The Role of Use in Defining Archival Practice and Principles: A Research Agenda for the Availability and Use of Records

LAWRENCE DOWLER

Abstract: This article contends that use, rather than the form of material, is the basis on which archival practice and theory ought to be constructed. For this reason, the study of the uses and users of archives must be the goal of a research agenda for the profession, and the social sciences and information theory may provide the models archivists need to conduct such research. The aim of archival research should be to study systematically the relationship between the use of information and the ways in which it is or can be provided; it is from this relationship that the value of records and the information they contain will be determined and archival practices defined. Highest priority must be given to a national study of use in order to establish a baseline of information against which to measure and compare access and retrieval, reference service, acquisitions, management, appraisal guidelines, and documentation strategies.

About the author: Lawrence Dowler is Librarian of the Houghton Library, the principal rare book and manuscript repository in the Harvard College Library, as well as Special Assistant to the Director of the Harvard University Library for Special Collections. This article was written as a product of the author's participation in the 1987 Research Fellowship Program for Study of Modern Archives administered by the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, and funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Research Division of the National Endowment for the Humanities, a federal agency.

RESEARCH ON THE AVAILABILITY and use of records should be a primary goal of the archival profession. My work in libraries during the past few years has confirmed for me the value of a distinctively archival approach to original records and the information they contain, which may have a number of lessons for librarians.[1] Archival principles will continue to be vital even as archivists converge—as I believe we are—toward librarians and other information specialists. There is, however, a real danger that the archival profession will become divided, with those who believe that archivists can only explain and analyze archives in terms of the physical record on one side, and those who are inclined to see archival records only as sources of information to be defined and manipulated entirely as a part of a knowledge-based system on the other. My aim is to present a third option, a research agenda in which both the actions archivists perform on records and the principles justifying these actions derive from explanations relating to the specific purposes and uses of archival records. Portraying use as a kind of solvent for dissolving the perceived differences between two points of view may or may not work, but the study of use does provide the purpose and intellectual framework necessary for meaningful inquiry and is essential to a research agenda for the profession.

Archivists need a better understanding of who uses archives and for what purposes, and of which theories and techniques are most suited to facilitating use and satisfying most users over time. First, if archivists ever expect to do serious research and, ultimately, develop a meaningful conception of the archival profession, we must stop pretending to be misplaced historians and

begin introducing scientific methods and models. Second, if archivists wish to understand the *how* of archival practices and the *why* of principles or theory, we must shift our attention from the physical record to the uses of records. Third, although many aspects of archival work need research, the first priority is a national study of the use and users of archives; without this data archivists lack a baseline of information against which to measure and compare access and retrieval, reference services, acquisitions, management, even appraisal guidelines and documentation strategies. Fourth, several implicit assumptions in a research agenda need to be made explicit, including the notion of a community of users, the meaning of outreach, the concept of mediation, and the idea of archives as information. The legal and political aspects of the availability and use of records, although it is certainly an area in which research is needed, is not discussed in this article.

The Need for a Research Agenda

All uses of archives, even research uses, are not the same, and archival policies and procedures ideally should recognize these differences. In an article on deaccessioning and the sale of copyright in archives, I suggested that archivists should determine access and publication policies according to the purpose of the intended research use. There are a variety of uses for research materials, some of which are for commercial gain; archivists should profit, or at least not be excluded from profiting, when collections are used for frankly commercial purposes.[2] Actually, this is not unlike Schellenberg's contention that different types of finding aids are needed by different

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[1] In particular, collection records, which are in a standard format for exchange purposes, derived from nonstandard local records, such as inventories, catalogs, lists, and other finding aids, may provide more cost-effective access and, quite possibly, better access to some kinds of library materials than item-level bibliographic control.

[2] Lawrence Dowler, "Deaccessioning Collections: A New Perspective on a Continuing Controversy," in *Archival Choices: Managing the Historical Record in an Age of Abundance*, ed. Nancy E. Peace (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1984), 130–31.

classes of researchers.[3] In each case, the objective is to make archival practice more responsive to the particular uses of material.

The problem, of course, is that archivists have so little information about the uses of archives and even less about their users. What do users use, how do they use it, what do they do with what they use, and how do they find their way to the archives in the first place? Who, in fact, are archival users? Archivists simply do not know the answers to these questions.

Most archivists persist in thinking of the scholar as the primary user of archives,[4] but in reality the scholarly use of archives is much less than archivists commonly believe. Roy Turnbaugh has concluded that despite heroic efforts to attract scholars to the Illinois State Archives, genealogists would probably always be its largest user group. In a study of the value of finding aids in the William and Mary Archives, James Oberly was surprised to discover that the foremost user of the collections was the archives staff itself.[5] Clearly, the lesson archivists have learned from these studies is that scholarly use is not the only use of archives; indeed, frequently it is not even the primary use. Administrators, genealogists, lawyers, amateur historians, librarians, and, of course, archivists are among the users of archives, in addition to a variety of academic researchers.

If archivists are reluctant to acknowledge that scholars are not the primary users of archives, they may find it even more difficult to accept William Maher's tentative conclusion that better finding aids do not result in better access.[6] Paul Conway's survey of four presidential libraries reaffirmed a common perception that an informational "grapevine"—rather than published sources—was the primary method by which scholars found out about collections. His study also showed the need for a more flexible reference response to the various kinds of users, and demonstrated a compelling need for further research into a variety of issues affecting the uses of archives.[7]

In fact, if archivists really believe, as stated in *Planning for the Archival Profession,* that use is the ultimate purpose and test of an archival program,[8] then they must be prepared to undertake research on all of their theories and principles, as well as the methods by which archival administration and management can be practiced. As Elsie Freeman has said, "We must begin to learn systematically, not impressionistically as is our present tendency, who our users are; what kinds of projects they pursue, in what

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[3]T. R. Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 113.

[4]The tendency to think of the scholar as the primary user of archives is understandable given the very large role of historians in founding the archival profession and the continuing influence of historical training in educating so many archivists (see Jacqueline Goggin's "That We Shall Truly Deserve the Title of 'Profession': The Training and Education of Archivists, 1930–1960," *American Archivist* 47 [Summer 1984]: 243–54). A useful analysis of this misassumption is Elsie T. Freeman's article, "In the Eye of the Beholder: Archives Adminstration from the User's Point of View," *American Archivist* 47 (1984): 113–16.

[5]Roy C. Turnbaugh, "Archival Mission and User Studies," *Midwestern Archivist* 11, no. 1 (1986): 30–31; James Oberly, "The Value of Finding Aids in the Archives: A Quantitative Analysis" (Paper delivered at the MidAtlantic Regional Archives Conference Meeting, Spring 1983), 1–2; Jacqueline Goggin, "The Indirect Approach: A Study of Scholarly Users of Black Women's Organizational Records in the Library of Congress Manuscript Division," *Midwestern Archivist* 11, no. 1 (1986): 61.

[6]William J. Maher, "The Use of User Studies," *Midwestern Archivist* 11, no. 1 (1986): 24. Oberly's study of the William and Mary Archives, however, drew the opposite conclusion and indicated that "modest, but solid gains can be made in redesigning finding aids to fit more closely the type of question asked." Oberly, "Value of Finding Aids," 9.

[7]Paul Conway, "Research in Presidential Libraries: A User Survey," *Midwestern Archivist* 11, no. 1 (1986): 46; Margaret F. Stieg, "The Information of [sic] Needs of Historians," *College and Research Libraries* 42 (November 1981): 553–54, 556–57; Conway, "Presidential Libraries," 48–49, 52–54.

[8]*Planning for the Archival Profession: A Report of the SAA Task Force on Goals and Priorities* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1986), 22.

time frames, and under what sponsorship; and, most importantly, how they approach records. Put another way, we must begin to think of archives administration as client-centered, not materials-centered."[9]

Despite the growing interest in the study of the use of archives, there is still skepticism about the value of such studies. Apart from providing statistics on reference and use for annual reports, are such studies worth the effort? What is the point of a use study? For one thing, better information about the use of collections will help archivists set priorities for processing and acquisitions. On the basis of user information, archivists might, like the Illinois State Archives, reexamine repository goals and objectives. Because of the constantly changing nature of inquiry, archivists need information about the effectiveness of various finding aids in satisfying specific types of use. Moreover, the study of use over time will provide a periodic check, a kind of reality test, for evaluating the criteria for appraisal and the effectiveness of documentation strategies.

The most important reason for studying use, however, is that research on use can provide a better conceptual basis for archival practices and principles. By research agenda, I do not have in mind the adoption of universal laws, from which archivists might deduce a set of operating principles nor the development of principles based either on empirical tests or the practical operating rules derived from experience. Rather, I believe archivists must borrow from the social sciences and from infor-

mation theory in order to identify conceptual frameworks and methods with which to conduct research on the various aspects of archival practice.[10] From this research, archivists will gradually cumulate the theories or principles which give meaning to the idea of a distinct archival profession. In the end, we may discover that what is distinctive about archival practice does not really constitute a separate and unique profession, but rather is one part of a broader profession concerned with the uses of information in the records and artifacts of society. In order to do genuine research, however, archivists must shift attention away from traditional concerns with the historically mandated conception of archives, and understand that the use of records not only provides the ultimate purpose of archives but also the basis for a research agenda.

For this reason, archivists must redirect their attention from the records or form of material to the uses of information, including *potential* uses. We need to put aside sentiment and tradition and, drawing upon the social sciences, begin to analyze and evaluate archival work. From this perspective, claims to know cannot be judged against universal principles; the value of knowledge depends on the purposes and uses it will serve.[11] In short, what is needed is a clearer definition of the goals and methods of inquiry, and an understanding of the kinds of information sources and methods of access needed to achieve those goals. Out of this process, archivists may begin to construct principles that can be tested

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[9]Freeman, "Eye of the Beholder," 112.

[10]A good general introduction to this topic is Eugene J. Meehan's *Explanation in Social Science: A System Paradigm* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1968). See also David H. Fischer, *Historian's Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); Arthur C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1965); and Abraham Kaplan, *The Conduct of Inquiry: Methodology for Behavioral Science* (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing, 1964).

[11]For those who seek philosophical justifications for their theories and practices, instrumentalism may provide a useful perspective for explicating a scientific model for archivists. Instrumentalism is the belief that knowledge is only a tool or instrument and can, therefore, only be evaluated in terms of its human uses and can be judged against neither absolute truth nor universal laws. The quality of knowledge depends on the purposes or ends that it will serve. Human experience, and perhaps the information and artifacts which document that experience, are not determined by general explanations and can only be examined in terms of specific events or as they relate to specific purposes.

and verified, and to define the archival profession as something more than custodial or ancillary to the study of history and the humanities.

Clearly, while a variety of use studies need to be conducted at the repository level, this data would be infinitely more valuable if archivists adopted common standards for collecting this information, in order to compare use data from various repositories. Most of all, national surveys are needed in order to develop a baseline, a benchmark, against which information gathered regionally or by individual repositories can be compared. Without much better information than is currently available, a research agenda for archives is only a pipe dream.

Collection Use as the Basis for Archival Practice: Some Underlying Assumptions

The several assumptions implicit in the proposal to make collection use the basis for defining archival practices and principles and the essential ingredient in a research agenda adopted by the profession fall into four areas: (1) community of users, (2) outreach, (3) mediation, and (4) archives as information.

Community of Users. If archivists accept the idea that the use of records or, in pragmatic terms, the purpose of the use and the questions being asked, is a principal determinant of the value of records, then it follows that all *potential* use, as well as actual use, is important to the conception and study of the uses of archives. In other words, the definition of use should not be limited to actual use, and the definition of users must include future users and all those

who could use, might use, perhaps even should use, the information in archives.[12] By limiting studies to actual use, archivists can never be certain that the response measured—especially regarding search strategies and points of access to records—is not predicated on, and therefore biased by, past experience and expectations.[13] To counter this limitation, archivists need to focus broadly on user questions, on the nature of inquiry itself, as well as on actual use. In short, not only must archivists broaden their definition of users and the uses of archives beyond scholarly use, they must also envision a community of users embracing future, past, potential, and actual users.

One aim of a use study is to identify the attributes of various groups or categories of users based on the nature and methods of their inquiry. From this information, archivists may begin to gauge the possible impact of use on archives and, even more, the availability of material that could satisfy a particular user group. For example, the methodological split between political scientists and economists has left to economists most concepts related to the distribution and allocation of resources in society. Based on current and past use of archives, one would not, therefore, expect political scientists to use such information in archives. But there is always the possibility that information on the distribution and allocation of resources may one day be viewed as a function of government, rather than as data for an economist's model, and archivists should be alert to this potential group of users. One only has to think of the recent explosion of women's studies and social history to understand how the changing nature of inquiry can affect various aspects

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[12]The notion of a community of users is a conscious adaptation taken from pragmatism and is meant to suggest the possible use of scientific models. In a more down-to-earth way, I am proposing the possibility for discovering a procedure or technique for monitoring and evaluating over time a three-way discussion among users, as seen through the questions they ask; the materials, reflected in appraisal studies and by the way they actually get used; and the archivist/mediator, whose practices and various methods of providing access to materials and information affect use. If archivists can find a way to evaluate effectively this process or discussion, then we will be able to implement those methods that more nearly satisfy the objective to improve the use of records.

[13]Richard Lytle, "Intellectual Access to Archives: [Part] I, Provenance and Content Indexing Methods of Subject Retrieval," *American Archivist* 43 (Winter 1980): 69.

of archival practice, and why it is important to extend the study beyond those who currently use records.[14] From this perspective, the questions users ask, the methods used, and even potential use, are as important as knowing what actually gets used.

On the other hand, archivists also need to study systematically the actual use of archives, in part to measure and evaluate the limits and successes of archival programs and to correlate archival perceptions of who ought to be users with who they actually are. There are three general areas which need to be examined:

(1) What are the principal characteristics of inquiry? Archivists devote an enormous amount of time and energy to processing collections and trying to improve access, but scarcely any time at all to evaluating the effectiveness of these efforts. This is an obvious area for research. Perhaps the place to begin is with an examination of the nature of inquiry itself. Can users be grouped or characterized on the basis of the type of questions they ask? Is their approach essentially narrative, problem-solving, bibliographical, anthropological, textual, or structural? And if a method can be so characterized, what difference does it make in terms of use? Can users and/or use be categorized according to methodology or the way in which records are used? For example, observations indicate that historians frequently go through three stages during the course of archival research. In the first stage they generally examine large quantities of material, looking for leads that will help define the general direction of their study. During the second stage, when the topic has been defined, research tends to be more intensive and focused on a definable group of records. In the third stage, which begins after writing has begun, the

researcher seeks to verify a specific point, and use of materials tends to be quite specific. Is such an exploratory or associative pattern of use characteristic of all scholarly users, or is the use process determined by academic discipline or methodology? Perhaps the research approach is simply a matter of intellectual temperament and is, therefore, characteristic of all research conducted by a particular user, regardless of discipline. In any case, each type of use has obvious implications for archival descriptive practice and reference and brings different expectations of and demands on archival retrieval methods and a reference staff.

(2) What information in archives gets used, and how can the quantity of materials used and the intensity of use (the length of time a given quantity of material is used) be more accurately measured? Every repository has its own method for measuring use; common standards for collecting this information are needed in order to have a meaningful comparison of data among repositories. In addition, while many repositories currently collect some user information as part of their registration process, few make any effort to analyze this data, except perhaps for annual reports. In order to develop a method or instrument for analyzing archival practices, especially collecting policies and descriptive practices, archivists need to develop common data elements and definitions of use and software that enable the collection of use and user information. A center to help gather and analyze data each year is also needed.

(3) Who are the users of archives, and are there significant differences in use for different kinds of repositories? Past surveys seem to suggest that scholarly use is low.[15]

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[14]For an excellent and challenging discussion of the development of social history and its relationship to archival principles and practices, see Fredric Miller's "Social History and Archival Practice," *American Archivist* 44 (Spring 1981): 113–24. For a discussion of some of the problems arising from social history, see Dale C. Mayer, "The New Social History: Implications for Archivists," *American Archivist* 48 (Fall 1985): 388–99.

[15]Goggin, "Study of Scholarly Users," 61; Freeman, "Eye of the Beholder," 114–17.

For many archivists this is discouraging news which they may be happy not to have confirmed in great detail. Still, there is much that is unknown. For example, what are the occupations of users? In some repositories there appears to be significant use by people doing research for others, users who, for example, are employed by law firms, book dealers, authors, scholars, newspapers, insurance companies, and local and state government agencies.[16] More precise data on this aspect of use would be helpful. It would also be beneficial to compare information about methods of use, materials used, and quantity and intensity of use for each category of user. This data might then be used to evaluate descriptive practices and reference service.

Outreach. The Committee on Goals and Priorities's report states not only that "the use of archival records is the ultimate purpose" of the identification and administration of records of enduring value (goals I and II), but that "promoting use of these materials is a fundamental goal of the archival community."[17] Thus, according to CGAP and most other commentators, the justification for outreach is the very practical need for archivists to gain support for archival programs.[18] One can scarcely quarrel with this reasoning, although one may wish for an appeal based on something more than expediency.

The notion of a community of users provides a different basis for justifying outreach. The idea of potential use and users logically requires archivists to determine who they might be—in effect, to take an active role in promoting the use of archives. The logic of this position brings to the fore the fact that most archivists—whatever they may say—are quite passive about the use of materials. Archivists prepare guides and catalogs and contribute records to national data bases, all of which may be regarded as a form of outreach; but for the most part archivists do very little to identify possible users or to encourage use by those who might benefit from such use.

Short of going out into the street and dragging unsuspecting strangers into the archives, what can archivists do? Archivists should take a more active part in promoting use by bringing users and resources together. For example, collections on medical care and health policy, which are essential to historians of medicine, might also be important to researchers interested in social policy administration, such as congressional committee aides concerned with medical care and health policies. An archivist determined to promote the use of collections should think about who could benefit from the use of the records and for what possible purposes, and then try to inform them about the records.

In addition to promoting use by publicizing holdings and identifying and informing potential users, archivists also need to study the perceptions and attitudes of archival staff and the impact of these beliefs on use. Almost all libraries and archives deflect potential users because of their institutional persona. Users' perceptions about the value of the repository for their intended use seem to influence the use of archives. What appears to matter the most to users—or at least what tends to govern a researcher's perceptions of a repository—are those intangible impressions about the architecture, staff attitudes, and, overwhelmingly, their understanding of the primary mission of the repository. For example, few researchers might think to look at the Schlesinger Library, known for its collections on women, for materials related to

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[16]Pugh, "The Illusion of Omniscience: Subject Access and the Reference Archivist," *American Archivist* 45 (Winter 1982): 39–40.

[17]*Planning for the Archival Profession*, 22.

[18]Maher, "The Use of User Studies," 16.

World War I. No doubt there are many similar examples. The question is, how can archives change these perceptions and reach the potential users of their collections?

As a start, archivists can conduct surveys to identify and describe both user and staff perceptions of the repository. How does the archives's stated mission compare with the perception of that mission by both staff and users? How does collecting policy affect use? That is, assuming there is information in records for a variety of possible uses regardless of the particular emphasis of the collections acquired, how do the stated and perceived acquisitions policies actually affect use? Does the announced acquisitions policy or perceived mission of the repository color staff perceptions and attitudes in a way that tends to discourage use by some users? Archivists need to know a great deal more about how archival repositories and their staff define and think of themselves, and about the impact of these attitudes on archival practices and, therefore, on use.

Archivists also need to appraise records in order to identify questions that could be asked of these materials and to determine which users are most likely to ask these questions. Such analysis not only builds on the broader definition of use described above, it also carries the idea of outreach beyond the notion of promoting the use of materials to something close to Schellenberg's contention that archivists should be subject specialists.[19] Although Schellenberg had in mind the personal interaction of the archivist with a researcher, those archivists who advocate appraisal, documen-

tation strategies, and other analytical methods are attempting systematically to analyze records and incorporate this information into finding aids and catalogs from the perspective of its potential, not just actual, use.[20] Such a distinction may be seen in Patricia Grimsted's guides to archives and manuscripts in the USSR, in which the entries describe collections and explain who might benefit from the use of the particular materials.[21] More guides of this kind are needed; even more, archivists need to achieve a better understanding of what kinds of guides are most useful for different categories of users.

The meaning of and methods for practicing outreach is also a fruitful area for research. What, after all, are the best ways to promote use? Nearly every study shows that the most common path to archives by scholars are footnotes and the scholarly "grapevine."[22] What are the implications of this fact for developing methods for promoting use? Do archivists need to plug into the "grapevine," publish scholarly articles with lots of footnotes, or perhaps initiate programs to educate student and scholarly users on how to do research? How effective are repository guides, subject guides, and other methods of providing access to materials, and what role, if any, can they play in a strategy to promote use? These are just a few of the topics involving outreach on which research is needed.

Mediation. The concept of mediation is one of the operating principles that informs archival practice, in particular reference, and distinguishes archives from libraries. Tra-

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[19]T. R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 126–27.

[20]The current MIT appraisal project, in particular, aims to go beyond an assessment of types of records by looking at the "overall purposes and activities of the institution." In addition, the project will examine the records that exist and will concentrate on "the documentation that *should* exist." Helen Samuels, Bridget Blagbrough, and Beth Pessek, "Appraising Records of Higher Education: A Report on the MIT Project" (unpublished draft, May 1987).

[21]Patricia Grimsted, *Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the USSR, Moscow and Leningrad* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972) and *Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the USSR, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Belorussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

[22]Conway, "Research in Presidential Libraries," 46; Maher, "The Use of User Studies," 23; Michael E. Stevens, "The Historian and Archival Finding Aids," *Georgia Archives* 5 (Winter 1977): 64–74.

ditionally, libraries have been guided by the vision of the self-sufficient researcher empowered to find sources through bibliographic tools. Mediation, or the intervention of the archivist between user and materials, on the other hand, is one of those unexamined archival practices, that, properly defined, is worthy of further consideration, especially as a way of relating reference and cataloging functions.

Archivists adhere to what may seem like an essentially curatorial conception of the archivist's vocation because of the size and complexity of records and the inadequacy of finding aids, especially for unprocessed materials. In addition, archival records are inherently organic and activity based, related to other records in ways not always familiar to users who may be more accustomed to the bibliographic methods of libraries. Thus, the intervention of the archivist in the search is much more important. More importantly, however, the dynamic nature of inquiry itself makes access without archival intervention far more complicated than, say, finding a particular book. Moreover, it seems that recent developments in automation will accentuate the need for such intervention and, in fact, may make mediation a useful tool for libraries as well.[23]

To archivists, mediation has generally meant the satisfying vision of the erudite archivist leading a grateful scholar by the hand through the uncharted forest of records to precisely the right material. One is reluctant to totally dismiss this kind of gratification, for either the archivist or the scholar. Yet, as Mary Jo Pugh has cautioned, archivists must question the "myth of the immortal, omniscient, indispensable reference archivist." Records are too large and staff too small for archivists to depend on personal intervention or mediation as the primary means of access to a repository's

records.[24] Archivists must find a way to capture systematically the knowledge of the reference archivist and enter this information into finding aids and knowledge-based systems for providing access to records.

One of the most compelling arguments for automation would seem to be the hope that it might bring together the reference staff and processors. A machine-readable catalog would enable the reference archivist to revise descriptive records, adding information gained from interaction with researchers, reflecting new questions users ask of collections originally arranged and described from a different perspective. Thus, automation could facilitate and provide the means for capturing the information in the head of the reference archivist.

Apparently, this has not happened. Reference and processing are still perceived as different activities, with reference occurring last. Archivists still seem to view the computer as an expensive typewriter, and our imagination seems forever restricted to three-by-five cards, albeit in a machine-readable form. What if, instead of conducting the fabled exit interview, archivists used an interactive program mounted on a personal computer in which they both registered users and queried them at the end of their work, eliciting comments on what they found—or did not find—that was useful or surprising in the collections used? Such information, with comments by the reference archivist, could be made available to other researchers, and also provide the basis for periodic revision of collection descriptions and catalogs. Provenance and historical information, which is currently scattered throughout various guides and finding aids, could also be entered into the same system. This would help provide the means for bridging the gap between reference and processing, and would change the way archivists look at information. This

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[23]In a recent survey at the University of Maryland, Fred Stielow found a changing perception of the reference function in libraries. Author's conversation at the Bentley Library, University of Michigan, July 1987.

[24]Pugh, "Illusion of Omniscience," 38–39.

topic, involving both theory and applications, is waiting to be researched.

There are also a number of questions and issues involving access and reference which could benefit from careful research. Richard Lytle's suggestive study of provenance and content indexing clearly demonstrates the need for additional studies of this topic.[25] In fact, despite adherence to the principle of provenance, archivists have done very little to incorporate provenance information—and all of the ways in which persons, ideas, activities, corporate bodies, and the like can be associated with provenance—into access and retrieval systems.[26]

Archivists seem to be uncertain about the value and effectiveness of subject indexing; that is, they tend to think it is important, but have very little information about either how it is currently used or how it might be used.[27] Moreover, there is no information on the value of other access points, such as form of material, function, occupation, or subject category. In fact, archivists do not even know with any certainty whether or under what circumstances these various kinds of access points are more effective than known item searches in an archival environment.[28]

The adoption by archivists of a bibliographic exchange format, USMARC, has been a positive step toward improved access to archives; but it also has called into question a number of commonly held principles. As Richard Szary has observed, "If one accepts the proposition that traditional archival practice is, or attempts to be, provenance-based rather than bibliographic-based, then the current direction of discussion concerning authorities and standards is redirecting archival thinking about arrangement, description, and retrieval away from its focus on a knowledge of activities of the creating entities as the primary access point, and towards direct indexing of the content of historical materials." The danger, says Szary, is that this development "addresses only one-half of the archival approach to the description and retrieval of information about materials. Exclusive reliance on bibliographic description and associated content indexing will improve access to archival materials, if only because of the limitations of current archival practices and methods that tend to be highly individualized and unstructured."[29] Archivists need to better understand the utilization of provenance information and knowledge about the history, structure, and activities of the persons and organizations that created the materials.

Another aspect of archival work about which little is known is reference. Although archivists have trumpeted the importance of reference service and elevated the idea of mediation, very little has been written about it. With the exception of Pugh's thoughtful article, there is very little in the archival literature about how one goes about being a reference archivist, what the principal problems are, or even what techniques should be employed in reference practice.[30]

Individual archivists could begin keeping records on the number and kinds of reference questions received in their own repositories. How many are by genealo-

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[25]Richard H. Lytle, "Intellectual Access to Archives: [Part] II, Report of an Experiment Comparing Provenance and Content Indexing Methods of Subject Retrieval," *American Archivist* 43 (Spring 1980): 191–206.

[26]Richard Szary, "Authority Control and Provenance-Based Information Systems for Archival Materials" (Paper presented at the annual meeting of Society of American Archivists, Austin, Texas, 1985).

[27]Pugh, "Illusion of Omniscience," 39–42.

[28]Szary, "Authority Control."

[29]Ibid.

[30]In addition to Pugh's "Illusion of Omniscience," see William Saffady, "Reference Service to Researchers in Archives," *RQ* 14, no. 2 (Winter 1974): 139–44; William L. Joyce, "Archivists and Research Use," *American Archivist* 47 (Spring 1984): 124–33; George Chalou, "Reference," in *A Modern Archives Reader*, ed. Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walch (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Trust Fund Board, 1984), 252–63.

gists, administrators, archival staff, various categories of scholars, and others? What are the characteristics common to each category of reference question? Is it possible to analyze reference requests, breaking them down into their component parts and then looking at the specific tasks that must be performed in response to each part and each category of question? Would it be possible to teach archivists how to provide reference service for the various kinds of uses? In addition, archivists may be able to evaluate reference service more effectively and find more efficient ways to respond to certain kinds of requests, thereby permitting the archivist to devote more time to analyzing collections or responding to more difficult questions.

Archivists need to change administrative priorities. They need to look systematically at the operation of archival repositories in order to find a way to give higher priority to the uses of archives. If use is the measure and justification of archives, then reference should be first, not last, in operational priorities. One kind of research, which every repository can and should do, is a systems analysis of the actual tasks performed by each member of the staff. By analyzing the discrete functions of the archives, jobs could be redefined in a way that permits the alignment of practice with principles. There is, of course, a danger in trying to fine-tune an entire organization around the whims of researchers or, for that matter, the whims of the reference archivist; but the goal is to incorporate a needed perspective based on use into the assessment of archival practices.

Archives as Information. Another research project could examine an unconfirmed impression that users care very little about the form of the information they need to use or where they find it. What they want primarily is to find the information that will satisfy their questions, regardless of its form or source. Printed sources are likely to be considered as useful—perhaps even more useful—than archival records.[31] This may—as many archivists suspect—represent the deplorable state of research training in graduate schools, especially in history. Perhaps providing this training is something archivists should claim as part of their responsibility; this is another area of applied research waiting for investigation. Regardless of who teaches research methods, archivists must look realistically at how scholars, among other users, actually use archives and, even more, at what kinds of information they both need and use to answer various categories of questions. If, for example, scholarly users focus on information, regardless of the source, then a reference archivist should identify sources of information that complement those found exclusively in the repository's records. Indeed, the development of the AMC format and other special materials formats, and the participation of many archives in national library networks has made it ever more likely for archivists to encounter and, indeed, to search for related information sources in nonarchival collections. Once this practice has been established, the conscious attempt to link information about archival holdings to related sources cannot be far behind.

The tendency of scholars to focus on information rather than the form or source of material, has been reinforced by the growing similarity between the materials in libraries and archives.[32] While archivists have rarely worried about the existence of printed material in archival collections, librarians have generally defined library materials, with some exceptions, as either published or printed material. But with new forms of reprography, these distinctions are blur-

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[31]Stieg, "Information Needs," 551–55.
[32]Lise Hesselager, "Fringe or Grey Literature in the National Library: On 'Papyrolatry' and the Growing Similarity Between the Materials in Libraries and Archives," *American Archivist* 47 (Summer 1984): 255–70.

ring; both archivists and librarians have begun to observe that library and archival materials increasingly look alike. Records are losing their distinctive character and uniqueness, and are acquiring many of the characteristics of publication. The issues raised by fringe or "grey" literature are of growing concern among librarians, especially in Europe where national libraries serve as institutions of deposit. From the library side, "printed" can no longer be regarded as synonymous with "published." Materials issued by noncommercial bodies may or may not be appropriate for libraries.[33] If librarians and archivists find it increasingly difficult to define the differences in their respective holdings, researchers can scarcely be expected to be fully cognizant of these differences. The most meaningful distinction between library and archives has less to do with physical form than with the purpose of creation. If this is true, what are the implications for the future use of archives and the notion of archives as a distinctive form of documentation?

For the scholarly user, especially one engaged in some aspect of social history, the sources of documentation may reside anywhere and everywhere. Photographs, museum artifacts, published and unpublished materials are grist for the researcher's mill. From this perspective, too, a collection of books may become a "primary source," depending entirely on the question asked of the collection. The researcher interested in social relationships in rural America at the turn of the nineteenth century may find

primary evidence in a collection of books on agriculture, as well as in the records of corporate agencies or personal papers.[34] Ideally, the reference archivist should be able to steer the researcher to those sources that may satisfy a question, regardless of the form of material or its location. This can be done if (1) archivists have a better understanding of the use of documentation, (2) they do not exclude nonarchival sources of information, (3) they systematically build access to records with links to other sources of information, and (4) they understand that the purpose of intended use, not the physical form of information, is the primary archival concern.

Implications and Conclusions

There are significant implications in CGAP's proposal to adopt a research agenda for the profession, in particular, implications for archival education. Because of the small size of the archival profession and the growing importance of technology and the information sciences, the most realistic path for improving archival education lies in incorporating it in a more serious way into library schools.[35] Archivists cannot undertake a serious research agenda when so few have the time and opportunity to undertake research. As suggested throughout, practicing archivists who do research should be encouraged and rewarded; but given the day-to-day demands of the archival job, in-depth research is virtually impossible. Although valuable local studies can be carried out, state, regional, or national survey research, studies of access

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[33]Richard J. Cox, "Government Publications as Archives: A Case for Cooperation Between Archivists and Librarians," in *Archives and Library Administration: Divergent Traditions and Common Concerns*, ed. Lawrence J. McCrank (New York: Haworth Press, 1986), 111–28.

[34]See, for example, the way in which John Stilgoe has used agricultural publications in his book, *Common Landscape of America, 1580–1845* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). Because these periodicals were cataloged as the scientific literature of the day, there is nothing in the public catalog that would suggest that this material might be used for any purpose other than that for which it was originally acquired and cataloged. Would it not be appropriate and greatly enhance access if a collection record could be made for this class of printed matter—agricultural and engineering classes—using the AMC format?

[35]Francis X. Blouin, Jr., "The Relevance of Archival Theory and Practice for Library Education: An Argument for a Broader Vision," in *Archives and Library Administration: Divergent Traditions and Common Concerns*, ed. Lawrence J. McCrank, 155–66.

or index and thesaurus construction, or systems research cannot progress without a cadre of archivists whose very position requires them to do research and affords them the opportunity to do so. Library schools afford just such an opportunity.[36]

Another problem in encouraging archivists to do research, especially studies related to use, is the paucity of archival theory or even agreement about the meaning and implications of those few principles archivists believe are fundamental to their vocation. Indeed, the very notion that archivists should be concerned with the informational value of archives or with questions of use will be regarded by many archivists as an abdication of their chief duty to maintain records of continuing administrative value.[37] But changes in the ways in which information is created, communicated, and used justifies the reexamination of archival practices and principles. The work archivists perform in order to provide physical and intellectual control over and access to records—the "value-added processes," in the words of Robert Taylor—must be examined from the perspective of the kinds of use that is or can be made of records.[38] Archivists' goal should be to systematically study the relationship between the use of information and the ways in which it is or can be provided; it is from this relationship that the value of records and the information they contain will be determined and archival practices defined.

In sum, a user-driven model of archives, rather than the current materials-centered model, can provide the intellectual tools needed to define archival principles and determine archival practices. Because the archival vocation is more oriented toward practice and application than theory—the principle of provenance, notwithstanding—archivists must look to the social sciences and information theory for the methods and models needed to conduct research on use and must begin to define archival practice and principles with the user in mind.

[36]Frank Burke, in his provocative article, has divided the archival world between "theoreticians" and "clinicians," and argued that an academic locale is needed in order for the profession to develop a "new philosophy of archives" ("The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States," *American Archivist* 44 [Winter 1981]: 45–6). While I agree that archivists need theory and principles, we do not need metaphysics and dogma. The danger of the academy is that the theoreticians may become increasingly detached from the clinicians and the realities of practice. The academe has its own imperatives for measuring success and determining status, and projects and programs which aim at practice are rarely accorded the same recognition and status as a scholarly article. It is precisely for this reason that some of the scholarly output of older vocations, like education and social work, is sometimes alien to reality and the practical problems of implementation.

[37]Turnbaugh, "Archival Mission," 27–33; Paul Levinson, "Problems of Archives Classification," *American Archivist* 2 (1939): 179–90; Margaret C. Norton, "The Archives Department as an Administrative Unit in Government," *American Library Association Bulletin* 24 (1930): 563–67.

[38]Robert S. Taylor, *Value-Added Processes in Information Systems* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Publishing 1986). I only discovered this very important work when making final revisions of this article.