Adopting Agile Techniques for Accessioning

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Life Pre-Agile:

Where We Were
The Good

• We have long created and published baseline collection descriptions and box lists at the time of accessioning
The Bad

• Rigid systems and policies prevented flexibility and responsiveness
• Two manuscript archivists handled all of the accessioning duties on top of their other responsibilities
• Management of incoming collections was chaotic and ineffective
The Ugly

• Communication breakdowns were negatively impacting our relationships with colleagues and with vendors and there were broken trusts

• Lack of flexibility in descriptive practice led to underserved and unhappy researchers

• People were not feeling empowered to use their professional judgment
“How, then, do we break these chains of unhelpful practice that hold us to inadequate productivity?”

--Greene & Meissner
Agile Principles That We Needed

• Iterative

• Flexible

• Collaborative

• Communication (rather than workflow) focused

• Value Individual Autonomy
Agile Processes

Where We Are Now
Policy and Practice Shifts

• Implemented processing levels

• Introduced iterative processing practices

• A&D done at accessioning counts towards processing stats

• Annual planning that takes time spent accessioning into account when developing benchmarks for other projects
New Approach to Accessioning

- Two main components of the change:
  - Staff Responsibilities
  - Communication
Adopted an Agile Project Team Model

- Product Owner
- Scrum Master
- Team Members
Friday Stand-Ups

• Collection Updates

• Workload Distribution

• Prioritization and Reprioritization

• Decisions about A&D levels
Kanban Board

TO DO | DOING | DONE
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![Kanban Board Image](Image credit: LeanKit.com)
Our Version

• List of Pending Acquisitions

• Current Status

• Status Updates

• Assignments

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Risks, Roadblocks, and Opportunities
Challenges

• Need a self-motivated team

• The process is definitely not all Agile—paperwork side is very process and workflow driven, so be willing to adopt various project management techniques
Opportunities and Improvements

• We can respond quickly to shifting priorities
• Team members now have much more authority to make decisions and manage their own assignments and responsibilities
• Collaborative decision making and team building
• Implementing arrangement and description levels = better, faster, more meaningful access to researchers
Major Takeaways

• This was about the PRINCIPLES behind what we were doing, not the workflows or project management techniques

• Agile is one tool, use it where it is useful, don’t where it’s not
Thank you