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Processing Reading Response

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Even in the days of Sir Hilary Jenkinson and T.R. Schellenberg, there was an overabundance of materials being accessioned into archives that need to be processed. Neither archivist set the standard on quick processing that eliminates excess from the start or how to remove the bulk in the present. Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner seek to rectify the problem of unprocessed archival backlogs in their paper, "More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing." Their solution is both complimentary and contrary to the writings of their peers. The best way to compare Greene and Meissner's method to others is by understanding what needs to be done now to deal with backlogged archives and then set up a system that anticipates user needs at the beginning of a record's creation.

Greene and Meissner's system offers four essential steps to quickly process backlog that should also be applied for future accessions. First, you must change your priorities to expedient getting your materials in the hands of your users. Second, you must stop arranging materials at the item-level and instead aim for what is adequate to the needs of your users (usually series-level depth only). Next, you only need to take minimal precautions to preserve your collection (since the physical environmental is probably well-regulated). Finally, materials only need to be subscribed to a point that is sufficient for usage (Greene and Meissner 2005).

Greene and Meissner differ from their contemporaries' responses on how to process records is that they embrace a Jenkinson model that does not look at individual items. Greene and Meissner are more interested in getting collections quickly processed in bulk to remove the backlogs. Their system is therefore the first step in processing archives since they found that 60% of archives have one-third of their collection as unprocessed backlog and 34% of archives

studied have over 50% of their collection unprocessed (Greene and Meissner 2005). After getting the backlog taken care of, the next three systems can be established which differ from Greene and Meissner in that they look at collections at the item-level of processing.

Once the backlog has been removed, Bruce W. Dearstyne's methods can be implemented. Like all of these four philosophies, Dearstyne points out that archives are for the use of researchers. However, in order to understand what researchers' needs are, archivists have to study record usage and ask users what information should be preserved (Dearstyne 1987). Without this knowledge, archives will be unable to tell what information is valuable. Greene and Meissner call this system that measures processing productivity, "metrics."

After finding out what information researchers find useful, F. Gerald Ham's theory suggests controlling how records are organized from creation. This system would provide a way for the creators to know what records are archival-quality which would remove much of the useless materials that is brought to modern archives (Ham 1984).

Finally, once the backlog had been processed, user needs are understood and accession policies shaped to find and preserve useful records, then can an archive concern itself with weeding. Leonard Rapport writes that records should be gone through to remove what would never be accessioned with today's standards. He suggests doing this every 20-30 years (Rapport 1981). Over time, the abundance of kept records would be reduced while correcting the disadvantage of Greene and Meissner who said to not weed when you are backlogged.

Therefore, there is no true rivalry between these four methods of processing collections. Each deals with a well-established scope of limitations to what their system applies to. These methods together create a way to deal with the current crisis and then dealing with future accessions.

Bibliography

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