

Institutional Functional Analysis at Northern Michigan University: A New Process of Appraisal and Arrangement of Archival Records

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Abstract

The identification of recorded information with continuing value that documents corporate and cultural memory is one of the archivist's primary tasks, and they accomplish this mission, in part, through the process of appraisal. But with options as diverse as documentation strategies, black boxes, functional analysis, macro-appraisal, and Theodore Schellenberg's evidential and informational values, how does the "lone arranger" in an institution of higher education settle on an appropriate course of action? The Central Upper Peninsula and Northern Michigan University Archives faced this decision when reconfiguring its process of appraisal and arrangement of archival records. This article details how the archives adapted elements of Helen Samuels's concept of institutional functional analysis and Terry Cook's macro-appraisal into a model tailored for use in university and college archives with limited financial and human resources.

Archivists have always taken seriously their role as guardians of the past. Indeed, Canadian archivist Terry Cook once noted that archivists alone determine "what is remembered and what is forgotten, who in society is visible and who remains invisible, who has a voice and who does not."¹ This is a heavy responsibility and an intractable challenge given the relentless attacks on resources that have left an increasing number of archives under the protection

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¹ Terry Cook, "Remembering the Future: Appraisal of Records and the Role of Archives in Constructing Social Memory," in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, Francis X. Blouin, Jr. and William G. Rosenberg, ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 169.

of a hapless “lone arranger,” a situation made even worse by the current economic climate and exacerbated by the rapid changes in the technology of record creation.

The Central Upper Peninsula and Northern Michigan University (NMU) Archives is a good example. Established in 1992, the archives has a twofold mission as the repository of the university’s official records and as a manuscript collection documenting the history of the central Upper Peninsula of Michigan. However, the archives operates on a shoestring budget with only one professional archivist. For the past fourteen years, the archives’ operating budget has remained flat, while its collections, use rate, and services continue to grow. Given the state of Michigan’s relentless fiscal crisis, pleas for more staff and resources have consistently fallen on deaf ears.

To survive and accomplish the archives’ mission, university archivist Marcus Robyns had to learn how to do things “well enough” by implementing modified versions of archival concepts and methods. Most recently, Robyns and graduate student intern Jason Woolman completed a reconfiguration of the process of appraisal and arrangement of archival records at Northern Michigan University. This article reviews the process of this reconfiguration and argues in favor of institutional functional analysis as the most efficient and effective way for the lone arranger to conduct appraisal and arrangement of archival records.

Initially, NMU Archives followed Schellenberg’s primary and secondary values, which focus on the relative value of the records themselves, rather than the function they document. The archivist conducted records inventories and created records retention and disposition schedules to identify the continuing value of records and to manage their eventual disposition. Each retention

Record Title Voucher File		
Series Number 0302-07	Schedule Number 97-0001	
Description This record series represents the source document for all vouchers entered into the FRS Accounts Payable System and documents payment activity. Records include source data entry document and supporting material. The source date document may include check requests, personnel service contracts, invoices with appropriate authorization signatures. Record series also includes a computer generated microfiche report used as a reference card.		
Record Copy Accounts Payable	Confidential? No	Vital? Yes
Retention: 5 years plus current. Retain previous year in office and transfer all others to the University Records Center.		

FIGURE 1. A typical records retention and disposition schedule at Northern Michigan University.

schedule represents a record series linked to its parent record group or subgroup through its series number. Since 1996, the number of records retention and disposition schedules has grown from 130 to 415, a 68 percent increase.

Following the practice advocated by William Maher, the archivist arranged record series identified by these retention schedules according to the principle of provenance and the concept of the record group in a manner that replicates the administrative hierarchy of the university. At Northern Michigan University, each principle office or department, such as the office of the president, is a record group, with secondary reporting offices identified as subgroups. Retention schedules identify and describe the record series within these subgroups. As Maher predicts, this method of arrangement quickly became unmanageable due to the shifting and fluid nature of administrative hierarchies.² For example, since 1997 the Office of Affirmative Action has moved through three different reporting lines, changed its name twice, and now resides in the Office of Human Resources, which reports to the vice president for finance and administration, as the Office of Equal Opportunity.

Given the archives' limited resources and staff, efforts to maintain these traditional methods of appraisal and arrangement became increasingly untenable. Robyns simply could not keep up with the growth in retention schedules and the administration's constant reinvention of itself. Casting about for an alternative methodology, he consulted Helen Samuels's *Varsity Letters*³ and discovered that it offered a well-structured and useful alternative methodology to the intractable problem of shifting administrative hierarchies and the proliferation of records retention schedules.

The Literature

In 1986, Max Evans called upon archivists to make a major "paradigm" shift in how they arrange archival records,⁴ arguing that the concepts of *record group* and *archival hierarchies* fail to provide adequate access to archival materials, demonstrate the complex links between record series, or deal with shifting organizational structures. In their place, Evans suggests the development of an authority control-based system flexible and amenable to changes in organizational structure and functions over time. He gives great detail of how such a system would work, but the bottom line is that an authority control-based system

² William J. Maher, *The Management of College and University Archives* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1992), 227–33.

³ Helen Samuels, *Varsity Letters* (Metuchen, N.J.: Society of American Archivists, 1992).

⁴ Max J. Evans, "Authority Control: An Alternative to the Record Group Concept," *American Archivist* 49 (Summer 1986): 249–61.

focuses on the record series as the “fundamental archival unit” of documentation of administrative programs and functions.⁵

In 1992, Helen Samuels responded to Evans’s call for a paradigm shift with *Varsity Letters*. In the introduction, Samuels provocatively describes institutional functional analysis as “a new tool that supplements archival practice and turns it around.”⁶ Like the Canadian practice of macro-appraisal, institutional functional analysis “turns around” the process of appraisal by identifying and evaluating the function that created a record, rather than the record itself. Essentially, the archivist first determines what the institution does and how it does it. He or she then identifies and decides the relative value of the institution’s key functions and from this analysis resolves the location and relative value of the records that document these functions. The record series identified in this manner are then arranged conceptually according to the broad functions of the institution rather than its administrative hierarchy.⁷

A function-based approach to archival work is hardly new to archivists. Canadian government archivists, for example, have successfully applied macro-appraisal since the mid-1990s. Yet functional analysis hasn’t really caught on in the United States, especially in Samuels’s area of higher education. In his recent contribution to SAA’s fundamentals series, Frank Boles only glances at functional analysis. Still, he acknowledges the liberating effect of functional analysis in freeing the archivist from slavish adherence to administrative structure as arrangement scheme. He strongly suggests that an archivist tailor functional analysis to the particular needs and peculiar circumstances of his or her institution. However, Boles believes the major drawback to functional analysis is a lack of any objective criteria for assessing what “key” functions of an organization deserve “archival status.” The methodology remains inherently subjective, he insists, prone to the particular bias and shortcomings of the archivist making the analysis. Regardless, Boles hails functional analysis as a methodology that “gives the archivist a powerful tool for identifying and obtaining records” that document key office functions.⁸

Most of the literature on functional analysis before and after Boles concurs with his assessment of the methodology, and a common thread of concern is the large commitment of human and financial resources. “Human resources,” John

⁵ Evans, “Authority Control,” 252.

⁶ Samuels, *Varsity Letters*, 1.

⁷ Terry Cook, *Appraisal Methodology: Macro-Appraisal and Functional Analysis Part B: Guidelines for Performing an Archival Appraisal on Government Records*, Library and Archives Canada, “Government” (2001), <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/government/disposition/007007-1041-e.html>, accessed 25 August 2010.

⁸ Frank Boles, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2005), 62–63.

Roberts insists, “must be adequate not only in numbers, but in skill.”⁹ For this reason, Roberts seriously doubts whether functional analysis could be accomplished in a small institution. Similarly, Catherine Bailey marvels at the fact that Canadian macro-appraisal projects are “carried out by teams of archivists headed by a lead archivist,” concluding that macro-appraisal “is a work of careful analysis and archival scholarship, not mere procedure.”¹⁰ Still, both archivists agree that functional analysis is an effective and efficient alternative to traditional micro-appraisal techniques. Bailey even argues that functional analysis does not necessarily preclude the use of such techniques.

Elizabeth Parker conducted a study in 1999 for the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) of the United Kingdom Higher Education Funding Councils to consider practical implementation of functional analysis on a scope similar to the Canadian model of macro-appraisal. Parker sought to develop selection criteria for records, retention schedules, and arrangement models based on functional analysis that could be used across the United Kingdom in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). She intended her model to “be a generic framework” that would allow each institution to modify it to its particular situation. Like Samuels and her Canadian colleagues, Parker stressed that “it bears no relationship to organizational structure for the very simple reason that while most HEIs do the same things in broadly the same way, organizational hierarchies vary enormously, particularly between types of institutions.”¹¹

Starting Over

When the Northern Michigan University board of trustees established the university’s archives and records management program in 1992, it gave the university archivist authority over the management and disposition of official university records. As records manager, the archivist is responsible for developing and implementing records retention and disposition schedules and managing a comprehensive records center. To keep the catalog of retention schedules effective and relevant, every five years the archivist conducts a comprehensive review and revision. The archivist completed the last review in 2003.

Electronic records, both born digital and digitally converted paper, are managed according to the university’s Electronic Records Management Policy (ERMP). Initiated in 2007, the ERMP applies to all electronic records, including

⁹ John Roberts, “One Size Fits All? The Portability of Macro-Appraisal by a Comparative Analysis of Canada, South Africa, and New Zealand,” *Archivaria* 52 (Fall 2001): 63–64.

¹⁰ Catherine Bailey, “From the Top Down: The Practice of Macro-Appraisal,” *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997): 116.

¹¹ Elizabeth Parker, “Study of the Records Life Cycle: Report by Elizabeth Parker” (Emerson Consulting Ltd., for TFPL Ltd. for JISC, 1999) *New Review of Academic Librarianship* 6, no. 1 (2000): 73.

digital images, created by NMU offices, programs, departments, and employees in the course of carrying out their official duties and/or functions. The ERMP requires that the disposition of electronic records follows the requirements of an approved records retention and disposition schedule. In fact, the Michigan Penal Code (MCL 750.491) establishes misdemeanor penalties for disposing of records without the authorization of an approved Retention and Disposal Schedule.¹²

While preparing for the 2008 review, archivist Marcus Robyns decided to launch a project to reconfigure how the archives appraises and classifies records. Although the archivist has the authority to determine and manage the disposition of university records, a project of this scope required the support of key administrators and clerical personnel across campus. The archivist reports directly to the dean of Academic Information Services, who in turn reports directly to the provost. After first convincing the dean of the necessity of the project, Robyns proceeded to secure the support and approval of the provost. To begin the project, he drafted a memo for office directors across campus signed and distributed by the dean of Academic Information Services and endorsed by the provost. This memo described the project, its goals, identified project staff, and asked directors to identify a staff member most familiar with the office's mission, functions, and records management to act as liaison to the project staff.

Preparation for the project began with the establishment of objectives, goals, and a realistic time frame for completion. Robyns was identified as the project director. Jason Woolman, an NMU alumnus and graduate student at the University of British Columbia School of Library, Archives, and Information Studies, was conveniently scheduled to begin a semester-long internship in the archives. Consequently, he was selected to serve as the project archivist and reported directly to the project director.

Institutional functional analysis rests upon the development and implementation of a sweeping "Documentation Plan." Woolman's contributions included: 1) researching and writing administrative histories; 2) meeting with office liaisons to gather specific data on office functions and revise drafts of administrative histories; 3) ranking each function in relation to its importance in completing the office mission; 4) assessing the scope of the archives' documentation for each function. As project director, Robyns's principle task was to identify the university's broad institutional functions and to use the data gathered by Woolman to reconfigure the records retention and disposition schedules and the arrangement scheme. Robyns set the fall semester of 2007 as the time frame for project completion.

¹² Northern Michigan University Human Resources, "Electronic Records Management Policy" (2007), <http://webb.nmu.edu/hr/SiteSections/Resources/AdminPolicyManual/ElectronicRecordsManagement.shtml>, accessed 2 November 2010.

Identifying Institutional Functions

In *Varsity Letters*, Samuels argues that selection and acquisition does not start with specific records, but rather with “an understanding of a record’s context.” She calls upon archivists at institutions of higher education to consider the three broad missions of the academy: teaching, research, and public service. Samuels identifies seven broad functions typical of an institution of higher education in the United States:

- **Confer Credentials:** The process of recruiting, selecting, and admitting students; providing financial aid, academic advice, and graduating students.
- **Convey Knowledge:** The formulation and delivery of the curriculum and learning process.
- **Foster Socialization:** Informal learning inside and outside the classroom through residential life, extracurricular activities, and personal counseling.
- **Conduct Research:** Endeavors of faculty and graduate students in the search for new knowledge.
- **Sustain the Institution:** Areas of governance, financial and personnel management, and the physical plant.
- **Provide Public Service:** Activities including technical assistance and continuing education directed to outside communities.
- **Promote Culture:** The role of the institution as collector and disseminator of culture through the operations of museums, libraries, and archives.¹³

Institutional functional analysis requires the archivist to weigh the relative importance of each office’s function in achieving the institution’s mission and broad institutional functions and then to identify the records necessary to document those functions.

For this project, Robyns shortened Samuels’s seven broad institutional functions to better fit NMU. Its educational mission is defined by a document known as the *Road Map to 2015*,¹⁴ which outlines the initiatives, goals, and priorities for faculty, staff, students, administrators, alumni, and all other stakeholders. It is organized into four broad categories: innovation; meaningful lives; campus attributes; and community engagement. The definitions of these categories fit into four of Samuels’s institutional functions: confer credentials (meaningful lives); convey knowledge (innovation); foster socialization (community engagement); and sustain the institution (campus attributes). Robyns

¹³ Samuels, *Varsity Letters*, 22.

¹⁴ Northern Michigan University, “Road Map to 2015” (26 March 2008), <http://www.nmu.edu/roadmap2015/>, accessed 25 August 2010.

revised the title of each broad function to make them more recognizable to university staff.

Table 1. Identifying Institutional Functions

Samuels	Road Map	Institutional Function
Confer Credentials	Meaningful Lives	Recruitment and Retention
Convey Knowledge	Innovation	Curriculum/Instruction
Foster Socialization	Community Engagement	Student Development
Sustain the Institution	Campus Attributes	Administration

A set of subfunctions further informs the essential activities for each broad institutional function. For example, the subfunctions for Recruitment and Retention are

- **Student Admission and Registration** involves the process of application, admission, enrollment, and the maintenance of the student's academic record over time.
- **Student Welfare** involves all the activities designed regulate students' lives, including disciplinary actions, health promotion, housing, rules and regulation, food service, and public safety.
- **Student Associations and Activities** includes all formal student organizations, special programs, and activities for students.
- **Conferring Degrees and Awards** includes the activities involved in student advising, financial aid, career advising, and graduation.

The last subfunction was one of Samuels's seven broad functions, but Robyns decided that it fit better as a subfunction, since its activities occurred in offices whose primary missions focused on the larger activity of recruitment and retention.

As with organizational structure, it is possible that these fundamental institutional functions will change over time; however, experience suggests that it is highly unlikely that they will change (be modified, appear, or disappear) with the same rapidity and breadth that the university's administrative structure has changed and will change. Should substantive change in the institution's functions occur, the archives will be forced to re-examine and alter its documentation plan to the new reality.

Developing Administrative Histories

Developing administrative histories is critical to institutional functional analysis just as the histories are critical to understanding the provenance of a record over time. However, rather than using administrative histories to place

an office within an administrative hierarchy for the purpose of establishing record groups, as Maher recommends, an administrative history developed as part of a functional analysis of an office focuses on the development of the office's major responsibilities over time. Consequently, such a history includes the date the office was established; the dates of alterations in scope, name, and programs; the reporting lines; the areas of responsibility; and key events in the in the delivery of the office's functions.

In preparation for his research, Woolman compiled a list of sources that identified relevant reference books, records in the archives, and contact information. He was fortunate that *A Sense of Time: The Encyclopedia of Northern Michigan University* provides a convenient reference to the early functions of the university, the various offices that existed over time, and the evolution of the institutional organization.¹⁵ Similarly, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Office of Planning and Analytical Studies authored *University Profiles*, comprising profiles of each office or department that include information on missions, outputs, and future goals and are typically accompanied by organizational charts. *University Profiles* used terms such as "outputs," and later "programs and services," when identifying important office functions. Woolman forwarded completed drafts of his administrative histories via email to the office liaisons for feedback. In most cases, the liaisons corrected errors or added information.

Assessing the Relative Importance of Office Functions

Upon completion of each administrative history, Woolman's next task was to gather more specific information on each office function identified in the administrative histories. He began by meeting with each office's records management liaison. These meetings lasted no longer than two hours and focused on obtaining answers to the following questions: 1) What is the history of this function? 2) How has the function evolved, and what were the causes of change? 3) What were the key policies, events, and individuals affecting the development and implementation of this function? 4) What structures have been used to carry out this function? 5) How important is this function to the completion of the office mission?

Critics of functional analysis charge that its proponents fail to offer some objective criteria for ranking the relative importance of office function within the larger institution's functions and subfunctions. That criticism is largely unfair. Indeed, since 2001, Canadian archivists have used guidelines that offer

¹⁵ Russell M. Magnaghi, *A Sense of Time: The Encyclopedia of Northern Michigan University* (Marquette, Mich.: Northern Michigan University Press, 1999).

Table 2. ACAC's Original Retention Schedules Based on Administrative Organization

Record Series Title	Schedule Number	Old Classification Number	Retention and Disposition
ACAC Statistical Reports	08-0031	0414-01	Retain seven years and delete from the Cognos Database. Retain and make paper copies of year-end reports and send to the University Archives for permanent retention.
Probationary Student File	93-0115	0414-02	Retain seven years after the file has been declared inactive and confidentially destroy.
Blue Book Reports	93-0116	0414-03	Confidentially destroy provided the report has been superseded.
Academic Proficiency Records	97-0044	0414-04	Retain seven years and then confidentially destroy.
Orientation Program Records	03-0046	0414-05	Permanent. Retain in office two years and then transfer to the University Archives.
Reservation Forms	03-0047	0414-06	Retain three years and then confidentially destroy.
Freshman Probation Project File	03-0048	0414-07	Confidentially destroy once the student leaves probation.

an extensive and well-defined set of criteria to assess the relative importance of functions within an office.¹⁶ For the project at NMU, Robyns borrowed the following elements of the Canadian model to help appraise the relative importance of office functions:

- Identify and determine the impact of state and federal legislation, regulations, and university policies;
- Determine the influence and degree to which each function contributes to the university's four broad functions and specific subfunctions;
- Determine the level of resources (human and financial) committed by the office to the completion of the function;
- Determine whether or not an office completes the entire activity or only contributes to the completion of the activity by conducting a specific part.

With this information, Woolman ranked the relative importance of each office function in accomplishing the office's overall mission. He distributed a draft of this ranking to the office director and records management liaison for feedback.

Woolman's work with the Academic and Career Advisement Center (ACAC) offers an example of how he determined the relative importance of office functions. The university created ACAC in 1996 within the Division of Student Affairs. The center's primary mission is to

Promote student success by assessing student support needs; providing personal, academic, and career support services to students; providing training and consultation in the delivery of these support services to other campus

¹⁶ Cook, *Appraisal Methodology: Macro-Appraisal and Functional Analysis. Part B.*

professionals and student staff; and otherwise using their knowledge of student development, characteristics, and needs to enhance the University living-learning community.

Woolman identified nine key functions that the office conducts to complete this mission. Besides providing academic and career advisement to students, ACAC also provides training to faculty advisers, coordinates career exploration activities, and administers the New Student Orientation and the All Campus Tutoring Program.

ACAC's mission and functions clearly fall under the university's institutional function of "Recruitment and Retention: The process of recruiting, selecting, and admitting students; providing financial aid, **academic advice** (emphasis added), and graduating students." Having made this determination, Woolman applied the four criteria borrowed from the Canadian model to determine the relative importance of the office's functions. ACAC's retention schedules prior to this project are listed in Table 2.

ACAC's function to "administer the academic proficiency system: academic proficiency support/appeals and semester deletion policy" is a good example of how Woolman applied these criteria to his analysis of relative importance. First, official university policy mandates that it conduct student proficiency services, and the Michigan legislature gives great weight to university retention rates when determining the level of state appropriations. Second, helping students succeed and achieve timely graduation is a major component of the president's *Road Map to 2015*, which forms the basis of NMU's four institutional functions. Third, ACAC commits approximately 27 percent of its resources to the accomplishment of this function, a high number given that the office must complete eight other functions. Finally, ACAC is responsible for completion of the entire function and does not share responsibility with another office. With this information, Woolman ranked this function high on the list of priorities for documentation, second only to ACAC's primary responsibility for providing academic career advisement.

Table 3. ACAC's Revised Retention Schedules, Ranked by Their Relative Importance

Record Series Title	Schedule Number	New Classification Number	Retention and Disposition
Probationary Student File	93-0115	I/5/1	Permanent
Academic Proficiency Records	97-0044	I/5/2	Permanent
Orientation Program Records	03-0046	I/5/3	Permanent. Retain in office two years and then transfer to the University Archives.
Freshman Probation Project File	03-0048	I/5/4	Confidentially destroy once the student leaves probation.

ACAC's revised retention schedules, ranked by their relative importance, are listed in Table 3. As the table indicates, the analysis of an office function's relative importance can result in a dramatic change in documentation. The most obvious change is the reduction of retention schedules from seven to four. Analysis revealed that the university's general retention schedules for forms and reports adequately provided for the disposition of those record series, so they no longer required a separate designation as an office-specific schedule. Next, each remaining record series received a new records retention and disposition number as described below. Finally, and most importantly, the retention period for three record series went from nonpermanent to permanent, which reflects their relative importance in achieving the ACAC's mission.

At this stage in the process, it is important to note that the ranking of a function's relative importance does not preclude an analysis of the records themselves to aid in that ranking. Indeed, Catherine Bailey insists that functional analysis does not preclude the use of what she describes as "micro-appraisal." In fact, she finds that a review of the records themselves as a final stage in the process of functional analysis serves "as a means of confirming, rejecting, or refining a macro-appraisal decision."¹⁷

In this case, a final review of ACAC's records using traditional appraisal techniques confirmed the ranking and the change in the records' permanence. For example, an inspection of the record series, "Academic Proficiency Records," revealed documents that track the decision-making process and actions taken regarding a student's academic suspension and/or dismissal. Records include minutes of meetings, notes by staff following advising sessions, and correspondence. The records' evidential and informational value as documentation of the office's decision-making process and the impact on a student's college career reinforced the functional analysis of the record series' importance in achieving the ACAC's mission and the university's broader institutional function.

***Assessing the Effectiveness of the Existing Records
Management Program in Documenting Office Functions***

Having ranked the relative importance of each office function, Robyns and Woolman proceeded to assess the third goal of the documentation plan: the effectiveness of the existing records management program in documenting the functions of each office.

Again, the Academic and Career Advisement Center offers a useful example of this process. Happily, Woolman's analysis found that the archives has done a particularly good job of identifying and retaining records of the office's function to administer the academic proficiency system. Two records retention

¹⁷ Bailey, "From the Top Down," 114.

and disposition schedules, the “Probationary Student File” and the “Academic Proficiency Records,” provide excellent documentation of that function. On the other hand, the records management program has done a poor job of actually transferring and accessioning these record series to the University Records Center, which currently, maintains no accessions for these two series.

Analysis of the other offices yielded a similar result. For example, the Office of Risk Management has eight major functions; seven are already identified by a relevant records retention and disposition schedule. The Office of Admissions, however, is not as well documented. It also has eight major functions, but only five identified by existing records retention schedules. Conversely, the Office of Financial Services had eight functions documented by seventeen retention schedules! This revelation eliminated eleven redundant or useless schedules.

This information greatly assisted Robyns in weeding out redundant or non-current retention schedules and helped rationalize his efforts to improve documentation of functions with a high relative value. Thus far, he has successfully reduced the number of retention schedules from 414 to 350, and he has increased accessions to the University Records Center by 13 percent. Just as importantly, Robyns has identified eighteen office functions of significant value to warrant permanent retention of records currently identified as nonpermanent.

Arranging Records

Following the functional analysis of University offices and programs, Robyns revised the archives’ arrangement and records retention and disposition numbering scheme. The new numbering system is a conceptual schema used to manage the university’s records retention and disposition schedules. The record series themselves are not physically placed together in the University Records Center upon transfer and accession. The NMU Archives’ initial arrangement scheme reflected the example offered by William Maher and relied on the traditional, provenance-based, hierarchical arrangement format of record group, subgroup, and record series mimicking the administrative structure of the university.

Table 4. Former Scheme Reflecting Traditional, Provenance-Based, Hierarchical Arrangement that Mimicked the University Administrative Structure

Record Group	Subgroup	Record Series
2000: Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs	2004: Office of the Registrar	2004-08: Transcript Requests
		2004-09: Degree Audit and Graduation File
		2004-11: Historic Student Record Card

In the former arrangement scheme (see Table 4), the Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs was assigned the record group number 2000. Offices reporting to the provost were assigned subgroup numbers beginning with the number 20 and followed by 01, 02, 03, and so on. Record series within the subgroup are identified with the subgroup number followed by a dash and a two-digit number. The Office of the Registrar had a total of seventeen identified and scheduled record series. The Office of the Registrar reported directly to the provost and received the record subgroup number 2004. Unfortunately, the registrar no longer reports directly to the provost.

Almost immediately, this method of traditional, hierarchical arrangement broke down as the university began its relentless shifting of administrative reporting lines. Maher acknowledges this possibility, but cautions archivists not to abandon the record group as the traditional basis of arrangement. Instead, he believes archivists should regard arrangement systems “as providing a loose structure for workable decisions relating records to institutional structure and organizational relationships.”¹⁸ He argues that an arrangement system “should reflect only the general provenance of the records” and rely more on administrative histories linked by function and subject indexes.¹⁹

In Robyns’s opinion, Maher’s suggestion still opened the classification scheme to frequent revision. Since institutional functional analysis works well for appraisal, why not also use it for the arrangement of records? Using function rather than record group as the basis, the project borrowed Maher’s simple numeral system and assigned each of the four broad functions a number, as Maher had assigned each office within the administrative structure a number: Recruitment and Retention—1; Academics—2; Student Development—3; Administration—4.

Table 5. Revised Scheme Reflecting Functions

General Function	Subfunction	Record Series
1/ Recruitment and Retention	1/1 Student Admission and Registration	1/1/21 Transcript Requests
		1/1/22 Degree Audit and Graduation File
		1/1/23 Historic Student Record Card

The placement of the subfunctions within the general function is arbitrary and does not reflect any relative importance. This new system recognizes that office names and reporting lines may change over time, but “Recruitment and

¹⁸ Maher, *The Management of College and University Archives*, 227.

¹⁹ Maher, *The Management of College and University Archives*, 231.

Retention” will most likely always be the general function, and this function will remain a primary activity of the university for some time to come. If the Office of the Registrar moves again within the administrative structure, no change will occur to the placement of function and record in the new arrangement scheme.

Evaluating the Project

The project did not proceed without difficulties. Timely and effective cooperation from office staff turned out to be the primary challenge in its completion. The main issue with the first phase of the project was the quality of response from the offices. Many offices, even with support and direction from the provost and the dean of Academic Information Services, took weeks to respond if they responded at all. The most common scenario was that many offices initially agreed to participate and then set the project aside to address the more immediate demands of daily business. The Office of Financial Aid was particularly difficult. The team initially contacted this office early in the summer, but it was undergoing an audit and was too preoccupied to meet. Several months of many unanswered emails and phone calls elapsed.

The Office of Risk Management proved to be an exception. This office responded within twenty-four hours to any questions, comments, or concerns. This positive cooperation is not surprising, given that risk managers are inclined to see records management as an ally in loss mitigation. The experience with Risk Management suggests that in the future the archivist should consider bringing the institution’s risk manager on board as a member of the project staff or, if established, a records advisory committee. The risk manager can provide critical guidance and advice to the archivist in convincing office staff of the importance of records management as a tool to improve office efficiency with an eye toward reducing liability, either in the form of property loss, improper documentation during audits, or even discovery demands resulting from court litigation.

Lack of institutional memory was a second problem. The project sought to create administrative histories with details as far back as the 1980s, but, unfortunately, earlier detailed functions and organizational documentation did not exist for every office. Many of the office staff were relatively new or did not have information for more than a few years back. The *University Profiles* were thus indispensable for gathering information.

A surprising resource in the effort to develop the administrative histories was the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP).²⁰ Many colleges and universities participate in AQIP, and Northern Michigan University was in the midst of the AQIP self-evaluation process. Members of this program must continuously generate reports for accreditation, which was the reason the *University*

²⁰ Higher Learning Commission, “Academic Quality Improvement Program,” <http://www.hlcommission.org/aqip-home/>, accessed 16 October 2010.

Profiles at NMU were created. These reports and university profiles are a valuable source of institutional memory. Archivists at participating AQIP institutions would do well to seek out such profiles.

Finally, the project did require a large amount of student labor to physically relabel boxes of records already under the archives control and maintained in its primary storage facility. Fortunately, the archives does not maintain such a large collection of materials as to render such work impractical.

Conclusion

To rationalize and make archival appraisal and arrangement more efficient at Northern Michigan University, this project accepted Boles's advice and adapted the most workable and applicable elements of Helen Samuels's institutional functional analysis to reconfigure appraisal away from a primary focus on the records themselves. From the perspective of the lone arranger, the difficulty had been the initial investment of time and human resources. Once the team identified core functions and subfunctions, established a workable documentation plan, and achieved a working relationship with the various offices, the project moved along relatively smoothly with the establishment of a procedural infrastructure that can be easily maintained over time.

Staff undertook this project out of necessity to address common issues in records management and organizational change. Archives at small and medium institutions of higher education have always struggled with limited resources and big responsibilities. This project demonstrates that traditional methods of appraisal and arrangement no longer work well for the lone arranger and require change and adaptation.

This project can serve as a template for other institutions, or at least initiate the idea that archivists cannot do everything perfectly and must learn to do things "well enough." It illustrates how archivists, regardless of institutional size or staffing, can utilize students and existing records when conducting an institutional functional analysis and highlights pitfalls to be wary of. Research-intensive projects, such as those required for institutional functional analysis, are well tailored to students in research-oriented fields. These projects can be set up as internships, work-study programs, or professional experiences to alleviate the budgetary and human resource constraints that face most archives and records management programs. The use of institutional reports for accreditation, yearbooks, and other primary and secondary source materials should not be overlooked when the institutional memory of employees falls short of the desired goals. Finally, when planning a project on the scale of an institutional functional analysis, it is critical to explain the project's importance to stakeholders and proceed with the understanding that delays will occur and time frames will be revised.