

# Records Management in the Administration of College and University Archives

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**W**HAT role should records management play in the administration of college and university archives? To answer this question we must first understand just what this activity is and its relation to archives administration. It evolved during the years of the Great Depression and the Second World War as a product of the effort to control the rapidly accelerating accumulation of papers in the Federal Government agencies.

The first phase in the evolution of records management took place at the National Archives as an outgrowth of the effort to improve the quality of accessioned records. As the Archives began to take in the noncurrent records of Government agencies, it had the unhappy experience of inheriting the results of poor filing practices of the offices of origin. In all too many cases these noncurrent records consisted of poorly arranged papers infiltrated with many extra copies, printed and processed nonrecord material, and record material of ephemeral value. The process of weeding out the disposable material and rearranging the records of enduring value at the National Archives was time consuming. The remedy lay in the archivist's extending his concern to the offices of origin and, in collaboration with them, improving the management of their records.

To bring this about the National Archives inaugurated its "Records Administration Program," relying on the legal sanction of powers granted to the Archivist of the United States in the National Archives Act of 1934. The strongest impact of the program was felt in the defense agencies, to which archivists from the National Archives were transferred to administer the program.

The Records Administration Program of the National Archives remained in effect for some 9 years, during which many of the current records in the agencies of origin were surveyed, appraised, and evaluated, and the results were recorded in a document that, after a period of experimentation, of trial and error, finally came to be known as a "schedule for the retention and disposal of records." The development of a schedule for an agency was a major accomplishment in that it was

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a helpful tool to govern the timely disposal of useless material and the systematic transfer of the noncurrent records of enduring value to the National Archives. Thus the aim of the archivist to improve the quality of accessioned records was accomplished in the program.

With the advent of the Task Force on Records Management of the Hoover Commission, the Task Force on Paperwork Management of the Second Hoover Commission, and the ensuing legislation, the groundwork was laid for the development of the second phase in the evolution of the records management function. In this phase the program moved into the area of general management, focusing on the communication process during which record documents come into existence. Here was a fruitful field for achieving economy and efficiency with an emphasis on such types of documents as correspondence, forms, reports, and directives.

With the inauguration of this phase of the program, its name was changed from "Records Administration" to "Records Management," and the major purpose of the program shifted from a concern for improvement of the accessioned records in the National Archives to an emphasis on management and its effectiveness in achieving economy and efficiency in the documentation process in the agencies. At the same time a separate Records Management Division was established at the National Archives whose personnel was recruited from the field of management rather than from the archives field. Currently the functions of records management as carried on by the National Archives and Records Service include those developed in both phases of the program briefly described here. In addition the service is now delving into the problem of automation for information retrieval.

Both records management and archives administration deal with the same kind of material, written communications. Unlike other kinds of property, written material has both tangible and intangible characteristics. In records management attention is focused on the tangible and material aspects, while in archives administration it is centered on the intangible informational content of the documents.

In the area of college and university archives, the pioneer in developing the service of records management seems to have been the North Carolina Department of Archives and History. At the request of the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina, a State-sponsored institution, the department undertook to survey, appraise, and schedule the college records with the full cooperation and assistance of the officers and staff of the college. The excellent schedule that resulted from this cooperative enterprise is published by the Woman's College. As it was reviewed in the *American Archivist* for April 1963, I shall not describe it here except to say that it is an excellent tool for accomplishing the timely disposal of useless papers and the systematic transfer of noncurrent records of enduring value to the college archives.

After similar surveys had been made in other colleges within its jurisdiction, the department issued a *College and University Records Retention and Disposal Schedule* for the State-supported colleges and universities of North Carolina, containing a list of the records common to most colleges and universities, about 75 percent of their records.

Now to answer the question: "What role should records management play in the administration of college and university archives?" My own view is that it is a proper archival function for the archivist to assume the functions of records management developed as the first phase of its evolution, during which the focus of attention must be on the intangible informational content of the documents, and that he should leave to the general management area of the institution the functions developed during the second phase. This should not preclude the archivist from acting in an advisory capacity on the improvement in the institution's documentation when the need is apparent. In the case of the questionnaire, so often used by colleges and universities in gathering information, it is comforting to know that the American Council on Education has conducted research on the form and use of the questionnaire and would be happy to share this knowledge with any institution in need of such advice.