Student Archivistics: The Contribution of Master of Archival Studies Theses to Archival Professional Literature

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Résumé
Établir un programme de recherches en études archivistiques constitue un exercice notoirement difficile alors que l'on s'interroge sur l'existence même de la science archivistique. Le Programme de maîtrise en études archivistiques de l'Université de la Colombie-Britannique est révisé dans le but de démontrer la nécessité de la théorie pour guider l'avènement d'une littérature archivistique professionnelle. Il est suggéré qu'une structure déductive, centrée sur deux domaines du savoir (la gestion des documents et des archives) conjuguée avec une insistance sur la théorie, la méthodologie, et la pratique peut fournir une structure scientifique capable d'expliquer le programme de recherches de l'École. Une telle structure pourra également être d'utilité pour orienter le programme de recherches des publications archivistiques professionnelles.

Abstract
Setting a research agenda for archival studies is a notoriously difficult exercise when the very existence of archival science is questioned. As a contribution to demonstrating the need for theory to guide the creation of professional archival literature, the thesis literature of the University of British Columbia's Master of Archival Studies Programme is reviewed. It is suggested that a deductive framework, centred on two knowledge areas—the record and archival administration—combined with emphases on theory, method, and practice, can provide a scientific template by which to explain the School's research agenda. Such a template may also be of use in guiding the research agendas for professional archival journals.
Richard Cox has declared, in an essay on the place of the *American Archivist* in producing archival science literature, that publishing the results of archival education students' research must be a priority in the development of a body of professional knowledge. To explain his sense of urgency, we need to establish what it is that archival students undertake research in and write about, and why this research should be publicized.

This article comprises a selective review of the University of British Columbia's Master of Archival Studies theses. As of the fall of 1994, over sixty MAS theses have been completed since 1984. A dozen of these have appeared in some published form, mainly as articles in *Archivaria*, with one, Heather MacNeil's *Without Consent: The Ethics of Disclosing Personal Information in Public Archives*, having been revised and published in book form.

The theses can be classified by the application of a functional analysis defining the object and contexts of archival science. This results in a delineation of two areas of knowledge:

- management of the record (intellectually/physically); and
- archival administration (from external questions such as defining the social contexts of records and institutional structures, to internal administrative concerns such as access, promotion, and education).

Each thesis, as measured against these two functions, can be analyzed for its particular emphasis in terms of subject (the record or administration) and approach—with particular attention to theory, methodology, or practice.

This conceptual, deductive grid is intended to group the research literature in a suggestive manner. Many theses focus on questions of method as well as practice, with preliminary theoretical expositions that cross neat categories. Nevertheless, a functional categorization can identify the research agenda of North America's only fully fledged professional archival education programme in the English language, indicate current debates, and reveal future needs.

In addition to using a basic typology of archival functions, the classification of MAS theses can be refined further in terms of subjects and approaches. The first general area to consider is management of the record. Only two theses are exclusively concerned with the theoretical nature of the record—the primary object of archival science. These are Rick Stapleton's archivographical study of the ideas of Theodore Schellenberg, the American archival manual writer (complemented by Stapleton's published essay comparing Schellenberg with Sir Hilary Jenkinson) and Trevor Livelton's thesis on the archival nature of public records.

Methodologically, the MAS thesis literature is much richer in addressing the management of the record on the question of appraisal, both retrospective and natural (by defining values such as legal, establishing provenance and original order through the preparation of administrative documentary histories, and applying diplomatics to records forms), and arrangement (by defining series). Only one thesis so far has emerged on the physical management of the record: Scott Reid's study of nitrate negatives. In the category of practice—focusing on both the intellectual and physical management of the record—is a group that has wrestled with
non-standard record formats: photographs, films, maps, sound records, and most importantly, electronic records. Of course, whether implicitly or explicitly, such theses challenge the student to find ways by which the theory of archival science can be applied.

The function of archival administration covers a broad area, from theorizing about the rights and duties attached to records, to questions of legislative mandates and organizational structure, the provision of professional education, and internal administrative concerns about how to build a comprehensive descriptive system about, provide reference to, and promote archival records.

This functional classification of MAS theses, though informed by the dialectical relation within and between theses across functions, will serve as the basis of the following analysis. Case studies, which are examples of archival practice, have been grouped with explicit methodological theses as illustrations. It should also be emphasized that this classification applies to a body of knowledge produced during the evolution of the Master of Archival Studies programme, which began with the task of inductively codifying existing archival ideas, methods, and practices, largely in the English-speaking world, moving later towards deductive model-building from an international perspective in defining archival functions.

The sum total of this body of knowledge about archival science—from managing the record, its uses, and developing knowledge about these two functions—is described as archivistics. In this case, then, we are examining student archivistics.

Since the record is the object of archival science, we shall begin with the two theses that have addressed the theoretical nature of the record—one indirectly, through archivography (the summary exposition and critical examination of writings about archives), the other directly, through theory building.

Rick Stapleton’s early thesis on Theodore Schellenberg, the pragmatic American thinker about archival issues, sketches Schellenberg’s personal career at the National Archives of the United States and his two archival manuals, particularly his first, Modern Archives, published in 1956. Stapleton presents, in a sympathetic manner, Schellenberg as an advocate of the need to modify appraisal, arrangement, and descriptive practices to manage the volume of modern records and to meet the informational needs of secondary (that is, historical) users. In a subsequent Archivaria article, Stapleton compared Schellenberg with Sir Hilary Jenkinson, who held to a theory of the record that emphasizes management of the record from the perspective of its creator. Records, according to Jenkinson, were evidence of actions in the ordinary course of business that had naturally accumulated and remained in the custody of the creator or its delegates, thus maintaining the characteristics of impartiality and authenticity. While there is a tendency to blur the lines of distinction between the two most important archival manual writers in the English language, Stapleton’s early work draws archivists’ attention to the fact that there is a theory, even if a contested one, of the record.

A more developed, theoretical inquiry is Trevor Livelton’s thesis on the nature of public records. Livelton develops a deductive model about the meaning and methods of theory-building (as an analysis of basic ideas that are defined and differentiated from each other as a means to ever more precise analytic categories), and the
nature of records as evidence of transactions (differentiated as a species of the

genus of information from other species such as non-recorded information, and

recorded or documentary forms such as bibliographic items as discrete expressions

of consciousness). Then, through a further process of differentiation, public

records are defined as a records subspecies through the concept of the juridical per-

son.8

The results of this process of analytical, deductive reasoning concludes with a
definition: “Public records are documents made or received and preserved in the

legitimate conduct of governance by the Sovereign or its agents.”9 This may seem

a small result for such an elaborate exercise. Every word and phrase, however, has

a precise meaning that should stand up to the test of managing the public record in

practice across time and place, the ultimate test of theory in defining archives as a

science as well as a discipline. Livelton finishes by defining a number of areas

where further theoretical work needs to be done to define records: the nature of

information, archival studies, and of course, the record itself.10

Methodologically, there is a rich store of analysis, argument, and information in

the UBC MAS thesis literature on managing the record. To begin with, there has

been a strong emphasis on defining appraisal standards, that is, the methods guid-
ing acquisition, selection, and arrangement of archival fonds—both retrospectively

(the practical situation facing most archivists) and by natural methods in the con-

struction of records systems.

Both Richard Klumpenhouwer in 1988 and Jane Turner in 1992 extensively
reviewed appraisal literature. Klumpenhouwer documented the historical evolution
of appraisal values from creator purposes, to those of historians in the nineteenth
century, to the current focus once more on creator needs as driven by Freedom of
Information laws and electronic media.11 Turner studies three archival traditions of
appraisal: the European (divided over whether there can be objective retrospective
appraisal), English, and American (the latter tending uncritically to accept retro-
spective appraisal). Interestingly, Turner argues that if archivists have to appraise
retrospectively it may be possible to borrow and adapt the probative (truth testing)
methods of history, law, and diplomatics. At the very least, there can be an
informed, if still subjective, judgement of the value of the records.12

However, in the recent thesis literature a number of methods are being developed
that should make natural appraisal—that is, decisions about what records to create
and keep permanently at the point of origin—possible. Four approaches have been
pioneered: value analysis (in the one case completed, records’ potential legal val-
ues); administrative documentary history (to establish provenance and original
order by an analysis of mandate, function, competences [i.e., functions delegated to
an agent], activities, and transactions); diplomatic analysis of record forms for a
bottom-up approach to the records;13 and analysis of records management methods
in the creation, classification, and disposition of both transitory and permanent
records.

Heather Heywood’s “Appraising Legal Values” defines three generic legal val-
ues: a document’s ability to act as a record of a juridical event, its admissibility,
and its weight as a source of information.14 Administrative documentary history, as
an alternative to particularistic histories of record-keeping systems, was first developed by Victoria Blinkhorn in her study of "The Records of Visual Artists." Blinkhorn analyzes artists, not from the retrospective perspective of their documentary residues, but from their functions—in their personal, professional, and creative aspects. For the latter function, for example, she identified three activities: administration (such as obtaining a grant), the creative process itself, and disseminating the finished cultural process. From an analysis of each activity, she then identified specific records and record series corresponding to each. This thesis has been followed by a number of administrative documentary studies to refine the analytic model (adding mandate, competences, and transactions) and to build up both private and public records examples.

Diplomatically, Janice Simpson completed an ambitious study of broadcast archives to illustrate the possibility of using diplomatic analysis to verify and refine the archival analysis of a fonds and series. She does this by a diplomatic analysis of three broadcast records: a radio drama script, a recording of the radio drama broadcast, and a news video broadcast. In combination with an administrative documentary history of the broadcast industry, Simpson has created a powerful template to guide any archivist dealing with a particular broadcast archival fonds.

What is also impressive about the Simpson thesis is its testing of diplomatic science—that is, the analysis of a document's external and internal characteristics, its means of representation, and the procedures revealed by showing the state at which a particular transaction is documented—on modern records. Simpson convincingly demonstrates that diplomacy can be used to understand new documentary forms, that a modern transaction, for example, may be covered by a number of supporting documents rather than by a single probative or dispositive document as is characteristic of medieval records. She also shows that diplomacy can be applied to new media, such as audio or video tape, and records with multiple information configurations such as a news broadcast with video, graphics, and sound track. She even develops a descriptive modification of extrinsic and intrinsic elements to better identify new documentary characteristics, including how different information configurations can be indicated.

Besides using the allied applied science of diplomacy, theses are also being written about records management as a means to guide appraisal, selection, and arrangement from the moment of creation. So far, a thesis by Jennifer Mohan has been completed on the history of records scheduling in North America. As Mohan points out, the retrospective disposition process that was originally meant to control the volume of modern records has broadened to include records in all media, the extension of general schedules, and a growing integration of scheduling with the development of records classification systems.

One other thesis of note about the intellectual management of the record is Linda Janzen’s study of the series. Once the initial provenancial context for a group of records is established through the concept of the fonds, the series is the next critical component by which arrangement within a fonds is expressed. As Janzen notes, however, archivists are divided over whether a series should reflect the original order, the physical state in which a fonds has been kept or has arrived in the
archives, or a fonds' "natural order" as a set of transactions grouped together by a common function.

In the first instance, Janzen describes how archivists have developed a number of schemes for the internal ordering of a fonds: by physical form, as in the American file unit; by subject as in the French tradition; or by the description of records at the series level, mixing office and agency, as the initial access point—the Australian system of Peter Scott. "Original Order" series, Janzen argues, have been the result of physical disorganization, administrative convolution, and archivists' historical concerns. Blair Taylor made one suggestion to overcome the conflicting logics of original and natural series orders: use hypertext software to create an archival descriptive system encompassing multiple arrangement links between and within fonds, and user subject access.21

As noted in the introduction, only one thesis has addressed the physical management of the records, Scott Reid’s study on nitrate negatives. As with studies of the intellectual management of the record, Reid begins with an analysis of the physical nature of cellulose nitrate, describes its historical evolution as a photographic medium, and then concludes with guidelines for the archival preservation and administration of records in this medium.22

Beginning with the start of the programme, another body of theses has been concerned with the global intellectual and physical management of non-standard record formats and their administration. Probably the best known of these is Catherine Bailey’s “Archival Theory and Machine Readable Records: Problems and Issues.” Starting from the premise that we need new methods, rather than new or no archival theory, Bailey discusses computer science’s methods of record creation and “archiving,” electronic records management considerations, arrangement and description, reference, and external administrative issues such as transborder data flows and the use of computer information as court evidence.23 Given the integrated character of the creation, use, and retrieval of electronic records, this thesis must consider both intellectual and physical management of the record and its administrative uses.

The second knowledge area of archivistics is archival administration, both external and internal. Externally, archival administration has been considered theoretically in terms of the rights and duties attached to records, usually public records; the need to socially mandate the creation, use, preservation, and public accessibility of certain private records; and defining the concept of copyright to have limited applicability in archival administration.

The first to address the social context of administrating archival records theoretically was Heather MacNeil’s “In Search of the Common Good: The Ethics of Disclosing Personal Information in Public Archives.” MacNeil explores this contentious topic by examining the nature of the social contract between citizens and the state; she argues that a citizen’s right to privacy comes before secondary uses, including scholarly ones.

The archivist as public trustee of the record must protect the integrity of the conditions of the original transaction by which citizens conceded a measure of information about themselves for certain defined purposes.24
Another idea about the nature of archival administration is the duty of accountability. As Jane Parkinson argues, accountability is a frequently stated but rarely defined archival administrative task. Because records are evidences of transactions, agents to whom particular functions have been delegated by the sovereign authority can be held accountable. The archivist as trustee of the permanent records has a social responsibility, a duty to ensure that the conditions of accountability can be fulfilled. This duty can be met only if archival administration is conducted with the proper legislative and structural support. In fact, in determining access, accountability complements the concept of privacy in defining where records are produced by the sovereign's agents and where they are simply expressions of self-determined activities.25

A third area of administrative theoretical inquiry has been speculation about the gap between the archivist's duty to acquire, preserve, and make accessible a society's documentary heritage and the reality of a majority of records being private in nature. If archives are mandated to be socially representative as "total archives," how can private records be included—or regulated for privacy and access—for private enterprises or to reflect constitutionally entrenched concepts such as multiculturalism?26

Sometimes, there has to be a study of what is not, or should not, be included in archival administration. Christina Andrews's "Canadian Copyright Legislation" reviews Canada's incomplete copyright legislation (with its international origins) and the application of archival theory to the idea of records as intellectual property. She argues that public records should be exempted from copyright considerations, since they do not function as independent expressions of consciousness. They were, therefore, never produced for dissemination in their own right. Only public end products such as reports or private papers should be defined as documentary forms needing copyright protection.27

Methodologically, external archival administration has come in for extensive analysis, from institutional histories, as of the Public Archives of British Columbia, to two studies of archival legislation. Victoria Bryans has written a frequently consulted thesis on Canada's provincial and territorial archival legislation, often commenting on the contradictions between archives' legal mandates and archival theory. In the other study, Vincent Ouellette has reviewed Quebec's advanced legislation and its networked archival administrative system.28 There are also a number of studies about how a total archives system could be developed: from how municipalities could develop cooperative archival institutions and programmes based on the joint work of a number of local public bodies, to studies about how the private sector, among religious denominations and businesses, could be integrated in a publicly regulated, comprehensive archival system.29

Methodologically, when it comes to internal archival administration, there is a rather uneven thesis literature about the means and promotion of access. These range from a study about archival indexing, bringing together indexing methods with a provenancially based descriptive system,30 to Blair Taylor's exploration of how hypertext software could be used as a platform to develop a horizontal as well as vertical system of description to express both a fonds' hierarchical order and its dynamic evolution internally, by series, and externally in its relation to other fonds.
Taylor also suggests that a hypertext platform could marry user needs—for searches by subject, documentary form, and with a reference database—to an archival descriptive system.  

In promoting access and use, there are theses about archivists’ perceptions of users, studies of user groups such as genealogists, exhibits, and documentary publishing. As Rhianna Edwards argues, an acquaintance with the principles of archival science can be critical in designing service and promotion strategies that are value free or archivally neutral, as opposed to being saddled with individual bibliographic items as a result of user acquisition pressures. Indeed, the first MAS thesis, by Laura Coles, about the decline of documentary publishing, is an interesting comment on how slow Canadian archives have been to reorient themselves from an academic audience to other user audiences.  

One final area of archival administration is that of archival education, the production of professional practitioners, and knowledge about archival science. Nayani Samarasinghe’s study on the proposed creation of graduate archival education in Sri Lanka illustrates a common set of administrative tasks shared with other professional education programmes: a common methodology for curriculum formation—with foundation (context), core, applied, and joint administrative courses—and a concern to identify an appropriate administrative delivery vehicle. In this case, she proposes a one-year graduate diploma to be given at one or both of Sri Lanka’s universities. This brief survey of the topology of student archival studies, in addition to informing us about what has been done, should also indicate current debates and future needs in archival student research. It should also respond to Richard Cox’s assertion that the writings of professional archival students need to be included in any research agenda guiding the development of a professional archival literature today.

One example of current debates is seen in the appearance of thesis literature that is explicitly theoretical in nature, concerning the nature of the record and its administration, developing archival studies from a discipline to a science. Another is the evolution, driven by the practical pressures of Freedom of Information laws and electronic records, from retrospective methods of appraisal to the development of a new records management methodology of natural appraisal through value analysis, administrative documentary history, diplomatics, and a historical analysis of the practical origins of current records management practice.

Certain obvious gaps stand out. There is a relative absence of discussion of public information policies or Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy laws and their administration, the physical management of the record (whether about particular physical formats or about preservation and conservation planning), and archival description, whether about the evolution of Rules for Archival Description or other elements of a comprehensive descriptive programme. Nor is there much in the way of archivography, the study of writings about archives that originated in Europe, or of archival education.

Finally, now that we know in a general way what has been produced by students, should this research literature be included in archival publications? If the profes-
ation believes in the value of a systematic and comprehensive research agenda based on the development of archives as a science as well as a discipline, by developing theories and methods about managing the record and its administrative context, then there is every reason to promote the results of one of the few places where research is conducted into archives as a science. In this way, student archivistics will become the basis of a theoretically armed, methodologically sophisticated, scientific profession.

Notes

* This article is based on a paper presented at the annual conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists, Ottawa, 27 May 1994. Thanks are due to Luciana Duranti, UBC, for suggesting this topic, and to Terry Eastwood, UBC, and Jay Atherton of Archivaria, for their editorial assistance.
2 Annex 1 contains a list of theses as of September 1994.
4 The bibliographic citations for Stapleton appear in notes six and seven below. Livelton’s thesis is to be published jointly by Scarecrow Press and the Society of American Archivists.
9 Ibid., p. 160.
10 Ibid., see introduction, pp. 1-26, and conclusion of Livelton’s discussion of the nature of the record, pp. 73-75.
13 For a discussion of this concept, of record analysis from the bottom up, see Heather MacNeil, “Weaving Provenancial and Documentary Relations,” Archivaria 34 (Summer 1992), pp. 192-198.
18 Ibid., see chapter one.
35 The thesis by David Weber, “Access to Public Records Legislation in North America: A Content Analysis,” which arrived too late to fully analyze, begins to fill this particular gap. The reader should note that, while Weber reviews Freedom of Information laws for over sixty jurisdictions in North America, the focus is on access; accountability remains to be addressed.

Appendix

Master of Archival Studies Theses (UBC)

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The Informational Needs of Historians Researching Women: An Archival User Study
Municipal Records Keeping in British Columbia: An Exploratory Survey
The Records of Visual Artists: Appraising for Acquisition and Selection
Canadian Provincial and Territorial Archival Legislation: A Case Study of the Disjunction Between Theory and Law
An Analysis of Archival Sources for the History of the Family in British Columbia, 1850-1914
Acquisition of Photographs: Determining Archival Quality
Multiculturalism and Archives
Conceiving Local Archival Institutions: A Study of the Development of Archival Programs in Richmond and Delta, British Columbia
Problems and Issues in the Arrangement and Description of Photographs in Libraries and Archival Repositories
The Decline of Documentary Publishing in Canadian Archives, 1865-1984
The Registration of a Deed of Land in Ontario: A Study of Special Diplomatics
Preserving Records Bearing on the Experience of Women in North America: The Women's Archives Movement and its Significance for Appraisal for Acquisition
Archivists' Outlook on Service to Genealogists in Selected Canadian Provincial Archives
W. Kaye Lamb and the Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1934-1939
Faculty Papers: Appraisal for Acquisition and Selection
A Functional Analysis of Church Institutions
Towards an Archives of Film
Archival Exhibitions: Purposes and Principles
The Records of Lawyers: Archival Appraisal and Access
Archival Acquisition of the Records of Voluntary Associations
Access and Accessibility to Canadian Vital Event Records
Appraising Legal Value in Records
Business Archives: Historical Developments and Future Prospects
Canadian Universities: A Functional Analysis
Cartographic Archives: A Composite Resource
University Student Records: Privacy and Research Access
Series: History, Theory and Practice
An Archival Investigation of Hospital Records
A Study of Archivists' Perceptions of Reference Service
Concepts of Value in the Archival Appraisal Literature: An Historical and Critical Analysis
Optical Storage Technology: Applications and Implications for Archives
The Potential for Acquisition of Ethnic Archives: A Case Study of Five Chinese Organizations in Vancouver, BC
Public Records: A Study in Archival Theory
Camera Lucida: The Moving Image as Evocative Document, Film Form, Meaning and the Grammatology of Archival Selection
An Administrative History of the Supreme Court of British Columbia with Particular Reference to the Vancouver Registry: Its Court Records, Their Composition, and Their Selection
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The Acquisition of Literary Papers in Canada
In Search of the Common Good: The Ethics of Disclosing Personal Information
Archival Indexing: Problems and Issues
A Study of the Archival Record and its Context: A Case Study of Nanaimo City Records
The Appraisal of Canadian Military Personnel Files of the First World War
Canadian Archives and the Corporate Memory: A Case of Amnesia?
Origin and Development of Records Scheduling in North America
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A Multi-Component Study of the Administration and Preservation of Nitrate Negatives
Developing a Programme to Educate Archivists in Sri Lanka
Broadcast Archives: A Diplomatic Examination
The Archival Ideas of T.R. Schellenberg on Appraisal, Arrangement, and Description of Archives
A Comparative Study of the Recordkeeping Practices of Anglican, Baptist and United Churches in British Columbia
The Application of Hypertext to Archives
A Study of the Theory of Appraisal for Selection
Special Diplomats and the Study of Authority in the United Church of Canada
Access to Public Records Legislation in North America: A Content Analysis
‘The Facts about Fax’: Facsimile Transmission and Archives Held in Public Archives