From Trickle to Flood: An Extensible Approach to Large-Scale Digitization of Manuscript Collections at UNC Chapel Hill Libraries
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Southern Historical Collection in The Wilson Special Collections Library:
16 million items in 4,600 archival collections
Papers, letters, photographs, etc.

Extending the Reach of Southern Sources: Proceeding to Large-Scale Digitization of Manuscript Collections
Mellon grant (2007-2009)
• Year 1: Determine interest in digitization of manuscript materials
• Year 2: Explore sustainable models for prioritization and workflow

Grant Outcomes
• Researchers see immense value in manuscript digitization (surprise surprise)
• Digitize everything, not selected items
  o At least at the container level
  o “show me everything”
• Discovery via the finding aid
• Digitization priorities (matrix):
  o Material condition
  o Research value
  o Convenience
  o Etc.
• Also influencing priorities:
  o Digitization on demand program
  o Special digitization projects (grants)

Goals
• Create sustainable workflows to digitize manuscript materials
• Provide a robust and extensible system that supports discovery of and access to digitized items

Constraints
• Discovery via HTML versions of EAD finding aids
• Minimal metadata for scanned items
• CONTENTdm as digital object repository
• Must support variable rates of ingest based on available resources
• Digitization and ingest must be accomplished by graduate students who can work independently with minimal training
• Should work transparently with little or no management or maintenance

Possibilities
• Very consistent metadata
• Tight workflow and policies from technical services staff
• CONTENTdm is easy to use for ingest
• Unique IDs for collections and containers within collections

Solution
• HTML finding aids and ingest packages built from XSL transforms of base file (figure 1)
• Both contain unique identifiers
• API created to query CONTENTdm collections and return results
• JavaScript added to every HTML finding aid
• AJAX query for content and create links if appropriate (figure 2)

Growth
• Began ingest in December 2009
• Went live January 14, 2010
• Contains ~110,000 objects as of October 2010
• 200 collections currently represented
• ~8,500 scans/month