Exploring the Black Box:
The Appraisal of University
Administrative Records

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Abstract: Although acknowledged as an essential archival function, appraisal is a complex process that is not fully understood. The authors examine the premises from which T.R. Schellenberg derived many of the practices used to appraise modern records and identify some problems in the widespread use of his approach. As an alternative, they offer a model comprised of the elements that should be considered when making an appraisal decision. Three interrelated categories of elements are discussed: value-of-information, costs-of-retention, and implications-of-the-appraisal-recommendations. While the focus is upon the appraisal of university administrative records, this model represents another step toward the development of a more systematic understanding of the entire appraisal process.

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THE APPRAISAL OF MODERN RECORDS sometimes seems to be derived from a black box. Archivists mix together a variety of values and record characteristics and pull from the box a determination of the records' value. Many archivists find existing explanations of appraisal inadequate. They want a more integrated explanation of appraisal. This article analyzes the appraisal of university administrative records, both theoretically and through an example, and offers a model of appraisal that may, with modifications, be applicable to the appraisal of other types of records in diverse settings.[1]

Many of the roots of modern records appraisal are found in the work of the National Archives and Records Service (NARS). As one of the first archival agencies to appraise modern administrative records, NARS developed guidelines that were widely distributed and often copied by other archivists. T.R. Schellenberg's "Appraisal of Modern Public Records" remains an influential work on the subject.[2] His principal contribution was a sharp distinction between evidential and informational values of records; this dichotomy remains a cornerstone of appraisal.[3] The most impressive subsequent writing on appraisal is Maynard J. Brichford's *Archives &*

Manuscripts: Appraisal and Accessioning.[4] Brichford combined the Schellenberg framework with the experiences of the subsequent twenty-one years. He provided a thorough compendium of ideas and practices; however, his lists of criteria and their explanations, while valuable, were not integrated into an overall system.

Despite the usefulness of Schellenberg's dichotomy and Brichford's compendium, archivists continue to search for better explanations of appraisal.[5] In order to think about this topic, it is helpful to examine the premises of Schellenberg's discussion of appraisal. There are two points in his discussion that are troublesome. The first revolves around his explanation of the focus of an institutional acquisitions mandate.[6] The second involves Schellenberg's assumptions regarding the required completeness of documentation.

When he discussed the mandate and appraisal procedures of NARS, Schellenberg employed the statutory provisions defining the authority of the National Archives and certain American and European assumptions about the responsibilities of both government and archivists. He defined his appraisal criteria, evidential value and informational value, using the terms of the 1943 Records

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[1]This article is based upon the appraisal of paper records. While the relationship between paper records and those in other formats is occasionally mentioned, we do not systematically consider the application of appraisal guidelines developed for other record formats.

[2]T.R. Schellenberg, "The Appraisal of Modern Public Records," *Bulletins of the National Archives* 8 (October 1956).

[3]Schellenberg also discusses this subject in *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 133–60.

[4]Maynard J. Brichford, *Archives & Manuscripts: Appraisal and Accessioning*, SAA Basic Manual Series (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1977). As subsequent notes indicate, many of our appraisal components and elements are discussed in this manual.

[5]See, for example, Richard C. Berner, *Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Analysis* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983), 117–19, 178–80; and Frank G. Burke, "The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States," *American Archivist* 44 (Winter 1981): 40–46.

[6]All archival repositories define the kinds of records they accept. Acquisitions is the generic term used throughout this article to include all materials received, purchased, or transferred to a repository. All types and formats of material are included. Both manuscript and archival materials are considered to be acquisitions.

Disposal Act, which described the universe of federal records subject to inspection by the National Archives. Records with evidential value were those "containing evidence of the 'organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the Government.' " Records with informational value were those that "contain essential information on matters with which an agency dealt. . . the 'research' records, which contain information useful for studies in a variety of subject fields."[7] Schellenberg's definitions were obviously formed by their governmental context.[8]

Schellenberg also incorporated certain assumptions in his recommendations. To justify the retention of records with evidential value, regardless of their informational value, he asserted as self-evident that "an accountable government should certainly preserve some minimum evidence of how it was organized and how it functioned, in all its numerous and complex parts."[9] This assertion, however, is not self-evident. Although it is perhaps desirable that a government document itself, documentation of government activities is a matter of public policy as defined by law. The long political struggle to establish and support archival agencies at all governmental levels demonstrates that governments assume no inherent responsibility to document their actions.[10] Similarly, governing bodies of private organizations must decide to document their activities

and to establish an archives. They must also determine the primary areas of responsibility of the repository. While evaluation of the repository. While or administrative value to the parent institution may be part of a repository's mandate, these are not automatically archival responsibilities.

Given the potential diversity of institutional policies and responsibilities, Schellenberg's dichotomy between evidential and informational values and his recommendations regarding the level of documentation to be retained provide limited assistance to archivists. His thoughts reflect the legal priorities of the National Archives that require the archivist to consider first the evidential and then the informational values of the records. These priorities, however, are not universal. There are, for example, repositories that serve as institutional archives but whose primary goal is to document other organizations or subject areas. Retention of records of evidential value to the parent organization is not the principal concern. In fact, under these circumstances, the automatic classification of information into the two categories of evidential and informational is not always helpful. The evidential value of records is only information about the parent organization. While it is useful for administrative history, this is only one informational topic that can be addressed through the use of the records.

There are also problems with Schellenberg's recommendations regard-

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[7]Schellenberg, "Appraisal of Modern Public Records," 6.

[8]Schellenberg, *Modern Archives*, 139–40.

[9]Schellenberg, "Appraisal of Modern Public Records," 8.

[10]Victor Gondos, Jr., *J. Franklin Jameson and the Birth of the National Archives, 1906–1926* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), and Donald R. McCoy, *The National Archives: America's Ministry of Documents 1934–1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), document the struggle to establish and define the role of an archives within the federal government. Ernst Posner, *American State Archives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), and the reports by Edwin C. Bridges and Richard Cox in Lisa B. Weber, ed., *Documenting America: Assessing the Condition of Historical Records in the States* (Atlanta: National Association of State Archives and Records Administrators, 1984), document the same issues at the state and local levels.

ing the completeness of documentation required. It may be important, as he suggested, for the federal government to document all the numerous functions of its complex parts; but other government or private institutions may determine that it is either unnecessary or impossible to document their activities as fully and comprehensively. Again, the constraints imposed by the legislative mandate of NARS limits the applicability of Schellenberg's appraisal advice. Unfortunately, however, archivists have often stretched Schellenberg's definitions and recommendations beyond their intended context, limiting legitimate alternative choices that can be made by non-federal organizations and archivists.

An appraisal model for institutional records that allows for diverse acquisition mandates and institutional settings is needed. To be realistic this model should include the three general categories of decisions evaluated when appraising records: (1) the value of the information, (2) the costs of retention, and (3) the political and procedural implications of the appraisal recommendations. These three modules are shown in Figure 1.

As diagramed in Figures 2, 3, and 4, each of these modules consists of several levels of characteristics that are considered during appraisal. The first level will be called components. For example, in the Value-of-Information module (Figure 2) there are three components: circumstances of creation, analysis of content, and use of the records. The final level of considerations will be called elements. The elements comprising circumstance of creation are: position in organization, unit activities, and record function. In some instances the complexity of the component requires that an intervening level of subcomponents be placed between the elements and the component. In the analysis of content, the subcomponents are practical limitations, duplication, and topical analysis.
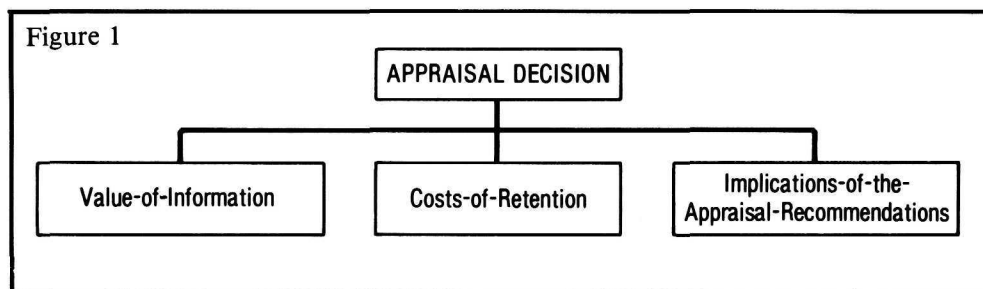
All of the components and their elements should be considered when making an appraisal decision. They are not, however, of equal value. The relative weight of each component or element in a particular appraisal decision is determined by individual repository policies, most notably those relating to record acquisition and disposition. Moreover, the modules, components, and elements are dynamic and interactive. The process by which they are considered is dependent upon repository policies, the circumstances of the appraisal, and the record level at which the appraisal decision is made. Because of the complex interplay of the entire system, the diagrams do not adequately reflect the dynamics of the appraisal process. An examination of each module's elements and an explanation of how they could have been used in appraising specific records show more clearly the major relationships and dynamics of the model.

Value-of-Information (see Figure 2) is the first module that should be evaluated.[11] It assesses the potential of records for use after their active administrative life is concluded. Three components comprise Value-of-Information: circumstances of creation, analysis of content, and use of the records.

(A) *Circumstances of creation* includes three elements: (1) the position in the organization of the generating office; (2) the principal activities of the unit or individual generating the records; and (3) the significance and function of the records in the unit's activities.

A belief in the intrinsic relationship between records and the activities generating them is basic to archival practice. Because of this relationship, ar-

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[11] Many of the components cited in the Value-of-Information module appear in Brichford, *Archives & Manuscripts: Appraisal and Accessioning.*

Figure 1

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chivists should look at the location of a unit within its organizational hierarchy and the activities of the unit. Organizational charts are a good starting point since they indicate official communication and decisionmaking positions; informal positions of influence are also significant. Regardless of hierarchical position, specific unit activities may vary widely. For example, in the office of a university dean, where policy-making is a primary activity, there are also non-policy, "housekeeping" activities. Similarly, record function within a given unit may vary widely, sometimes related to the unit's principal activity, sometimes documenting supplemental or tangential activities. Thus, within a unit, the unit's activities and the function of the records in documenting specific activities should be determined.

The archivist should also examine the circumstances of creation for those documents received by the unit. The authors' principal activities and the functions of the records within these activities should be assessed. Understanding the circumstances of creation of the records, both individually and as a group, is the first step in evaluating the value of the information that they contain.

(B) *Analysis of content* is an evaluation of the quality of the information contained in the records as a whole and as it relates to specific identifiable topics. There are three subcomponents: (1) practical limitations, (2) duplication of information, and (3) topical analysis.

Practical limitations that would impede use of the records are an obvious concern. Severe problems, such as illegible handwriting or incomprehensible prose, may make the records useless. While these are rarely found in twentieth-century administrative records, if they are present the significance of the other elements should be evaluated with these limitations in mind.

Duplication can only be evaluated within the context of a designated universe of known documentation. Realistically this universe should be defined as those materials held by the archives, those the archivist has seen, and those scheduled through a records management program. It should include all formats and types of records. The content of this universe will vary based upon the experience and memory of the archivist and the repository.

There are two elements within duplication that should be evaluated: physical and intellectual duplication. Physical duplication is the exact reproduction of the information, regardless of format. The worth of the information is not increased by repetition and therefore archivists have generally eliminated physical duplicates. For example, many university archives establish a central file of widely distributed records, such as university publications and faculty minutes, and destroy all other copies. Intellectual duplication should also be considered. This is the reproduction of related information, in different records
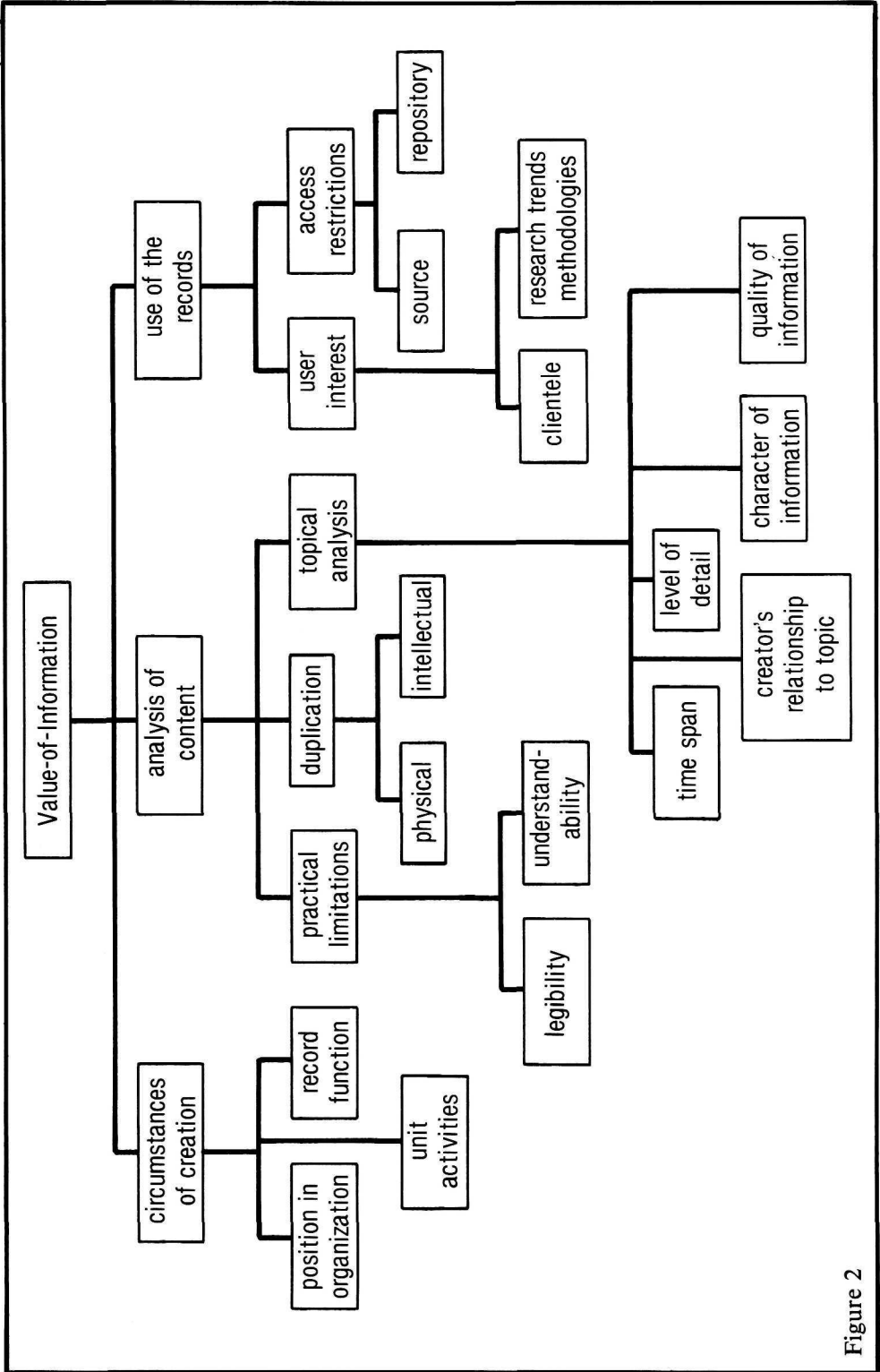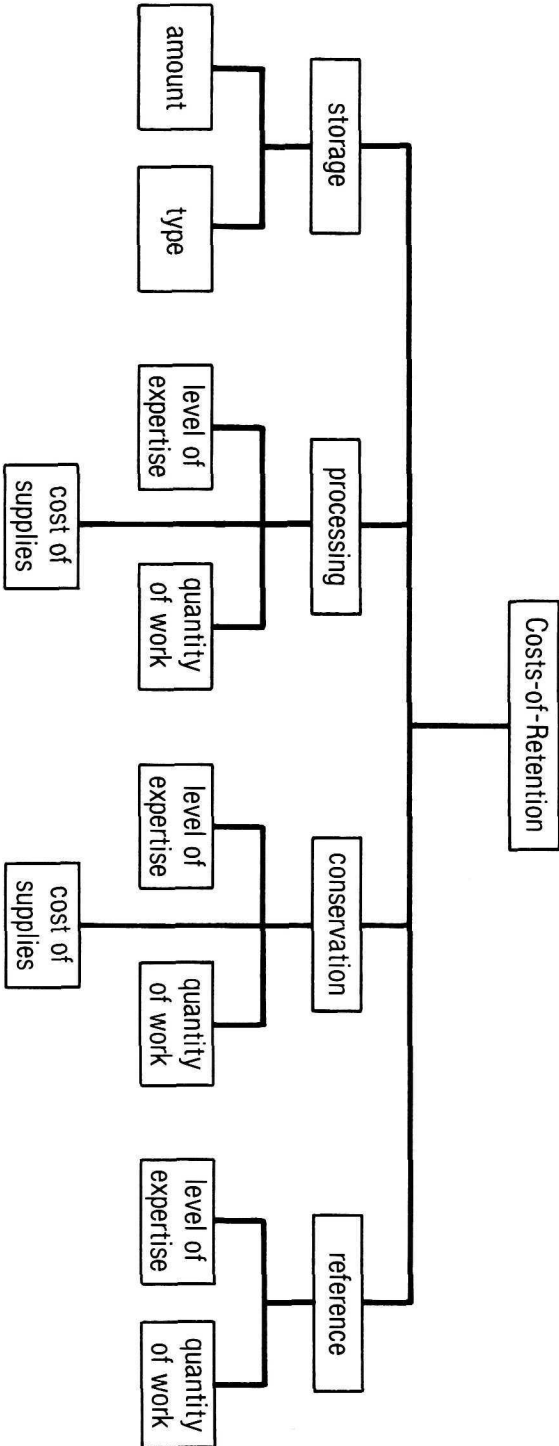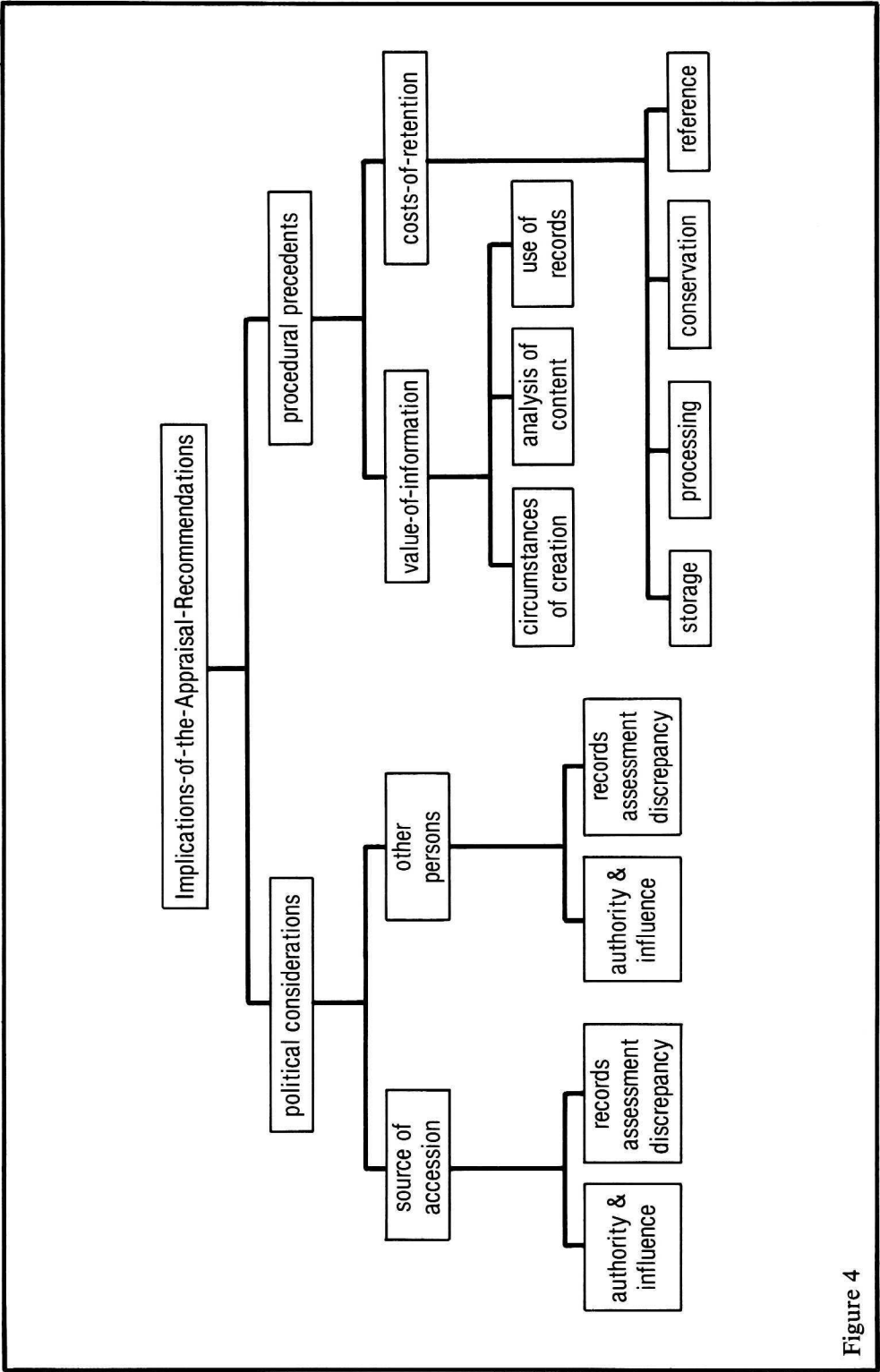
Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

or formats. Summaries, for example, partially duplicate information contained in other records and should be assessed for their completeness. Annotated versions of widely distributed records represent an extension of the information contained in the basic document and should be evaluated in terms of their additional content.

Topical analysis is the evaluation of the information contained in the records relating to specific topics. Analysis can be done at either gross or more refined levels. At its simplest, the archivist should assess the records in comparison to the largest subject of interest. If desirable, this very general analysis can be supplemented by more refined topical analysis in which the archivist investigates the important themes found within the records.

For each topic identified, whether it is one or many, the archivist should evaluate the records in terms of five elements: (1) time span, (2) the creator's relationship to the topic, (3) level of detail, (4) character of the information, and (5) quality of the information. Time span evaluates both the inclusive dates of the records and the distribution of the records over the relevant chronological period of the topic, including significant gaps in the coverage. When thinking about dates, many archivists assume that older documents are inherently more valuable. This assumption is not valid. While scarcity of information may enhance the value of a record's content, simple age does not. The relationship of the record's creator to the topic is the second element that should be examined. For example, a participant's commentary is likely to be of more value than a secondhand account. The third element, level of detail, asks if the amount of information relating to the topic is superficial or thorough. While a particular group of records may touch upon many topics, often the information about many

of them is quite tangential. Character of information, the fourth element, evaluates the kinds of questions answered by the records: why, how, what, where, and who. For example, a memo from a department chair may explain a routine procedure, such as the emergency evacuation of the building, or it may answer fundamental questions about the department, such as why a faculty member was denied tenure.

The final element evaluated in topical analysis is quality of the information. This measures the relationship of the records' information to the broader universe of information relating to the topic. The archivist should determine whether the records offer new information, verify existing information, or supplement the existing body of routine information. Like duplication, the analysis of this element takes place within a universe defined by the archivist's experience and knowledge. While quality of information and intellectual duplication appear superficially similar, they differ from one another in an important way. Intellectual duplication examines specific documents containing specific information. Quality of information looks at a broader information universe and assesses the information in terms of the topic. For example, intellectual duplication is an issue when an archivist considers marginal notes made on widely distributed minutes of a particular faculty meeting. Quality of information is at issue when an archivist considers the general similarity of faculty meeting minutes of various university departments.

(C) *Use of the records* is the third component in the Value-of-Information module. It consists of two subcomponents: user interest and access restrictions. User interest is divided into two elements: repository clientele and contemporary research trends and methodologies. Both the circumstances

of creation and the analysis of content may suggest members of the repository's clientele who have used similar records. Evaluation of current research trends and methodologies may also suggest potential users. As it is possible to imagine a use for almost every record, it is also possible to imagine a clientele for virtually any document. The relative importance of these clienteles should be consciously determined by repository policies. A strictly institutional archives, for example, may primarily serve administrators, while other archives may primarily serve scholars in a particular discipline. Appraisal should reflect the needs of a repository's primary clienteles.

Records may contain information that necessitates the restriction of their use. Such restrictions may be established for legal, ethical, or administrative reasons by either the source of the records or the repository, in order to protect the records' creator or other affected parties. Whatever the scope of the restrictions, access limitations affect the use of the records and thus the worth of the information they contain. To cite the most extreme example, the decision to retain permanently closed records is suspect.

The Value-of-Information module, then, is composed of three components: circumstances of creation, analysis of content, and use of the records. Before moving to a discussion of the next two modules, it is helpful to consider the general interaction of the Value-of-Information components and elements and their application to specific records.

The record level at which the archivist performs the appraisal affects the use of the components and their elements. Initial identification of potentially valuable records, the first decision in the appraisal process, often is best made at the record group or series level. The archivist primarily should employ the circumstances of creation elements to indicate units likely to generate significant records. For example, to document institutional policy-making the archivist should use position in the organization to identify units near the top of the hierarchy. In contrast, to document institutional research, unit activities are a better indicator of potentially valuable records. The archivist then transfers those records of the most functional significance to the activities of interest.

Subsequent examinations should seek to refine initial judgments. In a process of search and confirmation, the archivist scans file folder headings, examining a sample of files and a few documents. If the contents confirm the archivist's expectations about the records, the inspection process ends. If expectations are not confirmed, additional folders should be selected and examined. This is a sampling procedure. As with any sampling procedure, the more carefully the goals and methodologies of the selection and examination process are articulated, the better the sample will reflect the overall quality of the documents.[12]

Appraisal at the series, file unit, or document level may involve detailed analysis of content. Careful examination of records for practical limitations or topical analysis can be time-consuming. An archivist, therefore, should choose the level at which records will be ap-

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[12]While the sampling technique employed in choosing records for appraisal is usually quite primitive, some very complex projects have been undertaken. The best documented involve the records of the Massachusetts Superior Court and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. For more information see Michael Stephen Hindus, Theodore M. Hammett, and Barbara M. Hobson, *The Files of the Massachusetts Superior Court, 1859–1959: An Analysis and a Plan for Action* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979); and the National Archives and Records Service, *Appraisal of the Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation: A Report to Hon. Harold H. Greene, U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1981).

praised. Just as many repositories choose not to arrange and describe records below the series level, so too they can decide not to appraise below the series level. Appraisal should be a continuous process, beginning with the identification of record holders possessing potentially valuable records and continuing during on-site and post-transfer examination and processing at the various record levels.

The relative significance of each component within the Value-of-Information module is difficult to determine because it requires that the archivist compare abstract qualities such as the elements of analysis of content and use. Repository policies, however, and acquisition policies in particular, should guide the archivist in establishing the relative weights that should be assigned to the components and their elements. A repository whose acquisition policies sharply emphasize institutional administrative history would focus on significant administrative records. Topics other than administration and non-administrative clienteles would be of minimal interest.

The Value-of-Information module can be better understood by applying it to the appraisal of a group of records from a specific repository. The Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan collects material relating to the history of the state of Michigan and serves as the university's archives. One of its major goals as the institutional archives is to document university policy and program formulation in order to facilitate scholarly research on higher education. To carry out this goal, the archivist surveyed 424 linear feet of administrative records from the university's Medical School. Two hundred sixty feet of records were transferred to the repository for more detailed appraisal. Included in this project was a series of 92 linear feet of dean's correspondence, dating from 1915 to 1959. While the ap-

plication of the model will be explained using these records, the model was developed after the records were appraised and processed. The examples, therefore, are illustrative.

Initially the circumstances of creation were studied. University organizational charts and histories of the Medical School confirmed the expectations that the dean's office ranked high in the university's structure and was engaged in policy formulation. The school's departments, however, exercised great autonomy, indicating that the dean's office did not make all important policy decisions. A quick examination of the correspondence to confirm record function supported the conclusion that policy information, written both by the dean and by faculty correspondents in the departments, was located in the series. The examination also revealed that the series contained several other non-policy records.

Warned by the analysis of the circumstances of creation component that the series was not as simple as it might be, the archivist undertook a careful analysis of content. Two subcomponents, practical limitations and duplication, posed no problems. There was minimal physical duplication and most of the material was typewritten. Topical analysis proved more complex because documentation for some anticipated topics was poor, and unanticipated topics emerged.

Initially the series was thought to document three topics: administrative history, the history of medical education, and the career of an early and prominent dean. Topical analysis confirmed that administrative history and the history of medical education were reasonably well documented. The records' distribution over the relevant time spans was generally adequate; the relationship between the records' creators and the topic was direct; the level of detail was well focused on the

topics; and the records' character of information answered interesting questions about how and why things happened. The expected biographical material, however, proved a disappointment. The time span, already known to be shorter than desired since the records did not cover the individual's full tenure at the school, was even more disappointing. A three-year gap in the records, which did not strongly detract from the overall forty-four-year time span of the series, occurred in the years most critical for a biographer. Furthermore, the character of the information was poor. Of the four deans who were represented in the series, the one of most biographical interest was the poorest correspondent. He generally did not comment about his opinions and motivations nor those of others. In the traditional phrase of the archivist, his correspondence lacked substance.

A fourth unexpected topic, local medical practices and characteristics in Michigan, emerged in the series. From at least 1915 to about 1939 the dean was a frequent recipient of letters from physicians selling their practice or community leaders attempting to attract a physician to their area. These letters covered a long time span and were obviously written by individuals familiar with the topic. This correspondence revealed a surprising amount of focused detail and offered a unique description of medical practices in small communities. These letters represented an unexpected but valuable discovery within the series.

For all of the topics, however, the quality of the information was lessened by certain overall characteristics of the series. Careful examination led to the conclusion that the series had served not only as the file for the dean's correspondence, but also as a general office file. From one-half to two-thirds of the series consisted of routine program implementation and housekeeping records.

Three groups of routine, transactional records were defined. First, there was miscellaneous correspondence relating to students, including requests for application forms or school catalogs, clarification of admission criteria, announcements of postgraduate opportunities, and letters informing students of changes made in other records, such as a grade change on a transcript. Second, there was a large body of administrative forms, including voucher approvals, notices of staff vacations and travel plans, and temporary vacancies. Finally, minor papers of the various deans, documenting travel plans, invitations, regrets, and acknowledgements made up the third group. Thus, because the series documented several of the unit's activities, both policy-making and transactional, the overall quality of the policy information was diminished. Policy documents were lost in a large body of transactional paper that merely supplemented an already existing and generally uninteresting body of routine information. The problem created by the quality of information significantly lowered the value established through the other four elements of topical analysis: time span, creator's relationship to topic, level of detail, and character of information.

Use of the records was apparent early in the appraisal process. Several categories of researchers, such as university faculty and alumni, medical scholars, and individuals interested in local history, would find the records valuable. Given the age of the records, neither the current administration of the Medical School nor the repository staff questioned unlimited researcher access to the records. The application of the Value-of-Information module indicated, therefore, that the dean's correspondence series contained information of great value, documenting several topics of interest to users. This

value, however, was diminished by the large amount of routine information also present.

Costs-of-Retention (see Figure 3) is the second module in the appraisal process.[13] This is an estimate of the potential costs to the repository of the appraisal recommendations. Four costs, both actual and deferred, should be evaluated: storage, processing, conservation, and reference.

(A) *Storage* costs are determined by the amount and type of space required. Some record sizes and formats may require special storage facilities and thus create special costs. Since all records must be housed, storage costs are the minimum expense a repository assumes if records are retained.

(B) *Processing* costs are the expenses necessary to appraise, arrange, and describe the records. They are determined by the level of archival expertise, quantity of work, and cost of supplies. Processing costs should be estimated by comparing the existing organization of the records to the arrangement and description that is desired. At a minimum processing should make records usable, although circumstances may make it desirable to process records beyond this point. The comparison between the existing and the desired arrangement determines the skills, time, and supplies needed to perform the work.

(C) *Conservation* costs are all those expenses necessary either to retard or to arrest record deterioration. The same three elements should be evaluated: level of ex-

pertise, quantity of work, and cost of supplies. Likewise, comparison between the existing and the desired condition of the records determines the necessary conservation measures and the costs. Overhead expenses related to specific environmental storage standards, such as the maintenance of constant temperature and humidity, and processing costs incurred for conservation measures, such as acid-free folders or the removal of metal fasteners, should be considered as conservation costs.

(D) *Reference* costs, those expeditures necessary to facilitate the use of processed records, should be determined by the level of expertise and the quantity of work necessary to provide physical and intellectual access to the records. When estimating reference costs, the archivist should take into account the anticipated use by both repository clientele and staff.[14] Outreach programs should be considered part of reference costs. Although reference is often seen as an obligatory service, the archivist must nevertheless estimate the costs of providing such service.

Similar to the analysis of Value-of-Information, the four components of the Costs-of-Retention become more apparent at different records levels. The easiest to calculate, storage costs can be estimated at the record group level. Determination of processing and conservation costs involves a more detailed analysis at the series, folder, or even item level. Based on anticipated use and the

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[13]Again, many of the components cited in the Costs-of-Retention module appear in Brichford, *Archives & Manuscripts: Appraisal and Accessioning*. The idea of including costs as a factor in appraisal was first presented by G. Philip Bauer, ''The Appraisal of Current and Recent Records,'' *Staff Information Circulars* 13 (June 1946): 2.

[14]Archivists are often the single largest group of users of the records within an institution. In an unpublished paper entitled ''The Value of Finding Aids in the Archives: A Quantitative Analysis'' (presented at the Spring 1983 meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference), James W. Oberly pointed out that at the archives of the College of William and Mary the staff was the largest user of their university collections.

level of processing, reference costs are the most difficult to estimate.[15] While dollar estimates of the Costs-of-Retention elements are the most precise, the archivist more frequently measures costs by comparing the costs of the repository's customary procedures with the potential costs of the records being appraised.[16] When the records pose unusual storage, processing, conservation, or reference requirements, the archivist recognizes that particularly high costs will be incurred should the appraisal recommendations be carried out.

Many costs are deferrable and adjustable. If projected costs exceed a repository's customary level, it does not necessarily mean that a group of records will be rejected. It is more likely that costs will be adjusted. The proposed levels of processing, conservation, and reference may be lowered or deferred. Such decisions, however, should be carefully considered.

Applying the Costs-of-Retention module to the correspondence series of the dean of the Medical School is helpful even though exact cost estimates are unavailable. As discussed, however, a comparison can be made between the university archives' customary expectations regarding storage, processing, conservation, and reference costs for similar records and those projected for the series. Storage requirements were typical and of little concern. Likewise, the usual difficulties created by aging, acidic paper

could be dealt with through customary procedures, primarily storing the records in an environmentally controlled area in acid-free containers and folders.

Decisions regarding the processing of the series involved the relationship between description and arrangement and reference costs as well as an effort to resolve difficulties discovered through the evaluation of the Value-of-Information module. The large quantity of routine information and the arrangement of the series would lead to unusually intensive reference assistance. The series was arranged in an annual chronology, with each year's correspondence organized alphabetically by the correspondents' last names. Routine and significant correspondence was scattered throughout the series, making topical searches very difficult and requiring searching virtually at the item level. The size of the series also suggested high retrieval and reshelving costs unless very detailed finding aids were prepared. Although perhaps acceptable for a rarely used series, the identification of multiple clienteles indicated high use of the series.

Eliminating the routine material during processing, therefore, would ensure more typical reference costs, by reducing the time required to locate documents, and would significantly improve the worth of the information the records contained. Removing routine material would also reduce storage and conservation costs. Because of the character of the original

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[15]Oberly also tested the hypothesis that improved finding aids reduce the amount of staff time spent in searching records for information. For a five-year period (1 July 1976 to 30 June 1982) he examined a randomly drawn 30-percent sample from a total of 1,512 forms filled out by staff after performing a reference work. His conclusion was that as a result of improved finding aids the mean staff time spent researching questions dropped from seventy-seven minutes (one hour and seventeen minutes) in 1976 to forty-seven minutes in 1982. The size and distribution of the decline within the sample indicated that the result is statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence and cannot be attributed to sampling error or chance.

[16]Two recent articles have discussed the calculation of processing costs; both have included actual cost figures. Thomas Wilsted, "Computing the Total Cost of Archival Processing," *MARAC's Dear Archivist . . . Practical Solutions to Archival Dilemmas* 1 (Summer 1982): 2–3, offers advice on how to calculate costs with a single example. William J. Maher, "Measurement and Analysis of Processing Costs in an Academic Archives," *College & Research Libraries* 43 (January 1982): 59–67, is a more extensive treatment of the same tropic, offering a much larger base from which average costs are calculated.

order, however, item-level weeding would be necessary to achieve these results. After much discussion it was decided that the potential savings in the storage, reference, and conservation components, as well as the enhancement of the Value-of-Information, justified the high costs of processing. To minimize the expense of weeding the three previously identified categories of routine material, paraprofessional graduate student assistants performed most of the work, under the direction of a professional archivist.

Implications-of-the-Appraisal-Recommendations (see Figure 4) is the third module. The decision to retain or not retain particular records may affect the repository either positively or negatively. Before reaching a final appraisal decision, the archivist should consider the impact of the proposed recommendations, evaluating two components: political considerations and procedural precedents.

(A) *Political considerations* are the implications of the appraisal decision for the repository's relationships with the source of the records and other persons, such as researchers, other donors, or persons mentioned in the records.[17] For both of these subcomponents, the archivist should decide if their authority or influence indicates that records should or should not be retained, regardless of the Value-of-Information or the Costs-of-Retention, in order to gain favor or avoid offense. This authority/influence element is particularly important when a disagreement over the appraisal recommendations of the archivist is anticipated. The greater the archivist's estimate of the authority/influence element, the more critical the disagreement becomes. Such a discrepancy in the assessment of records can be caused by a difference of opinion relating to the

worth of the information contained in the records. For example, a repository may automatically retain all records of a university vice president, regardless of their quantity, because the political benefits outweigh the Costs-of-Retention. Likewise, the influence of a frequent scholarly researcher may be so significant that records are retained because the scholar has expressed an interest in them. Records' assessment discrepancy also can be based on an emotional attachment to the records. This is more troublesome because it is difficult to refute rationally. For example, a retired administrator who has established and nurtured a program may feel very proprietary about the related records, not understanding an appraisal recommendation that suggests destroying several series of housekeeping records. The archivist may, however, determine that, given the administrator's limited influence, implementation of the appraisal recommendation will not adversely affect the repository.

(B) *Procedural precedents* are the repository procedures relating to the components of the Value-of-Information and the Costs-of-Retention modules that are initiated, reinforced, or modified by implementation of the appraisal recommendations. For example, documenting a particular unit function may establish a precedent useful when later seeking similar records. Likewise, having established the precedent of rejecting certain categories of records may be helpful. The implementation of an appraisal decision sets standards for the future analysis of content, such as the amount of duplication or quantity of routine records that will be acceptable. Precedents relating to use are equally significant. An appraisal decision may continue previous practices favoring certain clienteles. On the other hand, by deciding to retain

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[17]"Other persons" could also include organizations or institutions such as university units or businesses.

records that are beyond its established acquisition policies, a repository may commit itself to serve new clienteles. There are also precedents for the Costs-of-Retention module relating to storage, processing, conservation, and reference. For example, the decision not to process a dean's records below the series level establishes a precedent for the processing of records of other deans. A repository that, for conservation reasons, has routinely removed metal fasteners from the records of nineteenth-century administrators must determine if it is able to support the cost of continuing this practice when dealing with the more voluminous records of their successors.

The procedural precedents and political considerations relating to appraisal decisions have long-term implications for a repository. When dealing with university administrative records, a repository cannot be all things to all people. It must make hard choices. These choices should be articulated in the repository's policies. Before deciding to implement an appraisal recommendation, the archivist should evaluate the associated political considerations and procedural precedents, for it is through implementation of individual decisions that repository policies and procedures evolve and develop.

To understand the Implications module it is again helpful to turn to the Medical School records. The school was politically influential in the university. Its dean was cooperative and personally interested in the project. While the school considered its records to be important, it did not consider them to be sacred. The archivist had the authority to determine what would be retained.

Several traditional clienteles would be pleased to see the records made available. While these clienteles had no immediate authority, their influence might prove politically beneficial. There was, however, the possibility of angering some

politically influential members of the university's medical community. In addition to the dean's correspondence series, the administrative records of the school included minutes of the faculty and numerous advisory committees, which contained candid discussions of faculty and other medical educators. The potential political problems posed by these records, however, could be resolved by temporarily restricting access to them.

Given the school's influence and cooperation, procedural precedents for several components of the Value-of-Information module could be set that would be useful when dealing with other university units. The precedent of depositing in the repository administratively significant records, such as faculty minutes and search committee records, would be strengthened. In addition, the access policies adopted would be valuable models. The vast majority of the school's records were immediately made available for scholarly research. In an effort to resolve the conflict between the desirability of open access and the privacy rights of third parties, confidential records such as the faculty minutes and search committee records were temporarily closed but would be open to all users twenty years after their creation. This precedent would be valuable in dealing with other university units that might want more stringent restrictions, based upon a different interpretation of relevant state law.

Several existing procedures relating to the costs of retention would be reinforced. Most importantly, the precedent of large-scale reduction of administrative records would be maintained. While the high costs incurred through item-level processing would be a burdensome precedent if other units requested similar treatment for their records, this was considered unlikely because detailed information about processing was not common knowledge outside of the repository.

Overall, the political and procedural implications of the appraisal recommendations relating to the Medical School records were favorable. These implications supported the recommendation to item-weed the dean's correspondence series. As a result, seventy feet of records were weeded at the item level and twenty-one feet at the file unit level. In all, fifty of the original ninety-two feet of correspondence were removed from the series.

A few final points should be made regarding this model of the appraisal process. First, the components of the model are cumulative; none stands alone. Nor can one module operate without the other two. Rather, each interacts with the others and must be evaluated with them in mind. This interaction of the elements and components means that the collective value of the records is greater than the sum of their parts. This interaction also means that the model's components and elements should not be reduced to a simple checklist or flowchart. Such simplification would not adequately reflect the complexities of appraisal.

Second, while the model is cumulative, its components and elements are not directly additive. The application of a well articulated repository acquisition policy to the model should cause some components and/or elements to be considered more important than others. Simple addition of the elements cannot reflect these important variations among repositories.

The model offers many advantages and solves many problems with existing explanations of appraisal. It is both flexible and comprehensive. It is flexible in that it can be applied to various types of administrative records at various levels of record analysis. It is comprehensive in that it tries to incorporate in a logical form all the significant parts of appraisal, both those traditionally acknowledged by archivists and those factors which are often unarticulated. Because of its flexibility and comprehensiveness, the model reflects appraisal in a number of situations: as part of a records management program, in traditional appraisal situations, and during reappraisal. In addition the model is viable for repositories of various ages and sizes with different political environments and acquisition mandates.

Although acknowledged as an essential archival function, appraisal is a complex process that is not fully understood. The model proposed here is an attempt to pull apart the elements and components of the process, to establish more precise definitions for them, and to analyze their interaction. Although developed primarily with administrative records in mind, it should have broader applications to the appraisal of other types of records in numerous institutional settings.

The exploration of the black box is not complete, however. Two areas in particular warrant further examination. The first involves implementing the model and assigning values to its components and elements. We must develop and test methods through which the qualitative assessments of the Value-of-Information and the Implications-of-the-Appraisal-Recommendation modules can be measured. If a simple checklist is not valid, perhaps some type of scales or continuums are more adequate measures of the components and elements. A second area of exploration to which the model points is the development and implementation of repository acquisition policies. As they now generally exist, acquisition policies are often open-ended statements designed primarily to grant a repository a perpetual hunting license for records. The way in which a repository defines, expands upon, and implements this very broad statement is the foundation of the appraisal process. As the model suggests, acquisition policies must be clear, focused, and refined in order for the archivist to reach sound appraisal decisions.

Appendix

To facilitate an understanding of the various elements discussed in this article, the elements and short-question definitions are provided in this appendix. The purpose of the appendix is to gather together the various elements in one place. It is not intended to serve as a checklist.

Value-of-Information Module

A. *Circumstances of Creation*
   1. Position in organization: What is the position of the generating office in the institutional hierarchy?
   2. Unit activities: In a given office, what are the principal functions of the particular unit (or individual) that generated the records?
   3. Records' function: In the context of the unit activities, what is the significance of the records? How directly are the records linked to the unit's principal activities?

B. *Analysis of Content*
   1. Practical limitations
      a. Legibility: Are the records decipherable?
      b. Understandability: Are the records coherent and clear?
   2. Duplication of information
      a. Physical duplication: Is the information in the document exactly reproduced elsewhere?
      b. Intellectual duplication: Is the information in the records approximately duplicated or expanded upon in related records (e.g., summaries, annotated versions)?
   3. Topical analysis
      a. Time span: For a given topic, how well do the records cover the relevant chronological period? Are there significant gaps?
      b. Creator's relationship to the topic: Does the creator of the records have a direct or indirect relationship to the topic? Was the creator a participant or an observer, or does he provide a second-hand account?
      c. Level of detail: Is the information about the topic superficial or thorough?
      d. Character of information: What kinds of questions about the topic do the records answer (e.g., why, how, what, where or who)?
      e. Quality of information: What is the relationship between this information and the broader universe of information on this topic?
      Is it new, does it verify assumptions already documented, or does it supplement an existing body of information?

C. *Use of the Records*
   1. Researcher interest
      a. Clientele: Are there members of the repository's clientele who are currently using or have used such records?
      b. Research trends and methodologies: What additional users of the records exist, given current research trends and methodologies?

2. Access restrictions
    a. Source-imposed access restrictions: Has the source of the records identified legitimate administrative, legal, or ethical concerns that would affect the use of the records?
    b. Repository-imposed access restrictions: Has the archivist identified administrative, legal, or ethical concerns that would affect the use of the records?

Costs-of-Retention Module

A. *Storage*
    1. Amount: How much space will the records require?
    2. Type: What kind of storage will be required, given the nature, type, and format of the records?

B. *Processing*
    1. Level of expertise: Given the nature and existing organization of the records, what level of archival expertise and experience will be required to arrange and describe the records?
    2. Quantity of work: How much work will be necessary to process the records to the chosen level of arrangement and description?
    3. Cost of supplies: What is the cost of the supplies required to process the records?

C. *Conservation*
    1. Level of expertise: Given the nature of the conservation problems, what level of skill and experience will be required to implement the recommended solutions?
    2. Quantity of work: How much work will be needed to carry out proposed measures?
    3. Cost of supplies: What is the cost of the supplies required to carry out the proposed conservation measures?

D. *Reference*
    1. Level of expertise: What experience or knowledge will be required to provide physical and intellectual access to the processed records?
    2. Quantity of work: How much work will be necessary to provide physical and intellectual access to the processed records?

Implications-of-the-Appraisal-Recommendations Module

A. *Political Considerations*
    1. Source of the records
        a. Authority/influence: Is the authority or influence of the records' source such that the appraisal recommendations should be reconsidered?
        b. Records assessment discrepancy: Is there a disagreement over the worth of the records' information, based on a factual dispute or due to an emotional attachment to the records?

2. Other persons
    a.   Authority/influence: Is the authority or influence of individuals other than the source (e.g., users, affected third parties) such that the appraisal recommendations should be reconsidered?
    b.   Records assessment discrepancy: Is there the potential for a disagreement over the content of the records with individuals other than the source, based on a factual dispute or due to an emotional attachment to the records?

B. *Procedural Precedents*
    1.   Value-of-Information: If the appraisal recommendations are implemented, what precedents will be established, reaffirmed, or changed regarding the components, subcomponents, and elements of this module?
    2.   Costs-of-Retention: If the appraisal recommendations are implemented, what precedents will be established, reaffirmed, or changed regarding the components, subcomponents, and elements of this module?