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IMPLEMENTING ARCHIVESPACE AT A UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

Abstract:

At Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar, we have started using ArchivesSpace to catalog our university archives. ArchivesSpace is open source software built for the information management of archives using the web as the access point. We have done this without becoming a member of the ArchivesSpace, which means we were unable to have access to any documentation or the support features. This paper will cover the software selection process, installation process and challenges faced using ArchivesSpace in a small university archives setting.

Keywords:

ArchivesSpace, description, information management, archives

Izvleček:

Implementacija programske opreme ArchivesSpace v univerzitetnem arhivu

Na Univerzi Virginia Commonwealth v Katarju smo začeli z uporabo programske opreme ArchivesSpace za popisovanje arhivskega gradiva univerze. ArchivesSpace je odprtokodni program, namenjen upravljanju z informacijami o arhivskem gradivu, kot dostopno točko pa uporablja splet. Implementirali smo ga, brez da bi postali člani skupnosti ArchivesSpace, in na ta način ostali brez dostopa do dokumentacije in programske podpore. Prispevek opisuje postopek izbire programske opreme, njeno namestitev in izzive, s katerimi smo se soočali pri delu s programom v manjšem univerzitetnem arhivu.

Ključne besede:

ArchivesSpace, popis, upravljanje z informacijami, arhiv

1 INTRODUCTION

Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar (VCUQatar) was established in 1998 in partnership with Qatar Foundation. VCUQatar offers a Bachelor of Fine Arts in the areas of Fashion Design, Interior Design, Graphic Design, and Painting and Printmaking, a Bachelor of Arts in Art History and a Masters of Fine Arts in Design. VCUQatar was the first school on the Education City campus, which now houses six American schools and HEC Paris and University College London. Each school teaches in an area of expertise, such as art and design at VCUQatar. VCUQatar currently has 323 students and approximately 130 faculty and staff.

The VCUQatar University Archives is housed within the VCUQatar Library. The archive has one full-time faculty member and works with a part-time staff member in the Communications Department, the Digital Media Archivist. Also, the VCUQatar University Archives takes on interns/volunteers from the library school at University College London and interested community members when able.

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While it is not clear how or when the VCUQatar University Archives was established, the collection has grown from previous library faculty and staff making an effort to collect and preserve the history of VCUQatar. Currently, the archive has approximately 150 linear feet of archival material and over 15,000 digital objects held in the VCUQatar digital asset management system, LUNA. The current collection of physical archives material is done on an informal basis, with the archives staff making the effort to collect material that is relevant to the collection development policy. Digital object collection from the academic departments and the Communications department is done through the Digital Media Archivist facilitating the collecting. Some material is collected from faculty and staff when they move offices or leave VCUQatar. Recently, we had a former VCUQatar administrator, ask if they could donate material to the university archives.

VCUQatar collects a variety of material from almost every department on campus. These departments include the academic departments as well as the administrative departments, such as the Dean's Office, Communications, Student Affairs, and Facilities. VCUQatar also hosts two biennial conferences, the Tasmeem design conference and the Hamad Bin Khalifa Symposium on Islamic Art. Each of these events produces significant amounts of material to be collected by the archives. The type of material collected consists of programs, invitations, posters, news clippings, reports and brochures. Much of what is collected is digital in nature. A professional freelance photographer or a department photographer covers every major event, and those digital images are collected by the Digital Media Archivist and uploaded with metadata into LUNA. Uploads are done throughout the academic year.

However, much of the physical archives had never been processed or described in any way. When I arrived at VCUQatar in 2013, as the then Image Resources Curator, there were no policies or procedures in place regarding the collection development, description or access of the VCUQatar University Archives, including the physical archives or the digital archives. Essentially this meant for many years; materials were being collected and stored without regard to appraisal and with no means of access or description. A few collections had some organization and box lists, but the collection was described at an item level. For us, description at the item level was causing a few issues. First, was the time it took to process a single record group. Even though the collection was small, each item was given a number and then listed in a finding aid. While several record groups had been processed, it was time-consuming and incomplete. Not all material for each record group had been sorted. This would lead to the need for renumbering later. Second, the archives staff now consists of one full-time archivist and two interns. The Digital Media Archivist no longer works in the library and does not work on the physical university archives. There isn't enough time for each item to be numbered and listed in a finding aid by one person. The interns do not fully process collections at this time.

University Archives are now processed at the folder level. Each record group is assigned a number and then the boxes and folders are given a number. This helps the archives staff to locate the material on the shelf and to determine where a material is located within a box. This also assists in the time it takes to process a collection fully. Because of the informal nature of collection at VCUQatar, the interns have been focused on putting material into their record groups without any processing. This saves the archivist time when processing a record group as each box does not have to be looked at when processing material.

Due to the processing and the informal collection of archive material at VCUQatar, the University Archives has seen an increase in use. The increase in use includes the digital collection and the physical archives. The use of the physical archives includes faculty nequeding documentation of projects for their promotion process, verifying dates of events, locating print photographs and student research. The digital archives see use from students for portfolios, the Communications department uses it for press releases and media kits, and faculty use them in their research.

Now that the VCUQatar University Archives has policy and procedures in place, has begun reprocessing and processing material and has now received reference requests, we needed a way to access the material and a way for the archives patrons to view our holdings. After conducting research on the different archival management software available, we decided to use ArchivesSpace. In this paper, I will discuss why we choose to use ArchivesSpace, the installation process, entering data into ArchivesSpace, the public interface, and the future of ArchivesSpace at VCUQatar.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Much has been written about archival management software, but little has been written about ArchivesSpace in detail and much what I have found has been in the form of presentations at archives conferences. The may be due to the launch of the software happening in September 2013 (<http://archivespace.com/overview>). Most of what has been written or presented is about the installation process of ArchiveSpace.

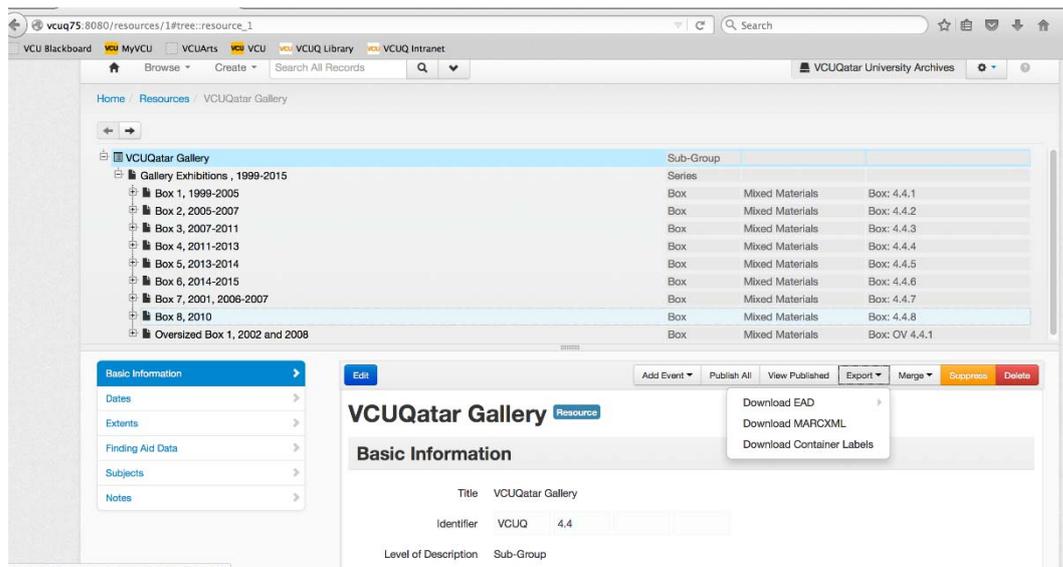
3 CHOOSING ARCHIVESSPACE

One of the biggest considerations for any description standard or archival management software we use at VCUQatar is that one day it may need to be exported and given to the home campus in Richmond, Virginia. Anything I chose needs to fit into the standards that VCU would adhere to. Before my starting at VCUQatar, the archives were going to use ATOM, which is the International Council of Archives' archives management system. While this system would probably be great for us, however, it uses the General International Standard Archival Description, ISAD (G) and in the U.S. the standard is Describing Archives, A Content Standard (DACS) and would be what VCU would use. ArchivesSpace can export data in XML, MARC, and several other metadata models allowing it to be easily imported into any system that the VCU would use (<http://archivespace.com/overview>).

ArchivesSpace being a combination of Archon and Archivists' Toolkit was another reason to select it (<http://www.archivesspace.org/overview>). There were aspects of Archon that I knew I wanted the system to have based on my past experience with Archon. First, Archon was a web-based tool. ArchivesSpace also became a web-based tool making it easy for me to use away from my desk if needed. The archives storage space is not near my office, and I take my laptop or work on the computer that is located in the archives processing area. While other software would be available to me at those other computers, I could not be logged in on two computers simultaneously, but I can be with ArchivesSpace. Since ArchivesSpace is web-based, the tool can run on any operating system, which is important at VCUQatar as we operate both on Macs and PCs. This also means that any updates

made in the back-end of the software are automatically updated for the user. There is no need for the staff to make any adjustments to the user display.

Both Archon and Archivists' Toolkit had the ability to link digital objects and to export data in EAD, XML and MARC records (http://archiviststoolkit.org/sites/default/files/Comparison_of_Archival_Management_Software_3.pdf). See picture 1. This is another added benefit of it being web-based. The finding aids will all be searchable in search engines, which is how many researchers start their initial research process. All of these things were transferred into ArchivesSpace and were deciding factors for choosing it.



Picture 1: Screen shot from the VCUQatar ArchivesSpace instance showing the export option

Another reason for choosing ArchivesSpace is that both Archon and Archivists' Toolkit are no longer being supported or updated after the release of ArchivesSpace (<http://archiviststoolkit.org/content/archivists-toolkit-archon-will-soon-be-super-seeded-archivespace>). Although you can still download both tools as of December 2015, the email for Archivists' Toolkit's email address is no longer functional (<http://archiviststoolkit.org/content/atug-l-user-group-listserv-update>). With updates to standards happening in the archives world happening all the time, the software needs to be updated when standards are updated and this would not happen with either Archon or Archivists' Toolkit.

The other important factor for choosing ArchivesSpace was the fact that it was open-source software. This meant two things that were important for me in choosing it. First, was that it meant the software was free. While we could afford to buy software, I choose to go with software that was free as I am expecting ArchivesSpace to become the standard archival description software used by archivists and archives in the United States. In the United States, the archive professional organization, the Society of American Archivists has had interest groups related to Archivists' Toolkit and I am sure that they will have one for ArchivesSpace soon. It also meant I could test the software without making any financial commitments. Second, it meant that developers could make additions to the

software that could prove useful. This means that ArchivesSpace has the potential to evolve quickly without waiting for official updates.

There is one thing I decided not to do when selecting ArchivesSpace for VCUQatar, which is to become a member. Becoming a member means paying a yearly membership fee based on your organization's Artstor or Jstor classification. Being a member means two things. First, you get access to ArchivesSpace documentation and support. I will talk more about how this has affected VCUQatar later. Second, you get to be a part of the governance of ArchivesSpace. I choose not to become a member for two reasons. First, when I initially reached out to ArchivesSpace, they thought that because our email addresses having the same domain name as the Richmond campus, we would have to be charged the Artstor rate of the Richmond campus. We would have had to pay for ArchivesSpace at a much higher membership level. As mentioned before, we only have one full-time archives faculty member and approximately 63 full-time staff faculty total compared to the Richmond campus having over 2,000 faculty members (<http://www.vcu.edu/about/facts-and-rankings.html>). This made the cost significantly higher and at the time, I had not even tested ArchivesSpace.

The other reason I choose not to become a member was the stability of ArchivesSpace, not of software stability, but of sustainability. Both Archon and Archivists' Toolkit were started in the same way and did not last. I did not want to invest money in a system that one day may become the next Archon or Archivists' Toolkit. I still think that it has the potential to become the standard archival description tool in the United States, but I need more evidence of usage by other archives and more archives community engagement in it to spend the money to become a member.

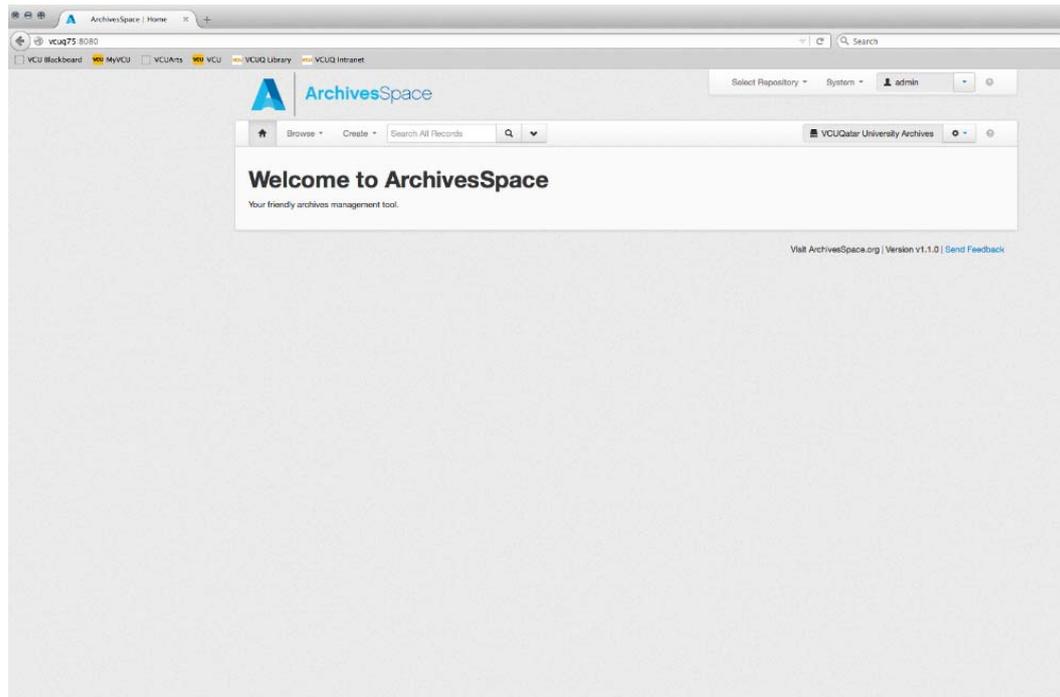
4 INSTALLATION

ArchivesSpace software installation is downloadable from the Github ArchivesSpace website (<https://github.com/archivesspace/archivesspace/releases>). All updates are posted here as well. Because this is open-source software, all the downloads are free. ArchivesSpace recommends that you setup the database using MySQL. There are basic instructions on installation on the ArchivesSpace website. Based on my past experiences at other archives, installing this software without the assistance of an Information Technology (IT) department would require lots of time and research into the technical terms and the needs of the software. Fortunately at VCUQatar, we have a large IT department to help us with software installation.

Once I decided to use ArchivesSpace, I contacted our IT department and sent him the links to the requirements for installation. After reviewing the software and obtaining a server for ArchivesSpace, it only took IT one month to install the software. Because of our small size and internal infrastructure, we did not have to seek approval from any other departments to install the software. Speaking to our IT staff after installation regarding the process they stated that overall the installation was easy. They stated the documentation for installation was good. Our instance of ArchivesSpace was installed on a Windows' server. The IT department did state that the only issue they have with it is that if the server goes down the software has to be manually restarted and that many software programs, like our digital asset management system, have an automatic restart. Our IT department did like the fact that ArchivesSpace is web-based. They thought it was the way of the future and that it meant it could be installed on any operating system.

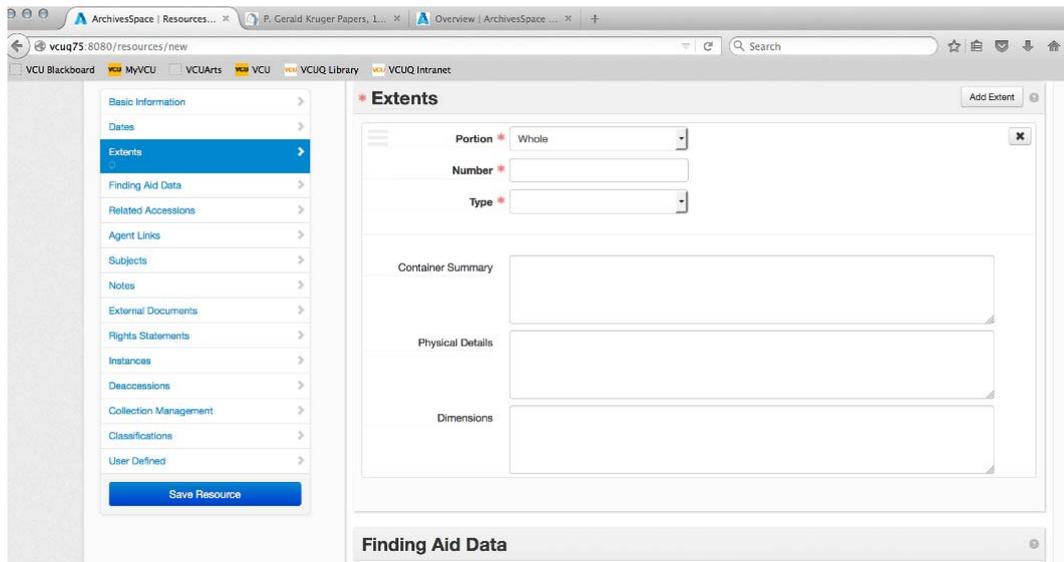
5 ENTERING DATA INTO ARCHIVESPACE

Once ArchivesSpace was installed, the entering of data could begin. This is when we ran into the first issue of not being a paying member. I could not access the user manual to know how to begin to enter data into the ArchivesSpace system. Looking at the home screen of the archives staff interface, it was not clear how to begin. See picture 2. Once I figured out that I needed to create a repository and then create a collection, I began to enter my first data for a finding aid.



Picture 2: Opening screen of ArchivesSpace staff interface

As I had no user manual, I decided to make the first entry a test run. This way if it did not work the way I thought it should, I would not be concerned about deleting the data and starting over. With no manual, teaching myself how to enter data took much longer than expected. ArchivesSpace did not look similar to Archon, the archival management system I was already familiar with. This was surprising since I knew that ArchivesSpace was going to be a combination of Archon and Archivist's Toolkit. Both of them seemed very user friendly and I had no issues learning Archon with little instruction before. In addition, the fields did not always match what DACS fields were familiar to me. One example is the Extents field. I learned DACS by hands-on use at previous jobs and did not know some of the formal names for the required fields. Extents were one of those fields. I always knew it was a required field and knew that it was the size of the collection, but did not know it was called Extents. For the required DACS fields, ArchivesSpace has small asterisk marks with the DACS section it was related to and that was helpful to give a better explanation of what was required. See picture 3.



Picture 3: Extents entry area with DACS requirements with asterisks

However, there were some fields that were not required DACS fields, but were required fields and I had to figure out what they were wanting, such as the Instances field. In a paper finding aid in the U.S., this would typically be the box and folder list or container list. Without expanding the Instance field, I did not know this was the location of the box and folder listing. Not wanting to go through every field to discover what it was for, I decided to look at other institution's public interface of ArchivesSpace for guidance.

Initially, I began using the ArchivesSpace membership directory that is available online (<http://www.archivespace.org/members>). This search began in early 2015 and at the time there very few members with active links to their instance of ArchivesSpace. I believe this is due to some members migrating their data from other archival management software to ArchivesSpace. Eventually, I selected Wilson College to use as a guide as their collections seemed similar to ours. Using Wilson College's ArchivesSpace public interface allowed me to see what the public sees and how they used the different fields (<http://coursecast.wilson.edu:8081/>). I used their public interface as a users manual.

After several weeks of trial and error and learning the workflow of ArchivesSpace, I had a much better idea of how it worked. Even though the test collection was an actual collection, there were many things that needed to be corrected before it could be used and I decided to delete the test run. Trying to figure out how to correct the mistakes would have taken longer than starting over. It also allowed me some more practice with ArchivesSpace.

Another issue I discovered while entering data into ArchivesSpace, was that the numbering system I had implemented for the record groups and containers was not going to work in ArchivesSpace without some written documentation for future archivists and I decided to adjust our numbering system instead. This was only discovered once the data entry began with the second record group that was entered. Local identifier numbering is required in DACS, but container numbering is not required (Identity elements, 2013). VCUQatar University Archives uses the record group number as the local identifier. Our numbering system had numbers for sub record groups, but not all record groups created had sub record groups. This lead to a discrepancy in numbering within ArchivesSpace and our numbers on the

containers, such as boxes and folders, for example one folder would be 4.2.2.1.1 in a record group with a sub record group and one without would be 4.2.1.1. Eliminating the sub record group number meant numbers across ArchivesSpace were consistent. To assist with locating material in the archives, record group numbers were placed on the archives boxes and folders. On the folders this included the record group number, sub record group number, box number and folder number. This was also done to assist in returning material to the correct box. Since ArchivesSpace only required a local identifier number,

During this time, processing of other collections continued. This led to the discovery that material had not been properly labeled when it was originally taken in. This affected the two collections that had been entered into ArchivesSpace, as we found material relating to both of these collections. Some material was added to existing folders and had no effect on the final finding aid. However, some material needed new folders to be added to boxes. This, of course, affected the numbering of the material both in the physical boxes and in ArchivesSpace. There was no clear way to add a folder to a box in ArchivesSpace and then have all the subsequent folders adjust their numbers accordingly, so this had to be done manually. As a result, this has delayed any current data entry into ArchivesSpace because we are still sorting through the material that has been collected. By not entering data until we are sure all material for a record group has been sorted, I am saving having to renumber folders both physically and in ArchivesSpace.

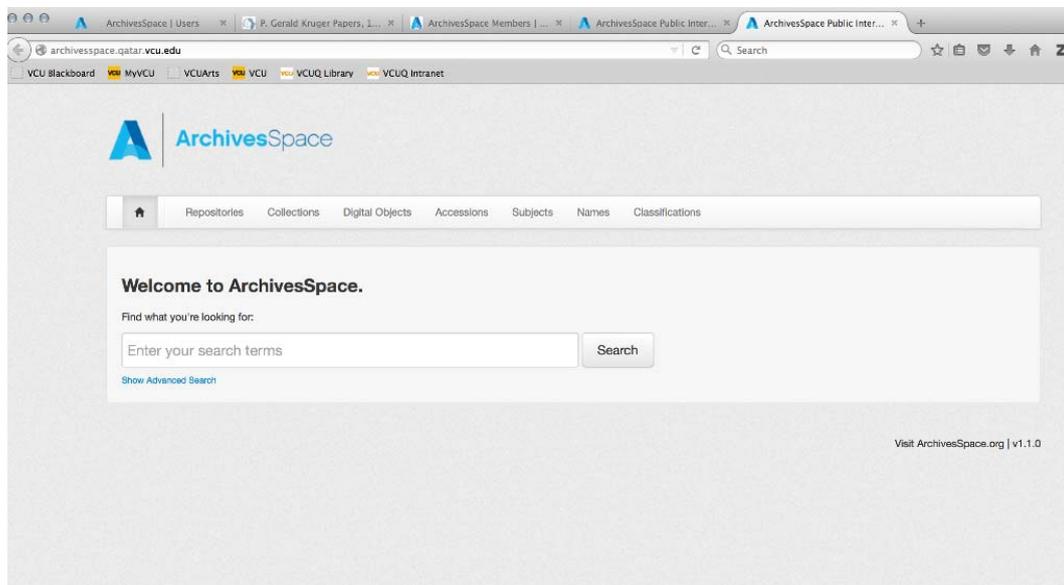
6 PUBLIC INTERFACE OF ARCHIVESPACE

When ArchivesSpace was first installed at VCUQatar, the public interface was not used. Only after the first collection was entered into the system did I begin to look at it. This allowed me to see what the public would see. However, it was not on our website, so the public could not see it. This was because I wanted to make sure everything worked on the staff interface before opening up the VCUQatar ArchivesSpace public interface.

The next step for making the VCUQatar ArchivesSpace open to the public was to obtain a vcu.edu url for it. Because our website is run through the Richmond campus, we had to request the url from them and that took several months. Once they set it up for us, we realized that ArchivesSpace was not spelled correctly. The correction took another several months. Due to security concerns we have our digital asset management system controlled by a username and password and this led our IT department to believe that this would be the case with the ArchivesSpace public interface. This led to delays, that I only discovered after asking if the corrected URL was ready. However, the VCUQatar ArchivesSpace public instance will be available to everyone and we were able to proceed with the customized url. As of this writing, December 2015, the url is live, but not up on the VCUQatar Library page.

However, at least now I can see what the VCUQatar University Archives Collections look like on the public interface. In general the standard public interface is a plain, simple website design. It is customizable with your own CSS and logo. The menu comes with a standard set up of tabs that include Repositories, Collections, Digital Objects, Accessions, Subjects, Names, and Classifications. See picture 4. While each of these means something to an archivist, not all of these means something to a researcher. You can remove the menu tabs that you do not want to include. At VCUQatar, we will eventually remove Repositories, Accessions, and

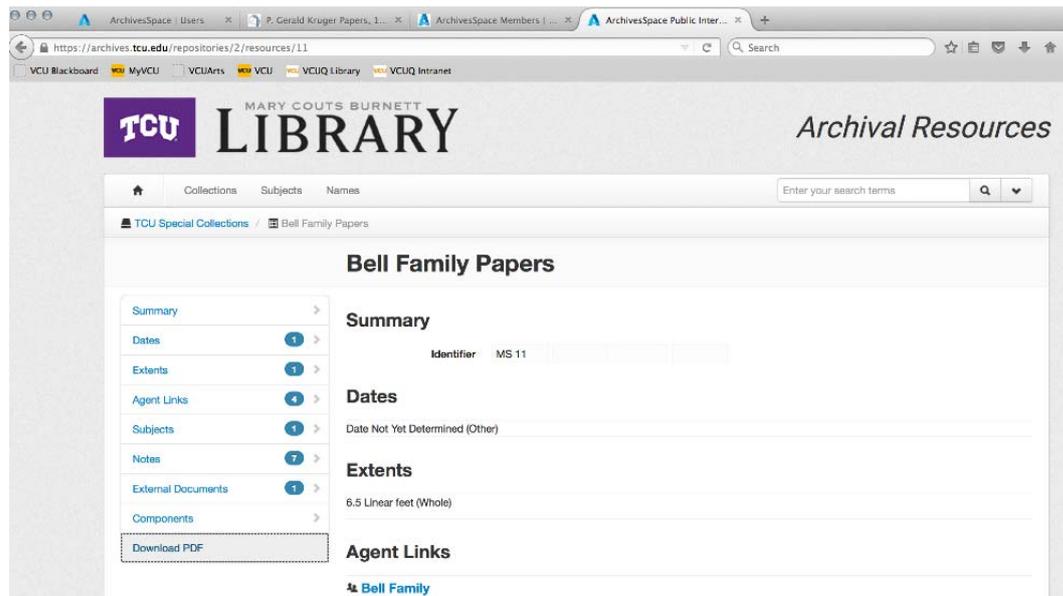
Classifications. We may consider removing Digital Objects if we decide to not link our digital archive collection.



Picture 4: VCUQatar ArchivesSpace public interface with menu tabs

There are two issues with the ArchivesSpace public interface. The first issue is on the left hand side are a list of subjects with number counts. The way ArchivesSpace populates this data is by counting the number of subjects entered for the repository. A subject does not appear unless it has been entered and selected as a subject heading for a collection. At this point, I can see no purpose of having subject as a menu tab and on the side bar. While the number county may prove useful for some researchers looking for collections with a particular subject, it would be good if you could turn them off if not needed. They should also be limited to just appearing when the subject menu tab is clicked.

Last, is the inability to print in the public interface. Of course, you can print from the browser, but there is no built-in print function. This would be beneficial, as the print out from the browsers does not format well. While visiting the Texas Christian University ArchivesSpace public interface, I noticed they have a download PDF option, which would allow for a formatted version to be printed. See picture 5. However, I have not been able to figure out how this function has been activated in ArchivesSpace. It may be a custom plug-in as I have not seen it in other public interfaces of ArchivesSpace.



Picture 5: Texas Christian University ArchivesSpace with download PDF option shown

7 CONCLUSION

As of this writing, December 2015, ArchivesSpace will continue to be the archives management software of choice. Currently, we have plans to have it go live on the VCUQatar Library website in the Spring 2016. The next step will be to promote it to the faculty, staff and students of VCUQatar. Google Analytics has also been installed on our instance of ArchivesSpace and it will be used to monitor use and its functionality.

The current process of sorting material into record groups continues, but it is close to being done. At that point, data entry will continue into ArchivesSpace of processed record groups. Both the processing and data entry will take time due to the lack of staff and time. Our aim is to have at least two more collections entered into ArchivesSpace by the end of 2016.

Overall, I am satisfied with ArchivesSpace as archival management software. It has improved my searching when someone asks for material in the two collections we have entered. It has also assisted in the processing task when we have located material for the two collections processed. I can easily see if the material is already housed in the collection. While learning ArchivesSpace has taken time without a user manual, I do not regret not becoming a member. The few things that I would like to know are not guaranteed to be in the manual and spending a large amount of money for access to the manual and support at this time is not in our budget.

There are two features that would benefit ArchivesSpace. First, is a reference or patron module. This way you could track reference questions and patron visits to the archives in the same software. The second would be an exhibition or use module. Frequently I put items on exhibition within the library or the VCUQatar building and I would like to be able to track those uses with the ArchivesSpace software.

ArchivesSpace will continue to improve. Currently they are working on improving the public interface and have hired a designer (<https://archivespace.atlassian.net/wiki/display/ADC/Public+Interface+Enhancement+Project>). I believe

that more modules are coming that will support more functions like I mentioned above. ArchivesSpace will also be more sustainable than Archon or Archivists' Toolkit because of its continued funding resources from membership. ArchivesSpace has the potential to become the standard archival management software in the United States.

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POVZETEK

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IMPLEMENTACIJA PROGRAMSKE OPREME ARCHIVSPACE V UNIVERZITETNEM ARHIVU

Univerza Virginia Commonwealth v Katarju (VCU Katar) je bila ustanovljena leta 1988 v partnerstvu s Katarskim skladom. Predstavlja vejo Univerze Virginia Commonwealth iz Richmonda, ZDA. V kampusu je okoli 323 študentov ter 130 zaposlenih. VCU Katar je specializiran za poučevanje in oblikovanje.

Arhiv VCU KATAR je v univerzitetni knjižnici in ima enega zaposlenega. Ni povsem znano, kdaj je bil arhiv ustanovljen, vsebuje pa gradivo skoraj vseh oddelkov v kampusu. Trenutno hrani okoli 45 tekočih metrov gradiva.

Ob prihodu avtorice na univerzo leta 2013 v arhivu ni bilo vzpostavljenih pravil ali postopkov prevzemanja, popisovanja ali dostopa do arhiva. Večina zbirke je bilo neobdelane. Ob obdelavi prvih enot gradiva je avtorica spoznala, da bo za delo

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potrebovala programsko opremo za upravljanje z dokumenti, ki bi ji bila v pomoč pri lociranju gradiva, ko ga bodo stranke zahtevale na vpogled.

Prvi korak je bil izbira programske opreme. Izbrala je ArchivesSpace, ki je izpolnjeval večino potreb in zahtev. Omogočal je izvoz podatkov v XML, EAD in MARC, bil pa je tudi odprtokoden. Zadnje je bilo zelo pomembno, saj so ga lahko naložili s spleta in testirali brez stroškov. Odločili so se, da ne bodo postali plačljivi član skupnosti ArchivesSpace, zato imajo omejeno uporabo dokumentacije in programske podpore.

Brez podpore so imeli nekaj težav, vendar so s pomočjo IT-oddelka instalacijo uspešno opravili. Vnos podatkov brez uporabniških navodil je bil težji, zato je avtorica za premagovanje prvih težav navezala stik z drugimi institucijami, ki so uporabljale ArchivesSpace.

Javni vmesnik ArchivesSpace VCA Katar bo na voljo spomladi 2016. Pri implementaciji so imeli nekaj manjših težav, ki pa jih bodo odpravljali sproti.

Z uporabo programske opreme so zadovoljni, uporabljali jo bodo še naprej. V naslednjem letu bodo dodajali nove skupine zapisov in uporabo nadzorovali z Google Analytics. ArchivesSpace ima tako potencial, da postane izbrana programska oprema za upravljanje z arhivi v Združenih državah.