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Caring for Vietnamese American Stories: Building and Sustaining a Community Digital Collection

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Caring for Vietnamese American Stories

Building and Sustaining a Community Digital Collection

October 22, 2025

UC Irvine Libraries

Today's Presenters



**Madelynn
Dickerson**

Head of Data,
Publishing, and
Digital Scholarship



**Elvia
Arroyo-Ramírez**

Digital Archivist



**Julia
Huynh**

Curator for the
Southeast Asian Archive



**Audra
Eagle Yun**

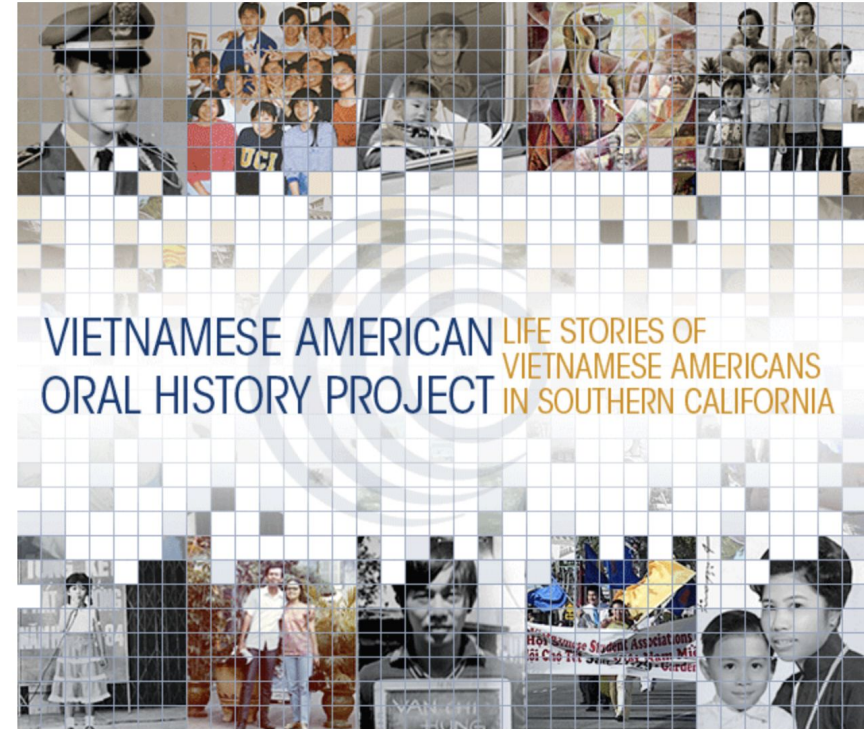
Head of Special
Collections and
Archives; University
Archivist

Agenda

- What is Viet Stories
- Caring for Viet Stories:
 - Curator's Perspective
 - Digital Archivist's Perspective
 - Manager's Perspective
- Questions and Discussion

About Viet Stories

- Started in 2011
- Documents and preserves the experiences of first-generation Vietnamese Americans living in Southern California
- 221 oral histories currently available online via Calisphere
- Types of files (video, photographs, transcripts, translations)
- Approx 2,606,575 total visits (~20,000 visits per month)



Inheriting a Legacy Collection

Julia Huynh

Curator for the Southeast Asian Archive

8512 Lorraine Drive
Huntington Beach, California 92646
February 11, 1985

Professor Raul Fernandez
Director
Comparative Culture Program
University of California, Irvine
Irvine, California 92717

Dear Professor Fernandez:

I am grateful that you had taken time from your busy schedule to talk with me about the UCI Comparative Culture Program and the Vietnamese in Orange County last Wednesday.

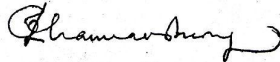
As I had brought to your kind attention, Orange County now has the largest Indochinese population in the nation while Yale University is the only institution that has established an archives program aiming at these people since 1982. Therefore, it is my hope that you and UCI would do something to respond to the increasing needs of the local community, both Indochinese and the larger one, and that of the many scholars who want to do research on these new groups of Asian Americans instead of leaving the task to a university in the East Coast where so far very few refugees have been resettled.

May I also point out that the Vietnamese have become an important labor force for the county's high technological industries and their culture could be an interesting area of studies in comparative culture, given the special circumstances in which these people came to this country and the many factors that shaped it.

I am looking forward to hearing from you, and should you have any further question please feel free to call me at (714)964-0458.

Wishing you every success for the Year of the Buffalo, I remain.

Sincerely,

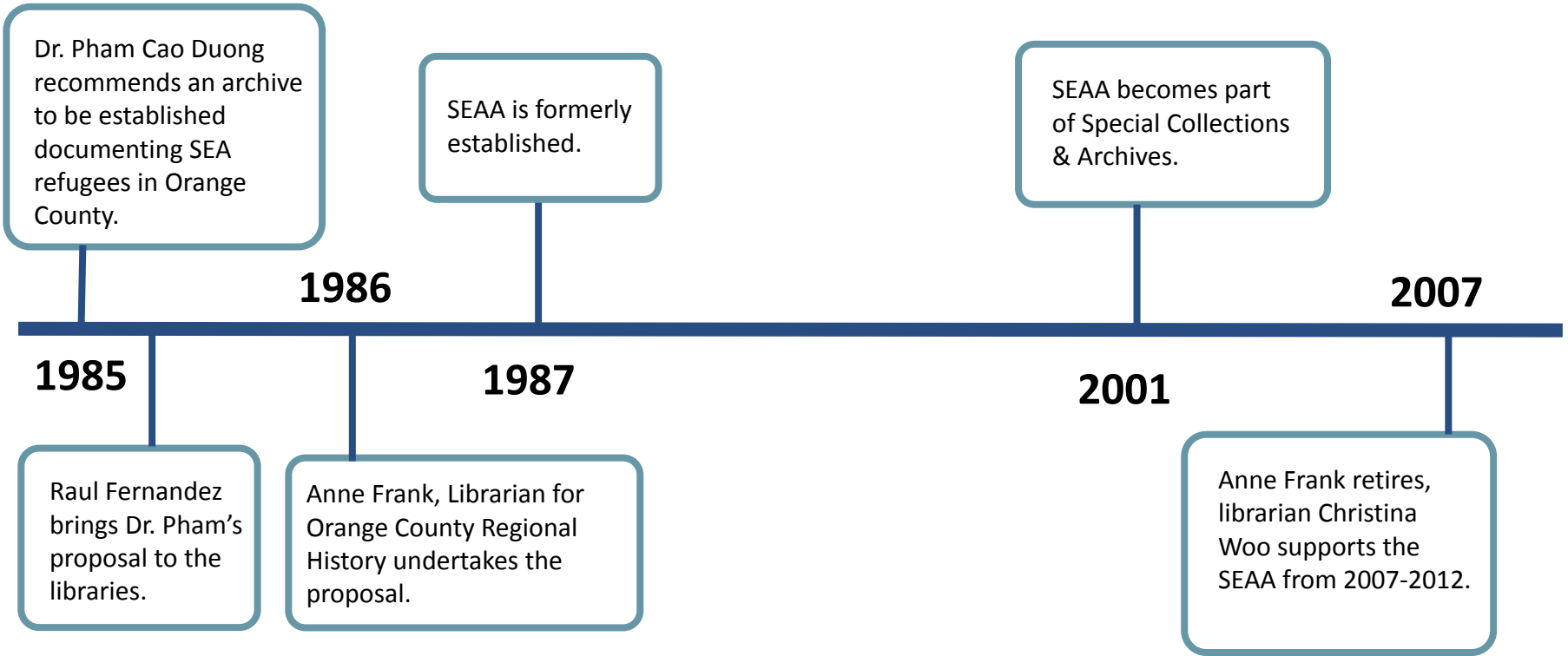


Pham, Cao Duong

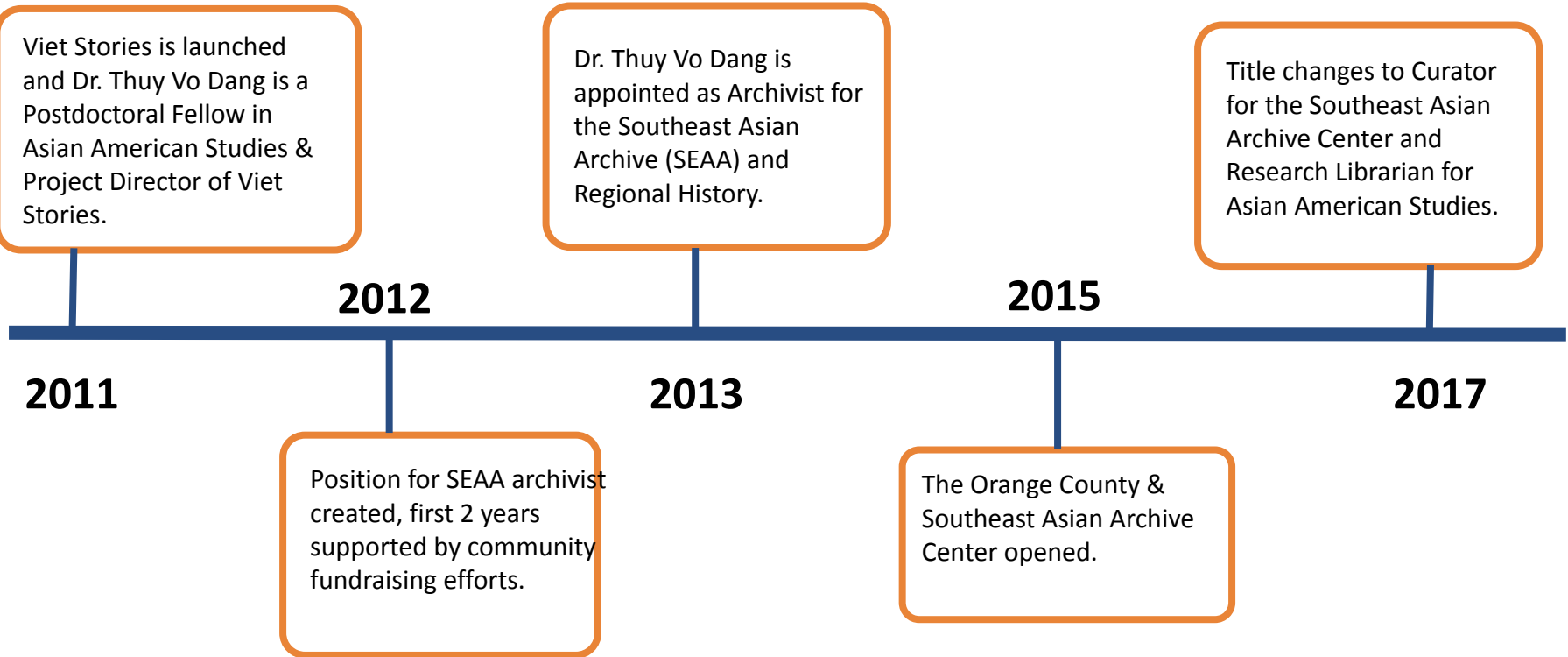
“Therefore, it is my hope that you and UCI would do something to respond to the increasing needs of the local community, both Indochinese and the large one, and that of many scholar who want to do research on new groups of Asian Americans instead of leaving the task to a university in the East Coast where so far very few refugees have been resettled.”

- Pham Cao Duong

History of the Southeast Asian Archive (SEAA)



History of the Curator Position



What's it like to inherit a complex collection?



Description: Gif of Kermit the frog nervously biting his nails and sticker of a cat waving their hands and shaking their head with the text, “no, no, no’ above their head.

What's it like to inherit a complex collection?

How I engage with it:

- Research and reference support for students
- Highlight it in instructions and workshops
- 50th anniversary - Exhibitions and copyright requests
 - Inquiries from other institutions
 - “Remembering Saigon” exhibition

What's it like to inherit a complex collection?

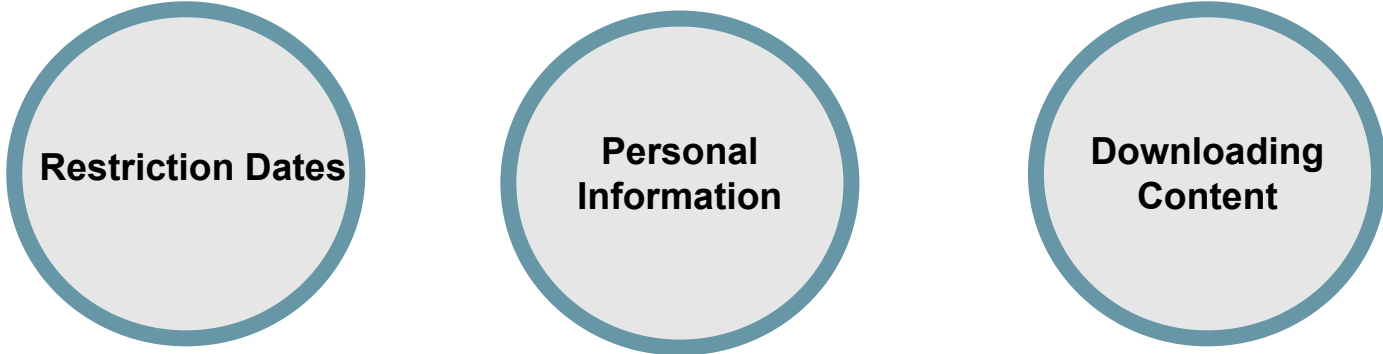
Challenges:

- No original project team members
- Finding puzzle pieces - understanding project workflows, past curatorial decisions
- Managing community members' expectations
- Very technical collection

PROs:

- Internal documentation
- I get to learn!
- Witness the impact of the collection on the community

What challenges and potential political sensitivities need to be considered?



Restriction Dates

**Personal
Information**

**Downloading
Content**

Principles of C.A.R.E.

Collaborative

In a community-centered approach, the institution focuses on shared authority, making decisions together and respecting the value, expertise, and perspective brought to the partnership by the community.

Attentive

An institution should seek to understand how communities have been misrepresented, absent, or maligned in historical documentation.

Responsive

An institution must be flexible, adaptable, and take an iterative and ethical approach to responding to how community memory and evidence is preserved, described, and made accessible.

Engaged

Community-institution partnerships must vary depending on the needs of each community, from the level of involvement by specific contributors to decisions about what archival material to collect.

How do you apply care to the collection when you are now the curator?

Collaborative:

- Have conversations with original project members and SCA colleagues

Attentive:

- Learn the collection
- Understand the significance of the collection to the community and hear their concerns/excitement

Responsive:

- Keeping the community and potential donors informed

Engaged:

- Take time, be involved in internal decision making

Technical and human impacts of sustaining a legacy digital project

Elvia Arroyo-Ramírez
Digital Archivist

Viet Stories on UCISpace

Description: Three screenshots of the Viet Stories collection on UCISpace showcasing custom functionality

Migrating to Calisphere

Restricted access

- This item is not available for online access.
- Access may be granted at the discretion of the Sherman Indian Museum.
- For more information, please contact the Sherman Indian Museum.

Restricted access

- Full access to this item is available on request.
- To request access, click on the Request button.
- Researchers may also request access using the collection guide in the Online Archive of California (OAC).

Subject

Ancestor | Anticommunism | Anticommunist | Boat People | Catholic | Children | Communism | Communist | Education | Family | Freedom of religion | Freedom of speech | Geneva Conference | Refugee camp | Sponsors or sponsorship | Student | Teacher | Tradition or custom | Viet Kieu | Vietnam War | Garden Grove, California | Little Saigon (Orange County, California) | Orange County, California | San Bernardino County, California | Vietnam, Northern | Saigon (Vietnam) | Vinh (Nam Dinh) (Vietnam)

Description: Screenshots of UCR and UCI examples of restricted access on Calisphere; topical subject keywords; custom faceting for Viet Stories listing decades of narrator birth; example of oral history with expired embargo date



Contributing Institutions

UC Irvine, Libraries, Southeast Asian Archive > Viet Stories: Vietnamese American Oral History project > Oral History of Ha Vu, restricted 2025-06-02

Sound set / **Oral History of Ha Vu, restricted 2025-06-02**

Decades of Birth

Select all

1920-1929 (2)	☐
1930-1939 (10)	☐
1940-1949 (30)	☐
1950-1959 (52)	☐



Functional split in Archival Technical Services team

Roles split by collecting area

Archivist for
Special
Collections

Manuscripts
processor

Assistant
University
Archivist

University
Archives
processor

Roles split by function/type

Collections
Management
Archivist

Archives &
Manuscripts
processor

Digital
Archivist

Digital
Archives
processor

Charging ahead with the backlog

Applying CARE principles to the current and future work of the project

Summer 2025 pilot project goals

- Iterative approach to processing (TVD subcollection)
- Holistic project assessment
- Time-informed estimates to processing, publishing, preservation
- Identifying barriers to completion
- Assessment of AI tools for transcription and translation

Department of Special Collections & Archives. (2025). Use of Artificial Intelligence for Special Collections & Archives Work. *UC Irvine: Libraries*. Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/726198sv>

UC Irvine | UCI Libraries
Special Collections & Archives

Use of Artificial Intelligence for Special Collections & Archives Work

Version 1 - EAR/MT 2025-05-05
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This document was created for internal use by and for the UC Irvine Libraries, Department of Special Collections & Archives. It is informed by our values and mission, and compliant with ethics and best practices for archives and librarianship.

Understanding how AI works and its implications

Privacy and security: Use of third-party tools

- Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems, in many cases, are designed without much consideration for security, making them susceptible to cybersecurity attacks, which can lead to your information being used outside of your knowledge ¹
- According to UCI's Information Security Division, "Not only does a third-party (those running the chatbot) have a copy of the information that is submitted, but also the AI large language model may be further trained on that information. Data submitted may be used in future responses to others using the AI chatbot" ²
- As personal information about individuals is gathered in AI systems, the lack of transparency and control over how that information is used makes the possibility of identity theft and fraud increasingly possible

Good archival debt: Resourcing commitment to community

Audra Eagle Yun
Head of Special Collections & Archives



Linda Vo, Tram Le, Thuy Vo Dang.
Credit: Orange County Register



SAVE THE DATE: COMMUNITY RECEPTION FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

The VIETNAMESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT (VAOHP) at the University of California, Irvine is pleased to formally launch its website and celebrate the efforts of volunteers, narrators, students, and community supporters at a Community Reception. The evening's program will include distinguished guest speakers, a spotlight presentation of the website, multi-media stations for guests to peruse the website, entertainment, and refreshments. This will be a great opportunity for community members, educators, researchers, and the media to learn about the project.

Wednesday, October 24, 2012 | 5:30-8:30 pm
Van Lang Community Hall
14861 Moran Street, Westminster, CA 92683

Co-organized by: UCI Department of Asian American Studies, UCI School of Humanities, UCI Libraries' Southeast Asian Archive, and Vietnamese American Community Ambassadors—a UCI alumnae chapter.
 Co-sponsored by: Asian American Studies Center (UCLA), Association for Asian American Studies, Boat People SOS, Center for Oral and Public History (CSUF), Center for Southeast Asian Studies (UCLA), Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, Delhi Community Center, Diasporic Vietnamese Artists Network, Go For Broke Foundation, Hanashi Oral History Program, Institute of Vietnamese Studies, Orange County Asian Pacific Islander Community Alliance, Project MuiVATe, Vietnamese American Arts & Letters Association, St. Anselm's Cross-cultural Community Center, Vietnamese American Cancer Foundation, Vietnamese American Chamber of Commerce, Vietnamese American Coalition (UCI), and Vietnamese American Heritage Foundation.



sites.uci.edu/vaohp
www.facebook.com/vaohp
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Daniel Do-Khanh with Special Collections & Archives
 librarian Stephen MacLeod, 2012. Photo: Michelle S. Kim

History of community support

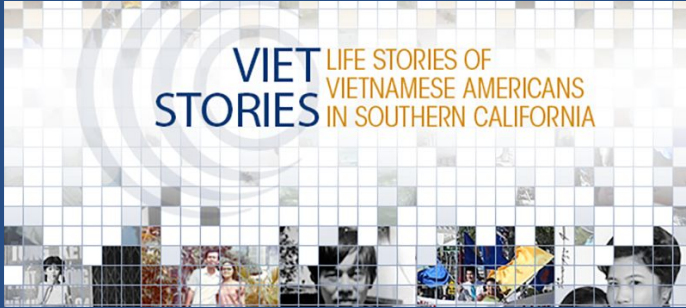
2011	An anonymous donor (later revealed to be real estate developer Frank Jao) gives \$350,000 to UCI School of Humanities to establish the Vietnamese American Oral History Project	Postdoctoral fellow Dr. Thuy Vo Dang is hired as the inaugural project director of VAOHP.
2012	The Vietnamese American Oral History Project website is launched. Many organizations, corporations, and individuals sponsor a massive community event in Little Saigon.	Co-sponsors include Vietnamese American Community Ambassadors, Vietnamese American Heritage Foundation, and UC Irvine.
2013	The Vietnamese American Community Ambassadors raise \$25,000 to help hire a temporary archivist for the Southeast Asian Archive. Funds are matched by the Chancellor. University Librarian Lorelei Tanji was inspired to create a permanent position.	Dr. Thuy Vo Dang leaves VAOHP and is appointed the first archivist for the Southeast Asian Archive
2015	Fundraising includes 60 donations under \$500; 18 donations under \$5000; 2 donations under \$20,000; 2 gifts of \$65,000; and 1 gift of \$75,000. The majority are from individuals and families.	Tram Le is hired as the coordinator for VAOHP until she leaves UC Irvine. The project slowly comes to a close in 2017. The Libraries receives 250 remaining oral histories.

UC Irvine Libraries' commitment

Librarians and staff who dedicated time and effort for VAOHP/Viet Stories

- Lorelei Tanji
- Michelle Light
- Matthew McKinley
- Mark Vega
- Christina Woo
- Andrew Jones
- Stephen MacLeod
- Kathryn Kjaer
- Julie Sully
- Alix Norton
- Sylvia Irving
- Audra Eagle Yun
- Shu Liu
- Ashley Burke
- Sean Hennessee
- Vicki Grahame
- Dana Peterman
- Mitchell Brown
- Dan Tsang
- Kevin Ruminson
- Lillian Gates
- Lynda Rogers
- Patricia Glowinski
- Thuy Vo Dang
- John Renaud
- Azadeh Vosoughian
- Wendi Morner
- Christine Kim
- Kimberly Gallon
- Ree Clark
- Kelly Spring
- Elvia Arroyo-Ramirez
- Jolene Beiser
- Madelynn Dickerson
- Ji-Hak (Paul) Park
- Archana Chaudhri
- Laura Uglean Jackson
- Zoe MacLeod
- Gabrielle Wood
- Sarah Glover
- Julia Huynh
- Charla DelaCuadra
- Tricia Lampron

Can some types of archival debt be *good*?



“the burden on archival workers and repositories resulting from previous decisions and practices”

Be a good ancestor – even when you are a descendant.

Cuellar, Jillian, Audra Eagle Yun, Jennifer Meehan, and Jessica Tai. “Defining Archival Debt: Building New Futures for Archives.” *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* 10, no. 1 (2023): Article 8. <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol10/iss1/8>

Looking ahead

Resources for the total cost of stewardship

- One-time costs
- Long-term stewardship costs
- “[Always be migrating.](#)” - Elizabeth McAulay*
- Working with Advancement/Development toward your goals

NO MATTER HOW GREAT THE TALENT OR EFFORTS,
SOME THINGS JUST TAKE TIME. YOU CAN'T
PRODUCE A BABY IN ONE MONTH BY GETTING
NINE WOMEN PREGNANT.

Warren Buffett

*

MacAulay, Elizabeth. “Always be migrating.” Code4Lib Issue 50, <https://journal.code4lib.org/articles/15568>.

Total Cost of Stewardship



Cost of Acquisition

Cost of Collection Management

- Cataloging
- Processing and Description
- Preservation and Conservation
- Digitization and Reformatting
- Storage and Maintenance

“Total cost of stewardship” by [OCLC Research](#), from **Total Cost of Stewardship: Responsible Collection Building in Archives and Special Collections** (<https://doi.org/10.25333/zbh0-a044>), CC BY 4.0

Questions and Discussion

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