“More Product, Less Process”
Could it be the solution?

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4/8/2012
Introduction

The trend of “More Product, Less Process” (MPLP) has given the archival world something to ponder and discuss. MPLP, on its surface, seemed to go against everything that archivists believed in about the way to go about processing collections. Below the surface, MPLP does not state that archivists should stop processing collections completely or even to sloppily process them, MPLP calls for efficiency. Greene and Meissner (2005) believe that archivists are taking too much time following trivial archival traditions by removing staples and changing folders, when archivists should be spending their time more efficiently by going through more collections. They call for reform. They do not want archivists and processors to abandon proper procedure in order to get more done either. Greene and Meissner want archivists to think about how they could process collections more efficiently, which might mean that they have to stop performing superfluous actions just because those actions are traditions in the archival world. Greene and Meissner might actually be getting to the heart of the issue.

Do archivists spend too much time completely inane tasks during processing? Maybe. Greene and Meissner (2005) affirm that the majority of archival institutions are inundated with unprocessed collections which continue to be useless to patrons and researchers because of their unprocessed state. Greene, Meissner, and most archivists believe that the purpose of archives is to have organized and processed collections for patrons to use for research. If those collections are not in a usable state, then how can archivists assist those patrons? Therefore, Greene and Meissner propose that archivists rethink what is truly necessary for processing collections. They deduce from their surveys (Greene and Meissner 2005) that many archivists over process small collections because the collections are small and easy to process, while they leave the larger
collections unprocessed because they will take up so much valuable time to process to the same level as the smaller collections.

Those critical of MPLP believe that processing collections to a lesser amount will result in horrific gaps in security and knowledge of the collections (Yakel 2005). They deduce that not knowing what is in the collection to the item level will allow thefts of documents to go unnoticed. This thought is not wrong and it appears as if this can and should be a legitimate concern for archivists. But processing every collection to the item level could in no way be that efficient for an archivist. Another concern is that the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) or other laws might accidentally be broken if archivists do not process every item to its fullest possible extent (Yakel 2005).

**Preservation**

All archivists want their collections to be well preserved. Preservation is one of the most important parts of arranging and describing archival collections. What would be the point of arranging and describing so many things if they are only going to be ruined in a few years? There is none. Therefore, archivists should make sure that the documents that they are arranging are being preserved appropriately. Greene and Meissner (2005) point out that if the climate conditions are good, then why do archivists need to spend so much extra time removing staples and paperclips, if they are not going to rust. They believe that going to so much extra work will not benefit the collection or the researchers in the long run because the metal most likely will not damage the paper in the collections any more than removing the staples would. Will going to such extreme lengths protect the documents? Most likely. But how necessary is that? Keeping the documents safe and preserved is tremendously important, but spending colossal amounts of time removing metals that might or might not eventually rust is not an efficient use of an
archivist’s time. In addition, refoldering every piece of paper that an archivist comes across is not efficient either, especially if the folders have the same acid content as the paper that is being stored in them. Refoldering is also very expensive monetarily, which is usually not very popular with those funding the archives, which leads one to believe that administrators would be happier and have more positive opinion of archivists.

Arrangement

The arrangement of archival collections is also a necessary element of organizing said collections. Spending vast amounts of time arranging collections to an item level is also inefficient, and according to Greene and Meissner (2005) completely unnecessary. Some repositories do not even arrange down to the folder level, they only arrange to the series level. Arrangement can be cumbersome if archivists let it get out of hand, so they should not abandon it, just work more efficiently when they are arranging collections. They could leave the folders unarranged, which would leave the archivists more time to work on other collections. Researchers might even find searching through folders to be a better experience during their research.

Description

Description is obviously the other important aspect of arrangement and description and many of the same ideas hold true for description as do with arrangement. Archivists sometimes squander their precious time and expertise describing every single item, when they could be describing the folder, or series, or collection. In addition, they frequently over describe the collection, when a more concise description would do (Greene and Meissner, 2005). Since description is so vital to archival collections, it must be present, but it does not need to be as extensive as some archivists make it.
Metadata

The MPLP approach can also be useful when discussing metadata. Metadata is increasingly becoming an all-encompassing monstrous entity that bogs down archivists with endless amounts of contextual, structural, and content metadata. Contextual metadata describes the provenance of the document, structural metadata describes when and how the document was created, and content metadata is what the document is about (Ataman 2009). Since discussing the detailing of metadata is the new trend in archives, following the MPLP approach from the beginning is an excellent idea. Metadata is rapidly getting-out-of-hand and some of the information that is being recorded is not as necessary or efficient as it could be. That is not to say that metadata is not important, just that some of it might not be as important as the document itself. An example of this is that an email from a senator might be more important than which email provider she used. The information about the email provider could possibly be important, but archivists need to decide how important it actually is and if preserving that information is worth the time and effort that are put forth in the act of preserving it.

Appraisal

Mark A. Greene believes that if archivists weed their appraisals before they receive those collections, then archivists could decrease their backlogged unprocessed collections because they would not be creating new backlogged unprocessed collections (Greene 2005). Archivists need to ameliorate their proficiency with articulating the word “no.” If archivists used this more often, they would not have to agonize over when they will be able to process that collection, how they will process that collection, and where they will put that collection when it is done being processed. In addition, being more selective about which collections are being brought into their institutions would allow archivists to keep their collections to a more manageable level.
Benefits

MPLP has many benefits for the archival world, most of which revolve around playing catch-up with backlogged, unprocessed collections. Using the MPLP approach would presumably appease donors, researchers, and the administration for various reasons. It would appease the donors because they would believe that their collections were being used as they want them to be instead of sitting unappreciated in a forgotten storage facility. It would appease researchers, who are one of the main reasons for archives existing, because they would be able to use the collections and be able to search through them for their research needs. It would appease the administration of the archives facility because they would see an increase of processed collections, which we all know is how administrations often view progress.

Other benefits can be seen too. It is not a universal system or answer. It can be adapted to every collection and every archive because it is not a set standard; it is just an idea that could help archivists work through their backlogged collections and make those collections available to the public.

Drawbacks

One of the major drawbacks to using the MPLP approach is that archivists who take joy and pride in processing collections to a minute level will not feel as fulfilled as they would if they continued to process collections to the item level. That aspect of MPLP is quite sad and most likely very frustrating for archivists, but it would allow them to have more time to complete other projects and aspects of their jobs because they would not be so backed-up with unprocessed collections. In addition, it is a new concept and not all people are willing or able to change their entire way of thinking to be able to use the MPLP approach.
Another drawback is that it is not a universal system that everyone can easily follow. It leaves a great deal for archivists to decide how much is too much, or how little is too little. It is also not necessarily a popular system because many archivists are afraid of using it. They believe that if they processed their collection less, they could be out of a job or worse, seen as unnecessary to their institutions. It was believed by many archivists that if they created a complex system of arrangement and description, that they could control who was allowed to arrange and describe their collections. This type of thinking led to the vast amounts of backlogged unprocessed collections that are useless to everyone.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, MPLP should be seen as a more efficient way to process backlogged collections. MPLP can be used at every level of processing, appraisal, arrangement, description, and preservation to make processing more economical both monetarily and time wise. MPLP should not be feared by archivists, it should be embraced because it can be adapted to an archival repository.
Works Cited


Works Referenced


