

# **Participatory Forums and the Informal Transfer of Knowledge: US Army Officers and Complex Records within a Professional Community of Practice**

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**Abstract:** Recordkeeping is an essential activity for any institution and its people. These activities range from the creation and use of records, the organization of records and systems to capture them, and the disposition of records. Within institutions, records explicitly and implicitly support the decisions and behaviors of records creators. Outside of official boundaries, records can also bear witness to actions and intent. Recordkeeping is an activity that can sustain, nurture, and foster growth for institutions, people, and communities. Sometimes recordkeeping infrastructures and systems do not meet the needs of dynamic and constantly changing demands. What are the consequences of community members perceiving that a need is not being met by the institution's normal recordkeeping processes, and establishing informal, unofficial systems to address that need?

This research presentation will explore the participation and record creating behaviors of US Army officers within a particular community of practice (Company Command) as they learn to navigate the new terrain of becoming commanders and leaders. Their participation in an unofficial online forum and their participatory learning through collaborative work has produced a set of narratives that is layered, complex, mediated, individual, and corporate. By examining these narratives within the context of official and unofficial records transmission within a hierarchical environment, this presentation will examine the interplay between individual and institutional voices and contribute to the literature of communities and records creation.

## **About the author:**

*Heather Soyka* is a doctoral student and teaching fellow in the Archival Studies program at the University of Pittsburgh School of Information Sciences. Previously she held the post of assistant university archivist and then head of preservation for Texas Tech University. Heather has been an active member of SAA since 2005, and recently completed three years on the Distinguished Service Award Committee. She has served on several SAA roundtables, presented during the SAA conference each year since 2009, and has been an active participant in the IMLS-funded Archival Education Research Institute (AERI) for the past four years. She received a masters degree with concentration in archives and records management from Simmons College GSLIS, and expects to earn the PhD in Archival Studies at the University of Pittsburgh in 2014.