

Solutions and Conclusions from Greene & Meissner's MPLP:

In response to these problems, Greene & Meissner propose a number of specific solutions in each category. All of these proposals follow a set of guidelines that they describe as the Golden Minimum, which basically asks the question “what is the least we can do to get the job done that is adequate to user needs now, and in the future?” If anything is done that exceeds this bare minimum, it needs to be justified.

In the world of arrangement, the solution they propose is that, for the most part, archival processors should concentrate only on the series level and above. They dismiss much of what has become standard in arrangement as “overzealous housekeeping writ large.” They view weeding, folder reorganization and relabeling as unnecessary, and far too time-consuming for future inclusion in archival programs. Besides this overall recommendation, they also recommend that series be selectively processed at differing levels depending on their importance and the need in individual cases.

In terms of description practices, they argue for a similar minimum effort – developing finding aids that simply describe the contents of the collection without excessive verbiage, which they claim wastes both the archivists' and the researchers' time. In their view, the finding aid should be a bare-bones inventory that lists series and reflects the lesser degree of arrangement and processing which the collections should receive. Another aspect of their suggestions in this area is that they believe that it is imperative to create at least an accession level description of every collection in a repository which should then be made immediately accessible to users.

In matters of conservation, they suggest that essentially archivists should simply allow their storage area environmental controls to do this work. Ceasing to perform the work of wholesale re-folding in acid-free folders, removing staples and paperclips, and unfolding letters would allow repositories to vastly increase their efficiency in processing their backlog as well as future accessions.

They also recommend that users be allowed access even to unprocessed collections, again focusing on their view of archival service to the public.

For metrics, their solution is a new set of benchmarks based on previous research. According to their literature review and their suggestions for limiting the level of arrangement and description, they recommend that processing archivists “ought to be able to arrange and describe large 20th century collections at an average rate of 4 hours per cubic foot.” This would represent an increase in efficiency by a factor of 4 or 5.

Overall, Greene & Meissner lay out a strongly worded manifesto intended to rouse archivists to face some of the major problems confronting the field. They suggest that in clinging to previously accepted methods of processing we are not reacting fully or appropriately to the increasing volume of records that confront us, and are therefore not fulfilling our ultimate duty to both present and future users of the archives. They end their article with a call to archivists to set and achieve ambitious processing goals: “Let's get on with it.”