

# Session five: Processing, or establishing control

INFO 7401 Archival Appraisal, Arrangement, and Access



# Processing

Preparing archival materials for use.

# Processing

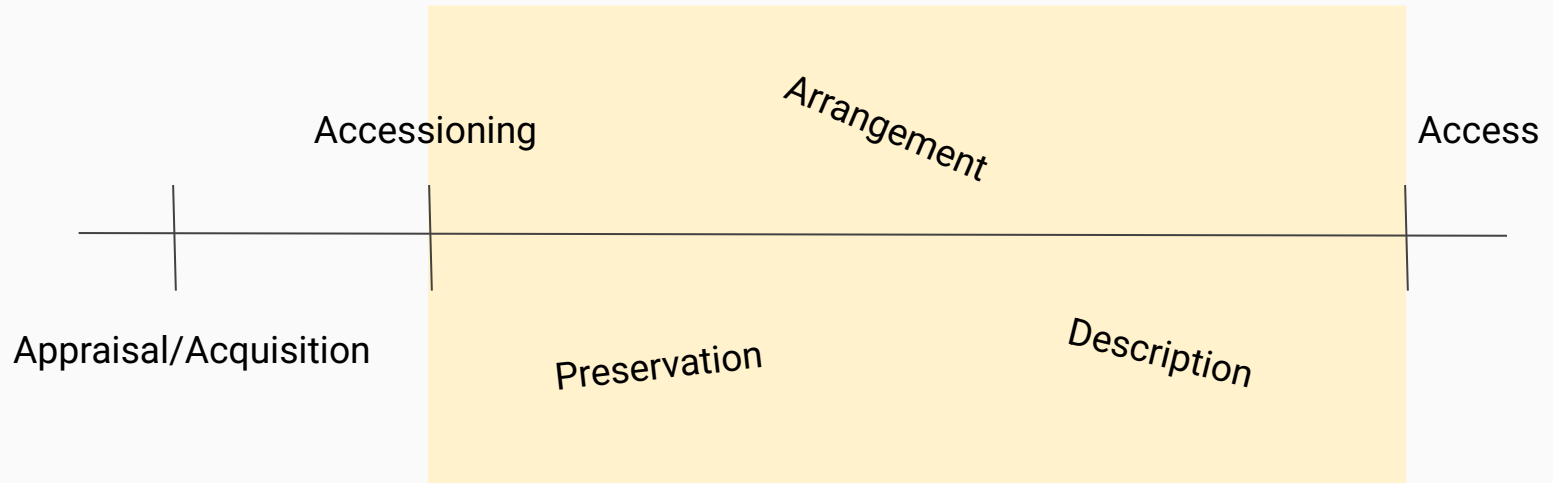
Preparing<sup>1</sup> archival materials<sup>2</sup> for use<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> What kinds of activities are included in “preparing” and how do we do them?

<sup>2</sup> What kinds and formats of materials and how much of them need to be “prepared”?

<sup>3</sup> What kind of use and what kind of users?

# What is processing?



“Quality may be measured by how effectively a processed collection **serves its users** and how wisely an archivist has **expended a repository's resources** to achieve this, over time.”

# Processing archivist

- Often project-based
- Often term positions
- Often funded externally (grants, donations)
- Often not involved with appraising or donor relations
- Often not involved with programming/further access measures after administrative, intellectual, and physical control is successfully completed
- For examples: <https://archivesgig.com/?s=processing+archivist>

# What is processing?

Establishing control in order to facilitate preservation and access:

1. Administrative
2. Legal control
3. Physical control
4. Intellectual control

# Administrative control

The management of the holdings in an archival repository, including the documentation of related processes.

Includes accession records, appraisal reports, location records.

# Legal control

The authority, under the law, to determine the accessibility, use, and disposition of records.

Includes deeds of gift/transfer, intellectual property agreements, custodial agreements.

# Physical control

The establishment and tracking of the location of holdings in a repository's custody.

Includes preservation, conservation, digitization, and repository management.

# Intellectual control

The establishment and maintenance of documentation that describes and accommodates access to the informational content of archival resources.

Includes finding aids, catalog records, inventories.

# Finding aid

Mark Levy Papers,  
ArchivesSpace finding aid

A description that typically consists of contextual and structural information about an archival resource.

Can be item-level or for an entire records group.

Establishing control(s) depends on deciding on and implementing an intentional level of control

# Levels of control / hierarchy

“Processing work may be viewed as a **continuum** whereby archivists start with the most general or largest grouping of materials (e.g., a collection) and proceed in organizing and describing smaller and smaller subsets (e.g., series, subseries, files, and, finally, items).”

# More Product, Less Process

Minimal processing to arrange and describe archival series and collections in order to reduce or avoid backlogs.

“MPLP, fundamentally, is not about specific processing actions.

It is about **resource management**, whether on a program or an enterprise level.”

# Backlog

Materials received by a repository  
but not yet processed.

“Detailed processing is often done for archivists, not for researchers.”  
(p. 239)

# Basics of MPLP

Make user access paramount: Get the most material available in a usable form in the briefest time possible.

- Instead of 20% of collections processed immaculately and 80% closed to researchers, 90% of collections processed a little and 90% open to researchers.

# Basics of MPLP

Establish an **acceptable minimum level** of work, and make it the processing benchmark. (“Golden minimum”)

- Instead of aiming for ideal processing level for all collections, aim for a minimum level of processing for all collections.

# Basics of MPLP

Expend the **greatest effort on the most deserving or needful materials.**

- High value (defined by YOUR repository and practice) requires more resources. Don't assume that every collection does!

# Basics of MPLP

**Embrace flexibility:** Don't assume all collections, or all collection components, will be processed to the same level.

- Like the previous point, don't strive for an ideal but aim for a minimum that can be achieved across all collections, and additional processing considered *value-added*.

# Basics of MPLP

Don't allow preservation anxieties to trump user access and higher managerial values.

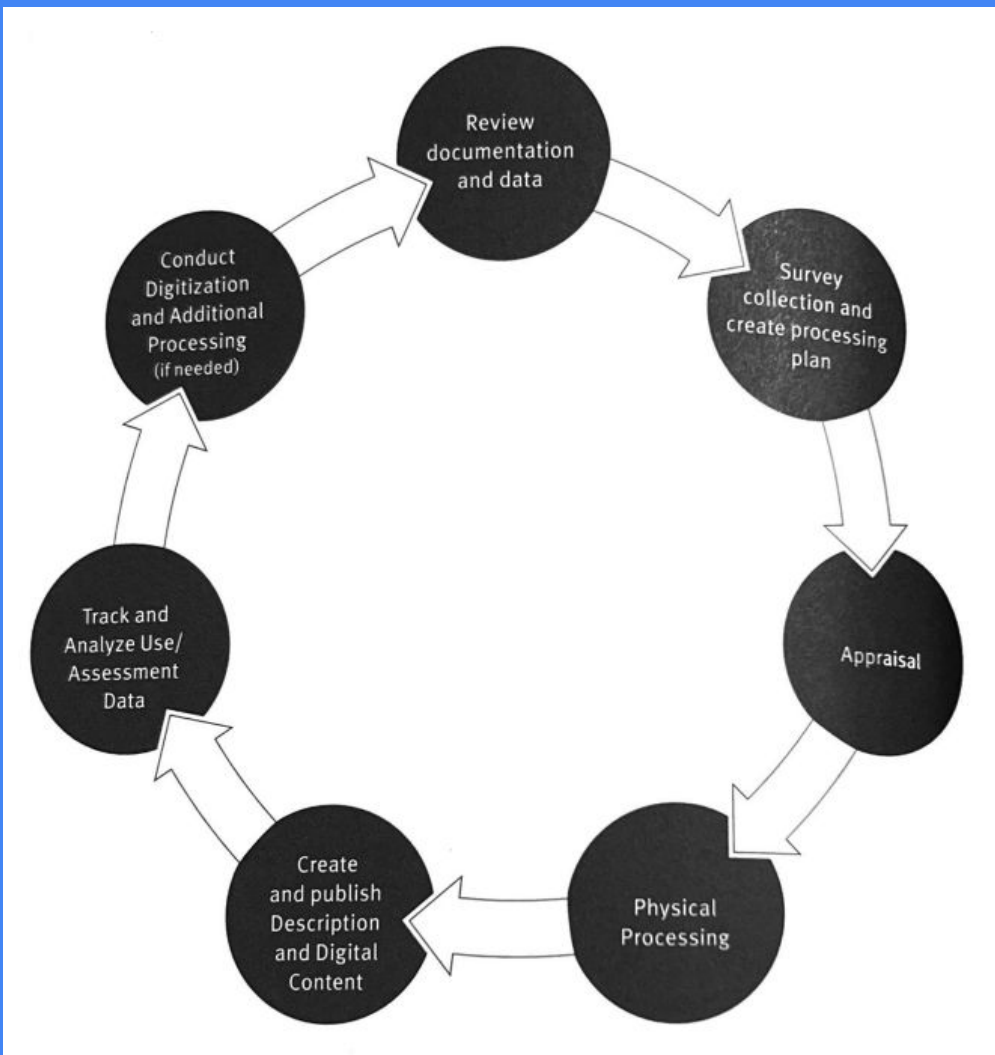
- Legal and ethical problems with minimal/extensible processing exist, but probably to a lesser extent than you fear!
- "Make backlogs more embarrassing to the profession than failure to remove paper clips." (p. 239)

# Drawbacks of MPLP?

- Heavy processing focus results in a repository that may not be as prepared for or committed to a holistic archival practice
- Easy to view labor/resources as tied to temporary processing projects
- Can be misinterpreted as a one-size-fits-all approach
- Over-reliance on metrics/data

# Extensible processing

The practice of preparing archival resources for use with limited initial labor and the intention of further work based on appraisal or user demand.



“Zero risk is not an acceptable real-world model.”

