Trust the (Re)Process: Enhancing Accessibility for the Jim Harrison Collection

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Images in this presentation are from the GVSU Archives
Conference Theme: Accessibility

• *ac·ces·si·ble (adjective) /əkˈsesəb(ə)l/
  • (of a place) able to be reached or entered;
  • **Able to be easily obtained or used;**
  • able to be reached, entered, or used by people who have a disability;
  • easily understood or appreciated.

• (of a person, typically one in a position of authority or importance) friendly and easy to talk to; approachable.
Who Was Jim Harrison?

Poet, novelist, essayist, screenwriter from Grayling, MI (1937-2016).
Collection Background

- Purchased by GVSU through the Meijer Foundation in 2005
- 160 linear feet (approx. 366 boxes)
- Contains a variety of handwritten drafts and typescripts of published and unpublished works of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction
- Events ephemera, reviews, interviews with Jim Harrison
- Extensive correspondence from friends, family, fans, and fellow writers
- One of our most heavily used collections
Original Processing

- One archivist and her successor
- Years-long process
- Later additions from Harrison, others
Our Reprocessing Philosophy

- Centered around main goal: increasing user accessibility
- Wish list of things to fix
- Can afford to take our time
- Comprehensive yet targeted
Questions to Consider About Proposed Changes

- Will this change improve user accessibility in some way?
- How much of the collection will be positively impacted?
- How many users will be positively impacted?
- How much time will this take?
Collection Audience

- English classes
- Biographers
- Students
- Filmmakers
- Fans
Access Concerns

- Arrangement
- Description
- Unprocessed additions
- Physical access
- Before: Box numbers restart within each series
  - Correspondence Boxes 1-4, Poetry Boxes 1-12, Fiction Boxes 1-11, etc.

- Confusion for researchers, student workers
  - "I want to view Boxes 3 and 7."

Now: Boxes numbered 1-366ish
Correspondence Everywhere!

If you wanted to find all correspondence between Jim Harrison and Jack Nicholson, you would need to search:
- Jack Nicholson folder
- Correspondence additions
- General Correspondence, 2007-2016 (6 large boxes)

Correspondence additions,
General Correspondence consolidated
Folders not Numbered or Inventoried

- Difficult for researchers to put folders away correctly
- How many folders do we have per box?
  - in the whole collection?

- Folders will be numbered, added to ArchivesSpace
Memorabilia?

- Not labeled

- Not memorabilia
  - Children's artwork, personal books
  - Large items
Unprocessed Materials

- Multiple boxes of materials
  - Correspondence, writings, books, video tapes, etc.

- Generally unavailable for use

- Processed just in time for patron research!
Our Location: Seidman House

Caligula :}
Physical Accessibility

- Old building...with no elevator

- Moved collection to top floor for easier physical access
Digitize the Collection?

- Yes, when patrons can't visit in-person

- But... copyright

- Future goal to tackle
Priority Questions for Accessibility

- **Correspondence:**
  - Users will have fewer places to check for correspondence
  - Correspondence series impacted, patrons using correspondence (popular series)
  - Medium time commitment - (in hindsight, High)

- **Boxes**
  - The boxes will be easier to find on the shelves, and easier to understand in the user interface
  - Entire collection impacted, all users (patrons and staff) impacted
  - Low to medium time commitment

- **Folder numbers:**
  - Easier to use folders, easier to put them back properly for patrons and staff
  - Entire collection impacted, all users (patrons and staff) impacted
  - Medium to high time commitment

- **Memorabilia:**
  - Both patrons and staff now know what is in the memorabilia boxes, and it fits the memorabilia definition
  - Memorabilia series impacted, patrons using memorabilia impacted (and might increase)
  - Low to medium time commitment

- **Physical Access:**
  - Staff no longer need to use stairs to pull boxes for patron use
  - Entire collection impacted, all staff positively impacted
  - Medium to high time commitment

- **Paper clips/sticky notes:**
  - Does not improve user accessibility
  - Entire collection would be impacted, users would not be impacted
  - High time commitment
Helpful Project All Around!

**Processing Archivist (me)**
- Experience working with and reprocessing a large collection
- Experience putting accessibility at the forefront of processing
- Experience working with a literary figure's collection

**GVSU Archives**
- Collection is fully processed
- Easier experience for users = easier experience for reference staff

**Users**
- Easier to understand what is in the collection
  - Easier to understand what to request
  - Full access to all materials
- More physically accessible to students and staff
Conclusion, or, is the collection perfect now?

- No
- Analyze wish list
- Prioritize according to user needs includes student workers/staff
- Can revisit in the future if needed
Thank You!