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SI 580 Understanding Records and Archives: Principles and Practices

Week 2 – Why Do Archives Exist?
Themes of this presentation

1. Evolution and nature of written communication
2. Evolution of archives and programs
3. Users and uses of archives
4. 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.
Information Density vs. Life Expectancy
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.”

Literacy Restructures Society

Themes

Written Communication
Archives and Programs
Users and Use
Accountability and ARM

Religious structures
- Adaptive

Economic structures
- Account keeping
- Census and taxation

Political structures
- Centralized administration; bureaucracy
- Depersonalization and rationalization

Legal structures
- Arbitrary
- Precedent and modification

### Orality contrasted with Literacy

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

**What are the different forms of literacy?**
Why Do Archives Exist?

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

Themes
- Written Communication

Archives and Programs
- Users and Use
- Accountability and ARM

• O’Toole and Cox. Understanding Archives, 2006.
Why Does Archival Content Exist?

- 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?

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

- **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?

- 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

Themes
- Written Communication

Archives and Programs
- Users and Use
- Accountability and ARM
Uses of Archives

Primary value [initial use]
- Administrative uses
  - legal, social, economic, organizational
- Personal uses
  - social, familial, individual

Secondary value [after initial use]
- Administrative
- Personal
Users of Archives

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

Figure 1: Research Purposes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOTIVATION</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrow</td>
<td>Occupational</td>
<td>Personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Avocational</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Value Proposition

- 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

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

- **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."
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

- 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
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- 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

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
Thank you!

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