

Mostly about processing

Multiple approaches to the tsunami of material

Little about reference and outreach here and there

But first the context...

What is SLAC?

SLAC



US Department of Energy physics laboratory operated by Stanford University

2-mile linear electron accelerator—longest in the world

Established as a particle physics research center, now a multipurpose laboratory

- Astrophysics,
- Photon science,
- Accelerator
- Particle physics research

History of reinventing

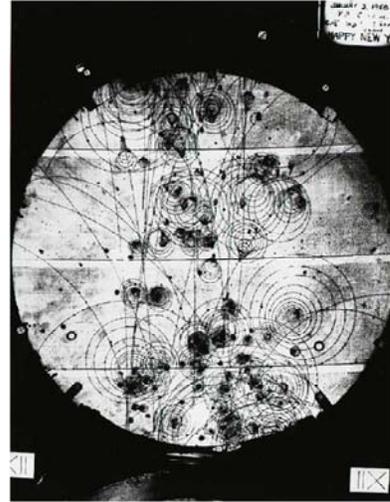
- Building on former success
- Repurposing technology

What is AHO?

SLAC

The SLAC Archives & History Office has the following responsibilities:

- Serves as a repository for documentation of the Laboratory's organizational and scientific history;
- Evaluates, selects, and preserves specific materials of archival significance created by Stanford University entities operating on the SLAC campus;
- Ensures compliance with relevant state and federal laws and with DOE records management policies and procedures;
- Promotes knowledge of the Laboratory's unique history and important scientific and technical accomplishments;
- Assists in the use of its collections by members of the Laboratory and University communities, visiting scholars, and the public.



Currently part of the Office of the CIO

This is our formal charge.

Ensures that the laboratory's history

- Identified,
- Collected,
- Preserved,
- Made accessible
 - SLAC and Stanford communities,
 - Researchers,
 - Public



Perceived dichotomy of science archives and other archives

Theory/Experiment softball game → All scientists

Regardless of our size or subject matter → All archivists

- Collect a mix of paper and electronic records, photos, av ...

Broad collecting areas and small staffs → Process in multiple subject areas

- (I majored in 19th-century history and literature.)

Creating communities

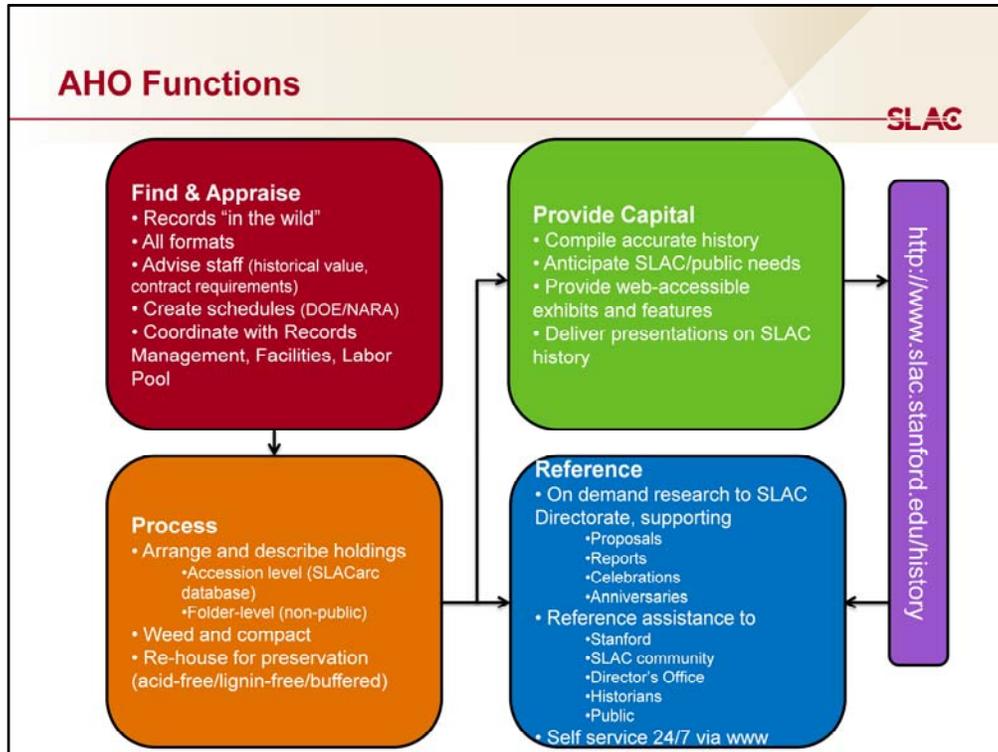
- Different ways of generating and recording their knowledge
- Different attitudes as to what constitutes a record of their activities

Still records → We collect them

We all

- Fulfill many duties
- Find strategies to preserve the integrity
- While making them available to the community

By sharing some of our approaches we help each other



AHO activities grouped into a few functions:

- Find and Appraise,
- Process,
- Provide Capital,
- Reference

Each of these functions supports the others.

Last year → Appraisal

- Rules we live by (DOE R&D Records Schedule)
- Couple of case studies

This year → What we do with the stuff

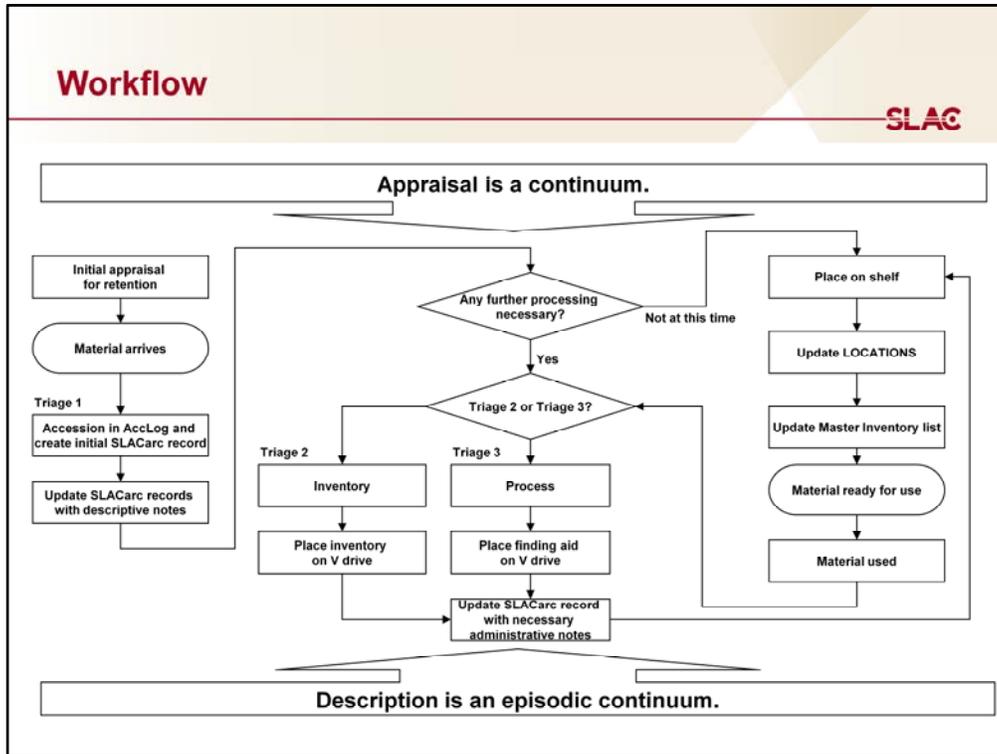
- Our workflow (esp. triage system)
- Couple new case studies

Find and Appraise, Provide Capital, and Reference → Visible to our users

Process → Behind-the-scenes function

- Underpins the others
- Tends to be invisible to management or regarded as trivial
 - "Real work" is accumulating the records and providing reference

Sheer size of effort/lack of recognition → Most difficult function to accomplish



AHO created in 1989

- Some growth
- Progress was halted by loss of staff
- Material continued to amass

1996

- JMD Laboratory Archivist
- LO part-time basis

SLAC just over 50 years old → 30-year processing backlog

Older records (past practices, winnowing of time) → Culled the material

Heritage of modern technology → Nearly unmitigated abundance of science records

1.5 FTE and material coming in, often by the pallet

- Find way to fulfill all archival functions

Well before MPLP became a part of the archival vocabulary

→ Incremental approach aka triage processing

Triage Processing (cont.)

SLAC



As resources allow and use or needs dictate → 2nd, or intermediate, level

- Expanded database description
- Comprehensive folder list
 - Currently just Word documents in template
 - Manipulate them when we need to migrate them

Often reference driven

- Pull an accession for reference → Improve description, create inventory
- Small shop where we wear both hats, processing and reference
- Time spent describing as reviewed for ref ultimately saves time
- Even when little bearing on question at hand

Looming anniversaries another driving force

- Proactively identify accessions pertinent to the anniversary
- Process them to the intermediate level.

Ex. November Revolution in Physics

- Intermediate-level processing
- Also web page: links to archival and published material, photo gallery
 - Threw it up and forgot
 - January → 90% increase in traffic in November
 - Extra web traffic = phone calls/emails that we did not have to respond to
 - Self-service reference for users / processing time for us

3rd level of triage: traditional archival processing

- Formal finding aid—scope and content, series descriptions, etc.
- Select collections ...extraordinary circumstances, usually extra funding

First Web collection

- 3 cf of documents
- SLAC's original web site, first web site outside of Europe
- Sir Tim Berners-Lee → killer app for the web
- Funding in conjunction with 10th anniversary of the web site.

Others as case studies

Case Study in Triage: The Legacy Backlog Project

SLAC

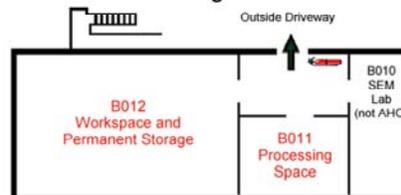


Priorities

- To gain intellectual control
- To reduce amount of material stored

Goals

- All holdings processed to basic level
- Off-site holdings processed to intermediate level
- A long-term goal of all holdings processed to intermediate level
- Selected holdings fully processed
- Selected holdings retired to NARA



Bulk of our backlog → Legacy

- Boxes and pallets stored in warehouses
- By creators and early Archives efforts
- Quick and dirty box list when lost on site warehouse space

Legacy Backlog Project

- Possible in large part thanks to AIP processing grant in 2009
- Supported archives assistant, primary role to process

Based on very brief descriptions → select a portion for recall → how should be accessioned

- What went together
- What might actually be another installment of a previous accession

All accessions processed to at least basic level

Anything returning off site → intermediate level

- Be able to provide reference on the material
- Plus don't pay for back and forth

Some retained on site (anticipated higher use) → also intermediate level

- If important enough to retain on site, important enough to describe more fully

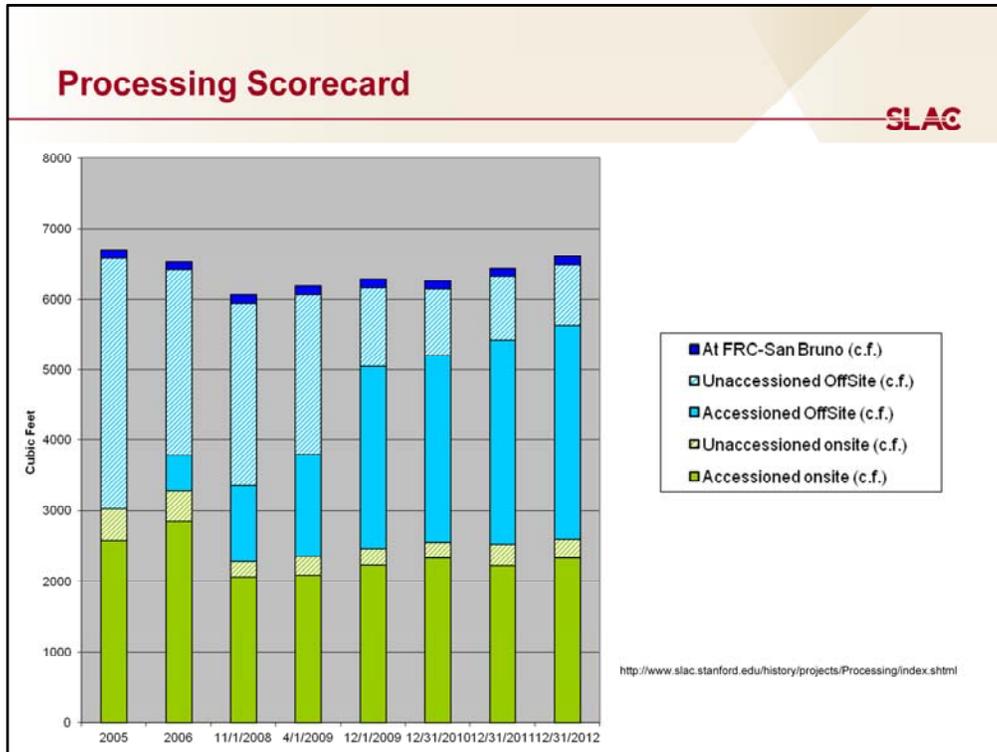
Same time as legacy backlog → new material

- Rather than add directly to backlog
- New material → same process as legacy backlog

Regular customers of SLAC Salvage

Couple of opportunities for mass disposal → lot of hard work

- Identifying
- Appraising
- Investigating disposal requirements
- Tracking
- Packing



Scorecard to visually track progress

Pattern = accession status

- Solid =accessioned
- Striped =unaccessioned

Color = location

- Green = on site
- Blue = off site (off site vendor or NARA)

Start of project

- Little over 2000 cf accessioned
- About 4000 cf unaccessioned

Near end of the project in 2010

- Almost 5000 cf accessioned
- Just over 1000 cf unaccessioned

Better than flipped

Eliminated about 2/3 of legacy backlog
Same time handling new material

Grant ended →Lost dedicated staff

Incremental progress since, but progress has slowed

Not really reflected

- Despite continued inflow of new material
- Total holdings shrank
- Disposal and shrinkage more than offset incoming



arc00488



Virtual sort
"wallpaper"

1st AIP processing grant, 2000 → Papers of Burton Richter

- Research associate, professor, director of SLAC's Technical Division, ultimately SLAC's Director
- Nobel Prize, E.O. Lawrence Award
- Elected National Academy of Sciences, fellow and later prez of APS, prez of IUPAP
- Stanford's Faculty Senate and various University committees

68 accessions over 11 years / 43 years of career

Low priority to systematic organization while active + Apparently random retirements to Archives = Challenge

Grant helped add archives assistant dedicated to project

Benefitted from triage → already intermediate level

Restrictions

- Quality reference service at same time as processing
- Lack of space
- Desire to physically rearrange as infrequently as possible
- Rotating series of assistants with various skill levels (YOP or summer students program)

→ VIRTUAL SORT

- Inventories into spreadsheet database
- Added fields to be filled in as processing: series number and name, dates...
- Wallpaper
- Review list in its entirety, begin to formulate series
 - Panofsky series? No, too different
- Tentative series list applied
- Re-sort the folders virtually
- New wallpaper, analysis continued
- Lather rinse repeat

Confident of several series → physical pull, order determined by virtual sort, analysis cont. virtually → 24 months
Retained original accession and folder numbers on virtual sort → continue ref service to Richter's office

Sorting completed → student assistants rehouse, couple of summers

Grant covered less than 7% but most critical part → catalyst for internal support and funding

Grant ended → remaining steps (final rehousing, quality review, completion of finding aid)

Frequently back-burnered by

- SLAC's 40th and 50th anniversaries
- Legacy Backlog Project
- Everyday activities of the Archives

Final finding aid was completed just last year.

Case Study in Full Processing: Panofsky

SLAC



Last case study → Start of AHO → Wolfgang “Pief” Panofsky

- SLAC’s first director, w/o Pief leadership, SLAC would not exist.
- Researcher, a machine-builder, basic research administrator
- Internationally respected expert: arms control, international security policy, government science policy

Recent attention

- Issue of collecting from living people
- How archives can develop protocols so not invasive
- Hinted at in the Richter Project, NOT new issue

Original Panofsky papers → Start of the Archives → Its first project

Only the papers retired at AHO founding

- Early career, conception and creation of SLAC, administration of the lab under his directorship

Continued to work long after stepping down as director in 1984 → day he died in 2007 (88)

~83 cf after processing over about 5 years

- Continued to retire records to the Archives
- Accretions have trebled

Periodically received special project funding , remains a work in progress

Fully processed papers → A challenge? Panofsky for Panofsky, simply insert the new material, right?

- Project archivist initially felt restricted to existing series
 - Some would fit, kind of fit in 2 places, no place at all
 - Erratic accretions, dribble of chunks, continued well after Pief’s death
 - Career shifted—policy work and consulting and less day-to-day of SLAC
- Recognized existing series not sufficient or appropriate, step back and see the forest
 - Depart from previously established series
 - Not simply insert new accretions into existing structure
 - New series and subseries
 - Sometimes within structure of old series
 - Reflect content of the material
 - Wide-ranging career → unwieldy subseries

Again, like Richter, provide reference

- No physical changes to the first set of papers
- Numerous annotations of the existing finding aid
- Reference on accretions more difficult

Extra funding waxed and waned over / availability of Panofsky papers expert / will persist (inflatable clown)

Learned lessons

- Richter continues to retire material, (held back initially and new)
- Now know should wait for whole universe of Richter before process 2nd part
- Now know new material will probably not fit same mold as 1st part

Any questions?

SLAC



Visualize progress

See the big picture

OK to
change horses

Center_SLAC-think tank-01

Science archives

- Experimental logbooks
- Bubble chamber film
- Field with its own terminology

Our real challenges are like those of other archives

Take away:

- Create a tool
 - Flowchart, bar chart, something
 - Help you visualize progress
 - Hard to feel the progress when you're rowing against the tide
 - See over that next wave
 - You are making progress as you process
- Try different techniques
 - Such as virtual sort wallpaper
 - Help see big picture
- OK to change horses midstream
 - When recognize previous plan is not appropriate



I leave you with this challenging box to process.

[This talk was a sequel to SCA AGM 2012 (Ventura) Session 10 "Balancing Volume and Value: Appraising the Records of Big Science"

http://calarchivists.org/Resources/Documents/AGM_Past/2012_AGM_presentation_session-10_O%27Hara.pdf

Part of that talk is also available in the SAA Science, Technology, and Healthcare Roundtable's newsletter *Archival Elements*, "Balancing Volume and Value: Appraising the Records of Big Science," <http://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/aelements2012.pdf>]