CASE 4

University Committee and Planning Records in the Digital Age

AUTHOR: **TIM PYATT**
University Archivist and Associate Director
Rare, Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library,
Duke University (tim.pyatt@duke.edu)

ISSUE: As campus planning committees shift from paper to electronic formats for gathering and disseminating information and reports, how can the campus archives ensure that these critical historical records are captured, preserved, and made accessible to researchers? This study looks at adapting existing accessioning tools for managing electronic committee records, methods for storing and normalizing files, and using a digital repository tool (DSpace) for providing access.

Institutional Context

Duke University was founded in 1838 as Union Institute Academy in Randolph County, North Carolina. By 1859 the name had changed to Trinity College and the school motto, "*Erudito et Religio*" (knowledge and religion), was adopted. In 1892 the school moved to Durham, N.C., with the support of tobacco industrialist Washington Duke. The College prospered and grew in Durham and continued to receive support from the Duke family. In 1924 James B. Duke formalized the family's historic pattern of philanthropy with the establishment of The Duke Endowment, a charitable trust supporting universities, hospitals, orphanages, and the Methodist Church. He also donated funds to rebuild the existing Trinity campus and create a new neo-gothic campus, transforming the college into a major university. The school was renamed Duke University in honor of the Duke family. Today Duke University is a highly regarded research university with ten colleges and professional schools and nearly 13,000 students.

The University Archives traces its roots to 1892, when the Trinity College Historical Society was founded. The goal of the Society was to gather historical materials for the students to study and in the process they began to gather the records of the college. These records resided in campus attics and storage rooms as well as in the library's Manuscripts Department until 1972, when the University Archives was established. In 2004 the archives began planning for an electronic records management program and launched its digital repository, DukeSpace, in the fall of 2006. Today the University Archives are part of the Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library at Duke.

As the official repository for the records of Duke University, the University Archives identifies, acquires, manages, and preserves university records of enduring value, regardless of format, and makes them available for use. The archives holds more than 11,000 linear feet of administrative records, campus publications, records of student groups, and selected alumni collections and faculty papers.

Background

In 2005 Duke University launched a strategic planning effort to map the direction of the school for the rest of the decade. The president appointed a committee with broad representation from across the campus—academic affairs, student life, faculty governance, administration, and development. The previous strategic plan, "Building on Excellence: The University Plan," had covered the period of 2001 through 2005 and proved extremely successful. Based on the recommendations of the plan, several new and now thriving academic programs had been established, a stronger alumni base developed, and the campus library expanded. The success of these programs had further raised Duke's profile and had led to an expansion in enrollment. Fund-raising reached an all-time high and university rankings rose.

Acquisition and Accessioning

"Building on Excellence" also produced a wealth of archival records—committee reports, planning documents submitted by a variety of departments, minutes and reports from campus meetings, documentation comparing Duke with peer institutions, as well as the final report. The records of the 2001 planning committee create a rich snapshot of the school.

The records for "Building on Excellence" were transferred to the archives by the Office of the Provost, whose staff provided administrative support for both the previous and current strategic planning efforts. When the paper records for 2001 report were received in 2006, the university archivist inquired whether any electronic versions of the reports existed. The provost's staff told him that the final version of the plan, as well as the reports from the various professional schools and other administrative units, were available on the website created for "Building on Excellence." Provost staff members also told the archivist that they were preparing to remove the website for the 2001 plan as the site for the new plan, "Making a Difference," was now live. The files from the 2001 website were transferred to the archives' server for accessioning along with the paper records.

Both the paper records and electronic records were accessioned and assigned the same accession number (UA2006-0037) with the storage location of both the paper records (stack location numbers) and electronic records (server location) noted. The archives creates suppressed catalog records in the library's Integrated Library System (ILS), Aleph, as accession records.
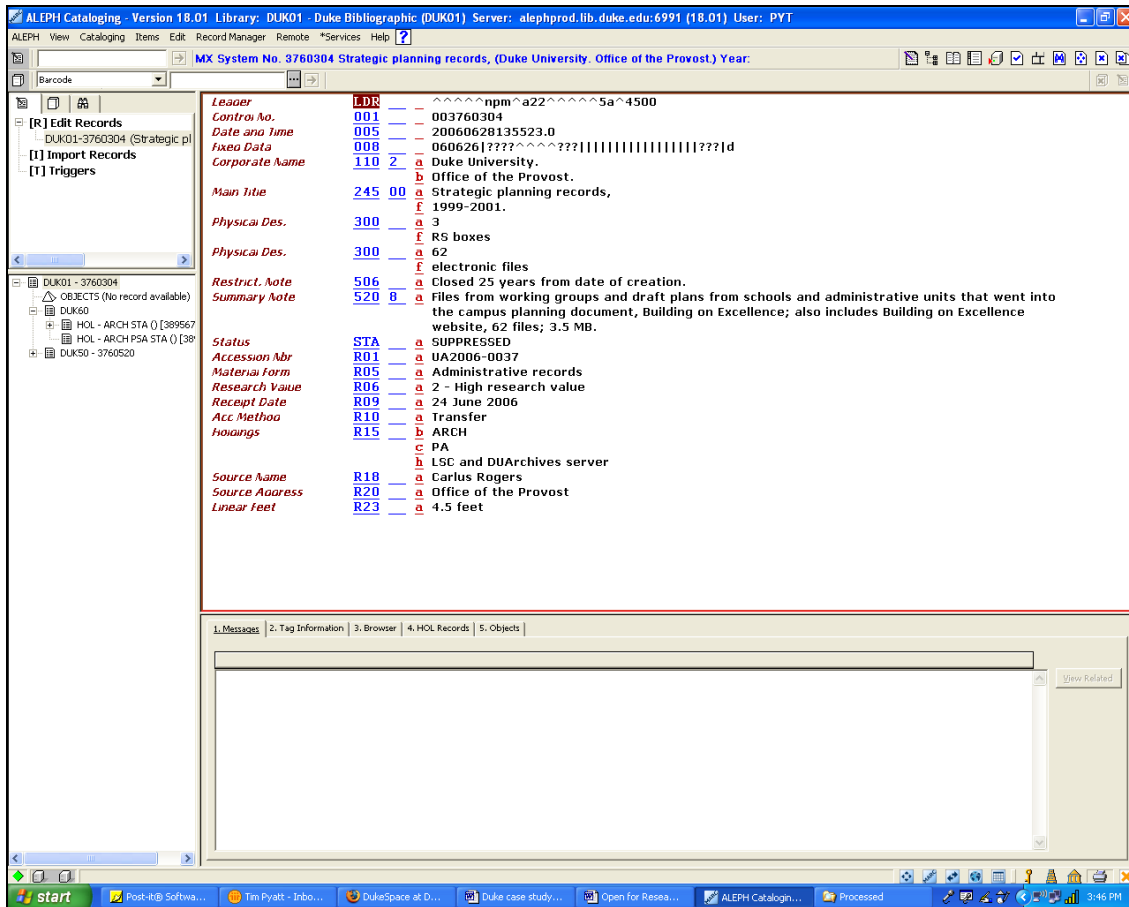
Accession record for 2001 plan.

Appraisal

Duke University takes strategic planning very seriously and the records that have been created as part of previous processes have high research and administrative value. Historically the plans have set the course for campus programs and have had major funding implications. Besides the final approved plan, the committee records included reports from various professional schools, academic divisions, and administrative units; committee minutes and planning documents; external reports; and other benchmarking tools. Nearly all of the external data and committee minutes were not received in electronic format. The archives, however, did receive the planning reports from various schools and units in electronic format. After review, all of the electronic files were retained.

Storage and Preservation

The paper records were handled according to standard archival procedures and are not detailed as part of this study. The electronic files received were placed on the archives

storage server and managed by accession number (i.e., directory for each accession with subdirectories within an accession as needed). The files stored on this server are backed-up daily with a tape maintained offsite. After accessioning, the files were normalized into standard file formats for access, with the source file maintained. For example, if a report was received as a Microsoft Word document, a PDF use copy would be created for processing and access. A log documenting original file name, date created, and original format was also generated. A "long-term" preservation plan for these records is still being developed. Normalization to common formats for future migration constitutes the present strategy. The source files (original bytes) will be maintained for as long as they are viable.
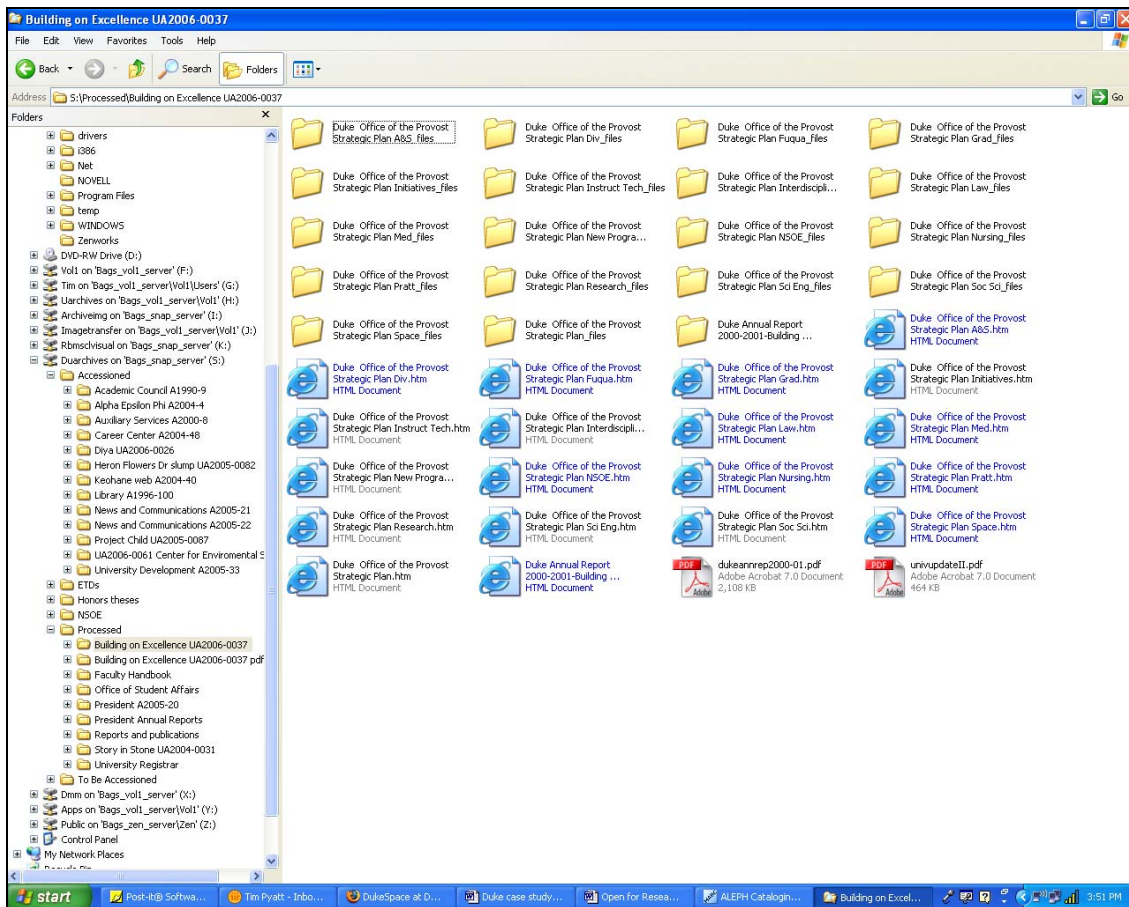
Directories for the 2001 plan (UA2006-0037) on the archives server.

Processing and Access

In 2006 the archives launched a DSpace installation called "DukeSpace" to serve as the access portal for processed born digital archival files. A "University Archives" community was established and within the archives community "collections" were created for administrative entities. Materials are described using Dublin Core metadata

elements. Each metatdata record may have one or more files associated with it and each item is assigned a persistent URL.

For collections that have both paper and electronic portions, we plan to link the persistent URL to the description in the finding aid.

Brief record from DukeSpace for the 2001 plan.

Analysis: Looking to the Future and Planning for "Making a Difference"

Given the technological advances since the 2001 plan was issued, the archives expect a greater diversity of electronic files to be associated with the 2006 plan, "Making a Difference." A scan of the 2006 plan website already shows that background documents, various campus reports, and the final report are present. Multimedia files—such as photographs and podcasts of the president discussing the planning process with various groups—can be found with the press releases about the plan. The public relations department has also posted links to external media stories about the plan.

In addition to the already public electronic files, the archives staff sought to discover what other "non-public" background files are available. When the 2001 plan records were transferred to the archives, planning committee minutes were received in paper format only. Minutes, along with other reports and materials used by the 2006 planning committee, were maintained on a secure wiki. The archives staff would like to evaluate this site before it is dismantled to see what content might have enduring value. Several of the planning subgroups maintained planning blogs in an effort to generate additional input. These were managed by the separate planning units (such as one of the professional schools) and not considered part of the central planning process.

The electronic records generated by the 2006 planning process raise a number of issues that the 2001 plan did not. For the 2001 plan, the archives only received electronic files for content that has been publicly released on the plan website. Appraisal was straightforward and access restrictions were not an issue. The number of file formats received was limited (primarily PDF with some HTML), making decisions about normalization relatively simple.

For the 2006 plan, access options for the "non-public" electronic records have yet to be negotiated, assuming that archives staff is allowed to evaluate the wiki. Formats are not as straightforward, with digital audio, video, and yet to be determined document formats all present. Most of committee members retained their emails about the process, providing another potential source for records. What will be the best capture and transfer method? The archives staff is also trying to determine if the blogs present any special concerns, such as privacy and ownership, especially if entries were made by alumni or contributors outside of the university.

The Duke University Archives staff sees management of these key electronic records as a high priority and a work in progress. Given the importance of the records, archives staff members also see this as an opportunity to create a model for the campus as it strives to expand its electronic records program.

Does your university archives have born-digital records?
Share how you are effectively managing these digital
records by submitting a case study to Campus Case Studies.
Visit www.archivists.org/publications/epubs/CampusCaseStudies/.