processing that can be done for a collection, and these different levels will be reflected here in the contents list. The processing levels range from item level, which describes every single item in the collection (which is uncommon), to a minimalist processing approach, which is referred to as MPLP, or More Product, Less Product. This is a good approach for institutions facing a large backlog of unprocessed material.

This collection received a middle-ground processing approach if you will, it is processed at the folder level, which is a common level of archival processing.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

findingaids.library.emory.edu

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### DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY

**Creator:** Roraback, Catherine G., 1920-2007.  
**Title:** Catherine G. Roraback papers, 1900-2010, undated  
**Call Number:** L-028  
**Extent:** 31.43 linear ft. (18 boxes) and 19 oversized papers (OP)  
**Abstract:** Papers of attorney and civil rights activist Catherine G. Roraback including correspondence, printed material, notes, photographs, and memorabilia.  
**Language:** Materials entirely in English.

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### ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

**Restrictions on Access**  
Unrestricted access. Some material in Series 2: Case Files and Legal Documents and Series 7: Awards and Collected Material are restricted due to attorney-client privilege.

**Terms Governing Use and Reproduction**  
All requests subject to limitations noted in departmental policies on reproduction.

**Related Materials in This Repository**  
Feminism and Legal Theory Project Records, L-015.

**Source**  
Gift, 2012.

**Citation**  
[after identification of item(s)], Catherine G. Roraback Papers, Emory Law Archives, Hugh F. MacMillan Law Library, Emory University.

**Processing**  
Processed by Joanna C.D. Rogers, 2012.

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findingaids.library.emory.edu

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### COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

#### Biographical Note

Catherine G. Roraback (1920-2007), attorney and civil liberties activist. She was born to the Rev. Albert and Gertrude Dittmars Roraback in Brooklyn, New York on September 17, 1920. Her father, a Congregational minister, came from a family of lawyers in Litchfield County, Connecticut. She graduated from Mount Holyoke College in 1941 with a degree in economics. In 1948 she graduated from Yale Law School, where she was the only woman in her class.

Roraback developed a civil and criminal trial practice in New Haven, Connecticut and later in Canaan, Connecticut, where she took over her uncle's practice upon his death in 1955. She helped to found the Connecticut Civil Liberties Union in 1948 and acted as legal counsel to Planned Parenthood of Connecticut. She was also active in the National Lawyers Guild, and she served on the board of the American Civil Liberties Union.

During her 50 year career, she litigated several major cases, including *Griswold v. Connecticut*, which overturned a Connecticut law that banned the prescription and use of contraceptives. *Griswold* established a constitutional right to privacy, and it laid the foundation for the landmark abortion rights case of *Roe v. Wade*.

In 1971 she defended Ericka Huggins, a Black Panther Party member accused of murdering a fellow party member in New Haven. Huggins was freed when a mistrial was declared because the jury could not reach a unanimous verdict; they had voted 10-2 for acquittal. Shortly thereafter, in 1974, Roraback defended Peter Reilly, a young Connecticut man, on a charge of murdering his mother. Roraback demonstrated that some of the evidence against Reilly was illegally obtained, and she was able to form the basis of an appeal which granted Reilly a new trial. This high-profile case revealed many abuses by the Connecticut State Police.

Roraback received many honors throughout her career, including awards from the National Abortion Rights Action League, Planned Parenthood of Connecticut, and the Connecticut National Organization for Women. She was inducted into the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame in 2001.

Catherine Roraback died on October 17, 2007 in Salisbury, Connecticut.

#### Scope and Content Note

The Catherine G. Roraback papers include correspondence, printed material, notes, photographs, and memorabilia dating from 1900-2004. The bulk of the collection is collected printed material related to the Black Panthers and the trial of Ericka Huggins. Printed material from the 1970s pro-choice campaigns conducted by the American Civil Liberties Union is also present. There is relatively little material on the birth control cases of the late 1950s and early 1960s, but the collection contains some correspondence about *Griswold v. Connecticut* and *Trubek v. Ullman*.

#### Arrangement Note

Organized into eight series: (1) Biographical material, (2) Case Files and Legal Documents, (3) New Haven Black Panther Trials, (4) Publications, (5) Subject Files, (6) Photographs, (7) Awards and Collected Material, and (8) Audiovisual Material.

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Return to Search Results

Search EmoryFindingAids

only collections with digital resources

SEARCH ▶

Search for items in the container list of Catherine G. Roraback Papers, 1900-2010, undated

only digital resources

SEARCH THIS FINDING AID ▶

Send us your feedback.

FEEDBACK ▶

RORABACK, CATHERINE G., 1920-2007.

CATHERINE G. RORABACK PAPERS > CASE FILES AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

Printable PDF

+ TABLE OF CONTENTS + DESCRIPTION OF SERIES

SERIES 2  
CASE FILES AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS, 1942-2010, UNDATED  
BOXES 1-4

**Scope and Content Note**  
This series contains files from court cases in which Roraback participated or researched, as well as court briefs from Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and the United States Supreme Court. Some material has been removed due to the restriction regarding attorney-client privilege, including notes from the case *Abele v. Markle* and the 1979 agreement between Women's Health Services and Yale University.

**Arrangement Note**  
Arranged alphabetically and chronologically therein.

**Case Files**

Box	Folder	Content
1	5	<i>Griswold v. Connecticut</i> , 1963-1990
1	6	<i>Maher v. Roe</i> , 1975-1984
1	7	Peter Reilly case, 1974-1977
1	8	<i>Trubek v. Ullman</i> , 1959-2010, undated
1	9	<i>United States v. Saxe</i> , 1975-1976
1	10	<i>Women's Health Services v. Maher</i> , 1979

**Legal Documents**

2	1	"Current Status of Birth Control in the U.S.," appendix to testimony of Harriet F. Philpel, Planned Parenthood, 1964
2	2	State of Connecticut court briefs, 1954, 1973

## FINDING AIDS: RESEARCHER USE

Looking at how Emory finding aids can be discovered by researchers, first and foremost there is the Emory finding aids database, which contains all of Emory's finding aids from all repositories, of which there are five across Emory. As of October 2017, 1831 finding aids can be found in the database, and that number is growing every week. Links to Emory's finding aids are also seen in Emory's online library catalog called discoverE.

Emory is not the only website where these finding aids can be discovered. Emory finding aids can also be seen in ArchiveGrid, which is a worldwide database of finding aids. Over 5 million finding aids are in ArchiveGrid from over 1,000 archival institutions. Also, standard internet searching in Google or another internet search engine will produce our finding aids. They are indexed every few weeks so there is a slight delay in new finding aids appearing, but all of Emory's finding aids can be discovered through a simple internet search.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

To conclude, I'd like to share my thoughts on current challenges and future opportunities. The first concern I have is keeping up with the demands of digital content for both institutions and researchers. As we should be, Emory and many other archival repositories are very much in tune to the demands of researchers and what they expect from us in terms of descriptive tools and digital content. Digital content is a complicated realm, both in terms of our own library systems, and also the privacy concerns we have for our donors and creators of these collections.

Whether it's reasonable or not, researchers want (and expect) to see digital content in our finding aids. They don't necessarily want to see Box 1, Folder 4 titled "Photographs," they want to see digital surrogates of the photographs on their screen. Emory finding aids does not include digital content, partly due to the infrastructure, which isn't built for this kind of digital environment, but even if it was, there are copyright review measures that take place, which is headed by the Scholarly Communications Office here at Emory. Providing access to digital material isn't as simple as making surrogates and having a proper digital environment for this content.

For us at Emory and in the profession, it's important to keep a focus on broadening our digital content from an online user perspective, while at the same time protecting the privacy of our donors.

The other concern I have is operability of library systems on the local level. Many library systems are built up in a static environment that doesn't interact with other library systems. By breaking down system barriers and having finding aids interact with digital libraries and so on, this allows for integration and forces us to keep systems and everything up to date and current. I know this is easier said than done, but as institutions look to upgrade and improve their library systems, I believe it's important to take a holistic approach to systems and really strive for systems that interact with each other.

This is an advantage that ArchivesSpace benefits from. With its community and support system, ArchivesSpace can evolve naturally through collaboration, ensuring that their functionalities meet user needs and stay current. ArchivesSpace is not just a finding aid tool, it is an information management application that has tools for finding aids and accessioning, two big parts of an archives systems process that can, and should, work in harmony with one another.