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LIBR 256 - Theme 7 – Digital Records

Case two

Our profession has changed and continues to change. These changes are brought on mainly by technological changes in the digital era. In your readings, Fran Blouin makes the case that archivists and historians have lost their traditional relationship. Digital humanists talk about how the archives is "silent" and sees its job as creating digital archives focused on building information about minorities and under-documented populations.

Look at this recent job posting before you answer these questions:

<http://hastac.org/opportunities/unc-charlotte-associate-university-librarian-aul-special-collections>

1. Do you think the profession of archives will disappear? If not, what will its role be in the future?

I think it won't disappear, but I think the archival discipline needs to stop separating itself from libraries, museums, and history disciplines. It needs to instead focus on commonalities with those disciplines in order to establish itself as an integral partner. It can benefit from the partnership intellectually, financially, and in terms of theory and practice. I think it needs to do the same thing with corporations and technology companies—try to work with them, especially in the age of born digital materials and trying to find/create an archival system to store and access those materials. I think the relationship between records managers and archivists also needs to continue to improve. The next stage of the archival professions seems like it will be a transitional one as the shift from paper to digital records occurs.

2. Will archivists have to be more involved in helping humanists create digital archives focusing on various topics rather than collecting such digital archives that have already been created?

I don't think it needs to be one or the other, granted staffing might not be appropriate to do both. I think it really depends on the archival repository's goals and its patrons. Certainly, if an archive wanted to add a revenue generating activity to its services, it might consider helping humanists to create their digital archives. Even if this is actually just internal billing between university departments, it will help the archive be recognized as more than a cost center. Also, it seems like a new or at least shifting role might make most sense for archives to take on to remain relevant.