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Material in a wide range of formats—including articles, review essays, proceedings of seminars, and case studies of specific archival projects or functions—will be considered for publication. Guidelines for authors of articles and case studies are available upon request from the editorial board chair.

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PREFACE

In any given institutional or collecting environment, strategically speaking, the archivist has at his or her command a variety of carrots and sticks to utilize, alone or in combination, when ensuring that the organization or repository’s documentary needs are met. These carrots and sticks might include public records law, mission statements, documentation strategies, theoretical or subject expertise, institutional long-range plans, entrepreneurial opportunities, and so on, and should be applicable regardless of the formats or media in which archival and manuscript materials originate. Yet one notes the low level of successful archival involvement with electronic systems and their products. This would seem to indicate either that archivists are still unclear as to how to use their strategic options to maximum effectiveness in this arena, or that archival education and its literature have insufficiently equipped its practitioners to cope with the number of technological and cultural variables they encounter along the way.

This special issue of Archival Issues highlights some of those carrots and sticks. In other words, it discusses a variety of practical strategies and existing skills the archivist can bring to bear when working with not only electronic systems and records, but also digital documents. The articles in this volume, all written by students in the University of Michigan School of Information and Library Studies’ archives, digital library, and doctoral programs, exemplify many different approaches to the identification and archival management, not just of the electronic record, but also of the human record as it is being electronically inscribed. These approaches include assessing the utility of various technical and policy “fixes” to cope with issues raised by electronic systems under different circumstances; seeking out, and conducting joint research projects with other professional communities that are attempting to address some of the same issues; and also attempting to identify which unique perspectives the archival profession brings to the digital environment.

William Landis and Robert Royce have prepared a case study that examines a small business environment, a graphic design company, where electronic records are inextricably linked to an electronic product. The paper is more than a case study, however, in that it represents one of the first attempts to apply the functional requirements model for electronic record-keeping that is being developed and tested by Richard Cox and David Bearman at the University of Pittsburgh. Ann Zimmerman looks at the enduring values of geographic information systems (GIS) for secondary user communities, and suggests a phased approach to establishing archival control over them. She bases her observations around an environmental GIS being used to track trout on the Great Lakes, and her comments are particularly interesting in that they speak to the commonality of interests and goals shared by archivists and GIS developers.

The final three papers are all concerned with the rapidly evolving electronic communications environment as it transcends individual, organizational, and
even national and cultural boundaries. Anne Gilliland-Swetland looks at the role electronic communications may play in creating and disseminating new forms of documentation and advocates a return to archival appraisal in establishing the nature, values, and uses of electronic communications materials. Laurie Crum takes an organic view of the Internet and its constituent parts such as the World Wide Web, and examines issues relating to hypermedia document design that are of concern to archivists. Nicholas Scalera examines the implications of the controversial Public Key Encryption (PKE) movement, and discusses not only the technical difficulties PKE will generate for archivists, but also the potential it demonstrates for solving issues such as electronic document and user authentication.

It is my hope that this volume will offer a small contribution toward making the area of electronic records somewhat more hospitable for archivists, as well as demonstrating the wealth of talent and curiosity that is being brought to bear on such challenging issues within graduate archival education programs.

Anne Gilliland-Swetland,
Ann Arbor, May 1995