

DOCUMENTATION STRATEGIES IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY?: RETHINKING INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES AND PROFESSIONAL LIMITATIONS

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Since its introduction into archival theory nearly fifteen years ago, the documentation strategy approach has generated considerable debate within the archival community, garnering both advocates and critics. This discussion has been so widespread that Terry Cook has called documentation strategy “the single most important North American contribution to a growing debate on appraisal theory, strategy and methodology.”¹ This paper will utilize a review of the professional literature to trace the evolution of the documentation strategy, consider the arguments that have been raised for and against it, and analyze several experiments with the concept to date. In addition, this overview will argue for the importance of documentation strategy as an appraisal tool, and will examine its relationship with functional analysis and macroappraisal. Finally, the paper will include the results of interviews conducted by the author to assess the impact that these three techniques, particularly documentation strategy, are having on North American archival practice.

Defining “Documentation Strategy”

The archival documentation strategy concept was first introduced in papers presented by Helen Samuels, Larry Hackman, and Patricia Aronsson at a session of the 1984 Society of American Archivists annual meeting.² The pioneering work in the archival literature, Helen Samuels’s “Who Controls the Past,” was published in 1986, and defined the documentation strategy as follows:

A documentation strategy is a plan formulated to assure the documentation of an ongoing issue, activity, or geographic area (e.g., the operation of the government of the state of New York, labor unions in the United States, the impact of technology on the environment). The strategy is ordinarily designed, promoted, and in part implemented by an ongoing mechanism involving records creators, administrators (including archivists), and users. The documentation strategy is carried out through the mutual efforts of many institutions and individuals influencing both the creation of the records and the archival retention of a

portion of them. The strategy is refined in response to changing conditions and viewpoints.³

This initial definition has five salient characteristics. First, the documentation strategy defines a particular scope of documentation. Second, the plan involves not only archivists, but also records creators, other administrators, and records users as well. Third, the strategy is multi-institutional. Fourth, it seeks to influence the creation of records, rather than deal only with existing documentation. Finally, the documentation strategy is an ongoing process and can be revised as circumstances change. It is important to note that Samuels distinguishes the documentation strategy from two familiar concepts, the collecting/acquisitions policy and the collecting project. The former focuses on the holdings and collecting priorities of individual repositories, although its implementation can be accomplished through interinstitutional cooperation and documentation strategies; the latter concentrates on the accumulation of existing documentation of a specific issue, and is not an ongoing process.

The concept of the documentation strategy has evolved during a decade of dialogue in the archival literature. Richard Cox cites the most recent definition of the documentation strategy as that offered in the Society of American Archivists' 1992 glossary:

An ongoing, analytic, cooperative approach designed, promoted, and implemented by creators, administrators (including archivists), and users to ensure the archival retention of appropriate documentation in some area of human endeavor through the application of archival techniques, the creation of institutional archives and refined acquisition policies, and the development of sufficient resources. The key elements in this approach are an analysis of the universe to be documented, an understanding of the inherent documentary problems, and the formulation of a plan to assure the adequate documentation of an issue, activity, or geographic area.⁴

This statement retains the essential elements of earlier definitions, while advocating more clearly the creation of institutional archives as part of the documentation strategy process. Based on this model, Cox suggests that the documentation strategy has four basic elements: it is an analytical tool that provides a framework for addressing "some aspect of the documentary universe;" it is an interdisciplinary process that brings the expertise of a number of parties to the analysis of the documentary area under consideration; it involves a recognition of inherent documentary problems, such as the increasing quantity of modern documentation and the changing forms of contemporary records; and, finally, it requires the formulation of a plan to define what constitutes appropriate documentation for the area analyzed.⁵ While the definitions in the glossary and by Cox are not as explicit about interinstitutional cooperation and archival intervention in the records creation process as Samuels's original definition, this might be considered a difference in emphasis rather than in substance. The glossary definition describes documentation strategy as cooperative, and Cox discusses it as an interdisciplinary process. Regarding archival intervention, the latter definition's focus on "the creation of institutional archives and refined acquisition policies" and "the

formulation of a plan to assure . . . the adequate documentation” necessarily involves steps to identify and fill gaps in existing documentation.

Purpose and Goals

One of the driving forces behind the inception of a documentation strategy approach was a professional perception that archivists were failing in their mission to adequately document society, because current appraisal practices had resulted in overabundant or inadequate documentation in some areas, while leaving complete gaps in the documentary record for others.⁶ The watershed expression of this concern about appraisal practice was written by F. Gerald Ham: “Our most important and intellectually demanding task as archivists is to make an informed selection of information that will provide the future with a representative record of human experience in our time. But why must we do it so badly?”⁷

Another important factor in the development of the documentation strategy was a sense that contemporary records were changing, and that this evolution required archivists to adapt old techniques and adopt new ones in order to effectively manage modern documentation. While there is not a professional consensus that present documentary realities have altered the fundamental issues involved in archival functions, a number of archivists have argued that emerging documentary forms and evolving organizational structures mean that the modern documentary universe differs from that of the past in at least three ways.⁸

First, the emergence of new technologies has sparked an explosion in the sheer abundance of records. Second, the increasingly complex relationships among modern institutions have rendered consideration of the records of isolated institutions unfeasible. Because of increased multi-institutional collaboration, today’s records often can be understood only in conjunction with each other. Moreover, this complex web of relationships has resulted in large-scale duplication of documentation. Thus, informed appraisal decisions must be made in the context of the available range of documentation, with the knowledge that related or better documentation might be held by another institution. Finally, documentary forms themselves are changing. In addition to the issues posed by the proliferation of electronic records, there is an increasing number of non-textual documentary materials to be considered. According to proponents of the documentation strategy, these changes in the nature of documentation itself require that archivists develop new methods of approaching the documentary record to supplement traditional practices.

Advocates of documentation strategies have argued that this approach holds a number of promises for contemporary archival practice. For example, through interinstitutional cooperation to avoid duplication in collecting and careful planning to determine in advance which records archivists should appraise, the strategy would appear to provide the means for conserving scarce archival resources in the long run. In addition, the broad definition of the documentation strategy allows it to be adapted to a wide variety of documentary needs, and its formulation as an ongoing process provides the flexibility for revision as the nature of documentation changes.

Another potential benefit of the documentation strategy is that, because it involves records creators, users, and area specialists in its work, it affords archivists the opportunity to educate other sectors of society about the importance of archival work. In addition, it offers archivists an opportunity to enhance the quality of documentation by drawing on the different experiences and perspectives that each of these groups brings to the table.⁹ In designing and promoting documentation strategies, archivists should place special emphasis on building alliances with related information and historical professionals, because documentation strategies have potential significance and application for these fields as well. Libraries, manuscript repositories, museums, and historical societies share the interest that archives have in ensuring the adequate documentation of society. Moreover, other information professionals often have more experience than archivists in collecting and preserving non-textual materials.¹⁰

The chief recommendation of the documentation strategy, however, is that it is a powerful tool to assist the archival profession with its appraisal responsibilities. In recent years, some archivists have begun to advocate research-based techniques as the only viable solution to the numerous appraisal dilemmas posed by the modern documentary universe. The premise behind these methodologies is that careful planning and analysis must precede any examination of actual records. The documentation strategy is one such approach that has been advanced in the archival literature; other techniques that offer considerable promise are functional analysis and macroappraisal.

Other Techniques

The seminal work in functional analysis is Helen Samuels's consideration of the documentation produced by modern colleges and universities.¹¹ Samuels's ideas of functional analysis grew out of prior efforts to consider the process involved in improving the documentation of science and technology.¹² The focus of functional analysis, unlike that of the documentation strategy with its collaborative emphasis, is the single institution. The premise of this approach is that

... archivists must start their selection activities not with a consideration of specific sets of records, but with an understanding of the context in which records are created. A functional approach provides the means to achieve a comprehensive understanding of an institution and its documentation: a knowledge of what is to be documented and the problems of gathering the desired documentation.¹³

Functional analysis involves the identification of an institution's primary functions, and the breakdown of each function into its component activities. In this exercise, the archivist examines what sorts of documentation are necessary to document each function and activity fully. This analysis enables the archivist to pinpoint which units within the organization are most likely to produce the required documentation, and also to determine what types of documentation might not be produced at all because of the nature of a particular function or activity. Having completed a functional analysis, an archivist is then able to target particular functions and activities for priority attention, based on the mission and goals of the institution.

Canadian archivists have been the primary advocates of a third approach: macroappraisal. This technique grew out of the "total archives" concept in which public archives seek out both public records and private papers.¹⁴ Terry Cook, a proponent of macroappraisal, has offered a comprehensive explanation of this model, and has outlined how the National Archives of Canada is utilizing it.¹⁵ In a macroappraisal model, the focus is on records creators and records-creating processes, rather than on the records themselves. The objective of this approach is to create an image of society that will represent its most significant features. This image is achieved by integrating function, which Cook equates with the purpose or intent of the records creator, with structure, which represents the actual records creator. Cook points out that records are produced through the interaction of function and structure with clients and argues that "It is at these points of sharpest *interaction* that the best documentary evidence will be found."¹⁶ Thus, selection within the macroappraisal model involves a process of identifying society's most important records-creating structures and then developing methods to evaluate the importance of the client's interaction with these structures.

A shared goal of documentation strategy, functional analysis, and macroappraisal is to improve the quality of documentation through more effective selection. Each of these techniques, however, approaches appraisal in a slightly different manner. Documentation strategies seek to achieve better documentation through the careful consideration of a specific issue, activity, or geographic area in a multi-institutional venture. Functional analysis advances more comprehensive documentation of a single institution by analyzing the institution's primary functions and activities. Macroappraisal focuses on providing a more representative image of society by considering the interaction of function, structure, and client as represented in an institution's records.

How do functional analysis and macroappraisal interact with documentation strategy? Richard Cox writes that the relationship of these techniques, "whether as three related concepts . . . or even an evolution from one primitive concept to another more sophisticated one or—even—similar ideas emerging in a parallel manner, remains to be worked out over time . . ." ¹⁷ In fact, proponents of these approaches have begun to envision the form that this interaction might take. Both Samuels and Cook indicate that documentation strategies, if they are to be implemented, must be preceded by appropriate groundwork at the institutional level.

Helen Samuels believes that the success of documentation strategies rests on strong institutional archives. Therefore, she advocates functional analysis as a necessary step to precede the implementation of documentation strategies. By gaining a firm understanding of the nature of their own institutional documentation, and by establishing their particular institutional priorities, archivists will be able to better understand what areas their institutions are able to document on their own. This process will also suggest, however, that there are certain areas that institutions would be able to better document as part of a multi-institutional, collaborative effort. Thus, Samuels feels that the greatest success of documentation strategies will follow the widespread application of institutional functional analysis.¹⁸

Cook also suggests that these techniques can complement each other. Once the structural-functional approach of macroappraisal has been applied at the institutional level, Cook suggests that "the image should certainly be further supplemented by personal,

private records in all media by use of the documentation strategy to identify who or what has fallen through the cracks."¹⁹ In addition to the arguments advanced by Samuels and Cook, which advocate the application of functional analysis or macroappraisal to precede documentation strategies, the experiences of the Milwaukee project (discussed in more detail below) lend credence to the notion that effective institutional archives and collecting repositories are a prerequisite for the implementation of documentation strategies.

Proponents of each of these techniques have repeatedly emphasized that such approaches are not intended to supplant traditional microappraisal methods. Richard Cox argues that "the documentation strategy is intended to supplement rather than replace traditional methods of archival appraisal. Documentation strategy is not a synonym for all archival appraisal . . ."²⁰ In addition, Cox has argued at length that the documentation strategy approach is consistent with traditional principles of archival appraisal.²¹ In her work on the institutional functional analysis of colleges and universities, Helen Samuels writes, "*Varsity Letters* builds upon traditional archival practice and is intended to supplement it. . . . Archival practice stresses the need to understand institutions and has used an examination of functions as a method to achieve this goal."²² Terry Cook calls for the application of traditional appraisal methods to follow the application of macroappraisal criteria: "Traditional or micro-appraisal criteria applied series by series, system by system, once the most important of these series and systems have been identified in the macro-appraisal model . . . must all be considered."²³

Documentation Strategy in Practice

In little more than a decade, proponents of the documentation strategy have published several examples of how the concept might be translated from theory into practice. Recent archival literature has offered several models for documentation strategies, described experimental documentation strategy projects, and suggested areas in which a documentation strategy approach might prove useful.²⁴ Projects detailing the application of the documentation strategy to topical, functional, and geographic areas have been described. This discussion within the professional literature has suggested a number of common concerns and underscored several lessons that have emerged from documentation strategy projects to date.

Over the course of the past 30 years, the American Institute of Physics (AIP) has spearheaded a program that has had notable success in improving the documentation of modern physics. It has served as a model for other disciplines, resulting in the creation of a number of new discipline history centers to document various areas of science and technology. The success of the AIP project is largely due to its sustainability, to its recognition of the importance of institutional archives, and to its approach to the documentation of physics as an evolving process. It was from the outline of the purpose, method, and practice of this project that the broader concept of documentation strategy evolved. It was no coincidence, therefore, that an extended description of the AIP project became one of the first published accounts of documentation strategy implementation.²⁵

In 1959, a committee of physicists was established to assess the existing documentation of physics in American academia, industry, and government from 1890 to 1940. Based on the results of this analysis, AIP requested a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) in 1961. This grant enabled the AIP group to identify important individual and institutional contributors to modern physics. Following this process, AIP began work with records creators to ensure the placement of their papers at appropriate repositories, and to occasionally encourage the creation of documentation to fill existing gaps. The program was considerably strengthened in 1965 when AIP established the Center for the History of Physics and the project was no longer dependent on NSF funding. Since then, the Center for the History of Physics has extended its documentary work into subfields of physics and into post-World War II physics.

The AIP program incorporated elements considered essential by later documentation strategists. For example, the documentation group worked to achieve a thorough understanding of its intended field of documentation. In addition, it educated records creators about the importance of their source materials and encouraged them to place these materials in appropriate repositories. Most importantly, the project continued to evolve and redefine its role as it recognized potential areas requiring better documentation. Recently, AIP has examined large-scale “collaboratories” and identified which to document.

In other ways, however, the AIP program diverges from the broader model outlined by documentation strategy theorists. For example, the documentation group is largely composed of records creators—members of the physics community—rather than a broad mix of records creators, administrators, and users. In addition, its efforts to fill gaps in existing documentation have been limited. The AIP project has, however, recognized the importance of fostering institutional archives; its efforts have resulted in the establishment of fine collections at such institutions as Harvard University, the California Institute of Technology, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

In the late 1980s, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) funded a two-year project in Western New York to test the archival documentation strategy concept. This experiment, consciously modeled on a documentation strategy framework, sought to improve the documentation of six counties in Western New York. This regional documentation strategy project was intended to serve as a model to suggest approaches to improve documentation statewide.²⁶ A documentation group, composed of members such as archivists, librarians, and historians, was assembled.²⁷ A framework was developed within which to assess existing documentation. This model incorporated 15 topics that were considered to cover the whole range of human activity, and designated periods of past, present, and future documentation.

The objective of the Western New York Project was to produce and implement a written strategy to enhance the region’s documentation. While the documentation group did not meet this goal, the project served as a valuable learning experience, underscoring the challenges involved in planning for adequate documentation and raising questions about the general applicability of the documentation strategy approach. Cox summarizes the project’s successes as follows: “. . . the process of examining documentation helped to evaluate the acquisitions of historical records repositories, open channels of communication, and build bridges of cooperation between historical records

repositories and users.”²⁸ In addition, the project helped participants identify the acquisition of records of the twentieth century, especially those of the post-World War II era, as a collecting priority. The Western New York experience highlights the difficulty of narrowing a geographic area sufficiently to allow for a meaningful study; the challenges of finding resources to support a documentation strategy; the concern of whether a long-term strategy can ultimately be cost-effective and result in better documentation decisions; and the issue of what alternatives to the documentation strategy model might yield better results in terms of improving the documentation of society.²⁹

Another two-year NHPRC-funded project attempted to enhance the documentation of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.³⁰ Perhaps drawing on the lessons from the Western New York experience, the Milwaukee project focused on a smaller geographic area and involved a wider range of participants, including records creators as well as administrators and records users. Participating institutions were asked to assess the subject content of their collections in order to facilitate analysis of existing documentation. The goals of the project were to produce a written documentation strategy and implement a framework to allow the project to continue beyond the initial grant period.

Interestingly, the outcome of the Milwaukee project was significantly like that of the Western New York experience: although many good things came out of the process, most of them had nothing to do with the immediate improvement of the region's documentation. The project taught the archival community many valuable lessons, pointing to a pervasive weakness in organizational policies and practices. Most of the institutions, for example, did not have previously existing collection policies. Many found that they did not have adequate intellectual control over their collections. In addition, the study suggested a widespread lack of professional expertise and training in such basic areas of archival theory and practice as appraisal, description, and reference.³¹

What were the lessons of the Milwaukee project? Ericson points to three issues that might seem to call the viability of the documentation strategy framework, as presently articulated, into question. First, there is more tension involved in reconciling the goals and priorities of the individual participating institutions and the interinstitutional cooperative goals necessary to the successful implementation of a documentation strategy than has thus far been acknowledged by documentation strategists.³² Second, institutions should not embark on a documentation strategy if they do not have the resources to sustain it on an ongoing basis. These resources include adequate staffing and time to dedicate to the project, as well as the professional expertise to participate actively in the plan. Finally, the Milwaukee experience, coupled with that in Western New York, suggests that documentation strategies may not lend themselves as readily to geographic areas as originally thought.³³

The effort initiated at the 1988 Evangelical Archives Conference to ensure better documentation of the evangelical movement does not illustrate a full-scale process such as the other examples cited, but it demonstrates how the documentation strategy can combine a functional approach with a subject area.³⁴ The objective of this effort was “The identification and preservation of an adequate record to document the activities and significance of the evangelical movement, and the provision for full access to this information.”³⁵

With this objective in mind, the group identified seven activities that describe the evangelical movement and its functions, such as denominations/fellowships/communities, media, and political/social action groups. For each area, the working group outlined the functions that describe how the activities were carried out, such as “convey knowledge” or “evangelize.” By defining the evangelical movement in terms of functions and activities, the working group concluded that adequate documentation must include records from each of these activities. Moreover, analysis of these functions could indicate what types of documentation each activity generates.³⁶

The documentation group summarized the status of documentation for each activity, identified documentary problems, pinpointed available mechanisms to remedy these shortcomings, and recommended what might be done to improve documentation of the area. The working group’s report was intended to be a first step in the development of a documentation strategy for the evangelical movement. While the working group established a sound framework for a documentation strategy and sparked much discussion, this effort does not appear to have produced any concrete results in the evangelical community.³⁷

Interviews with Practitioners

In order to assess the extent to which these emerging methodologies, particularly documentation strategies, are being translated from theory into practice, the author interviewed 16 archivists. An original pool of 13 college and university archivists was selected for inclusion in the survey, based on their extensive appraisal experience and on their presumed familiarity with the recent appraisal literature. Of the original group, two declined to be interviewed. The additional five interviewees included three college and university archivists; a government archivist; and an archivist from a religious organization, whom the initial participants identified as knowledgeable about appraisal. Based on the composition of this group of respondents, it should be noted that the results of the interviews may be more representative of the views of college and university archivists than of the attitudes of archivists in other institutions. The archival experience of the respondents ranges from 11 years to 25 years, with a rough average of 20 years in practice. Thirteen of the interviews were conducted by telephone; the following discussion is based on notes of those conversations. The remaining three interviews were conducted by E-mail.

The purpose of the interviews was to gain a basic sense of whether documentation strategies, functional analysis, and macroappraisal are affecting archival appraisal practice. Additionally, the process was intended to provide a general understanding of the perceptions that practitioners have of these approaches following several years of discussion in the professional literature. Thus, this exercise was neither designed as, nor intended to be, a scientific survey; therefore, its results should not be considered to have statistical validity. Questions were designed to elicit specific information about appraisal practice and policy at each respondent’s institution, as well as to allow participants to offer their own impressions about the impact of documentation strategy, functional analysis, and macroappraisal on actual archival practice.³⁸ In order to facilitate an open dialogue, the names and institutions of survey participants have been kept

confidential, with interviewees identified generically as Respondent A, Respondent B, and so on. The following discussion will summarize the results of these interviews, focusing first on documentation strategies and then on functional analysis and macro-appraisal.

The several recurring themes that emerged in response to questions about the usefulness of documentation strategies parallel the discussion of the methodology that has appeared in the archival literature of the past decade. Without exception, the documentation strategy approach was recognized, even by its critics, as a valuable conceptual framework. Interviewees felt that documentation strategy had gotten the profession thinking and talking about how best to approach its appraisal function, had raised awareness of the importance of cooperation in archival practice, and had opened channels of communication with nonarchivists. Respondent D commented, "The documentation strategy is an engaging framework that has gotten archivists rethinking how they do things and has been especially useful with its ability to engage nonarchivists." Respondent A felt that one of the primary recommendations of the documentation strategy is that it encourages archivists to think cooperatively, and thus "eliminates some of the traditional competition mentality."

There was also agreement, however, that in spite of these positive results, the documentation strategy is not viable within the context of present archival reality. Respondent F stated, "Documentation strategies are valuable as a conceptual framework, but in terms of reality, archives have more urgent priorities, such as delivering services to clients. Documentation strategies do not work because archivists are not in a steering position." Respondent A reinforced this argument, also citing the issue of limited resources: "Politics is a big reason that documentation strategies do not work. In the absence of a centralized political and funding mechanism to pass out responsibilities and resources, such an approach is ineffective."

While these interviews confirm that documentation strategies are not being adopted on a wide-scale basis, they also indicate that archivists are applying what they perceive as the most positive aspects of the documentation strategy concept at the level of their individual repositories.³⁹ For example, Respondents D and E thought that the documentation strategy had been instrumental in helping the profession more clearly articulate what is involved in documenting particular topical, functional, or geographic areas. In fact, archivists do seem to have found this framework useful for more clearly defining their institutional collecting priorities. Four respondents indicated that their institutions had either drafted or refined collecting policies, partially in response to the documentation strategy approach.⁴⁰

The documentation strategy's most notable impact on the archival profession appears to be that it has promoted the value of cooperation. Twelve of the 16 interviewees indicated that their institutions had become more aware of the importance of interinstitutional cooperation as a result of the discussion of documentation strategy in the archival literature. While archivists have become more aware of the need to cooperate rather than compete with other institutions, however, cooperative efforts on the whole seem to be limited to respecting other repositories' collecting areas and referring potential donors to more appropriate institutions. Most interviewees indicated that their institutions had not been involved in cooperative projects; the cooperative ventures

that had been undertaken tended to be short-lived and ill-fated because of issues of institutional priorities and limited funding.⁴¹

The strongest reservations that interviewees voiced about documentation strategy reinforce the major objections raised in the archival literature: institutional priorities and limited resources. Terry Abraham, for example, argues that documentation strategies are unworkable because archivists are “already burdened with too many things to do” at the institutional level. Frank Boles asserts that documentation strategies assume archival prosperity. Additionally, Ericson’s recent description of the Milwaukee experiment seconds these objections. Not surprisingly then, these same concerns have emerged as the major stumbling blocks in the implementation of documentation strategies.⁴²

The results of the interviews also indicate several general trends regarding the impact of macroappraisal and functional analysis on the American archival community. For example, despite the effectiveness with which macroappraisal is being implemented at the National Archives of Canada, it has not begun to significantly affect archival practice in the United States.⁴³ It appears that functional analysis, on the other hand, is being implemented by an increasing number of colleges and universities.⁴⁴ Ten of the archivists surveyed indicated that this technique had affected appraisal practice at their institutions. In fact, Respondent H credited functional analysis with leading to a “renaissance of institutional archives.”

Thus, these interviews suggest that documentation strategy, functional analysis, and macroappraisal—with the possible exception of functional analysis—are currently having a very limited effect on North American selection practice. Many of the archivists indicated that they did not have the latitude to fully implement such techniques because institutional or state mandates largely determine what records they must retain. Several respondents felt that while these approaches have not had a widespread impact on archival practice as a whole, they are increasingly applied by individual archivists within their own institutions and repositories. Respondent M expressed the opinion that these strategies are, “. . . having an impact on archival practice, but so far only on a micro-level.”

Impact of Documentation Strategy

Though the archival literature and the interviews described above confirm that the profession as a whole has not embraced documentation strategy, the consensus of the respondents to this limited survey—that documentation strategy provides a useful framework for discussing selection issues—suggests that Cook’s observation that the concept has played a significant role in the North American dialogue about appraisal is particularly apt. While even the best of frameworks can be improved, however, experiments with documentation strategies have not revealed fundamental flaws in the original construct. What these projects have perhaps done is underscore a number of challenges long faced by the archival community. Foremost among these are conflicting institutional priorities, scarce archival resources, and a lack of standards for the education and training of archivists. Before documentation strategies can achieve success, the archival community must take steps towards overcoming these obstacles.

What the experience of documentation strategy projects thus far might in fact argue is that archivists need to become more effective advocates for their profession, and that the archival community must focus on finding solutions to the above problems. Heightened advocacy efforts, targeting organizational administrators, granting agencies, other information professionals, and the larger society are needed to underscore the significance of strong institutional archives and collecting repositories. While institutional priorities will always be a reality for any organization, successful advocacy could serve as a first step towards putting archivists in a better position to redefine their priorities and to establish additional goals for their archival programs. In addition, effective advocacy is a prerequisite for increased funding, whether from a parent organization or from a granting agency. Greater resources would permit higher levels of training for archivists, thereby facilitating and enabling participation in cooperative ventures.

The need for archivists to find solutions to the difficulties inherent in archival practice is hardly new. Advocates of documentation strategies have called for archivists to become innovators and risk takers: "Archivists should feel freer to experiment, evaluate, develop, and refine their . . . theory, principles, and practices—something that archivists have done too little of . . ."45 A scan of the existing professional landscape indicates that this is a challenge that archivists should welcome. The nature of documentation continues to change at a rapid pace. Current methods of approaching this new documentary reality are inadequate even today. Clearly, new frameworks are needed to supplement traditional practices. Documentation strategies, functional analysis, and macroappraisal provide constructs for productive dialogue about how to most effectively solve the selection dilemmas posed by contemporary records.

Will documentation strategies have a place in the archival practice of the twenty-first century? In a recent review of Richard Cox's *Documenting Localities: A Practical Model for American Archivists and Manuscript Curators*, Frank Boles states, "The simple fact is that a decade or more after it was first proposed as a theory, there have been no successful applications of the documentation strategy in practice." He then characterizes Cox's continued advocacy of documentation strategy as ". . . a tactic used to accomplish a broader agenda, rather than simply a stubborn refusal to see the obvious."⁴⁶ The fact that documentation strategies as originally conceived have not worked to date, or the question of whether they can be made to work in the future, is ultimately of less significance than the professional dialogue that this approach has generated. If documentation strategies advance a broader agenda that spurs the archival profession to rethink and broaden institutional priorities, reallocate resources to reflect these new priorities, and provide its members with the training they will require to meet the challenges of dealing with contemporary records, then it would seem that this tactic is certainly one worth adopting.

This is true not only of documentation strategies, but of functional analysis and macroappraisal as well. Proponents of these techniques must continue to experiment with them and to present the results of their efforts to the archival community. Critics of these strategies have a professional responsibility to offer more viable frameworks for meeting the challenges posed by modern documentation. All archivists have an obligation to follow this emerging debate, the answers to which will, for better or for worse, surely shape the future of the archival profession and ultimately determine the

effectiveness with which archivists are able to fulfill the foremost of their professional responsibilities.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

Purpose

To evaluate how the documentation strategy has affected appraisal practice, and to determine if this approach is being implemented, particularly in relation to functional analysis and macroappraisal.

Background questions

- 1) How long have you been in practice?
- 2) What is your background in appraisal and acquisitions?
- 3) How long have you been in your current position?
- 4) How long has your program been established?

Survey questions

- 1) Please describe your institution's appraisal policy and/or practice.
- 2) Has the introduction of the documentation strategy approach, and techniques such as functional analysis and macroappraisal, led to any changes in or formal redrafting of, your institution's appraisal policy and/or practice, or to the establishment of records management programs? If yes, please describe the changes.

- 3) Do you know of any other organizations that have adapted their appraisal policy/practice in response to the documentation strategy, functional analysis, or macro-appraisal? If so, please describe how these modifications have affected their practice.
- 4) Has your institution been involved in, or can you identify other organizations that have participated in cooperative efforts such as those advocated by a documentation strategy approach? If so, what was the outcome of the effort?
- 5) Based on your professional experience, do you feel that the documentation strategy, functional analysis, and macroappraisal are having an influence on appraisal practice? If so, how would you characterize the impact? If not, why do you think such methods are not being applied?

Follow-up questions

- 1) Can you suggest anybody to contact who might be involved with the implementation of documentation strategies, functional analysis, or macroappraisal?
- 2) Do you know of any materials that are not readily available that might help in assessing the degree of impact that the documentation strategy approach has had on appraisal practice (for example, unpublished articles or Web sites)?

NOTES

1. Terry Cook, "Documentation Strategy," *Archivaria* 34 (summer 1992): 181.
2. Richard J. Cox, *American Archival Analysis: The Recent Development of the Archival Profession in the United States* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1990): 293.
3. Helen Willa Samuels, "Who Controls the Past," *American Archivist* 49 (spring 1986): 115.
4. Cited in Richard J. Cox, "The Archival Documentation Strategy and Its Implications for the Appraisal of Architectural Records," *American Archivist* 59 (spring 1996): 145-146.
5. Cox, "The Archival Documentation Strategy and Its Implications for the Appraisal of Architectural Records," 146-148.
6. Cox, *American Archival Analysis*, 293-294.
7. F. Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," *American Archivist* 38 (January 1975): 5.
8. Discussion about the changing nature of documentation is derived from several sources: Richard J. Cox, "The Documentation Strategy and Archival Appraisal Principles: A Different Perspective," *Archivaria* 38 (fall 1994): 11-37; F. Gerald Ham, "Managing the Historical Record in an Age of Abundance," *American Archivist* 47 (winter 1984): 11-22; and Helen Samuels, "Who Controls the Past" and *Varsity Letters, Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. and the Society of American Archivists, 1992).
9. Cox, "The Archival Documentation Strategy and Its Implications for the Appraisal of Architectural Records," 154. Cox labels this aspect of the process as "synergetic," citing Joseph Nitecki's idea that synergy is the "process in which an aggregated, combined action of different elements together produces more effective or efficient results than each could produce by itself."

10. Richard Cox has discussed the implications of the documentation strategy for related information and historical professionals. Cox, *American Archival Analysis*, 300–303.
11. See Helen Samuels, *Varsity Letters, Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities*.
12. See Joan K. Haas, Helen Willa Samuels, and Barbara Trippel Simmons, *Appraising the Records of Modern Science and Technology: A Guide* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1985). Since the release of *Varsity Letters*, Joan Krizack has edited a volume to help improve the documentation of the U.S. health care system, also based on a functional approach. See *Documentation Planning for the U.S. Health Care System*, ed. Joan D. Krizack (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).
13. Samuels, *Varsity Letters*, 1.
14. Richard J. Cox, "Archival Documentation Strategy: A Brief Intellectual History 1984–1994 and Practical Description," *Janus* (1995): 79–81.
15. See, for example, his essay, "Mind over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal," *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor*, ed. Barbara L. Craig (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1992): 38–70. This discussion of macroappraisal strategy draws heavily on his work.
16. Cook, "Mind over Matter," 50.
17. Cox, "Archival Documentation Strategy: A Brief Intellectual History," 79.
18. Based on a conversation with Helen Samuels, June 1, 1998.
19. Cook, "Mind over Matter," 51. It is important to note that Cook has been a critic of the documentation strategy model on the basis that it gives function greater primacy than structure, and that it is not well suited for application at institutional archives. See also his "Documentation Strategy."
20. Richard J. Cox, "A Documentation Strategy Case Study: Western New York," *American Archivist* 52 (spring 1989): 193.
21. Richard J. Cox, "The Documentation Strategy and Archival Appraisal Principles: A Different Perspective," *Archivaria* 38 (fall 1994): 11–36.
22. Samuels, *Varsity Letters*, 3.
23. Cook, "Mind over Matter," 58.
24. For documentation strategy models, see Philip N. Alexander and Helen W. Samuels, "The Roots of 128: A Hypothetical Documentation Strategy," *American Archivist* 50 (fall 1987): 518–531, and Larry J. Hackman and Joan Warnow-Blewett, "The Documentation Strategy Process: A Model and a Case Study," in *American Archivist* 50 (winter 1987): 12–47. For analyses of experimental documentation strategies, see Cox, "A Documentation Strategy Case Study," 192–200; *A Heritage at Risk: The Proceedings of the Evangelical Archives Conference*, July 13–15, 1988 (Wheaton, IL: Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College, 1988); Timothy L. Ericson, "To Approximate June Pasture: The Documentation Strategy in the Real World," *Archival Issues* 22:1 (1997): 5–20; and Jack Wertheimer, Debra Bernhardt, and Julie Miller, "Toward the Documentation of Conservative Judaism," *American Archivist* 57 (spring 1994): 374–379. In addition, the following articles describe hypothetical applications for a documentation strategy: T. D. Seymour Bassett, "Documenting Recreation and Tourism in New England," *American Archivist* (fall 1987): 550–569, and Maureen A. Jung, "Documenting Nineteenth-Century Quartz Mining in Northern California," *American Archivist* 53 (summer 1990): 406–418.
25. See Hackman and Warnow-Blewett.
26. Discussion of this experiment is based on Cox, "A Documentation Strategy Case Study."
27. Cox notes the absence of records creators from the documentation group. See Cox, "A Documentation Strategy Case Study," 199. This provides an interesting contrast with the AIP team.
28. Cox, "A Documentation Strategy Case Study," 195.
29. In a 1992 article, Larry Hackman criticized Cox's assessment of the Western New York project as premature, characterizing the project as a "... preliminary effort, barely begun when the grant project ended," and "... far too brief, modest, and informal to support a formal evaluation or published article." See Larry Hackman, "State Government and Statewide Archival Affairs: New York as a Case Study," *American Archivist* 55 (fall 1992): 592. This implication that the effectiveness of documentation strategies can be accurately assessed only over a period much longer than this two-year pilot project is important. AIP, for example, has had 30 years to develop its documentation strategy, but how would it have characterized the success or failure of its efforts in 1963 or 1967? While Hackman's point is well taken, however, articles such as Cox's assessment of the Western New York experiment and Ericson's recent analysis of the Milwaukee project are essential for helping the archival community test and refine the documentation strategy model.

30. See Ericson.
31. For a very different analysis of the Milwaukee project, see Judith Campbell Turner. Letter to the Editor. *Archival Issues* 22:2 (1997): 99–101. Turner argues in part that such difficulties “. . . were known going into the project, not revealed by it.”
32. Critics of the documentation strategy have long pointed to this difficulty and argued that it is insurmountable. See Frank Boles, “Mix Two Parts Interest to One Part Information and Appraise Until Done: Understanding Contemporary Record Selection Processes,” *American Archivist* 50 (summer 1987): 364.
33. Richard Cox, however, has discussed localities, whether geographic or ideological, as ideally suited for the application of documentation strategies. See Richard J. Cox, *Documenting Localities: A Practical Model for American Archivists and Manuscript Curators* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. and the Society of American Archivists, 1996).
34. Consideration of the Evangelical Conference’s approach is based on *A Heritage at Risk* and Richard J. Cox, “Evangelical Religious Institutions Consider Their Archival Needs: A Review of the 1988 Evangelical Archives Conference Proceedings,” *Provenance* 7 (spring 1989): 66–79.
35. *A Heritage at Risk*, 21–22.
36. This heavy functional emphasis, which foreshadows Helen Samuels’s *Varsity Letters*, might be attributable to her work with the group.
37. Based on an E-mail message from Bob Schuster, September 23, 1998. Moreover, it appears that the working group’s experience with producing a detailed documentation strategy that has not been put into action is not unique. A 1992 effort to define congressional functions and to identify what records are required to adequately document Congress also does not seem to have made a noticeable impact on congressional archivists. For descriptions of this project, see Karen Dawley Paul, *The Documentation of Congress: Report of the Congressional Archivists Roundtable Task Force on Congressional Documentation*, S. Pub. 102–120 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Senate, 1992) and Faye Phillips, “Congressional Papers: Collection Development Policies,” *American Archivist* 58 (summer 1995): 258–269.
38. See Appendix A for survey questions.
39. There are, however, a few documentation strategy projects under way. Respondent J pointed to several projects in New York that are attempting to document the arts in the greater Capital system, local business and industry, and vacation industries in the Adirondacks. Respondent E indicated the existence of a virtual archives created by the American Jewish Historical Society to document the history of Jewish women.
40. These responses indicate in part that some members of the archival community do not draw the appropriate distinction between collection policies and documentation strategies. See Terry Abraham, “Collecting Policy or Documentation Strategy: Theory and Practice,” *American Archivist* 54 (winter 1991): 44–52.
41. For another perspective on cooperation and documentation strategies, see Turner’s previously cited Letter to the Editor, in which she suggests, “Far from expecting a documentation strategy to generate cooperative activities, I’d recommend undertaking one only in the presence of a solid history of cooperation that was strong enough to survive some serious fraying.”
42. See Abraham’s unpublished paper, “Documentation Strategies: A Decade (or More) Later,” at <http://www.uidaho.edu/special-collections/docstr10.htm>; Boles, “Mix Two Parts”; and Ericson.
43. For discussions about how the National Archives of Canada is using macroappraisal, see Cook, “Mind Over Matter,” and Catherine Bailey, “From the Top Down: The Practice of Macro-Appraisal,” *Archivaria* 43 (fall 1997): 89–128.
44. Because these interviews focused on college and university archivists, who constitute the primary audience for Samuels’s *Varsity Letters*, the prevalence of functional analysis within the American archival community as a whole remains difficult to measure.
45. Cox, “The Documentation Strategy and Archival Appraisal Principles,” 18.
46. Frank Boles, Review of *Documenting Localities: A Practical Model for American Archivists and Manuscript Curators*, *American Archivist* (fall 1997): 460–463.