



**University of North Texas
College of Information
INFO 5240: Archival Arrangement and Description
Fall 2026**

COURSE INFORMATION

Contact: Professor Samantha Dodd Summerbell

Course: INFO 5240, Section 401, 402

Email: Samantha.dodd@unt.edu

Office hours: online via appointment only; please email me to schedule.

The best way to reach me is through the Canvas Inbox (Messenger). Please use Canvas to ask course-related questions or to schedule a one-on-one meeting. I am happy to meet with you individually and encourage you to reach out to arrange a convenient time.

Course pre-requisites:

INFO 5371: Archives and Manuscripts

Certification Program:

INFO 5240: Archival Arrangement and Description is required to earn an [Archival Management Graduate Academic Certificate](#) from the College of Information.

INFO 5240 is pre-approved by the Academy of Certified Archivists (ACA) as meeting the requirements for Domain 2 (Arrangement and Description) in the ACA Role Delineation Statement.

Course Description:

This course provides an overview of the theoretical and methodical principles of archival arrangement and description. Emphasis will be placed on practical issues related to the arrangement and description of physical and electronic records, in addition to best practices. Coursework will include mock arrangement and description exercises, a review of professional literature, and a discussion of relevant technologies.

Course objectives:

Upon completing this course, you will be able to:

- Define archival vocabulary and discuss theoretical principles of arrangement and description.
- Appraise and critically evaluate professional literature, various theories, and methods of arrangement and description.
- Compose a processing plan justifying your processing suggestions for a given collection based on your analysis of the collection's specific needs.
- Prepare a written finding aid for an archival collection.
- Identify emerging trends in archival processing and devise solutions to critical issues facing professional archivists

Methodology:

Assigned readings and other course materials will provide a basis for weekly activity, either a course discussion or an exercise. **You are expected to have read the assigned readings prior to the week they are assigned.** You should be prepared to respond to the readings and interact with the instructor and each other through the activity each week. All assigned readings are available from the first day of class, allowing you to work ahead in anticipation of life events.

The processing plan assignment, finding aid assignment, and final project all include a practical example collection in ascending order of difficulty. These assignments are designed to allow you to dramatize and solve common challenges associated with the arrangement and description of an archival collection.

Required Texts:

There are no required textbooks for this course. Instead, you will be assigned a variety of readings and videos throughout the semester, including journal articles, book chapters, reports, and other course materials. Readings will be available through the University Libraries or posted in the course learning management system. You should not have to pay to access any assigned materials, although you may need to log in with your university library account to access some readings.

Grades will be based on the following:

Participation: 30%

For this course, participation will require completing all assigned readings in a timely manner and actively contributing to a weekly module activity, either a discussion or an exercise.

Manuscript Processing Plan: 20%

Assignment Objectives: Identify and evaluate the major components of an archival processing plan. Analyze a preliminary inventory to identify arrangement, description, preservation, and access needs. Develop an arrangement that reflects the collection's provenance, original order, content, and anticipated research use. Estimate processing time and identify factors that may affect the estimate. Identify materials requiring deaccession, transfer, restriction, preservation attention, or further review. Synthesize course readings, discussions, and professional practice to justify archival decisions. Communicate processing decisions clearly and professionally.

Finding Aid Exercise: 20%

Assignment Objectives: Identify the major components of a professional archival finding aid. Apply relevant DACS rules to archival description. Conduct external historical research to contextualize archival materials. Write a professional Biographical/Historical Note. Write a substantive Scope and Contents statement. Analyze provenance and arrangement. Make defensible archival arrangement decisions. Apply controlled subject terminology. Identify related collections and research resources. Distinguish information about a creator from evidence actually represented in the archival collection. Describe a multigenerational family collection at the collection and series levels. Produce a finding aid that could function as a professional research tool.

Final Project: 30%

Assignment Objectives: Read and analyze an archival job description. Identify the arrangement and description knowledge and skills employers seek. Translate course concepts into professional competencies. Assess your own qualifications and identify areas for professional development. Write an effective, position-specific cover letter. Use appropriate archival terminology and communicate clearly with a professional audience.

Assignments are due **before** midnight **CST** on the date shown in the syllabus. Assignments turned in late will drop by one letter grade for each day late, no matter the quality of the assignment. Assignments will be considered a day late even if they are submitted several minutes after the deadline. Please be careful to submit your work on time. This will enable your instructor to get grades and feedback to you in a timely manner.

Assignments will be graded in terms of completeness, accuracy, and appropriateness. This is a **graduate-level** course, and students are expected to demonstrate the ability to write properly.

Grading criteria:

The UNT scale for grading is:

A = 90-100

B = 80-89

C = 70-79

D = 60-69

F = 59 and below

Assignment	Percentage of Final Grade
<i>Manuscript Processing Plan</i>	<i>20%</i>
<i>Finding Aid Exercise</i>	<i>20%</i>
<i>Final Project</i>	<i>30%</i>
<i>Participation</i> <i>12 Module activities (6 class discussions; 6 exercises)</i>	<i>30%</i>
<i>Total Points Possible</i>	<i>100%</i>

Dates to Remember:

All assignments are due by 11:59 PM Central Standard Time on the due date

Assignment	Due Date
Weekly Module Activity	Due each Sunday
Manuscript Processing Plan	Due Sunday, October 4
Finding Aid Exercise	Due Sunday, November 8
Final Exam	Due Monday, December 7

COURSE POLICIES

Communication with your professor

The best way to reach me is through the Canvas Inbox (Messenger). Please use Canvas to ask course-related questions or to schedule a one-on-one meeting. I am happy to meet with you individually and encourage you to reach out to arrange a convenient time.

Netiquette

Netiquette, or online etiquette, refers to how students are expected to interact with each other and their instructors online. Please read through this [Netiquette Guide for Online Courses](#). Although our course is online, you will be held to the standards of behavior expected of students in a traditional in-person classroom. Failure to comply with netiquette guidelines may result in expulsion from the class.

Minimum Technical Skills Needed

Students are expected to have the following technology skills to fully participate in learning. Students should be able to use the learning management system, Canvas, to access course-related materials and resources, keep up with emails regularly, create, modify and submit files according to the instructor's direction, such as proper file format, be able to download and install software when needed, and utilize the basics of the Microsoft Suite (Word, Excel, PowerPoint). Students are expected to be able to search and retrieve articles via UNT Library databases, which may require the use of a VPN.

Minimum Technology Requirements

Minimum technology skills for successful completion of this course include:

- Creating, sending, and receiving Microsoft Word documents
- Posting to discussion boards
- Reliable internet access
- Speakers
- Microsoft Office Suite
- [Canvas Technical Requirements](#)

Computer Skills & Digital Literacy

- Using Canvas
- Using word processing software
- Saving and naming documents in the correct format
- Sending and receiving email
- Printing Word documents OR opening and printing PDF files, using free Adobe Acrobat Reader

Use of Generative AI Policy

In this course, I want you to engage deeply with the materials and develop your own critical thinking and writing skills. For this reason, the use of Generative AI (GenAI) tools like Claude, ChatGPT, and Gemini is not permitted. While these tools can be helpful in some contexts, they do not align with our goal of fostering the development of your independent thinking. Using GenAI to complete any part of an assignment, exam, or

coursework will be considered a violation of academic integrity, as it prevents the development of your own skills, and will be addressed according to the Student Academic Integrity policy (<https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>).

Technical Requirements

Please familiarize yourself with the technical requirements to complete this online course:

- [Hardware and Software Requirements for Canvas](#)
- [Canvas Browser Check](#)

Technical Assistance

Part of working in the online environment involves dealing with the inconveniences and frustrations that can arise when technology breaks down or does not perform as expected. You can contact the Student Help Desk at UNT for help with Canvas or other technology issues.

UNT IT Help Desk

Email: helpdesk@unt.edu

Phone: 940-565-2324

In Person: Sage Hall, Room 330

For additional support, visit [Canvas Technical Help](#)

Accessibility Requirements of Technologies Used in the Course

- [Canvas](#)
- [Microsoft Office](#)

In the event of a technical failure

If you encounter a technical problem while using Canvas that prevents you from meeting a deadline or otherwise prohibits you from fulfilling your obligations as a student (i.e., Canvas crashes when you submit an assignment and you lose your work), I require that you send a Canvas help desk ticket number in your email reporting the problem to me and explaining why you missed the deadline. Please attach a copy of your assignment to your email. The UIT Help Desk can be reached at (940-565-2324). This policy is in place to prevent academic dishonesty.

Late Work

Late assignments will drop by one letter grade for each day late, no matter the quality of the assignment. Assignments will be considered a day late even if they are submitted several minutes after the deadline. Please be careful to submit your assignments on time. This will enable your instructor to get grades and feedback to you in a timely manner.

Academic Support & Student Services

- [Registrar](#)

- [Financial Aid](#)
- [Student Legal Services](#)
- [Career Center](#)
- [Counseling and Testing Services](#)
- [UNT Food Pantry](#)
- [Academic Success Center](#)
- [UNT Libraries](#)
- [Writing Lab](#)

Mental Health

UNT provides mental health resources to ensure there are numerous outlets available to you when seeking care, regardless of the nature of the issue or its severity. Listed below are Denton campus in-person and online student resources that can support your academic success and mental wellbeing, whether enrolled in Denton, Frisco Landing, Discovery Park, or online-only courses.

- [The Counseling and Testing Center \(CTS\)](#) is located on the 3rd floor of Chestnut Hall, where students have free access to individual counseling/therapy, group counseling, workshops, and crisis counseling, with both in-person and virtual appointment options available.
- Psychiatric Services are available at the [Student Health and Wellness Center](#) (SHWC) on the 2nd floor of Chestnut Hall, where staff can see students for psychiatric evaluations, prescribe medications, and develop comprehensive treatment plans, with both in-person and telemedicine (online) options available.
- [Togetherall](#) is a fantastic online peer support platform for UNT students. It's a safe community that is available 24/7, where you can connect with students from across the world who are going through the same struggles that you might be facing.

Additional Student Support Services

- [Registrar](#)
- [Financial Aid](#)
- [Student Legal Services](#)
- [Career Center](#)
- [Multicultural Center](#)
- [Counseling and Testing Services](#)
- [UNT Food Pantry](#)
- [Student Affairs Care Team](#)
- [Student Health and Wellness Center](#)

Academic Support Services

- [Academic Resource Center](#)

- [Academic Success Center](#)
- [UNT Libraries](#)
- [Writing Lab](#)

UNT POLICIES

Academic Integrity Policy (Policy 06.003)

The University of North Texas promotes the integrity of learning and embraces the core values of trust and honesty. Academic integrity is based on educational principles and procedures that protect the rights of all participants in the educational process and validate the legitimacy of degrees awarded by the University. In the investigation and resolution of allegations of student academic dishonesty, the University's actions are intended to be corrective, educationally sound, fundamentally fair, and based on reliable evidence.

ADA Policy (Policy 16.001)

The University of North Texas (UNT) does not discriminate on the basis of disability in employment, admission, treatment, or access to its programs or activities. UNT is committed to providing equal educational access for qualified students with disabilities in accordance with state and federal laws including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as Amended (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Additionally, the University is committed to making all UNT sponsored programs and activities accessible, as required by the Texas Accessibility Standards and the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines. To this end, all academic units are willing to make reasonable and appropriate adjustments to the classroom environment and the teaching, testing, or learning methodologies in order to facilitate equality of educational access for persons with disabilities.

You can request accommodations at any time, but it's important to provide ODA notice to your faculty as early as possible in the semester to avoid delays in implementation. Keep in mind that you must obtain a new letter of accommodation for each semester and meet with each faculty member before accommodations can be implemented in each class. You are strongly encouraged to meet with faculty regarding your accommodations during office hours or by appointment. Faculty have the authority to ask you to discuss your letter during their designated office hours to protect your privacy. For more information and to access resources that can support your needs, refer to the [Office of Disability Access](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access) website (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access>).

Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation (Policy 16.004)

The University of North Texas (UNT) prohibits discrimination, harassment and retaliation because of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation,

gender identity, age, disability, genetic information, or veteran status in its application, employment practices, and facilities; nor permits race, color, national origin, religion, age, disability, veteran status, or sex discrimination and harassment in its admissions processes, and educational programs and activities. The University takes active measures to prevent such conduct and investigates and takes remedial action when appropriate.

Sexual Assault Prevention

UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Federal laws (Title IX and the Violence Against Women Act) and UNT policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, and therefore prohibit sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking, and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance. UNT's Survivor Advocates can assist a student who has been impacted by violence by filing protective orders, completing crime victim's compensation applications, contacting professors for absences related to an assault, working with housing to facilitate a room change where appropriate, and connecting students to other resources available both on and off campus. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students Office at [940-565-2648](tel:940-565-2648). Additionally, alleged sexual misconduct can be non-confidentially reported to the Title IX Coordinator at oeo@unt.edu or at [940-565 2759](tel:940-565-2759).

Emergency Notification & Procedures

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

Retention of Student Records

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. Students have the right to view their individual record; however, information about student's records will not be divulged to other individuals without proper written consent. Students are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws

and the University's policy. See UNT Policy 10.10, Records Management and Retention for additional information.

Acceptable Student Behavior

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including University and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. Visit [UNT's Code of Student Conduct](#) to learn more.

Access to Information - Eagle Connect

Students' access point for business and academic services at UNT is located at: my.unt.edu. All official communication from the University will be delivered to a student's Eagle Connect account. Please visit the [Eagle Connect](#) website for more information about Eagle Connect and how to forward e-mail.

Student Evaluation Administration Dates

Student feedback is important and an essential part of participation in this course. The student evaluation of instruction is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. The survey will be made available during weeks 13, 14 and 15 the long semesters to provide students with an opportunity to evaluate how this course is taught. Students will receive an email from "UNT SPOT Course Evaluations via IASystem Notification" (no-reply@iasystem.org) with the survey link. Students should look for the email in their UNT email inbox. Simply click on the link and complete the survey. Once students complete the survey they will receive a confirmation email that the survey has been submitted. For additional information, please visit the SPOT website or email spot@unt.edu.

Important Notice for F-1 Students Taking Distance Education Courses

Federal Regulation

To read detailed Immigration and Customs Enforcement regulations for F-1 students taking online courses, please visit the [Electronic Code of Federal Regulations](#) website. The specific portion concerning distance education courses is located at Title 8 CFR 214.2 Paragraph (f)(6)(i)(G).

The paragraph reads:

(G) For F-1 students enrolled in classes for credit or classroom hours, no more than the equivalent of one class or three credits per session, term, semester, trimester, or quarter may be counted toward the full course of study requirement if the class is taken

on-line or through distance education and does not require the student's physical attendance for classes, examination or other purposes integral to completion of the class. An online or distance education course is a course that is offered principally through the use of television, audio, or computer transmission including open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, or satellite, audio conferencing, or computer conferencing. If the F-1 student's course of study is in a language study program, no online or distance education classes may be considered to count toward a student's full course of study requirement.

University of North Texas Compliance

To comply with immigration regulations, an F-1 visa holder within the United States may need to engage in an on-campus experiential component for this course. This component (which must be approved in advance by the instructor) can include activities such as taking an on-campus exam, participating in an on-campus lecture or lab activity, or other on-campus experiences integral to the completion of this course. If such an on-campus activity is required, it is the student's responsibility to do the following:

- (1) Submit a written request to the instructor for an on-campus experiential component within one week of the start of the course.
- (2) Ensure that the activity on campus takes place and the instructor documents it in writing with a notice sent to the International Student and Scholar Services Office. ISSS has a form available that you may use for this purpose.

Because the decision may have serious immigration consequences, if an F-1 student is unsure about his or her need to participate in an on-campus experiential component for this course, s/he should contact the [UNT International Student and Scholar Services Office](#) by telephone 940-565-2195 or email internationaladvising@unt.edu to get clarification before the one-week deadline.

Student Verification

UNT takes measures to protect the integrity of educational credentials awarded to students enrolled in distance education courses by verifying student identity, protecting student privacy, and notifying students of any special meeting times/locations or additional charges associated with student identity verification in distance education courses.

See [UNT Policy 07-002 Student Identity Verification, Privacy, and Notification and Distance Education Courses](#).

Use of Student Work

A student owns the copyright for all work (e.g. software, photographs, reports, presentations, and email postings) he or she creates within a class and the University is not entitled to use any student work without the student's permission unless all of the following criteria are met:

- The work is used only once.

- The work is not used in its entirety.
- Use of the work does not affect any potential profits from the work.
- The student is not identified.
- The work is identified as student work.

If the use of the work does not meet all of the above criteria, then the University office or department using the work must obtain the student's written permission by using the UNT System Permission, Waiver and Release Form.

Web Policies

Web Accessibility & Privacy

Please find the web accessibility and privacy statements for UNT, Canvas, and all CLEAR-supported technologies below.

UNT

- [Web Accessibility Policy](#)
- [Privacy Statement](#)

Canvas/Instructure

- [Accessibility Statement](#)
- [Privacy Policy](#)

CLEAR-Supported Technologies

- See [CLEAR's Supported Technologies web page](#) for links to Accessibility Statements and Privacy Policies.

Copyright

Materials used in connection with this course may be subject to copyright protection. Materials may include, but are not limited to: documents, slides, images, audio, and video. Materials in this course Web site are only for the use of students enrolled in this course, for purposes associated with this course, and may not be retained for longer than the class term. Unauthorized retention, duplication, distribution, or modification of copyrighted materials is strictly prohibited by law. For more information, visit the [UNT Policy Office](#) or [Copyright.gov](#).

CALENDAR

Module 1: Introduction and overview of class structure (August 17-23)

Module Objectives: Define basic archival vocabulary related to arrangement and description. Review syllabus and comprehend course structure. Identify any initial questions you have for your instructor about expectations or the course structure.

Readings:

- Review syllabus and module 1 content
- Review the following definitions provided by the Society of American Archivists:
 - [Archival processing](#)
 - [Arrangement](#)
 - [Levels of arrangement](#)
 - [Archival description](#)
 - [Finding Aid](#)
 - [Papers](#)
 - [Collection](#)
 - [Manuscript](#)

Assignments:

Post an introduction to the module 1 discussion forum and respond to at least one of your classmates' introductions.

Module 2: Overview of Arrangement and Description (August 23-30)

Module Objectives: Define archival arrangement and archival description. Explain why archivists arrange and describe collections. Understand how arrangement and description fit within the archival continuum. Describe the value archival processing adds to collections. Recognize the core principles that guide archival processing. Identify practical factors that influence arrangement and description decisions.

Readings:

- Module 2 Notes

Assignments:

Module 2 activity.

Module 3: Historical Context and Introduction to Major Theoretical Principles (August 30-September 6)

- **Module Objectives:** Review the history of archival practices in Western Europe, Canada, and the United States. Explain the principles of provenance, original

order, and respect des fonds. Describe how archival arrangement preserves the context and evidential value of records. Distinguish between archives, manuscripts, and collections. Compare archival description practices with library cataloging methods. Identify the levels of archival arrangement from repository level to item level. Defend your recommendations for the arrangement of hypothetical archival collections.

Readings:

- Module 3 notes
- Hintz, Carrie. [“Processing Levels: The Hows and Whys.”](#) *Chaos -> Order* blog. November 10, 2015.
- Trace, Ciaran B. [Maintaining Records in Context: A Historical Exploration of the Theory and Practice of Archival Classification and Arrangement](#). *The American Archivist*: Spring/Summer 2020, Vol. 83, No. 1, pp. 91-127.
- Trace, Ciaran B. [“Maintaining Records in Context? Disrupting the Theory and Practice of Archival Classification and Arrangement.”](#) *The American Archivist*: September 2020, Vol. 83, No. 2: 322–372.

Assignments:

Module 3 activity.

Module 4: Practical Basics of Processing (September 6-13)

Module objectives: Review workflow of archival arrangement and description. Employ an understanding of procedures for arrangement and description to analyze an example processing manual. Prepare for Processing Plan Assignment by identifying elements of a processing plan.

Readings:

- Module 4 notes
- [UT-Arlington processing manual](#), 2011, 6th edition
As you read the UT-Arlington processing manual, remember that not all of the UT-Arlington processing manual “rules” will apply to all institutions. Instead, they outline best practices as determined by a specific institution. Processing manuals at other institutions may vary in specifics.
- Lyon, Meghan. [“A Case for Processing Proposals.”](#) *Chaos -> Order* blog. November 3, 2015.
- Meehan, Jennifer. [“Making the Leap from Parts to Whole: Evidence and Inference in Archival Arrangement and Description.”](#) *The American Archivist*, Vol. 72 (Spring/Summer 2009): 72-90.

Assignments:

- Module 4 activity.
- Begin Processing Plan assignment.

Optional Further Readings:

- Yale University Library, [Manuscripts and Archives Processing Manual](#)
- Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library at Emory University [The Collection Services Manual](#)
- [Arizona State University Libraries Manuscript and Archival Records Processing Manual](#)
- [University of Maryland Libraries processing manual](#)
- [Additional A&D Manuals- SAA Museum Archives Section](#)

Module 5: Minimal Processing, a.k.a. “More Product, Less Process” or MPLP (September 13-20)

Module Objectives: Define minimal or extensible processing, commonly known as “MPLP.” Summarize how minimal processing helps repositories reduce backlogs and provide earlier access to materials. Understand the concepts and arguments in “More Product, Less Process.” Analyze case studies of MPLP’s use.

Readings:

- Module 5 Notes
- Greene, Mark A. and Dennis Meissner. “[More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing](#).” *The American Archivist*. Vol. 68 (Fall/Winter 2005): 208–263.
- Weideman, Christine. “[Accessioning as Processing](#).” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 69 (Fall/Winter 2006): 274 – 283 (Available in Canvas course content)
- Harling, Adrienne R.S. “[MPLP as Intentional, not Necessarily Minimal, Processing: The Rudolf W. Becking Collection at Humboldt State University](#).” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 77, No. 2 (Fall/Winter 2014): 489–498.
- Meissner, Dennis and Mark A. Greene. “[More Application while Less Appreciation: The Adopters and Antagonists of MPLP](#).” *Journal of Archival Organization*, 2010, 8:3-4, 174–226.
- Phillips, Jessica. “[A Defense of Preservation in the Age of MPLP](#).” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 78 (Fall/Winter 2015): 470-487.

Assignments:

Module 5 activity.

Optional Further Readings:

- Benoit, Edward. “[#MPLP Part 2: Replacing Item-Level Metadata with User-Generated Social Tags](#).” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 81 (March 2018): 38–64.
- Benoit, Edward. “[#MPLP Part 1: Comparing Domain Expert and Novice Social Tags in a Minimally Processed Digital Archives](#).” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 80 (Fall/Winter 2017): 407–438.
- Anchor, Rachel. 2013. “[‘More Product, Less Process’: Method, Madness or Practice?](#)” *Archives & Records* 34 (2): 156–74.

- Herzinger, Kyna (2020) "[MPLP: From Practice to Theory](#)," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*: Vol. 7, Article 20.
- [Guidelines for Efficient Archival Processing in the University of California Libraries](#).

Module 6: Born Digital Content & Electronic Records/Non-Manuscript Archival Formats (September 20-27)

Module Objectives: Identify the challenges presented by the arrangement and description of electronic records. Appraise how arranging and describing electronic records differs from analog materials. Review case studies related to the arrangement and description of electronic records.

Readings:

- Module 6 notes
- Shallcross, Mike. "[The MeMail Project: Digital Curation at the Bentley Historical Library](#)." *Practical E-Records* blog. June 2, 2011.
- Bailey, Jefferson. "[Disrespect des Fonds: Rethinking Arrangement and Description in Born-Digital Archives](#)." *Archive Journal*. Issue 3, Summer 2013.
- "[We're All Digital Archivists Now: An Interview with Sibyl Schaefer](#)." Library of Congress. September 24, 2014.
- Kim, Julia Y. (2018) "[Researcher Access to Born-Digital Collections: an Exploratory Study](#)," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*: Vol. 5, Article 7.
- Szekely, Ivan (2017) "[Do Archives Have a Future in the Digital Age?](#)," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*: Vol. 4, Article 1.

Assignments:

- Module 6 activity.
- **Assignment #1: Processing Plan assignment due October 4.**

Module 7: Finding Aids and Discovery (October 4-11)

Module Objectives: Prepare for the Finding Aid Assignment by identifying elements of a finding aid. Identify limitations of the current finding aid format and propose solutions based on case studies and reports.

Readings:

- Module 7 notes
- Yakel, Elizabeth. "[Encoded Archival Description: Are Finding Aids Boundary Spanners or Barriers for Users?](#)" *Journal of Archival Organization*, 2004, 2:2, 63–77.
- Maier, Shannon Bowen. "[MPLP and the Catalog Record as a Finding Aid](#)." *Journal of Archival Organization* 9, no. 1 (2011): 32–44.

- Berry, Dorothy. "[Finding Your Way Through Finding Aids: Archives 101](#)." July 2020.
- Wiedeman, Gregory. (2019) [The Historical Hazards of Finding Aids](#). *The American Archivist*: Fall/Winter 2019, Vol. 82, No. 2, pp. 381-420.

Assignments:

- Module 7 activity.
- Begin working on your Finding Aid Assignment.

Optional Further Readings:

- Williamson, Felicia, Scott Vieira, and James Williamson (2015) [Marketing Finding Aids on Social Media: What Worked and What Didn't Work](#). *The American Archivist*: Fall/Winter 2015, Vol. 78, No. 2, pp. 488-513.
- Walton, Rachel. "[Looking for Answers: A Usability Study of Online Finding Aid Navigation](#)." *The American Archivist*: Spring/Summer 2017, Vol. 80, No. 1, pp. 30-52.

Please also browse:

- [UNT Libraries finding aids](#)
- [Princeton University Library finding aids](#)
- [Dallas Municipal Archives Collections Guides](#)

Module 8: Standards for Archival Description Part I (October 11-18)

Module Objectives: Identify standards governing archival description. Generate archival descriptions compliant with content standards. Prepare for the Finding Aid Assignment by reviewing the rules outlined in *DACS*.

Readings:

- Module 8 notes
- [DACS: Describing Archives: A Content Standard](#)
- [Statement on proposed revisions to DACS Statement of Principles](#)

Assignments:

- Module 8 activity.

Module 9: Standards for Archival Description Part II (October 18-25)

Module Objectives: Identify the purpose and structure of archival data structure and companion standards Machine Readable Cataloging (MARC), Encoded Archival Description (EAD), and Encoded Archival Context – Corporate bodies, Persons and Families (EAC-CPF). Analyze EAD's effectiveness as a technology, especially in light of recent revisions.

Readings:

- Module 9 notes
- Eidson, Jennifer G. and Christina J. Zamon (2019) [EAD Twenty Years Later: A Retrospective of Adoption in the Early Twenty-first Century and the Future of EAD](#). *The American Archivist*: Fall/Winter 2019, Vol. 82, No. 2, pp. 303-330.
- Sweetser, Michelle and Alexandra A. A. Orchard (2019) [Are We Coming Together? The Archival Descriptive Landscape and the Roles of Archivist and Cataloger](#). *The American Archivist*: Fall/Winter 2019, Vol. 82, No. 2, pp. 331-380.
- Wisser, Katherine M. (2014) ["Investigating the "small world" of literary archival collections: the impact of EAC-CPF on archival descriptive practices – Part 1: Relationships, description and the archival community."](#) *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*: Vol. 1, Article 1.
- ["EAD Revision – Points of Emphasis"](#)

Assignments:

- Module 9 activity.

Please also browse:

- [Encoded Archival Description Tag Library Version EAD3](#)
- [Social Networks and Archival Context \(SNAC\)](#)
- [Connecting the Dots: Using EAC-CPF to Reunite Samuel Johnson and His Circle \(wiki\)](#); [Connecting the Dots homepage](#) (make sure to watch the video)
- [People Australia](#)
- [EADiva Tag Library](#)

Module 10: Access Systems (October 25-November 1)

Module Objectives: Identify ways to display and provide access to archival description. Analyze the effectiveness of current access systems for archival description. Compare and contrast prominent archival access systems.

Readings:

- Module 10 notes
- Matienzo, Mark A. and Kott, Katherine. "[ArchivesSpace: A Next-Generation Archives Management System](#)." in *Museums and the Web*, N. Proctor and R. Cherry, eds. (Silver Spring, MD: Museums and the Web, January 31, 2013).
- Watch the "[ArchivesSpace demos](#)" playlist (4 videos)

Assignments:

- Module 10 activity.
- **Assignment #2: Finding Aid Assignment due November 8**

Please also browse these collective databases:

- [Online Archive of California \(OAD\)](#)

- [Northwest Digital Archives \(NWDA\)](#)
- [Texas Archival Resources Online \(TARO\)](#)
- [ArchiveGrid](#)
- [Archives Hub](#)
- [ArchivesSpace Sandbox](#)

Module 11: Challenges & Special Considerations (November 8-15)

Module Objectives: Identify and appraise examples of challenges presented by technological innovation, description backlogs, and growing collections. Predict how these challenges could be overcome with insight from course readings and personal experience.

Readings:

- Module 11 notes
- Dooley, Jackie M. and Katherine Luce. [Taking Our Pulse: The OCLC Research Survey of Special Collections and Archives](#). 2010. OCLC Research. Read pages 9–14 (the Executive Summary)
- Hutchens, Kate. ["What are all those blue binders? Or, #FindingAidFriday meets #TBT."](#) *Beyond the Reading Room*. University of Michigan Special Collections blog. September 12, 2014.
- Gracy, Karen F. and Frank Lambert. ["Who's Ready to Surf the Next Wave? A Study of Perceived Challenges to Implementing New and Revised Standards for Archival Description."](#) *The American Archivist*. Spring/Summer 2014, Vol. 77: 96–132.
- Morris, Sammie L. and Pam Hackbart-Dean. ["Case Studies in Managing Collections That Grow."](#) *Archival Issues*, 2003–2004, Vol. 28, No. 2: 105–118.
- Manžuch, Zinaida (2017) ["Ethical Issues In Digitization Of Cultural Heritage,"](#) *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*: Vol. 4, Article 4.

Assignments:

Module 11 activity.

Module 12: Next Generation Archival Arrangement & Description (November 15-22)

Module Objectives: Identify examples of current solutions that signal the future of archival arrangement and description. Analyze current solutions and predict what innovations will be needed to provide excellent access to archival materials.

Readings:

- Module 12 notes

- Dunbar, Hope and Axford, Ken (2026) "[Leveraging Consumer-Level AI for Descriptive Metadata Creation in Archival Collections](#),[Links to an external site.](#)" *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*: Vol. 13, Article 4.
- University of Virginia Library. (2026). [UVA archival AI protocol](#)[Links to an external site.](#). University of Virginia. virginia.gov
- Yaco, Sonia, Bala Desinghu, Claire Warwick, and Richard Anderson. "What Can AI Do for Special Collections?." *The American Archivist* 88, no. 2 (2025): 441–473. <https://doi.org/10.17723/2327-9702-88.2.441>[Links to an external site.](#). Accessed August 13, 2026.
- Dunbar, H., & Axford, K. (2026). [Ethical AI Implementation in Archival Metadata Generation: A Case Study of the WBFO Radio Archive AI Pilot Project](#).[Links to an external site.](#) *Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archives Professionals*, 22(2), 163-177.
- Verkerk, A., & Harman, R. (2026). [Navigating the Limitations of AI in Archival Description: Can and Should AI Write Biographical Notes?](#)[Links to an external site.](#) *Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archives Professionals*, 22(2), 178-185.

Break (November 22-29)

Thanksgiving break.

Finals (November 29-December 7)

Work on your final project.

Final project due December 7.



Welcome to **INFO 5240: Archival Arrangement and Description!** I am delighted to have you in the course and look forward to exploring this essential area of archival practice together.

Throughout the semester, you will examine the theories and principles that guide how archivists arrange and describe archival collections. You will also explore the practical challenges that arise in these processes and develop the critical thinking skills needed to evaluate and address them in professional settings.

Whether you are new to archival studies or building on previous experience, this course is designed to strengthen your understanding of arrangement and description as foundational components of archival work.

If you are new to Canvas, you will find helpful information below to assist you in navigating the course and getting started.

Course Navigation Menu

- **Home:** This area is the Home Page, which is set up to be your first stop for basic information about the course and a guide for navigating the course. Also, please note that there is a menu on the left side of the page. You can find everything you need on that menu, too. Use that menu as your shortcut to all aspects of the course.
- **Syllabus:** This page contains all the essential information you need about this course, a printable copy of the course syllabus, and a dynamic schedule of the course assignments.
- **Modules:** The modules are where the course content is located. Here, you can see the entire course curriculum sequenced at a glance. All of your online lessons and assignments are linked within the modules. You should proceed through the modules numerically, as each will build upon the next.
- **Discussions:** View and post your responses to weekly discussion topics and module exercises. These activities are also located at the end of each module. To receive full participation points for discussions, you will be expected to post an original post (thread) in response to the week's discussion question and respond to at least one classmate's post. To receive full participation points for exercises, you will be expected to address each component of the exercise. Module discussions and exercises are due by Saturday each week.
- **Assignments:** You can view and download Processing Plan, Finding Aid, and Final project assignments here. See the syllabus for due dates for individual assignments.
- **Grades:** View your grades and course progress here.
- **Announcements:** In this announcements section, I will occasionally post job and internship ads, calls for papers/posters, and additional online resources related to the profession.

Finding Support

Brand new to Canvas? This [video](#)  is a great way to help you get familiar with navigating your Canvas Course and finding your way around.

Canvas Help: On the far left of your screen is the global navigation menu (left of the course menu), and at the bottom of that menu is Help. There, you will find the link to [Canvas guides](#)  that contain step-by-step instructions for nearly every function in Canvas. If you need to learn how to do something in Canvas, those guides are the best resource for figuring things out.

The links below help a lot with learning how to do things in Canvas.

Student Orientation to Canvas

[Online Student Orientation](#)

Next Step

Be sure to read the information in your [Syllabus](#) and then go to the [Modules](#) in your course navigation menu to find the course curriculum. Welcome to our class!

Course Syllabus

COURSE INFORMATION

Contact: Professor Samantha Dodd Summerbell

Course: INFO 5240, Section 401, 402

Email: samantha.dodd@unt.edu

Office hours: online via appointment only; please email me to schedule

The best way to reach me is through the **Canvas Inbox (Messenger)**. Please use Canvas to ask course-related questions or to schedule a one-on-one meeting. I am happy to meet with you individually and encourage you to reach out to arrange a convenient time.

Course Pre-requisites:

INFO 5371: Archives and Manuscripts

Certification Program:

INFO 5240: Archival Arrangement and Description is required to earn an [Archival Management Graduate Academic Certificate](#)  from the College of Information.

INFO 5240 is pre-approved by the Academy of Certified Archivists (ACA) as meeting the requirements for Domain 2 (Arrangement and Description) in the ACA Role Delineation Statement.

Course Description:

This course provides an overview of the theoretical and methodical principles of archival arrangement and description. Emphasis will be placed on practical issues related to the arrangement and description of physical and electronic records, in addition to best practices. Coursework will include mock arrangement and description exercises, a review of professional literature, and a discussion of relevant technologies.

Course objectives:

Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Define archival vocabulary and discuss theoretical principles of arrangement and description.
- Appraise and critically evaluate professional literature, various theories, and methods of arrangement and description.
- Compose a processing plan justifying your suggestions for a given collection based on your analysis of the collection's specific needs.
- Prepare a written finding aid for an archival collection.
- Identify emerging trends in archival processing and devise solutions to critical issues facing professional archivists

Methodology:

Assigned readings and other course materials will provide a basis for weekly activity, either a course discussion or an exercise. **You are expected to have read the assigned readings *prior to the week they are assigned*.** You should be prepared to respond to the readings and interact with the instructor and each other through the activity each week. All assigned readings are available from the first day of class, allowing you to work ahead in anticipation of life events.

The processing plan assignment, finding aid assignment, and final project all include a practical example collection in ascending order of difficulty. These assignments are designed to allow you to dramatize and solve common challenges associated with the arrangement and description of an archival collection.

Required Texts:

There are no required textbooks for this course. Instead, you will be assigned a variety of readings and videos throughout the semester, including journal articles, book chapters, reports, and other course materials. Readings will be available through the University Libraries or posted in the course learning management system. You should not have to pay to access any assigned materials, although you may need to log in with your university library account to access some readings.

Grades will be based on the following:

Participation: 30%

For this course, participation will require completing all assigned readings in a timely manner and actively contributing to a weekly module activity, either a discussion or an exercise.

Manuscript Processing Plan: 20%

Assignment Objectives: Identify and evaluate the major components of an archival processing plan. Analyze a preliminary inventory to identify arrangement, description, preservation, and access needs. Develop an arrangement that reflects the collection's provenance, original order, content, and anticipated research use. Estimate processing time and identify factors that may affect the estimate. Identify materials requiring deaccession, transfer, restriction, preservation attention, or further review. Synthesize course readings, discussions, and professional practice to justify archival decisions. Communicate processing decisions clearly and professionally.

Finding Aid Exercise: 20%

Assignment Objective: Identify the major components of a professional archival finding aid. Apply relevant DACS rules to archival description. Conduct external historical research to contextualize archival materials. Write a professional Biographical/Historical Note. Write a substantive Scope and Contents statement. Analyze provenance and arrangement. Make defensible archival arrangement decisions. Apply controlled subject terminology. Identify related collections and research resources. Distinguish information about a creator from evidence actually represented in the archival collection. Describe a multigenerational family collection at the collection and series levels. Produce a finding aid that could function as a professional research tool.

Final Project: 30%

Assignment Objectives: Read and analyze an archival job description. Identify the arrangement and description knowledge and skills employers seek. Translate course concepts into professional competencies. Assess your own qualifications and identify areas for professional development. Write an effective, position-specific cover letter. Use appropriate archival terminology and communicate clearly with a professional audience.

Assignments are due **before** midnight **CST** on the date shown in the syllabus. Assignments turned in late will drop by one letter grade for each day late, no matter the quality of the assignment. Assignments will be considered a day late even if they are submitted several minutes after the deadline. Please be careful to submit your work on time. This will enable your instructor to get grades and feedback to you in a timely manner.

Assignments will be graded in terms of completeness, accuracy, and appropriateness. This is a **graduate-level** course, and students are expected to demonstrate the ability to write properly.

Grading criteria:

The UNT scale for grading is:

A = 90-100

B = 80-89

C = 70-79

D = 60-69

F = 59 and below

Course Calendar:

- August 17-23
 - Module 1: Introduction and overview of class structure
- August 23-30
 - Module 2: Overview of Arrangement and Description
- August 30-September 6
 - Module 3: Historical Context and Introduction to Major Theoretical Principles
- September 6-13
 - Module 4: Practical Basics of Processing
- September 13-20
 - Module 5: Minimal Processing, a.k.a. "More Product, Less Process" or MPLP
- September 20-27
 - Module 6: Born Digital Content & Electronic Records/Non-Manuscript Archival Formats
- September 27-October 4
 - **Processing Plan assignment due October 4**
- October 4-11
 - Module 7: Finding Aids and Discovery
- October 11-18
 - Module 8: Standards for Archival Description Part I
- October 18-25
 - Module 9: Standards for Archival Description Part II
- October 25-November 1
 - Module 10: Access Systems

- November 1-8
 - **Finding Aid Assignment due November 8**
- November 8-15
 - Module 11: Challenges & Special Considerations
- November 15-22
 - Module 12: Next Generation Archival Arrangement and Description
- November 22-29
 - Thanksgiving Break
- November 29-December 7
 - Work on Final Project
 - **Final Project due December 7**

Dates to Remember:

All assignments are due by 11:59 PM Central Standard Time on the due date

Assignment due date table

Assignment	Due Date
Weekly Module Activity	Due each Sunday
Manuscript Processing Plan	Due Sunday, October 4
Finding Aid Exercise	Due Sunday, November 8
Final Project	Due Monday, December 7

Course Summary:

Date	Details	Due
Sun Aug 23, 2026	<u>Module 1 Activity</u>	due by 11:59pm
Sun Aug 30, 2026	<u>Module 2 Activity</u>	due by 11:59pm
Sun Sep 6, 2026	<u>Module 3 Activity</u>	due by 11:59pm
Sun Sep 13, 2026	<u>Module 4 Activity</u>	due by 11:59pm
Sun Sep 20, 2026	<u>Module 5 Activity</u>	due by 11:59pm
Sun Sep 27, 2026	<u>Module 6 Activity</u>	due by 11:59pm

Date	Details	Due
Sun Oct 4, 2026	<u>Processing Plan Assignment</u>	due by 11:59pm
Sun Oct 11, 2026	<u>Module 7 Activity</u>	due by 11:59pm
Sun Oct 18, 2026	<u>Module 8 Activity</u>	due by 11:59pm
Sun Oct 25, 2026	<u>Module 9 Activity</u>	due by 11:59pm
Sun Nov 1, 2026	<u>Module 10 Activity</u>	due by 11:59pm
Sun Nov 8, 2026	<u>Finding Aid Assignment</u>	due by 11:59pm
Sun Nov 15, 2026	<u>Module 11 Activity</u>	due by 11:59pm
Sun Nov 22, 2026	<u>Module 12 Activity</u>	due by 11:59pm
Mon Dec 7, 2026	<u>Final Project</u>	due by 11:59pm