



Archives Association of British Columbia

2008 Revisions to RAD

Announcement by the Canadian Committee on Archival Description, July 24, 2008

Dear colleagues,

In 2001, the Canada-U.S. Task Force on Archival Description (CUSTARD) was initiated to explore the potential for harmonizing archival descriptive standards within North America. At the time, the initiative revealed what were felt to be significant divergences in approach between Canadian and U.S. practice. At the conclusion of CUSTARD in 2003 a collaborative draft document formed the basis for the U.S. standard, Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS), and a comprehensive revision of the Canadian standard referred to as draft RAD2.

Over the course of 2004 there was comprehensive consultation on the draft RAD2 document. Not unlike the CUSTARD project, this consultative process revealed widely divergent opinions from within the Canadian archival community. Following a careful review of feedback received, CCAD put forward to the CCA Board of Directors Toward A Second Edition of RAD: A Report. This document contained a number of options for proceeding with the development of RAD. The approved option saw the Committee move forward to draft a series of revisions to RAD based on those aspects of draft RAD2 that received the most consensus from the Canadian archival community.

The 2008 revision to RAD is the result of this effort, and reflects the responsibility of CCAD to directly respond to needs expressed by the Canadian archival community. The revision sees the addition of a number of rules as well as a new chapter. The revision means to make the standard more flexible and reflective of the range of descriptive practice in Canadian archives. For example, RAD now includes rules that provide guidance for those approaches where the series constitutes the highest level of description. These rules make the standard more permissive, and will ultimately allow more Canadian institutions to participate in the national archival database.

The revision also includes rules that guide the description of collections and discrete items. Archival material varies with respect to provenance. Rules have been added to provide guidance for the description of collections of material assembled on the basis of a common characteristic. A new chapter includes rules for the description of discrete items that do not form part of a larger body of materials. The addition of these rules will support archivists to consistently describe the range of material that make up the holdings of Canadian archival repositories.

Finally, CCAD is very pleased that the 2008 revision incorporates a Statement of Principles. The principles serve as a conceptual framework for the standard that represents a contemporary approach to archival description. They mean to guide descriptive practice and inform the evolution of standardization in Canada. The sum of the changes implemented in the 2008 revision allow archivists and institutions greater flexibility, latitude and the exercise of judgment in describing archival materials, while at the same time firmly grounding practice within a framework of explicit principles.

The 1990 publication of RAD represented a substantial and cooperative effort by the Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards. The 2008 revision to RAD reflects ongoing dialogue by the Canadian profession on the nature and evolution of contemporary descriptive practice. As a national archival descriptive standard, RAD continues to require the input of, and feedback from, the archival professional community. In addition to identifying areas of consensus, recent community consultations also revealed a number of areas with greater divergence of opinion. These points of divergence will form the basis for future discussion, consultation and revision of the national descriptive standard.

Follow this link to access the 2008 Revisions to RAD:

<http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/archdesrules.html>

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