

## Processing University of California, Irvine's historical photographs

Leah Loscutoff, Archivist (Temporary, University of California, Irvine Libraries Special Collections and Archives)

### **Introduction**

I am currently working on a photograph collection from UCI's Communications Office. The photographs document the entire history of the University and are in constant use. The collection includes 92 linear feet of slides, negatives, prints, and contact sheets. Over the years several archivists, and students worked piecemeal on the collection, and a recent accession doubled its size. Various finding aids, inventories, charts, training manuals, and databases were created to help reference staff locate materials, but access remained confusing and limited at best. My job is to cohesively process the whole collection and build an easy to use comprehensive access system to gain intellectual and physical control over the materials.

### **Reprocessing the Collection**

Throughout the years, processing had started and stopped several times, making each increment look like a different collection. However, there was some order that reflected how the collection was created and used. This original order provides valuable contextual information and also allowed for more minimal, efficient processing, because there was little if any physical arrangement to be done. For the most part, the photographs were in chronological order. However, chronological order didn't support the kind of detailed access we needed to identify people, topics, events, and places. So I have focused on describing the collection intellectually to elucidate its content.



### **Metadata Creation**

I devised a metadata structure that will support near item-level retrieval more accurately than any physical arrangement of the materials could. For example, I utilized a controlled vocabulary of subject terms, date ranges, and broader categories that work almost like subseries to group similar images intellectually. A natural language description field was added to capture nuance and unique keyword terms. I described small clusters of related images rather than individual items, e.g. a sleeve holding related slides or all the negatives from a single photo shoot. Currently, I am using Excel to capture and manipulate this data. A researcher can browse or sort through categories and, dates, or search for key

terms, making retrieval more efficient. I also plan to create an EAD-encoded finding aid for the Online Archive of California to provide an overview of the collection; this will include a link to the Excel file so researchers can interact with the data in more flexible ways.

Box	Identifier	Date	Categories	Unit	Subject (Geographical)	Subject	Description	# of Images	Size	File
1	S00001	193600-197600	Early UCI Campus		University of California, Irvine	Campus grounds; Aerial views	Three separate aerial views of the UCI campus area, which document the drastic changes over the years.	4	35mm	CS
4	S00002	195800-196308	Early UCI Campus	SA	University of California, Irvine	Aerial Views; Architectural drawings (visual works)	A campus plan study, and various aerial views.	4	35mm	CS
5	S00003	196204-196510	Early UCI Campus		University of California, Irvine	Campus grounds; Models (representations); Architectural drawings (visual works)	UCI campus architectural plans and models: Greenhouse, Headhouse, UCI P.E. & intramural activities area, handball courts, buffalo ranch bldg., soil test excavation, residential UCI architectural plans and renderings: Residence apartments, library conference center proposal (Pereira), LRDP study, campus plan study by W.L.P., site for student health, outdoor	19	35mm	CS
6	S00004	196207-196511	Early UCI Campus		University of California, Irvine	Campus grounds; Buildings (structures); Architectural drawings (visual works)	Students in Aldrich (campus) park, moving cattle on campus lands, first UCI basketball game, and Arbor Day. A student rally, and an aerial view of graduation in the park. Science	20	35mm	CS
7	S00005	196212-197111	Early UCI Campus		University of California, Irvine	Buildings (structures); Campus grounds; Students; Models (representations)	Models of Humanities, library, cafeteria, and Centrum. Irvine Ranch house with #1 employee Le Cox. Interim office, and UCI staff in front of interim office.	20	35mm	CS
8	S00006	196300-196300	Early UCI Campus		University of California, Irvine	Buildings (structures); Campus grounds	UCI site pre-construction, Urbanus Square and Collins radio. San Joaquin Marsh, Lamboree or Campus Rd. being built.	20	35mm	CS
9	S00007	196300-196300	Early UCI Campus		University of California, Irvine	Buildings (structures); Campus grounds	Douglas Astropower - first office University library. Interim UCI campus area pre construction, Urbanus Square, UCI Interim office, Irvine Ranch house, and ranch hands at Interim office. Ranch hands on horses.	20	35mm	CS
10	S00008	196300-196300	Early UCI Campus		University of California, Irvine	Buildings (structures); Campus grounds	UCI campus area pre construction. Interim office with cows and fields. Campus center - towards mountains, UCI site	20	35mm	CS

## Looking to the Future

I created this metadata structure knowing that it will soon be imported into Canto Cumulus, a digital image management system with a web publishing capability. The main categories and date ranges will be essential for staff and researchers wishing to browse the description. The structure can also be applied to future accessions of born-digital photographs as well as other photograph collections in Special Collections and Archives.

On another note, all of the processing notes and description standards are well documented. I want to make sure that any other archivist that succeeds me will be able to pick up where I left off. With budget restraints and temporary positions being the norm right now, we should make a real effort to make transitions much easier by leaving good processing notes and documenting description decisions.

## Conclusion

When processing collections that many staff has worked on over the years, it is good to use what you can to minimize time spent reprocessing. Documenting decisions and actions will be helpful for the next person, especially if it is a collection that receives accruals over the years. Creating a really solid metadata structure is essential for intellectual control, and supporting more efficient retrieval, particularly when researchers most often need item-level access to the materials, and the collection isn't arranged in ways that directly support intellectual control.