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"Introduction" to Burning Decisions: Case Studies on Appraisal for Access

Ruth E. Bryan
University of Kentucky, ruth.bryan@uky.edu

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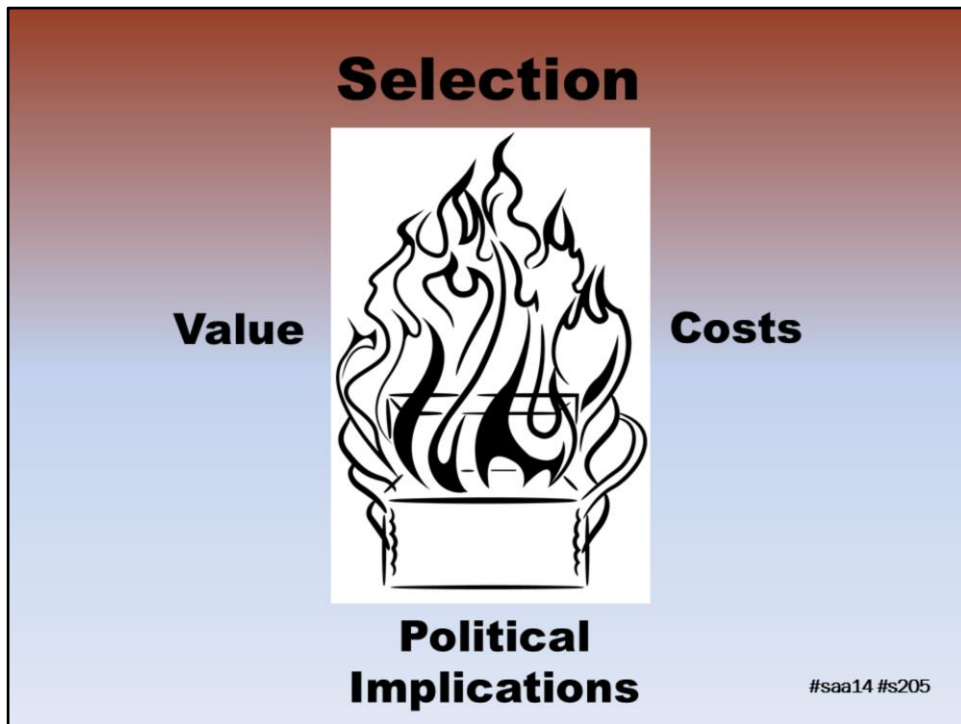


Burning Decisions

2014
Archives ★ Records
ENSURING ACCESS

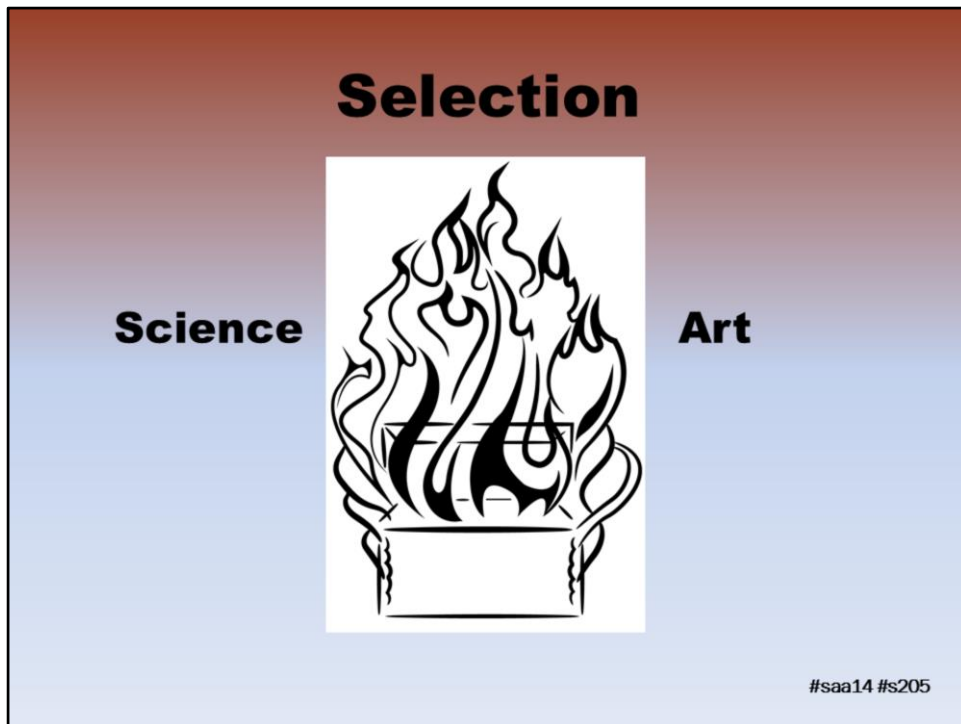
COSA · NAGARA · SAA JOINT ANNUAL MEETING

#saa14 #s205



These are case studies of archival selection in complex situations within individual institutional contexts and weighing the information value, repository costs, and political implications of saying yes or no to collections and types and groups of records within collections.

The panel is situated in American archival praxis that argues for the active role of the archivist in the selection of voluminous and multi-format modern records in order to provide the best documentation possible of human life to our user communities and document essential legal and administrative functions to serve our parent organizations. Thus, appraisal is the necessary first step to access.



We hope to contribute to the ongoing discussion about selection by revealing how we made our appraisal decisions—decisions that to a certain extent were guided by our understanding of our mission and the theory, procedures, and standards of our American archival profession, but decisions that we also made based on our individual skill, interests, and experience. Another archivist finding themselves in the same situation could conceivably have made different decisions.

Each of the presenters will thus articulate the intellectual framework that guided their decision while also sharing the individual decisions they made either within or outside those frameworks to achieve their specific collection development and access goals. We thus also hope to demonstrate the art as well as the science of selection.

Burning Decisions



#saa14 #s205

Because selection (yes or no) is an irrevocable decision: once the paper is shredded and the bytes are scrubbed, you (mostly) can't get that information resource back, we thought the metaphor of "burning decisions" was apt and also fun. Fire makes change. Once something is burned, its former form is irretrievable; it might be lost forever (a family house burned to the ground); it might be cleansed, ready for new growth (as in human-set controlled burns for agricultural purposes); it might be changed into a new form with new uses and meanings (as in the phoenix).

Burning Decisions

- Burns Like Hell (Jay Trask)
- Burns Like a Prairie Fire (Cliff Hight)
- Burns Like a Laser (Trevor Alvord)
- Burns Like Dust (Ruth Bryan)
- Burning comments (Frank Boles)

#saa14 #s205

Since it was Jay Trask who, when we were planning this panel, started the burning idea with his title “Burns like Hell,” he’ll go first, talking about developing a records schedule for 20,000 cubic feet of defunct organizational records. Jay is Head of Archival Services for the University of Northern Colorado now.

We all thought the idea of titling each presentation with “burns like...” would be both poetical and fun—archives isn’t all serious! So, the next presentation will be Cliff Hight, university archivist at Kansas State University, discussing the prairie fire of reappraisal of university archives. Third will be Trevor Alvord, Curator of 21st Century Mormonism and Western Americana at Brigham Young University, focusing on laser-like precision appraisal of subject-based Websites. Following Trevor, I’ll present on the dusty experience of sifting through a house-full of personal papers. I’m the Director of Archives & University Archivist at the University of Kentucky. Then, Frank Boles, Director of Central Michigan University’s Clarke Historical Library, will draw all the burning together with his comments.

Each person will speak for 10 minutes, and then we’ll have audience discussion for 15-20 minutes following.



And, yes, you can see, hear, and taste that we've taken the burning theme even further with candy, introductory fire-related music, and our fiery t-shirts.

We thank Sarah Thullin, who works with Trevor at Bingham Young University, for the drawings and t-shirt design.

If you'd like a playlist or a t-shirt, come see us after the show.