Square Pegs and Round Holes:
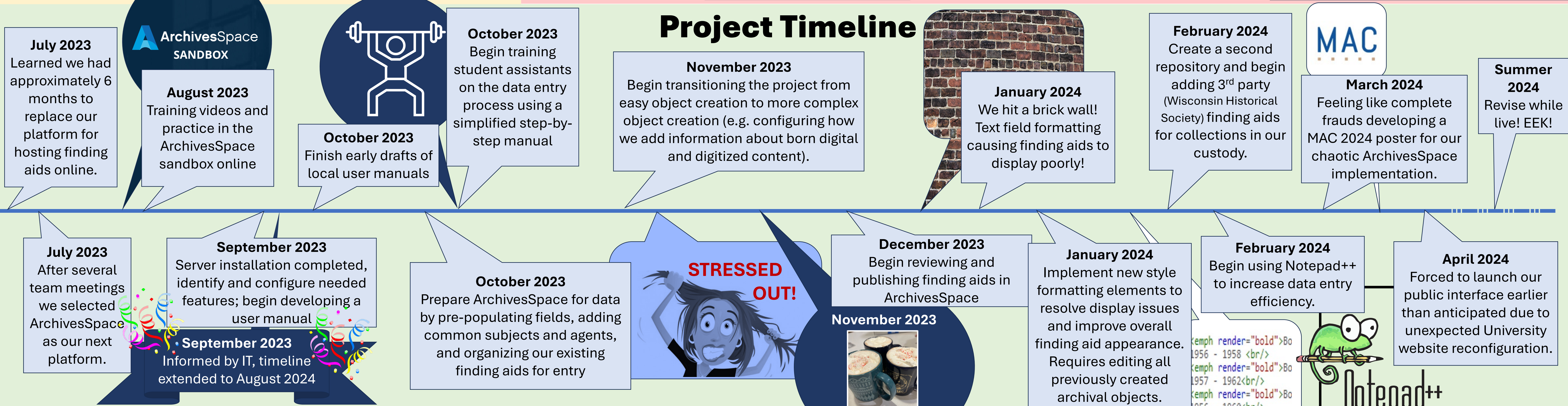## Examining an unconventional approach to using ArchivesSpace

Why ArchivesSpace? Why Now?

Faced with the looming 2024 shutdown of our existing finding aid application and limited IT support for a new tool, the UW-Eau Claire archives took action. We saw a chance to leverage ArchivesSpace, a platform offering more than just hosting and discovery, to reimagine our operations broadly. Our initial focus: efficiently replicating finding aids in ArchivesSpace and configuring the tool for usability. Drawing on past open-source implementations, Library IT facilitated installation and configuration in the fall of 2023. A dedicated team of student assistants, guided by a detailed manual, are now meticulously entering finding aids. Our user-centric approach utilizes custom field labels, open text boxes, and strategic HTML styling to effectively replicate and present collection content.

Transforming Our Finding Aids

Project Timeline

July 2023
Learned we had approximately 6 months to replace our platform for hosting finding aids online.

ArchivesSpace SANDBOX

August 2023
Training videos and practice in the ArchivesSpace sandbox online

October 2023
Begin training student assistants on the data entry process using a simplified step-by-step manual

October 2023
Finish early drafts of local user manuals

November 2023
Begin transitioning the project from easy object creation to more complex object creation (e.g. configuring how we add information about born digital and digitized content).

January 2024
We hit a brick wall! Text field formatting causing finding aids to display poorly!

February 2024
Create a second repository and begin adding 3rd party (Wisconsin Historical Society) finding aids for collections in our custody.

MAC

March 2024
Feeling like complete frauds developing a MAC 2024 poster for our chaotic ArchivesSpace implementation.

Summer 2024
Revise while live! EEK!

July 2023
After several team meetings we selected ArchivesSpace as our next platform.

September 2023
Server installation completed, identify and configure needed features; begin developing a user manual

September 2023
Informed by IT, timeline extended to August 2024

October 2023
Prepare ArchivesSpace for data by pre-populating fields, adding common subjects and agents, and organizing our existing finding aids for entry

STRESSED OUT!

November 2023
Team Building + Bonding

December 2023
Begin reviewing and publishing finding aids in ArchivesSpace

January 2024
Implement new style formatting elements to resolve display issues and improve overall finding aid appearance. Requires editing all previously created archival objects.

February 2024
Begin using Notepad++ to increase data entry efficiency.

Notepad++

April 2024
Forced to launch our public interface earlier than anticipated due to unexpected University website reconfiguration.

⭐ Rewards & Challenges ❌

⭐ **Staff Development**: Learn a new program & develop problem solving skills; mentor students on a widely adopted tool in the field.

⭐ **Team Building**: ESSENTIAL! 4 months into the project we needed a break to bond as co-workers outside of the office to keep us focused. Afterwards, apply "get to know you" ?'s at beginning of staff meetings.

⭐ **Archives Team**: Has more administrative and development control leading to improved search and user experience when compared to previous finding aid discovery tool.

⭐ **Finding Aid Development and Processing**: Opportunity to review and approve our approach and to create more consistency in digital collections processing and description practices.

⭐❌ **Consensus Building**: Reaching agreement on how to develop program & crosswalk existing word document finding aids via data entry using ArchivesSpace features while attempting to conform to past practice.

❌ **Manual Entry Process**: Inconsistencies in existing finding aids creates inconsistency in creating resource records/training students & volunteers – requires staff oversight, review, and problem-solving.

❌ **Limited Resources – Time & Staffing**: Waited 2 months for a library IT staff person to install and configure the application, a necessary delay before finding aid development by 3 archives staff guiding 5 student assistants, and all balanced against other day-to-day operations.

❌ **ArchivesSpace Nonmembers**: Implement application with $0 budget; limited access to technical support and training.

Future Considerations

After prioritizing online finding aid access, the project team aims to leverage ArchivesSpace's flexibility going forward. We plan to explore features for accessioning, digital collections, container management, and processing improvements as development progresses under less pressure.

Poster Team

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