August 25, 2022

Suddenly, Everything's Online! What Do We Do Now
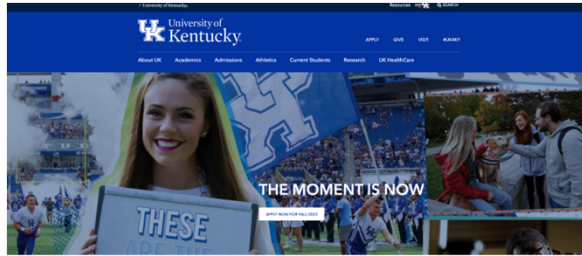
Ruth E Bryan

Suddenly, Everything's Online!
What Do We Do Now?

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SAA Session 302: Acquisitions in a New Age, 8/25/2022

I'm the University Archivist for the University of Kentucky, a public, land-grant university located in Lexington, KY. My melodramatically-titled case study of acquisitions is a new age is "Suddenly, everything's online! What do we do now?"

SUDDENLY! (The Realization)

2019-2021

Situation:
- Key records and papers
- Are distributed online only
- Not transferred to Archives
- Likely to be lost
- Preservation is complex
- And resource-heavy
- Do I need to re-align my effort?

The situation is that starting in 2019 through 2021, the realization washed over me that key university records are being distributed or published online and not routinely transferred to the archives the way they were in the past. Unless I proactively acquire these documents, they are likely to be lost because of the ephemeral nature of the Web.

Yet, crawling or otherwise capturing dynamic and changing web platforms adds technological complexity and thus requires additional resources.

Given that I have scarce time and money and given the risk of loss of these documents, do I need to re-align my acquisitioning effort?

SUDDENLY! (The Realization)

2019-2021

- 2019-present: University history researcher
  - No regulations, 2005 onward
  - No Senate Council, 2006 onward

- 2021: Student Traditions presentation
  - No yearbook, 2014 onward

Several experiences brought this situation to my immediate attention. Starting in 2019, a researcher investigating university administrative history requested records we didn't have, including superseded university regulations from 2005 onward, and University Senate Council meeting minutes from 2006 onward. Then in April 2021, I gave a virtual presentation about university student traditions, and couldn't find many documents from the 2010s onward. For example, the university stopped publishing a yearbook in 2014.

SUDDENLY! (The Realization)

2019-2021

- 2020-2021: COVID-19 web archives and "In This Together" documentation project
  - Social media and videos in blogs not captured

Further, for our COVID-19 web archives collection and for our documentation project "In This Together: Documenting COVID-19 in the Commonwealth," we haven't been able to capture the donated social media accounts.
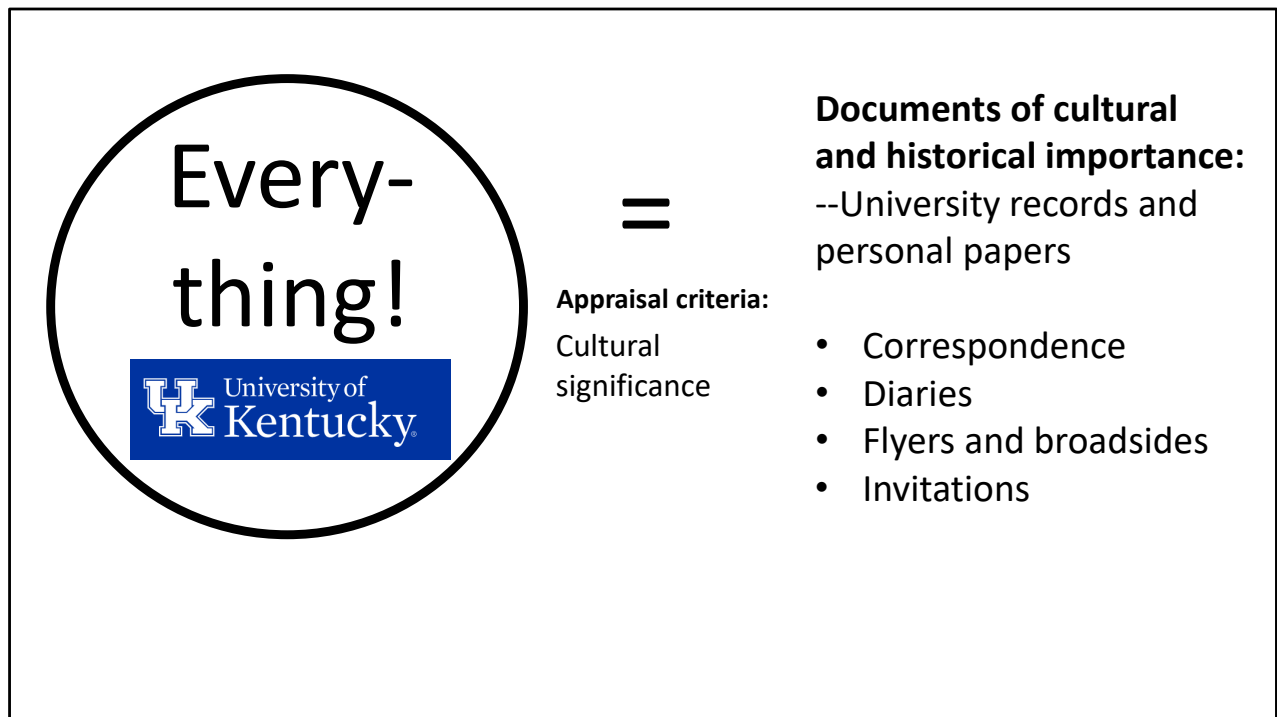
SUDDENLY! (The Realization)

2019-2021

- 2019-present: Student and employee protest and activism
  - Latino Student Union
  - Black Student Union
  - Students for Black Lives Matter
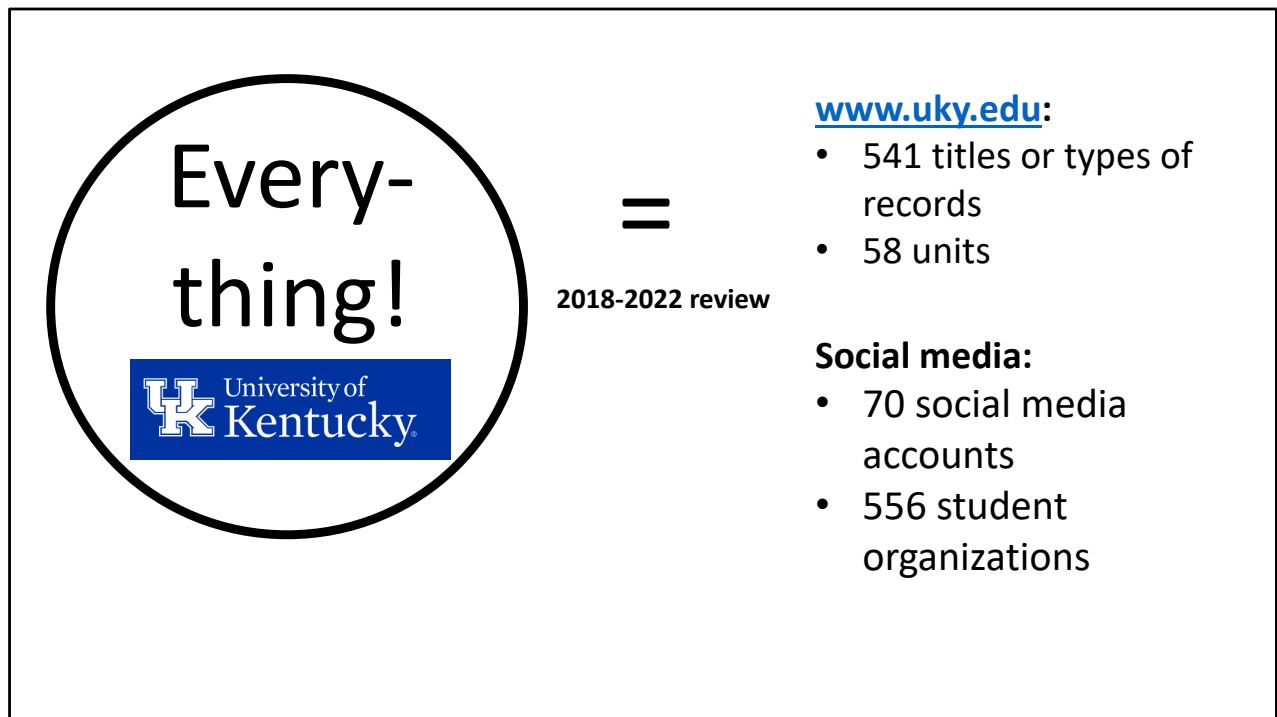 - United Campus Workers of KY

And in 2019, Daniela Gamez Salgado, the then-President of the Latino Student Union, donated some of the LSU records to the archives, mainly social media, which we haven't been able to preserve effectively. We would also like to assist in preserving the contemporary voices of other social justice and activist student and university organizations, such as the University of Kentucky Black Student Union, Students for Black Lives Matter, and the United Campus Workers of KY.

The "Everything" in the presentation title refers to key, permanent University of Kentucky records as outlined in the State University Model Records Retention Schedule, which schedules all public records for all the public universities in KY. These permanent records provide documentation of the university's decisions and actions, finances, and planning. Formats include publications; regulations and policies; minutes of university decision-making bodies; press releases, newscasts, and newsletters; and photographs and audiovisual recordings.

Every-thing! [University of Kentucky]

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Appraisal criteria:
Cultural significance

Documents of cultural and historical importance:
--University records and personal papers

- Correspondence
- Diaries
- Flyers and broadsides
- Invitations

"Everything" also includes other documents of cultural and historical importance that the records schedule considers non-permanent, but that are crucial to documenting the experiences and activities of university units and individuals. They often provide a counterweight to the official or public stance or story of the university.   Social media posts, blogs, podcasts, and video blogs are today's correspondence, diaries, flyers, broadsides, and invitations.

www.uky.edu:
- 541 titles or types of records
- 58 units

2018-2022 review

Social media:
- 70 social media accounts
- 556 student organizations

In a review of the UK website that student Alex Reaugh started in 2021 and that I continued this year, we found 541 titles or record types across 58 university units. There are many more individual files, as most of these titles or types of records are produced serially.

In a review that I conducted in 2018 for our request for an Archive-It subscription, I counted 70 social media accounts for high-level administration, colleges, student government, athletics, and fraternity and sorority councils. This is obviously the tip of the iceberg, as, for example, there are currently 556 student organizations, each with their own social media.

Is Online!

Created by UIcons

- Of those 541 titles or types of records, 393 are in PDF and 7 are on proprietary platforms with no download.
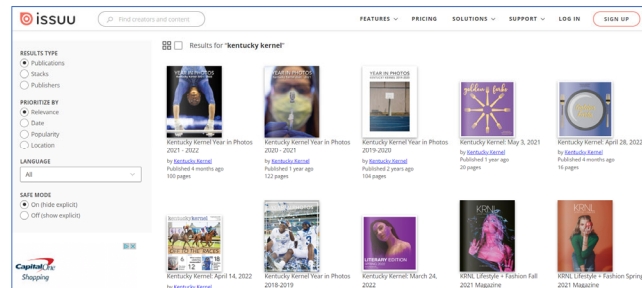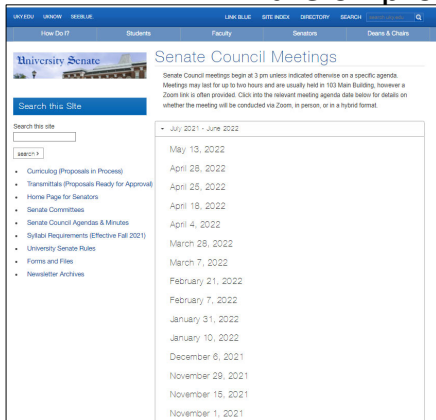
University Senate Council minutes (left); the Kentucky Kernel's publications on issuu (right).

The ways in which these key university records and other documents of historical value are distributed online varies considerably. For example, of those 541 titles or types of records, 393 are PDFs and can be downloaded or easily crawled, like the University Senate Council meeting minutes. On the other hand, not many (about 7) but some important publications are distributed on proprietary platforms with no download option. The Kentucky Kernel "Year in Photos" is now the only yearbook and is an example (although it's also distributed in limited print quantities).

online journal by UIcons from Noun Project

Is Online!

• Some web pages with PDFs haven't been crawled.

UK Information Technology home page and policies page

We crawl the uky.edu website yearly. I thought most content was being captured until I reviewed it for this presentation. For example, the Information Technology webpages haven't been crawled, including all the university's IT policies and standards. I don't yet know why this is.
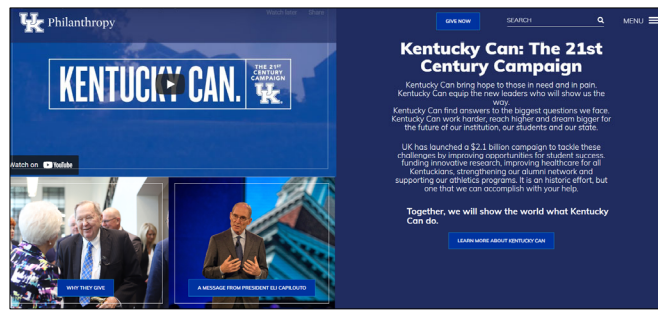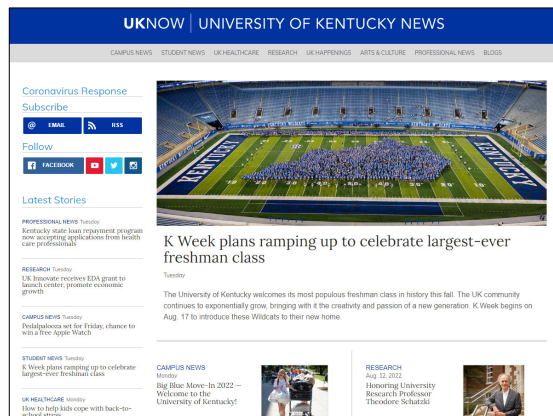
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Is Online!

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- Of those 541 titles or types of records, 122 are websites/blogs

UKnow, the university's press releases (left). The "Kentucky Can" capital campaign on the Philanthropy home page (right). Embedded video isn't captured.

Of those 541 titles or types of records we found in our survey, 122 are websites or blogs. UKnow, the university's press releases, is an example. We crawl UKnow monthly as a stand-alone seed, and this content seems to be captured well. However, embedded YouTube videos are often not captured, such as the one on the "Kentucky Can" capital campaign area of the Office of Philanthropy home page.
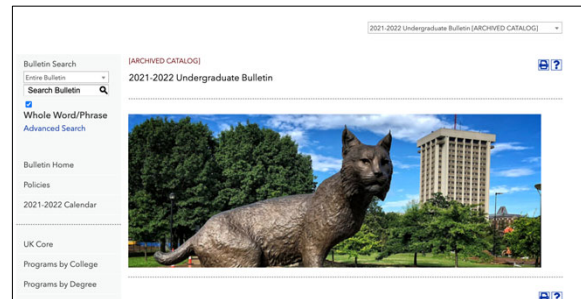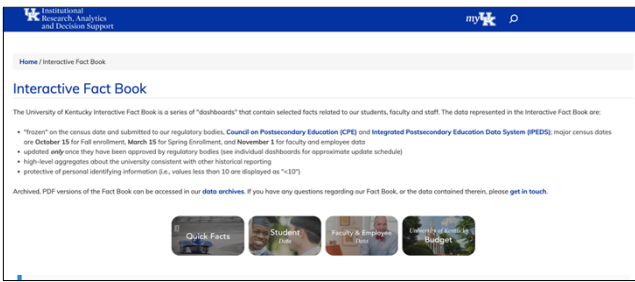
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Is Online!

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- Some key records are now distributed as content management systems or databases

Interactive Fact Book (left) and the web- and database formatted undergraduate catalog (right).

And, of the 541 titles or types of records, a few of those that used to be print publications are now distributed as content management systems or databases. This allows users to interact with the data, but makes capturing the information by web crawling impossible. Two examples of this are the UK Fact Book and the Undergraduate course catalog.
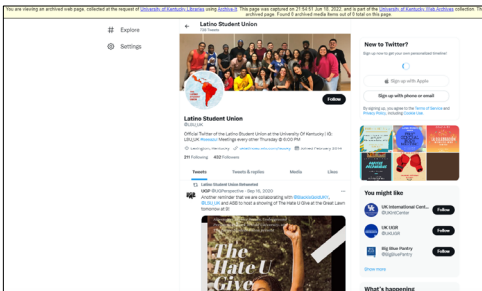
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Is Online!

- Social media dynamic scrolling, threading, commenting, and many other Web 2.0 functions are difficult to capture

Created by UIcons

Latino Student Union Twitter feed capture on Archive-It. As of June 2022, top tweets captured, but only through part of 2019.

The dynamic Web 2.0 functions of social media platforms are difficult to capture and preserve, including infinite scrolling as demonstrated by this Latino Student Union Twitter account. Of course, social media posts and comments can be copied and pasted into static document formats, but this is really time-consuming.

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Is Online!

- Records creators equate "online" with "archived."

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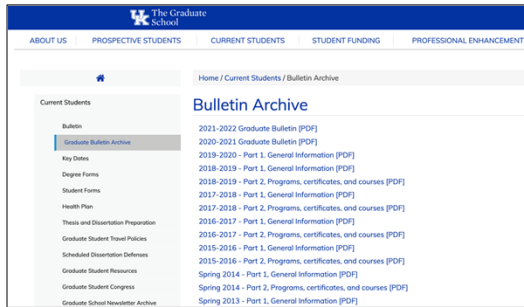
Examples of "archives" online: The Graduate Bulletin/course catalog (left) and the University Senate newsletter (right).
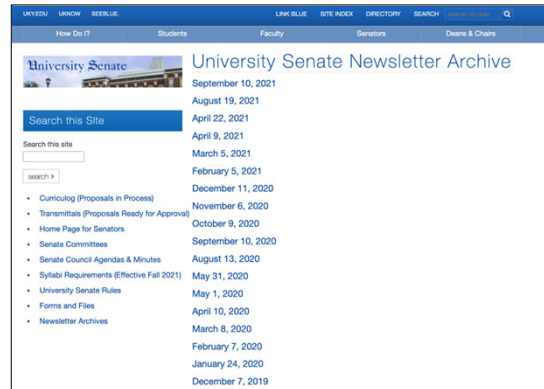
And, currently, records creators believe that putting documents online is the same as archiving them, so there's no need to send a copy to the archives. The archivist must now proactively search for and acquire these records.

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What Now?

- Thought 1: Are web-based documents too expensive to acquire?
  - Only acquire the easy ones?
- Thought 2: Give up acquiring comprehensively
- Thought 3: De-center the records retention schedule as an appraisal tool
  - Records created by powerful units will most likely survive without intervention

So, What do we do now? Here are some of the things I'm considering and would love feedback on:

Thought 1: Are web-based documents too expensive to acquire and maintain, even if their content is important? Or, should I focus acquisition resources on those documents that cost less to acquire, like the PDFs that can be downloaded and static web pages?

Thought 2: Even with print-format records, in the 20th century when the university was smaller, the archives has permanent university records comprehensively as outlined in the records schedule. Previous archivists acquired what they thought was the most important or what was created by their friends or allies. Even with all the problems I found, preserving online university records has the potential to be more comprehensive and less subjective than how we acquired university records in the past.

Thought 3 is related to this. The University of Kentucky is a predominantly white institution with a long history of racism and prejudice against people of color in the community and on campus. The records schedule is a risk management tool that serves the interests of the university and privileges the records of its most powerful units and people. It's probable that the records they create will be more likely to survive without archival intervention. De-centering the records retention schedule as an appraisal tool would allow me to focus

my scarce resources on those documents created by people currently at the margins of the university, whose voices and actions are crucial to preserve, in order to diversify the archival record and to provide a countermeasure to the "official" viewpoint of the university elite. These documents are predominantly social media accounts, which are the most difficult.
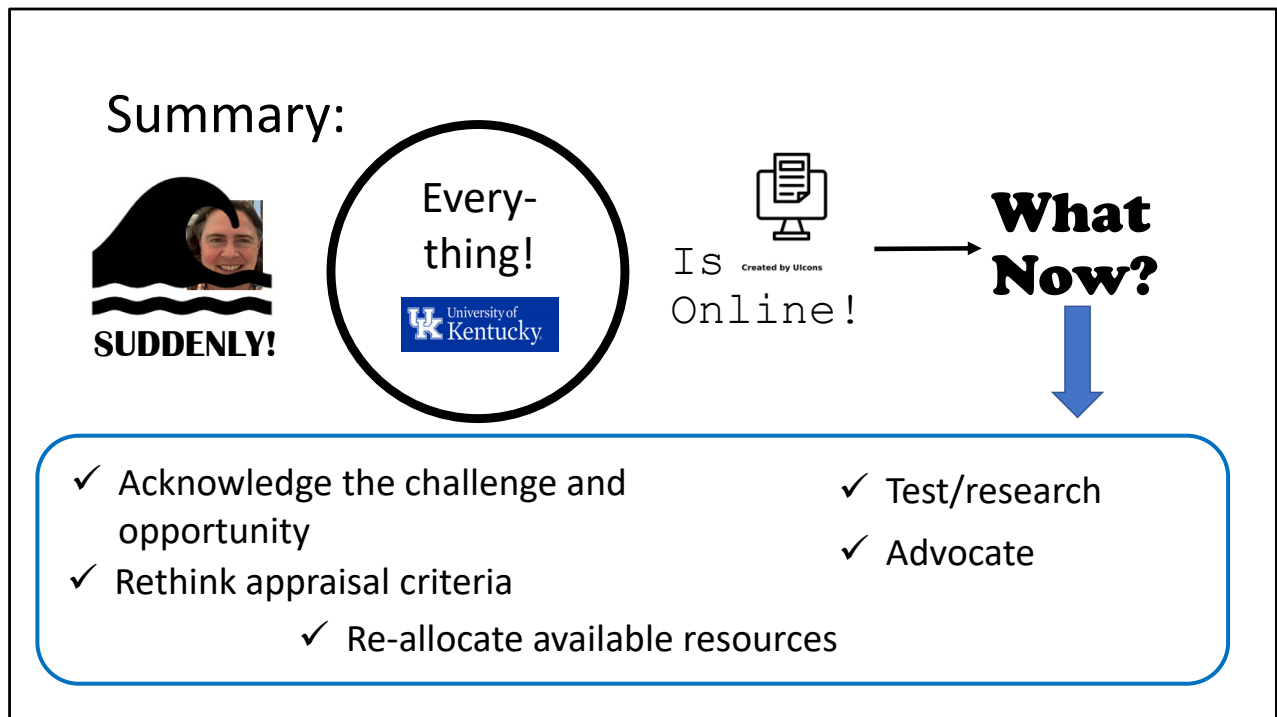
What Now?

- Thought 4: Acknowledge that the acquisition process takes longer
  - Preservation and technology research are required
  - Constant change
  - Item-level acquisitioning and preservation
- Thought 5: Find additional resources
  - Re-assign student work and budget
  - Grant funding (Project STAND "Wildcat Histories")
- Thought 6: Information and advocacy

Thought 4 is for me to acknowledge that acquiring online records and papers just takes longer. They require preservation before or concurrent with traditional acquisitioning. Ongoing research is required because the formats and preservation methods themselves are so complex and change so quickly. Also, the work is item level for each document, seed, or account.

Thought 5: Since acquiring documents distributed online takes longer, I need to find and/or allocate additional resources. I can re-think what I assign students to work on or request that some of the student budget be converted to hire a part-time web archiving specialist. We also just received a mini grant from Project STAND to work with the Latino Student Union on their social media accounts.

Thought 6: This presentation is an opportunity to gather information and approaches to share with my administrators about the importance of and challenges and opportunities in acquiring online documents. I also now have more information to realign my own effort, which I have immediate control over.

Summary:

Every-thing! University of Kentucky Is Online! → What Now?

SUDDENLY!

- ✓ Acknowledge the challenge and opportunity
- ✓ Rethink appraisal criteria
- ✓ Re-allocate available resources
- ✓ Test/research
- ✓ Advocate

So, to recap, starting in 2019, I suddenly realized that university documents are now being distributed online only. Managing these web-based documents is complex and requires additional resources. Given that I have scarce time and money, what do I do now?

First, I acknowledge the technological and resource challenge of online formats, while also acknowledging the opportunity their acquisition provides for a wider, stronger presence of voices and content in the historical record.

Second, I rethink appraisal criteria, moving away from the university records schedule and more carefully quantifying the resources required for acquisition.

Third, based on my appraisal, I re-allocate the resources I already have access to.

Fourth, I continue to test and research to refine the technology and staffing requirements and the appraisal criteria.

Fifth, I use the research, testing, thinking, and practice to advocate for more support.

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href="https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/online-journal/" target="_blank" title="online journal Icons">Noun Project

Your thoughts?
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Boxes everywhere!

I don't know yet how this will turn out, but I've been glad of the opportunity to start working on it by working on this presentation.