

[slide 1:] In this presentation, we will discuss our shared effort to instigate a collective re-conceptualization of curation work at our institution.

We will present takeaways from the consulting report written by Ashley Blewer formerly of Artefactual Sytems, whom the Georgia Tech Library engaged to assess the current state of our digital stewardship initiatives and to collaborate with us on producing a roadmap for revitalized organizational design and technological infrastructure.

We will also reflect upon the successes and struggles encountered in implementing the recommendations and offer starting points for practitioners looking to reimagine and sustain their curation work across existing silos.

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[slide 2:] Brought together by our shared frustration over the siloed nature of our work and inspired by activities learned at a Design Thinking for Library Leadership Workshop, we sought to cultivate an internal community of practice around ethical digital curation practices. We intentionally sought partners across organizational boundaries, including those not traditionally considered part of the library & archives digital curation landscape (such as public services).

We also sought to jump start revitalization of our curation services under new library leadership. With the goal of building bridges across previously siloed content types, workflows, systems, and departments, we chose to look holistically at all unique content stewarded by the Library, from archives and special collections (Wendy's domain) to the research and scholarship housed in the institutional repository (Susan's world).

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[slide 3:] To this end, we enlisted Artefactual to conduct a review of our digital curation services & provide recommendations for our future direction.

The objective of this project was to call upon our developing community of practice to establish a shared, holistic curation strategy and roadmap. Ashley interviewed the Georgia Tech Library digital curation group members and library leadership to uncover individual & group aspirations; discover what did & did not work with our technology; and identify what did & did not work with our organizational structure.

Several common themes emerged from these structured interviews, all illustrating a shared commitment to overcoming barriers to user-centered innovation, whether organizational or technological.

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[slide 4:] We named the conceptual model that emerged from our work with Ashley the Archives Curation Framework – it weaves together collections, workflows, services,

products, and the caretakers who maintain it all, regardless of organizational or discipline boundaries.

As a collective, we are moving towards this holistic vision which enables us to look at our work from three points of view: collections (looked after by curators), workflows (managed by service owners), and systems (stewarded by product owners).

The framework also includes the role of Technologist, an appointed individual who partners with the product owner, and is responsible for system maintenance and implementation.

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[slide 5:] The deliverable of our work with Artefactual was the aforementioned consultant report, available in the Georgia Tech repository at the [persistent identifier](#) seen here. Ashley provided specific suggestions for our path forward – I will cover the recommendations related to technical infrastructure and Wendy will discuss issues related to organization design, all through the lens of the Archives Curation Framework.

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[slide 6:] A significant outcome from this work was an organizational understanding of our curation repository infrastructure as an ecosystem of components, rather than as a single monolithic system or product.

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[slide 7:] This shared understanding allowed us to focus on revitalizing and connecting the core products of the ecosystem, many already in use, but poorly aligned across departmental boundaries. Under the guidance of the Head of Archives and the Library's chief IT administrative officer, identified Product Owners and Technologists partnered to create product roadmaps that support this vision.

Challenges with this approach include the need to balance our desire to become cutting-edge leaders in technology development with our organizational capacity to do so.

Another challenge stemming from this work is the demanding nature of making multiple product changes at once – both in terms of complex project management but also in terms of stress placed on individuals.

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[slide 8:] Ashley highlighted the need for us to focus on the rich backlog of accessioned archival materials that remain for the most part inaccessible to the community. To address this issue, we worked with vendors to implement Archivematica and contracted for DSpace customizations to allow cascading permissions for private content.

We also face the challenge of articulating how this investment in technology can deepen our commitment to an ethics of care.

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[slide 9:] As we expand our concept of the repository to an ecosystem of products, metadata is essential to connecting content across these systems. We developed a set of core descriptive metadata fields, making use of work already accomplished by our peers down the road at Emory University. A challenge of working with metadata across our collecting areas is differences in description levels; in addition, metadata work is often invisible and difficult to conceptualize.

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[slide 10:] A critical factor supporting our work is an organizational commitment under new library leadership to provide resources for digital stewardship.

We are still figuring out how future technology architecture decisions will be made. For example, if the research data curator were to suggest adding Dataverse to our repository ecosystem, we do not yet have in place a mechanism for determining how to prioritize or accommodate such a request.

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[slide 11:] As Susan mentioned, we call the conceptual model that emerged from our work with Ashley the Archives Curation Framework, which brings together services, collections, products, and the caretakers who maintain it all, from across our library organization. I will walk through some of the consulting report's key recommendations related to organizational design and reflect on progress and challenges to-date.

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[slide 12:] The report recommended that we define the components of our organizational design framework, such as "services," "products," "curatorial areas," etc., as well as the roles responsible for these components – "service" and "product owners," "curators," etc.

In response to these recommendations, we wrote and shared initial definitions for framework components and roles. Operationalizing all these definitions has been challenging because each of us wears several hats, juggling multiple roles at once.

The Product Owner and Technologist roles have been embraced. We've had less capacity to dig into the Service Owner and Curator roles. All the work we've done to revamp the technology infrastructure, as Susan discussed, has meant we've had less time to focus on some organizational aspects.

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[slide 13:] The report recommended that clear pathways of communication be established up and down the organizational hierarchy so that curation service owners could communicate with leadership about priorities, vision, and strategy.

Conversations throughout the consulting project opened up opportunities for communication between service owners and library leadership. Still, understanding how a matrix-based service owner model can exist within a traditional hierarchical department model is difficult.

As we define the framework roles and make changes to our technological infrastructure, the connections we're forging among our historical silos are becoming more visible to stakeholders throughout the Library. The cross-functional interconnections are becoming more concrete. While we can see the connections more clearly, we haven't yet fully taken advantage of them. We can see what the services, products, and collections are, but it's still challenging to figure out how Service Owners and teams can collaborate across the curation lifecycle of acquisition, preservation, and access to achieve shared goals.

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[slide 14:] The report recommended that we invest in cross-training and knowledge sharing among librarians, archivists, and IT.

Through framework-wide meetings and engagement in professional development training, we've deepened shared understanding between library services and IT. At times, though, it's proven challenging to bridge professional domains within the library and figure out where alignment is critical to progress and where it's okay to diverge. The library contains many "micro-professions," such as software development, project management, data curation, physical and digital archives, etc. Sometimes these internal "micro-professions" (plus external vendors and library communities) all bring conflicting definitions of the same terms to the table -- "Product Owner" or "Roadmap," for example. We're still working on allowing ourselves the flexibility to create our own definitions for industry-standard vocabulary, or to use multiple definitions when that suits us.

Cross-functional conversations about curation have nurtured increased interest in knowledge-sharing related to diversity, equity, and inclusion and ethical stewardship. The open conversations and community-of-practice cultivation in themselves have felt like a key part of committing to ethical stewardship. At times, though, it's been challenging to balance open community-building with establishing a clear plan of action, to give maintenance and caretaking their due while also following momentum towards innovation. This difficult balance between maintenance and innovation, between a long-term cultural community of practice and a fast-paced project plan, plays out across the framework in other lingering questions, such as: how can we prioritize both clearing the archival backlog and making cutting-edge scientific research available right away?

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[slide 15:] The pandemic and sociopolitical events of 2020-2021 both accelerated progress and intensified challenges related to the report's organizational design recommendations.

The pandemic temporarily paused some operational work, freeing up bandwidth for strategic change. Cultural reckonings at large activated us to think differently. But the trauma, zoom fatigue, and isolation of this era have, at times and rightly so, dampened momentum. This busy, politicized semester presents another stressful moment in which to explore organizational design.

It's difficult to balance the competing pressures. We're trying to resume paused operational work while continuing the technological and organizational transformation that will have long-term impact for the sustainability of our work.

[Image caption: Image from Baptist Health:

<https://www.baptistjax.com/juice/stories/covid-19/fighting-covid-19-fatigue>]

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[slide 16:] Looking ahead, we have several next steps towards continuing to implement the report's recommendations related to technology infrastructure and organizational design. These steps should empower us to move through some of the challenges we've encountered so far.

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[slide 17:] Overall, our next steps will be focused on activating the framework, moving from a conceptual model towards taking concrete silo-bridging action together. We hope to demonstrate how this collaborative curation framework can support employees across the organization and provide end-users what they need. In other words, we hope to explore how the framework can move the library towards sustainable digital stewardship, nurturing caretakers and our organizational mission.

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[slide 18:] We invite you all to please try this at home. Here are a few starting points for practitioners looking to reimagine and sustain their curation work across silos of systems, workflows, content, and people. The steps mirror what we've outlined in our presentation, from building a community of practice to articulating a plan, from staying flexible to simply enduring and taking comfort that we are in this together. And we really are --

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[slide 19:] Please reach out to us if any of this resonates with what you're going through, if we can help you or you can help us, or just to chat. We'd like to express our gratitude to this community, and to Ashley Blewer for her guidance on this journey.

[image caption: "Waikerie on the River Murray in SA. These old grain silos located where the railway yards once stood were painted by Garry Duncan on the left and Jimmy Dvate on the right. Both depict views of the natural landscape and wildlife." by denisbin is licensed under CC]