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Suggestions for Moving University Archives

Dennis S. Taylor

Moving archival material is, in most situations, a formidable task that requires weeks or months of preparation. Even in a college or university setting where optimal conditions supposedly prevail, moving material may still require weeks or months because individuals from levels of the organizational hierarchy, as well as the student body, are affected or involved. Whereas another type of archival repository might shut down for the duration of a move, a university archives (located more than likely within a library) cannot, because it serves users who want ready access to the holdings. A quick and efficient move is, therefore, in the interest of all concerned. How is such a move accomplished?

A successful move is the result of a well-articulated methodology. It is a set of procedures that guide the archivist through the planning, implementation, and follow-up stages of a move by answering completely and in full detail five basic questions: What is to be moved? How will the material be moved? Who will do the moving? Where will the material go?
And, when will the move occur? As these questions, and others that are derived from them, are answered, the methodology evolves from a general outline to a detailed description of activities for each stage of the move, from a few scraps of papers to notebooks filled with well-organized information, blueprints, drawings, and specification charts. Depending on the size or types of material in the collection, or a combination of these, a committee of archivists, librarians, history professors, staff members, and security or traffic personnel might be and, it is hoped, will be involved in developing the methodology. In a process that may be compared to an artist painting a landscape by advancing the entire canvas at once, rather than painting a rock or tree one at a time, the committee advances several parts of the methodology simultaneously, all the while reviewing pertinent literature or seeking outside advice.

1 There are few, if any, articles on the subject of moving archives. There are, however, numerous articles on moving libraries and collections of books and these contain applicable information. See Donna Lee Kurkul, "Planning, Implementation, and Movement of an Academic Library Collection," College and Research Libraries 44 (1983): 220-234; Matt Roberts, "Some Ideas on Moving a Book Collection," College and Research Libraries 27 (1966): 103-108. The use of the term methodology is my own. Many refer to a moving plan, but the term is too general to express the details and steps that a methodology encompasses.

A three-ringed binder, or anything portable and easily accessible, may be used to organize the methodology.

3 In the experience of this archivist, the committee was called a "task force" and was appointed by the director of libraries. It consisted of the head of special collections, a serials librarian, and a library technical assistant (both of whom had helped in a move of the library several years earlier), and another archivist.
This seemingly helter-skelter approach is necessary because certain procedures of the methodology depend on the successful completion of other procedures.

The process of developing the methodology begins as the committee gathers information on the size, type, condition, and value of the holdings, or, in other words, by answering "What is to be moved?" Of great help in gathering the information are the accession register, finding aids, and an inventory of holdings. Although a staff member or a student may perform this task, an archivist of experience or someone with knowledge of the collection would do well to perform it, for it is rare that assistants or novice staff members know all the locations where material may be kept, or understand the idiosyncrasies of accession registers, finding aids, and collections.

Next, the committee decides how to move the holdings and who is to do it, procedures that involve packing the collection, transporting it to the new location, and determining if professional movers or in-house staff should undertake the job. The decisions reached depend on an evaluation of several factors: the size of the collection, available funding, how far the security or integrity of the collection will be compromised, and other factors peculiar to an institution, such as time allotted for the move, time needed for completion, and the number of able-bodied staff members who can be conscripted into service.  

— A. E. Lumb, "Moving an Academic Library: A Case Study," *Journal of Librarianship* 4 (1972): 253-271. Our task force developed a methodology under the assumption that student labor and staff of the facilities and maintenance division would perform the move over a period of weeks. Estimating the cost at approximately $15,000, the committee included supplies, student hours calculated on the minimum wage, and use of vans from the campus motor pool. After the director of libraries reviewed our figures, he recommended that the contract be put out for bid; the
Even if the services of professional movers are employed, the committee would do well to develop procedures on how to move material and see to it that the movers follow them. The following suggestions serve as guidelines for various types of materials:

1. Books. Wrap fragile books in kraft paper, label with their call numbers, and pack into boxes. Books should be packed spine down.\(^5\)

2. Maps and oversize material. A small quantity may be placed into large, flat, storage boxes and packed with acid-free paper. For larger amounts, however, allow the items to remain in their drawers and place the drawers into large moving boxes, then move the cabinet hull and reinsert the drawers.

3. Memorabilia. If possible, wrap in acid-free tissue, place into a box, and secure. Keep a master list of boxes and their contents to maintain intellectual control and permit ready access. Depending on the size and/or value of the collection, a staff member might move the collection by car or van to the new location.

4. Records center cartons need no special preparation.

5. Manuscript boxes (the flip top variety) require care to avoid spilling the contents; pack into larger moving boxes and label appropriately.

As stated earlier, the approach of developing parts of the methodology simultaneously is necessary when certain procedures depend on the completion of others. This approach is needed most when numbering, labelling, and calculating shelving

winner underbid our estimate by nine thousand dollars.

\(^5\) Although informed by the Southeastern Library Network that books should be packed spine down, they were not consistently packed that way; instead, they were packed to utilize space to the best advantage and to facilitate easy unpacking.
space are underway, because boxes cannot be moved until they are first numbered and assigned a new shelf location.

The method of numbering and labelling may be as simple or as complex as the nature of the collection being moved. One method uses pre-numbered, self-stick tickets of various colors to represent books, manuscripts, unprocessed collections, or other types of material. But since a roll contains only 500 tickets, and the number of boxes in most collections exceeds the number of tickets on a roll, another method may need to be devised. A practical, more economical system uses a combination of letters and numbers of various colors and legible script. Staff members simply number boxes consecutively in the way they will appear on the shelves.⁶

To calculate shelving requirements and rates of future growth, the committee might consult acquisition records, annual reports, or articles in the professional literature. An illustrated shelving arrangement, such as one that could be produced on a personal computer, showing locations of processed, unprocessed, and other material, helps staff members and the movers.⁷

If the date of the move is not decided by higher levels in the administrative hierarchy, the committee must make the determination based on such factors as seasonal changes in the weather, campus events, traffic patterns, and holidays.⁸ The

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route over which the material will be moved should permit speed, maneuverability, and safety, taking into account any obstacle, from door widths and elevators, to curves and intersections encountered.\textsuperscript{9} If the material is to be transported in open air en route to a truck, plan for the possibility of bad weather. Arranging in advance a place for the moving van or vans to park by consulting the traffic safety department of the campus police is also a good idea. Whenever the date and route are decided, publicize through the media and by word of mouth.

When moving day arrives, the second stage of the move, implementation, and the corresponding part of the methodology, go into effect. Staff members should be present at the site where boxes are being loaded and unloaded to supervise and direct the movers. As the boxes arrive at the new location, the boxes may be placed on the shelves in proper sequence if shelf space will allow; if not, the contents will need to be unpacked and shelved. If movers are responsible for shelving material and any items are mishandled, speak up; moving company employees are conscientious workers accustomed to long hours, but as they tire, they may neglect procedures. Also, prepare for the possibility that movers may need to leave a loaded van unattended overnight; if this situation arises, notify campus security.\textsuperscript{10}

As soon as the last box is put into place, the follow-up stage of the move and the corresponding part of the methodology go into effect. These procedures, which may take several days or a couple of weeks to complete, involve checking the old location to make sure all materials have been removed, unpacking and disposing of cartons, inventorizing the collection or counting

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boxes, reading the shelves and noting any damaged or missing items, taking appropriate measures if damaged material is found, and finally, informing the public that the move is complete. As a part of the follow-up stage, but after sufficient rest and recuperation, celebrate the success with a party or special recognition to those who assisted with the move.

Moving archival material requires hours of mental and physical labor, the coordination of diverse activities, and the cooperation of many individuals. A methodology, while not a magical formula, will make the process less traumatic and more efficient.

Dennis Taylor is university archivist at Clemson University in South Carolina. This article is based on a paper presented at the 1989 Society of American Archivists annual meeting in St. Louis.