

Classification by Function for Institutional Records: An Experiment in the JHU Archives

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Abstract: As institutions become increasingly decentralized in their decision-making processes, mission-critical records are distributed across organizations. This trend challenges the primacy of organizational hierarchy and its archival counterpart, the record group structure, as the optimum way to organize institutional records. Alternatives to the record group system date back as early as 1966, when Australian archivist Peter J. Scott advocated for an alternative arrangement scheme known as the series system. However, the American archival community has not embraced this approach save for a handful of enterprising examples (see [the Vermont State Archives' functional classification system](#) and Robyns et al, "[Institutional Functional Analysis at Northern Michigan University: A New Process of Appraisal and Arrangement of Archival Records](#)," *American Archivist*, 74.1 (2011)) .

Johns Hopkins University decided that providing a way to group record series by function would aid its users in discovery and allow the creation of retention schedules that transcend organizational units. Therefore, we drew upon Helen Samuels's *Varsity Letters*, TUCA, and other established resources to create what is one of the few, if not the only, functions thesauri tailored to academic institutions. (You may browse our functional thesaurus at <http://recordsmanagement.library.jhu.edu/>.) Our proposal for the SAA 2014 Research Forum is first to present this thesaurus to the audience and explain the purpose for its existence. However, because we believe our work to be at the vanguard, we will invite feedback from the audience on the extent to which our thesaurus meets the need of providing a new and useful way to understand and discover institutional memory.

About the author:

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