Appraisal and Acquisition Strategies, edited by Michael J. Shallcross and
Christopher J. Pro, Society of American Archivists, Chicago, 2016, vii + 196 pp.,
USD$29.99 (hardback), ISBN 978 0 931828 00 3

Appraisal and Acquisition Strategies is the latest instalment of the Trends in Archival Practice
Series from the Society of American Archivists. Previous instalments cover arrangement and
description, digital preservation, teaching with primary sources and digital rights. Each instal-
ment contains modules written by well-known US-based experts. *Appraisal and Acquisition
Strategies* contains three modules, which in effect are modules fourteen to sixteen in the series.

Module fourteen, 'Appraising Digital Records' by Geoff Huth, begins by outlining a couple
of truisms:

- Life is messy and archives mirror life.
- Appraisal determines everything.

In short, this stuff is hard but important.

After initially scaring the reader, it then outlines a range of useful strategies and tools to
address this complexity, through the mechanism of appraisal. Interestingly, the first strategy is
to 'start before the beginning' (p. 14), before the point of record creation in order to influence
the world where archives are made. Five pages are dedicated to making this point. It made me
curious whether the complexity of the digital information eco-system is drawing our American
colleagues toward continuum thinking.

Some aspects of the 'everything' that appraisal determines are methodically addressed, with
an emphasis mostly placed on highlighting differences to the analogue paradigm. For example,
determining the authentic copy of a record and what to do with large databases or records in
local network storage. There is also a reminder to appraise the metadata embedded in digital
records that may or may not support appropriate access.

Several pages are spent on technical appraisal – a process of technical analysis of files to deter-
mine issues around preservation and access that supports appraisal decision-making. Technical
appraisal is a term and workflow well-established in collecting archives, but doesn't seem to be
as established within public archives. Both should find it useful.

Module fifteen, 'Collecting Digital Manuscripts and Archives', by Megan Barnard and
Gabriella Redwine, also has a range of recommendations on how to be active in the creation
space, focusing on establishing and maintaining good relationships with creators.

After several pages on incorporating born-digital into collecting policies, there is some very
good, practical advice on how to have conversations with creators. Conversation topics include:
discussing the creation process; addressing old media first; the relationship between letters and
emails; and discussing their online presence. The authors also provide options for taking a more
active approach to encouraging good personal records management, through file name conventions
(with none of those pesky special characters that cause problems later in the workflow), inven-
tories and backup options. There are also good sections on discussing privacy and copyright issues.

The second half of the module outlines strategies and tools that can be used for apprais-
ing digital material in the collecting archive context. The standard equipment, such as write
blockers and forensic tools, are briefly discussed. The module finishes with an outline of the
documentation required to complete the acquisition – essentially a summary of all of the key
issues outlined earlier in the module.

I liked this module a lot. I liked its optimism and vim balanced with the (sometimes dour)
practical realities of collecting archives. I liked the comfort and assurance I felt from reading
recommendations that came from a place of experience. Of lessons learned. Of conversations had
that weren't so great but were better the next time, and are now shared for us all to benefit from.

Module sixteen, 'Accessioning Digital Records' by Erin Faulder, outlines a range of models, standards and tools that can support the workflow for transferring and processing digital material that is provided in the second half of the module.

I thought this module was a little more confused than the other two. It starts by stating that 'accessioning is the archivist's first step in processing and preserving archival materials' (p. 121), when the other two modules have been clear in their approach that working with the creation process is the first step. Later, when introducing the accessioning workflow, it states that 'accessioning procedures formalise the steps an archivist takes to document the transfer' (p. 148). This mixed view of what accessioning is and where it fits in the overall appraisal and acquisition process makes it sit a little awkwardly alongside the previous two.

Nevertheless, there's plenty of value here, especially for collecting archives. The summary descriptions of the standards and models will be useful to those seeking to understand many of the acronyms for digital collecting. There's also a good summary of some of the infrastructure required to support digital collecting and preservation.

The second half of the module is a detailed step-through of a transfer workflow in the collecting archive context, including file format identification, validation and ingest, which will provide a good introduction to archivists. However, the workflow is presented as though everything will go swimmingly. I thought the several pages on validation should have been followed by some of the options available when validation fails – the more likely scenario in my experience.

Overall, I thought *Appraisal and Acquisitions Strategies* would provide useful reading to archivists taking their initial steps into digital collecting. It also reminded me that, in the collecting archive context, our American colleagues are leaders with digital collecting and have a range of experiences and implementations for the rest of the world to learn from. Maybe we in Australasia should be looking State-side to build the relationship we need to improve our professional practice.

Mark Crookston
National Library of New Zealand
✉ crookston.mark@gmail.com

Check for updates

Digital Preservation Essentials, edited by Christopher J Prom, Society of American Archivists, Chicago, 2016, vii + 125 pp., AUD $39.95 (hardback) ISBN 1 931666 95 4

Digital Preservation Essentials is part of the Trends in Archives Practice series published by the Society of American Archivists. Consistent with the series, the book has a pragmatic orientation. It consists of two parts: Module 12, Preserving Digital Objects, and Module 13, Digital Preservation Storage, both by Erin O'Meara and Kate Stratton. Each module begins with an introduction to the topic and concludes with recommendations for practice. Both modules include appendices identifying further readings, describing case studies and defining key terms. Module 12 includes additional appendices addressing preservation metadata and metadata schemas.

Erin O'Meara is currently Department Head in the Office of Digital Innovation and Stewardship at University of Arizona Libraries. Her career as a practitioner spans more than a decade and has had a focus on electronic records throughout. Kate Stratton studied under Helen Tibbo at the University of North Carolina, and is currently Collection Development Archivist at the Gates Archive. Their collaboration on the two modules has produced thoughtful and well-integrated insights and advice.