

Research Article

Understanding Administrative Use and Users in University Archives

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Abstract: The users of institutional archives range from local and professional historians to lower- and upper-level administrators. In many cases, administrators are the primary user population. Past archival studies, however, have focused on users with principally a historical purpose. The lack of research is surprising since most archival programs rely on their parent institutions for funding. This study is an initial attempt to examine administrative use and users in a university archives setting. It raises some interesting questions concerning how administrators analyze primary sources, what types of finding aids are most appropriate, and how much interpretation archivists need to do. The research suggests that archivists should look at themselves less as the historical voice in an institution and more as part of the administrative team.

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THE PRIMARY MISSION of many archival programs is to manage the noncurrent records of their parent institutions. Institutions rely on archival records for a variety of reasons: to assist in consistent planning efforts, to understand the processes behind official positions, and to preserve materials related to the infrastructure. Despite the value of archival records for administrative purposes, archivists have been slow to study administrative use. Administrative use is any inquiry directed to the university archives to assist university administrators, clerical staff, or faculty carry out their official, job-related duties. For the purposes of this article, student organizations using archival records is considered an administrative use. Administrative use of archival records is an understudied aspect of archival administration. This lack of research is surprising since most archival programs rely on their parent institutions for funding. The analysis of administrative use patterns and the questions and concerns of administrative users begins to suggest ways in which college and university archivists can better serve this population.

This is an exploratory study of administrative use of archival records in a university setting. It is hoped that the value of an in-depth case study concerning administrative use at a specific institution, at this point when virtually no research on administrative use in archives exists, will stimulate more research in this area and be theory-generating. The study combines two research techniques: (1) an analysis of historical or existing statistics, and (2) interviews with administrative users.

Preliminary conclusions indicate that the archives is seen by administrative users as serving a vital function of preserving institutional memory. Furthermore, although time is always of the essence for administrative users, they use the archives when searching for specific items and researching more open-ended questions. However, administrators expect archivists to do much

of the information search and analysis for them. Administrative users rarely use finding aids or other access tools and rarely question the reliability of the information they are given. Confidence in the archivist signifies reliability of the information provided. Other research findings highlight several problems with using reference statistics to understand users and the importance of major institutional events to generate new user groups for the archives.

Literature Review

There are three fields that contribute important background information and research to this study: organizational theory, archival administration, and library and information science. Although none of these fields explicitly discusses administrative use of archival records in depth, the literature review reveals how each bears on the topic at hand.

The organizational theory literature contains studies of decision making, organizational behavior, and organizational culture. Within this large body of literature are a relatively small number of works focusing specifically on universities. Among others, Karl Weick, Michael Cohen and James March, and Arthur Stinchcombe argue that institutions of higher education are unique.¹ The organizational dynamics, power bases, hierarchical structures, and decision-making practices in colleges and universities differ from all other types of organizations. Following this line of

¹Michael D. Cohen and James G. March, *Leadership and Ambiguity: The American College President*, 2nd. ed., (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1986); Karl Weick, "Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 21, No.1 (March 1976):1-19; Arthur L. Stinchcombe, *Information in Organizations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); The pertinent section in Stinchcombe is Chapter 9, "University Administration of Research Space and Teaching Loads: Managers Who Do Not Know What Their Workers Are Doing," pp. 312-40.

thought, one would assume that information-seeking behavior among administrators in a university setting would differ from that in other types of organizations. The present study attempts to contribute to the establishment of a baseline for administrative information-seeking behavior in universities, which eventually could be juxtaposed with administrative use of archives in corporate settings.

Cohen and March consider universities "organized anarchies," which have no shared goals, foster fluid participation, and maintain little understanding of their processes. They note that in many cases the "garbage can" model is at work: decisions and solutions find each other accidentally, depending on temporal and spatial coincidence.² For example, a person with a decision to make may encounter one solution (problem solver) one day and another solution (problem solver) another day. Solutions wait for decisions just as much as decisions wait for solutions. Extrapolating from this model, archival records (potential solutions) wait for administrative questions, and archivists need to get the records to the right place or to the right problem-generating administrator at the right time.

Cohen and March also characterize universities as having a weak administrative information base: "Information about past events or past decisions is often not retained. When retained, it is often difficult to retrieve. Information about current activities is scant."³ They continue by stating that when information is provided, it

need have no particular validity. Consider, for example, the common assertion in college decision-making processes about what some constituency . . . is "thinking." The assertions are rarely based on defensible evidence, but they tend to become organizational facts by virtue of the shortage of information. More generally, reality for a decision is specified by those willing to spend the time required to collect small amounts of information available, to retrieve the factual assertions of others, and to disseminate their findings.⁴

These findings—based on extensive interviews with college presidents, other highly placed officials in universities, and members of their support staffs—present the main challenges and opportunities for university archives. As a first step in better understanding the process of seeking archival information, the present study focuses solely on users. Of course, this does not mean that an examination of nonusers would fail to reveal equally interesting data concerning the dynamics of information seeking.

Weick builds on the concept of educational institutions as organized anarchies. He sees universities as "loosely coupled" systems; events are related but "each event also preserves its own identity and some of the evidence of its physical or logical separateness."⁵ Educational institutions are loosely coupled, according to Weick, because the two most prevalent mechanisms for coupling—a technical core and authority of office—are less relevant. Weick does not argue that tight couplings do not appear in universities, just that two of the signifi-

²The garbage can model is a probabilistic computer simulation of the decision-making process, which manipulates the variables of problems and solutions. March, Cohen, and Olsen apply the garbage can model to many different types of organizations, not just to those in higher education. It was originally introduced by Michael D. Cohen, James G. March, and Johan P. Olsen, "Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice," in *Administrative Science Quarterly* 17 (March 1972): 1–25.

³Cohen and March, *Leadership and Ambiguity*, 207.

⁴Cohen and March, *Leadership and Ambiguity*, 207–08.

⁵Weick, "Loosely Coupled Systems," 3.

cant populations, students and educators, generally fall outside the coupling mechanisms.

Technical couplings are task dependent, the task or process is the organizing element, and people must work together to accomplish the entire process. Examples of technical couplings might be the development of a specific unit's budget, strategic plan, or annual report. Authority couplings concern the mechanisms by which positions are filled, responsibilities are set, and people are evaluated. For example, disciplinary issues will be tightly coupled or more highly regulated in a university. Classroom content will be loosely coupled or left up to the individual professor. The implications for this study are that information is created in many different administrative entities and not shared because of their loose couplings. More to the point, entities may not be aware of exactly what information exists elsewhere. In an academic environment such as the one described by Weick, the archivist might be the first person to see the range of information produced and may be one of the few people able to link problems and solutions.

Stinchcombe demonstrates how the ideas of Cohen, March, and Weick translate into the real problem of space allocation in a university. He notes the importance of research at many universities in terms of prestige, money, and power. Yet, knowledge of the research is concentrated in departments different from those that deal with space allocation and needs. Therefore, administrators do not have sufficient information to compare research projects. Once space has been allocated to a certain department, it is virtually impossible to reclaim the space. Stinchcombe finds that this is because

centrated in the (separate) lowest units. . . . This deficiency of adequate information at higher levels also means that people at lower levels see higher-level attempts to manage space as an intervention by ignorant people into matters they do not understand. . . . Vice presidents for research see a lab empty and propose to reallocate that space without knowing that this lab is merely between projects.⁶

Formal information sharing concerning administrative matters in universities is not a traditional activity. In this organizational culture, archival activity involving administrative use of university records should be viewed as, at best, an anomalous activity, and at worst, a subversive activity.

While many articles in the archival literature relate tangentially to this topic, the ideas in two areas are of particular value to this study: the first is use and user studies, and the second is management of archival and records management programs in colleges and universities. The absence of concern regarding administrative use is prevalent in both of these areas. Even Lawrence Dowler's essay, which defines a research agenda for archival user and use studies, fails to specifically mention administrative use as an important factor for archivists to consider.⁷

Use and users studies are found in both the archival literature and the library and information science literature. The library literature looks at academic use of libraries and information centers by students and faculty or corporate use and users. The latter, however, is often geared toward pro-

information needed [by administrators] to compare the space needs of different kinds of scientists is con-

⁶Stinchcombe, *Information in Organizations*, 323–24.

⁷Lawrence Dowler, "The Role of Use in Defining Archival Practice and Principles: A Research Agenda," *American Archivist* 51 (Winter and Spring 1988): 74–86.

fessional affiliation (e.g., scientists or engineers) and not organizational identity. The archival literature has largely studied the same populations. One could consider the studies done by Colin Mick, Georg Lindsey, and Daniel Callahan, by David Ellis or Robert Taylor to be investigations of administrative use.⁸ Yet, while these studies raise important issues for consideration in any use or user study, they fail to acknowledge the central place of organizational dynamics in information seeking. Mick, Lindsey, and Callahan study the information-seeking patterns of two disparate groups, scientists and engineers. Although the response rate to their questionnaire is low and the validity of the comparison between these two groups can be challenged, these authors at least acknowledge that organizational culture plays a significant role in information behaviors. Their article notes individual, environmental, and situational variables in the hope of finding means of better responding to information needs. However, they do not generate a usable construct for analyzing these variables.

Taylor and Ellis study individual search behaviors even though the individuals examined (engineers, legislators, and practicing physicians for Taylor and social scientists in an academic setting for Ellis) are part of larger environments. Furthermore, the culture of the setting and organizational structure are variables that neither considers. Research by Patricia Fandt and Gerald Ferris, among others, has demonstrated how information can be used for

control or to assert power in organizational settings.⁹ Martha Feldman and James March also note that organizational cultures can promote or discourage information seeking through unwritten cues and signals.¹⁰ Administrative user studies must not only account for the user and the reason for use, but also for the environment in which the user works.

Archival user studies are similar to the library and information science studies. Paul Conway carries out investigations and provides an overall framework for archivists to employ while studying users.¹¹ Conway is interested in information transfer and makes a distinction between the use of records (quantity) and their usefulness (quality). He cites the need to look at archival reference services differently and proposes a three-part model encompassing quality (how researchers define their task in terms of subject, format, and scope of information), integrity (how archivists balance their responsibilities between making the information available and protecting the materials), and value (evaluation of the services rendered). Conway states that better internal recordkeeping is necessary, as are more surveys and experiments. His sample research form, however, would not provide clear indications of who the administrative users are or of what administrative use is occurring. William Maher also argues for more user studies but sees a great problem in the fact that there "is a

⁸Colin K. Mick, Georg N. Lindsey, and Daniel Callahan, "Toward Usable User Studies," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 35 (September 1980): 347-56; David Ellis, "A Behavioral Approach to Information Retrieval System Design," *Journal of Documentation* 45 (September 1989): 171-212; Robert S. Taylor, "Information Use Environments," *Progress in Communication Sciences*, edited by Brenda Dervin, Vol. 10 (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1991) 217-53.

⁹Patricia M. Fandt and Gerald R. Ferris, "The Management of Information and Impressions: When Employees Behave Opportunistically," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 45 (February 1990): 140-58.

¹⁰Martha S. Feldman and James G. March, "Information in Organizations as Signal and Symbol," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 26, No. 2 (1981): 171-86.

¹¹Paul Conway, "Facts and Frameworks: An Approach to Studying the Users of Archives," *American Archivist* 49 (Fall 1986): 393-408, and "Research in Presidential Libraries: A User Survey," *Midwestern Archivist* 11 (1986): 35-56.

great deal of variance in what is counted and what is done with the data.”¹² Although Maher calls for user studies of different types of use (historical, administrative, genealogical), administrative use studies have not been done.

Two good studies of historical users, one by Conway and another by Jacquelin Goggin, provide a basis for the information needs of historical researchers.¹³ Both authors examine how scholarly researchers learn about archival information and approach archival collections, how historians define and refine their questions during the research process, and how they use the archival materials as evidence. Goggin accomplishes this through an examination of Library of Congress Manuscript Division call slips (1971–1981) that document the usage of their collections. She then takes a sample (unsystematic) of the resulting published works, citing the collections used and analyzing the quality of the use of sources. Goggin asserts that a majority of the researchers have little training in the location and evaluation of archival sources. If this is true, historical researchers may have more in common with administrative users than is traditionally thought.

Conway’s study of presidential libraries indicates that reference archivists also perform a filtering function or mediated reference service for historical researchers. This indicates another similarity with administrative users in this study. In his survey, Conway finds that 35 percent of the researchers noted that the orientation interview with the archivist helped them to narrow or define their topic and that 68 percent stated that the orientation interview

helped them to locate important collections.

A final user study of note is David Bearman’s “day in the life of” archival reference study.¹⁴ On 15 March 1989, eighteen archives in nine institutions of various types (corporate, college and university, manuscript repository) provided Bearman with data from all reference questions from all sources for that day. This totaled 1,559 inquiry forms. His purpose was to get a better understanding of the questions asked, the use to which the answers would be put, and the criteria for success. Bearman criticizes past studies: “They recorded profiles of users, but not the contents of their questions, thus leaving us with some knowledge of who users are, but only prejudice about what each category of user might want.”¹⁵ Administrative use is a low 3 percent. However, Bearman’s categories are undefined, and several categories—including records creators, legal/professional, and general—could possibly encompass administrative use. This again points to the necessity for a common definition of *administrative use* in archives.

While Bearman’s survey is unsystematic, his data do indicate areas in which more research is necessary. He questions the myth that archival users are not looking for a specific item. Bearman finds that 56 percent of the requests are for specific items. The present study also finds evidence, in both the existing statistics and the user interviews, indicating that a higher number of administrative users than previously mentioned in the archival literature are seeking specific items. Bearman also alludes to the difference between authenticity and reliability of archival information. Reliability is the correctness of the data. Authenticity is whether or not the cre-

¹²William J. Maher, “The Use of User Studies,” *Midwestern Archivist* 11 (1986): 17.

¹³Conway, “Research in Presidential Libraries,” and Jacqueline Goggin, “The Indirect Approach: A Study of Scholarly Users of Black and Women’s Organizational Records in the Library of Congress Manuscript Division,” *Midwestern Archivist* 11 (1986): 57–67.

¹⁴David Bearman, “User Presentation Language in Archives,” *Archives & Museum Informatics* 3/4 (Winter 1989/90): 3–7.

¹⁵Bearman, “User Presentation Language,” 3.

ator had the authority to provide the data. For example, anyone can issue a birth certificate with the correct information included, but only a county clerk has the authority to issue a birth certificate that will be legal and "authentic." Although Bearman does not cite a percentage, he states that "many queries are for authority data."¹⁶ The context in which records were created may matter to users.

Many works treat the administration of college and university archival and records management programs. The most recent is by Maher.¹⁷ However, his section on use concentrates on the management of historical use. This is surprising, considering the fact that administrative use at his repository, the University of Illinois—Champaign/Urbana, averages 18 percent of the total use of that archives over a five-year period (1987–88 to 1991–92).¹⁸ An even higher percentage of administrative use of academic archives is noted by Patrick Quinn in his impressionistic article.¹⁹ Quinn finds increasing levels of administrative use in the repositories he contacted as well as in his own archives at Northwestern University. He observes that the difference between administrative users and historians is that "patrons seeking information expect instantaneous responses, while sustained researchers mine their own information."²⁰ The administrative constraints of time and the desire for quick responses are supported by the interviews in this study.

Records management is closely tied to administrative use because an effective re-

cords management program will bring larger amounts of administrative information into the archives in a more systematic manner. Marjorie Barritt and Don Skemer and Geoffrey Williams discuss records management programs in colleges and universities.²¹ Barritt conducts a small, non-random survey of twelve university archives with records management programs and finds that many are hampered by a strong institutional tradition of collecting manuscripts:

Among the institutions surveyed, college and university archivists do not adopt records management techniques to enhance administrative service and reference or to provide space saving and cost effectiveness—although these are important outcomes of such techniques. Rather they adopt and adapt selected records management techniques that will allow them to maintain more efficiently cultural facilities focussing on the preservation of records for [historical] research use.²²

Weick, Cohen and March, and Stinchcombe would also argue that this phenomenon is linked to the organizational culture.

Skemer and Williams conducted a more systematic survey of 1,532 universities which generated 449 responses. They sought to answer three basic questions: "Why have some institutions developed programs while others have not? Why do some succeed and others fail? Are there

¹⁶Bearman, "User Presentation Language," 6.

¹⁷William J. Maher, *The Management of College and University Archives* (Metuchen, N.J.: Society of American Archivists and Scarecrow, 1992).

¹⁸University of Illinois, University Archives, *Twenty-Ninth Annual Report, July 1, 1991 to June 30, 1992*, 24.

¹⁹Patrick M. Quinn, "Academic Archivists and Their Current Practice: Some Modest Suggestions," *Georgia Archive* 10 (Fall 1982): 14–24.

²⁰Quinn, "Academic Archivists and Their Current Practice," 22.

²¹Marjorie Rabe Barritt, "Adopting and Adapting Records Management to College and University Archives," *Midwestern Archivist* 14 (1989): 5–12; Don C. Skemer and Geoffrey P. Williams, "Managing the Records of Higher Education: The State of Records Management in American Colleges and Universities," *American Archivist* 53 (Fall 1990): 532–47.

²²Barritt, "Adopting and Adapting Records Management Programs to College and University Archives," 10.

any valid operational models?"²³ The article provides comprehensive frequency data on numbers of programs, records management services offered, characteristics of records administrators, records retention and disposition schedules, and software used. However, the authors fail to examine the amount of use and users in any detail. Use and users is an aspect of a records management program which would seem essential to answering all three questions, particularly why some programs succeed and others fail. If one can assume that the existence of a records management program facilitates administrative use of non-current records, it is telling that Skemer and Williams find over a third of the respondents said they had no records management program.

Mary Jo Pugh points out that archivists act as intermediaries in the reference process and that the traditional provenance-based system of archival organization will succeed only if the user supplies information extrinsic to the finding aids (e.g., names of people and organizations with activities).²⁴ She asserts that archivists assume historians want high recall and low precision. The interviews completed for this study indicate that administrative users are more interested in high precision. This is a decisive difference between these two groups which requires more study.

Although Pugh alludes to the need for archivists to become more aware of the information-seeking processes of archival users, the library and information science literature does a much better job of analyzing different search processes. Brenda Dervin and Michael Nilan note three major approaches to understanding users' infor-

mation-seeking patterns.²⁵ These three approaches are all more user-oriented and user-focused. The first is Dervin's "sense-making" approach, which examines the conceptual and theoretical premises of how users make sense of their world and use information. This concept originated in and is prominent in Herbert Simon's work. Simon discusses how sensemaking applies in an organizational setting when culture, control, and power become central variables.²⁶ In fact, Robert Birnbaum asserts that "sensemaking," not decision making, should be viewed as the main goal of colleges and universities.²⁷

A second approach, termed the anomalous states of knowledge approach, is attributed to Nicholas Belkin.²⁸ Belkin proposes that users approach systems with incomplete questions and needs that are constantly being refined. He argues that systems need to be more responsive to users' needs and should be designed to respond better to a user, helping him or her to define questions, rather than forcing the user's search process into a predetermined, automated direction.

The third approach is characterized by Susan MacMullin and Robert Taylor's user-values approach. The user-values approach concentrates on the dimensions of the user's problem and the information traits required to satisfy the user's need.²⁹ Each of these approaches can be applied to

²³Brenda Dervin and Michael Nilan, "Information Needs and Uses," *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology* (ARIST) 21 (1986): 3-33.

²⁶Herbert A. Simon, *Administrative Behavior: A Study of Decision-Making Processes in Administrative Organizations* (New York: Free Press, 1976).

²⁷Robert Birnbaum, *How Colleges Work: The Cybernetics of Academic Organization and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1988), xvii, passim.

²⁸Nicholas J. Belkin, "Anomalous States of Knowledge as a Basis for Information Retrieval," *Canadian Journal of Information Science* 5 (May 1980): 133-143.

²⁹Susan E. MacMullin and Robert S. Taylor, "Problem Dimensions and Information Traits," *The Information Society* 3 (1984): 91-111.

²³Skemer and Williams, "Managing the Records of Higher Education," 533.

²⁴Mary Jo Pugh, "The Illusion of Omniscience: Subject Access and the Reference Archivist," *American Archivist* 45 (Winter 1982): 33-44.

a study of the archival information needs of administrators in a university setting. Thus, in this study, an attempt is made to map the process by which users got to the archives. The investigators also seek to understand how users defined their questions or how those questions were defined for them by an archivist. Clearly, more research is needed on the information-seeking patterns of administrative users and nonusers.

Methodology

The first challenge is to define the limits of administrative use of university records. As stated, in this study, administrative use is any inquiry directed to the university archives to assist university administrators, clerical staff, or faculty carry out their official, job-related duties or to help student organizations verify their official status within the university. Within this study, research by faculty or students for class projects is not considered an "administrative" use. Faculty members seeking information in an official departmental capacity and students representing student organizations or trying to maintain the official status of a student organization within the university are considered administrative users. And, in this study, administrative users are divided into four categories: (1) higher administration (e.g., offices of the president, vice-president, provost); (2) support services (e.g., the bulk of administrative offices, research, public relations, library, development); (3) academic departments (faculty, administrative assistants, etc. working in a departmental capacity); and (4) students who had to perform some administrative function for a student organization.

The university considered in this study is a public institution in the Midwest with an enrollment of approximately 25,000 students. The university archives agreed to participate in the study and provided access

to its user statistics. The academic schedule is four semesters or quarters per year: September to December; January to mid-March; late March to June; and July to August (when two five-week sessions and one ten-week session run concurrently). However, students and faculty are predominantly present during the former three semesters. The archival program is 23 years old and includes an active manuscripts program as well as a university records management program. The records management program gained significant authority after a decision and mandate by the institution's governing board in December 1992. The university records program employs three full-time equivalents (one professional, one clerical, and three students).

The university archives provided consistent user statistics for a five-year period. These longitudinal data are the basis for the statistical procedures. However, the problems associated with using existing statistics became readily apparent. For example, the reference process for administrative users begins with a telephone call to the archives with a request. The archivist responds to the caller by helping the requestor define the problem. Generally, it is the archivist who fills out the request form and who does the actual research for the administrative user. Therefore, the reference question, as it is defined on the forms, is the archivist's interpretation of the user's need. Likewise, the materials-requested section is usually the archivist's best estimate of where the answer to the question will be located, not a search suggestion by the administrator. This pattern has been identified by Richard Lytle, who notes the inferential process of translation from a topical request to an answer based on the context or provenance of the records.³⁰

³⁰Richard H. Lytle, "Intellectual Access to Archives: I. Provenance and Content Indexing Methods of Subject Retrieval," *American Archivist* 43 (Winter 1980): 64-75 and "Intellectual Access to Archives:

This also provides further evidence to support Conway's contention that "the most complex aspects of a research problem are not necessarily best understood through routine repository procedures."³¹ If this pattern holds for other institutions, it indicates that there is very little unfiltered information concerning actual user needs, the precise questions asked by administrative users, or their actual knowledge of the scope of the information available for later analysis and study. If archivists continue to be the only ones knowledgeable of the information available, this will reinforce and support Weick's theory of the university as a "loosely coupled" system.

Figures 1 and 2 on pages 606 and 607 show the original and revised forms, the two types of statistics sheets the university employed from 1988 to the present. Both forms ask users to identify their affiliation (e.g., administrator, faculty, student, etc.). Neither form, however, asks users to state if the primary purpose of use is administrative. The revised form (figure 2) indicates whether administrative records (e.g., university records) are used, but not whether the use is actually administrative. Therefore, the investigators had to return to the actual statistics sheets to determine the extent of administrative use. At times, this required a qualitative judgment on the part of the investigators to determine whether a certain faculty member was requesting information for personal research or to fulfill his or her duties as department

chair or representative. This finding supports Barritt's assertions concerning continuing emphasis on historical use and the lack of serious attention given to administrative concerns.

To supplement the existing statistics and to get a better understanding of administrative users without filtering, interviews were carried out at the university. Eight interviews were conducted with two different categories of administrative users: higher administration (3) and support services (5). Unfortunately, no convenient interview time could be scheduled with a faculty member or a student. Interviewees were purposefully selected after reviewing the request forms. Selection was designed to represent the different categories of administrative users and different rates of use (frequent and infrequent, longitudinal, and new users). The university archivist sent each potential interviewee a letter introducing the project. Attached to this letter was a letter from the investigators and an article on the project written for the library newsletter. Figure 3 on page 608 is a list of the basic interview questions asked of all the interviewees. In fact, the questions were designed as discussion starters and, as hoped, the interviewees explored other issues as they arose during the interviews. Although the archivist knew who might be interviewed, the archivist was not told who agreed to be interviewed. Potential interviewees were assured that their remarks would be confidential and that none of their comments would be attributed to a specific person.

Results

Statistical information from the university provides sufficient data to test for use frequency. Total reference requests in 1990-91 numbered 650, and administrative use comprised 30 percent of these requests. In 1991-92, total reference requests numbered 557, and administrative use reached

II. Report of an Experiment Comparing Provenance and Content Indexing Methods of Subject Retrieval," *American Archivist* 43 (Spring 1980): 191-205. These articles are derived from his dissertation: Richard H. Lytle, "Subject Retrieval in Archives: A Comparison of the Provenance and Content Indexing Methods," Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1979.

³¹Conway, "Facts and Frameworks," 400.

Figure 1. Original Form

REQUEST FOR USE OF MATERIALS (Please Print)			
Name _____		Date <u>6/20/95</u>	
Address <u>VP Business Affairs</u>		I.D. No. _____	
_____		Phone No. <u>2660</u>	
Check One:			
<input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate Student	<input type="checkbox"/> Faculty	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____	
<input type="checkbox"/> Graduate Student	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Administrator or Staff	_____	
Major: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Alumni	_____	
PURPOSE OF RESEARCH			
<input type="checkbox"/> Research Paper		<input type="checkbox"/> Verification of Facts/Dates	
<input type="checkbox"/> Thesis/Dissertation		<input type="checkbox"/> Personal Interest	
<input type="checkbox"/> Publication (Book, Article, Film)		<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____	
Topic of Research: <u>Board of Directors, Restricted Fund</u>			
INFORMATION REQUESTED			
Rare Books:			
Call No. _____	Call No. _____		
Author _____	Author _____		
Title _____	Title _____		
Call No. _____	Call No. _____		
Author _____	Author _____		
Title _____	Title _____		
Archives or Manuscripts:			
Description of Information requested: _____			
← READ THE REVERSE CAREFULLY AND SIGN WHERE INDICATED →			
FOR OFFICE USE ONLY. LIST MATERIALS USED. <u>Treasurers Office,</u>			
<u>Subject Files; Finance Office Inventory</u>			

Visit _____ Phone <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Letter _____			

Figure 3. Interview Questions Asked of All Interviewees

Could you summarize the functions of your office for me?

Think about a specific instance when you used the archives, and answer the questions in reference to that instance.

Instance remembered: _____

1. At what point in the research did you contact the archives?
2. Was it the first place you contacted for the information?
3. Was your question well defined?
4. Were you looking for a specific document?
5. Were you sure it existed?
6. Were you interested in materials your office sent to the archives?
7. Does your office regularly send materials to the archives? If not, why not?
8. Was authenticity a question?
9. Was reliability a question?
10. Did you do your own research, or did archives staff do the research for you?
11. Do you use the archival finding aids?
12. Was the specific incident you are describing typical of your questions for the archives?
13. How is the incident atypical? Which of the questions would you have answered differently?
14. If there was anything you could change about the archives service, what would it be?
15. Do you have anything to add?
16. Is your office affected by the academic schedule?
17. Do others in your office use the archives? If yes, why; if no, why not?

41 percent.³² Figure 4 indicates the frequency by month for the past five years and gives a visual representation of administrative use frequency by month. October and February are consistently the months with the greatest amount of administrative

use. Both are midsemester periods at the university. Dips occur in December for the holidays and in July/August, a less popular quarter for both student enrollment and faculty teaching. Clearly, the traditional academic calendar influences the pace and need for administrative consultation of university records.

The differing amounts of administrative

³²Archives Annual Reports, 1990-91 and 1991-92.

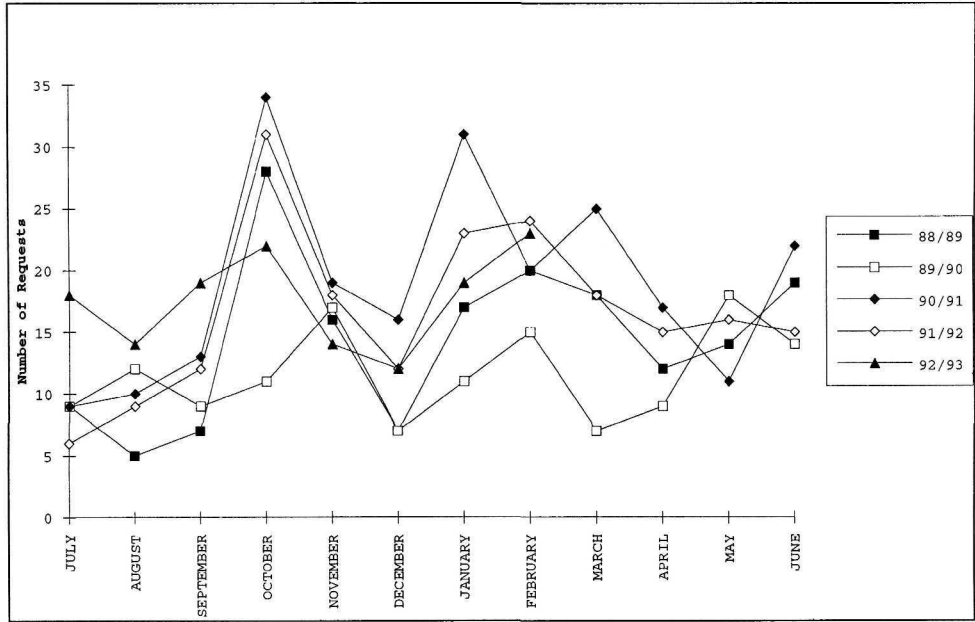


Figure 4. Administrative Use by Month, 1988/89–1992/93

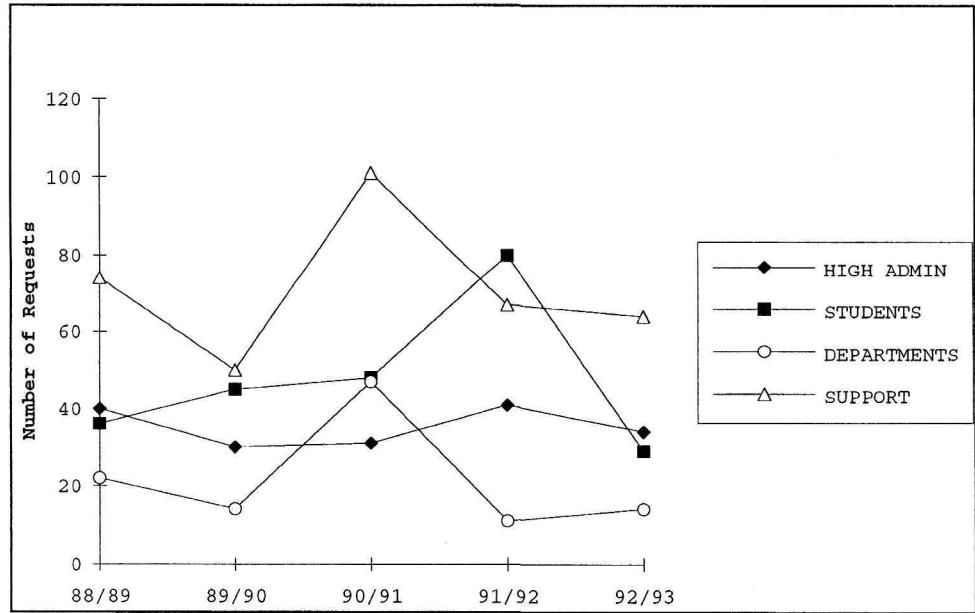


Figure 5. Administrative Users by Category, 1988/89 – 1992/93

use by these four groups (higher administration, support services, departments, and student organizations) is shown in Figure 5. In the interviews, only the higher ad-

ministrative interviewees indicated that their offices were not affected by the academic schedule. This is demonstrated by the data which indicate that archival ref-

erence questions from higher administrative offices are the most evenly distributed throughout the year and over the five-year period of the four groups studied.

A series of analyses of variance computations were done to determine if increased usage between the academic years 1988–89 and 1991–92 was within the range of statistical probability. In spite of the overall growth trend in the archival program, administrative requests were significantly lower in the 1989–90 academic year. The statistical comparisons indicate that administrative use in 1989–90 is lower than would be statistically probable than 1990–91, 1991–92, and 1992–93. No explanation could be found for this. Administrative use in 1990–91 is probabilistically higher than either the previous or subsequent years (although 1992–93 should come close when all the reference statistics have been counted). The high degree of administrative use in 1990–91 is possibly attributable to participation in a reaccreditation self-study, which was mentioned in several of the interviews and on the reference forms in the archives. The increased use may also be part of a general trend toward greater usage of the archives by administrators, which is evident by looking at the overall use frequencies for the five-year period. But the growth in this archives surpasses the level of use one would predict through statistical analyses. This is definitely a growing archival program, which is increasing use every year.³³

³³After examining the frequency data, a one-factor analysis of variance (*AOV*) was computed to test if any significant difference between yearly levels of use, requests and the years (1988–89 to 1991–92). This was done for the four-year period for which complete data were available at the university. A statistically significant difference is found between yearly levels of use, $F(3,44) = 3.93$, the critical value at the .05 level is 2.76. As a next step, a Multiple F test indicates that critical differences exist between some of the sample means, $CD(1,44) = 4.42$, $p < .05$ —thus, identifying 1989–90 as an exceptionally low-use year and 1990–91 as an exceptionally high-use year.

The comparisons of usage between different categories of administrative users are also revealing. Support services are consistently the heaviest users of the archives. As previously noted, the numerical distribution over five years shows that use by higher administration has been the most consistent during the period in question. Departmental use peaked in 1990–91 during the pre-reaccreditation self-study. Otherwise, departmental use is also stable. The reaccreditation process was a significant event in both the life of the university and the archives. This demonstrates how a single event can bring many more reference requests to the archives and how important it is to respond to that event in a manner that brings the requestors back when they have an ordinary question. As was revealed in the interviews, administrative users who had successful experiences (relevant retrieved information) in the archives were very likely to be repeat archival users.

Statistically significant differences exist between the various administrative groups of archives users. Support services use the archives reference services significantly more than all the other groups. There is also a wide discrepancy between student organizational and departmental use.³⁴ Figure 6 shows the percentage of use by each of the groups under study.

There is a consistent peak of archival reference requests by administrators in October over the five-year period. This is broken down in Figure 7, which illustrates the frequency of use in October 1988–89 to 1992–93, according to the different administrative use groups. Higher administration seems less prone to this tendency, and the

³⁴A one-factor analysis (*AOV*) was also completed to test for statistically significant use-frequency differences based on membership in the designated administrative use groups. This procedure confirmed that some statistically significant difference exists, $F(3,16) = 8.21$, $p < .05$, between rates of use by the different administrative groups over a five-year period (1988–89 to 1992–93).

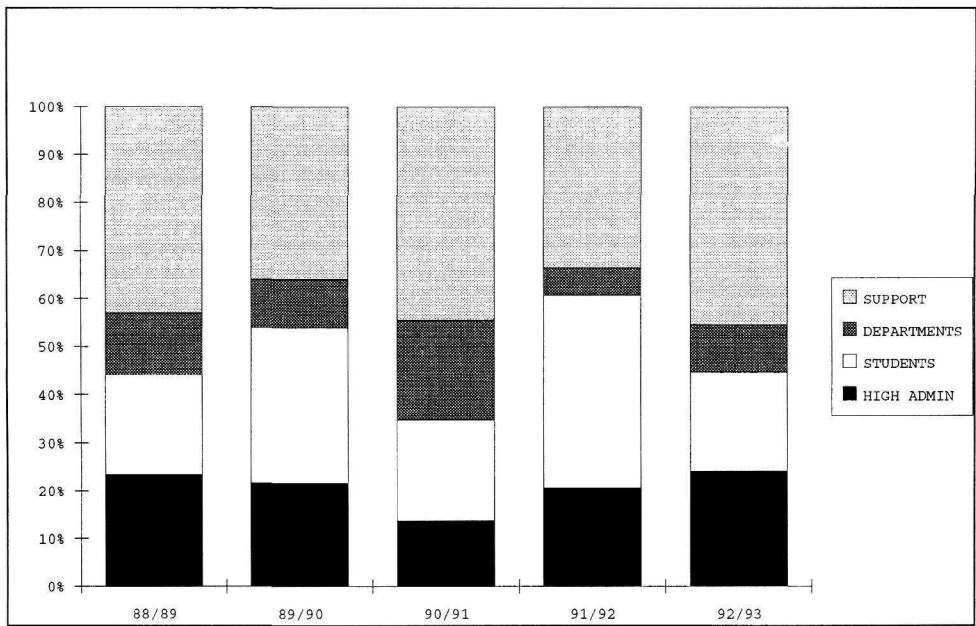


Figure 6. Percentage of Use by Different Categories of Administrative Users, 1988/89–1992/93

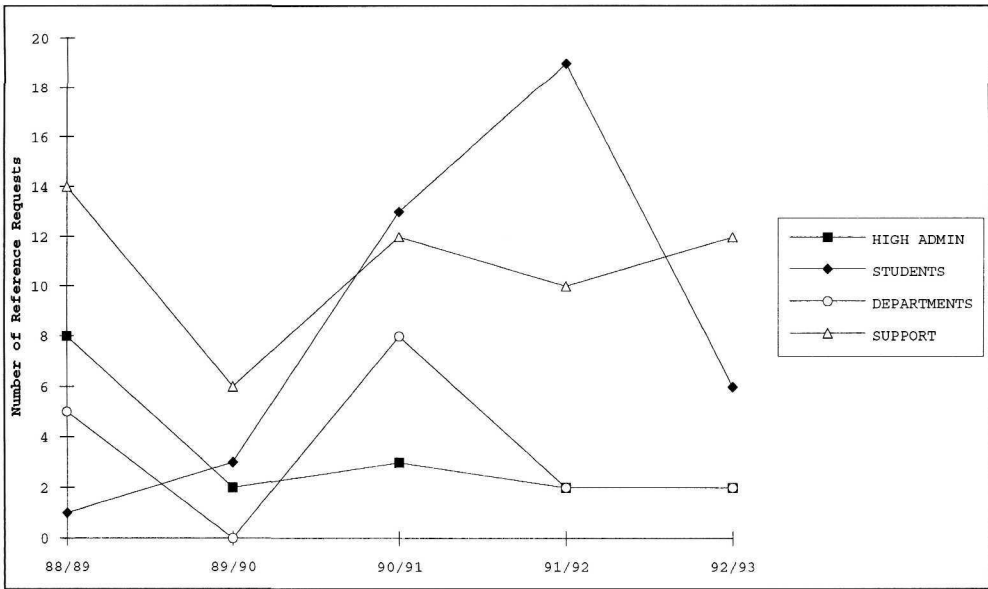


Figure 7. Administrative Users in October, 1988–1992/93

interviewees from higher administration both stated that their offices are influenced little by the academic calendar. Student organizations, departments, and support services all show a rise in midsemester activity during the fall term. Student organizations must reregister themselves with the administration every few years to retain their status as an official student organization. This often entails a trip to the archives to find the organizations by-laws and other pertinent information, and it results in a statistically significant difference between student use and departmental and higher administrative use in the month of October.³⁵ Reasons for heavy support service use were not determined, but possible explanations are fall celebrations such as Homecoming, which require a significant amount of public relations and alumni office activity.

Turning from the quantitative aspect of this study to the qualitative, the interviews at the university provide more evidence to support themes found in the literature and the statistical computations. Weick and Stinchcombe's observations concerning the lack of centrality of information in a loosely coupled system and the ensuing lack of a single organizational culture based on the collective memory of an institution is a major thrust of one of the interviews. For one of the interviewees, the archives' *critical function* is the preservation of the institutional memory. This interviewee attributes the institutional memory lapses to high turnover and the transitory nature of presidents, staff, faculty, and students.

The interviews also give evidence related to Quinn's assertion that time is of the essence for administrators. In four separate interviews, the interviewees said that they felt a tension between saving time by having the archives staff complete a research request and the interviewees' desires to do the research themselves. Interviewees thought they might "see" something in the records that would be useful for their project but that had not specifically been requested of the archivist. In the interests of time, however, interviewees were willing to forgo these possible discoveries. Pugh notes that archivists assume historical researchers in archives want high recall. These administrators want high precision, but they realize there may be a high cost for this choice.

Pugh also expresses concerns that archival indexing systems are not serving historical users. The interviews revealed that none of the administrative users had ever used any of the archival inventories, the card catalog, or the finding aids. There are a combination of reasons for this phenomenon. First, much of the archival administrative reference is over the telephone and the "answer" is sent to the office. Even if users enter the archives, it is the archivist who translates the question and uses the inventory. As one interviewee stated, the archivist does the "dirty work." The question arises, for whom are the finding aids intended? If they are intended to aid the archivist, are they really designed for the archivist as audience?

This type of archival reference and research service places much of the question definition and the search strategy in the hands of the archivist. Ellis notes that scientific researchers benefit from backwards and forwards chaining, following citations, and pursuing additional works by favored authors. This pattern of reacting, following leads, and refining the search strategy is not an option for many administrative archival users who need the information yes-

³⁵A significant difference also exists for October usage between groups, $F(3,16) = 8.38, p < .05$. A further Multiple $F(1,16)$ test reveals a critical difference (4.82) between the means of use of support services (higher) and both higher administration and academic departments. There is also a critical difference in means (e.g., higher rate) between the rate of student use and higher administration and academic departments.

terday and are very grateful to have an archivist do the work.

Two of the higher administrative interviewees regularly transferred files to the archives. Prior to sending the files, each interviewee prepares an inventory list. If these files are required in the future, the inventory list is used to select files. Neither administrator requests files that another office has transferred to the archives. One of the women said that if the files of another office were required, she would contact the secretary for that office and let the other secretary contact the archives. Exploring new archival territory is not popular among administrative users.

Two of the interviewees were employed by the university prior to the establishment of the archives, and another works in the same building with the archives. In these cases, existence of the archives was "always" known. The four other interviewees found out about the archives through other sources. One woman, now a full-time employee, discovered the archives when she was a student intern in her current office. Her boss told her to call the archives for the information she was seeking, and she found it "worked." She is now one of the archives' heaviest users. She works in an office that regularly transfers files to the archives. (As an aside, the former boss now teaches and has one class assignment requiring archival research.) One man found out about the archives after calling a frequent source of information, the documents librarian, who referred him to the archives. Although his work requires less archival research, since the initial contact he has been a repeat user. This makes one wonder if search behaviors are learned. If a behavior is fruitful, it will be repeated. If this is true, much of the increased usage since the self-study year prior to reaccreditation could be linked to good archives reference during that self-study.

As noted above, several of the administrative users who require archival materials

the most are also in offices that regularly transfer materials to the archives. Records management at the university has not been systematically done in the past, and it was not mandatory for offices to participate. Records management at the university is similar to the programs described by Barritt, a program that adopts and adapts practices, rather than implementing mandatory policies. One of the occasional users expressed concern about his ability to regain records if they were transferred to the archives. This provides a small amount of evidence for the assertion that use and perceived ease of use affects compliance with records management programs. Although it requires more study, there does appear to be a logical, if unproven, link between higher use and larger amounts of records transferred to the archives. The effects of the recent approval of an official records management program by the board of trustees at this university will be interesting to follow.

One of the questions asked in the interviews concerned the degree to which administrators worried about the authenticity of the documentation or the reliability of the information. The biggest surprise in this study was that no interviewee had any major concerns. A couple of interviewees mentioned that they had confidence that the archival system would prevent any tampering that would affect authenticity (legality). One of the women commented that she probably should consider the reliability (accuracy) of the documents more carefully. Only one of the men stated that he had ever questioned information given by the archives, and this happened when a student assistant, not one of the professional archivists, provided the data. For these users, confidence in the information equals confidence in the professional archivist. There was considerable high praise for the archives director, and users wondered how the system would function without her.

Administrative users may approach archives with little experience in using ar-

chival records. Only one of the interviewees had specific training in research methods, where skepticism and criticism of sources might be acquired. More research is needed in how administrators interpret records. This is especially important when administrators are given "the answer" rather than records in context. Administrators view archivists as the protectors of the authenticity of records and see trust in the archivist as equivalent to the reliability of the answers they provide.

Bearman finds that 56 percent of the requests reported in his study were for specific items. A specific item is a need for a certain object, as opposed to a request for specific information that could come from a number of sources. This is somewhat supported by the data examined in this study and in the interviews. Interviewees were divided about how often they requested specific, known items. The two women who frequently request their own files are after specific items. The other interviewees are after specific items only a small portion of the time.

Conclusions

Better tracking of administrative users and administrative uses in university archives is necessary to provide a better basis for studying this important group of users. As Bearman, Maher, and Conway assert, archivists are better at tracking records used than at tracking users. A useful first step is revising the forms used for collecting statistics so that they will better reflect administrative use.

A second step is for archivists to pay greater attention to their unconscious filtering of information on the request forms. There are few questions on the forms analyzed for this study which do not reflect the archivist's understanding or even the answer to the question. A more user-oriented approach that would better represent the user's need is required. Mediated ref-

erence in archives is unlikely to change in the near future because of the organization of records according to provenance and the security under which collections must be housed. Reference archivists should note, however, that they are mediators in two ways. First they assist administrators in the question definition process, and then they themselves often filter sources during the search process. This aspect of administrative use needs further study.

By and large, the administrators were unaware of the scope of the archival holdings at the university. This lack of awareness of the entire holdings contributes to their feeling that by looking at the records themselves, they would see some other interesting item that they had not requested. This lack of awareness also ties into the nonuse of the archival inventories and finding aids. Do researchers not use finding aids because they are difficult to understand? Or do archivists unconsciously design finding aids to help archivists, who are aware of archival arrangement, can locate the materials better, and make the most use of the inventories? Clearly, if administrative users are not employing these devices to locate materials, the prioritization of the production of these devices and the emphasis placed on their production in archival education programs and archival workshops is questionable. This relates to Conway's notion of integrity—do archivists provide the most appropriate means of access to collections? Furthermore, how well does the administrative user's view of archivists as searchers and analyzers fit with archivists' perceptions of themselves? Pugh's concerns relating to drawbacks of mediated archival reference (e.g., an archivist's memory lapses or personality clashes between the archivist and the researcher) are exacerbated in a system where the administrator is entirely dependent on the archivist for access to information.

Another question arises concerning who needs training in research methods. Should

better training be done with archival students on the graduate level so that they can better serve administrators? Or is it feasible to provide administrators with some orientation in the archives? Does this lack of knowledge concerning research methods and use of primary sources by administrative users result in a lax attitude toward authenticity and reliability of the documentation?

Administrative users, long the stepchildren in many archival programs, are now their primary constituency in many in-

stances. Knowledge concerning the archival information needs, search strategies, and research skills of this group is small. This paper has presented some of the concerns and limited findings of a case study. More in-depth studies, as well as studies of administrative users in other college and university settings, are needed to refute or confirm the findings of this study. Administrative use studies in other types of institutional archives are also needed to better understand this phenomenon.