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SI 580 Understanding Records and Archives: Principles and Practices

Week 11 – Users and Uses

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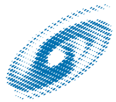
Themes of this presentation

Themes

- Digital context
- Uses of archives (revisited)
- Users of archives
- “Facts and frameworks”
- What to study
- Lingering doubts



Relentlessly Digital

- 93% new information is digital (1999) + (2003)
- Near collapse of microfilm and loss of AV media
- Overwhelming demands for online access
- Archives / museums bid for relevance

Themes

Digital context

Uses of archives

Users of archives

“Facts and frameworks”

What to study

Lingering doubts

Picture removed

Kentucky, 1955
William Gedney Photographs and Writings
Duke University Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library
http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/gedney/

Digital Archives

Themes

Digital context

Uses of archives

Users of archives

“Facts and frameworks”

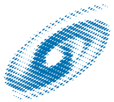
What to study

Lingering doubts

Archives in the digital world equals digital archives.

- from digitization to managing digital assets
- applying tried and true archival principles
- both transformation and throw-back

Dramatic decline in the proportion of people who care about, seek out, and use original artifacts



Digital Preservation and Use

Themes

Digital context

Uses of archives

Users of archives

“Facts and frameworks”

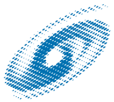
What to study

Lingering doubts

Digital preservation begins with the creation of digital products worth maintaining over time.

- value to a host of end users
- inaccessibility equals non-existence
- low use or no use could be fatal

For now, preserving digital archives for prospective use is unsustainable.



Archives and IT

Themes

Digital context

Uses of archives

Users of archives

"Facts and frameworks"

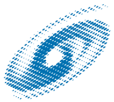
What to study

Lingering doubts

Technology in archives plays competing roles…

- … as museum exhibition
- … as publishing and outreach tool
- … as access system
- … as guarantor of authenticity (integrity)

Only the latter role is distinctively archival.



Uses of Archives

Themes

Digital context

Uses of archives

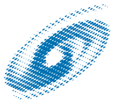
Users of archives

“Facts and frameworks”

What to study

Lingering doubts

- Evidential
- Informational
- Symbolic



Evidential value

Themes

Digital context

Uses of archives

Users of archives

“Facts and frameworks”

What to study

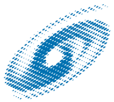
Lingering doubts

– *accountability* -- internal / external

– *protection of legal rights*

– *administrative continuity* -- organizational memory

– *operational utility* -- coping with current issues, needs, problems



Informational value

Themes

Digital context

Uses of archives

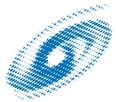
Users of archives

“Facts and frameworks”

What to study

Lingering doubts

– *history*
– *scholarship*
– *social memory*
– *social identity*
– *personal identity / genealogy*
– *education*
– *enrichment*



Symbolic value

Themes

Digital context

Uses of archives

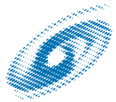
Users of archives

“Facts and frameworks”

What to study

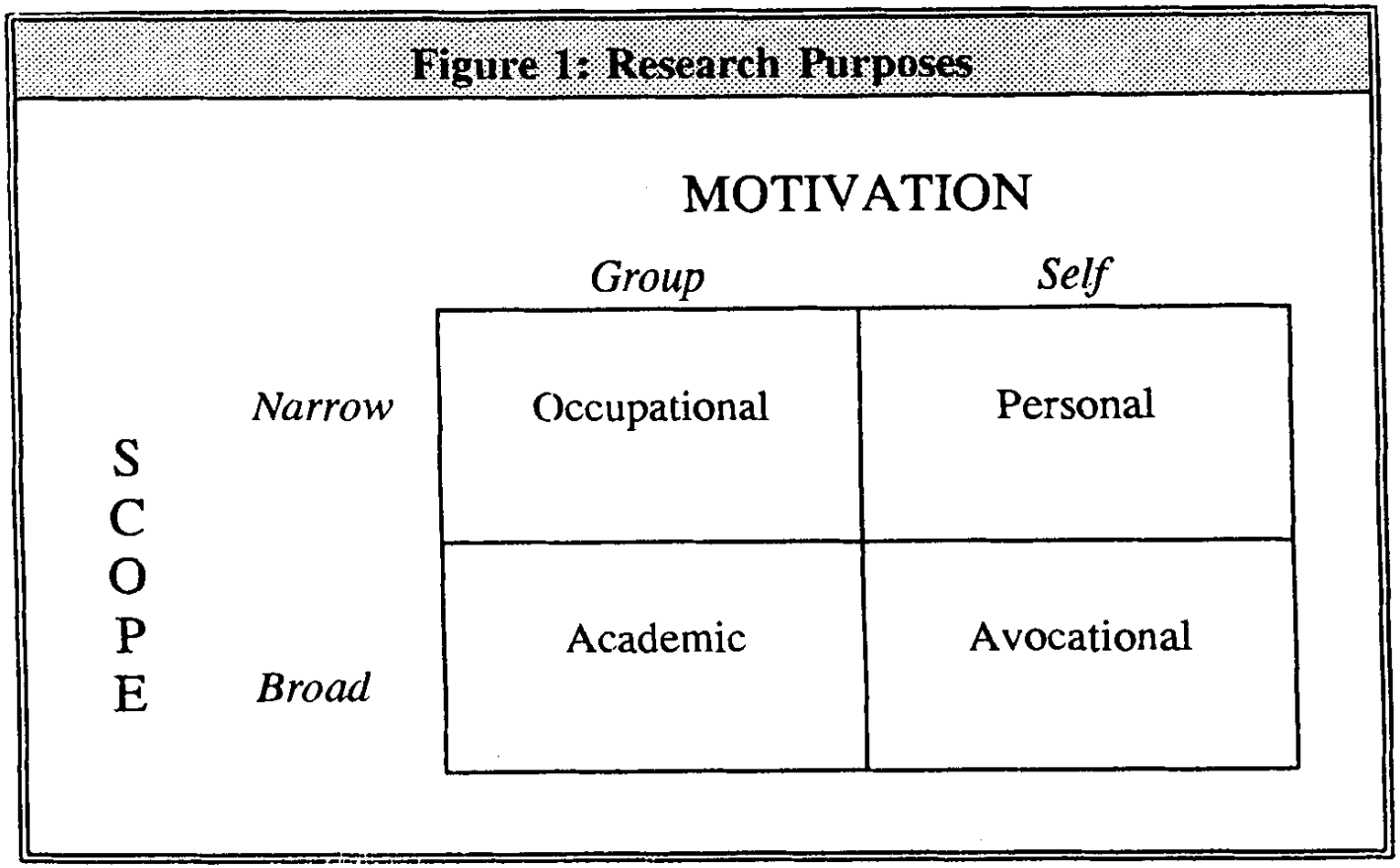
Lingering doubts

- *ceremonial*
- *artifactual*



Research Purposes

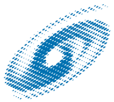
Figure 1: Research Purposes



Users of archives

Themes
Digital context
Uses of archives
Users of archives
"Facts and frameworks"
What to study
Lingering doubts

- Direct User
  - individual examiner of archival records (archives user)
- Indirect User
  - potential beneficiary of labors of direct user (consumer of user output: reader; tv viewer; movie goer; web surfer…)



What Do Online Users Do?

Themes

Digital context

Uses of archives

Users of archives

"Facts and frameworks"

What to study

Lingering doubts

- Discover relevant information anyplace
- Capture to their personal workspace
- Consult experts or engage scholarly communities

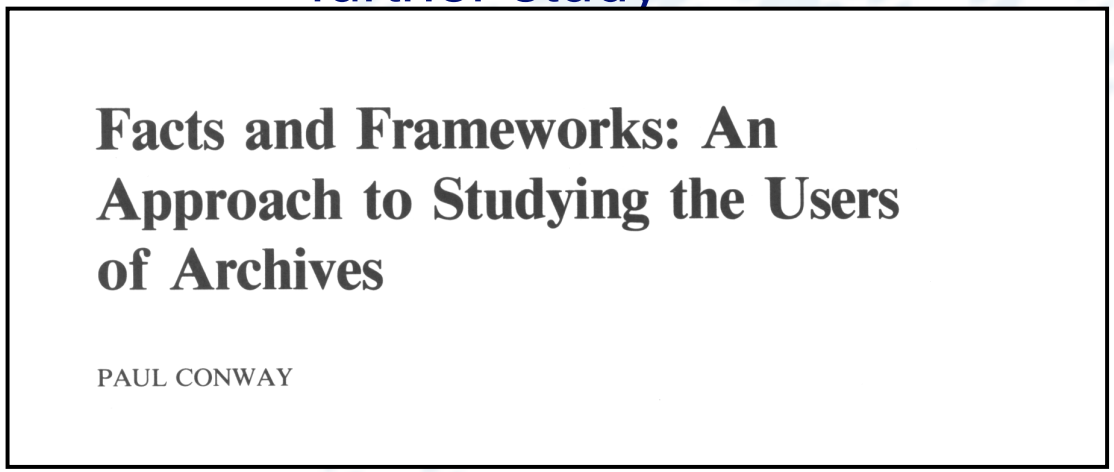
- Organize content (by concept, time, space, format)
- Cite works to track origins

- Manipulate found content (text and image)
- Distribute or publish to Web/paper

Origins

Themes
Digital context
Uses of archives
Users of archives
“Facts and frameworks”
What to study
Lingering doubts

- Followed a study of presidential libraries
- Bentley Library Mellon Fellowship
- No overt focus on standardization
- Establish a broad context for further study


Facts and Frameworks: An Approach to Studying the Users of Archives

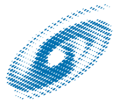
PAUL CONWAY

Key Ideas

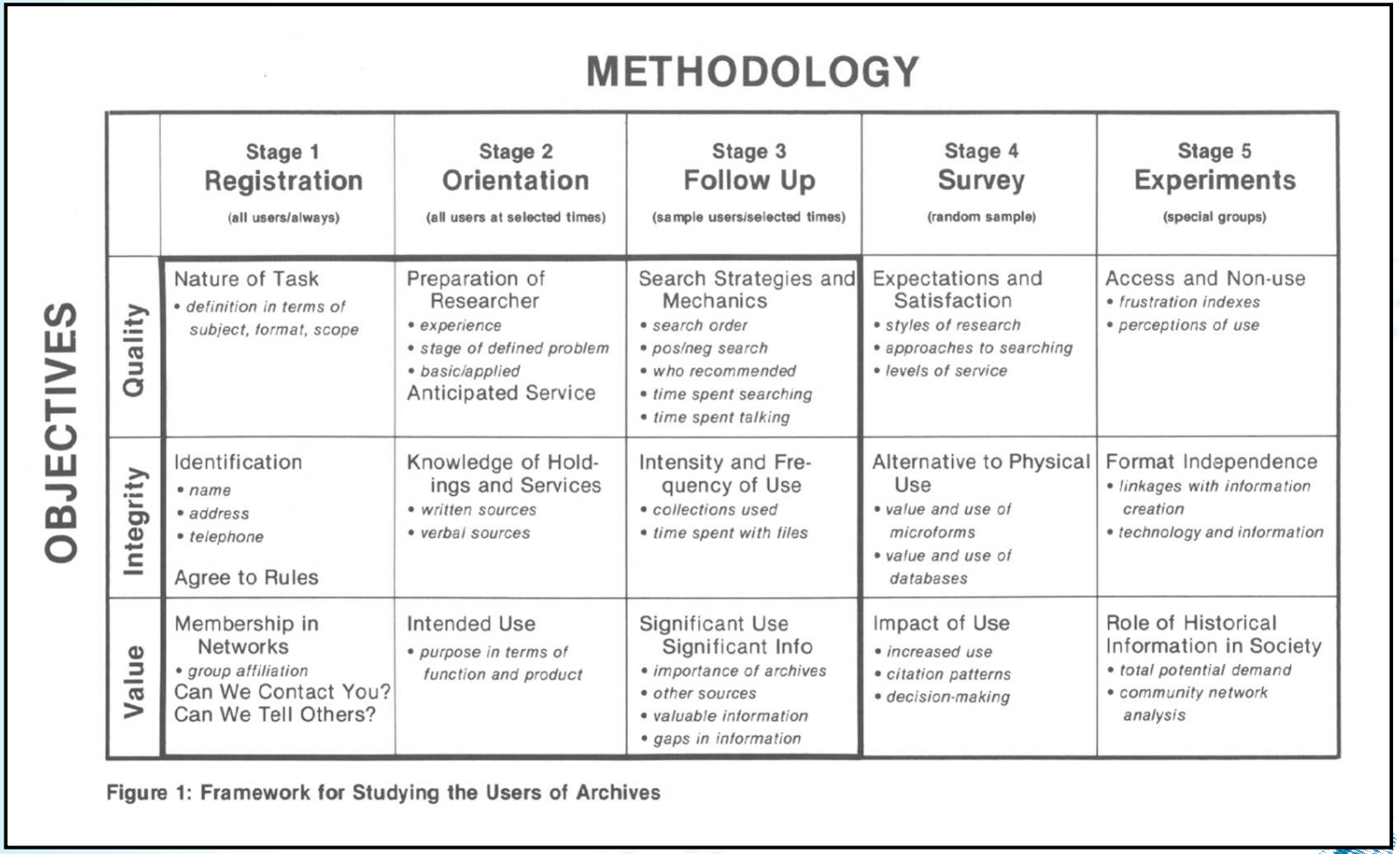
Themes
Digital context
Uses of archives
Users of archives
"Facts and frameworks"
What to study
Lingering doubts

… better understanding of users …
"seems less a problem of will than a problem of method."

- archival reference is both a service and a fertile ground for evaluation
- fit appropriate methodology to stages of interaction with users



User Study Framework



METHODOLOGY

OBJECTIVES

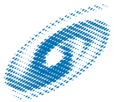
	Stage 1 Registration (all users/always)	Stage 2 Orientation (all users at selected times)	Stage 3 Follow Up (sample users/selected times)	Stage 4 Survey (random sample)	Stage 5 Experiments (special groups)
Quality	Nature of Task • *definition in terms of subject, format, scope*	Preparation of Researcher • *experience* • *stage of defined problem* • *basic/applied* Anticipated Service	Search Strategies and Mechanics • *search order* • *pos/neg search* • *who recommended* • *time spent searching* • *time spent talking*	Expectations and Satisfaction • *styles of research* • *approaches to searching* • *levels of service*	Access and Non-use • *frustration indexes* • *perceptions of use*
Integrity	Identification • *name* • *address* • *telephone* Agree to Rules	Knowledge of Holdings and Services • *written sources* • *verbal sources*	Intensity and Frequency of Use • *collections used* • *time spent with files*	Alternative to Physical Use • *value and use of microforms* • *value and use of databases*	Format Independence • *linkages with information creation* • *technology and information*
Value	Membership in Networks • *group affiliation* Can We Contact You? Can We Tell Others?	Intended Use • *purpose in terms of function and product*	Significant Use Significant Info • *importance of archives* • *other sources* • *valuable information* • *gaps in information*	Impact of Use • *increased use* • *citation patterns* • *decision-making*	Role of Historical Information in Society • *total potential demand* • *community network analysis*

Figure 1: Framework for Studying the Users of Archives

What Still Resonates

Themes
Digital context
Uses of archives
Users of archives
"Facts and frameworks"
What to study
Lingering doubts

- Quality, Integrity, Value
- Stages of developing deeper understanding
- Fit methodology to stages
  - concrete to theoretical
  - comprehensive to selective
  - quantitative to qualitative
  - narrow to broad

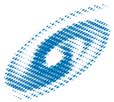


What I Missed the First Time

Themes
Digital context
Uses of archives
Users of archives
"Facts and frameworks"
What to study
Lingering doubts

- Limits of linear model
- Overly tied to reference processes rather than user behaviors
- Not conducive to program evaluation
- Not sensitive to time

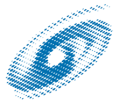
NARA study "Partners in Research" was effort to address these issues – little traction either.



What Has Happened Since 1986

Themes
Digital context
Uses of archives
Users of archives
"Facts and frameworks"
What to study
Lingering doubts

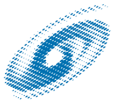
- SGML (ISO 8879) approved in 1986
- EAD finding aids
- Ubiquitous digitization
- WWW
- Digital libraries and digital preservation
- Tangible socio-technical transformations



Quality of Access

Themes
Digital context
Uses of archives
Users of archives
"Facts and frameworks"
What to study
Lingering doubts

- Usability testing of websites, finding aids, and interfaces
- Fundamental critique of EAD as an appropriate access mechanism
- Connection between use of artifacts and use of digital surrogates



Integrity of Assets

Themes

Digital context

Uses of archives

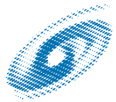
Users of archives

"Facts and frameworks"

What to study

Lingering doubts

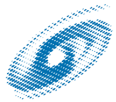
- Credibility and trust
- Effectiveness of navigation and juxtaposition
- Context and its value for access
- Impact of transformed functionality
- End-user assembled collections



Value of Archives

Themes
Digital context
Uses of archives
Users of archives
"Facts and frameworks"
What to study
Lingering doubts

- "What's the use?"
- Impact locally
- Value added (cost/benefit analysis)
- Impact of IP restrictions on scholarship and creativity, generally



User Collaboration

Themes

Digital context

Uses of archives

Users of archives

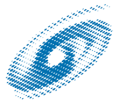
"Facts and frameworks"

What to study

Lingering doubts

Since users are rarely autonomous actors …

- … motivation based on group norms
- … dynamics of collaboration



Managing Archival Functions

Themes

Digital context

Uses of archives

Users of archives

"Facts and frameworks"

What to study

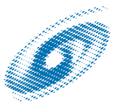
Lingering doubts

If delivering context to end users is fundamental…

If users rarely care about our organizational boundaries…

If collaborative digital library development is our only hope over the long term…

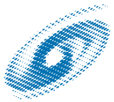
- "connecting the dots"
- "clairvoyance enhancement"



Measuring & researching use: what's wrong?

Themes
Digital context
Uses of archives
Users of archives
"Facts and frameworks"
What to study
Lingering doubts

- archivists do not keep enough data on users
- archivists do not study their users
- archives do not receive sufficient use to justify their expense
- archivists do not advertise their services, rarely engage in efforts to build and nurture a constituency, and do not aggressively support their primary clientele
- absence of "common reference points"



Measuring & researching use: why is it wrong?

Themes

Digital context

Uses of archives

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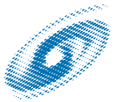
What to study

Lingering doubts

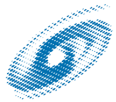
- Misperceptions?
  - archivists are oriented towards users
  - archivists know who their users are
  - archivists understand the nature of research
  - archivists provide adequate help to those conducting research



Lingering Doubts

Themes
Digital context
Uses of archives
Users of archives
“Facts and frameworks”
What to study
Lingering doubts

- Is standardization possible or worth the effort?
  - field consistency
  - content consistency
- Is quantitative data useful locally or beyond?
- Do metrics really contribute to justifying archives?
- Are research agendas for academics only?



Thank you!

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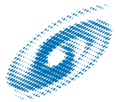

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