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Review of *How to Manage Processing in Archives and Special Collections*

By Pam Hackbart-Dean and Elizabeth Slomba. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2012. 160 pp. Softcover. $69.95. ISBN 1-931666-43-1

Learning to process archival collections as an intern or student processor constitutes many archivists' first practical understanding of the archival enterprise. Though this experience is an excellent hands-on opportunity for many nascent archivists to sharpen their project management skills, it does not fully prepare them to manage an archival processing program. Few students in archival graduate programs receive in-depth management training, leaving many to learn effective management techniques without formal guidance. With *How to Manage Processing in Archives and Special Collections*, Pam Hackbart-Dean and Elizabeth Slomba set out to offer archivists a comprehensive, practical toolbox for managing a processing program. Geared towards new professionals, small institutions, and lone arrangers, this publication addresses key components of planning and implementing a successful program. The authors consider methodologies that will promote efficiency and consistency with an emphasis on how to best serve the needs of patrons.

The first two chapters focus on creating a strategy for a processing program. The authors entreat archivists to, "move away from processing off the cuff," and to instead devise a programmatic approach by developing a comprehensive, goal-oriented plan that is grounded by procedural documentation and evaluative measures that ensure accountability. The authors outline a number of factors at the departmental and institutional level that managers should consider as they plan and implement a program, including patron needs, available resources, collection development policies, and strategic plans. They also suggest tactics to help managers prioritize collections in a processing queue, and they include explicit examples of ranking systems and collection survey and analysis tools.

Hackbart-Dean and Slomba delve deeper into the nuts and bolts of processing techniques and workflows in Chapter 3. After an overview of the typical workflow that supports collection processing, they describe the levels of arrangement and description that may be applied to an individual collection. The authors then consider how recommendations derived from Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner's article, "More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing," translate into specific minimal processing techniques that can be applied in practice. They highlight the hidden collections processing project administered by the Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries (PACSCL) as an example of a management team that successfully implemented an MPLP informed approach to processing. One of the many noteworthy outcomes of the PACSCL project is that the management team created thorough documentation of their

policies, procedures, and planning tools, many of which are now available on the project's website. Hackbart-Dean and Slomba note that these kinds of management and communication tools—processing manuals, work plans, checklists, in-house wikis, blogs—are the backbone of an effective processing program. Written policies and procedures that are created with staff input and reviewed and updated on a regular basis encourage consistency, standardization, and efficiency in processing work. Managers looking to employ some of these tools will find it useful to consult the book's Appendix, which illustrates some basic examples of these documents.

The remainder of Chapter 3 outlines strategies for dealing with what the authors refer to as "special considerations." This includes recommendations on how to handle processing non-paper materials such as audiovisual materials, objects, and electronic records, as well as how to address accruals, legacy collections, and collections that require reprocessing. As a processing manager, I can attest that these considerations are no longer special but increasingly the norm. I would have appreciated more detailed guidance on how an archivist might apply techniques informed by MPLP to efficiently process these materials, including more discussion of description, preservation, and accessibility concerns. Archivists who have little to no exposure to managing born digital materials or large audiovisual collections may find this chapter informative for acquiring baseline knowledge of processing tactics for these materials, but those who are looking for in-depth guidance will need to consult additional resources.

The authors continue to stress a programmatic approach to processing as they discuss preservation and description strategies in the next two chapters. It is recommended that managers consider broad level efforts to preserve and describe collections, such as relying on climate controlled storage environments and posting brief descriptions of all collections online, before concentrating on individual collections. Hackbart-Dean and Slomba examine various tools that will contribute to a successful program such as the use of data and content standards, content management systems, and survey instruments. Acknowledging that engaging patrons in an online environment is crucial to promoting discoverability of archival resources, the authors provide some guidance on incorporating social media and digitization efforts, including metadata creation, into a processing workflow. However, the authors missed an opportunity to take a closer look at the many issues that make folding these efforts into processing workflows a challenge. For example, recommendations on how a processing program might implement a digitization plan for already processed collections that may require enhanced description would have been a valuable addition to the discussion.

The authors then transition their focus from processing activities to processing staff. Information on establishing a culture of personal accountability for employees may be particularly helpful to smaller institutions lacking policies mandated by an administrative department, while the recommendation to engage processing staff in a regular review of local practices and documentation will benefit all. Still, as a former project archivist—a very common experience for many in the

archival profession—I was disappointed that the authors did not use this space to explore ways to involve project staff, paraprofessionals, and student assistants in programmatic work that goes beyond their routine job responsibilities. An employee who is willing to use their expertise and skills to contribute to programmatic initiatives can be a significant asset to institutions of any size. Moreover, that experience can translate into better job opportunities for project-term employees and boost the morale of long-term staff. In consideration of the archival profession's continually evolving landscape, this chapter may also have benefitted from an investigation of techniques managers might employ to encourage experimentation to overcome barriers, to build consensus to address competing priorities, and to increase capacity among existing staff to meet contemporary challenges in our field.

As our profession continues to make progress towards increased standardization of archival practice, archivists are more empowered to methodically assess effectiveness and evaluate outcomes. The seventh chapter of the book examines the elements of evaluation and assessment and considers potential strategies and tools that managers might employ to undertake this work. The authors underscore the necessity of clearly defining the elements of processing in order to accurately and consistently measure them, and they provide concrete examples of forms and procedures for collecting and interpreting statistics and for measuring the effectiveness of a processing program. The overarching goal of evaluation and assessment in archives and special collections should be to create an environment of accountability that will encourage a responsible approach to processing.

The book closes with a bibliographic essay detailing archival literature on relevant topics, as well as an annotated list of archives related websites. These final resources point to the greatest strength of the book. In *How to Manage Processing*, Hackbart-Dean and Slomba do a fine job of pulling together a variety of resources and organizing them in an easily digestible fashion. Newly minted archivists or managers will find the book to be a good go-to resource that provides concrete guidance on taking a programmatic approach to setting up a processing program. Still, there are some facets of this book that warranted a deeper discussion. For instance, how might processing managers work in harmony with other archives and special collections staff to facilitate access more efficiently? How might managers incorporate Technical Services, Public Services, or Digital Library staff into processing programs? The portrait painted here of a processing program seems to be one where processors are largely segregated from non-processing staff. The authors do recommend working with other library colleagues on several initiatives, yet they do not offer much insight on how managers can generate buy-in from those colleagues to ensure productive working relationships. Investigating methods for encouraging effective collaboration across an institution in ways that would ultimately benefit a processing program would be advantageous to organizations of any size.

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