

Research Article

Managing the Records of Higher Education: The State of Records Management in American Colleges and Universities

DON C. SKEMER AND GEOFFREY P. WILLIAMS

Abstract: A half century after the beginnings of records management and institutional archives in American colleges and universities, the authors undertook a broadly based national survey to analyze the state of records management in academe and to identify program characteristics. Campus-wide programs were identified at approximately one-third of the 449 responding colleges and universities, particularly at public institutions subject to state legal requirements for public accountability. The survey also identified widespread implementation of decentralized, office-centered records management programs by registrars and other campus officials. Archivists accounted for most of the survey respondents reporting no campus-wide programs. College and university archivists have long been tireless supporters of academic records management, believing that records management responsibility provides a legally mandated means to identify and accession records of enduring value. But archivists should modify their traditional approach to records management in order to implement and maintain viable programs.

About the author: Don C. Skemer is head of Special Collections and Archives at the University at Albany, State University of New York, and is a lecturer at its School of Information Science and Policy. He holds an M.L.S. from Columbia University and a Ph.D. in history from Brown University.

Geoffrey P. Williams is university archivist/campus records officer at the University at Albany. He holds an M.L.S. and a M.A. in history from the University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign.

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THE DOCUMENTATION FOUND IN college and university archives will be of limited historical and administrative value, argued the eminent archivist Ernst Posner in 1952, without an institutional mandate "to survey the entire records of the university, to develop a university-wide program for the disposal of useless records, and to agree with the offices concerned on the periodic transfer of records of enduring value to the archives vault." Moreover, Posner continued, "the archivist would not fulfill his duty if, in addition, he does not attempt to exercise a healthy influence on the creation of records."¹

At the time Posner was writing this oft-cited article, there were eighty-four college and university archives in the United States, a remarkable number for its time when one realizes that the Harvard University Archives, first in the nation, was not founded and staffed until 1938.² The past half century has been a period of unprecedented growth in college and university archives. With the tremendous expansion of higher education in the 1960s and 1970s, college and university archives proliferated. The most recent *Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories* lists no fewer than 416 college and university archives, more than five times the number found in the

1950 Society of American Archivists survey.³

Although Harvard University established a modest records management program within a year of the creation of its archives,⁴ and many archivists, perhaps heeding Posner's words, have established records management programs, effective programs in colleges and universities today are reputed to be somewhat uncommon. Yet records management programs, effective or not, have proliferated over the last half century, but relatively few have been recognized in the professional literature. Fifty years after the beginnings of records management and archives in American colleges and universities, the authors undertook a national survey of higher education to help answer certain basic questions. Why have some institutions developed programs while others have not? Why do some succeed and others fail? Are there any valid operational models? Most important, what is the proper relationship between the archival and records management functions in academic institutions? This article will describe the state of records management activities and pro-

¹Ernst Posner, "The College and University Archives in the United States," in *Miscellanea Archivistica Angelo Mercati* (Vatican: n.p., 1952): 368-74. In a 1979 review of the development of college and university archival programs, Annabel Straus cited records management as one of the two factors most responsible for the revitalization and expansion of the archival movement in academic institutions. See Straus, "College and University Archives: Three Decades of Development," *College and Research Libraries* 40 (September 1979): 432-33.

²Dwight H. Wilson, "Archives in Colleges and Universities: Some Comments on Data Collected by the Society's Committee on College and University Archives," *American Archivist* 13 (October 1950): 343. Not all of these, however, were archives in the sense of serving as repositories of official records of an institution.

³National Historical Publications and Records Commission, *Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the United States* (Phoenix: Oryx Press, 1988). The figure of 415 includes college and university archives as well as libraries or special collections departments with college or university archives. Another 126 institutions reported the possession of records or historical materials relating to their college or university. Not counted were any institutions failing to report material relating to the history of the institution in the textual notes. Citing the SAA Committee on College and University Archives' directories of archives in institutions of higher learning and the 1978 NHPRC *Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories*, Maynard Brichford calculated that there were 1,183 American academic institutions with archival program (including college and university archives, manuscripts departments in academic libraries, and others). See Maynard Brichford, "Academic Archives: Überlieferungsbildung," *American Archivist* 43 (Fall 1980): 454.

⁴Clifford K. Shipton, "The Harvard University Archives: Goal and Function," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 1 (Winter 1947): 101-2.

grams at American colleges and universities and show that records management is more than a recommendation in archival theory, even if all too rarely followed in practice.

Literature Survey

A thorough survey of the relevant journals and technical reports since Posner's study has identified a modest literature on academic records management but very few articles analyzing the administrative structure of records management in institutions of higher education and the proper relationship of records management to a professional archives program. There have been surveys of records management programs in academe, but they have covered relatively few institutions and have indicated little more than the existence or non-existence of a records management program. Research and publication on this topic falls into certain categories. Records management has been shown to have stimulated the creation of archival programs.⁵ Many articles have called for academic archivists to assume records management functions and have gone on to describe how to implement such a program.⁶ Other articles have

described records management programs at particular American colleges and universities,⁷ and a few studies have dealt with pro-

to implement a records management program. Shipton, "Harvard University Archives," 400, urges records management as a natural extension of archival activity. Thornton W. Mitchell, "Records Management," in *University Archives*, ed. Rolland E. Stevens (Champaign, Illinois: Illini Union Book Store, 1964): 22-26, argues for university archivists to participate in records management in order to fulfill a real need in the face of the post-World War II paperwork explosion. For a similar argument see Bruce C. Harding, "Paperwork: A Twentieth Century Dilemma," *Records Management Quarterly* 1 (July 1967): 19-20; and Helen Chatfield, "Records Management in the Administration of College and University Archives," *American Archivist* 31 (July 1968): 243-45. William Saffady, "A University and Records Management Program: Some Operational Guidelines," *College and Research Libraries* 35 (May 1974): 204; and *Guidelines for College and University Archives* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1979): 6, urge archivists to assume records management functions when no independent program exists. William J. Maher, "Records Management in Archives," an unpublished paper presented at the Midwest Archives Conference, 16 October 1987: 1-4, 12-13, advances many of the same arguments. For detailed descriptions of how to establish a comprehensive records management program, see William F. Schmidt and Sarah J. Wilson, "A Practical Approach to University Records Management," *American Archivist* 31 (July 1968): 247-64; and Saffady, "A University and Records Management Program," 204-10. For suggestions on how to establish a more modest program of records scheduling at departmental request, see Maher, "Records Management," 5-11.

⁷According to Chatfield, "College Archives," 244, the first comprehensive records management schedule was produced for the Women's College of the University of North Carolina in 1962 (*Archives Record Schedule* [Greensboro: The Archives Committee of the Women's College of North Carolina, 1962]). The University of Washington's program is described in Harry N. Fujita, "A Case Study: Retention Scheduling at the University of Washington," *Records Management Quarterly* 2 (October 1968): 25-28; in Peter M. McLellan, "The University of Washington Records Management Program and Its Impact on Campus Records," *Records Management Quarterly* 21 (July 1972): 9-12, 23; and in Richard C. Berner, "Scheduling and Disposition of Records," a paper presented at the Society of American Archivists' meeting, 28 September 1973. Yale's program is described in detail in John Dojka, *Planning and Organizing a Joint Archives Records Management Program: The Report of the Archives Records Survey, October 1978-March 1980* (New Haven: Yale University Library, Department of Manuscripts and Archives, 1981);

⁵To cite two examples, see Clifford K. Shipton, "College Archives and Academic Research," *College and Research Libraries* 27 (July 1964): 295-96, attributes the success of the archival program at Harvard to the assumption of record management functions, while Gerald Woodruff, "Benedict College-Columbia, South Carolina Records Management Program," ARMA, Educational Institutions, IAC, *BY-LINE* (September 1987): 6-7, describes the creation of an archives as the result of the establishment of a records management program.

⁶See Fulmer Mood and Vernon Carstensen, "University Records and their Relation to General University Administration," *College and Research Libraries* 11 (October 1950): 337-45, which describes records management problems and proposed solutions at Beloit College, the University of California, and the University of Wisconsin. Dwight Hillis Wilson, "No Ivory Tower: The Administration of a College or University Archives," *College and Research Libraries* 13 (July 1952): 17-19, details the steps an archivist can take

grams in statewide systems of higher education.⁸ Nevertheless, the precise extent, scope, and administrative structure of archival involvement in college and university records management remains to be studied.

and in John Dojka and Sheila Connen, "Records Management as an Appraisal Tool in College and University Archives," in *Archival Choices: Managing the Historical Record in an Age of Abundance*, ed. Nancy E. Peace (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1984): 19-60. Jean K. Crary, "So You Want to Do an Inventory," *Records Management Quarterly* 17 (July 1983): 25-28, briefly mentions the administrative structure of the University of Delaware program and outlines their survey procedures. Descriptions of records management programs at the University of Connecticut, Pennsylvania State University, the University of Oregon, the University of Kansas, Washington State University, and the University of Illinois, and a proposed program at Texas A & M are contained in *University Archives in ARL Libraries*, SPEC Kit No. 107 (Washington: Association of Research Libraries, September 1984). Pepperdine University's program is described in Robert L. Sanders, "Records Inventories and Scheduling for Small Organizations: A Case Study," *Records Management Quarterly* 6 (July 1987): 24-30. Charles Gilbreath, "Records Management in a Non-Traditional University," ARMA, Educational Institutions IAC, *BYLINE* (September 1987), [unnumbered], gives a brief synopsis of the program at Georgia State University. Woodruff, "Benedict College," 1-7, gives a detailed description of the Benedict College program. Maher, "Records Management," 5-11, describes the programs at the University of Illinois and the College of William and Mary.

⁸For the program at the University of California, see *Records Management Handbook Records Disposition* (Sacramento: University of California, 1963) and *Records Disposition Schedules Manual* (Sacramento: University of California, 1980), iii-vii. For Missouri's state university system, see Gerald L. Hegel, "University Wide Records Management," *Records Management Quarterly* 3 (July 1969): 21-6. For Georgia and South Carolina, see R. Linton Cox, Jr., and Jerry M. Stewart, "The State Viewpoint: Georgia and South Carolina," *Records Management Quarterly* 7 (October 1973). For Wisconsin, see Cooperative Records Inventory, Analysis and Appraisal Project, *Report and Records Manual* (Madison: University of Wisconsin: System Archives Council, 1983): 1-13. For North Carolina, see *College and University Records Retention and Disposition Schedule* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 1985), introduction, unpaginated; and A. Torrey McLean, "The Records Program for North Carolina State-Supported Universities," *NAGARA Clearinghouse* (Spring 1986): 6-7.

Only three attempts have been made to survey records management, not archival activity, in academic institutions nationwide. The first was a survey conducted in 1975 by Bruce Harding, records manager of Washington State University. It surveyed twenty-six colleges and universities and concluded that 75 percent of the twenty-three respondents had some type of formal records management program. The second survey was carried out by the Council for Advanced Studies of the Institute of Certified Records Managers in 1983. Unfortunately, while that survey covered the full range of records management activity, only four universities were included among its ninety-four respondents. Marjorie Rabe Barritt's recent article on records management in relationship to college and university archives is based on a 1987 survey of twelve major universities.⁹

Three other recent surveys have addressed some aspect of college and university records management. A 1982 national survey of college and university archives, conducted by Nicholas C. Burckel and J. Frank Cook, was restricted to ninety-five United States institutions randomly selected from the 1980 *Directory of College and University Archives in the United States and Canada*. The study showed that almost 60 percent of respondents had no records management program on campus.¹⁰ A 1983 survey conducted by the Association of Research Libraries also considered records

⁹Bruce Harding, "Survey of Records Management Procedures," (Pullman: Washington State University, 1975), mimeograph, unpaginated. "Survey of Records and Information Retention and Disposal Practices," *Records Management Quarterly* 17 (October 1983): 55-62. Marjorie Rabe Barritt, "Adopting and Adapting Records Management to College and University Archives," *Midwestern Archivist* 15:1 (1989): 5-12.

¹⁰Burckel and Cook, "A Profile of College and University Archives in the United States," *American Archivist* 45 (Fall 1982): 420-23. Of the 40 percent with a records management programs, only 56 percent had a program administered by the archives.

management as only one aspect of a broader survey of university archival activity and included only fifty-three responses.¹¹ The most broadly based survey of records management in institutions of higher learning was conducted by the Records Management Task Force of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) in 1986. This survey included 191 institutions, but it did not attempt to survey archivists or records managers and was largely limited to the management of student records.¹² Though useful for what they set out to do, none of these surveys broadly describes the present state of records management in American colleges and universities. The potential importance of this subject is underscored by the fact that approximately 40 percent of SAA members are employed by colleges and universities, many of them in positions that stand to benefit from the improvement of existing records management programs or the establishment of new ones.

Survey Methodology

In an effort to reach the widest group of individuals who were either in charge of or would know of the existence of a records management program at institutions of higher learning in the United States, the authors decided to contact one individual at each of more than 1,500 four-year colleges and universities.¹³ At each institu-

tion, the authors attempted to contact the records manager by name; if one could not be identified, the survey and cover letter were sent in order of preference, again using personal name, to a college or university archivist, registrar, admissions officer, or librarian. In a few cases, failing to find the name for an individual in any of these positions, the authors used office title to contact the institution's chief administrative officer, archives, or admissions office, hoping that the survey and cover letter would be passed on to an individual with campus-wide records management responsibility. The survey mailing list was compiled from six membership directories that provided names of individual records managers, archivists, registrars, admissions officers, and librarians.¹⁴ The names of additional archival programs for which personal names could not be identified were added as were the chief administrative or admissions officers of additional public colleges and universities.¹⁵

Operational data about records manage-

¹¹*University Archives in ARL Libraries*, 6.

¹²American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, *Retention of Records. A Guide for Retention and Disposal of Student Records* (Washington: AACRAO, 1987): 40-41.

¹³Due to financial considerations, not all four-year colleges and universities could be surveyed. Grant funding was sufficient for a survey group of approximately 1,500. Junior or community colleges were intentionally excluded from the survey for the same reason. Some two-year colleges were inadvertently contacted because their names did not include the designation "community" or "junior." There are viable records management programs at some two-year colleges, which also merit study.

¹⁴The sources of individual names, in priority order, were: Association of Records Managers and Administrators, *Educational Institution IAC Membership Directory* (Prairie Village, KS: ARMA, 1987); Society of American Archivists, *Directory of Individual Members* (Chicago: SAA, 1988); Mid-Atlantic Archives Conference, *Membership Directory* (MARAC, 1988); Midwest Archives Conference, *Membership Directory* ([St. Paul, MN]: MAC, 1987); American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, mailing list, 1988; and American Library Association, *American Library Directory* (Chicago: ALA, 1988). Individuals were added to the survey mailing list only if their four-year institution was not already represented from a higher-priority source.

¹⁵Additional archival programs were derived from the 1988 NHPRC *Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories*. To achieve a fair representation of public colleges and universities, the mailing list was then checked against John F. Ohles and Shirley M. Ohles, *Public Colleges and Universities* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), appendix 2. Any additions to the list from this source were filled by the name of a chief administrative or admissions officer found in the American Council on Education's *American Universities and Colleges*, 13th ed. (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1987).

ment in American colleges and universities was generated by a four-page questionnaire mailed to 1,532 institutions. The survey asked forty-one questions arranged in five groups. Questions concerned the nature and size of the institutions, the administration and policies of their records management programs, records retention and disposition schedules, and records management operations and services. Respondents were asked to give an overall evaluation of their programs and activities and add comments, which many did. The national survey was mailed in December 1988 and generated a solid 29.3 percent response, or 449 survey questionnaires completed and returned. Table 1 summarizes the pattern of responses.

Some records management programs may have been missed because not every four-year college and university in the nation was surveyed, not every records officer could be identified from available mailing lists and directories, and not every institution with a program responded. These qualifications acknowledged, the survey offers a broadly based picture of comparative data and operational insights regarding the current state of college and university records management.

Campus-Wide Programs

For the purposes of this survey, records management programs are considered to be organized efforts to provide centralized services for the management of all records in all formats generated by academic institutions in their day-to-day operations; the programs have been officially designated and legally authorized at the campus or system level to implement retention and disposition guidelines and provide other centralized services to an entire university or college, or at least in two or more of the following areas: administrative and departmental records; student records; business and financial records; and official publications.

According to the above criteria, a total of 148 institutions, or a third of the 449 responding, can be said to have records management programs (see table 1). Three-quarters of the institutions with campus-wide records management programs proved to be public colleges and universities rather than private, although only a quarter of four-year colleges and universities are public.¹⁶ Approximately one-third of institutions with records management programs were part of multi-campus public educational systems, such as the university systems in New York, California, and a dozen or so other states.

Public expectation and requirements of legal and fiscal accountability clearly help explain why 75 percent of respondents with campus-wide records management programs are from publicly supported colleges and universities. In answer to a question about why the programs were established (multiple responses were possible), state legal mandates or records management requirements were cited almost as often as the expected institutional desire for better archives, improved records retrieval, and savings of space and filing equipment. State laws and regulations were cited as important reasons for the creation of records management programs by fifty respondents, particularly in the South (Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia), Midwest (Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Minnesota, Wisconsin), and West (California, Oklahoma, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming). Whether or not they were part of a centrally administered state university system, publicly supported

¹⁶Of 2,058 four-year colleges and universities nationwide, 28 percent are public and 72 percent private (see American Council on Education, *American Universities and Colleges*, 7). By comparison, 28.3 percent of the 1,532 institutions surveyed were public and 71.7 percent private. So the smaller survey group is representative of the whole. In the records management survey, the University of Delaware was the only respondent that selected both public and private as its category.

Table 1

College & University Records Management Survey Respondents								
	Campus-wide Records Mgmt.		No Records Management		Registrar Manages Student Records		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Total respondents	148	32.9	154	34.3	147	32.7	449	100.0
Type of Institution								
Public								
University	82	55.4	38	24.6	18	12.2	138	31.0
College	21	14.2	10	6.5	8	5.4	39	8.7
Other	8	5.4	—	—	20	13.6	28	6.2
Public subtotal	111	75.0	48	31.1	46	31.3	205	45.7
Private								
University	10	6.8	48	31.2	13	8.8	71	15.8
College	23	15.5	52	33.8	78	53.1	153	34.0
Other	4	2.7	6	3.9	10	6.8	20	4.5
Private subtotal	37	25.0	106	68.8	101	68.7	244	54.3
Totals	148	100.0	154	100.0	147	100.0	449	100.0
Size of Institution (Enrollment)								
30,000 +	9	6.2	4	2.6	—	—	13	2.9
20,000–29,999	13	9.0	3	1.9	—	—	16	3.6
10,000–19,999	38	25.7	23	14.9	2	1.5	63	14.0
2,000–9,999	58	39.2	66	42.9	44	29.9	168	37.4
0–1,999	27	18.2	52	33.8	101	68.7	180	40.1
Null	3	2.0	6	3.9	—	—	9	2.0
Totals	148	100.0	154	100.0	147	100.0	449	100.0
Multi-Campus Systems or Independent Institutions								
Part of system	54	36.5	25	16.2	20	13.6	99	22.0
Independent campus	94	63.5	121	78.6	127	86.4	342	76.2
Null	—	—	8	5.2	—	—	8	1.8
Totals	148	100.0	154	100.0	147	100.0	449	100.0

institutions in these sixteen states were clearly responding to legal requirements for public accountability through records management.¹⁷

Campus-wide records administrators have many characteristics in common. While a wide variety of campus administrators occasionally have campus-wide records man-

¹⁷In the decentralized environment in American colleges and universities, Marjorie Rabe Barritt has concluded, “mandates from governing boards are not an

effective substitute for state and federal records laws.” (Barritt, “Adopting and Adapting Records Management,” 9.)

agement responsibility, just over half the respondents from the 148 institutions with programs combined the titles and duties of archivist and records manager (see table 2). Given the size of institutions with campus-wide programs, it seems unlikely that many of those doubling as archivists and records

administrators could devote more than a fraction of their time to the demands of records management and to the supervision of professional, technical, clerical, and student support staff. Significantly, only fourteen respondents were full-time records managers with an appropriate job title. Considering the large number of college and university archivists with responsibility for records management, it is not surprising that the largest number of records administrators (38.5 percent) report to a library administrator, with lesser numbers reporting to the president's office or to another senior campus administrator (see table 2). The educational level of records administrators is quite high; three-quarters had a least a master's degree (see table 2), not surprising for employees of academic institutions.

The records retention and disposition schedule is a hallmark of campus-wide records management programs. Almost 90 percent of colleges and universities with programs had their own schedules, though with an average age of 9.7 years, many of these schedules could be misleading or useless. While many institutions operate under relatively recent schedules that are regularly updated, as they should be to maintain a viable program, other institutions are still using schedules developed some time in the last thirty years and now hopelessly out of date. A number of institutions reported that they were rewriting or modifying state-supplied schedules to meet local needs. North Carolina, for instance, encourages each campus to adapt the system-wide schedule, and the records managers at the University of Cincinnati and Ohio State University have co-chaired a task force to develop schedules for all thirty-seven colleges and universities in Ohio for paper, microform, and electronic records.

The survey generated information about the principal characteristics of the records retention and disposition schedules in use. Most institutions reported using office-specific schedules, either developed for partic-

Table 2

Characteristics of Records Administrators	
Title/Function of Records Administrators	%
Archivist/Records administrator	52.0
Registrar	14.2
Records manager	9.5
Librarian	8.8
Business office	8.1
High-level administrator	4.7
President's office	2.7
Supervisors of Records Administrators	%
Library administrator	38.5
Vice president/Senior administrator	20.9
President's office	15.5
Business office	8.8
Archivist	4.4
Registrar	3.4
Secretary to board of trustees	2.0
Education of Records Administrators (Highest academic degree held*)	%
Diploma	6.8
B.A.	18.9
M.A.	32.1
M.L.S.	18.8
Ph.D.	19.6
*Two respondents were certified records managers	
Tables 2-5 are drawn from the 148 respondents who identified campus-wide records management programs.	

ular offices or derived from general schedules. The latter tended to be organized both by function and office rather than by one or the other alone. Most schedules tended to give either a combination of maximum and minimum retention periods for record copies and duplicate copies or minimum periods for record copies and duplicate copies. A majority of schedules mandate archival preservation for records of enduring historical value, give the location of record copies, and cover microform records. Given the relative age of schedules in use, it is perhaps not surprising that fewer than half of them cover automated records. Relatively few schedules were reported to give illustrative cases, numerical identification numbers for forms, or an alphabetical index (see table 3), all elements that would make the schedules much easier to use.

According to respondents, most schedules were developed after hands-on campus records surveys, either alone or supplemented by questionnaires and/or telephone contact. Periodic surveys of campus offices and newly identified series are conducted by the records administrator and approved locally by the president's office or other high campus administrators. For state-supported colleges and universities, approval must also be obtained at all levels, including one or more agencies such as a state archives, library, or records board. System-wide schedules in New York, California, and other states are an exception and may in fact be based on surveys of records at one campus or in the central administrative offices. When the records administrator is able to insure some level of compliance with the schedules, it is usually through the efforts of coordinators in each office (33.8 percent) and routine audit of records in campus offices (25.7 percent), rather than control over purchase of filing equipment (7.4 percent). While control over the purchase of filing equipment is common in corporate records management programs, it

Table 3

Characteristics of Retention and Disposition Schedules	
Feature/Characteristic	%
Office-specific schedules*	81.1
General schedules, organized by:	
Function and office	43.6
Function only	21.8
Office only	30.9
Other	3.7
Record copy	
Maximum only	23.6
Maximum and minimum	39.9
Duplicate copy	
Maximum only	9.5
Minimum and minimum	23.6
Mandate archival retention	68.9
Cite record copy location	56.8
Coverage	
Microform records included	54.1
Automated records included	43.9
Index	
Form number	26.4
Alphabetical	24.3
*Most institutions that reported schedules developed for offices alone also reported the use of some functional schedules.	

would be difficult to implement in the American academic environment. Many records administrators, hard-pressed by other responsibilities, reported being able to do no more than send an annual reminder memorandum and hope for some level of compliance with the schedules.

Beyond scheduling obsolete records for destruction, the ability to retire inactive files from crowded administrative offices to a records storage center is clearly a key to campus compliance and to the overall success of many programs. This service is provided by just over half of the institutions with programs in a facility under the records administrator's supervision, usually on

campus but occasionally located off campus; in a few cases, storage was at a state or federal records center or at a commercial records center. Campus records centers located at sixty-two institutions operated on average at 78.7 percent capacity, or 5,780 cubic feet of storage space and 4,546 feet of records stored. Three-quarters of the institutions offer records center storage free of charge to campus offices, while the remainder charge minor fees for supplies and photoduplication. Technologically, these campus records centers are more or less traditional warehousing operations.

Automation is becoming as important for records management programs as it is for college and university archives. Sixty-one (41.2 percent) of institutions with campus-wide programs reported using mainframes or microcomputers with commercially available software, chiefly for the production of retention schedules, scheduling of records disposition, statistical reporting, and internal office administration (see table 4). But despite the growing internal automation of records management, surprisingly few respondents appeared ready to deal with automated records or even realized that records in electronic format could be scheduled under existing retention and disposition schedules after some rewording and revi-

sion. Most campus records administrators do not yet have the technical expertise to advise campus offices on automation. Administrative data processing and campus technology officers were not surveyed, but their relationship to records management merits study because it may be a key to the long-term success of records management programs. The ability to manage records in an electronic environment or work effectively with those who do are surely marks of strong records management programs.

Source-document microfilming to reduce bulk and protect records of permanent value is another important service offered in 45.9 percent of records management programs, either externally by a service bureau, internally by an administrative office, or in a campus microfilming department supervised by the records administrator. The registrar's office accounted for the use of microfilm services at almost six of ten institutions, followed distantly by the business office, admissions, personnel, bursar, purchasing, and academic departments. Other services mentioned by respondents include the identification of vital records, consultation, file management, instruction, records equipment management, and forms management (see table 5).

Respondents were given an opportunity to evaluate their records management programs. Overall evaluations were quite positive. As expected, most felt that records management programs at their institutions had resulted in better archival documentation (62.2 percent), improved access to information (62.2 percent), vital records protection (60.1 percent), and space and equipment savings (54.1 percent). Yet there were nagging problems, principally inadequate staff (62.2 percent) and space (56.1 percent) available to the program. Despite the existence of records management programs, almost a fifth of the respondents (including one university that had received a National Historical Publications and Records Commission [NHPRC] grant to create

Table 4

Records Management Software	
Microcomputer software*	%
dBASE	24
R:Base	24
PC-File	14
MicroMARC:amc	10
MARCON	10
MultiMate	10
Enable	4
FileMaker	4
*This table does not reflect main-frame applications.	

Table 5

Records Management Services	
Service	%
Record center storage (average size: 5,780 cu. ft.)	52.0
Microfilming	45.9
Vital records identification	43.9
Consultation	39.9
Files management	30.4
Instruction	22.3
Records equipment management	16.2
Office automation	14.1
Forms management	13.5
Reports management	6.8

its program) indicated that records of enduring value were not routinely transferred to the university or college archives. Other problems cited were the sheer volume of records generated, inadequate campus and state support, low priority for records management, weak policies and outdated schedules, lack of compliance and cooperation, the survival of single-office records management programs, and the inability to deal with automated records.

Institutions Without Programs

Just over one-third (154) of the respondents indicated no campus-wide records management program (see table 1). It is significant that 86.4 percent of these respondents were college or university archivists, manuscripts and special collections curators, and librarians with responsibility for archival materials; the remaining 13.6 percent of such respondents were high-level administrators at small colleges with fewer than 2,000 students. Private status far more than size seems to correlate with the nonexistence of campus-wide programs. While the 148 campus-wide programs seem to flourish at public universities of all sizes and publicly supported colleges with be-

tween 2,000 and 10,001 students, the 154 institutions without campus-wide programs tended to be private universities with between 2,000 and 10,001 students and independent colleges with fewer than 2,000 students. Moreover, 68.8 percent of colleges and universities without programs were private, as compared with 25.0 percent for private institutions with programs; and 82.9 percent were not part of multi-campus systems. Among institutions reporting no campus-wide program were prestigious private universities such as Duke, Johns Hopkins, Northwestern, and Princeton, and colleges such as Amherst, Haverford, Kenyon, and Vassar.

Archivists and manuscripts curators at institutions of all sizes seem to subscribe to Ernst Posner's belief in the natural nexus between their field and records management. As professionals dedicated to improve their archival programs, they believe that records management responsibility would provide them with a legally mandated means to identify and accession records of enduring value. Judging from the comments of archivists and manuscript curators at institutions without campus-wide records management programs, high-level administrators view such programs as a low priority or even an unnecessary and unproductive new layer of administration. Campus officials in decentralized private institutions, especially those of modest size, undoubtedly see little reason to create campus-wide records management offices; for, they believe, financial, personnel, student, and other significant records are already being cared for by the offices of origin. This prevalent feeling was even noted by archivists in two institutions that had received NHPRC grants to create such programs. Other reasons cited for the lack of campus-wide programs were the initial investment needed to provide adequate space and staff, backlogs in college and university archives, and the lack of equipment and expertise to handle electronic records.

The Decentralized Model

In the absence of campus-wide records management programs, or even in spite of them, programs develop in individual offices in response to legal requirements and administrative needs to manage records effectively. This is especially true of registrars in small colleges, universities, and technical institutes. Only 21 of 168 registrars (12.5 percent) responding to the survey had campus-wide records management responsibility. The remaining 147 registrars (87.5 percent) deal exclusively with applications, transcripts, grade distribution reports, and other student records generated and kept in their offices. Of the 147 responding registrars who handle only student records, just over half are from private colleges, and 68.7 percent are from institutions with fewer than 2,000 students (see table 1).

Generally serving colleges and universities without campus-wide records management programs, these registrars tend to follow AACRAO guidelines in their single-office programs. Registrars dealing only with student records, it is interesting to note, disagree on whether or not they have a records management program: only 42.9 percent of responding registrars without campus-wide programs reported that their management of student records was a form of records management. It should be emphasized that the 147 responding registrars were not from the 146 institutions where archivists and others noted the lack of campus-wide programs; one must assume that registrars at the latter colleges and universities also pursued a scheme of decentralized records management, whether or not they consider it records management. In short, most registrars and other administrators recognize the limits of programs focusing only on student records but are not necessarily calling for a comprehensive, campus-wide records management program encompassing all records.

Academic administrators other than registrars also create and manage records. Many other types of decentralized programs would surely have been identified if the survey had been directed to other groups of college and university records creators as well. Among professional associations of college and university administrators who create and maintain electronic and paper records, according to the 1988 report of the Society of American Archivists Committee on Goals and Priorities, are those whose members are responsible for admissions counseling, audit, business, financial aid, law enforcement, personnel, physical plant, sponsored research, and student employment.¹⁸ Administrative data processing centers or information technology offices and other campus offices may be involved in campus-wide records management. Besides the guidance provided by professional associations of academic administrators, other sources of current records management requirements, such as Donald S. Skupsky's serial service, *Legal Requirements for Business Records*, are potentially valuable. Because of the special nature of their records, university medical school and teaching-hospital administrators responding to the survey invariably had their own records management programs.

The need to manage records in all formats in support of these important administrative functions will usually result in the development of office-centered records management activities unless there is a strong campus-wide program. At several public colleges where records management is mandated by state law, implementation of schedules and other records responsibility is vested in each creating office. Even at institutions with officially centralized

¹⁸*An Action Agenda for the Archival Profession: Institutionalizing the Planning Process: A Report to SAA Council by the Committee on Goals and Priorities* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1988), 12, 49.

records management programs, respondents noted a good degree of decentralization in records management. This centrifugal phenomenon is hardly unusual in an environment as decentralized and compartmentalized as academe.

Records Management and Archives

The present survey has plainly identified many more campus-wide records management programs than have been identified in previous surveys, though the percentage of responding institutions with programs (32.9 percent) is not dramatically different from what Burckel and Cook discovered in their 1982 survey. American higher education can boast a surprising amount of records management activity, falling into two more or less distinct models: (1) the centralized, campus-wide or system-wide records management programs at a third of responding institutions, predominantly publicly supported colleges and universities; and (2) the decentralized, single-office programs established by registrars and other records creators at some public and most privately supported institutions. This dichotomy has not been recognized in previous studies, which were looking for records management programs as centralized and campus-wide in scope as college and university archives.

While the centralized model would appear the most reasonable in the predominantly paper-bound offices of American academe, the decentralized model may become more prevalent in the future as the electronic office permits everyone to be "his/her own records manager." An element of decentralization can be seen in the scheduling of automated records. The University of Delaware, for example, has recently established campus-wide policy and standards for electronic information in individual offices, which the university's records managers monitor by annual audits.¹⁹ De-

centralized records management can succeed if there are at the very least clear guidelines and centrally coordinated training of designated records administrators in each campus office. Other approaches to decentralization are possible, such as nationally accepted retention guidelines and policies for certain types of records. AACRAO's widely used retention guidelines are a case in point, though they may lack legal validity in some cases and have been criticized by archivists for other reasons.²⁰ Of potential benefit is the 1988 SAA Committee on Goals and Priorities' proposal to work with professional associations representing college and university administrators in order to create guidelines for electronic records of enduring value.

Does the survey suggest reasons why some institutions have records management programs and others do not? One inescapable conclusion is that legal requirements accompanying public finance and the success of records management in the public sector over the past half century are important reasons for the creation of campus records programs. As Michael Buckland has reminded us, "society seems to have decided that you can make people honest by requiring enough documentation—or, at least, that you can make them more accountable."²¹ Publicly supported colleges and universities account for only 45.7 percent of survey respondents but make up 75.0 percent of institutions with campus-wide

lishing Policy and Standards for Decentralized Electronic Information Management at the University of Delaware," *Records Management Quarterly* 23 (April 1989): 34-47.

²⁰For an archival critique of the 1979 AACRAO guidelines, see Donald D. Marks, "AACRAO's Guide for Retention and Disposal of Student Records: A Critical Review," *Midwestern Archivist* 8:1 (1983): 27-33. The revised 1986 AACRAO guidelines are considerably improved in their acknowledgment of the historical research value of student records.

²¹Michael Buckland, "Records Management in Its Intellectual Context: Experience at Berkeley," *Records Management Quarterly* 16 (October 1982): 26.

¹⁹Jean K. Brown and Linda L. Ruggiero, "Estab-

records management programs. Clearly, the principal reason for the development of programs is the need seen by state legislatures and statewide systems of higher education for public accountability, legal compliance, and administrative efficiency.

While the value of space savings and improved access to records could hardly be questioned by any responsible academic administrator, legal pressure is probably more persuasive in colleges and universities that rely principally on public financing. The force of a state records law, no doubt, is more important in the creation and longevity of campus-wide programs than a federal grant or the conventional wisdom about projected material benefits. Legal pressure apparently works nationally at all the U.S. military academies and statewide in the South, Midwest, and West. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) has made campus records policies concerning student records necessary. But even with the force of law or administrative regulation, there is no guarantee of effective records management programs being implemented locally. A respondent in an institution with a legally mandated program commented, "there exists a less than total commitment to our program from library/university/state officialdom—it is simply not a priority matter." A respondent from a college with records management mandated by system-wide regulation saw no need for creating a campus program. Without strong administrative support and/or legal enforcement at all levels, there can be no effective records management programs.

Are there a few model programs amid a plethora of weak ones? The survey was designed to identify records management programs and broadly describe their activities, not just to focus on a few model programs. Yet judging from survey data, some programs are stronger and more viable than others. While most of the programs have similar policies and procedures, certain ele-

ments stand out. Only 14 of 148 campus-wide programs identified through the survey have at least one full-time records manager assisted by a variety of support staff, records center storage in excess of 10,000 cubic feet, and some sort of automation.²² At Dartmouth College, for example, an institution with about 4,500 students, records management is run by a business office conscious of the economic benefits associated with improved records retrieval and reduced space and equipment; it has found that records management pays sufficient dividends to justify the employment of two full-time staff members. Their program includes scheduling records of all types with the aid of an R:Base program on an office-by-office basis, and running a records operation that includes a microfilm program and a records center with a storage capacity of 14,000 cubic feet.

Successful programs exist at larger public and private institutions such as the universities of Delaware, Pennsylvania, Tennessee at Knoxville, Washington, and Cincinnati, to cite but a few examples. Significantly, 71.4 percent of the administrators of the fourteen programs in question report to a high-level campus administrator such as the president, vice president, chancellor, business officer, or secretary to the board of trustees; the remaining four report to a librarian or archivist. Sad to say, it is not a sign of program vitality that 38.5 percent of records administrators are actually archivists with part-time records management responsibility reporting to library administrators who tend to place a low priority on managing current campus administrative records and generally lack the clout to enforce program compliance.

Despite the textbook benefits of records

²²It is not possible for the authors to draw statistical conclusions from responses concerning levels of staff support and funding if any respondents indicated that staff was assigned as needed, without indicating full-time equivalency for personnel.

management, it is perhaps unrealistic to expect most institutions with fewer than 2,000 students to adopt a comprehensive records management program of this sort. A valid model for a small college, however, may be that adopted by the archivist of Alverno College, who, with a presidential mandate, assumed the duties of records manager in addition to her archival functions. The program she created, based on written authorization, involved surveying campus offices to discover what records existed, then writing records schedules organized by both function and office, with illustrative cases and an alphabetical index, which specifically mandate archival preservation. The schedules were circulated to office coordinators in a detailed records management manual, which contains an overview of records management as well as the internal Alverno College records management procedures. Additional records management functions adopted by the archivist/records administrator include instruction and consultation, vital records identification, and coordination of the campus microfilming program (the microfilming was done by an outside service bureau). Similar programs exist at other smaller institutions such as Bennington College and Kentucky State University, both of which have small records centers. Compliance with records management schedules in both cases is the product of "jawboning." Budgets in all three cases are in the \$15,000-50,000 range, chiefly for personnel services. It may well be that the true place of the archivist who wants also to be a records manager is in small institutions such as Alverno College, which cannot afford to appoint a full-time records administrator.

Archivists have long been tireless supporters of academic records management, and well they should be because, as most records administrators have concluded, improved archival documentation is a direct consequence of their programs. Generations of archivists have been educated to

believe that retention scheduling through a formal records management program is the best course to ensure the accessioning of archival records. Frank B. Evans referred to archivists and records managers as "variations on a theme."²³ One of the operating assumptions of the 1986 report of the SAA Task Force on Goals and Priorities is that "records and information management is the means by which the archivist intervenes as needed throughout the life cycle of records to ensure the proper management of prospective archival material."²⁴ Similarly, Marjorie Rabe Barritt concluded recently, "A comprehensive records management program may not be a practical goal for many college and university archives, but the adoption and adaptation of records management techniques offers college and university archives their best chance of meeting the challenge of adequately documenting campus communities."²⁵ Summarizing the sometimes strained marriage between the two professions, Robert L. Sanders has recently observed that "the records manager looks to the archivist to sanction the destruction of obsolete records, and the archivist relies upon the records manager to safeguard what merits preservation."²⁶ It is clear from the present survey that archivists are the largest group of records administrators, both in institutions with campus-wide records management programs and also in institutions without such programs but with an interest in having one. But to the extent that their commitment to records management flows

²³Frank B. Evans, "Archivists and Records Managers: Variations on a Theme," *American Archivist* 30 (January 1967): 45-58.

²⁴*Planning for the Archival Profession: A Report of the SAA Task Force on Goals and Priorities* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1986), 4.

²⁵Barritt, "Adopting and Adapting Records Management," 12.

²⁶Robert L. Sanders, "Archivists and Records Managers: Another Marriage in Trouble?" *Records Management Quarterly* 23 (April 1989): 12-20.

from a simple desire to improve archival documentation, their support may actually undermine the development of viable programs that serve administrative informational needs.

How many archivists are willing and able to devote as much effort to managing bulky administrative records with short retention periods as they are to preserving records of enduring value for historical research? How many archivists who want to be in charge of records management understand the demands of running even a modest records management program? While college and university archivists perform exemplary service in preserving institutional memory and understand the benefits of records management to effective administration, they often lack the means and support to build viable, comprehensive records programs.

With limited budgets and marginal campus influence, as Burckel and Cook demonstrated, college and university archivists are often hard-pressed to implement a full-fledged records management program. But for those who accept the challenge, a change in archival thinking about records management might be beneficial. The management of current and recent academic information for administrative purposes has to be considered as important to resource allocators and archivists as the preservation of historical information for cultural purposes is to archivists. Unless archivists have a broader interest in the management of all administrative information, either directly or by coordination of decentralized efforts, most of them will continue to have weak records management programs or none at all.

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