Migrating Research Data Collections
Mentor: Andrea Thomer

Project description
Implicit in the work of digital curation is the recognition that digital collections ought to last longer than the infrastructures on which they are stored. Migration of digital collections from one platform to another is therefore a fundamental aspect of curatorial work – yet, there is surprisingly little guidance for information professionals faced with this task.

The Migrating Research Data Collection project is an IMLS-funded initiative investigating common practices in data and database migration in libraries, archives and museums. Our goal: to develop a set of best practices in migrating data collections, and an initial model of common “migration patterns” in data collection migration (AKA typical challenges/tasks, and strategies for surmounting those challenges/tasks).

This year, we are developing case studies of data collection migration through interviews with staff at natural history museums to better understand how they have migrated and managed their digital data collections over their history. We are also analyzing how database structures have changed over time, and prototyping methods of succinctly visualizing database histories.

Student Role
The REMS student will be involved in conducting, transcribing, coding and analyzing interview data, as well as the analysis of existing case study data. Ideally, the student will have some background or coursework in digital curation and database management; and some knowledge of SQL, R, and/or Python. The student should also be comfortable working independently as well as part of a team.

Specific tasks will be tailored to the student’s interests and background, but in general, this project will provide them with valuable experience conducting qualitative research; developing digital curation best practices; working with databases; and potentially creating simple information visualizations about database change over time.

Mentoring Plan
The student will work closely with Dr. Thomer and the rest of the MRDC team, regularly attending lab meetings, as well as meeting with Dr. Thomer one-on-one. Individual meetings will focus on developing and articulating research interests and goals, as well as project-specific tasks. Team meetings will give the student a broader look at what it’s like to be part of a research team and participate in collaborative, interdisciplinary research.