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About the Cover

This photographic print from the records of the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) at the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division is discussed by Paul Conway in his article, "Modes of Seeing: Digitized Photographic Archives and the Experienced User." Lewis Wickes Hine (1874–1940) took this photo of one of the spinners in the Whitnel Cotton Manufacturing Company in North Carolina in 1908. Hine worked as an investigative photographer for NCLC to document working and living conditions of children in the United States between 1908 and 1924. He later referred to his photographic work for NCLC as "detective work." The collection consists of more than 5,100 photographic prints and 355 glass negatives, which were given to the Library of Congress along with the NCLC records in 1954. The collection is now fully digitized and available through the online catalog of the Library of Congress's Prints and Photographs Division. Conway discusses the relationship of digitized images to archival collections and assesses how experienced users see these surrogates as images, pictures, and archives. Color digital file from black and white original print, available at http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/nclc.01555. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

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F O R U M

With the exception of editing for conformity to capitalization, punctuation, and citation style, letters to the Forum are published verbatim.

To the Editor:

We applaud Carl Van Ness for offering *American Archivist* readers the first published critique of our 2005 MPLP article, "Much Ado about Paper Clips: 'More Product, Less Process' and the Modern Manuscript Repository," 73 (Spring/Summer 2010), 129–45. But while its appearance is refreshing, it nevertheless contains misrepresentation and error sufficient to merit a response.

Van Ness invests many pages assaulting our survey of processing practices in a hundred U.S. archival repositories. We gladly concede that we lacked time and resources to conduct a truly statistically valid survey. We were, and are still, content to have gathered more and better information than had ever been gathered about such topics theretofore. And to ensure we could be held accountable for our numbers, we made the original data set itself accessible online (see our footnote 5). Whatever the survey's flaws, we believe its conclusions to be valid: They are supported by our grant projects survey, by our literature review, and by the impressive uptake of its key messages from practicing archivists, journal authors, conference presenters, educators, and grants-making agencies, as well as in the data gathered by subsequent surveys.[1]

We believe that MPLP held up a mirror to archivists, in which they clearly saw themselves and their behaviors. The key MPLP messages remind us that 1) our most important obligation is to serve the access needs of our users, 2) that by approaching arrangement, preservation, and description *inflexibly* we waste scarce program resources, and 3) that small, commonsense behavioral changes, repeated many times over, can create very large operating efficiencies that will benefit our users, our budgets, our donors, and our employers. Nothing Van Ness presents undermines these conclusions.

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[1] Shannon Bowen, Jackie Dean, and Joanne Archer conducted a survey of the Society of American Archivists' Reference, Access, and Outreach section; some data from the survey is available online at http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/rao/MPLPTF_survey_report.pdf, accessed 1 June 2010. In addition, we refer to a survey conducted in 2009 of subscribers to the Archives and Archivists discussion list by Stephanie H. Crowe and Karen Spilman (email to Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner from Karen Spilman, 18 September 2009). The researchers requested that we not cite the URL where the raw survey data is found, as they hope to present it publicly soon (email to Mark Greene from Stephanie Crowe, 1 October 2009). Readers interested in their survey and its data may contact them directly.

Although he takes frequent exception to our assumptions, our analysis of data, and the conclusions that we draw, Van Ness provides no adequate supporting data or citations for the broad assumptions and conclusions *he* offers:

- He is content to rely on four blog posts and one survey to argue that the impact of MPLP has been exaggerated.
- He suggests that our lens is skewed toward manuscript libraries and C&U special collections and away from government and institutional archives (Chris Prom, in the same journal issue, interprets the same statistics as being skewed *toward* institutional archives). From that claim he draws outsized conclusions that minimal processing is nothing new (of course, we said the same thing ourselves—e.g., "Some repositories are already implementing these changes" (p. 238))—and that it is not relevant to a large segment of American archivists (which is refuted by the popularity of MPLP workshops and conference sessions, and the increasing appearance of its language and concepts in archival job descriptions, the NWAPI II results, the RAO survey, etc.).
- In the section entitled "The Grand Assumption," Van Ness challenges the potential of MPLP processing approaches to eliminate backlogs, arguing instead that appraisal is the better weapon. As we clearly noted, "Archivists who have sought to address the problem of too much stuff in repositories have focused for the past twenty years on improving the rigor and application of appraisal theory. Arguments about appraisal have been frequent and sometimes fierce" (p. 213), but have regretably not helped us in reducing our backlogs.

On the other hand, there is strong evidence that minimal processing *can* have profound positive effects on unprocessed backlogs. Just the evidence presented in case studies[2] that have emerged since the MPLP article support the validity of the approach. This was summed up by editor Tom Frusciano introducing an article about MPLP in *Journal of Archival Organization*: "Although as Gorzalski points out, Greene and Meissner has its critics, 'success stories on minimal processing has [*sic*] forced archivists to reevaluate their processing

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[2] Published case studies include Christine Weideman, "Accessioning as Processing," *American Archivist* 69 (Fall/Winter 2006): 274–83; Donna M. McCrea, "Getting More for Less: Testing a New Processing Model at the University of Montana," *American Archivist* 69 (Fall/Winter 2006): 284–90; Michael Strom, "Texas-Sized Progress: Applying Minimum-Standards Processing Guidelines to the Jim Wright Papers," *Archival Issues* 29, no. 2 (2005), 105–112. See also, Colleen McFarland, "Minimal Processing as Management Strategy," paper presented at SAA Annual Meeting in San Francisco, 26–30 August 2008; Tiah Edmundson-Morten, "Does Minimal Processing Mean Minimal Reference? A Study of Northwest Digital Archives Users," paper presented in session 307, "Reference Service and Minimal Processing: Challenges and Opportunities," Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting, Chicago, 30 August 2007, available online at http://temarchivalmusings.blogspot.com/2007/09/saa-2007-session-307. html, accessed 1 June 2010; Matt Gorzalski, "Minimal Processing: Its Context and Influence in the Archival Community," *Journal of Archival Organization* 6, no. 3 (2008), 186–200.

methods, apply minimal processing to electronic records, and reevaluate what is necessary for effective reference services.'"[3]

Our conclusions were even more graphically borne out by a major NHPRC grant, the North West Archives Processing Initiative (NWAPI), Phase II, in which a broad range of repositories in three states not only applied MPLP but captured detailed processing statistics. The eight institutions participating processed 800 collections comprising 1,120 feet at a rate of *2.8 hours per cubic foot.*[4] Van Ness ignored this study, as well as a set of unpublished but accessible success stories far more numerous than his four contrary blog posts.[5]

What puzzles us most, however, is the extent to which Van Ness attacks our data and methodology while simultaneously agreeing with our conclusions. For example, "Regardless of whether a standard metric is desirable, there is much to commend in Greene and Meissner's arguments concerning basic preservation tasks" (p. 138)—this after using pages 134–37 attempting to debunk the statistical basis of those very arguments. In the end, we are hard pressed to understand either the purpose of his attack or the paucity of supporting evidence in what passes for a "research" article. We are, in the end, content to let readers judge for themselves.

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Mark Greene
Director, American Heritage Center
University of Wyoming

Dennis E. Meissner
Head of Collections Management
Minnesota Historical Society

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[3] Thomas J. Frusciano, "Archives and Education: Differing Perspectives," *Journal of Archival Organization* 6, no. 3 (2008), 139.

[4] Northwest Archives Processing Initiative Phase II, NHPRC Grant No. 2002-064 – Whitworth University: *A Final Narrative Report Submitted to The National Historical Publications and Records Commission* for the grant period 1 July 2005–30 June 2007, 43. Available at http://www.orbiscascade.org/index/cms-file-system-action?file=nwda/reports/phase%20i%20nhprc%20final%20report.doc, accessed 1 June 2010.

[5] These will be enumerated in Dennis Meissner and Mark A. Greene, "More Confusion, Less Comprehension: Reviewing Some Common Objections to MPLP," to be submitted for publication to the *Journal of Archival Organization.*

To the Editor:

"What passes for a 'research' article" is something Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner need to take up with the editorial board of the *American Archivist*, not me. In regard to my article, they spend most of their letter defending themselves from attacks that never occurred. Let me set the record straight. I do not attack MPLP processing methods nor do I argue anywhere "that the impact of MPLP has been exaggerated." Yet, they somehow manage to raise these straw men and knock them down not once, but four times in their letter. Just so that we are perfectly clear on this matter, I began my career as an archivist on a one-year contract to process a 900-cubic-foot collection. At the end of that year, we had a usable finding aid. 900 cubic feet is 500 feet over the MPLP metric. The year was 1984.

Despite the impressive processing rate, the University of Florida still has a backlog problem. Why? For one, our "resource allocators," to use Greene and Meissner's term, went, as my late Uncle Arnie might have said, a "bisel meshugina" (a little nutty) with the acquisitions in the 1980s and 1990s. They kept piling up the collections in the hopes of becoming, in the words of one resource allocator, "Florida's Beinecke." Their strategy was to acquire collections first and hire the staff later. The collections came; the staff did not. In fact, we shrank, not grew. A second reason for our backlog is the explosion of reference questions in the last fifteen years. Most stem from online access to our finding aids, but many are a direct result of that great processing. More collections, more patrons. More access, more patrons. More patrons, less time to process. The math is both simple and cruel, and it doesn't require a grant to support it. There are other reasons for our backlog. Other repositories have their reasons, and, for many, it is problems in the processing room.

In short, life and archives are complicated. I make no "broad assumptions"; Greene and Meissner make broad assumptions. There are many reasons why the nation's archives have backlogs. I was careful not to say that any one reason predominated. I did *not* argue that "appraisal is a better weapon." As in all important issues, there is a lot of granularity to this one. Processing is one grain, appraisal is another. I do maintain that appraisal is a bigger grain than processing, but there are too many other grains to get into an argument over which grain is bigger.

I do not presume to know why any repository has a backlog. I know why I have a backlog and I assume the same from everyone else. We are all professionals and we need to assess our situations and act accordingly. That is what professionals do. Sometimes, though, we fall into professional ruts and routines and we need to be challenged. Every now and then, a Leonard Rapport or a James O'Toole or a Mark Greene will come along and ask us to re-examine our methods. Greene and Meissner ask us to re-examine our processing and preservation

practices. It needed to be done, and I, for one, thank them (again). But, Greene and Meissner make other arguments based on what I feel is inadequate and sometimes flawed analysis of their own data. I took issue with their arguments and their analysis. If they will extend me the professional courtesy of a reply to my article, we can have a collegial debate. However, I cannot defend arguments that I neither made nor support.

Here are several arguments that I do make and support:

- A 400-foot metric is unwise and unnecessary. Rather than reassure our resource allocators (most of whom are not archivists), the 400-foot metric is more likely to confuse them. Most manuscript repositories are not staffed in such a way as to assign one person to do processing specifically. Rather, the kind of large-scale processing that Greene and Meissner describe is often done by temporary project archivists often with little or no training. Even when the desire is there, the complexities of some manuscript collections can impede their progress. Whether resource allocators will understand the difference between a processing archivist and a project archivist or even the difference between an administrative record series and a literary manuscript collection is largely circumstantial. Metrics are important. We have our own at UF. But they are our metrics based on our situation and our expectations.

- There are both benefits and costs associated with MPLP. Those who advocate for MPLP should not downplay the costs. That 900-cubic-foot collection I processed in 1984 still had 730 cubic feet and lots of paper clips after one year. Today, it is "completely" processed, has 375 linear feet and no paper clips. The finding aid is much richer and my personal knowledge of the collection is valued by the historians who use it. In 2006, the core of the collection was commercially microfilmed; we earn royalties from the sale of the film. That would not have been possible if we had simply left it as it was at the end of one year. The subtraction of 355 feet came as a result of additional processing and appraisal over a twenty-year period. All of those impressive processing rates that Greene and Meissner cite won't seem so impressive twenty years from now if our stacks are overflowing with records that are still minimally processed and inadequately appraised.

- Processing rates have as much to do with our respective work cultures as they do our normative attitudes regarding arrangement, description, and preservation. All work cultures are resistant to change; academic ones even more so. Greene and Meissner seem to dwell in a world where everyone has IT support, there is an endless amount of stack and work space, and no one is subject to the tenure process. Would that it were so.

These arguments hold no sway with Greene and Meissner because they are not supported with mountains of survey data. But statistics, like life and archives, are also complicated. My article was submitted to the *American Archivist* as a perspective, not a research article, with the intent of stimulating thought and discussion. I hope it has done that.

Carl Van Ness
University of Florida

Editor's note: The editor placed the article by Carl Van Ness, "Much Ado about Paper Clips: 'More Product, Less Process' and the Modern Manuscript Repository," among the Research Articles in American Archivist *(Spring/Summer 2010).*

To the Editor:

We were impressed with and thoroughly enjoyed Chris Prom's article in *American Archivist* 73 (Spring/Summer 2010), "Optimum Access? Processing in College and University Archives." Chris knows us both well enough, however, to not be surprised that we do have a couple of bones to pick with his analysis and a suggestion for pushing his conclusion even further along the path he points to.

First, though, we wish to express our appreciation both for Chris's generally favorable assessment of our work and for his taking the time to conduct his own analysis from the raw data of our repository survey. We are grateful to have him say that "Greene and Meissner's article should be required reading for every college or university archivist," even if he cautions that "it leaves some unanswered questions" (p. 150). We would be delusional, of course, if we believed the article answered all questions relating to processing large collections.

We also believe he raises important questions about why application of MARC and EAD seem relatively thin across a wide range of C&U repositories (pp. 162–66). As we stated in our article, we believe that EAD (and MARC, for that matter) largely entails front-end costs (software, training, technical infrastructure) that more than pay off on the back end, but we certainly admit we have not investigated what his data and ours clearly show to be a reluctance or inability to take advantage of either standard. Or, indeed, whether there are alternatives that provide equally robust, efficient, and effective transmission of description to patrons.

And we would heartily underscore his assertion that archivists need to match the effort they have made in developing descriptive standards with concomitant efforts aimed at creating economies for implementing them. We also applaud his suggestion that repositories undertake formal processing audits, and then report back the results. Doing so will give the community better data on processing metrics and, we would expect, some recommendations for improvements to practice.

That said, we believe Chris rather understates our repository survey's evidence that intensive processing tasks affect processing rates. While he demonstrates quite convincingly that each individual task has but a small impact (pp. 157–58), he overlooks the combined impact of applying all the tasks. If our math is correct (and believe us, we're never TOO confident about that), the combined impact is approximately 25 percent of processing speed.

Moreover, and more compelling, Chris overlooks the most decisive evidence to date of the impact of MPLP on processing rates. That is a major grant funded by NHPRC, the North West Archives Processing Initiative (NWAPI), Phase II, in which a broad range of repositories in Alaska, Oregon, and Washington not only applied MPLP but captured detailed processing statistics. The eight institutions participating in the grant processed 800 collections comprising 1,120 feet of materials.

As their report to NHPRC summarizes:

Overall Metrics
- 15 = "traditional" hours/cubic foot
- 4 = MPLP hours/cubic foot
- 2.8 = NWAPI hours/cubic foot

Another Way to look at it…
- "Traditional" processing methods produce one box of processed materials every two days.
- "More Product, Less Process" methods should produce two boxes of processed materials every day.
- NWAPI consortium members produced three boxes of processed materials every day, with 48 minutes left at the end of the day![1]

These results were achieved despite the fact that many archivists involved were not fully comfortable with a full MPLP approach and asked us to create a document outlining a "middle way" between traditional processing and minimal processing as originally conceived. The numbers, they say, don't lie, and these numbers would seem to strongly support our article's argument that altering some common, unhelpful processing behaviors would significantly change processing rates.

In concluding, Chris makes a strong case for repositories to review a wider range of activities, workflows, and processes relating to arrangement and description (pp. 167–68). We would suggest, however, that he stops short of where the profession really needs to be pushed, and that is in undertaking overall *management* reviews of all archival processes—appraisal, accessioning, arrangement and description, reference, outreach, and so on. Too often, we approach each task as largely distinct from every other, whereas the real efficiencies and enhanced effectiveness depend on assessing the forest rather than the trees—that is, truly bringing a manager's perspective to our overall efforts. A paper given by Colleen McFarland at SAA in 2008, "Minimal Processing as Management Strategy," while aimed particularly at lone arrangers, might be a good starting point for many archivists.[2] In any event, Chris has begun the important work of asking us to more critically examine our work, and for that we gratefully commend him.

Mark Greene
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University of Wyoming

Dennis E. Meissner
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[1] Northwest Archives Processing Initiative Phase II, NHPRC Grant No. 2002-064—Whitworth University: *Final Narrative Report Submitted to The National Historical Publications and Records Commission* for the grant period 1 July 2005–30 June 2007, 43, available at http://www.orbiscascade.org/index/cms-filesystem-action?file=nwda/reports/phase%20ii%20final%20report%202007.doc, accessed 1 June 2010.

[2] Colleen McFarland, "Minimal Processing as Management Strategy," paper presented at SAA Annual Meeting in San Francisco, 26–30 August 2008.

To the Editor:

First, thanks to editor Mary Jo Pugh for republishing my article and to Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner for submitting their perceptive comments.

In general, Mark, Dennis, and I are singing from the same hymnal. I wish I had known about the report of the Northwest Archives Processing Initiative when I was drafting the chapter for *College and University Archives: Readings in Theory and Practice*, back in late 2007. The report clearly demonstrates that capable people using a sound and well-structured methodology can accomplish more work than we sometimes imagine possible—provided the repositories are funded at level adequate to meet the task at hand.

The NWAPI model is worth emulating, but if there is one thing I have learned in doing statistical analysis, it is that one cannot equate correlation with causation. Are the results replicable when the archives are not operating with grant funding and dedicated personnel, including consultants such as Mark Greene?

I do have a few quibbles with Mark and Dennis's reading of my article. I did not ignore the combined effect of applying all the MPLP methods, I simply studied the obverse of the question. In the main analytical section of the article (supported statistically in Table 5 and Figure 1), I noted that I measured the combined effect of applying thirty-five "intensive" processing techniques. The analysis showed absolutely no statistically significant correlation between the combined use of these intensive practices and slower processing, so it is clear that repositories using them did not process slower than those who practiced most elements of MPLP. The numbers, as Mark and Dennis say, do not lie.

However, this does not mean that application of MPLP techniques will not improve processing speed. My study simply described affairs before any changes had been made by the repositories; it is clear that when a program sets out to improve processing rates in a grant study or special project, it is very likely to achieve that result.

Similarly, I find it curious that Mark and Dennis chide me (albeit mildly) for not arguing that repositories should review the entire range of archival activities. In fact, I noted at a key point in my narrative that "[a] repository's entire range of archival activities needs to be constantly audited and adjusted." Admittedly, I could have made the point more strongly in the concluding section of the paper, but I chose to focus there on positive steps concerning the topic of the article, processing.

After reading their letter and Carl Van Ness's article about MPLP, I think there is one point everyone can agree on. As Carl put it, "[t]he practices condemned by Greene and Meissner are just part of a much larger problem. To focus on poor processing practices as the sole or even primary cause of the backlog will not solve the problem and may distract us from the larger unresolved

issues. In essence, MPLP is fighting the wrong fight." In retrospect, I wish I had fleshed out one aspect of my article in more detail, because I too have come to believe that MPLP if not the wrong fight, at least a fight that is long overdue for a truce.

Bluntly, many archival repositories are failing to demonstrate a *raison d'être* in terms of contemporary records and manuscripts—most of which exist mainly in electronic form. Whether low processing rates are due to over-processing and poor archival management skills (as Mark and Dennis argue) or inadequate staffing, lackluster appraisal techniques, and rising reference use (as Carl argues), is beside the point. Either way, a singular focus on paper, paper, and more paper has obscured our view of the electronic elephant that is standing in the center of the room.

As Lisl Zach and Marci Frank Peri demonstrated in the previous issue of *American Archivist*, very few archival academic archives have adopted a workable electronic records policy, much less implemented practical techniques to identify, process, and provide access to born-digital materials. This failure is far from an academic issue, since other organizations and even individual records creators stand ready to supersede our role in managing electronic "archives," even if they lack the wherewithal to provide true long-term digital preservation.

Against the reality of this problem, the MPLP "debate" seems irrelevant, stale, and even a bit quaint. This letter is not the time or place to reflect on the reasons why our profession has made relatively little progress in effectively identifying, preserving, and providing access to born-digital records of archival value. (And certainly I am aware of several outstanding programs, including one profiled in the *New York Times*.) [3]

Professionally, we must demonstrate the value of our archival programs, during in an era when library and archival programs are threatened with their very existence. This means re-imagining archival programs to facilitate the effective, day-to-day management of digital materials for true long-term preservation and access (while continuing to provide excellent services for paper-based records).[4] As my own repository re-imagines its archives, I only hope I can share just a tiny bit of the same spirit of knowledge, rigor, and generosity that I have seen in Mark, Dennis, and Carl—as well as in many other SAA members—over the past 10 years.

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[3] Patricia Cohen, "Emory University Saves Rushdie's Digital Data," NYTimes.com, 16 March 2010, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/16/books/16archive.html.

[4] See Christopher J. Prom, "Re-imagining Academic Archives," *Practical E-Records* blog, 27 May 2010, available at http://e-records.chrisprom.com/?p=1219.

FROM THE EDITOR

Mary Jo Pugh

Research: Intersecting Theory and Practice

Many readers of the *American Archivist* shy away from the word *theory*, but as I learned from Michael Buckland, a former colleague at the University of California at Berkeley,[1]

The original meaning and underlying sense of the word *theory* is a view of, or perspective on, something. In its origins, the word *theory* is related to the word *theater*.[2] More generally, theory is someone's view or *description of the nature of something*. In this general sense there is theory of anything that you can describe the nature of.

There should be no rigid dichotomy of "theory" versus "practice," since some view of what is involved—in effect *theory*—underlies both. Nevertheless, the thoughtful practitioner… is generally faced with choosing between formal, rigorous, "respectable" theory that seems divorced from messy everyday realities and less formal "theory" that does reflect, more or less, the untidy reality encountered in practice but does not seem much like theory.[3] The challenge for the thoughtful, and especially for academics, is to seek to bridge the gap: to develop formal theories that are more realistic and to develop realistic views that are framed in terms of general principles.

The papers in this issue explore the intersection of theory and practice. All are grounded in research and fall into three areas: understanding our users, understanding our records, and understanding ourselves as archivists.

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[1] Michael Buckland,"On the Nature of Records Management Theory**,**" *American Archivist* 57 (Spring 1994): 346–51.

[2] *Oxford English Dictionary* , 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), vol. 7, 902.

[3] Donald A. Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 42–5.

Understanding Our Users

From his research, Paul Conway proposes a new theory for understanding how users interact with digitized visual resources in "Modes of Seeing: Digitized Photographic Archives and the Experienced User." Like Buckland, Conway explicitly addresses the frustrations that practitioners feel about theory when he says, "Archivists may sometimes find it difficult to grasp the relevance of archival theory to the management of archival programs or to detect the motivations of those proposing new ideas." He explains the methodology he uses to build "a new theory of the use of archives—modes of seeing" and how it might "emerge from in-depth engagement with experienced users" through grounded theory research, "the process of developing testable hypotheses from the interview data itself, rather than using interview data to test pre-established theories." Conway also uses theory (descriptions of the nature of things) from related disciplines, such as literary criticism, to deepen his understanding of how users understand digitized images. For example, he uses W. J. T. Mitchell's useful distinction between *image* and *picture*, and he uses the theory of remediation proposed by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin to gain "a perspective that allows for the transfer of materiality from analog photographs to digital surrogates."

Students are an important constituency using archives, especially for academic institutions. For much of my career, I have argued that archivists can be partners with faculty in teaching students to understand archival research, and I am not alone in this view. Magia G. Krause offers a groundbreaking approach to this general call by developing and testing an instrument for assessing whether students have learned what we seek to teach. In her article, "Undergraduates in the Archives: Using an Assessment Rubric to Measure Learning," she explains why an assessment rubric is an effective tool for archivists to codify what they intend to teach and to measure their success. As one reviewer noted, this article serves "as a foundation for more collaboration among practicing archivists around designing useful, valid, instructional interventions for undergraduate classes." Another reviewer remarked, "This study offers a well thought-out, planned, and tested assessment tool that archivists can replicate in their individual shops." The tool also offers a means for "academic archivists to take a more collaborative approach with academic librarians and faculty members in trying to impact student research skills in a significant way."

Morgan G. Daniels and Elizabeth Yakel study how users interact with online finding aids in "Seek and You May Find: Successful Search in Online Finding Aid Systems." Their research identifies the search strategies, rules of thumb, and problem-solving methods used by a variety of researchers when searching in archival finding aids and considers how prior experience with library systems and search engines both facilitate or frustrate their success in archival systems. Such research can assist in designing interfaces for all users of archival systems, both experienced and inexperienced.

In "The Development, Testing, and Evaluation of the Archival Metrics Toolkits," Wendy M. Duff, Elizabeth Yakel, Helen R. Tibbo, Joan M. Cherry, Aprille McKay, Magia G. Krause, and Rebecka Sheffield test the hypothesis that we archivists will seek to learn more about our users if we have robust, reliable tools to do so. So far, it does not appear that archivists are using the tools developed by these researchers.

Understanding Our Records

Understanding our records assists archivists in providing better service to users in all archival activities, whether appraisal, arrangement and description, preservation, or reference. Nitrate motion picture film is one of the most challenging materials to manage in our repositories. As one reviewer noted, in "Burn After Viewing, or, Fire in the Vaults: Nitrate Decomposition and Combustibility," Heather Heckman dissects the "disconnect between what archivists, film preservationists, and materials scientists know about nitrate motion picture film degradation and what seems to be actually happening with the remaining stock of nitrate film stored (cautiously, nervously, fearfully) by archival film collections." By exhuming and examining the research studies that underlie our "common" knowledge about nitrate film, she demonstrates, first, how little is actually known about the decomposition and combustibility of motion picture film and, second, the isolation of the stakeholders interested in its preservation: archivists, safety experts, and chemists. Understanding the nature of nitrate film is even more important since the National Fire Protection Association expanded its standard *NFPA 40: Standard for the Storage and Handling of Motion Picture Film*[4] in 2000 to cover *flat* film as well as roll film. We can only hope that she and other archivists carry out the research agenda she advances to answer the many questions still outstanding about nitrate film.

Juan Ilerbaig explores "Specimens as Records: Scientific Practice and Recordkeeping in Natural History Research" and provides insights into the system of specimens and field notes established by biologist Joseph Grinnell at the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at the University of California, Berkeley. Although he does not explore the current status of this system established a century ago, I note that the museum is a leader in biodiversity informatics and information technology—perhaps another research paper.

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[4] National Fire Protection Association, *NFPA 40: Standard for the Storage and Handling of Motion Picture Film* (Quincy, Mass: NFPA, 2007).

U n d e r s t a n d i n g   O u r s e l v e s   a s   A r c h i v i s t s

Amber L. Cushing helps us more seasoned archivists to understand the young archivists entering our profession in "Career Satisfaction of Young Archivists: A Survey of Professional Working Archivists, Age 35 and Under."

Case studies provide the opportunity to learn from the research necessary to make good decisions in archival practice. Maggie Dickson provides empirical evidence of the monetary costs of searching for every possible copyright holder in a manuscript collection and the futility of doing so in "Due Diligence, Futile Effort: Copyright and the Digitization of the Thomas E. Watson Papers." Sonia Yaco assembles a formidable primer on the law to evaluate decisions about access to personal information in "Balancing Privacy and Access in School Desegregation Collections: A Case Study." Laura Uglean Jackson and D. Claudia Thompson in "But You Promised: A Case Study of Deaccessioning at the American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming" provide insight into their research into the ethical and legal dimensions of deaccessioning out-of-scope collections and their decision-making process in doing so.

Jeannette Bastian sought and assembled an extraordinary collection of reviews for this issue. This is her last issue as reviews editor—where she has served since 2005—and she sets the highest standard for her successors. Please join me in thanking her for her contributions to this journal and for forwarding discussion of the professional literature.

Finally, we've got mail! The letters to the editor section engages discussion engendered by the spring/summer 2010 issue relating to MPLP, but it is a continuation of the debate by the authors, rather than from you, the readers of the *American Archivist.* Don't shy away from theory and don't be shy about writing for the *American Archivist*, whether it's a letter, a review, or a paper!

Mary Jo Pugh

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