

Research Article

Redefining the Role of College and University Archives in the Information Age

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Abstract: Academic administrators rely on archival records for a variety of administrative, legal, financial, and historical reasons. In fact, the primary mission of many college and university archives is to manage these non-current records. In an era of increasing fiscal constraint and limited resources, accurate analysis of the use of archival information by university administrators is crucial to the development of successful, responsive archival programs. The authors believe the administrative use of archival records is an understudied aspect of archival administration. This study examines the information environment on modern campuses, explores the evolving roles of traditional and emerging information sites, examines the information use patterns of academic administrators, and proposes methods for improved information service in the modern academic environment.

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Introduction

ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATORS RELY ON archival records for a variety of administrative, legal, financial, and historical reasons. In fact, the primary mission of many college and university archives is to manage these non-current records and make them accessible to users. In an era of increasing fiscal restraint and limited resources, accurate analysis of the use of archival information by university administrators is crucial to the development of successful, responsive archival programs. A 1950 Society of American Archivists survey of college and university archives elicited a number of comments that will sound familiar to archivists today. In his published report on the survey's findings, Dwight H. Wilson noted that "too many of the schools reporting have not yet comprehended the modern objectives of archival agencies...the archivist...spends considerable time and effort developing his program without even the faculty being aware of what he is doing."¹ In words that ring true today, Wilson also offered the suggestion that college and university archivists must succeed in "developing in administrators a greater consciousness of archives as an integral part of college and university administration."²

This study returns to the topic of the archives in college and universities. It explores the administrative use of information from three perspectives and focuses on archival information and the place of archival services within the total campus information environment. This study offers a description of the increasingly competitive information environments on modern campuses. This introduction precedes an analysis of the emergence of the virtual campus and the administrative effect of both too much and too little information, and too little time to process this information. The study then examines current information use patterns of academic administrators and presents proposals designed to improve archival information services. Based upon this analysis, the study portrays an expanded role for the proactive college and university archivist, one who preserves, evaluates, and provides information in timely, accurate, understandable, and useful formats.

This paper blends an analysis of selected literature on higher education, organizational theory, and college and university archives with original interview data from fifteen university administrators from five colleges and universities and a diverse array of administrative positions and academic departments. The majority of interviews were taped and transcribed. The transcripts were coded in order to juxtapose and compare comments concerning similar categories. One interviewee declined to be taped and the information is based on notes. Several subjects were interviewed as part of a previous study by one of the authors. Information from these interviews was added to the data set and these data are also based on notes. Researchers allowed discussions concerning the information environment on campus and the use and retrieval of information to emerge from the interviews. Thus, an inductive approach was used rather than a deductive model seeking to support a pre-established hypothesis.³ To foster an open and frank discussion of important issues, the names of all interview participants and their academic institutions remain confidential. Individual respondents are identified through the use of generic names, i.e., "Subject Bob." Generic names for offices and position titles are also used.

¹Dwight 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): 343–50.

²Dwight H. Wilson, "Report of the Committee on College and University Archives," *American Archivist* 13 (January 1950): 62.

³Barry G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1967).

Competition in the Campus Information Environment

Descriptions of the contemporary administrative environment in colleges and universities are replete with a litany of buzzwords now familiar to information professionals. These phrases carry significant implications for the archives. Terms such as "post-industrial environment," "technetronic era," the "information society," the "telematic society," and "the third wave" communicate a transformed environment where three characteristics will permeate institutions: more and increasing information, more and increasing turbulence, and more and increasing complexity.⁴

Along with these trends, campuses are also facing declining federal and state support. Thus, many colleges and universities are trying to deliver services more efficiently by employing techniques such as total quality management (TQM), continuous quality improvement (CQI), and value-centered management (VCM). "This means more specialization, in order to avoid information overload, and more generality, in order to retain the ability to perform a multiplicity of tasks."⁵ This dichotomy applies to information collectors as well as information users. Numerous academic offices scattered throughout the university are responsible for the acquisition, collation, analysis, review, dissemination, and preservation of various types of information.

The proliferation of information-based offices includes traditional information centers such as libraries, archives, records centers, sports information centers, alumni relations offices, development departments, student services, and public information offices. However, more recent players on the information scene have emerged, such as computer centers, data warehouses, institutional research offices, and policy analysis centers. Most recently, the proliferation of World Wide Web sites providing information on colleges and universities as well as on academic and administrative departments has altered the relationship between information seekers and information suppliers on many campuses. The growth of these offices and services typifies the push towards specialization. However, generality is also at work here. For example, when one begins to look at actual information services provided in these offices, one finds that many offices can and do provide the same information. Thus, competition is keen among campus information providers. While the archives may be the only unit with a specific mandate to preserve official records, other facilities collect information and thus play a role in maintaining the organizational memory.

The "loose coupling" that ties these offices and programs together has not, to date, served the best interests of academic administrators or the larger institution. The stratification of information across an academic institution creates the unnecessary duplication of effort and information, ignorance of valuable information resources, and a failure to preserve or maintain adequate information. On occasion, individuals in a variety of educational and information fields, including archivists, have proposed avenues of communication and study.⁶ The overall lack of substantive dialogue and action among these many

⁴Kim Cameron and David O. Ulrich, "Transformational Leadership in Colleges and Universities," in *Academic Effectiveness: Transforming Colleges and Universities in the 1990's*, edited by Michael D. Waggoner, et al. (Ann Arbor, Mich.: School of Education, University of Michigan, 1986), 69.

⁵Cameron and Ulrich, "Transformational Leadership in Colleges and Universities," in Waggoner, *Academic Effectiveness*, 69.

⁶See John R. Thelin and Marsha V. Krottseng, "Higher Education's Odd Couple: Campus Archives and the Office of Institutional Research," in *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, Vol. V, edited by John C. Smart (New York: Agathon Press, 1989); and Elizabeth Yakel and Laura L. Bost, "Understanding Administrative Use and Users in College and University Archives," *American Archivist* 57 (Fall 1994): 596-615.

academic administrative and information professionals must be reversed if college and university archives are to meet the goal of service to administrators.

Competition among information providers is keen and can come from unexpected quarters. Archivists may think that they have a firm hold on the traditional historical questions such as the dedication dates of buildings, information on commencements, anniversaries, etc. However, our interview data suggests otherwise. "Carol," who is an administrative aide to a university president notes that "lots of times when there's history types of things if they don't know where else to come they will come to the President's Office."⁷ In those instances, if she can answer the inquiry, she will. Resource allocators are increasingly reluctant to tolerate the existence of redundant or extraneous services, information-based or otherwise. It is crucial in the new academic environment for archivists to determine what unique services they provide to various constituencies and to promote the value of these activities to resource allocators.

Campus administrators offer several reasons for valuing archival information. The legal value of records as evidence and the reliability of information are two salient reasons. "Bill" notes the importance of legal recordkeeping requirements and comments that the records in the archives demonstrate compliance, or if laws are lacking, records demonstrate consistent treatment of issues.⁸ In collecting faculty and alumni information, "Nora" first makes inquiries to the archives. "We get information from one of the other departments but it is not always reliable so we check their information with the archives."⁹ "Chuck," in public relations, asserts that the archives fills specific gaps in information which is unavailable elsewhere.¹⁰ He regularly uses the archives as one of several standard information providers to complement other sources. "Chuck," who could be a source of major competition for this archives, is in fact a strong ally. "Chip," another public relations officer, notes that the archives' "critical function is institutional memory."¹¹

A review of the information needs of academic policy makers offers valuable insights for archivists. With such a wide range of information available to administrators literally at their fingertips through desktop computers, why would they turn to the archives and what are their expectations? Policy makers do not have the luxury of undertaking lengthy, time-consuming investigations. This argues, then, for an active archivist who serves as part of the administrative team, both culling and packaging information as well as working with administrative colleagues in the evaluation and interpretation of the data. As one public relations assistant noted, the archivist has to do the "dirty work."¹² Yet, this also means that an archivist must be willing to work cooperatively with other offices to produce information products for those offices. For example, one development officer described a project in which the archives, the development office, and the finance office collaborated on a project to research, verify, and centralize information on all endowment funds. The resulting product now serves as a central resource for all development officers.¹³

⁷Elizabeth Yakel and William E. Brown, Jr. "Interview transcript with Subject Carol," lines 111–14.

⁸Yakel and Brown, "Interview transcript with Subject Bill," lines 47–52.

⁹Yakel and Brown, "Interview transcript with Subject Nora," lines 26–28.

¹⁰Yakel and Brown, "Interview notes with Subject Chuck."

¹¹Elizabeth Yakel and Laura L. Bost, "Interview notes with Subject Chip."

¹²Yakel and Bost, "Interview notes with Subject Katherine."

¹³Yakel and Brown, "Interview transcript with Subject Harriet," lines 241–49.

The Example of Institutional Research: Administrative Colleagues, Collaborators, or Competitors?

The evolution of college and university administration, and the developing information needs of administrators, is perhaps best exemplified through the growth and proliferation of institutional research offices and programs on campuses. Since the 1960s, institutional researchers have served as active information providers for academic administrators. These information professionals stress the collection of data and information, and progress toward its study and analysis. Some policy analysts in higher education now identify institutional researchers, not archivists, as the torch-bearers of historical information.

Because of their central position as data managers in institutions, systems offices, and agencies, institutional researchers can often identify sources of data or information and may know of previous work that has been done related to the issue under review....In addition, institutional researchers frequently function as local historians and have insights on what has and has not worked.¹⁴

Authors writing on institutional research and the value of institutional history, such as Thomas Dyer, recognize the dangers in the creation of simplified history. The brief, cursory history contained in many institutional research articles and reports demonstrates "little effort to make use of sources and methodologies of professional historians to present a clearer picture of institutional concerns and policy considerations."¹⁵ Dyer's writing, though, suggests little familiarity with modern college and university archives. His advice to colleagues that "archivists often maintain detailed 'calendars' to individual manuscript collections that can disclose materials of interest,"¹⁶ offers a rather old-fashioned view of college and university archives. However, his comments are noteworthy in that they represent a most unusual occurrence in the academic administration literature—the recognition that archives and archivists have a function in the information delivery system.

In a similar vein, others have urged institutional researchers to seek the skills of librarians, public relations directors, and legislative liaison staff in gathering necessary but perhaps elusive background information.¹⁷ At the very least, archivists need to gain recognition and be added to this list.

Initial findings indicate that institutional research offices hold a position of "exalted mysticism" on campus. They may have a vague administrative profile and administer a clandestine (and assumed) wealth of resources, yet they are an unknown quantity to many offices. As Thelin and Krottseng observe,

Offices of institutional research and planning maintain a wealth of information—as well as a touch of mystique. What really happens to all those data? Where do they come from? Where do they go? Much of the information is generated from records

¹⁴Judith I. Gill and Laura Saunders, editors, *Developing Effective Policy Analysis in Higher Education*, New Directions for Institutional Research, Number 76 (Winter 1992) (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers), 31.

¹⁵Thomas Dyer, "Institutional Research and Institutional History," *Research in Higher Education* 8 (1978): 283–84.

¹⁶Dyer, "Institutional Research and Institutional History," 285.

¹⁷Gill and Saunders, *Developing Effective Policy Analysis*, 85.

customarily created by other university offices....And virtually every month, representatives from either the federal Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS, formerly HEGIS) or the state governing board or coordinating board expect transmittal of certain vital reports.¹⁸

Such an office would seem to be an important ally for college and university archives. Both offices are dedicated, at least in part, to the search for information of importance to the parent organization, and each office provides that information to members of the larger organization. However, a review of the literature and our campus discussions indicate a general unfamiliarity between these two offices. Both institutional researchers and college and university archivists appear to operate as wary dance partners, forsaking intellectual intimacy for the comfort of perceived "territory."

What is needed, as one article describes it, is "an exercise in matchmaking, an orchestrated mating dance to bring together this 'odd couple' of institutional memory—the archives and the office of institutional research—with the aim of providing improved interpretation of college and university condition and behavior."¹⁹ The engagement of institutional research and archives, however, is problematic. The anxiety of one institutional researcher was reflected in his attitude towards giving records to the archives. "They want to take ownership of it and that makes it a little bit complicated occasionally to let them have things that you may need or feel you ought to be able to go look at."²⁰

A successful mating would serve to invigorate and strengthen the collection and analysis of higher education statistics. Obstacles exist, however, even if both parties are willing to accept the marriage proposal of historical archives and institutional research. The most basic obstacle is that few archives have maintained comprehensive statistics on institutional characteristics which fill in gaps for institutional research offices. "Frank" readily admits that "our records that we had internally that we could look at, don't go back that far."²¹ Adding to this problem is the fact that few archivists are adequately trained in quantitative or statistical methods, and are thus unable to evaluate numerical data as well as they evaluate documentary evidence.

As an explanation to the exclusivity of information "turf" held by these two offices, Thelin and Krotseng observe that "although both are central to the knowledge industry," each unit characterizes a markedly different section of the organizational brain. "Institutional researchers are apt to say that archivists do not count. Archivists, in turn, would respond that the institutional research office suffers from amnesia, as it has no memory."²²

For the academic administrator, the ultimate question regarding access and use of administrative information is one of fiscal and temporal efficiency. As one archivist noted, "I've streamlined, I used to send everything, but someone commented that they just wanted the answer."²³ How many and what offices engage in administrative information services is irrelevant if the resources are allocated efficiently and the results are satisfactory.

¹⁸Thelin and Krotseng, "Higher Education's Odd Couple," in Smart, *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, 183.

¹⁹Thelin and Krotseng, "Higher Education's Odd Couple," in Smart, *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, 182.

²⁰Yakel and Brown, "Interview transcript with Subject Frank," lines 168–71.

²¹Yakel and Brown, "Interview transcript with Subject Frank," lines 83–84.

²²Thelin and Krotseng, "Higher Education's Odd Couple," in Smart, *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, 193–94.

²³Yakel and Brown, "Interview transcript with Subject Brett," lines 206–8.

Those who are engaged in administrative information services, however, must recognize the shifting nature of the playing field and the rotating players. From the archival perspective, of course, it is crucial to respect the fact that we are "witnesses to history in our own time."²⁴ If archivists are to function as a part of the larger campus administrative team, we must determine and pursue a more active role.

As archivists prepare for this expanded role, familiarity with electronic records is a prerequisite, although not an end in itself. Archivists must also understand the accelerated pace of decision-making on college and university campuses and embrace the concurrent explosion of information creators and providers found on the "virtual campus."

The Virtual Campus

Recent attempts to characterize the administration of modern academic institutions by both internal participants and external observers depict increasingly bureaucratic, stratified organizations that face significant challenges to the effective, efficient collection, use, and preservation of information resources on campus. Automation has done little to refute Karl Weick's view of colleges and universities as loosely coupled systems with distributed resources, authority, and information.²⁵ However, one respondent in our study, "Bill," who works in a financial administration office, states, "technology has changed dramatically how we are conducting business."²⁶

The initial introduction of computer equipment on college and university campuses met with mixed reactions. The early promise of the "paperless office" soon disappeared under an avalanche of paper documents, reports, and files. The frustration is inherent in the observations of many academic administrators.

At present the computer is the greatest possible obstacle to management information because everybody has been using it to produce tons of paper...any piece of paper coming over any person's desk calls for some kind of response. The damn thing has to be filed, thrown away, looked at, or left on some corner of the desk until some disposition is decided upon....The university suffers as much from its technological capabilities of quantifying information and keeping track of large numbers as it benefits from them.²⁷

With recent developments in automation such as enhanced computer links within offices (local area networks), between offices (wide area networks), and among organizations (web sites), the complexity and size of the campus information environment has expanded exponentially. Tora Bikson discusses the internal changes in organizational structure and culture which these alterations are causing.²⁸ She cites research on the effect of electronic mail systems that produce organizations with a "flatter" or less hierarchical, administrative structure. In flatter organizations, information flows horizontally across de-

²⁴Thelin and Krotseng, "Higher Education's Odd Couple," in Smart, *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, 195.

²⁵Karl Weick, "Educational Institutions as Loosely Coupled Institutions," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 21 (March 1976): 1-19.

²⁶Yakel and Brown, "Interview transcript with Subject Bill," line 288.

²⁷Kenneth Eugene Eble, *The Art of Administration* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1978), 56.

²⁸Tora K. Bikson, "Organizational Trends and Electronic Media: Work in Progress," *American Archivist* 57 (Winter 1994): 48-68.

partmental and functional lines, as well as vertically through the chain of command, irrespective of status. The advent of the World Wide Web is also changing organizations in ways we are only beginning to see. In particular, every office is now a potential purveyor of information as well as a consumer. Furthermore, it is much easier for offices to see the information collected and disseminated by other offices than ever before, perhaps creating even more tightly coupled institutions. In the past, this was one of the advantages held by the archivist—a global view of information throughout an organization.

Interview subjects from all aspects of college and university service echoed these comments. As “Bill” succinctly asserts, “the amount of paper that flows through this office in a day or a week is scary.”²⁹ The physical onslaught is paralleled by an intellectual barrage of information for college and university administrators. “Bill” notes, “What is happening is, it is increasingly harder to keep track of all these things and there is anticipation that we are monitoring all these things on an ongoing basis and keeping up with them all and it is becoming more difficult to do that.”³⁰

The introduction of office automation and more advanced electronic information resources is a major contributor to the re-shaping of the information needs and expectations of university administrators. Clifton Conrad observes that “colleges and universities are splintered into divergent social groups...interest groups and potential power blocs, each attempting to influence policy.”³¹ This adds a political dimension to information collection and provision.

On many campuses important data are not collected, or they are collected but only made available selectively, or they are made available but in formats that do not speak to the interests of constituents and therefore never truly become information. Information is the lifeblood of an effective cybernetic system, but it does not automatically distribute itself throughout a university.³²

Two trends compound the problems of political motivations and the ever-increasing volumes of intellectual and physical information. These are the expectation of speedier responses and the requirement of more elaborate and precise reports and statistical analyses. Expectations are changing concerning the necessary reaction time to events, new regulations, and published reports. Instantaneous electronic communications engender expectations of quicker responses to questions.

Access to more information, in increasing amounts, in almost instantaneous fashion, therefore, will lead to more and increasing turbulence. That is, decisions will need to be made even faster as both the amount and rapidity of data being encountered are increased.³³

²⁹Yakel and Brown, “Interview transcript with Subject Bill,” lines 293–94.

³⁰Yakel and Brown, “Interview transcript with Subject Bill,” lines 315–19.

³¹Clifton F. Conrad, “A Grounded Theory of Academic Change,” *Sociology of Education* 51 (April 1978): 101–12.

³²Robert Birnbaum, “Leadership and Followship: The Cybernetics of University Governance,” chapter 2 in *Governing Tomorrow's Campus: Perspectives and Agendas*, by Jack H. Schuster, Lynn H. Miller and Associates (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1989), 37.

³³Cameron and Ulrich, “Transformational Leadership in Colleges and Universities,” in Waggoner, *Academic Effectiveness*, 69.

As "Frank," an institutional researcher, states, "There's an expectation that results can be produced pretty quickly here."³⁴

Information technology has also increased the ability to produce more sophisticated reports. In response to this development, federal and state agencies require more information from academic institutions. "Bob," an administrator in a provost's office, claims that "there are a lot more reports being done because you can do them...a lot more accountability."³⁵ In fact, "Bob" sees this trend as fundamentally changing the thinking patterns of administrators in higher education and the types of information valued most.

Getting the right numbers, in the right format is a struggle. You need data. Your feelings don't count anymore, you can feel all you want to, you can think all you want to but if you don't have the numbers that show it and back it up it doesn't carry much weight. You have to have access to the numbers, you have to be sure that the numbers are right.³⁶

College and university archivists must be prepared to respond to the increase in information on our campuses, the proliferation of information seekers and providers, and the immediate demand for that information. These issues have been of longstanding concern to archivists from the standpoint of appraisal. As Helen Samuels writes, "for the archivist, the problem is not just the volume of material created but also the duplication of that information around the campus."³⁷ Our traditional concepts of information, its use, and its users must constantly evolve. Although our administrative users may be slower to adopt the automated information resources that are in vogue on our campuses, we must monitor, evaluate, and appraise the value of these sources in our efforts to serve the administrative, legal, financial, and historical missions of the archives.

In the "loosely coupled" world of higher education, the archives is unique among information providers in that it holds information in diverse formats from multiple sources. Maintaining the ability to collect broadly and select from among all information sources is a continuing challenge for the archives. This has become difficult in the electronic age. When computer centers began on campuses, they contained primarily statistical information. Thus, archives collected the "qualitative" written (paper) records and the quantitative (digital) information was left to the systems administrators. As computation has become more distributed and digitized, information is as likely to be text as numbers, and information systems personnel are increasingly likely to be responsible for all digital information, both qualitative and quantitative. This poses a challenge for archivists.

Administrators on campuses have recognized the proliferation of information and are thinking of implementing various types of data warehousing projects which reduce and rationalize data. "Bob" in the provost's office notes the importance of having one place where all offices can find the same, accurate information. "It is being able to find it and have it be accurate. We have too many different places where information is kept."³⁸

³⁴Yakel and Brown, "Interview transcript with Subject Frank," lines 214-15.

³⁵Yakel and Brown, "Interview transcript with Subject Bob," lines 428-29, 450.

³⁶Yakel and Brown, "Interview transcript with Subject Bob," lines 388-94.

³⁷Helen Willa Samuels, *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (Metuchen, N.J. and London: The Society of American Archivists and Scarecrow Press, 1992), 140.

³⁸Yakel and Brown, "Interview transcript with Subject Bob," lines 242-44.

One example of a project like this is in progress at the University of Michigan. The Strategic Data Planning (SDP) initiative seeks to identify and analyze data being generated and collected by administrative units in order to reduce redundancies and to increase the consistency and accuracy of data university-wide.³⁹ From an administrative viewpoint, the project is proactive. It recognized that data should be captured a single time and shared by a variety of units that have the authority and need to access specific data elements. Archivaly, however, this is really an information system which does not ensure the continued authenticity and reliability of data over time, as a recordkeeping system should. How well the archives is able to influence the development of systems like these will be a major determinant of the position of, views concerning, and services provided by college and university archives on the campus of the future.

The traditional mantra for college and university archives and archivists is thus sustained once more. Archivists must strive to intervene in the information policy process and they must be prepared to cope with increasingly complex and diverse types of records, regardless of format. Furthermore, archivists must find means of getting involved early in the planning phase of projects, so that archival concerns about the designation of records, appropriate legal safeguards, and administrative usefulness are taken into account.⁴⁰ Finding means of retaining the role of the information synthesizer is also critical in this environment. Losing this ability may endanger many archival programs in colleges and universities. Helen Samuels cautions archivists not to be negligent and ignore current information trends.

The availability of massive quantities of information in paper and automated files masks the fact that many aspects of administrative activities are poorly documented and difficult to capture....It is also hard to capture in a tangible form the administrative style and ambiance of the institution—now referred to as its “corporate culture.”⁴¹

In addition to understanding the organizational culture of the college or university, the archivist should also investigate the personal research styles of academic administrators (and staff) and, whenever possible, provide information in a timely and useful format. By demonstrating the ability to maximize the use, and therefore the value, of the information in their care, archivists can contribute to the formation of better academic policies, improve their status, introduce new sources of information to administrators, and improve the quality of research at their institution. Although research styles among academic administrators can vary greatly, certain patterns are prevalent on our campuses.

Information Use Patterns and Needs of Academic Administrators

It is in this dynamic environment of rapid information growth and technological advance that information providers on university campuses face the challenge of meeting the ever-changing information needs of the diverse academic community. Central to this

³⁹Documentation on the Strategic Data Planning Project is available at <http://www.umich.edu/~uip/SDP/>.

⁴⁰David Bearman and Margaret Hedstrom, “Reinventing Archives for Electronic Records: Alternative Service Delivery Options,” *Electronic Records Management Program Strategies*, Archives and Museum Informatics Technical Report #18 (Pittsburgh: Archives & Museum Informatics, 1993).

⁴¹Samuels, *Varsity Letters*, 147.

accomplishment, however, is the ability of university administrators to meet their own information needs. How university administrators seek, acquire, and evaluate administrative information is a largely unexplored, unknown variable for archivists and other information providers.

The number of campus administrators skyrocketed in the 1980s. There are nine administrators for every ten faculty members in higher educational institutions in the United States.⁴² This means that this is a growing audience for archivists to target as potential users. The academic library world offers a useful analogy. As Mary Sprague observes, it is important

to determine the current and future needs of campus constituencies in developing strategic plans....In any university setting, administrators and nonfaculty professional staff members comprise a large, influential library constituency with a unique set of information needs.⁴³

Little is known about the information use patterns of university administrators. Recently, librarians explored the teaching of research skills to academic administrators and found that

academic administrators and support staff are rarely regular users, and what they need from the library is often a specific piece of information or a specific known item. They are the epitome of pragmatism—needing information that exactly and succinctly answers their question, and needing it quickly...it is almost certainly true that academic administrators will frequently send someone else to the library for them.⁴⁴

Sprague's survey of administrators and nonfaculty administrators at Ohio State University offers useful observations for archivists. The survey results provided a number of insightful trends on the information-seeking habits of university administrators. An extremely high percentage, 94 percent of all respondents, cited other university staff members as a primary information resource; some 78 percent of respondents reported using personal printed materials; 71 percent also cited contact with faculty members; and 65 percent cited printed materials located in their immediate department. Only 40 percent of all respondents used books, newspapers, and journals in the library and less than 30 percent of respondents reported the actual use of library-based resources (OPAC, indexes, librarians).⁴⁵

Sprague's data clearly suggest that university administrators hold a strong preference for interpersonal information providers. This is corroborated in our study. One archivist observed the shorthand language which developed over time with other administrators, "when the attorney's office calls and says I need biographical information about ... we

⁴²Karen Grassmuck, "Throughout the '80's, Colleges Hired More Non-Teaching Staff than Other Employees," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 37 (14 August 1991): A22.

⁴³Mary W. Sprague, "Information-Seeking Patterns of University Administrators and Nonfaculty Professional Staff Members," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 19 (1994): 378.

⁴⁴EBSS Bibliographic Instruction for Educators Committee (Barbara Celeone, chair), "Teaching Library and Information Retrieval Skills to Academic Administrators and Support Staff," *College and Research Libraries News* 49 (April 1988): 217, 219.

⁴⁵Sprague, "Information-Seeking Patterns of University Administrators and Nonfaculty Professional Staff Members," *passim*.

know that all they're interested in are the university affiliations."⁴⁶ When archivists and information providers develop a relationship based upon a better understanding of each others needs, such communication shorthand does not result in wasted time and resources.

In our discussions with academic administrators, several individuals noted their personal use of automated information systems to meet their information needs. However, they also relied heavily on paper and trusted human information providers. In fact, paper is not even the primary alternative source of information. Instead, administrators rely most on human information networks resulting from years of experience and personal relationships built on trust and prior provision of reliable information. One secretary to a departmental dean described her initial skepticism concerning the archives' ability to retrieve materials. "I can remember being amazed when we could call over there and ask for something and they could find it."⁴⁷

Prior experience or knowledge led administrative users to people (and therefore, sources). "Carol," from the president's office, notes, "I probably wouldn't call a person if I didn't think they were reliable."⁴⁸ This implies a prior relationship. We would add that this may also be geared to successful prior experience. One of our interviewees in public relations noted that shortly after she began work, a colleague indicated that the archives could answer her question. She contacted the archives and received the information and has been an archives user ever since that time.⁴⁹ Likewise, Peter Watson and Rebecca Boone find that "administrators have become more information dependent."⁵⁰ They argue that the library should pay greater attention to this population because there is an information need, as well as the fact that these administrators can influence library budgets. The services envisioned include both the collection and synthesis of information for administrators from traditional library sources as well as non-traditional sources. This approach may also help college and university archives.

In a 1993 case study of administrators at one university, Elizabeth Yakel and Laura Bost found several patterns of use. First, success breeds success. Administrative users who had successfully used the archives often became repeat users. Second, the information delivered by the archives was assumed to be both authentic and reliable. Only one administrator questioned the veracity of the information provided by the archives, and in that case a student worker, not the professional archivist, provided the information. The administrator noted that if the professional archivist had delivered the information it would not have been questioned. Third, administrators do not use finding aids, they expect information to be extracted and packaged for them. They simply do not have time, nor do they see it as their job, to hunt through archival records.⁵¹

Our respondents confirm many of these findings, and we are able to add some additional items to the list of search patterns and expectations. Expectations of research service and the speed of response are common themes. "Carol" from the president's office is typical. "Ninety percent of the time it is needing it [the information] within a twenty-

⁴⁶Yakel and Brown, "Interview transcript with Subject Teresa," lines 591-94.

⁴⁷Yakel and Brown, "Interview transcript with Subject Clair," lines 324-25.

⁴⁸Yakel and Brown, "Interview transcript with Subject Carol," lines 227-28.

⁴⁹Yakel and Bost, "Interview notes with Subject Katherine."

⁵⁰Peter Boone and Rebecca Watson, "Information Support for Academic Administrators: A New Role for the Library," *College and Research Libraries* 50 (January 1989): 66-67.

⁵¹Yakel and Bost, "Understanding Administrative Use and Users in College and University Archives," 596-615.

four-hour block of time.”⁵² The need for speed affects collecting because some administrators have access concerns. As noted before, “Frank,” the institutional researcher, is very concerned about this issue. Not having the data on site “inhibits the speed of the retrieval, and it inhibits the amount of time that you put into a particular question.”⁵³

Research patterns also emerge. Administrative information seekers expect thorough searches. “Carol” states, “I’m expecting that what [the archivist] gives me is anything [the archivist] has over there in whose ever files on that topic.”⁵⁴ “Teresa,” an information provider, claims, “People call and want the piece of information that they want...they don’t want to have to do any of the filtering.”⁵⁵

The concept of reliability is also elusive. It is often transferred or projected from the information to the individual providing the information. “Nora,” who works with the university attorney, answered a question on how she judges reliability with the comment, “When I deal with [the archivist, archival assistants] they are right on the mark...they must have an excellent retrieval system. [The archivist] is good because she is able to pull out the information.”⁵⁶ Thus, information location is identified with reliability.

Research questions also often pass through chains of command before they reach the ultimate information provider. “Carol” again notes, “I just know who to go to for certain things.”⁵⁷ However, “Carol” may not be aware that her requests are just the beginning of a string of calls. “Teresa” discusses the development of questions which come from “the administrative assistant or the secretary of the person who is reporting to the person who really wants the information.”⁵⁸ Information providers seeking to zero in on the real object of the search are stymied in these instances because the requestor cannot clarify the question or make decisions concerning the depth of the information needed.

Literature in the academic library field suggests that college and university administrators, who place a high demand on the immediacy of information, “have created an information network separate from the library to meet their very pressing requirements.”⁵⁹ An additional influence on the behavior of academic administrators can be traced to their origins. As Watson and Boone observe,

Campus administrators are almost exclusively drawn from the teaching and research faculty ranks and are not fully aware of the library’s potential for supporting administrative work...academic administrators...retain the typical faculty relationship with the library, its resources, staff and services: namely, a solitary interaction between themselves and the materials that embody their area of research.....Administrators are seldom seeking pure research...they are much more likely to require applied research, current policies and procedures from other institutions, and raw data brought together into a useful whole....If the scholar turned administrator cannot find the needed information fairly quickly...the information is probably not going to be pursued within the library. The library as an information system quickly becomes

⁵²Yakel and Brown, “Interview transcript with Subject Carol,” lines 205–6.

⁵³Yakel and Brown, “Interview transcript with Subject Frank,” lines 207–9.

⁵⁴Yakel and Brown, “Interview transcript with Subject Carol,” lines 373–75.

⁵⁵Yakel and Brown, “Interview transcript with Subject Teresa,” lines 88–91.

⁵⁶Yakel and Brown, “Interview transcript with Subject Nora,” lines 70–73.

⁵⁷Yakel and Brown, “Interview transcript with Subject Carol,” lines 181–82.

⁵⁸Yakel and Brown, “Interview transcript with Subject Teresa,” lines 544–47.

⁵⁹Sherman Hayes, “Serving the Professional Staff in Higher Education,” *College and Research Libraries News* 51 (December 1990): 1060.

functionally unusable; administrators have accepted the idea that the library...is not a useful tool for administrative purposes.⁶⁰

It may be unsafe to transfer this observation of libraries to college and university archives without serious testing. Our preliminary survey data offer only a first step in this direction. The importance of understanding the intellectual and personal background of administrators is vital to a better understanding of their information needs. The fact remains, however, that administrators themselves are seldom the individuals who are conducting administrative research in archives.

Conclusions: Implications for College and University Archivists

Today, college and university administrators find themselves working in a complex and expanding world of information with many potential sources from which they can choose. How administrators pursue their information needs and utilize information technology in their daily activities reflects the values of their institutions. After all, colleges and universities exist to gather, preserve, evaluate, critique, disseminate, and publish information. Students seek information, faculty conduct research to create information, libraries and computing centers exist to store, preserve, and disseminate information, and virtually every office on a campus relies on some form of information to perform its daily activities. This study illustrates the turbulent information environment on our campuses, with increasing competition and overlapping services among information providers, and the divergent uses of information that exist among university administrators.

Clearly the role of the college and university archivist must continue to shift from that of pure custodian of records to one involved in the larger administrative environment on campus as both an active interpreter of the information in his/her domain and as an integral part of information policy formulation. No longer can the archivist satisfy himself or herself with physical ownership of materials, a quest which in itself may be untenable in the digital and post-custodial age. In the modern information environment, the very existence of successful archival programs demands that archivists assume a more active role. The archival profession can no longer remain passive observers, as advocated years ago.

Records sent to the archives will require occasional administrative reference....the archivist should inform the person or persons making the request that members of the archives staff are not qualified to interpret the information the records contain.⁶¹

In addition to digital documents which archivists must take a lead in managing, archivists must keep a close eye on digital information provision, such as home pages on the World Wide Web and data warehousing projects on campuses. With the arrival of the Web, never before has so much information about offices, services, and individuals been available in such an accessible manner on college and university campuses and around the world. The impact of this on students, administrators, and the archives cannot be projected,

⁶⁰Boone and Watson, "Information Support for Academic Administrators," 66.

⁶¹William Saffady, "A University Archives and Records Management Program: Some Operational Guidelines," in *College and University Archives: Selected Readings* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1979): 101.

but is important to watch. Finally, administrators are recognizing the value of information and the costs of misinformation, and have begun to address these problems. These projects directly challenge archivists' expertise in appraising the value of record materials and in determining what information is record material.

Archivists must begin to view themselves as a part of the larger campus information environment. To do this, the archivist must assume a dual identity—identifying with other campus administrators as part of the administrative team as well as with other archivists. Developing an identification with other administrators should not be seen as disavowing one's archival identity, or as antithetical to maintaining an archival identity. Rather, it is a means of better understanding the organizational culture and information needs of college and university administrators. Furthermore, it is a means of identifying competing services as well as potential collaborators in various information access projects.

There is no question that the bread and butter clientele of a university archive is the administrative officer....In most universities with which I am acquainted the archives program has obtained recognition and support only by offering records management service.⁶²

Finally, archivists must become literate in both quantitative as well as qualitative information. The former split between the computer center maintaining the numerical files and the archives getting the textual records is no longer applicable. Digital files contain both types of information. In fact, multimedia documents can contain both types of information or can link text with images as well as spreadsheets. Archivists need to be able to provide the same quality of service (appraisal, description, reference) for all types of information.

Additional research and analysis of administrative users (and non-users) is required if archivists are to better understand the information needs of our internal population. The very well-being of our profession demands such study. Archivists have previously discussed the needs for a better understanding of our users. The views of administrative users collected in this study is only a beginning. Expanded surveys, interviews, observations, and case studies of archivists collaborating with other administrators are necessary. Research should seek to determine the broader state of administrative user documentation, satisfaction, and expectations. As Paul Conway writes, "By linking activities and assessments across time, archivists can better understand the process of seeking and finding useful information."⁶³

Research is particularly needed in the area of electronic records. What mechanisms for reference service are being developed on campuses for electronic records? Who is developing them? How is the archives involved? What is the impact of institutional web sites on the same institution's archives? Although paper is here to stay, paper records will be increasingly mixed with electronic records. Identifying a place for archivists in this transitional phase is essential.

The information climate will no longer tolerate nor excuse information practices that do not benefit the institution in a tangible, measurable manner. The college and university

⁶²Clifford K. Shipton, "The Reference Use of Archives," in *College and University Archives*, 125.

⁶³Paul Conway, "Facts and Frameworks: An Approach to Studying the Users of Archives," *American Archivist* 49 (Fall 1986): 401.

environment, as well as the archival environment, should not tolerate activities, programs, and practices that do not justify the expenditure of precious and limited resources. Analysis and study of the archives should be constant facets of archival programs.