

January 1994

Studying the Weathervane: Use as a Factor in Appraisal Criteria

Wendy Duff
University of Pittsburgh

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/provenance>



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Duff, Wendy, "Studying the Weathervane: Use as a Factor in Appraisal Criteria," *Provenance, Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists* 12 no. 1 (1994).

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/provenance/vol12/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Provenance, Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

Steadying the Weathervane: Use as a Factor in Appraisal Criteria.

Wendy Duff

Introduction

In his 1974 Society of American Archivists presidential address, Gerald F. Ham cautioned archivists against becoming "too closely tied to the vogue of the academic marketplace" otherwise "the archivist will remain at best nothing more than a weathervane moved by the changing winds of historiography."¹ These wise words of advice reflected concern over collecting activities that responded to the latest research interests rather than a broad knowledge of "the scope, quality, and direction of research in an open-ended future."² But how can archivists predict the future trends of research, especially those in an open-ended future? Should they even try? Timothy Ericson has

¹ F. Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," *The American Archivist* 38 (1975): 8.

² *Ibid.*, 13.

pointed out that "we do not collect or preserve records as an end in itself; we do so in order that others may use what we have selected, whether by viewing it in an exhibit, by conducting personal research, or by reading the scholarship of someone else who has conducted research in our holdings."³ If archivists preserve the records so others may use them, can they appraise them without determining what those uses may be? If they focus on the potential uses of the material during appraisal will they be at the mercy of the changing winds of historiography? Can archivists steady the weathervane and allow it to direct and guide their appraisal decisions or does considering their current users' needs condemn them to a fate of fluttering to the latest breeze?

This essay will briefly consider the growth in the volume and fragility of modern records as well as the increasing numbers who wish to consult them. It will review traditional theories of appraisal and identify four types of uses which emerge from Schellenberg's concept of value. It will outline five current theories and methods of appraisal: macro-appraisal; sampling; documentation strategy; risk management; and a social theory of appraisal, and evaluate their consideration of use as a factor in appraisal. After a short overview of selection criteria proposed in related fields, it will present a new structural approach to appraisal

³ Timothy L. Ericson, "At the 'Rim of Creative Dissatisfaction': Archivists and Acquisition Development," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92): 76.

that recognizes use as a key component of appraisal decisions.

The Increasing Volume and Fragility of Records

The exponential growth of all types of records is well-documented in the archival literature. The German archivist, Hans Booms, has noted that records growth and diversity is accelerating because of the needs of a world that is highly-managed, and as a result of increased social complexity which has led to more interaction between state and citizen.⁴ Without doubt the phenomenon of overabundant documentation will continue to escalate because of technological developments in many areas especially communication. Paul Peters has suggested that poor communications promotes domination, good communication encourages competition, and that excellent communication fosters collaboration.⁵

As our society adopts to a communication revolution, one can foresee a new age of collaboration, with a resulting growth in transactions, leading to a further increase in the volume of records. Upon archivists rests the responsibility to "create, out of this overabundance of information, a

⁴ This observation has made by Hans Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage: Issues in the Appraisal of Archival Sources," *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987): 76.

⁵ Paul Peters, *Leadership Strategies for Networked Enterprises*, paper presented as part of an Internet Series at University of Pittsburgh. School of Library and Information Science, 24 March 1994.

socially relevant documentary record that is, in spacial terms, storable and, in human terms, usable."⁶ Furthermore, as the amount of records has increased, their durability has decreased. With every new technological development, the longevity of our documentary heritage diminishes. "The shift from stone to clay tablets, from clay to papyrus, from cloth paper to wood pulp paper, from paper to photographic media and now to magnetic recording has produced ever shorter format lifetimes."⁷

The increasing fragility of records that have archival value requires a proactive approach to their preservation. Archivists must now intercede at the beginning of the life cycle to ensure the retention of this material.⁸ This forces archivists not only to redefine their traditional role as custodians, but to identify records with archival value without knowledge of the creator's actual use of the records. However, it does eliminate the concern that Hans Booms articulated that archivists must free themselves of the social values of their own age and appraise the records according to the social values of their creator. When an archivist appraises records at the beginning of the life cycle,

⁶ Booms, 77.

⁷ David Bearman, "Archival Methods," *Archives and Museum Technical Report* 3 (Spring 1989): 17.

⁸ F. Gerald Ham, "Archival Strategies for the Post-Custodial Era," *American Archivist* 44 (1981): 207-216; and F. Gerald Ham, "Archival Choices: Managing the Historical Record in the Age of Abundance," *American Archivist* 47 (1984): 11-18.

the creator and the archivist are more likely to share the social values of the society of which they are both part. The fragility and volume of records has compelled archivists to re-evaluate their assumptions, their theories, their methodologies, and even their role as records appraiser.

As archivists develop new methods for managing the increasing volume and complexity of records, they must also come to terms with a myriad of new archival users. According to Lawrence Dowler "most archivists persist in thinking of the scholar as the primary user of archives"⁹ in spite of the findings of a number of user studies that refute this conviction. In fact, the diversity of use and archival users is escalating along with the growth of records. No longer do archives serve only the creator of the records or the scholar/historian. "Overall use of archives is increasing dramatically with the greatest increase being in non-traditional areas. Archivists increasingly must serve a heterogeneous clientele with diverse needs and expectations."¹⁰ Should archivists alter their traditional appraisal criteria to serve the new demands of this increasing user population? To answer this question, one must first explore established appraisal criteria

⁹ Lawrence Dowler, "The Role of Use in Defining Archival Practice and Principles: A Research Agenda for the Availability and Use of Records," *American Archivist* 51 (1988): 76.

¹⁰ Bureau of Canadian Archivists, Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards, Subject Indexing Working Group, Subject Indexing for Archives (Canada: Bureau of Canadian Archivists, 1992), 23.

recommended by traditional theories. The next section will explore traditional and current appraisal theories to examine their consideration of use as a factor in appraisal.

Traditional Appraisal Theories

British

Sir Hilary Jenkinson, the patriarch of British archival theory, rejected the proposition that archivists should appraise records because of the inherent bias in their selection. He proposed that only the original creator of the records should make appraisal decisions and that those decisions should be based solely on "the needs of its own practical business; provided, that is, that it can refrain from thinking of itself as a body producing historical evidences."¹¹ Therefore, according to Jenkinson, only use by the creator of the records was a valid criterion upon which to base appraisal decisions. An archivist's interest, he said, was "an interest in his Archives as Archives, not as documents valuable for proving this or that thesis."¹² For Jenkinson, appraisal should be based solely upon legal or administrative requirements, not to fulfill a research need or any other use. Records should be made available to researchers but selection decisions based on upon

¹¹ Sir Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration*, rev. 2nd ed. (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co., Ltd., 1966), 149-150.

¹² *Ibid.*, 146.

perceived historical needs distorts the historical record and jeopardizes their "unquestioned impartiality."

American

T.R. Schellenberg, the father of American appraisal theory, rejected Jenkinson's proposal that archivists could not select records for retention. He suggested that archivists should appraise records and that they should do so based upon an evaluation of the value of the records. He posited that records have two kinds of value: "primary values for the originating agency itself and secondary values for other agencies and private users."¹³ Secondary value was comprised of two separate elements: evidential value or evidence of the originating organization's functions and activities; and informational value which focuses upon the potential of the records to fulfill research interests.

He opined that records that documented how a government was organized and how it functioned were "indispensable to the government itself and to students of government. For the government they are a storehouse of administrative wisdom and experience. They are needed to give consistency and continuity to its actions."¹⁴ These records fulfill an essential administrative need for the operation of good government. They also provide the

¹³ T.R. Schellenberg, "The Appraisal of Modern Public Records," *National Archives Bulletin* 8 (Washington: National Archives and Records Service, 1956): 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

accountability that "every important public official owes to the people whom he serves."¹⁵ Furthermore, according to Schellenberg, the evaluation of records containing evidential value is an objective test, for which archivists' training in historical methodology prepares them. On the other hand, the informational value or research value of records is far more difficult to ascertain with certainty. This decision will rest upon an evaluation of the records' future importance to a particular type of research.

Schellenberg argued that:

An archivist assumes that his first obligation is to preserve records containing information that will satisfy the needs of the Government itself, and after that, however undefinable these needs may be, private scholars and the public generally. He should take into account the actual research methods of various classes of persons and the likelihood that they would under ordinary circumstances make effective use of archival materials. He will normally give priority to the needs of the historian and the other social scientists, but he obviously must also preserve records of vital interest to the genealogist, the student of local history and the antiquarian.¹⁶

Even though informational value is more subjective and arduous to evaluate, Schellenberg perceived it as

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

determining the selection and retention of the majority of archival records. Schellenberg's divisions of values can provide useful categories in which to group use of archival records. Based upon his values, one can delineate four different types of uses or needs for records.

- 1) The first category includes primary users who require records for their legal and/or administrative value.
- 2) The second category includes both primary and secondary users who consult records for their evidential value or for reasons of accountability. Schellenberg emphasized that this value is important to government and students of government because it provides a "storehouse of administrative wisdom." However, today, the need to provide an accounting of an organization's or government's actions may be more valuable than a "storehouse of administrative wisdom."
- 3) The third category includes all uses of the records for research purposes.
- 4) The fourth category includes genealogists, students of local history and antiquarians.

The third and fourth category could be conflated but since Schellenberg many archivists refer to and often treat these types of users differently, making it advantageous to separate them for purposes of analysis.

Although Schellenberg's concepts of evidential and informational value were instrumental in shaping North American archivists' concept of appraisal, some have recently questioned his notion of value. Macro-appraisal, a new appraisal strategy proposed by some Canadian archivists, has rejected many of Schellenberg's tenets.

Macro-Appraisal

Since 1990, to help archivists identify records with archival value amongst the overabundance of records created by government, the National Archives of Canada (NAC) adopted a new top-down, or a macro-appraisal approach, to records selection. This approach emphasizes the need to commence the appraisal process with an analysis of the functions and activities of records creators.¹⁷ Eldon Frost explains this intellectual model:

Archivists ascertain, first on an agency-wide basis, the significance of programmes through a review of their organizational structure, functions and processes; secondly, by a study of records systems, their linkages and interconnections in support of the programmes; and, finally, by appraising the records themselves. Special attention in the research is paid to functions and processes which cross agencies, in view of making the best possible appraisal decisions

¹⁷ Frost comments that although "the strategy is based on traditional archival methods....I am unaware of previous attempts by archives to rank institutions in of their importance of their contribution to government and society," 84. However David Levine reported in 1984 on the Ohio State Archives' appraisal policy that included both an evaluation of individual record series, and a "ranking of states agencies [that] specifies which agencies are to be documented most thoroughly in light of their overall impact on the government and the people of Ohio." David Levine, "The Appraisal Policy of Ohio State Archives," *American Archivist* 47 (1984): 292.

by having adequate knowledge of similar record holdings.¹⁸

The application of this approach in Canada ranks the organizations and agencies according to the significance of their contribution to government and to its citizens. The theory, ostensibly, accentuates the functions and activities that created the records over the content or information in the records.¹⁹ Although it seeks records that provide evidence of government/citizen interaction, it does not base this appraisal criteria on any *a priori* assumption of the potential use of these records. Terry Cook, one of the main designers of the appraisal strategy, decries the propensity of archivists to search for research value in records. He states:

archivists have usually appraised records according to theories of value defined by users or by expectations of future use. This approach by definition decontextualizes the record from the internal, organic relationship of its creation and

¹⁸ Eldon Frost, "A Weak Link in the Chain: Record Scheduling as a Source of Archival Acquisition," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92): 84.

¹⁹ Richard Brown, "Records Acquisition Strategy and its Theoretical Foundation: The Case for a Concept of Archival Hermeneutics," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92): 34-56.

imposes instead an external standard for judging value.²⁰

For Cook "values are not found in records — except in rare intrinsic cases — but rather in theories of value of societal significance which archivists bring to the records."²¹

Cook is not alone in his rejection of use as an important criterion upon which to base appraisal decisions. Ellen Scheinberg, another NAC staff member, also opposed the formation of appraisal decisions based upon use. She stated that "although archivists should be aware of certain research methodologies relating to computers as well as trends within government departments, research developments and interests within the academic community [these interests] should not play a role when appraising archival documents."²²

Although staff of NAC discount Schellenberg's concepts of value, their emphasis on identifying records that document government/citizen action should serve well those

²⁰ Terry Cook. "Mind Over Matter: Toward A New Theory of Archival," in *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor*, Barbara L. Craig, ed. (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivist, 1992), 44.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

²² Ellen Scheinberg, *Case File Theory: Does it Work in Practice*, paper presented as part of a conference, "Between 'The Rock' and a Hard Place: Archival Theory and Practice," the Annual Conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists, St. John's, Newfoundland, 19-24 July 1992: 20.

in the second category of use: patrons requiring an accounting of the government's actions.

However, as the adherents of macro-appraisal reject use as a factor of appraisal, interpreting the theory in terms of use may be misleading.

The top down approach of macro-appraisal determines the important functions or programs that may have created records of archival value. To select the actual records from all the records produced in carrying out the activity, the NAC has opted, in certain cases, to employ sampling techniques.

Sampling

Sampling, a statistical approach to appraisal, is a method that enables archivists to handle the increasing number of heterogeneous files, such as case files. As an appraisal tactic, sampling usually denotes the random choosing of files from a series using inferential statistical techniques which ensure that each file has an equal chance of being selected and results in a reliable representation of the series or a predetermined stratum of the series. Terry Cook, also a strong advocate of sampling, has provided a comprehensive review of the stringent procedures required to ensure that a representative sample is chosen. Sampling, he asserts, results in the retention of records that

can be used to reconstruct the whole with statistical validity. It thus facilitates accurate quantitative research for a multitude of disciplines and interests....[However] researchers cannot do

longitudinal work: it will be impossible to trace a particular individual or office or county over time, as the county or person or office in all likelihood will not be selected for every annual or decennial random sample from the series.²³

Selection of exemplary files, material that reflects significant characteristics "saves the files usually of greatest interest to researchers who are not undertaking collective quantitative research."²⁴ Although Cook points out that the technique chosen: sampling or selection, will determine the research value of the records, he does not, as others have, recommend that archivists first identify the potential users of the material.²⁵

Gerald Ham, on the other hand, recommends that before embarking on a sampling design archivists should ask: "What will be the primary use of the sampled records?"

²³ Terry Cook, "Many are called but few are chosen: Appraisal Guidelines for Sampling and Selecting Case Files," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991): 39.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁵ The FBI files case in an interesting example of users rejecting the use of random sampling techniques and demanding that files be appraised on their individual characteristics. See Susan D. Steinwall, "Appraisal and the FBI Files Case: For Whom Do Archivists Retain Records?" *American Archivist* 49 (1986): 52-63.

What sampling technique is most appropriate in supporting that use?"²⁶

Cook's failure to recommend that archivists undertake an analysis of potential use of records is not an oversight. As previously noted, Cook strongly opposes the development of an appraisal theory based on use or users' needs. Therefore sampling, as a technique, does not preclude the consideration of actual or potential use of material but the archivist employing the technique might.

Moreover, as sampling supports those involved in quantitative research, it appears to address the needs of the third category of use: research use. Sampling may result in the retention of records less suited to meet the needs of those requiring an accounting of the government or organization's actions.

Documentation Strategy

Documentary strategy provides a different top-down approach; one that requires inter-institutional cooperation. The SAA glossary defines documentation strategy as:

an on-going analytic, cooperative approach, designed, promoted and implemented by creators, administrators (including archivists) and users to ensure the archival retention of appropriate documentation in some area of human endeavor

²⁶ F. Gerald Ham, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: The Society of American Archivist, 1993), 76.

through the application of archival techniques, the creation of institutional archives and redefined acquisition policies, and the development of sufficient resources. The key elements of this approach are an analysis of the universe to be documented, an understanding of the inherent documentary problems, and the formulation of a plan to assure the adequate documentation of an issue, activity or geographic area.²⁷

Documentation strategy provides a comprehensive view of appraisal which includes the assessment of an ongoing activity or topic and the identification and selection of records — both public and private — that document the field. The fundamental concept underlying this theory is that "analysis and planning must precede documentary efforts, and institutions must work together because modern documentation crosses institutional lines."²⁸ Prior to an archivist appraising any actual records, a plan is created by: a) identifying and delineating the topic, function, or geographic area to be documented; b) selecting advisors (records creators, archivists, librarians, record managers, and users) to guide the process and identifying a repository

²⁷ Lewis J. Bellardo and Lynn Lady Bellardo, comps., *A Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators, and Records Managers*, (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1992), 12.

²⁸ Helen Samuels, "Improving our Disposition: Documentation Strategy," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92): 126.

to hold the material; c) organizing the strategy and analyzing the available sources. Only after the completion of the plan are any records selected.²⁹

Selecting an appropriate team of advisors is an integral element of a documentation strategy. By recommending an advisory committee consisting of creators, custodians, and users, the proponents of documentation strategy ensure that the users of the records assist in the formation of a plan to preserve records of archival value. This enables users with many different perspectives and viewpoints to be heard.

Although archival creators serve as advisors, and the use of the records by the creators are considered, documentation strategies appear to be primarily concerned with use of the material by secondary users. Helen Samuels acknowledges that institutions retain records for their legal, fiscal, administrative, and historical value. She likens these records to a library's core collection and states that the:

archivist's legal obligations to their institutions are fulfilled by gathering the core collection. With the legal mission assured, archivists can examine their collections as sources of information, seek ties with

²⁹ Helen Samuels, "Who Controls the Past?" *American Archivist* 49 (1986): 109-24.

other institutions, and develop new strategies to build and manage collections.³⁰

Based on this statement, it would appear that archivists become involved in documentation strategies after they have fulfilled their responsibilities to primary users of the records: the creators. Furthermore the strategy does not address the needs of citizens to have an accounting of a government's or organization's activities.

In confronting the issue that some organizations will be documented while other not, Samuels explains:

If a strategy documents some unions and railroads more fully than other, can this documentation meet the information needs of the employees, individual union members, cities, and companies? The answer is probably no, but a strategy that fulfills everyone's needs returns archivists to the practice of saving everything.³¹

Documentation strategy promotes the establishment of institutional archives whose first responsibility would be to address the needs of the first category of users: primary users. An institutional archives would also probably fulfill an organization's need for records with evidential value or fulfill its need to account for its actions. If they retained these

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 121.

records, the second category of use would also be fulfilled. However, the advocates of documentation strategy have not articulated or emphasized these needs.

The proponents of documentation strategy emphasize that they promote "the full documentation of society, not merely the piecemeal evaluation of isolated records for historical or other long-term value."³² Perhaps, due to the complex relationships between organizations and governments, records needed to meet legal and administrative requirements as well as those needed to provide an accounting of actions may only be preserved with a cooperative approach to appraisal.

Furthermore, by emphasizing inter-institutional cooperation and the inclusion of the user population on advisory committees, documentation strategy provides a framework for archival appraisal which incorporates the potential use of records as an essential element. The plan, if so designed, could address the needs of all four categories of use. However, which uses are considered the most important will rest upon the viewpoints of the individual members of the advisory committees.

Risk Management

David Bearman has joined the chorus of archivists who assert that the profession requires a new approach to appraisal — one that does not focus on the actual records

³² Richard J. Cox and Helen W. Samuels, "The Archivists' First Responsibility: A Research Agenda for the Identification and Retention of Record of Enduring Value," *American Archivist* 51 (1988): 30.

themselves. As a method of achieving this goal, he suggests that archivists replace their analysis of cost-benefit which evaluates the cost of obtaining records against the benefits accrued with a language of risk management.

Instead of asking what benefits would derive from retaining records, they should insist on an answer to the probability of incurring unacceptable risks as a consequence of disposing of records. This will very likely dramatically reduce the volume of records that are judged essential to retain. And it suggests an approach to solving the second dilemma of our current appraisal methods; their focus on records rather than the activity they document.³³

This approach accentuates the actions or transactions that created the records. It emphasizes the risk of not saving evidence of actions rather than on the informational value of the records. However, Bearman asserts that in evaluating activities that may have created records of archival value, the archivist must consider use as an integral component of any appraisal decision.

Continuing value looks to use for justification of retention. It will result in considering such highly used series of records as birth, death, and marriage certificates as archival, thus assuring heavier use of archival records by the public. Appraisal based on activity looks at functions

³³ David Bearman, *Archival Methods*, 10.

that had a direct effect on potential users, especially on their rights as citizens in a governmental archives. Decisions based on appraisal of records by functions with substantial potential impact on constituents will result in saving and servicing records that are particularly needed.³⁴

A theory of appraisal based on risk management could, therefore, accommodate the needs of all four categories of use, if their needs were important to the organization.

Bearman's emphasis on retention of records needed for an accounting of government activities evolves out of the consequences of not being accountable. "The risk of not being accountable is (if one is a government) loss of legitimacy and if one is a private entity it is the risk of being successfully sued for negligence. The loss of legitimacy is the most dangerous thing that a government can possibly subject itself to."³⁵

His suggestion that archivists in government archives identify functions that have had an effect on citizens bears interesting parallels to the National Archives of Canada's macro-appraisal theory. However, Bearman posits that these records should be retained partly due to their potential importance to users, a concept that NAC's staff neglects.

Social Theory of Appraisal

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

³⁵ David Bearman, e-mail message to Wendy Duff, 30 March 1994.

Terry Eastwood, like Bearman, has also recommended that archivists develop a new appraisal theory based primarily on use. He reasons that as archivists strive to ensure the objectivity of the appraisal process with a system of evaluating records that is inherently biased and subjective, they should develop a theory of appraisal "based ultimately but not exclusively on an assessment of use." He argues that

It is therefore the appraiser/archivist's task to marshal evidence for the evaluation of archives on the basis of an objective analysis of the qualities of any archives to be appraised and an analysis of the uses to which they may be put.³⁶

For Eastwood striving for an objective theory of appraisal requires an understanding of the potential uses of the records as evidence of transactions. He argues that archives are inherently utilitarian, created by a person or organization to assist in the carrying out of an activity or function. Therefore, the appraisal of these records should consider the past, present, and potential use of the records.

Eastwood's assertion of the primacy of use to appraisal decisions is a natural corollary to his belief that archives are arsenals of democratic accountability:

In democratic societies like ours, government administration, and increasingly even private affairs

³⁶ Terry Eastwood, "Towards a Social Theory of Appraisal," 83.

with which government is inextricably linked in myriad ways, is carried out in the name of the people and in and by the law the people sets through its democratic institutions. We are accountable to each other for what we do to each other and to the common land we inhabit and rule so that we may, whatever our conflicts, continue to live in comity. Archives and the institutions which preserve them serve the polity, the commonwealth. All who come to us, the historian to probe subject, the administrator to carry out duties, the plaintiff or defendant to plead before the courts, even the much maligned genealogist to search for ancestry, must make some accounting of past actions and transactions from the circumscribed evidence borne by documents which are themselves a part of the very actions and transactions under investigation.³⁷

In essence, Eastwood is suggesting that archivists must appraise evidence and that their appraisal should incorporate an analysis of societies' past, present and future need for evidence. Appraisal becomes an exercise in evaluating a need or future need for evidence of transactions. Eastwood's suggestion that archivists develop a new social theory of appraisal incorporates all four

³⁷ Terrence M. Eastwood, "Reflections on the Development of Archives in Canada and Australia," in *Archival Documents: Providing Accountability through Recordkeeping*, Sue McKemmish & Frank Upward, eds. (Melbourne: Ancora Press, 1993), 36.

categories of uses: use by the record creator, use by those requiring an accounting of an individuals or organizations actions, use by scholars, and all other uses.

This brief review of modern appraisal theory reveals that the profession disagrees on the importance of use as a factor in appraisal. Consulting the writings of related professions that also must acquire material may help the analysis by presenting alternative viewpoints.

Selection Policies of Other Cultural Organizations

Other cultural institutions, such as libraries and museums, have also encountered problems emanating from the burgeoning volume and complexity of material, the growing demands on their services, and diminishing funds. Although museum and library collecting activities normally focus on the acquisition of individual items, as opposed to the whole output of a creator as an archives does, consulting their literature can provide insights into their methods for adapting to these new exigencies.

Museums

Museum curators have identified factors integral to the selection of artifacts including: aesthetic quality, cultural meaning, historical significance, rarity, age and skill of production.³⁸ Most of these qualities, however, are extremely subjective, and heavily depend upon the

³⁸ Hubert G. Alexander, "Why Preservation?" in *The Idea of the Museum: Philosophical, Artistic and Political Questions*. Lars Aagaard-Mogensen, ed. (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 1988), 7-15.

educated opinion of the curator.³⁹ Recently some curators have begun to question the traditional methods of selection.

David Barr, like many archivists, has proposed that museums abandon their traditional bottom-up approach that concentrates on qualities of the material they are selecting and develop new collection policies based on a top-down strategy.

The top-down approach places the emphasis first on determining where we are going and only secondarily on how we intend to get there. It suggests that collecting should start with a definition of the uses we intend to make of our collections. Collections may be used to exhibit fine quality of design or craftsmanship, tell a story, to educate, to supply data for research, to teach or 'act out' an interpretation, or for exchanges with other museums in order to enrich both. Which use or combination of uses is it to be? Asking this question already goes considerably beyond bottom-up thinking. We

³⁹ Swedish museum curators have developed a collecting program called SAMDOK that attempts to secure materials that document contemporary life. This program attempts to collect artifacts that best represents a family and their home life. Harry Rubenstein, "Collecting for Tomorrow: Sweden's Contemporary Documentation Program," *Museum News* 63 (August 1985): 55-60.

have replaced what? (and where? and how?) with what for?⁴⁰

For Barr, a top-down tactic focuses first and foremost on the projected use of material and away from the object itself. However, not everyone agrees that museum curators should base their collecting decisions on current use or needs. David Lowenthal has warned:

Museums uniquely mediate past, present and future. They play an often lonely role in seeking to prevent today's viewpoints from swamping tomorrow's. It is all too easy to pillory stewardship as hoarding. It may be our best defense against public amnesia. To serve posterity museums must remind themselves, and persuade their masters, that some custodial autonomy is essential. To abnegate all aloofness, to be wholly responsive to immediate exigencies, would defeat all our ultimate interests and condemn us to a brief and shallow present, one devoid of temporal depth and historical insights. ...Most alarming, populist 'presentism' risks disenfranchising the greatest majority — the future. The more responsive museums are to present-day

⁴⁰ David W. Barr, "Top Down or Bottom Up?: Which is the Most Useful Way to Develop our 'First Principles' of Collecting," *Museum Quarterly* 17 (August 1989): 19.

demands, the less they can heed our heirs, the constituency yet to come.⁴¹

Museum curators are not alone in their quest to "mediate past, present and future." Archivists have also sought to provide future generations with "temporal depth and historical insights." Do we disenfranchise future researchers by concentrating on the needs of our present clients? How do libraries who also serve present and future users integrate the needs of users into their collection policies?

Library Selection Policies

Library literature is replete with treatises on selection policy, collection development, and, more recently, collection management. The scope of this essay does not permit adequate coverage of all the various theories. However, a cursory overview can provide interesting comparisons to archival appraisal.

Librarians generally agree that a collection policy framework should include some, if not all, of the following four components:

- 1) an institutional context which includes needs and priorities as well as staffing and financial constraints;
- 2) their users, both present and future. Although librarians generally acknowledge that the changing nature of scholarship makes the prediction of future needs impossible;

⁴¹ David Lowenthal, "From Patronage to Populism," *Museum Journal* (March 1992): 27.

- 3) technologies and techniques which have affected not only the different media required by a library but also the library's ability to share resources;
- 4) the patterns of scholarship which are being dramatically affected by technology.

Not all collection literature includes all four components but almost all recognize the importance of users needs.⁴²

Librarians can alter collecting priorities to incorporate new patterns of scholarship because current published literature usually reflects contemporary scholarship. Archives, however, cannot quickly accommodate a new pattern of research if they have not previously acquired the necessary records. Furthermore, as Ham has warned, responding to current research needs results in archival holdings that reflect "narrow research rather than the broad spectrum of human experience."⁴³

The other factors that librarians consider: institutional context, the development of new technologies, and users, do concern archives but their importance has often been tempered with concern over the importance of the record itself.

This cursory review of the literature has indicated that selecting material appraisal is a complex, multi-dimensional task for librarians, museums, and archivists. Frank Boles and Julia Mark Young's study of criteria used in appraisal

⁴² Dan C. Hazen, "Selection: Function, Models, Theory," in *Collection Management: a New Treatise*, Charles B. Osburn and Ross Atkinson, eds. (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1991), 273-300.

⁴³ Ham, "The Archival Edge," 8.

identified three different separate modules that affect appraisal decisions, each made up of numerous elements.⁴⁴ To understand how the different elements interrelate, a structural approach to appraisal is required.

In 1977, James C. Baughman developed a structural approach to collection development in libraries. "The structural approach," he explained, "seeks to find a pattern of relationships, since effective collection building is assumed to rest on identifying a structure."⁴⁵ He posited that collection development was comprised of three major constructs: 1) use which represents a cluster of demands; 2) knowledge which represents an assembly of disciplines, subjects, topics, etc., and 3) librarianship which is a manifestation of an array of subject literature relationships. He presented these three constructs in a Venn diagram which depicts overlapping areas and forms a center which he identified as collection development.

Structural Approach to Appraisal

Using Baughman's structural approach, one could develop a model for appraisal that would also include three major constructs. Figure 1 illustrates the major clusters essential to archival appraisal. These constructs are:

⁴⁴ Frank Boies, and Julia Marks Young, *Archival Appraisal* (New York: Neal-Schuman Pub., 1991).

⁴⁵ James C. Baughman, "Toward a Structural Approach to Collection Development," *College and Research Libraries* 38 (1977): 242.

- 1) provenance or records context which represents the functions, actions, and transactions which created the records and the record-keeping systems that controlled the environment in which the records were created;
- 2) the records and their relationships to other records;
- 3) the archives environment or institutional context which represents a cluster of demands or constraints on the archives such as their mission, the mandate of their sponsor, and the needs of their users which include the archives' clients, the creators of the records, and their other users. The archives mission will dictate who uses the archives and the needs of the users will impact on, and transform, its mission and policies.

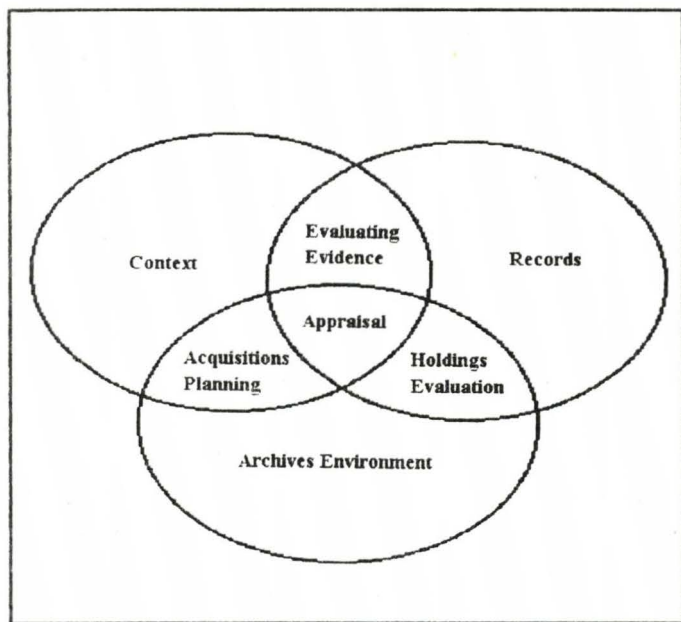


Figure 1 Structural Approach to Appraisal

Analyzing the three components and their interactions is integral to appraisal. Concentrating on only one component to the detriment of the others will cause archivists to fail in their mission. Appraisal, as collection development, rests on the identification of a structure that represents the relationship among the constructs.

At the intersection of the archives environment and the context constructs lies acquisitions planning. By analyzing the transactions and functions that impact upon, and are important to their mission and their users, the archives can develop an acquisition plan. This plan, as the documentation strategy and the National Archives of Canada have emphasized, should occur before records are examined.

In the section formed by the crossover between the archives environment and records constructs lies the evaluation of the repository's holdings or the material for which the archives has legal or administrative control. Appraisal of new records must be based upon an understanding and knowledge of the use of records already under archival care. Furthermore, an evaluation of the existing collection is essential for ongoing reappraisal projects.⁴⁶

The evaluation of evidence relies not only on an examination of the records or on an understanding of the functions and transactions that created them, but rather on

⁴⁶ For an interesting discussion on the importance of reappraisal see Leonard Rapport, "No Grandfather Clause: Reappraising Accessioned Records," *American Archivist* 44 (1981): 143-150.

the synthesis of the two. Therefore, in the area formed by the overlap of the context and the evidence constructs, lies the evaluation of evidence, which is integral to all appraisal decisions because to appraise records archivists must consider their value as evidence of transactions.

At the convergence of the three constructs is the locus of the most important archival activity: appraisal. Only after analyzing all the clusters: the context, the records, and the archives environment, and their interactions, can archivists determine which of the mass of records they must retain, preserve, and make available.

Context and Evidence

The context construct includes an analysis of both the functions and activities that created records and the record-keeping systems that controlled them. An evaluation of record-keeping systems is central to an evaluation of evidence because if a record-keeping system is not secure or cannot prove the authenticity of records, their integrity and their value as evidence are diminished. As Bearman asserts:

Record-keeping systems are organized to accomplish the specific function of creating, storing, and accessing records for evidential purposes. While they may also be able to retrieve records for informational purposes, they are designed for operational staff, not for archivists or researchers, and thus are optimized to support the business processes and transactions of the creating

organization rather than generic information retrieval. Although record-keeping systems are not created for archivists, archivists must appraise record-keeping systems and make decisions to destroy or preserve the records that they contain.⁴⁷

Records that the record-keeping systems contain are evidence of actions and transactions. The records are not an end in themselves; they are evidence that substantiate that an action took place. They are the remnants of past deeds and as such can only be evaluated with an analysis of the activities or transactions which they represent. As Cook has argued:

the focus of appraisal should shift from the actual record to the conceptual context of its creation, from the physical artifact to the intellectual purpose behind it, from matter to mind. While good archivists have always considered context more important than content, they have traditionally used context to explain or situate the physical record. It is now time to focus much more centrally on context, or on a conceptual version of provenance, if appraisal theory is to be redefined to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ David Bearman, "Record-Keeping Systems," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993): 17.

⁴⁸ Terry Cook, "Documentary Strategy," *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992): 183.

But appraisal is not just an evaluation of context. It is not context over records or records over context, rather it is a symbiotic relationship. It is not mind over matter or matter over mind, but rather their marriage that archivists seek. Although archivists require a top-down approach, supremacy of one construct weakens the whole. Records are evidence of actions and transactions, and therefore the transaction forms and defines the record. One cannot interpret or understand the record without comprehending the transaction from which it emanated. Moreover, the records are the documentary traces of transactions. It is through the records that the transaction reveal itself and speaks to us over the time-space continuum.

A transaction is carried out to support a function and creates a record which is the physical manifestation of that transaction that is enacted to satisfy the function. Appraisal depends upon the "document-event relationship."⁴⁹ When evaluating evidence, archivists must understand the relationships between the constructs. They must, as Heather MacNeil has asserted, "allow value to emerge naturally through the archival analysis of relationships of the external [the context] and internal structure [the original order]."⁵⁰ Only with an understanding of the whole of the records, the relationships of the series to each other, and

⁴⁹ Heather MacNeil, *Between Two Paradigms*, paper presented as part of a conference "Between 'The Rock' and a Hard Place: Archival Theory and Practice," the Annual Conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists, St. John's, Newfoundland, 19-24 July 1992: 12.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

the relationships of the fonds to other records in the archives or controlled by other repositories, can one determine retention requirements.

The records themselves must also be studied to ensure they provide the evidence required. Scheinberg has concluded that "although assessing the records may be the last step in the appraisal process, it is certainly not the least important. For the records reveal certain truths about the programs and record management systems that shed new light on existing authorities and/or hypotheses."⁵¹ The escalating growth of documentation may preclude archivists from evaluating individual documents, but an evaluation of records, perhaps through an examination of representative samples or a documentary probe, is integral to any appraisal decision. Barbara Craig has contended:

The reality of the record base must be an indispensable component of all acts of appraisal. Without an understanding of documents and records, of their forms and of their functions, and of how they were created and used, a plan can be so easily upset by the attractiveness of concentrating on information divorced from the realities of its documentary expression....After all is said and done,

⁵¹ Scheinberg, 27.

it is the record which is our special area of knowledge."⁵²

To appraise evidence, archivists require a records expertise. Their training and experience should provide them with a knowledge of the types of records, the intellectual forms and functions of the records, that represent the transactions they wish to protect. Archivists require a greater knowledge of the types of records that they appraise. Cox and Samuels have argued that the profession requires research into the types of documentation and the information (and I would add evidence) they provide.⁵³

Archives Environment

After an analysis of the functions and transactions that created records, a review of the record-keeping systems that controlled them, and a study of the records and their relationships, archivists can determine the value of records as evidence of important transactions or actions. But to decide whether the evidence should be preserved, whether they warrant the cost of their retention and preservation, archivists must decide if the records are needed. They must attempt to understand if and why they might be needed in the future. Therefore the third construct, the

⁵² Barbara Craig, "The Acts of the Appraisers: The Context, the Plan and the Record," *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992): 179.

⁵³ Cox and Samuels, 34.

archives environment which includes use, is an essential arbitrator of retention decisions. This construct also includes the archives mission and its sponsor's mandate or, as Frank Boles has labeled them, the "institutional interest evaluation."⁵⁴

Hugh Taylor has explained that "without users (which include ourselves), records and the information they contain have only a potential, a pent up 'energy' which is released through the dynamic interaction of human involvement with" the records.⁵⁵ Decisions that do not consider this dynamic interaction are destined to preserve records that will languish on shelves, until they deteriorate. A well-defined "statement of purpose,"⁵⁶ or use of records, is essential when the fragility of record carriers are forcing archivists to speak of continuous rather than permanent value. Archivists no longer have the luxury of leaving records untended for a hundred years just in case a future researcher may wish to consult them. They must be used

⁵⁴ Frank Boles, "Mix Two Parts Interest to One Part Information and Appraise Until Done: Understanding Contemporary Record Selection Processes," *American Archivist* 50 (1987): 356-368.

⁵⁵ Hugh A. Taylor, *Archival Services and the Concept of the User: A RAMP Study* ((Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1984), 3.

⁵⁶ Kent Haworth has discussed the need for archivists to develop a 'language of purpose' which focuses attention on their obligation to their sponsor and their principles. Kent Haworth, "The Principles Speak for Themselves: Articulating a Language of Purpose for Archives," *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor*, Barbara L. Craig, ed. (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1992), 94-104.

and have their potential exploited during their relatively short life time.

Archivists do not appraise material for themselves. They appraise records for present and future patrons. As they select records to ensure the accountability of an organization or government, they too are accountable for their appraisal decisions. As the judges in the FBI court case determined, "The thrust of the laws Congress has enacted is that government records belong to the American people."⁵⁷ When archivists appraise these records, they do so in trust and, as civil servants, are answerable to the people for their actions. Decisions that do not consider the needs of the people to which the records belong are unconscionable and may lead to the archives losing its legitimacy or being sued for its actions as witnessed by the FBI case file and the ongoing Profs case.⁵⁸

Archivists working in an organizational archives identify and retain records to fulfill the legal, fiscal, and administrative requirements of their organization. Identifying all of these needs requires a careful analysis and an understanding of the legal environment of the primary users. A recent study on the regulatory requirements of the federal

⁵⁷ American Friends Service Committee, et al. v. William H. Webster, et al. (Civil Action 79-1655, US District Court, Washington, DC), Order and Opinions, 20-21, quoted in Steinwall, "Appraisal and the FBI Files Case," 63.

⁵⁸ For an interesting account of the Profs case see David Bearman, "The Implications of *Armstrong v. the Executive Office of the President* for the Archival Management of Electronic Records," *American Archivist* 56 (1993): 674-689.

government discovered that banks operating in the United States must comply with ninety-five different record retention requirements.⁵⁹ These requirements obviously create administrative obligations for the primary users of the records. Archivists have traditionally acknowledged this need as a responsibility that they must fulfill. A requirement to account for one's actions has also been identified as an essential need that the archives fulfills for its sponsor and its users. But what other needs do these primary users have? What records must be kept to fulfill other needs?

To understand the needs of their users, archivists must gain a better understanding of the people who use material. In a recent book on emerging paradigms,⁶⁰ Peter Schwartz and James Ogilvy has observed that disciplines and mental processes are not neutral. They are affected by our culture, language, and our view of the world. These views or perspectives control what we see and what we ignore. These perspectives will, of course, affect what records archivists see as valuable and what they choose to destroy. It will also affect the user's evaluation of the

⁵⁹ Edward A Pisacreta, "Electronic Records: Can Regulation Catch Technology?," presentation to the Section of Business Law, American Bar Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL. (8 August 1990), cited in Jeffrey B. Ritter, "Defining International Electronic Commerce," *Northwestern Journal of International Law & Business* 13 (3 1992): 24 f50.

⁶⁰ Peter Schwartz and James Ogilvy, *Emergent Paradigm: Changing Patterns of Thought and Belief* (Menlo Park, CA.: SRI International, 1979), as cited in Herbert K. Achleitner and Roger B. Wyatt, "Visualizations: A New Conceptual Lens for Research," in *Qualitative Research in Information Management*, Jack D. Glazier and Ronald R. Powell, eds. (Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1992), 21-36.

records' relevance. Basing appraisal decisions on just one perspective of the world disenfranchises all those who have different perspectives and therefore find value in different records. Archivists do bring values to records, as Cook asserts, but they are not necessarily the only value that the records have. Any one value judgment can only be a partial verdict of a record's worth. Other people, with other perspectives, who view the records through a different lens might need to consult different records or the same records for different reasons. Archivists must attempt to understand and take into consideration those other perspectives.

Furthermore Schwartz and Ogilvy state that Western society's beliefs have undergone a major shift in the way it perceives the world. One of those shifts is a change from seeing the world as definite or predictable to a vision of life as indefinite or unpredictable. Affected by our changing paradigms and perhaps Heisenberg's indeterminacy principle, society has realized that the future is indefinite. This realization has resulted in a realization that trends and patterns are more important than individual events.

Archivists acknowledge that they lack prescience. No one can predict future needs. Records kept purely for their value as evidence will gain importance to users because of the information they contain. Genealogists have unearthed a wealth of information in records kept for legal rather than genealogical purposes. If archivists lack foresight, should they base appraisal decisions on a projected use of material? Boles and Young's study demonstrated that archivists consider use of records an important criterion in

appraisal. But how do they project that use? Intuition and anecdotes of users' needs will not suffice.

Futurists have developed techniques to identify trends and patterns that guide them in their work of predicting the future. Bertrand de Jouvenel, a French futurist, has stated the possible becomes "futurible" "only if its mode of production from the present state of affairs is plausible and imaginable....A futurible is a descendant of the present, a descendant to which we attach a genealogy."⁶¹ The metaphor of genealogy derives out of the belief that "if you know the great-grandparent, the grandparent, and the parent, you can foresee the child, the grandchild, and the great-grandchild. If you do not, your forecasting will be purely speculative. Even if you are missing just one or two links in the chain of events, you may err badly"⁶² As many archivists profess, 'the past is prologue.' However, do archivists know their past? Do they know the great-grandfather of today's users? I think not. According to Luciana Duranti, archives in ancient Greece were "arsenals of law, of civil rights, in a word...of democracy."⁶³ These archives preserved the records of both public officials and

⁶¹ Bertrand de Jouvenel, *The Art of Conjecture*, Nikita Lary, trans. (New York: Basic Books, 1967), 19; quoted in W. Warren Wagner, *The Next Three Futures: Paradigms of Things to Come* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 11.

⁶² W. Warren Wagner, *The Next Three Futures: Paradigms of Things to Come* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 12.

⁶³ Luciana Duranti, "The Odyssey of Records Managers," in *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance*, Tom Nesmith, ed. (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1993), 35.

private citizens but "all records were kept because nobody could take the responsibility of deciding whether the creator of each single record did not need it anymore."⁶⁴ This fact would indicate that the needs of users were considered important, but unknown. This situation bears certain similarities to the present predicament.

Users of Archives

Archivists have recently begun to acknowledge that they do not know enough about their users. Cox has stated that "archivists realize that they must know who their researchers are and how to evaluate the reference function; they must understand researcher's information-seeking behavior and be able to apply this knowledge to the management of their repositories."⁶⁵ The few studies that have been conducted have mainly concentrated on the users' interaction with the archivist or the archival retrieval system. Few studies have investigated why users consult records or the value of those records to users. Furthermore, the studies have concentrated on current services or records seen through the eyes of the archivist rather than an holistic approach concerned with the needs of all potential users.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁶⁵ Richard Cox, "Researching Archival Reference as an Information Function: Observations on Needs and Opportunities," *RQ* 31 (Spring 1992): 387.

In the 1970s, Wilson and Streatfield⁶⁶ conducted a study into the information needs of a local authority social services department. They examined the documents used by the staff and noted their frequency of use. Grover and Glazier investigated the information gathering and dissemination practices of city managers and their staff.⁶⁷ These studies and other like them provide valuable insights into the information needs of the creators of records, independent of any specific system. How many archivists have conducted similar studies into the needs of their primary or secondary users? How many archivists have even consulted the studies undertaken in other fields?

If use is to be an important component of appraisal theory, and I would argue that it must, archivists must gain an understanding of the reasons why people refer to archival material. Over the last twenty years, the library and information science professions have begun to question the types of user studies that they have conducted. Some have argued that answers to new questions need to be sought.

Information needs result from 'problems arising from specific situations.' A situation is a way to look at a variety of environmental variables. This holistic

⁶⁶ T.D. Wilson and D.R. Streatfield, "Information Needs in Local Authority Social Services Department: an Interim Report on Project INISS," *Journal of Documentation* 33 (1977): 277-293.

⁶⁷ Robert Grover and Jack D. Glazier, "Structured Participant Observation," in *Qualitative Research in Information Management*, Jack D. Glazier and Ronald R. Powell, eds. (Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1992), 105-121.

approach to information needs provides a logical context for understanding information seeking behavior, and it demands that information specialists learn to respond not only to the single question with which information systems now deal —What do you want to know? — but with companion questions — How and why is the information needed? How is it likely to help? What does the user know already? What is expected? What are the parameters of the problem?⁶⁸

Do archivists even know what their users want? Do archivists know why people visit their archives? Do they know how the information or evidence that users seek will help them? Do they want to know the parameters of the problems? I would say no. To date only one study, never replicated, has examined the type of questions asked. If we do not know what evidence is sought and why it is needed, we can never hope to fulfill the needs of our users. Perhaps people do not need evidence of transactions. Perhaps they only need information which may be readily available in more appropriate sources.⁶⁹ On the other hand, what needs are archivists not able to fill? What evidence have they failed to preserve? Studies that explore

⁶⁸ Joan C. Durrance, "Information Needs: Old Song, New Tune," in *Rethinking the library in the Information Age—Issues in Library Research: Proposals for the 1990s* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, 1989), 163.

⁶⁹ David Bearman recently posed this question in a conversation with the author.

the evidence that archives have failed to retain and the consequences of those decisions may provide much valuable information.

Current use may not be an accurate indicator of what will be required in the future. But by examining the reasons behind the need for archival records, by studying present, past, and future use by both primary and secondary users, trends and patterns of use or a genealogy of use will emerge over time. The information that archivists must gather will not be collected overnight. The profession must become committed to a research agenda that attempts to understand users, and their need for archival records. As Paul Conway has suggested

All archivists who have responsibility for public service should continually gather and make use of basic descriptive information about users — the who, what, when, where and why questions. Questions that concern process — the 'how question' are more complex, and at the same more generalizable.⁷⁰

This research, however, must consider all uses, and all users who turn to archives for an understanding of some previous transaction.

⁷⁰ Paul Conway, "Partners in Research: Improving Access to the Nation's Archives," *Archives and Museum Information Technical Report 8* (Spring 1994), 29.

Conclusion

Archivists need to acquire a greater knowledge in all the facets or clusters of appraisal. They need to research record-keeping systems to better understand the systems that have controlled records of archival value. They need to identify the functional requirements of the system that will ensure the integrity and completeness of the records in their care. They need to identify not only the major functions that an organization was involved in but also the transactions that they carried out to support these functions.

They require a far greater understanding of the records themselves and which records contain the best evidence of particular transactions. They need to gain the subject expertise that Craig says "is their special area of expertise." They also need to understand the legal and administrative constraints of their parent organization. They need to determine which actions hold an organization to account and for which actions do citizens require an accounting.

When archivists appraise records they should ask and be able to answer the following questions:

- 1) What evidence of what transactions should be preserved to meet the legal and administrative requirements of the record creator? What records contain the best evidence of those transactions? Where are they located?
- 2) What other needs for evidence do the primary users have?
- 3) What evidence of what transactions, are required to provide an accounting of the creators actions? What

records contain the best evidence of actions that require an accounting?

- 4) What evidence of what actions do other (and I would group all other uses together) users need and which may they need in the future?

Through research, archivists will be able to reveal the patterns and trends in an organization's structures, their functions, and their transactions. Research will reveal the changing patterns of record-keeping systems and the records they contain. Finally, research will help identify possible uses and needs that these records may fulfill. Only when patterns and trends surface will archivists steady the weathervane and enable it to guide their decisions and point to records with continuing archival value.

Wendy Duff is a Ph.D. student in Library Science at the University of Pittsburgh School of Library and Information Science. She has worked on both Canadian and international descriptive standards, and she has published articles in *Archivaria* and the *American Archivist*.

