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Reimagining Record Groups: A Case Study and Considerations for Record Group Revision

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Reimagining Record Groups: A Case Study and Considerations for Record Group Revision

The record group has been the foundation for organizing institutional records since the National Archives and Records Administration developed the concept in the early 1940s. Based on the archival principle of provenance, the record group is currently defined as "a collection of records that share the same provenance and are of a convenient size for administration."[1] First prevalent among government archives, the record group model was also adopted by many colleges and universities. But the record group has been criticized for its shortcomings in describing the intricacies of provenance and coping with changes in organizational structure. The use of record groups in the archives at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) reflects some of these issues, presenting challenges in current organization, future accessions, and the creation of new record groups. While the concept's flaws have been noted and alternative classification schemes suggested, little literature exists on revising a record group hierarchy. This article describes how previous considerations about creating record groups have influenced revisions of the problematic structure at SIUC. Despite many issues within the hierarchy, changes were made only to one record group as a starting point. The author does not advocate wholesale revision of a hierarchy, but only in areas where the end result creates a sensible and manageable classification system.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE RECORD GROUP

In 1941, The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) formulated the record group as the method for organizing the voluminous amount of federal records collected since the agency's 1934 inception. NARA archivists believed that existing arrangement models such as the English "archives group," the French *fonds*, and the registry systems of central Europe insufficiently addressed the challenges posed by modern government records. They sought a classification system that could accommodate dynamic agencies – government entities of varying status and authority that changed structure and function – creating an unprecedented bulk of records. After months of discussion, the Finding Mediums Committee defined record group as "a major archival unit established somewhat arbitrarily with due regard to the principle of provenance and to the desirability of making the unit of convenient size and character for the work of arrangement and description and for the publication of inventories."[2] This system allowed NARA to organize records into manageable units that identified office of origin, was convenient for descriptive and reference purposes, and was flexible enough for assigning new accessions to existing record groups.

Developing the classification system was not straightforward. The Finding Mediums Committee, and later the Advisory Committee on Finding Mediums, acknowledged the ambiguous and subjective nature of creating records groups by definition, and wrestled with consistent implementation. They considered identifying record groups with symbols and ultimately rejected the idea. Organizing collective records was also problematic, such as whether to arrange records of various embassies into a single record group or individual smaller units. This raised questions about what constituted the appropriate quantity of material and

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[1] Society of American Archivists, "Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology," http://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/r/record-group (accessed June 6, 2013).

[2] Theodore R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956), 181-182.

degree of agency distinction needed to create a record group. Another challenge was how departmental reorganizations, including the transfer or abolishment of bureaus and commissions, would affect record group numbering.[3] After debating these issues, NARA's final system established record groups primarily at the bureau level of government, with subgroups for arranging bodies within the record groups.[4]

The record group's suitability for organizing records of institutions with hierarchical structure has influenced archives outside of government settings. William J. Maher advocated implementing the system in college and university archives, using the familiar three-tiered structure of group, subgroup, and series. He stated that "Ideally, an archival classification system would be a hierarchical scheme that structures the archives' holdings to mirror or parallel the administrative organization and reporting lines of the parent institution."[5] Maher recognized the complications of institutional reorganization on provenance-based classification, and argued that the system should only be a "rough reflection" of organizational structure. He noted that record groups are "not intended as a definitive or comprehensive description and retrieval system," but rather they "permit rapid classification and arrangement of filing units."[6]

CRITICISM OF THE RECORD GROUP AND ALTERNATIVE IDEAS

Although the record group concept sought to clarify arrangement of federal records, it was quickly criticized for its arbitrary nature and perceived manipulation of arrangement principles and context of records creation. While NARA debated record group classification in the 1940s, Illinois State Archivist Margaret Cross Norton had already proposed using the record series as the primary cataloging unit in 1938.[7] Advocates of authority and context control classification such as Peter J. Scott and Max J. Evans echoed Norton's idea decades later. Scott argued that record groups fail to adequately preserve provenance and original order as records change custody as a result of government reorganization. For Scott, context was better preserved using the record series as the basic cataloging unit, and proposed an early iteration of authority control via series registration forms that described the records and custodial history for clearer contextual access points.[8] Evans reiterated the problems with record groups, adding that they can cause archivists to confuse records with organizations, manifested in series being mistaken for sublevels in a record group hierarchy. Evans modernized the authority control system where creators and series are described separately in descriptive records that cross reference one another.[9] The distinction between creator and records description is at the heart of the authority control solution to the record group's problems.

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[3] Mario D. Fenyo, "The Record Group Concept: a Critique," *American Archivist* 29, no. 2 (April 1966): 232, 235-236, 238. Fenyo's article details these issues and the arbitrary nature of the record group.

[4] Schellenberg, *Modern Archives*, 182, 184.

[5] William J. Maher, *The Management of College and University Archives* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Society of American Archivists and Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1992), 79.

[6] Maher, *The Management of College and University Archives*, 79, 87.

[7] Richard C. Berner, "Historical Development of Archival Theory and Practices in the United States," *The Midwestern Archivist* 7, no. 2 (1982): 105

[8] Peter J. Scott, "The Record Group Concept: a Case for Abandonment," *American Archivist* 29, no. 4 (October 1966): 493-504.

[9] Max J. Evans, "Authority Control: an Alternative to the Record Group Concept," *American Archivist* 49 (Summer 1986): 249-261. Confusion of subgroups and series was also noted earlier, see Richard C. Berner, "Perspectives on the Record Group Concept," *Georgia Archive* 4, no. 1 (Winter, 1976): 49.

Additional ideas contributed to the growing dissatisfaction with record groups. David Bearman and Richard Lytle argued that record groups were rooted in obsolete mono-hierarchical views of organizational structure, whereby "linking documentation with the hierarchical placement of the creating unit," failed to convey the realities of multiple creating influences in modern institutions. Instead they favored authority records in which provenance-based access points are emphasized not by creator name, but rather by the functions generating the records and their resulting form.[10] Uli Haller's floating record group concept attempts to show the provenance of all records within an accession. In this complex method the accession is the main record group, and folders are assigned subgroups based on creator.[11]

Archivists continue to advocate that authority control records are superior to record group classification in describing the intricacies of provenance and context of creation.[12] This has been aided by the growth of computer technologies and descriptive standards. As Kathleen Roe explained, while embedding administrative and biographical notes into paper finding aids was a matter of convenience, computers allow the functionality needed to fully realize authority control systems.[13] The International Council on Archives published the first standard on authority control records, the *International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons, and Families (ISAAR(CPF))*, in 1996.[14] Additional standards for creating finding aids and encoding them for web display offered new possibilities for authority control. Larry Weimer argued that *Describing Archives: a Content Standard* and Encoded Archival Context provides effective means to describe creators apart from archival material and link multiple creators to records series, leading to a rediscovery of provenance.[15] A growing body of literature describes efforts exploring authority control systems.[16]

DEFENSE OF THE RECORD GROUP

The record group concept has endured the criticism and remains in use among government and institutional archives. Gerald L. Fischer upheld it as the "logical extension of the principle of provenance" that reflected "as nearly as possible the record output of the various agencies that have existed historically." He added, "We should not deceive ourselves that the listing of series on card indexes or other tables, however elaborate, is any substitute for the reality of the administrative structure and physical propinquity that the records of a given agency once had."[17]

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[10] David A. Bearman and Richard H. Lytle, "The Power of the Principle of Provenance," *Archivaria* 21 (Winter 1985-86): 14-27.

[11] Uli Haller, "Processing for Access," *American Archivist* 48, no. 4 (Fall 1985): 400-415.

[12] Jean Dryden, "Archival Authority Files – An Idea Whose Time Has Come?," *Journal of Archival Organization* 1, no. 4 (2002): 97-102; Jean Dryden, "From Authority Control to Context Control," *Journal of Archival Organization* 5, no. 1-2 (2007): 1-13.

[13] Kathleen Roe, "Enhanced Authority Control: Is It Time?," *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993): 120-121.

[14] Sharon Thibodeau, "Archival Context as Archival Authority Record: The ISARR(CPF)," *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995): 75-85.

[15] Larry Weimer, "Pathways to Provenance: DACS and Creator Descriptions," *Journal of Archival Organization* 5, no. 1-2 (2008): 33-48.

[16] Several case studies are included in the edited volume Jean Dryden, *Respect for Authority: Authority Control, Context Control, and Archival Description* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Haworth Information Press, 2007).

[17] Gerald L. Fischer, "Letting the Archival Dust Settle: Some Remarks on the Record Group Concept," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 4, no. 8 (1973): 640, 644. Fischer's article is in response to Peter J. Scott's 1966 critique of the record group concept. Scott subsequently responded to Fischer in "Facing the Reality of Administrative Change – some further Remarks on the Record Group Concept," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 5, no. 2 (1974): 94-100.

K. A. Polden likewise defended record groups as the best adherence to provenance, adding that they create convenient pauses that mitigate challenges of infinitely growing series found in Scott's series cataloging.[18] Also responding to Scott and Mario Fenyo, Meyer Fishbein argued that record group symbols and numbering were merely internal identifications, and that control could be enhanced with auxiliary name indexes developed after initial provenance was established.[19]   Richard C. Berner departed from the notion that record groups were reserved for institutional archives and argued how it could apply to personal papers as well.[20]   Terry Cook called the *fonds* "an essential reflection of the essence of archival work" and that alternative concepts are "worse and more misleading." However, he argued that the *fonds* should be viewed as an intellectual construct rather than physical entity, and supported authority control to describe provenance.[21]   Finally, William Maher noted that alternatives to provenance-based classification "hinder analysis of records in relation to the structure that created them." He listed additional administrative advantages: filing and retrieving acquisition correspondence, recording use of records, tracking documents, and expediting bibliographic citations.[22]

RECORD GROUP ISSUES AT SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) is a mid-size university in the Midwest. The university archives, a component of the Special Collections Research Center, consists of approximately 9,000 cubic feet of material and uses Archon to provide online access to finding aids. The record group hierarchy at SIUC is modeled on Maher's three-tiered philosophy of record group, subgroup, and series. It attempts to reflect the university's administrative organization. The earliest iteration found by the author is a revision dated 1982. At this time the hierarchy was modified "towards functional division" and "simplification and decentralization to most particular function." Student organizations shifted from the Student Development Office to their sponsoring office or department, and records of administrative units that had been abolished were merged with the unit succeeding them in function.[23]

The 1982 hierarchy consists of 32 top-level record groups and 276 subgroups. However, the document begins with Record Group 17 College of Liberal Arts, suggesting that several missing pages listed earlier record groups. Since 2000 the hierarchy has undergone six revisions and has evolved into a complex structure. Prior to 2010 the hierarchy consisted of 59 top-level groups and up to 1,130 subgroups, primarily because all student organizations listed under Record Group 82 were assigned a number. The most recent revision in 2010 eliminated these designations and organized student organizations alphabetically under Record Group 82, reducing the total number of subgroups to 885. Many of the classifications are placeholders and the University Archives only has material from 38% of top-level or sub record groups.

The hierarchy presents several hindrances to classifying new accessions, making the system itself potentially unsustainable. Within certain record groups the number of subgroups

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[18] K. A. Polden, "The Record Group – a Matter of Principle," *Archives and Manuscripts* 3, no. 6 (1968): 5.

[19] Meyer H. Fishbein, letter to the editor, *American Archivist* 30, no. 1 (January 1967): 239-240.

[20] Berner, "Perspectives on the Record Group Concept," 48-55.

[21] Terry Cook, "The Concept of the Archival Fonds in the Post-Custodial Era: Theory, Problems and Solutions," *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993): 26, 32-33. See also Terry Eastwood, *The Archival Fonds: from Theory to Practice* (Ottawa: Bureau of Canadian Archivists, 1992).

[22] Maher, *Management of College and University Archives*, 88.

[23] Student groups were later revised and are currently listed under Record Group 82 Student Organizations. The Student Development Office is now called Student Life and Intercultural Relations.

has increased substantially and the identifications have grown into exceptionally long numerical strings. For instance, materials from the Core Institute are classified as Record Group 13-15-1-8-5 (see Figure 1). While unlikely, theoretically a subgroup within Core Institute could transfer records and create the need for subdivision of 13-15-1-8-5-1. This level of granularity makes it inconvenient to classify accessions when such circumstances arise, and suggests that the numerical strings can extend indefinitely. The need for this many subdivisions reveals that the record group is too large and certain subgroups should shift to top-level groups, a sentiment noted by previous archivists.[24]

Figure 1

Record Group 13 Student Affairs
13-15 Student Health Center
13-15-1 Administrative Director
13-15-1-8 Prevention Programs/Student Wellness Resource Center
13-15-1-8-5 Core Institute

A related problem is that of perpetuating the numbers of abolished offices through the classification system. Record Group 13 Student Affairs is a top-level unit, but an office that no longer exists on campus. One of the largest record groups, it consists of numerous departments pertaining to student-related matters including former administrative offices and dean positions, counseling, housing, and the health center, as well as unrelated offices such as Plant and Service Operations and Physical Plant. The all-encompassing reach is the result of trying to illustrate organizational change. Instead of renaming the Student Affairs record group with subsequent offices with similar functions, or instead of closing it and creating new top-level record groups for new campus-wide student administrative units, these offices were placed as subgroups under Record Group 13. Following this pattern, the current and unscheduled Dean of Students office would be classified as a subunit of a nonexistent campus unit rather than being a top-level record group.

The hierarchy also contains instances where record groups are confused with record series, a point of criticism noted earlier by Evans.[25] The office of Printing and Duplicating prints various publications, reports, and ephemera on behalf of campus offices and regularly transfers copies to the archives. These accumulations were organized into respective record groups, and instead of creating series of publications they were given record group numbers. For instance, subgroup 17-44 is entitled Printed Materials under RG 17 College of Liberal Arts. This occurs with unique papers as well. Under RG 15-3 Office of Research Development and Administration (ORDA), papers of the Fort Massac Study are classified as 15-3-24 and the Mississippi Valley Study is 15-3-28. Publications, studies, and projects are not administrative offices and these materials are more appropriately arranged and described as series. The previous archivist initiated this change in the online finding aid but the hierarchy does not reflect it.

Although SIUC has both university archives and records management, the two units had no formal relationship and miniscule interaction prior to January 2012 when the latter was

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[24] Fischer, "Letting the Archival Dust Settle," 642.
[25] Evans, "Authority Control," 252.

shifted under library administration. Systematic transfers from records management to the archives never occurred, and the archives acquired records by soliciting campus departments or through gifts. Little evidence exists that previous archivists consulted the records retention schedules, and as a result, series were assigned titles rather than synchronized with titles in the schedules. The lack of coordination can make it difficult to determine if a given series already exists within a record group or if a new one is needed. This confusion combined with the classification issues noted earlier makes the accessioning process laborious.

REAPPRAISAL PROJECT AND PROBLEMATIC DISCOVERIES

In the fall of 2012 the university archivist began reappraising 803 backlogged boxes from ORDA, now called the Office of Sponsored Projects Administration (OSPA). The records had never been arranged into series or grouped by OSPA subunit. The university archivist began by reviewing the record group hierarchy, the existing OSPA Archon record, and the office's records retention schedule. It became apparent that obtaining intellectual control of the records required measures beyond reappraisal. The Archon record was merely a placeholder with no administrative history, a short scope and content, and six listed series with no information other than titles. The review of the record group hierarchy showed RG 15-3 OSPA reporting to RG 15 the Graduate School, which no longer reflects university structure. The organizational chart consulted prior to the project did not mention the Graduate School by name, which was instead represented by the school's top office, Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Dean. A July 2013 revision put the Graduate School on the chart by separating the office into both the Vice Chancellor for Research and the Graduate School Dean.

This created several challenges. Contrary to the record group hierarchy, OSPA now reports to the Vice Chancellor for Research rather than the Graduate School Dean. The Vice Chancellor for Research is a new office never before added to the hierarchy. The office's split raises questions about managing new accessions from these units. The university archives holds 195 cubic feet from RG 15-1 which was the Graduate School Dean before it was renamed the Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Dean. Considering that previously this office concerned both Graduate School and research affairs, which post-split office has stronger claim to existing and future accessions? Also, while the organizational chart identifies the Coal Extraction and Utilization Research Center as reporting the Vice Chancellor for Research, the record group hierarchy places it under OSPA. Other units reporting to OSPA include the Cooperative Wildlife Research Lab and the Center for Fisheries, Aquaculture and Aquatic Sciences, which the hierarchy places under the Zoology Department.

Complications in Archon exist as well. OSPA's newly created administrative history noting its placement under the Vice Chancellor for Research is perplexing when the record group number is a subgroup of the Graduate School. Both the hierarchy and Archon create further confusion by identifying two OSPA record groups: 15-3 and 15-4. This possibly resulted when the Office of Research Development and Administration (ORDA) changed its name to the Office of Sponsored Projects Administration (OSPA), and a new record group was created instead of revising the name of the existing one. Both list series but none match series titles in the records retention schedule. The series numbering is also perplexing. For instance, Record Group 15-3 lists series 1, 2, 24, 26, and 28, and the record group hierarchy provides no explanation or placeholder series to accommodate for the gaps.

Figure 2: Discrepancy Between Record Group Hierarchy and Organizational Structure		
Note that Current Organizational Structure only mentions offices relevant to the discussion and is not intended to provide a detailed chart of the Vice Chancellor for Research or Graduate School.		
Current Record Group Hierarchy	**Current Organizational Structure**	
RG 15 Graduate School	Vice Chancellor for Research (new, not on the hierarchy)	Graduate School Dean (15-1)
RG 15-1 Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Dean	Office of Sponsored Projects and Administration (15-3)	
RG 15-2 Graduate Council		
RG 15-3 Office of Research Development and Administration		
RG 15-4 Office of Research Development and Administration		
RG 15-5 Individual Research		

RECORD GROUP REVISION AS INFLUENCED BY PAST PRACTICE

The university archivist decided to revise the record group hierarchy in light of these issues. Building on the reappraisal project, Record Group 15 Graduate School and OSPA provided an excellent place to begin. Two approaches helped guide the process. First, as NARA established record groups at the bureau level of government, SIUC's record groups will be maintained or created at the university equivalent of a government bureau. Secondly, Michel Duchein's article on the principles and problems of *respect des fonds* poses several relevant questions and practical solutions.[26] The new strategy abandons the past practice of reflecting organizational structure through the record group hierarchy in certain cases. By taking former subgroups and

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[26] Michel Duchein, "Theoretical Principles and Practical Problems of Respect des fonds in Archival Science," *Archivaria* 16 (Summer 1983): 64-82.

establishing them as top-level record groups, we can mitigate problems arising from institutional change.

Writing from a Canadian perspective, Duchein identified several problems with using the principle of provenance as the basis for organizing institutional records into contextual groupings. His first point reiterated the ambiguous nature of the definition of *fonds*, complicated by the hierarchical and ever-changing nature of government bodies. At what level in an organization's structure should the *fonds* be created? To meet Duchein's criteria a *fonds* must possess: its own name and judicial existence; precise and stable powers defined by a text having legal or regulatory status; a defined position in the administrative hierarchy with subordination to a higher agency clearly stated; a responsible head possessing the power of decision at his or her hierarchical level; and an internal organization regulated by an organizational chart.[27]

Adapting these measures to Record Group 15 Graduate School justifies moving OSPA from beneath the Graduate School and establishing it as its own top-level record group. Reporting to the newly created Vice Chancellor for Research, it has a clear place on the university's organizational chart. The office also has a director with decision making power at OSPA's hierarchical level, and it is structured by an internal organizational chart. However, the judicial existence defined by legal documentation is not straightforward. The Board of Trustees' annual reports make no specific mention of the establishment of this office as an independent unit. It was likely created during the 1950-1951 academic year at the time the Graduate School was formed, and organizational charts from this era mention "research" as a subunit of the school.[28] The first mention of a specific unit, the Research Office of the Graduate School, appeared in the president's report to the Board in the 1960-1961 annual report with a description of its responsibilities.[29] Although no statute established the research office, its purpose and functions are outlined in the annual reports.

Record Group 15's restructuring in accordance with Duchein's first point is paralleled in the National Archives' method of creating record groups at the bureau level. The Department of Labor provides a good illustration (see Figure 3). The Department's organizational chart depicts several subunits reporting to the Secretary of Labor including the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Wage & Hour Division, and Women's Bureau among others.[30] But unlike OSPA, these bodies are not subunits of the Department of Labor's record group 174. Instead they are established as individual top-level record groups.[31] Because the Office of Sponsored Projects Administration mostly meets Duchein's criteria for a record group, and because the Department of Labor demonstrates that entities reporting to it need not be numbered within the department's Record Group 174, OSPA is considered the university equivalent of a bureau.

[27] Duchein, "Respect des fonds in Archival Science," 68-70.

[28] Southern Illinois University Board of Trustees, *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees, 1950-1951* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Board of Trustees, 1951), 406-408.

[29] Southern Illinois University Board of Trustees, *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees, 1960-1961* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Board of Trustees, 1961), 117-118.

[30] United States Department of Labor, "Organizational Chart," http://www.dol.gov/dol/aboutdol/orgchart.htm (accessed August 8, 2013).

[31] National Archives and Records Administration, "General Records of the Department of Labor (Record Group 174)," http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/174.html (accessed August 8, 2013). The Related Records section identifies the Bureau of Labor Statistics as Record Group 257, the Wage and Hour Division as Record Group 155, and the Women's Bureau as Record Group 86.

Figure 3: Structural Comparison between Federal Government and Southern Illinois University Carbondale		
Federal Level	Federal Government	Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Agency Level	Department of Labor	Vice Chancellor for Research
Bureau Level	Bureau of Labor Statistics	Office of Sponsored Projects Administration

Elevating subgroups to top-level record groups helps prevent the original record groups from becoming too large with too many subdivisions with exceedingly long classification numbers. Archivists need not worry about creating too many top-level groups. The National Archives' list of record groups numbers into the 500s, and considering that the university structure is less complex than government bureaucracy, it is unlikely that the numbers will become burdensome. This practice requires archivists to weigh the degree to which a campus unit can function independently. Despite OSPA's shift in reporting lines its functions have not changed, nor are they vital to the functions of another campus unit. Its existence and responsibilities do not depend on a higher unit. By contrast, the compliance units within OSPA such as Human Subjects or Animal Research directly support the mission to manage research grants. Therefore it is unlikely that they will merit transfer from OSPA's jurisdiction; instead, they exemplify units not suitable for individual record groups.

Duchein's next criticisms are related. His second described familiar challenges emanating from changes in organizational structure and jurisdiction, and the third questions the principle of provenance in light of these changes. But rather than a *fonds* or record group hierarchy, his primary concern was preserving the context of records series. As agencies are abolished and departments and powers are shifted, record series are often split apart, intermingled, and transferred to the archives by an agency that did not create them. Thus the *fonds* is problematic for preserving provenance and original order. Duchein presented several scenarios and solutions for determining when a *fonds* remains distinct from an agency inheriting its powers, and when its records should be incorporated into the successor agency.[32]

Although OSPA's record series have not been affected in these ways, Duchein's concerns are relevant. Organizational change can distort record group hierarchies that numerically depict reporting lines of subunits within an agency. Record Group 15-3 OSPA is a subunit of Record Group 15 Graduate School which is no longer accurate. As a remedy, archivists should reconsider using a record group system as a reflection of the organization. As a top-level group OSPA's number remains unaffected by institutional change because it is not linked to another. Applying this philosophy to other subunits that can function independently supports a sustainable and less vacillating classification system.

Some may argue that there is no benefit to removing OSPA from Record Group 15. Even as a subgroup it was still a defined record group. Also, because of its historical and functional tie to the Graduate School, the restructuring could jeopardize the context of the office's records. But the linkage with the Graduate School was broken in the current organizational chart. To preserve context, reporting lines should be better articulated in administrative histories rather than in numbering systems that are meaningless to researchers.

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[32] Duchein, "Respect des fonds in Archival Science," 71-74.

Additionally, OSPA's record series remain arranged and described within the finding aid, and therefore the context is understood.

Duchein's fourth point discussed the challenges arising from open and closed *fonds*. He rejected the idea that records become archival only when a *fonds* is closed or inactive. But in respect to context, he noted the difficulty in preserving the integrity of a *fonds* when it is unclear whether an agency has changed names, transferred certain powers to another agency, or been abolished entirely. He proposed solutions to manage these circumstances. If there is evident and complete continuity between agencies A and B, a name change occurred and agency A is continued under the new name of agency B. Contrary, if agency C is abolished and its functions are transferred to agency D, which existed before C's abolishment, agency C's *fonds* is closed and agency D's *fonds* continues and is distinct from agency C. Likewise, if an agency performs the functions of multiple abolished agencies, it succeeds but remains separate from the closed agencies.[33]

Duchein's solution for handling agency name changes is relevant for SIUC's hierarchy. Record Group 15 identifies two subgroups named Office of Research Development and Administration, one as 15-3 and other 15-4. Both are in Archon, with 15-3 listing legacy series such as the Fort Massac Study, and 15-4 listing series reflective of ORDA's organizational structure such as the Human Subjects Committee. However, the majority of the series were placeholders for anticipated accessions, and as noted earlier, the boxes had never been arranged. The circumstances of how Record Group 15-4 was created are uncertain, but it likely represents an attempt to reflect the 2011 name change from the Office of Research Development and Administration to the Office of Sponsored Projects Administration. Because a name change occurred rather than the transfer of jurisdiction between offices, Record Group 15-4 has been deleted from the hierarchy and Archon.

Duchein's final point echoed the principal of original order as it pertained to maintaining the internal arrangement of a *fonds*. He argued that archivists should not attempt to rebuild internal structure through arrangement if it has been destroyed by organizational change. However, the theory remained valuable, and Duchein believed that organizational subunits provided the basis for internal arrangement of complex agencies. He added that these divisions did not constitute *fonds* themselves, unless if institutional change was so frequent that the subunits could be easier managed if they were treated as simple-agency *fonds*.[34]

Change in reporting lines for OSPA are infrequent, as it remained steady from the mid-1950s to 2011. But conflict discovered during the reappraisal project made creating OSPA as a separate record group beneficial for easier management. The retention schedules depict both the Graduate School and the Office of Sponsored Projects on equal level under the Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate School Dean. But the record group hierarchy placed both OSPA and the Dean beneath the Graduate School record group. Making OSPA an independent record group avoids confusion from discrepancy between organizational charts and records schedules. For internal arrangement, OSPA records have been organized into the series designated in the records schedule and assigned the appropriate subgroup as identified in the office's organizational chart. This practice was uncommon prior to 2012 because Records Management was not a part of the library and had minimal interaction with the University Archives. Future accessions can now easily be compared to current holdings to see if the material is a new or existing series.

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[33] Duchein, "Respect des fonds in Archival Science," 74-75.
[34] Duchein, "Respect des fonds in Archival Science," 75-78.

After applying these changes, the new record group structure is charted below. The Office of Sponsored Projects Administration has been revised from 15-3 to Record Group 32, with subgroups reflecting OSPA's organizational chart. These changes address several of the noted issues regarding record groups. Other subgroups listed in the old hierarchy were merely placeholders and therefore did not carry over. In summary, the office is no longer a subgroup of a unit to which it no longer reports to. Its name has changed from ORDA to OSPA, and the duplicative RG 15-4 has been eliminated. Former subgroups such as Mississippi Valley Investigations and Fort Massac Study are now series.[35] Also, accumulated accessions have been processed into series identified in the retention schedule, such as Annual Reports or Administrative Correspondence and Reference File. This facilitates accessioning transfers from OSPA and Records Management and quick identification of existing holdings.

Figure 4: Old vs. New Record Group Hierarchy	
Old Hierarchy	**New Hierarchy**
Record Group 15 Graduate School	Record Group 32 Office of Sponsored Projects Administration
15-3 Office of Research Development and Administration	32-1 Director's Office
15-3-1 Coordinator of Research and Projects	
	32-2 Computer Information Specialist/Data Manager and Reporting Analysis
15-3-2 Vivarium	
15-3-24 Fort Massac Study	32-3 Intellectual Property, Patents, and Copyrights
15-3-26 Animal Laboratory Program	
15-3-28 Mississippi Valley Investigations	
	32-4 Human Subjects Committee
15-3-29 McNair Scholars Program	
	32-5 Pre and Post Award Services

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS WHEN REVISING RECORD GROUPS

Shifting and renumbering record groups within a classification system has potential unintended consequences. Archivists must consider previous use of a collection, especially if the collection was used frequently or referenced in a published work. Changing numbers can lead to confusion if current classification no longer matches author citations. However, as institutions change names and the updated classification system reflects those changes, author citations become dated anyway. The author has heard anecdotal evidence describing institutional archives abandoning a record group system for alternative organizing schemes. In these cases any

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[35] The Mississippi Valley Investigations and Fort Massac Study are records from two separate research initiatives that studied various aspects of the Mississippi River Valley, and the development of Fort Massac State Park. These records better reflected a series by definition, as they were created by a variety of researchers rather than a campus office.

previous citations become obsolete. Variables affecting record group change should not restrain archivists from making decisions necessary to ease collection management and promote access.

Record group revision can be affected by institutional practice. At SIUC, faculty collections are numbered using the record group of the department in which he or she taught. For example, philosophy professor Lewis Edwin Hahn's papers are number 17-19-F8, being the eighth collection from Record Group 17-19 Philosophy Department. Collection numbers are incorporated into the file names of digitized items from any faculty collection. Therefore if the philosophy department record group number changes, all file names of digitized Hahn materials becomes obsolete. The same goes for departmental items which also include record group numbers in the file name. Change also affects items uploaded items into digital online projects that include file names as a metadata field, making online image metadata erroneous and confusing. Therefore changes to record group numbers could necessitate revising all file names, box labels, finding aids, and online metadata.

Fortunately these concerns have had minimal impact at SIUC. Teaching units such as the philosophy or English departments, where faculty collections originate, are much more stable and less prone to institutional reorganization. English is a liberal art and the likelihood of it shifting from beneath the College of Liberals Arts is negligible. Conversely, campus units that benefit the most from record group revision are administrative offices that evolve with more regularity. Revision has only occurred to administrative offices and will likely never occur to teaching departments, thus eliminating the file name and metadata issues.

CONCLUSION

Recent literature continues to make a strong case for authority control in favor of the record group concept. Central to authority control advocacy is the notion that record group classification fails to adequately describe the provenance of record series in modern, complex organizations where multiple entities have creating influence on records. Yet when applying Duchein's solutions and rejecting attempts to mirror administrative structure, record groups become candidates for revision to support easier management. In a university setting, issues concerning multiple creators may be better understood as creator as *originator* or creator as *aggregator*. As Terry Cook notes, "individuals and institutions – whether they actually originate the records, receive the records or share and manipulate information that is in or could become records – create an aggregate of documentary material…which reflects their juridical status as records creators."[36] At Southern Illinois University, retention schedules establish the series of each campus entity. Although several creators may be represented in a series, the series itself has a primary administrating office to serve as the basis for provenance and arrangement.

Record group systems will likely persist in institutional archives, especially government and college or university settings. Using the archival management tool Archon which incorporates authority control features, Southern Illinois University Carbondale maintains record group classification with linked authority records. Both Archon and its successor, ArchivesSpace, allow for linking multiple creator records to a record group. This feature permits the creating influence of other entities to be described, supporting the "rediscovery of provenance" that authority control seeks.[37] Admittedly at SIUC, the number of record groups with linked authority records is limited, with many still having traditional administrative

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[36] Cook, "The Concept of the Archival Fonds," 27.
[37] Weimer, "Pathways to Provenance," 33-48.

historical notes embedded in the Archon finding aid. In both cases, the context description must improve the information on changes in administrative structure and function over time, as it does with the revised Office of Sponsored Projects Administration historical note.

Although the SIUC structure contains multiple sections of problematic hierarchy, this article describes changes made to only one record group and offers reasoning behind those decisions. The approach outlined in this article offers guidance for future revision, such as in the case of Plant and Service Operations being classified under Student Affairs. The author does not advocate wholesale revision of a record group hierarchy. Instead, changes should occur only in areas where the end result is a more manageable and sustainable classification system.