Documentation Strategy and WPDHAC

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Defining Documentation Strategy

“…archivists have no choice than to conduct their appraisal according to the emphasis and weight placed on events of the time by contemporaries.”

–Hans Booms, ‘Überlieferungsbildung: Keeping Archives as a Social and Political Activity,’ 1992

“A documentation strategy is a plan formulated to assure the documentation of an ongoing issue, activity, or geographic area [...] ordinarily designed, promoted, and in part implemented by an ongoing mechanism involving records creators, administrators (including archivists), and users.”

–Helen Willa Samuels, ‘Who Controls the Past,’ 1986
Hans Booms

- Arose from rapid changes in societal structure and a proliferation of records
- Traditional archival practices vs. personal intuition
- Build contextual knowledge
- Example: Subject experts (disability rights advocates)
- Suggestion: Committee with members of target community
Example: Disability in classrooms; HHC accessibility efforts

Response to an abundance of records

Functional analysis approach

“...designed, promoted, and in part implemented...”

Suggestion: Archival liaisons; just hit the target

Helen Willa Samuels
Doris J. Malkmus

- Need for narrow topic that everyone agrees on; best if limited geographically
- Need for strong collaboration
- Example: Overlap in HHC and WPDHAC missions and collecting scope
- Suggestion: Pick a (collecting) lane and stay in it
Documentation can influence record creation

Ongoing drain on institutional resources; concerns about sustainability

Example: WPDHAC oral history initiative; twice-yearly events

Suggestions: Assess potential of non-archival funding avenues through community; limit strategy application
Takeaways

- Build knowledge alongside community partners
- Use projects to make disability history visible and to gradually increase access
- Know and clearly define your limits; lend support if you can
- Something is better than nothing

