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SI 580 Understanding Records and Archives: Principles and Practices

Week 2 – Why Do Archives Exist?

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Themes of this presentation

Themes

- Evolution and nature of written communication
- Evolution of archives and programs
- Users and uses of archives
- Accountability and ARM

"Recording information and finding ways to keep
And use it for long periods of time are very old problems
For human culture." **O'Toole and Cox, 2006.**

Conway, *Preservation in the Digital World*, CLIR 1996.

Information Density vs. Life Expectancy

• Ong, Walter, *Orality and Literacy*, 1982.

Evolution and Nature of Written Communication

Themes

Written Communication

Archives and Programs

Users and Use

Accountability and ARM

- Throughout human history, orality has been the rule and literacy the exception.
- Once introduced, literacy is not immediately adopted / legitimized.
- “More than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness.”

• *Goody, Jack. Power of the Written Tradition, 2000.*

Literacy Restructures Society

Themes

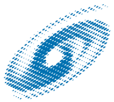
Written Communication

Archives and Programs

Users and Use

Accountability and ARM

- Religious structures
  - Adaptive Fixed
- Economic structures
  - Account keeping
  - Census and taxation
- Political structures
  - Centralized administration; bureaucracy
  - Depersonalization and rationalization
- Legal structures
  - Arbitrary Fixed
  - Precedent and modification



• Goody

Orality contrasted with Literacy

Themes

Written Communication

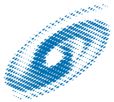
Archives and Programs

Users and Use

Accountability and ARM

Orality	Literacy
Formulaic	Nonformulaic
Social	Solitary
Situational/Subjective	Abstract/Objective
Fluid	Fixed
Internalized	Externalized
Localized access	Globalized
Relayer is alive	Relayer can be dead
Exists as sound	Exists as symbol
Common language	No common language necessary

What are the different forms of literacy?



• O'Toole and Cox. Understanding Archives, 2006.

Why Do Archives Exist?

Themes

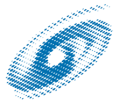
Written Communication

Archives and Programs

Users and Use

Accountability and ARM

- Archives as collected content
- Archives as spaces
- Archives as programs
- Archives as a body of precedent



Why Does Archival Content Exist?

Themes

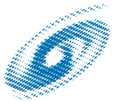
Written Communication

Archives and Programs

Users and Use

Accountability and ARM

- Creating, collecting, keeping
  - personal, social, economic, legal, instrumental, symbolic
- Accidental versus purposeful
- Purposes relate to value
  - What is value?
  - To whom are archives valuable?
  - Is value fixed or fluid?
  - Is value permanent?



Why Do Archival Spaces Exist?

Themes

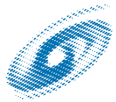
Written Communication

Archives and Programs

Users and Use

Accountability and ARM

- Symbolism
- Preservation
- Control
- Scale
- Efficiencies



Why Do Archival Programs Exist?

Themes

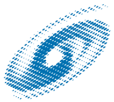
Written Communication

Archives and Programs

Users and Use

Accountability and ARM

- Evolving traditions
  - Historical manuscript tradition (circa 1791 onward)
  - Public archives tradition (circa 1900 onwards)
  - Records management tradition (circa 1940)
  - Cultural heritage tradition (circa 1995 onwards)
- Professional identity [organization]
- Professional control [education]
- Shared knowledge [literature]



Why Does Archival Knowledge Exist?

Themes

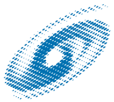
Written Communication

Archives and Programs

Users and Use

Accountability and ARM

- Tied to literacy in general
- Scholarly communication cycle applies to archival theory
- Specialized practice mirrors specialized content
- Bottom line: professionalization
- 20th century professions
  - early years, 1930s, post-war, today



Uses of Archives

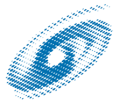
Themes
Written Communication
Archives and Programs
Users and Use
Accountability and ARM

Primary value [initial use]

- Administrative uses
  - legal, social, economic, organizational
- Personal uses
  - social, familial, individual

Secondary value [after initial use]

- Administrative
- Personal



• Conway, *Partners in Research*, 1994.

Users of Archives

Themes

Written Communication

Archives and Programs

Users and Use

Accountability and ARM

- Motivation and need
- Experience and characteristics
- History or other?

Figure 1: Research Purposes

SCOPE	MOTIVATION: *Group*	MOTIVATION: *Self*
Narrow	Occupational	Personal
Broad	Academic	Avocational

A Value Proposition

Themes

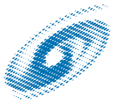
Written Communication

Archives and Programs

Users and Use

Accountability and ARM

- Evidential value
  - Accountability
  - Protection of rights
  - Administrative continuity
  - Coping with current issues
- Informational Value
  - History/scholarship
  - Social memory
  - Place and identity (genealogy)
  - Education and enrichment



A Value Proposition

Themes

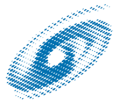
Written Communication

Archives and Programs

Users and Use

Accountability and ARM

- Symbolic value
  - Ceremony / Ritual / Culture
  - Representational
  - Wow factor
- Artifactual value
  - Hard evidence
  - Monetary value
  - Intangibles



The Concept of Accountability

Themes

Written Communication

Archives and Programs

Users and Use

Accountability and ARM

- Oxford English Dictionary
  - liable to be called to account, or to answer for responsibilities and conduct; answerable, responsible. Chiefly of persons.
- Random House Dictionary
  - subject to the obligation to report, explain, or justify something; responsible, answerable
  - capable of being explained; explicable
- Wikipedia
  - "the willingness to stand up and be counted -- as part of a process, activity or game."

    http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accountability

Recordkeeping and Accountability: Threats

Themes

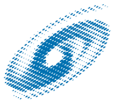
Written Communication

Archives and Programs

Users and Use

Accountability and ARM

- Destruction
- Tampering
- Improper removal
- Inadequate security
- Absence or non-enforcement of access and use policies
- Purposeful neglect in documenting
- Poor or negligent recordkeeping culture
- Over-emphasis on heritage and custody as ends in themselves



Recordkeeping and Accountability: Opportunities

Themes

Written Communication

Archives and Programs

Users and Use

Accountability and ARM

- Catalog / publicize egregious incidents of poor or negligent recordkeeping and their consequences.
- Underscore need for recordkeeping regimes that integrate laws, rules, policies, direction, and procedures
- Applying value proposition to inform what not to keep
- Leverage professional ethics and values.

Accountable to whom? Accountability for whom?

Themes

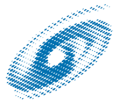
Written Communication

Archives and Programs

Users and Use

Accountability and ARM

- Records: a critical component of the chain of responsibility in a hierarchy
- Personal, organizational, societal
- Accountability and records are now a part of our common vocabulary.



I read it in the news today, oh boy.

New York Moves to Allow Residents to Change Their Gender on Documents *NY Times 11/07/06*

Eastern Europe Still Struggles to Purge Security Services *NY Times, 12/12/06*

Trove of Black History Gathered Over Lifetime Seeks a Museum *NY Times 12/14/06*

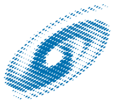
Nazi archive to be unsealed for scholars, victims, families

Ann Arbor News, 12/19/06

Small U-M library offers expansive view of brief presidency

Ann Arbor News, 01/02/07

Sites Invite Online Mourning, But Don't Speak Ill of the Dead *NY Times, 11/05/06*



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Thank you!

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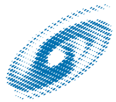

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