

# Practical Approaches for Training Student Library Employees in Metadata Creation

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**Sarah Lynn Fisher**  
Digital Collections Librarian

**Hannah Tarver**  
Supervisor, Digital Projects Unit

**Mark Phillips**  
Associate University Librarian for Digital Libraries

University of North Texas Libraries

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DIGITAL LIBRARIES  
University Libraries

**UNT**  
EST. 1890



# Overview

Benefits of our approach

Metadata roles in Digital Libraries Division

Who we hire

Training workflow

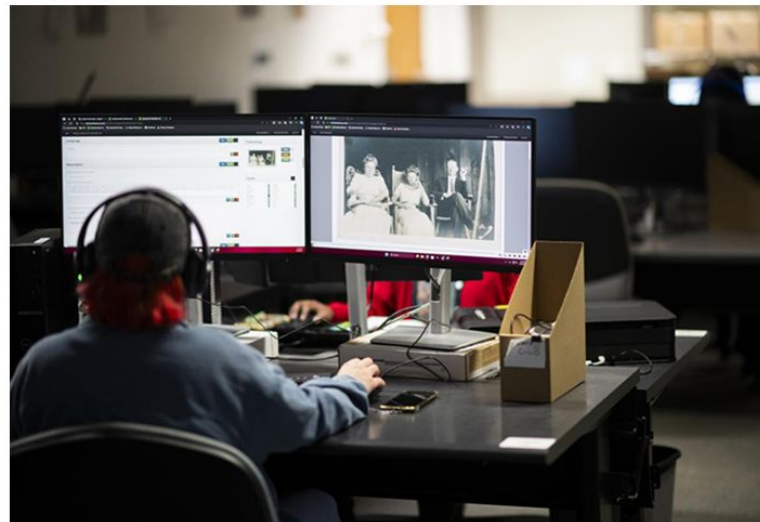
Quality control

Challenges

Case studies



Aug. 15, 2024



## GAME-CHANGING PORTAL

UNT's [Portal to Texas History](#) — a digital collection of Texas historical materials that logs more than one million uses each month — was one of the first online research resources of its kind when it launched in 2004. It was a time when the value of digitizing historical documents hadn't become apparent — at least not to everyone. Cathy Nelson Hartman, then head of the government documents department in the UNT Libraries, was a different story. She wished there was a way to pull Texas history content together into one place online, and then she set about making that happen. [Read more about the Portal's beginnings and how it's changed the way scholars research the state](#), then celebrate its 20th anniversary at 3:30 p.m. Aug. 22 in the Jade Ballroom, Union 333.

# Why We Hire Students for Metadata Work

Sustainable solution to scale our operations beyond the capacity of full-time staff

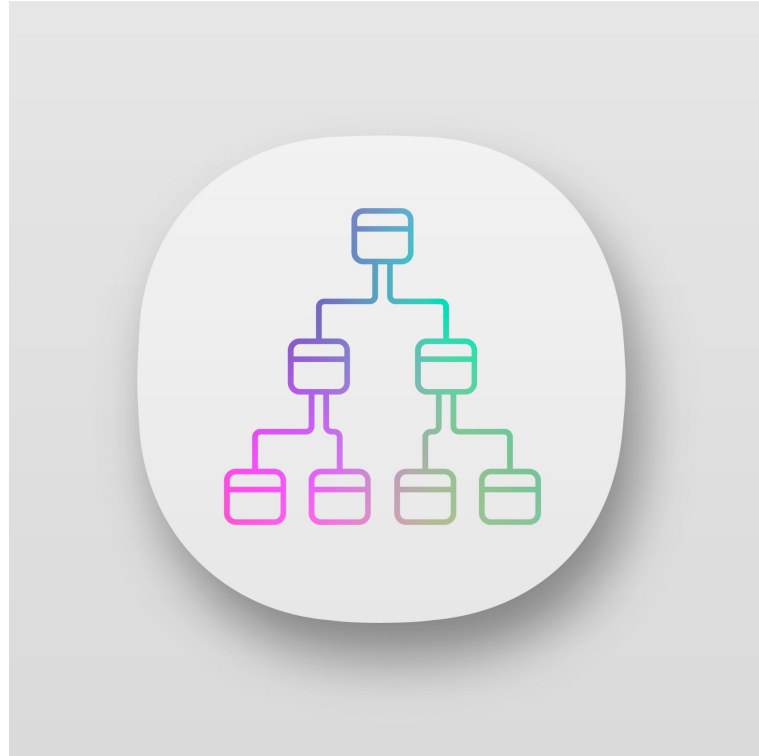
Effective distribution of tasks according to difficulty and expertise

Professional development experiences for students from a variety of disciplines

Facilitated by the development of a clear and repeatable training process

# Metadata Roles

- Metadata administrator
- Metadata supervisor
- Metadata student lead
- Metadata student editor



# Hiring

- Part-time undergraduate and graduate students hired at an hourly rate using Division, grant, or project funds
- Undergraduate students can have a longer tenure = more time for skill building
  - Look for students with at least 1 year remaining in their degree program
- Applicants apply through UNT student jobs platform
- All majors considered - advertise to College of Information, Department of History.
- Typically a ~1 hour interview with interview questions, skill demonstration, and tour of the Digital Projects Lab and reference check

# Students in the Digital Projects Unit

- Number can depend on current projects, but typically 8-10 metadata students
- Successful applicants work over several semesters - building skills and increasing responsibilities over time
- Edit accounts with access to specific collections or partners.
  - Can progress from a single collection to system wide access
- Use metadata guidelines to complete records with **placeholder values** that become visible to users when completed
- Assist with metadata quality control tasks

**Example compact record view with placeholder values**

Metadata Fields & Values		Other Data
Field	Qualifier	Value
<b>Title</b>	officialtitle	{{{add title}}} DMC_WTC-Neiman-Marcus-Italian-Fortnight-03-1975
<b>Creator</b>		
<b>Contributor</b>		
<b>Publisher</b>	N/A	
<b>Date</b>		
<b>Language</b>	N/A	No Language
<b>Description</b>	content	Photograph of
	physical	1 photograph : b&w
<b>Subject</b>	UNTL-BS	People
	UNTL-BS	Social Life and Customs
	AAT	interior views
	KWD	Apparel Mart
		{{{add / adjust subjects, remove any that do not apply to this photo}}}
<b>Primary Source</b>	N/A	True
<b>Coverage</b>	placeName	United States - Texas - Dallas County - Dallas
	date	{{{date}}}
	timePeriod	Into Modern Times, 1939-Present
	placePoint	north=32.8058; east=-96.8343;
<b>Source</b>		
<b>Citation</b>		
<b>Relation</b>		
<b>Collection</b>	N/A	Texas History Collection
<b>Institution</b>	N/A	Dallas Market Center
<b>Rights</b>		
<b>Resource Type</b>	N/A	Photograph
<b>Format</b>	N/A	Image

# Progression of Student Metadata Work

1. Specific task with knowledge of formatting guidelines for one field
2. Looking at the item and copying information where it is missing from the record, e.g. serials
3. Increase levels of content analysis for a single resource type
4. Increasing variety in resource types, concepts, standards and fields required for each record

# Training Workflow

- Goal to incrementally increase the attention and analysis required for assigned metadata work
- Assignments posted on internal wiki
  - Links to metadata guidelines
  - In person, video, and peer-support training
- Supported by written documentation
  - Public facing: [library.unt.edu/metadata](https://library.unt.edu/metadata)
  - Supplemental internal wiki pages
- Built-in tools in UNT metadata editing system
  - “Placeholder” values with hints or instructions in hidden records

Field	Qualifier	Value
<b>Title</b>	officialtitle	[Photo Album {{or Scrapbook}} Page: {{{title}}}] NMPW_2016.045.144
	seriestitle	Harmon L. Graff Collection
<b>Creator</b>	com	<b>Name:</b> Graff, Harmon L., 1926-2005
		<b>Type:</b> per
		<b>Info:</b>
<b>Contributor</b>		
<b>Publisher</b>	N/A	
<b>Date</b>	creation	{{{add date}}}
<b>Language</b>	N/A	
<b>Description</b>	content	Album page of # photos oriented {{{describe how the photos are placed and them describe each photo individually}}}.
	physical	# photo album page : {{{b&w or color}}}; h x w cm.
<b>Subject</b>	UNTL-BS	Military and War
	UNTL-BS	People
	UNTL-BS	Landscape and Nature
	AAT	twentieth century (dates CE)
	LCGFT	Photomontages
	KWD	{{{add keywords}}}
	KWD	scrapbook pages
	named_person	{{{add names}}}
<b>Primary Source</b>	N/A	True
<b>Coverage</b>	date	{{{add date}}}
	placeName	{{{add place(s)}}}
	timePeriod	Into Modern Times, 1939-Present

# Example record with placeholder values

# Quality Control

## FOR NEW STUDENTS: EVERY RECORD REVIEWED

- ✓ Catch potential misunderstandings
- ✓ Guide editors towards consistent entry
- ✓ Encourage use of reference materials

## OVER TIME: SAMPLE RECORDS CHECKED



- UNTL system tools to find errors:
  - *count* - lists the number of entries per record for a field
  - *facet* - lists all unique values in a field
  - *cluster* - groups values with the same normalized key

## UNTL SYSTEM TOOLS TO FIND ERRORS

### UNTL system tools to find errors:



#### **count**

lists the number of entries per record for a field



#### **facet**

lists all unique values in a field



#### **cluster**

groups values with the same normalized key

# Quality Control, Contd.

- Students are asked to check their own work as they complete records
  - Summary page
  - Edit system tools
- Some review is done after a collection or set of records is completed
  - QC checklist (Google form)
  - Name authority
- Students also assist with long-term systemwide corrections or enhance existing records

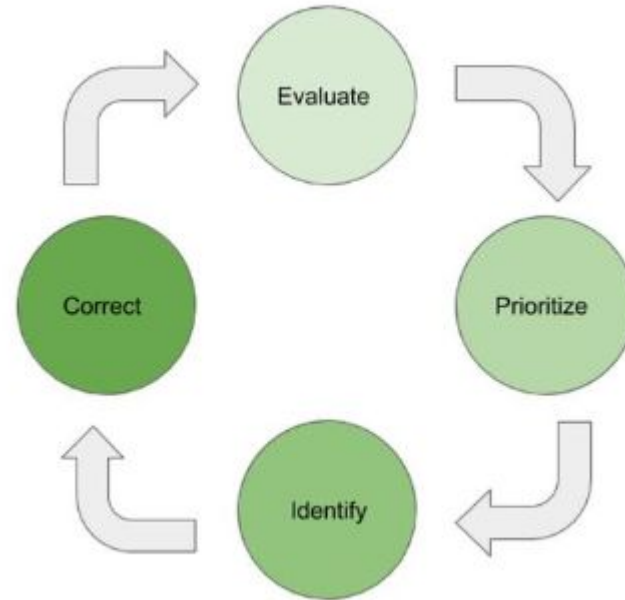
# EPIC Framework

Evaluate

Prioritize

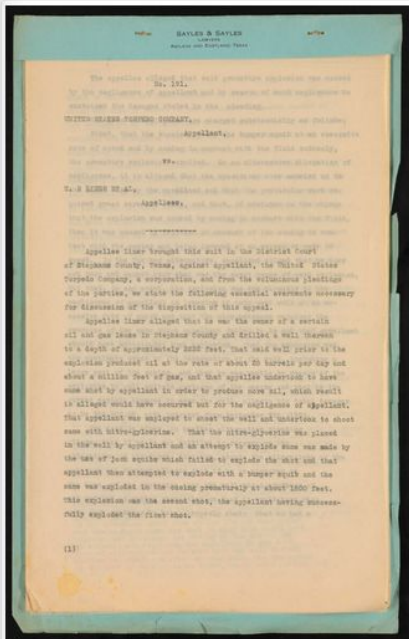
Identify

Correct



# Summary Page in Edit System

- Recently redesigned summary page provides an overview of metrics for each metadata record
- Metrics include:
  - date added
  - last editor
  - if record is live or hidden
  - direct link to live item (when visible)
- Compact record view of all fields and values entered
- Quality control checks embedded in the interface



Edit this Record

REVIEW

- View on The Portal to Texas History
- Review Item
- Metadata History

EDITORS

Number of Editors: 2

Last Editor: [amaker](#)

MODIFIED

Last: 2020-08-12 5 years, 8 months ago

Added: 2019-06-12 6 years, 10 months ago

STATUS

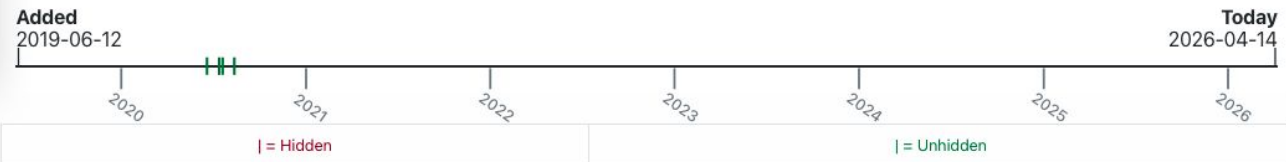
- Visible: Yes
- Unlocked
- Complete
- Invalid Dates

USE STATS

Yesterday: 0

Past 30 days: 0

Total Uses: 0



Metadata Fields & Values

Other Data

Metadata Fields	
Title	1
Creator	0
Contributor	0
Publisher	0
Date	0
Language	1
Description	2, ~ 65 words
Subject	9
Primary Source	1
Coverage	3
Possible problem found.	
Source	0
Citation	0
Relation	0
Collection	2
Institution	1
Rights	0
Resource Type	1
Format	1
Identifier	1
Degree	0
Notes	0

**Example summary page with a deprecated date format flagged**

# Challenges

Lived experience varies along with contextual knowledge of historical events, people and relationships

Retention of students

Limitations of student employment at UNT

Written language skills and attention to detail are important for this work

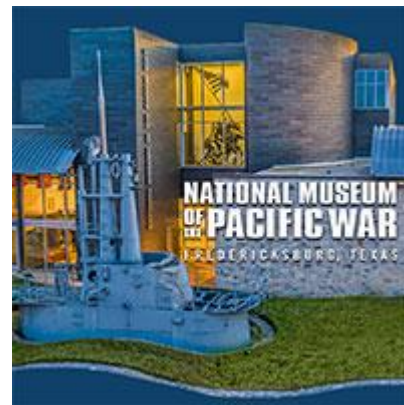
# Case Study: Harris and Eliza Kempner Collection

- 2017 to 2025 - digitization and description of over 66,000 individual items
- Over 50 significant metadata editors
- Periodic goals to motivate the team
- Problems were compiled in documentation for future quality review
- Lessons learned for future projects on this scale



# Case Study: National Museum of the Pacific War Digital Archive

- Ongoing partnership
- Items are described following digitization by box
- Student metadata lead with 2+ years of experience until graduation
- Progression from resource types with standardized approach (letters, photographs) to more complex records



# Case Study: Rescuing Texas History Mini-Grants

- Annual project for multiple partners to have digitization funded
- Many individual projects of different sizes and material type
- Discrete projects move through workflows at different times
- Individual projects assigned as they are uploaded based on student experience
- Students conduct initial quality control for each set of materials they complete

The image displays four screenshots of the Rescuing Texas History website interface, arranged in a 2x2 grid. Each screenshot shows a header with the year, a featured image, a description of the project, and a date added. Below each description are links for 'ABOUT' and 'BROWSE'.

- Rescuing Texas History, 2021:** Features a portrait of a man. Description: "Rescuing Texas History collects photographs, letters, postcards, and other historical materials from across the state and beyond to document and preserve the rich history of the state." Added: May 2022.
- Rescuing Texas History, 2022:** Features a photograph of three flags. Description: "Rescuing Texas History collects photographs, letters, postcards, and other historical materials from across the state and beyond to document and preserve the rich history of the state." Added: November 2022.
- Rescuing Texas History, 2023:** Features a photograph of a street scene with a sign that says "Vintage". Description: "Rescuing Texas History collects photographs, letters, postcards, and other historical materials from across the state and beyond to document and preserve the rich history of the state." Added: May 2023.
- Rescuing Texas History, 2024:** Features a photograph of a person in a field. Description: "Rescuing Texas History collects photographs, letters, postcards, and other historical materials from across the state and beyond to document and preserve the rich history of the state." Added: March 2025.

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*UNTL metadata documentation.* (2022). UNTL Metadata Documentation. Retrieved April 27, 2026, from <https://library.unt.edu/metadata/index.html>

*Using the UNTL editing system.* (2022). UNTL Metadata Documentation. Retrieved April 27, 2026, from <https://library.unt.edu/metadata/technical/navigation.html>