We have both admired and benefited from Archivaria over the years. We have despaired of US archivists’ parochialism because so few subscribed to the authoritative voice of the archival profession in Canada. One of us published an article in Archivaria and contributed a letter to the editor some time later. Yet here we find ourselves confronted with a special issue on processing (arrangement and description) and discover that your journal is as parochial as our own. Since 2002, US arrangement and description has undergone something of a revolution, as more and more archivists accept a method that puts researcher access first and pristine processing second.

The method goes by several names: “MPLP,” “Greene-Meissner,” “minimal processing,” “maximal processing.” MPLP derives from the title of the original article: Mark A. Greene and Dennis E. Meissner, “More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing,” American Archivist 68, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2005): 208–63. The article, for which the research was supported by a 2003 NHPRC Archival Research Fellowship, is freely available online at http://archivists.metapress.com/content/c741823776k65863/fulltext.pdf. Since its publication, it has spawned a dozen related articles (all but one of them favorable; most were examples of applying the method), at least a dozen sessions at the Society of American Archivists annual conferences, a long-running SAA workshop on how to implement MPLP, innumerable blog posts and tweets, readings in the curriculum of most if not all US graduate archival concentrations, and – perhaps most importantly – a change in the granting programs of the National Historic Publications and Records Commission to favor MPLP-based projects. Yet the several articles in the Archivaria special issue completely ignore MPLP (though it is mentioned in a book review).

Archivists apply processing (arrangement, conservation, description) techniques that are remarkably insufficient to eliminate their backlogs, procedures that may have been appropriate decades ago but are unsuited to current needs. These traditional approaches (for example, searching for and destroying every paper clip, photocopying every news clipping, and refoldering and relabeling every file) are labor intensive; they tend to be applied in ways that are inflexible and dogmatic; and they ignore the real needs of most users, who would generally prefer to see archival materials arranged and described to a less granular level and appear less pristine if, in return, they receive speedier access to many more collections. MPLP argues that all collections in a repository ought to be processed to the collection (fonds) level, then to a series level, before any of them are treated to arrangement and description at some notably more granular level. Significant productivity increases, improved user outcomes, and better relations with donors and other stakeholders will result.

While some archivists erroneously see MPLP as a set of rigid prescriptions repudiating detailed processing (one person going so far as to refer to it as “much ado about paperclips”; see below), it is in fact an approach that stresses flexibility in applying processing procedures, and sensibility and sound management in deploying institutional resources. Above all, MPLP focuses on the needs of researchers as the key driver in processing decision-making. MPLP articulates an approach to archival processing that is both more efficient and more effective than traditional approaches, one that seeks to preserve scarce program resources by expending them more intentionally and thoughtfully. Surveys of both researchers and reference archivists confirm our hypothesis that MPLP improves user access even though it may require some realignment of resources between processing and reference staffs.


Moreover, MPLP’s principles can and are being applied to other aspects of archives administration. See Mark A. Greene, “MPLP: It’s Not Just for


Our point in this letter is not that MPLP ought to be unthinkingly embraced by our Canadian colleagues, only that our friends from the north should take some serious and substantial cognizance of a method spreading quickly and generally with success across the US. Love it or hate it, it seems odd to completely ignore it.

Respectfully,

Mark A. Greene, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming
Dennis E. Meissner, Minnesota Historical Society

**The General Editor and the Guest Editor Respond**

Thank you for your letter regarding the absence of an article about MPLP from the Fall 2012 issue of *Archivaria*, which focused on arrangement and description. We question your charge of parochialism. An issue that features authors from the UK, the US, and Canada can hardly be called parochial.

It is true that many aspects of archival arrangement and description are not covered (e.g., the ongoing maintenance of standards, arrangement of born-
digital records, as well as the impact of MPLP). However, we were not publish-
ing a comprehensive volume of commissioned essays on archival description;
we were publishing a single issue of a journal that can at most include six to
eight articles. The content of the issue was drawn from proposals received
in response to a call for papers. Of the thirty-seven proposals received, only
one dealt with MPLP. As you indicate, MPLP has been widely discussed in
the published literature and in other venues, and the proposed paper did not
appear to add new insights to an already well-documented discussion. Given
the absence of proposals on MPLP, it may be that the community feels the
topic has been thoroughly canvassed.

Archivaria always welcomes submissions of thoughtful, scholarly,
evidence-based articles that advance our knowledge, and we invite you to fill
the perceived gap in addressing this issue.

Jean Dryden, General Editor
Terry Eastwood, Guest Editor