

College & University Archives Section

Breakout Session #3 Documenting Student Organizations Led by Jay Gaidmore

Ideas for collecting these records

Many student organizations meet nights and weekends so if you want to speak with these groups prepare to do so at outside of normal working hours.

Another suggestion was to treat student organizations as you do administrative and academic departments and have them designate a liaison with the Archives, similar to records management liaisons.

Work with student government to revise by-laws so officers are aware that records should be sent to the Archives. Send reminder emails towards the end of each semester asking for a transfer of records.

Harvesting websites:

Harvesting websites is an excellent way to document student life and the history of student organizations. Duke University is using Archive-It, a subscription service offered by the Internet Archive, to capture the websites of student organizations. However, many student organizations are not using the URL's provided them by their universities, thus creating dead sites. Instead, many of these student organizations are using Facebook. .

Deeds of gift and access restrictions:

Old Dominion University has the records of a fraternity, whose historian had come into the Archives to use them for an upcoming anniversary. The historian said no one but him is really interested in these records so he asked they be returned to the fraternity. The ODU archivist declined this request, but cautioned other archivists to get deeds of gift for records of student organizations.

Officers of organizations should make the donation of records official and clearly spell out any access restrictions including who in the organization can grant access to interested patrons. This pushes the question of access away from the Archives.

One institution restricts access to fraternity materials to those with membership cards.

For secret societies, a new contact with the Archives is designated each year. If a new contact is not designated, the records of the secret society become open. This policy provides the impetus for the secret society to maintain contact with the Archives.

Organizations to focus on:

Student Government
Big Social Organizations

Partners in collecting student organization records:

Work with alumni, who years after graduation, may have records to donate, or current contacts with these organizations.

Faculty representatives do not turn over as much as the students. They can provide continuity over the long-term.

Organization historian – can help find money for processing records and fill in gaps in the records.

One institution had success collecting intramural records by working with the Interfraternity Athletic Council.

Another institution suggested the creation of a Student Advisory Group to identify student organizations to solicit for records and help with the solicitation.

Student Activities Office can help with funding and raise awareness.

Freshmen seminars get students familiar with the Archives and provide an opportunity to solicit materials.

Alumni Office – use them to help engage current students on the history of the institution, use them to recruit students to help solicit records from student organizations with the idea that students are more comfortable dealing with other students.

Raising Awareness:

Give out t-shirts or posters as prizes if student uses collections for research or brings materials to Archives.

When hosting a public program on any topic, lure students to attend by offering food and drink.

Motivate student organizations to donate materials by demonstrating the use of this material.

Launch a competition between fraternities and sororities.

Put up exhibits and host show and tells – bring out your best and most interesting stuff.

Identify upcoming anniversaries and offer assistance in celebrating these anniversaries.

Digitization Projects

Digitization of student newspapers is an excellent project and generally receives good support from the current student body, alumni, and the development office. They provide a more robust documentation of student life than student organization records.

University photographs

Yearbooks – issues with copyright, Alumni Offices will support the digitization of yearbooks but will resist putting up more recent years to prevent data mining by marketers.

Electronic records:

Harvard has collected a tiny amount of email but has not been successful.

Subscribe to e-newsletters and group listservs.