

The Uncounted ‘Who’ of Archival Processing

Meredith Scheiber
National Archives and Records Administration

Jean Dryden
College of Information Studies, University of Maryland

The processing of archival material (i.e., arranging, describing, and housing archival collections in accordance with archival principles and standards) is a complex task, and archives always have a backlog of unprocessed material. While the professional literature offers guidance on more efficient ways of dealing with the backlog, the matter of *who* does the processing of archival material has never been systematically investigated. This paper presents the findings of an exploratory study that investigated whether the arrangement and description of archival holdings is done by professional archivists or by para-professionals, such as interns or volunteers. The findings suggest that processing is frequently done, not by professional archivists, but by project staff who may not have much professional training. If this is the case, this has profound implications for users of archival material (particularly as finding aids are routinely made available online), and archival education.