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Upending Tradition Through Strategic Change: The Evolution of Archival Processing at the BYU Library

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Abstract

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Abstract

Organizational change is challenging. At the heart of this challenge is an attachment to the status quo. Both employees and managers tend to prefer the status quo because it is known and, unless shown otherwise, enables them to successfully accomplish their responsibilities. They often use tradition as a way to maintain the status quo. This case study provides an example of organizational change in the Brigham Young University (BYU) Library and discusses how tradition was used to both promote and resist change.

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Organizational change is challenging. At the heart of this challenge is an attachment to the status quo. Employees and managers often prefer the status quo (often referred to as tradition) because it gives them the ability to successfully accomplish their work. It allows them to exercise power over their work. Status quo bias is the tendency to use tradition to resist change.

The creation of the Central Processing Unit (CPU) in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections in the Brigham Young University (BYU) Library (hereafter Special Collections) and its development into the Archival Processing Section (APS) in the Cataloging and Metadata Department in the BYU Library (hereafter Cataloging and Metadata) illustrate how tradition can be used

as a double-edged sword to both promote and resist change. It also shows that change must be carefully managed and that new traditions need to be developed to replace those traditions that are being disrupted.

Creating the Central Processing Unit (CPU)

Special Collections was established in its current configuration in 1999 when the rare books collections, the manuscripts collections, and the university archives were co-located in a new addition to the BYU Library. The hope was to leverage processes in common. A joint reference desk and reading room was created to serve patrons, and a classroom was constructed to enable instruction on using special collections and archival materials in a secure environment. While many processes were combined and centralized, several were not. One of the processes not centralized was the arrangement and description of archival and manuscripts collections (hereafter referred to as archival processing). Curators were in charge of archival processing because they were perceived as experts in managing all of the processes associated with manuscripts collections including accessioning, archival processing and collections management. Curators created archival finding aids¹ to help patrons find specific collections. An additional

access point to archival and manuscript collections was created by the cataloger embedded within Special Collections. This cataloger, while considered an expert in MARC cataloging, was not considered an expert in archival description and created the catalog record based on the archival finding aid produced by the curator or their student employees. To help them manage archival processing, curators were each allocated a certain number of hours of student labor (typically 15-20 hours per week) and they were left to manage archival processing according to their individual understanding of developing professional standards (see Figure 1).

This resulted in uneven archival descriptions as curators opted to process collections at a range of different levels (item, file, series, etc.) and utilized a variety of standards to guide those descriptions. This began to change in late 2001 as a new University Archivist was hired and given the mandate to figure out how to get the department's archival finding aids online. Department leadership believed that having another access point to archival and manuscript collections in addition to the collection level MARC catalog record would make materials more accessible.

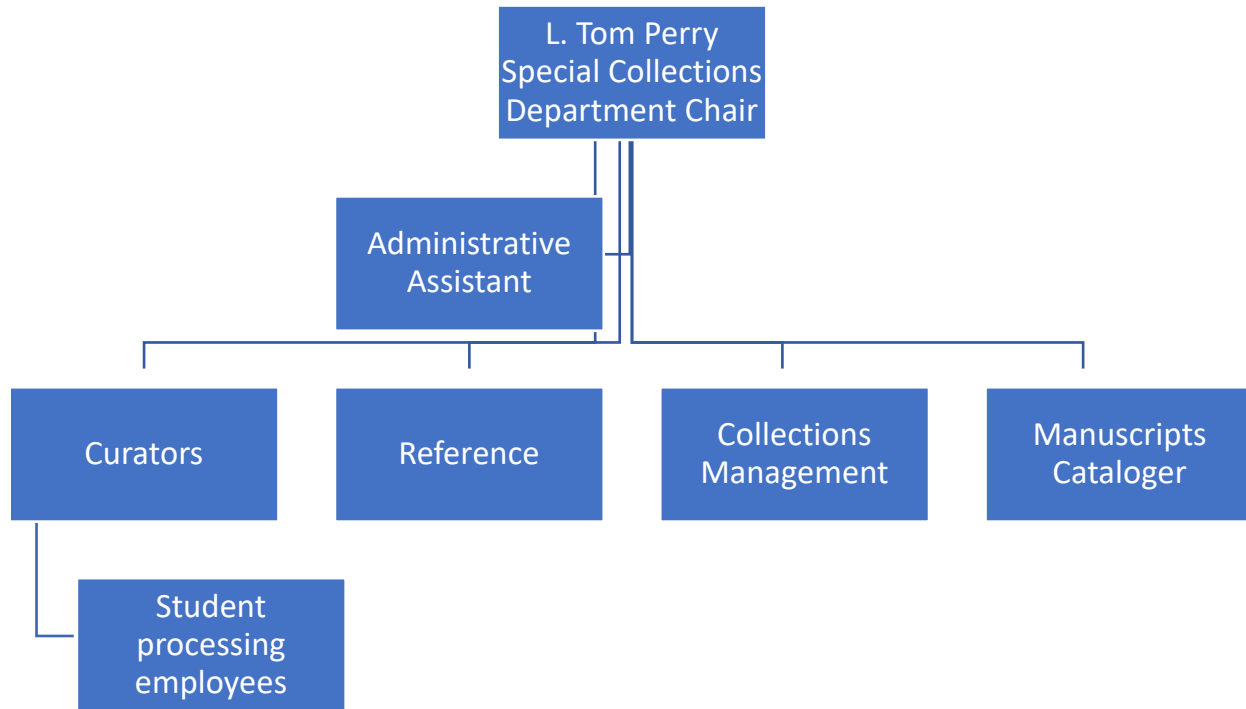


Figure 1. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Department Organization 2001

Moving Toward Standards Compliance

The University Archivist quickly realized that the best starting place would be to standardize archival processing in the department. It was rationalized that standardized descriptions would be easier to encode using Encoded Archival Description (an XML standard for describing archival descriptions) so that the department's archival descriptions could be placed online. In early 2002, a processing guide was created to standardize how manuscripts collections were arranged and described. This guide indicated what fields should be a part of all finding aids and stipulated that *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts* (APPM)² should guide all descriptive work in the department.³ While recognizing that APPM was designed for the formulation of catalog records, department leadership also believed that it could be used to provide guidance

for creating standardized text for many components of finding aids. Leadership provided training for curators on how to apply the processing guide and APPM. Curators were then responsible for training their student employees and any professional staff assigned to them on using the new processing guide. Curators preferred their individualized approaches to archival processing and resisted the move to standardization; in other words, they preferred the status quo. The curatorial preference for the status quo slowed the standardization of archival processing.

In 2008 the department initiated another attempt at standardization with the implementation of a new archival standard, *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (DACS).⁴ DACS described the core elements that should be present in all finding aids and how to structure the content in those elements. The implementation of DACS

meant that the processing manual was updated again and a new round of training on its application began. Another factor in the renewed attempt at standardization was that a new manuscripts cataloger had been hired who was recognized as an expert in the application of DACS and other descriptive standards. Department leadership hoped that having an expert physically in the Special Collections space would facilitate the consistent application of DACS. Curators were strongly encouraged by departmental leadership to apply the new standard in a consistent manner and to utilize the expertise of the cataloger. However, because archival processing continued to be managed by individual curators, this effort met with inconsistent results. Departmental staff engaged in a series of conversations about how the situation could be improved and several individuals proposed the idea of a centralized processing unit. Recognizing that they would lose control over the processing of the collections that they were responsible for, the majority of the curators were not interested in pursuing this possible solution. The status quo, tradition, was again being used to successfully block change and the department continued to produce inconsistent archival descriptions.

Centralizing Archival Processing

The catalyst for major change came in late 2014 when the department's Collections Management unit⁵ was given responsibility for reviewing all archival descriptions in order to ensure that they were standards compliant. Two related factors influenced the decision to give this responsibility to Collections Management: 1) the incoming department chair was concerned about the lack of progress in standardizing archival descriptions and 2) a new position had been added to Collections Management creating bandwidth for this new assignment. Collections Management staff quickly realized that if all archival descriptions were going to be standards compliant, the current process needed to change. Curators

were asking student processors and professional staff to process collections one way (curatorial expectations) and Collections Management was expecting collections to be processed in another way (departmental expectations). The student processors and professional staff were caught in the middle and asked by Collections Management to redo work in order to bring it into departmental standards compliance. This was lengthening the time that it took to get collections processed and accessible to researchers. Collections Management proposed a meeting with the department chair to discuss "the possibility of centralizing processing activities."⁶ Curators were also asking the department chair to figure out how to streamline the process and to stop the back and forth between Collections Management and their student employees and professional staff. The Manuscripts Cataloger also expressed a desire to improve the situation. Based on the feedback from all of these groups, the department chair created a task force to review archival processing workflows and generate a report documenting the major issues with those workflows. The task force was comprised of the Manuscripts Cataloger and the Collections Management staff. The resulting report indicated that these "longstanding issues [about standards application] have at times resulted in inconsistent training and direction for processing staff, conflict between processors and Collections Management, and bottlenecks in processing collections."⁷ The report proposed that the department engage in a serious discussion about whether or not archival processing should be centralized with a single supervisor for all student employees and professional staff engaged in archival processing. The department chair began a series of conversations⁸ with the manuscripts curators in December 2014 that resulted in a decision to hold a department meeting to discuss "the feasibility and desirability of creating a Central Processing Unit in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections."⁹ This meeting was scheduled for January 2015.

The main topic of discussion at the January 2015 department meeting was the possibility of creating a centralized processing unit.¹⁰ After robust discussion, the department decided to pilot a centralized processing unit. The proposed central processing unit was intended to create greater consistency in the description of archival and manuscripts collections, improve training for archival processing staff, eliminate existing bottlenecks with processing collections, and streamline the process for reviewing finding aids for standards compliance. The proposed pilot removed curators' supervisory responsibility

for students and professional staff doing archival processing work and placed it in the hands of a single individual (hereafter CPU Supervisor) who worked collaboratively with Collections Management to provide training on archival descriptive standards and who was responsible for work assignments (see Figure 2). The pilot was initially scheduled to run from April 1 to October 31, 2015.¹¹

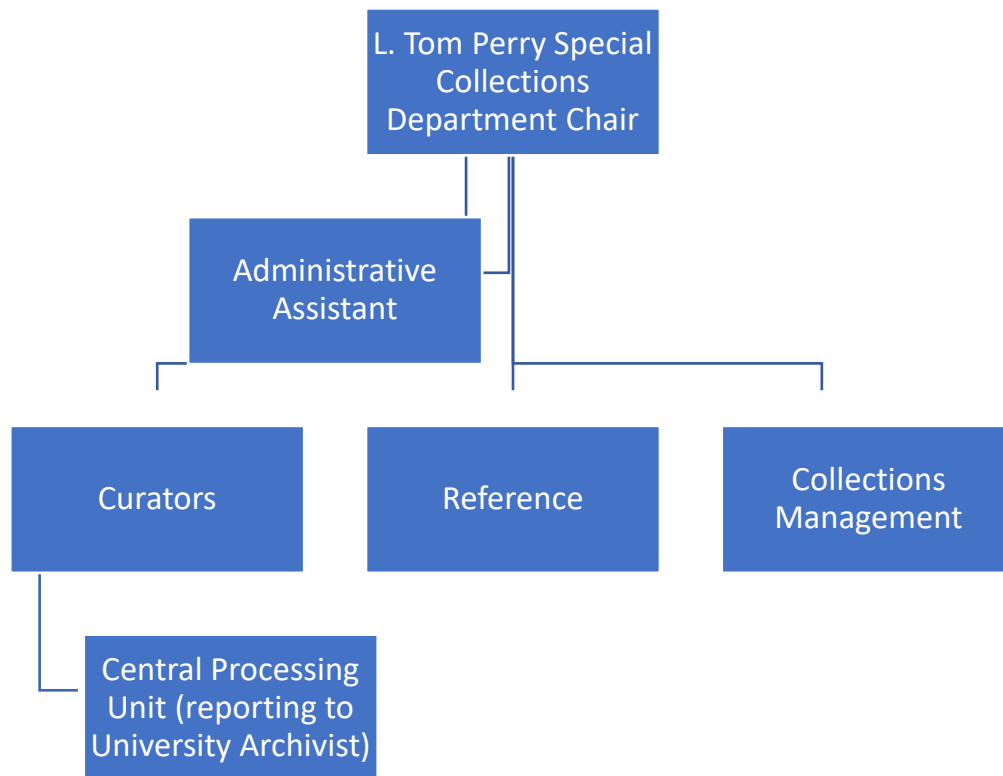


Figure 2 L. Tom Perry Special Collections Department Organization 2015 to 2019

Confronting Status Quo Bias

It was at this point that curators began to realize the potential impact that the centralized processing unit would have on their traditional autonomy. They would no longer directly supervise the students or professional staff doing archival processing work on the archival and manuscripts collections that they acquired. They would also no longer have a say on which standards would apply to this work and how those standards would be implemented. This understanding was solidified shortly before the pilot began when the CPU Supervisor (also the University Archivist) sent an email to the impacted curators and re-iterated that reporting lines were changing, and curators would now be individually responsible for accessioning materials—a task previously assigned to students. The CPU Supervisor's email was followed shortly by one from the department chair reinforcing this change.¹² Curators began to complain that they no longer had students available to help them accomplish non-processing related tasks. They also worried that collections would not be processed “their way.” This ended up being their biggest concern—the perceived lack of an ability to influence archival processing. Several of the curators began to resist the implementation of the pilot: they were slow to accession new collections and slow to submit processing plans to the CPU Supervisor.

It was becoming clear that the creation of the Central Process Unit (CPU) had caused a structural misalignment between the curators’ understanding of the goals of the department and the way that work was occurring in the department. Curators were using two traditions to fight against the proposed change: 1) each curator was used to having around 15-20 hours of student labor that they controlled and 2) each curator was used to managing how archival processing of “their” archival and manuscripts collections occurred. This gave them a strong sense

of ownership in their work. Both traditions were being violated by the creation of the CPU.

The shift of reporting lines changed all of this. Students and professional staff suddenly reported to a CPU Supervisor who (according to the curators) was not as invested in their collections. They now had no control over which order collections were processed in and to what level those collections were processed. Curators were also unhappy because they were now responsible for creating the initial accession records that documented the receipt of manuscripts collections, negatively impacting their productivity. Curators were not shy in letting the department chair know this. They argued that the pilot should be stopped, and that the department should return to the traditional (status quo) way of archival processing.

Aligning Expectations and Creating New Traditions

The department chose to tackle these complaints in two ways: 1) with the creation of a CPU Advisory Committee (during the pilot) and 2) by making student labor for non-processing tasks available to the curators (after the pilot). The major goal of the advisory committee was to provide an opportunity for the curators to collaborate with the CPU Supervisor in the establishment of archival processing priorities. The advisory committee was comprised of all of the manuscripts curators, a representative from the book curators, and the CPU Supervisor. The advisory committee was tasked with establishing policies and procedures to govern the CPU pilot. They were also charged with evaluating the pilot upon its completion. Problems with coordinating work between the CPU and the curators diminished with the establishment of the advisory committee. Alignment problems also began to dissipate as curators realized that they had a voice in determining how the CPU functioned and how collections were prioritized for archival

processing. Several months following the completion of the pilot and the decision to formalize the CPU, the department also created a new student position that could help curators with projects not associated with archival processing.¹³ Curators were asked to submit an application explaining what they wanted the student to do and how many hours they needed the student for. The student was then assigned to work with them. This alleviated some of the concern about lack of access to student labor but not all of it.

The actions taken by the department led to a favorable result for the CPU pilot. The pilot was eventually extended through September 2016 after which a report was issued recommending that the CPU be made permanent. The report recommended that a new staff position be created to act as the CPU Supervisor, that the CPU be physically centralized and given a bigger space, that more staffing be added to the CPU to improve processing productivity, and that the CPU adopt an electronic method of tracking its work.¹⁴ Two of these items proved actionable—creation of a new position and adopting an electronic method of tracking the work of the CPU. The other two items were beyond the resources of the department. The department made several proposals to increase staffing of the CPU but were told by library administration that any positions would have to come from repurposed positions in the department—a luxury that the department did not have. The department also proposed that a larger physical space be created for the CPU but were told that funding for the proposed remodel was unavailable.

The creation of the CPU successfully confronted status quo bias by strategically creating a centralized service for archival processing. Special Collections worked through the initial resistance, responding with collaborative solutions rather than reverting to the status quo. This momentum set up the CPU for continued success

when the BYU Library administration later decided to transfer the CPU out of Special Collections and into Cataloging and Metadata.

Reviews and Reorganizations

In the three years following the implementation of the Central Processing Unit (CPU), a series of reviews was conducted examining how well it was accomplishing its designated functions. These reviews shaped the BYU Library administration's decision to transfer the CPU to Cataloging and Metadata and sparked another round of resistance to the proposed change. Tradition was again used as a tool to resist change.

Special Collections Internal Review

The first of these was an internal review of the Special Collections Division initiated by the library administration in the fall of 2018. The Special Collections Division consisted of the Special Collections department, the Conservation department, the Digital Initiatives department, and the Records Management department. The final report issued by the division review committee was generally positive about the CPU but also raised several issues. Three of the more significant issues identified were the need for greater capacity to meet processing obligations, the desirability for additional processing space, and a perceived problem with finding aid quality and training. This final issue reflected not simply a concern with curatorial autonomy, but with the overall autonomy of Special Collections in its production of descriptive metadata. It was evident from the review that there was a growing interest in the BYU Library administration in developing a closer relationship between the Central Processing Unit and Cataloging and Metadata—especially surrounding workflows that harvested finding aid metadata for digitization projects.

Toward a Library Reorganization

A year later, with the pending retirements of two associate university librarians, the library contracted with an external library consulting firm to assess its organizational structure. During their initial visit, the review team signaled that their analysis would focus on aligning administrative structures with library functions. This approach was reflected in their final report released in Fall 2019, which recommended that the Special Collections Division be disbanded entirely and that the Special Collections department be moved to the newly created Research & Learning Division. The report also noted some ongoing tensions between the existing Collections & Technical Services Division and the Special Collections Division, though it was unclear what the causes or scope of these disagreements might have been.

In applying their functional analysis to the BYU Library's structure, the consultants had a mixed response to the CPU. On the one hand, they wrote that "the continued separation of special collections processing (in Special Collections) and other processing (in Collections & Technical Services) was inefficient."¹⁵ However, they did not necessarily recommend the transfer of the unit to another division. As part of the recommendation the consultants instead called for a review of the CPU unit's charge and procedures without reference to its organizational placement.

Archival Processing Administration Survey

To provide BYU Library administrators with informed recommendations to assist in their decisions about the placement of the CPU within the library's organizational structure, Cory Nimer and Rebecca Wiederhold undertook a review of the landscape of academic libraries' placement of archival processing units.¹⁶ Data was collected first through an examination of staff directories and organizational charts available on Association of Research Libraries (ARL) member library websites, followed by a survey of ARL

members regarding archival processing placement within their libraries and administrators' opinions about their administrative structure. Several key findings emerged from the research. The authors found that the majority of institutions had archival processing staff within special collections or archives departments, and among larger institutions, an archives cataloger was also located in the same department.¹⁷ A very small subset of ARL institutions placed cataloging and archival processing together, outside the special collections department. Survey responses suggested that the most common organizational structure reflected distributed activities with special collections doing archival processing and library technical services units (outside of special collections) cataloging archival collections.¹⁸ Where archival processing and cataloging were organizationally separated, a gap was produced between those activities.¹⁹ One suggestion for addressing this gap included closer integration of technical services and archival processing staff.²⁰ Respondents also indicated that potential weaknesses of organizational structures could be overcome by improving communication between those directly involved with archival processing and with other stakeholders.²¹

Transition of CPU from Special Collections to Cataloging and Metadata

Library administrators received a presentation of the survey's results, followed by further discussions of issues surrounding the CPU. Representative stakeholders from both Special Collections and Cataloging and Metadata agreed that archival processing could be successfully performed in whichever unit the CPU might be placed. Some suggestions for how workflows and communication could be improved were also discussed. In January 2020, the BYU Library administration determined that the CPU aligned most closely with Cataloging and Metadata due to its responsibility for describing collections and generating metadata.²²

Strategic Development of the Archival Processing Section

Shortly after the Central Processing Unit (CPU) was transferred to Cataloging and Metadata in March 2020, the unit was renamed the Archival Processing Section (hereafter APS).²³ One significant change between the CPU and the APS was the addition of a dedicated head for the section. The Archival Processing Section Head (hereafter APS Head), now provided strategic direction for the APS, guided APS priorities, and aligned the section's work with the mission and objectives of the library. While a dedicated staff member had been supervising the day-to-day operations of the CPU's staff and student processors, this supervisor had reported to a curator whose responsibilities spanned the full spectrum of archival practice, which necessarily divided the curator's focus at times from CPU matters (see Figure 2). The new APS Head was the Manuscripts Cataloger of the Cataloging and Metadata Department, where her faculty assignment was already focused on archival description, allowing for close alignment of the APS Head's added responsibilities with her existing professional development, scholarship activities, and other duties. The APS Head was assigned to provide leadership and high-level management of the APS, ensure efficient and high-quality archival processing, facilitate transparency of the section's processes and backlogs, coordinate cross-divisional relationships and workflows between the APS and other library departments, and support the professional development of APS staff. The day-to-day operations of the APS continued to be overseen by a manager (hereafter APS Supervisor) with more granular project and personnel management responsibilities.

The creation of the CPU within Special Collections had laid the foundation for further strategic development envisioned by the APS Head and the APS Supervisor. In centralizing archival processing activities in a specialized unit, traditional curatorial autonomy that had resisted

standardization and caused bottlenecks in the production of finding aids had been successfully confronted, and curators had become more comfortable with this arrangement. Once the unit had moved into Cataloging and Metadata, the APS leaders recognized that current circumstances at the BYU Library would allow for different opportunities for the management of archival processing than had existed previously.

The remainder of this paper outlines multiple positive change measures implemented by the APS in an effort to overcome several other status quo biases common in libraries and archives: resistance to change, differences in archival processing preferences, siloed workflows, misunderstanding and under-resourcing archivists' work, and the deprofessionalization of archival processing workers.

Conducting Listening Sessions

The new APS Head was acutely aware of the need to proceed sensitively during this period of transition, understanding that significant organizational change is often a source of residual negativity or the cause of low morale among individuals who had not been of the opinion that the change was needed.²⁴ When adapting to organizational change, listening sessions that allow for individuals to express their opinions and feelings without "judgment, rebuttal, or defensiveness" can help dissipate negative emotion.²⁵ The APS Head and the APS Supervisor decided to jointly conduct listening sessions as a first step in attempting to foster an environment of transparency and trust among the distributed stakeholders of the APS.

The Special Collections department chair was supportive of the APS setting up individual listening sessions with each member of the department whose responsibilities intersected with the APS's work (see Figure 3). The APS Head and the APS Supervisor sent individual Zoom meet-

ing invites to each manuscripts collections curator, the University Archivist, Special Collections reference personnel, and the Special Collections department chair. Because Collections Management had also been moved out of the Special Collections department into another division during the BYU Library reorganization, a similar meeting was held with the head of that unit.

Questions asked during these listening sessions were designed to provide each stakeholder with an opportunity to both express concerns and suggest improvements (see Table 1). Professional staff members of the APS who had previously been part of the CPU within Special Collections were also interviewed for their unique viewpoint.

1. What has the CPU been doing that you would like to see the APS continue? (procedures or practices that are particularly helpful that you wouldn't want to see go away)
2. What is unique to your role or your collections that you want the APS to consider? (photographs, numbering, reformatting, level of processing, etc.)
3. In your role, what challenges do you experience in your interactions with the APS? What ideas do you have for resolving any issues or for greater collaboration between our units?
4. What interest do you have in receiving training from the APS? (description standards, how to use the library catalog or finding aids database, processing plan development, etc.)
5. Do you have any collections currently in the APS queue that need to be prioritized?
6. Do you have any value-added projects that were submitted in the past but you haven't seen any movement on?
7. What else should we be looking at for future improvements to the APS's function and service?

Table 1. Questions asked by APS leaders during listening sessions with stakeholders.

Not surprisingly, the listening sessions afforded some curators with the opportunity to express specific resistance to the organizational change. Some wanted to retain final say in archival processing procedures, some had been happy with

how things were being done before and didn't want anything to change, and others indicated apprehension that the APS might be physically separated from Special Collections on the 1st floor in the future, moving to Cataloging and

Metadata space on the 6th floor. The most common concern shared by curators was worry about a potential lack of transparency. Systems in place during the previous implementation of the CPU had not provided curators with enough granular information about each collection's status, and they feared that moving archival processing to another unit in the library altogether would introduce further obscurity. Curators and processors alike also indicated communication challenges were ongoing. Another issue surfaced by the listening sessions was the existence of residual differences in opinion between curators about certain archival processing practices and perceived procedural interference in how each other's collections were being processed. The surfacing of this issue suggested that curatorial autonomy was still being clung to by some members of the Special Collections department.

Regardless of stated challenges, most curators indicated optimism about working with the new APS organization and several came to the listening sessions with specific suggestions to share about how traditional practices could be improved upon. Curators recommended regular reports from the APS on archival processing projects and expressed desire to participate in regular one-on-one check-ins with the APS Supervisor. The APS's newly implemented project management software²⁶ was a common topic of discussion, and most were already optimistic about the tool's ability to improve transparency and increase curator involvement in communication about archival processing projects and in reviewing finding aids. Opportunities for cross-departmental training were also identified. The APS Head and the APS Supervisor treated the information gathered from these preliminary discussions as valuable insights into the needs and priorities of Special Collections stakeholders and determined to proceed with an attitude of serving the curators as customers.

Documenting Procedures

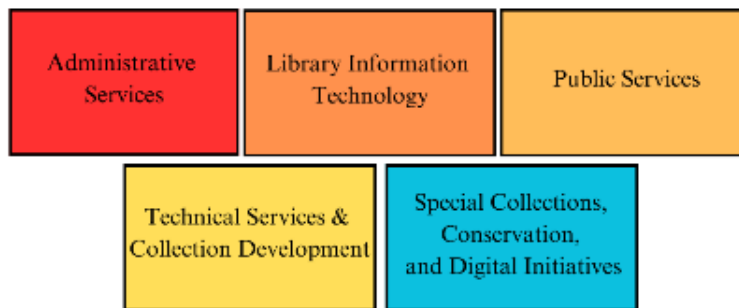
It had become apparent that there were holes in the existing documentation of archival processing procedures. Some areas of ambiguity had allowed conflicts between curators to fester.²⁷ Regularly documenting updates to archival processing practices due to technology changes and evolving standards and workflows was necessary, especially to ensure consistency across the institution.²⁸ Updating process documentation reduced conflict between team members.²⁹ A representative from Special Collections and the Manuscripts Cataloger therefore decided to collaborate to revise the archival processing manual, updating institutional practices according to current arrangement and description standards. Specific attention was given to areas of historically diverging practice between curators, prioritizing practices that would best lead to efficiency and practicality. The former CPU Supervisor had recently retired, and an archivist with several years of experience at other major archival institutions had been hired to take over the management of the archival processing staff at the BYU Library. One of the first responsibilities given to the new APS Supervisor was to review the newly created documentation, a task which allowed her to bring her own previous practices and archival processing workflows to the table. Various scenarios based on past archival processing experience were explored between the three collaborators, and the documentation was then edited or expanded, as needed. Once this process was complete, the manual was shared with Special Collections curators and APS staff to publicize the updated procedures. Having the written procedures manual thus documented at the outset of the transition from the Central Processing Unit (CPU) to the Archival Processing Section (APS) provided common ground from which to collaborate between the two departments moving forward.

Forming a Cross-Departmental Working Committee

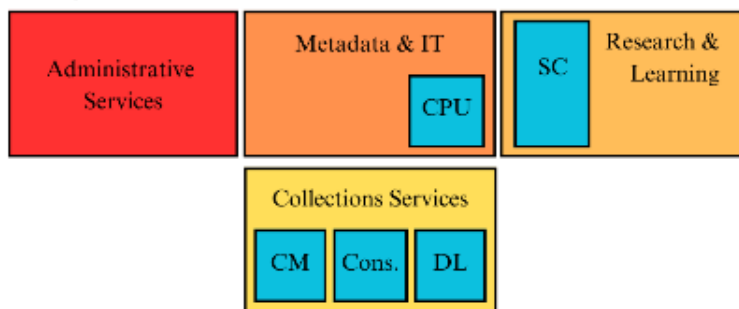
The organizational shift of archival processing from Special Collections to Cataloging and Metadata necessitated the development of a new library committee (the Archival Processing, Preservation, and Access Committee (APPAC)) to facilitate interdepartmental communication among the distributed personnel with responsibility for aspects of providing access to manuscripts and archival collections. Other units with close ties to the APS had also been distributed across the library during the 2020 reorganization according to functional alignment within the

four library divisions. The Collections Management unit and the Conservation Department had been moved from the Special Collections Division to merge into the new Collections Care Department in the Collection Services Division. The Digital Initiatives Department was also moved from the Special Collections Division to Collections Services. The curators, Special Collections reference staff, conservators, stacks managers, and digitization and digital preservation personnel all now operated in three different departments under two separate library divisions from the APS (see Figure 3). It was clear that future problems might crop up if silos were allowed to develop in the workflows of the new organizational structure.

Library Divisions prior to March 2020



Library Divisions after March 2020



CPU	Central Processing Unit
SC	Special Collections Dept. (curators and reference staff)
CM	Collections Management
Cons.	Conservation
DL	Digital Lab

Figure 3. The BYU Library's 2020 reorganization went from five functional divisions down to four, leaving the former Special Collections Division to be divided into functional components. Each sub-unit was distributed to the new division with which it most closely aligned in terms of its primary function. While the Special Collections Division was dissolved, the L. Tom Perry Special Collections Department continued to exist and was moved to the new Research and Learning Division.

Knowledge sharing disparity is a symptom of workplace silos occurring when members of a team identify more strongly with other members of their group than with the overarching organization. Such favoring of one's team within the workplace can cause disruptions in the movement of knowledge across the organization, making cross-departmental work more difficult to accomplish.³⁰ Archival processing necessarily involves integrated decision-making across multiple teams within the organization. These kinds of workflows can be encouraged and improved through regular collaboration and the development of a shared vision for how group members jointly serve the organization's mission.³¹ Department chairs and other key stakeholders of the APS preemptively sought to create a structure that would facilitate such free-flowing communication channels and common goals so that former obstructions would not continue, and new silos would not develop. This group proposed the formation of a new committee that would replace the CPU Advisory Committee where collaboration would thrive. The purpose of this committee is defined in its mission statement, "The Archival Processing, Preservation, and Access Committee (APPAC) develops policies related to archival accessioning and processing in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections. It has authority to develop and implement procedures and coordinate location tracking, preservation, and reformatting tasks related to processing."³² Other key responsibilities of the committee include prioritizing archival processing projects and coordinating proper housing and preservation of collection materials. One important aspect of APPAC that helps retain the positive culture of the committee is the balanced nature of its membership. The former CPU Advisory Committee had been composed of the CPU Supervisor, three manuscripts curators, one books curator, one collections management representative, and the Manuscripts Cataloger.

Over half the committee members were curators and only one member of the committee came from outside of Special Collections. In the new committee, curator membership was reduced to two representatives, and the addition of a conservation specialist and a Digital Initiatives representative ensured that other key decision-makers could weigh in on archival processing workflows that impacted their work as well.

Through frequent meetings, APPAC fosters interactions between committee members from different library departments working together on mission-focused assignments, which increases understanding between groups. Members of the committee who are representatives of other library groups are often given an action item to gather feedback from their constituencies and bring it back to APPAC before a vote is taken on proposed changes to policy or procedures. An overarching commitment to the BYU Library's goals for archival processing work was fostered through the formation of this cross-departmental committee and through the continued efforts of the committee's chair to keep meetings focused on finding solutions to the inevitable challenges that come up in the committee members' shared responsibilities.

Advocating for More Archival Processing Staff

Under its new leadership, in addition to coping with the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the APS spent its first year assessing the state of the section, learning existing workflows, discovering the status of in-process collections and blocked projects, and gauging its current capacity. The APS had multiple streams of incoming work along with daunting legacy backlogs. There was no documentation of how much unprocessed archival and manuscripts material existed in Special Collections, but it quickly became clear that the APS's professional staff level would not support all the work that needed to

be done, with one full-time supervisor, two part-time archival processors, and 10-14 students. Increasing professional staff involvement in archival processing as opposed to student workers improves efficiency.³³ When archival processing had been overseen by Special Collections, a similar recognition of the need for more archival processing staff had been identified, but resources had not been available then to add the needed staff positions. While the existence of archival processing backlogs is common among archives, unprocessed collections' absence from public catalogs delays the institution's ability to provide the researcher with valuable information.³⁴ The under-resourcing of archival work contributes to the difficulty of addressing archival processing backlogs.³⁵

Considering the historical positioning of archives within libraries may shed light on this issue. Archives often exist structurally within academic libraries, which can impact resource allocation for archival work.³⁶ Librarianship and archival theory and practice have different historical backgrounds, educational paths, and methods of performing work, and library administrators may often not be familiar with what archivists do.³⁷

The APS Head recognized that the Cataloging and Metadata department chair and the associate university librarian over the Metadata and Information Technology Division would need to be provided with contextualized information, especially because they were both relatively unfamiliar with archives work. They met on several occasions to discuss the personnel needs of the APS, with most of these meetings focusing on helping the administrators to gain a better understanding of the types of workstreams for which the APS was responsible and a general understanding of the scope of each workstream. The APS Head provided a valuable basic understanding of the APS's working landscape, which includes not just collection- or series-level processing of incoming archival and manuscripts

collections, but also the processing of legacy collections; value-added processing for high-value or high-use collections; preparation of file- or item-level description of collections being digitized; migration of physical registers, inventories, and XML finding aids to the library's online archival access system; and, any necessary re-processing triggered by curator-led initiatives including reappraisal, poor collection housing, integration of displaced materials, and accommodation of user-centric research needs. With a better understanding of the APS's demonstrated resource needs, administrators were able to successfully advocate for the repurposing of a vacated Cataloging and Metadata position, which allowed the APS to hire a full-time archival processor in fall 2021.

Meanwhile, library administrators and other stakeholders were expressing increasing interest in digitization. When opportunities arose for the APS Head to participate in related discussions, she sought to help others understand that increased digitization must be supported by increasing the number of people processing and preparing file- or item-level description for the archival and manuscripts collections being digitized rather than simply adding to digitization personnel. In 2022, a new Cataloging and Metadata department chair asked the APS to provide an assessment of their workload. Part of the backlog report the APS provided confessed that digitization preparation was the APS assignment that was most frequently deferred in the interest of prioritizing other pressing archival processing work. When another vacated position in the department became available, the APS was offered the position if they would devote it to preparing archival and manuscripts collections for digitization, in alignment with BYU Library priorities. This resource allocation win was tempered by the fact that it was a part-time position, which is not ideal for attracting long-term archival workers with the experience needed for such standards-heavy work.³⁸ The

APS intends to continue advocating for the conversion of part-time positions to full-time in the future if the part-time positions experience significant turnover. Although the APS started out with minimal professional staff, advocacy through educating BYU Library administrators on archival processing work resulted in a more appropriate allotment of personnel resources.

Advocating for Professional Status of Archival Processors

As previously mentioned, a common problem in the archives field, particularly within academic libraries, is the potential for library colleagues to misunderstand archival processing work. Archival positions are sometimes placed in lower job classifications or pay levels, and libraries may sometimes also over-rely on student labor for this type of work. This deprofessionalization of archival workers is a tradition that weakens the ability of the archives to perform high-quality and efficient archival processing. Measures taken by the APS at the BYU Library to combat this issue included pursuing a position reclassification for the APS Supervisor, the creation of a career ladder to support archival processors' ability to advance within their positions, and a re-emphasis of support for professional development activities for staff employees.

Reclassification of APS Supervisor Position

During its first two years, the APS worked to understand challenges in several areas of the BYU Library's archival processing program and develop solutions for those issues. A key reason why the APS was successful in improving processes during this period was because of the archival expertise of the APS Supervisor, an experienced archivist with an archives-focused MLS degree who had been hired in late 2019 to replace the former CPU supervisor who had vacated the position earlier in the year. When the Central Processing Unit (CPU) had been formally established following its successful pilot,

the BYU Library had created the CPU Supervisor position by repurposing a staff position from the library's acquisitions department. Bringing someone from outside of the archival profession into this role was not ideal, as a manager in the archives must have archival knowledge and proper training in order to succeed in the role.³⁹ Filling the supervisor role with an experienced archivist was the next step toward improving the professional output of the unit.

The APS Head recognized that the job classification for the APS Supervisor position was inappropriate for the complexity of responsibilities, scope of decision-making, and high degree of coordination required to perform the work. Professional processing archivists benefit from a master's degree with graduate-level coursework in archival theory and must possess a variety of crucial competencies including organizational and analytical skills, project management aptitude, technical skills across a variety of material formats, broad experience in processing collections, and other varied qualifications.⁴⁰ The APS Head worked to communicate these qualifications to BYU Library administrators and show examples of similar positions at other institutions that were classified at high administrative or faculty levels. In 2023, a shared understanding of the section's needs led to a decision to reclassify the APS Supervisor position and elevate it to faculty status as the new APS Head, prompting a national search. The current APS Supervisor successfully applied for the position and took on the head duties in 2024, while the former Head reverted to her previous duties as Manuscripts Cataloger. The successful reclassification of the APS Supervisor position demonstrated another example of combatting the common misunderstanding some librarians may have of the difficulty of archivists' work through education and advocating for understanding between members of the two professions.

Creation of a Career Ladder for Archival Processing Staff

In the four years since the APS Supervisor was hired, her focus has been on developing the archival processing program and looking for ways to improve workflows. Previously, student employees had traditionally carried out the bulk of archival processing duties, with ten to fourteen students employed by the APS at a time prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The APS Supervisor initially endeavored to follow the student-heavy labor tradition, but as she reviewed the projects that had been completed by students in the last couple of years, it became evident that the reliance on student work had developed a secondary backlog of work for the professional staff in the APS. Student work requires more review and correction due to their lack of deep knowledge of archival principles and minimal experience. The APS has since reduced its student labor force and developed a stronger focus on building a narrower set of skills to increase the accuracy of the work produced by the students.

Another reason for the reduction in student labor within the APS was the early career status of the existing professional staff. Recent turnover in staff positions and the addition of new positions meant that the APS Supervisor was the only professional staff member able to review and complete archival processing work done by students. The vision for the APS's future includes building the capabilities of staff with the gradual introduction of student supervision among their responsibilities, which should increase efficiency and eventually bring the number of student employees back up closer to previous levels.

In the fall of 2022, the BYU Library human resources manager suggested that the APS explore the creation of a career ladder document. This document's purpose was to outline the technical

and soft skills required for promotion of professional staff in archival processing positions. The APS leaders were enthusiastic about taking this opportunity, since this would provide staff the ability to progress in their careers and have more range in their compensation over the coming years.

Drawing on past supervisory experience in library and archives settings and analyzing job descriptions from various institutions, including the federal classification schedule for archivist positions, three progressive job levels were developed for archival processing staff and submitted to Human Resources Department (HRD) for approval and assignment of pay levels. Throughout the development process, the APS Supervisor debated on the best way to define promotion requirements, eventually settling on a model based on increasing project management complexity and supervisory responsibility versus a model based on specialized expertise in processing in a specific subject area or format type. Struggling with the burden of running the unit and spreading out responsibilities fairly, the supervisor chose to utilize this model and focus on ways to train more impactfully and help employees reach the standards laid out at each level. Competencies in the career ladder include knowledge and application of complex workflows, archival theory, job-specific project management, quality control duties, willingness to accept supervisory assignments, demonstration of collegiality and collaboration, self-directed development, and independent decision-making, among other responsibilities and expectations. This career ladder document was approved and put into effect in February 2024, leading to an elevated base pay level for all the staff members in the APS, and the opportunity for future level increases based on individual performance. The ultimate goal of this investment of time and analysis was to achieve higher pay levels for archival processors, attract mid-career archivists to new positions, and retain

employees for longer in these positions. More effective and efficient archival processing at a higher level of quality is expected from the APS.

Supporting Professional Development of Staff

In 2020, the BYU Library began an initiative to re-emphasize its support for professional development activities for all employees, revising job descriptions to ensure they included reference to the expectation that 5-10% of an employee's time should be dedicated to development. All staff are encouraged to attend virtual trainings, and some local or national conference attendance is also supported, as funding allows. This support has helped to combat a traditional perception among some in the library that only faculty can pursue professional development opportunities or actively contribute to external professional communities. Professional development supports the individual library worker's career and simultaneously improves library work. With the help of library funding, this initiative has led to two APS staff becoming Certified Archivists and receiving other certifications, and all APS staff have been able to attend library and archives conferences as well as webinars and other types of training.

Conclusion

The development and creation of the Central Processing Unit (CPU) followed by its transition to the Archival Processing Section (APS) is an informative case study in change management. It highlights the investment that employees feel in the status quo and their attempts to resist change by leaning on traditional ways of doing work. It also underscores the importance of creating new traditions to combat status quo bias. These new traditions are most successful when created in collaboration with those employees most impacted by the proposed changes.

Those involved with the creation of the CPU and its eventual transition to the APS learned a

number of lessons during this change management process. The most important lesson learned is to involve those who will be impacted by the change from the very beginning. When people have a voice, they are more likely to accept new traditions. Successful change management is a collaborative process. Change leaders need to communicate clearly and consistently the goals of the organizational change and the rationale behind the change. Creating formal structures (like the CPU Advisory Committee and APPAC) allows for formal collaboration to occur and these facilitate change efforts. Repurposing existing positions to facilitate collaboration between different organizational structures is also a good way to facilitate change. It is equally important to cultivate an attitude of openness to change in your organizational structure. Encourage employees to embrace the opportunity to learn new skills and to improve their ability to do their work. This is best done by providing employees with ample opportunities for professional development and by rewarding those who take advantage of those opportunities. Change is hard. Acknowledge that it is hard and reward those who actively participate in change. It is also important to note that change management never really ends. Managers need to be conscious of how work is performed and work collaboratively with their employees to make needed changes. These changes can be major like the creation of the CPU and the complete overhaul of archival processing that followed. They can also be small changes meant to tweak the existing status quo.

The archival processing program at the BYU Library has evolved over the past two decades from distributed archival processors under the guidance of curatorial experts to a centralized unit within Special Collections and later a strategically managed section in Cataloging and Metadata. This specialization has allowed the library to confront several status quo biases through positive change measures. In recent

years, as the APS and curators have been located in different departments within the BYU Library, this has meant that there are now two organizational units heavily invested in the success of archival processing functions. By the nature of their separation within the library, there are now two department chairs and two associate university librarians regularly involved in the administration of the archival processing function and its impacts. Both lines of administration are now responsible for supporting their unit's close involvement with the particular needs of archival and manuscripts collections through the work processes that are required to ready them for the library's patrons to discover, handle, and study. This has increased the integration of related processes across the library and has required library administrators to develop a stronger understanding of archival principles and the unique contribution to student education that is served by archival and manuscripts collections. Continued development is likely, as the APS plans to refine its operations and hopes that efforts to educate administrators will allow for increased professional treatment of archival processing staff, leading to longer retention and more efficient provision of access to archival and manuscripts collections. Tradition cuts both ways. It can be used as a tool to resist change to the status quo and it can be used as a tool to overcome that resistance. Those leading change efforts need to actively plan to use tradition to successfully meet the needs of the organization.

¹ A finding aid is "a description that typically consists of contextual and structural information about an archival resource" (Society of American Archivists. *Dictionary of Archives Terminology*. Society of American Archivists. April 18, 2024. <https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/finding-aid.html>). Archival finding aids in

the L. Tom Perry Special Collections were created by curators and then the embedded manuscripts cataloger used the finding aids to create a MARC catalog record for the collection.

² Steven L. Hensen. *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts: A Cataloging Manual for Archival Repositories, Historical Societies, and Manuscript Li-*

braries (Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists, 1989). *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts* is a content standard for developing collection level catalog records for archival materials that can be integrated into bibliographic catalogs.

³ *Processing Guide* (Provo, UT: L. Tom Perry Special Collections, 2002). Copy in the possession of the authors.

⁴ *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists, 2016). DACS is an output-neutral set of rules for describing archival materials. It is the U.S. implementation of international standards.

⁵ Collections Management in Special Collections had the responsibility of reviewing archival descriptions, labeling materials, and managing locations at the time.

⁶ Meeting invite, December 4, 2014. Copy in possession of the authors.

⁷ Cory Nimer, Matthew Leavitt, and Lyn Clayton to Gordon Daines, 17 December 2014. In possession of authors.

⁸ Department chair meeting minutes, 17-18 December 2014. In possession of authors.

⁹ Gordon Daines to Special Collections Department, 24 December 2014. In possession of authors.

¹⁰ Special Collections Department meeting minutes, 12 January 2015. In possession of authors.

¹¹ Central Processing Unit discussion (January 2015) memo, 23 January 2015. In possession of authors.

¹² Gordon Daines to Special Collections Department, 31 March 2015. In the possession of the authors.

¹³ Alexis Davis, "Project Assistant Program Report", 12 December 2017. Copy in possession of the authors.

¹⁴ CPU Advisory Committee, "CPU Advisory Committee Final Report", 28 September 2016. Copy in possession of the authors.

¹⁵ Re:work library consulting, "Brigham Young University Libraries Organizational Structure Review Report, September 16, 2019," copy in possession of author. It is unclear whether they were speaking of bibliographic processing or conflating archival processing with book processing.

¹⁶ Cory L. Nimer and Rebecca A. Wiederhold, "Cross-functional Collaboration: The Placement of Archival Processing in ARL Libraries," *Society of American Archivists Research Forum Proceedings* (2020): 1, https://files.archivists.org/annual-meeting/2020/research-forum/Nimer_Wiederhold.pdf.

¹⁷ Nimer and Wiederhold, Cross-functional Collaboration, 5.

¹⁸ Nimer and Wiederhold, Cross-functional Collaboration, 6.

¹⁹ Nimer and Wiederhold, Cross-functional Collaboration, 7.

²⁰ Nimer and Wiederhold, Cross-functional Collaboration, 9.

²¹ Nimer and Wiederhold, Cross-functional Collaboration, 10.

²² Interim University Librarian Brian Rennick, email message to library employees, 22 January 2020. Copy in possession of the authors.

²³ The term "unit" was being replaced with "section" across the library, and while this change was the impetus, the new head of the unit recommended replacing the term "central processing" with "archival processing" in order to provide clarification organization-wide and externally about the type of work done by the unit.

²⁴ Karen van Dam, "Feelings About Change: The Role of Emotions and Emotion Regulation for Employee Adaptation to Organizational Change," in *Organizational Change: Psychological Effects and Strategies for Coping*, ed. Maria Vakola and Paraskevas Petrou (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 67-8.

²⁵ Dean Anderson and Linda Ackerman Anderson, *Beyond Change Management: How to Achieve Breakthrough Results Through Conscious Change Leadership* (San Francisco: Pfeiffer, 2010), 153-4.

²⁶ The software used by the APS is Basecamp. More information about Basecamp is available at <https://basecamp.com/>.

²⁷ Problems were caused by having some procedures documented in the CPU's processing manual and some procedures just in the CPU Supervisor's head. Conflict arose between curators over their ideas of how certain practices had "always been done." Because of the long period of time before implementation of the CPU, curators had developed multiple different ways of doing some things (for example, numbering of photographs), and there still lingered some practices that needed to be standardized after the CPU's transition to the APS.

²⁸ Pam Hackbart-Dean and Elizabeth Slomba, *How to Manage Processing in Archives and Special Collections*, (Chicago: ALA Editions, 2013), 39.

²⁹ Rebecca W. Walton, "Updating Internal Process Documentation," *Intercom* (March 2005): 21. Mustafa C. Ungan, "Standardization Through Process Documentation," *Business Process Management Journal* 12, no. 2: 139.

³⁰ Yu-Qian Zhu, "Solving Knowledge Sharing Disparity: The Role of Team Identification, Organizational Identification, and In-Group Bias," *International Journal of Information Management* 36 (2016): 1180, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfo-mgt.2016.08.003>.

³¹ Zhu, Solving Knowledge Sharing Disparity, 1181.

³² BYU Library, Archival Processing, Preservation, and Access Committee charge, approved 5 August 2020. Copy in possession of the authors.

³³ Nimer and Wiederhold, Cross-Functional Collaboration, 8.

³⁴ Ciaran B. Trace, "Archival Infrastructure and the Information Backlog," *Archival Science* 22 (2022): 78, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-021-09368-x>.

³⁵ Eira Tansey, "Archives Without Archivists," *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture* 16, no. 1 (2016): para. 5. Gale Academic OneFile. Accessed 30 November 2023.

³⁶ Ashley Todd-Diaz, "Archives in Libraries: The Impact of a Parent-Child Relationship on Corporate Identity and User Perception" (PhD diss., Emporia State University, 2019), 4-5.

³⁷ Jeannette A. Bastian, Megan Sniffin-Marino, and Donna Webber, *Archives in Libraries: What Librarians and Archivists Need to Know to Work Together* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2015), 4-6. Diana K. Wakimoto and Christine Susan Bruce, "Experiencing Archives at Universities," *Reference Services Review* 43, no. 2 (2015): 189, <https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-07-2014-0025>.

³⁸ APS leaders felt it was necessary to accept the part-time position, even though they felt a full-time position was called for, as a show of willingness to work within resource limitations. The initial search in early 2023 failed after two archivists declined the offer. Posting the position again resulted in a successful hire in the fall of 2023.

³⁹ Bastian et al., *Archives in Libraries*, 82. Todd-Diaz, *Archives in Libraries*, 147. James M. O'Toole and Richard J. Cox, *Understanding Archives & Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2006): 104-5.

⁴⁰ Hackbart-Dean and Slomba, *How to Manage Processing*, 83.