Guidelines for College and University Archives
2023

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Executive Summary

This document discusses the definition of college and university archives, as well as the administrative relationships, records management, core archival functions, and facilities and equipment that may be involved in maintaining college and university archives. The guidelines are not intended to provide in-depth guidance on other areas related to archival management where there are well-established best practices, including special collections maintenance, preservation and conservation, archival processing, born digital programs, and reference, access, and outreach. Wherever possible, the guidelines reference existing standards as they relate to college and university archives.

A. Definition

The archives serve as the institutional memory of the college or university and play a vital role in the management of the institution's evidentiary documents and resources in all formats. A strong college and university archives is an integral component of, and an active partner to any thriving and accountable institution of higher learning. To fulfill the responsibilities of that role, the archives identify, acquire, and maintain records of enduring value that chronicle the development of the institution and ensure its continued existence. The archives document the process of institutional evolution by retaining both the evidence which shapes decisions and the decisions themselves.

B. Mission

The archives takes its mission from the mission of the institution:

- by supporting and enabling the administration which provides and maintains the overall structure;
- by determining what evidence is essential, preserving that essential evidence, and making that evidence accessible to users regardless of location or format;
- by, in some cases, complying with legal mandates to support or manage recordkeeping systems and records retention schedules;

- by providing information that promotes the mission of the institution internally and to the extended community;
- by supporting teaching and enhancing the curriculum as appropriate;
- by supporting the research of the administration and staff, faculty, students, and other scholars through access to information about the institution;
- by promoting further understanding through discovery and dissemination of knowledge.

C. Constituents

1. The archives primarily serve users including:

A. Administrative units
B. Students
C. Alumni/ae
D. Faculty and staff
E. Extended community

D. Organizational Structure

An effective archival program requires a mandate from the chief executive officer or governing board that authorizes the archivist to work with institutional units, programs, and recordkeeping systems to identify records of enduring value, document their location or unit of origin, appraise and make retention determinations, carry out preservation efforts, and establish methods of control that provide ready and consistent access to archival holdings.

To meet these criteria, the institution must provide resources that support the ongoing function of the archival program:

- professional and support staff to manage and implement the program;
- facilities to house staff and collections in all formats in a stable and secure environment;
- financial resources to fund personnel, equipment, and supplies;
- a technologically current environment.

Institutional resources and staffing for college and university archives vary across institutions, thus, expectations for activities in this area must be scoped accordingly. Those with archival and/or records management duties should seek to be flexible and opportunistic in their approaches to the work.

Administrative Relationships

A. Goals

The basic goal of college and university archives is to aid the institution in its survival and growth by supporting the institution's education mission, and its administrative requirements. To fulfill the responsibilities of that role, archives share the following goals:

- To *acquire* or *identify* records of long-term historical, evidential, legal, fiscal, and administrative value to the institution and to *preserve* and *provide access* to them

B. Implementation

College and university archives will fulfill their mission and goals through:

- Acquisition, arrangement, and description of archival materials
- Maintaining and proper utilization of facilities
- Facilitating access to materials and provide information
- Promoting knowledge and understanding of the institution's origins, mission, and goals
- Publicizing archival resources to encourage their use

Archival programs strive to:
- remain flexible in adapting to the rapidly changing institutional environment
- maintain a technologically current environment.

C. Administrative Authorization

Archives should act independently when prioritizing and making accessible collections and should not be unduly influenced by other donor/university activity.

A document authorizing the archives' existence and conferring the authority for it to accomplish its mission should define the archives program. This authority may be stated in the institution's operations manual or similar document, and may cite statute, regulation, and/or institutional policy as appropriate.

While administrative placement, structure, and governance will reflect institutional differences and cultures, the status of the archives program should reflect the following considerations:

- This authorizing document should define institutional records, establish them as institutional property, and designate a single, central archives as their long-term repository or access point whether the institution occupies one or a number of campuses;
- The authorizing document should establish the authority to undertake all activities necessary to serve the program's mission according to current professional standards. The document should provide the authority to survey records, including those considered confidential, and determine their appropriate transfer in all formats from offices and departments;
- The administrative structure should provide the resources to maintain adequate personnel, facilities, equipment, and security levels to enable the archives to fulfill its

current responsibilities to the institution and to keep pace with evolving technology and other changes;
- The administrative location and status of the archives should be unambiguous to permit effective interaction and cooperation with other units within the institution;
- The administrative structure should facilitate service to the archives' diverse constituents.

D. Personnel

College and university archives require appropriate professional and support personnel to manage a viable archival program.

1. Professional/Administrative staff

2. Support staff

3. Student or Temporary staff

E. Justification for Expanding Archival Programs

College and university archives may be called upon to justify their existence, promote their programs, and work toward expanding them. One way to evaluate program needs and areas for improvement and growth is to regularly gather data via tools such as reading room and collections management software that can provide data and reporting.

F. Relationships with External Administrative Units

Depending upon institutional policies and protocols, college and university archives may interact with other administrative units on campus in the course of collection development and management. In such instances, the independence of the archives must be recognized and upheld. Archives should not be unduly influenced by other university activities, such as, for example, relationships with financial donors. Archives strive to develop their holdings independently and in accordance with its acquisitions policy.

G. Relationships with Other Archives Within the Institution

Archives elsewhere within an institution may exist, independent of the institution's repository. In these instances, it is recommended that curators collaborate as appropriate when developing or administering collections, to avoid duplication of effort or violation of collection or other policies.

Records Management

A. Introduction

Many college and university archival programs include records management services. This section outlines basic considerations and components of records management programs either within or organizationally separate from archival programs. Records management may not always be addressed in-depth in graduate archival education programs, and so those with records management responsibilities should be supported in pursuing specialized training through, e.g. ARMA, leading to the CRA or CRM credential. As with any archives program, institutional resources and staffing for records management vary across institutions, thus, expectations for activities in this area must be scoped accordingly. See also the suggested readings in Appendix II and [SAA Records Management Section's Best Practices for Records Management Resources](link).

Archival programs with no records management function are strongly encouraged to collaborate with the institution's records management program to strive to ensure scheduled transfer of records identified as having enduring value. If no such program exists at the institution, archivists are encouraged to advocate for the establishment of a program in compliance with legal and administrative requirements, and to fulfill anticipated research needs.

B. Records Management Objectives

Within the constraints of institutional resources, personnel availability, and campus climate, those in colleges and universities with records management responsibilities should strive to:

- Protect institutional records throughout their life cycle by establishing policies and procedures thus ensuring the proper destruction of records and the transfer of vital and historical records to the university archives, regardless of format.
- Follow applicable laws and regulations for retention, preservation and access while also centering the information management needs of institutional units and departments.
- Establish records retention schedules and/or retention policy statements for the records created by university employees, regardless of format.
- Maintain an awareness of how business is conducted at the institution, the kinds of records that are created, where and how they are stored and accessed, and who is the custodian of the records.
- Provide input into the development of organizational and/or departmental policies and procedures, the selection and specifications for software and IT platforms and applications utilized in campus business,
- Seek opportunities for collaboration on records management-related issues that work within the culture and traditions of the individual institution. These might be partnerships with individual academic departments or units, collaborations with individuals in specific roles (such as the head of campus IT, the CIO, or the general counsel), or collaborations with individual faculty or staff who create and manage valuable research data.
- Engage directly with record creators about their information needs
- Offer training and education on relevant records management topics.

C. Organizational Relationships

The administrative relationships must facilitate a systematic approach to records management

 Organizational relationships should:

- Provide authority for program staff to operate on an institution-wide basis including authority for the archivist/records manager to negotiate directly with campus offices regarding all facets of the records management program;
- Ensure access to appropriate campus offices and staff;
- Include a working relationship with campus legal, audit staff, and perhaps, if established, records management advisory boards;
- Foster effective working relationships with information technology staffs and others involved in information policy and planning and systems design;
- Provide a structure for cooperation and communication between the institution's archival and records management program personnel, in cases where the records management program is organizationally separate from the Archives.

Core Archival Functions

A. Acquiring Archives

In an institution with a records management (RM) program, the archivist monitors incoming paper and digital records to ensure that all records series arrive according to retention schedules; periodically reviews the program to ensure that it adequately documents the school's operations as functions and units change; and seeks to acquire the records of student and other groups that may fall outside the formal program. If the school has no RM program, the archivist must perform some RM functions, outlined in the section above and the previous sentence, to obtain the records of enduring value. NARA provides records management standards at the federal level, while the Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA) provides additional standards and best practices. When collecting papers of faculty, student organizations, or other individuals or groups related to the institution whose records may not fall under any RM mandate, a deed of gift or formal agreement is required.

Archivists will pay special attention to born digital records and work closely with units, offices, and information technology and systems personnel to preserve and make these records accessible. These records should be retained for the correct amount of time based on records retention schedules or defined collecting policy. This may require the archivist's involvement with information technology and systems personnel.

- Archivists should give priority to official records and publications, especially those reflecting the development, policies, and activities of offices, units, or committees that:
  —involve more than one department;

      —formulate or approve campus-wide or division-wide policy;

      —document administrative, faculty, student, and external involvement in those activities.

- Records of departments, individuals, groups, or programs which substantially influenced the institution's development or evolution also belong in the archives.
- Archives may:

      —accept other records in imminent danger of loss or destruction pending a decision on their ultimate accession or disposal;

      —house vital records and microfilm or digital, duplicate, security copies of records.

Through acquisition, archives obtain those records which meet the above appraisal criteria. When considering any potential new acquisitions, archives should reference OCLC's *Total Cost of Stewardship: Responsible Collection Building in Archives in Special Collections*.

See Appendix I for types of college and university archival records.

Using their appraisal criteria, each archives should develop:

1. A regularly updated, written acquisitions policy that is available to be viewed by members of the public, and includes:

- an analysis of the archives to identify any gaps or areas of weakness by unit or chronological period;
- a statement that outlines the archives' acquisition responsibility;
- definitions of acceptable donor restrictions indicating circumstances under which they may be imposed—for set time periods, if possible;
- descriptions of copyright and literary rights, which should be assigned to the institution or its appropriate governing board, as well as any current licensing agreements when relevant (i.e., photograph collections).

2. A documented plan to improve weak areas by establishing acquisition priorities to target the records of key offices and groups, including papers and records of faculty, student organizations, local community, support staff, athletics, environmental impact considerations, and any areas that represent gaps in prior collecting efforts.

3. A contact or "pursuit" file on every office or individual with which the archivist has discussed transfer of records or the donation of papers, including recorded dates of contact, identified and updated key contacts and stakeholders, agreements on transfers or donations, development of schedules for transfers, and supporting correspondence.

4. Easily available information in multiple formats outlining archival services and records transfer procedures for campus offices.

5. An understanding of federal and state laws and institutional policies that balance freedom of information rules (where applicable) and users' need for access with personal privacy or confidential matters (mention FERPA, HIPAA, etc.) Utilize the online resource FOIAdvocates for state policies on public records.

6. Appropriate documentation regarding copyright ownership, executed and recorded in a system that is easily accessible for future reference by others, particularly when it impacts options for methods of access, for instance with dissemination of digital records. Utilize Peter Hirtle's (Cornell University) Copyright and Public Domain resources.

   a) Oral history projects: College and university archives that engage in oral history projects must obtain release forms from interview subjects. Refer to the Oral History Association's "Web Guides to Doing Oral History" and the University of Michigan's "Copyright and Oral History Interviews" document.

7. A policy, secure storage, and a management plan for acquisition of born digital archival records. Guidelines for digital archives programs can be found in the BitCuratorEdu Project and in the resources in Appendix II.

8. A plan for deaccessioning records that are out of scope or no longer fit within the established appraisal criteria for a given repository. SAA's Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning can provide further guidance.

See Appendix II: Bibliography for example collection policy guidelines and retention schedules.

B. Processing Archives

Processing includes all the archivist's activities to accession, arrange, describe, preserve, and make available for research use the documents in the archives. Processing in College & University archives should comply with *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*, Encoded Archival Description, and/or other external arrangement/description standards, as well as local conventions when needed.

1. Accession record. Accession records should be used to document preliminary acquisitions information. When accessioning, it can be useful to use record groups to organize records according to the school's component departments, units, and organizations.

2. Preservation. New acquisitions should be quarantined and reviewed for signs of mold and/or pest damage before being shelved with existing collections. Digital acquisitions should also follow a quarantine procedure. Repositories should strive to only acquire materials for which they are able to provide appropriate storage.

3. Arrangement. Principles of provenance and original order should be upheld where possible to maximize context of the original records creators and reduce complex artificial arrangement.

4. Description. A finding aid or catalog entry for each archival resource or collection that informs viewers of the contents and adheres to national descriptive standards should be made available to members of the public in order to facilitate research.

C. Facilitating and Promoting the Use of Archives

1. Facilitating Archival Use.

An essential component to serving as the institutional memory is the ability to provide access to the materials that document a college or university's history, and to provide advisory services to other campus units maintaining their own records. Policies related to the use of archives and archival material should adhere to [ACRL/RBMS-SAA Guidelines on Access to Research Materials in Archives and Special Collections Libraries](#) and [Guidelines for Accessible Archives for People with Disabilities](#). Access to unrestricted archival materials should be on equal terms to all persons who abide by the archives' rules and regulations.

- Archivists should maintain current lists of restricted archival materials, along with documentation for when and how restrictions will be lifted.
- Archivists should determine the process for providing access to minimally processed collections that may contain sensitive or restricted information.
- Support archival use by providing scanners and access to other duplication services either for research access or for use in publications, exhibitions, audiovisual productions, etc.
- Provide guidance to researchers regarding legal issues, including but not limited to copyright, privacy, and confidentiality, in relation to collections.

2. Promoting Archives: Outreach Through Service and Publicity.

Archivists may use a variety of methods of outreach and engagement to inform stakeholders, campus units, potential donors, academic communities and users about the value and contents of archives and to facilitate their use. Whenever possible, archivists should partner with outreach and instruction archivists, librarians within their departments or larger units, and faculty outside the library. Other potentially fruitful partnerships include records managers (if separate units), library and university development offices, alumni associations, academic departments, campus student activities units, student leadership and organizations, and local community organizations.

The types of outreach archival repositories can carry out depends greatly on availability of resources, personnel, administrative support, collections, collaborative opportunities, space, and equipment. Outreach efforts should be guided by clear objectives or learning outcomes, as well as an understanding of intended audiences or user groups. Resources needed in order to carry out these efforts should be clearly identified during the planning stages. See Appendix II for references related to outreach and programming.

For additional information, refer to the work and guidelines promoted by [SAA's Reference, Access, and Outreach Section](#).

3. Service.

College and university archives provide administrative, research and educational services. By performing these functions, archives clearly establish their role in contributing to the information

needs of their institutions and those of the larger research community. College and university archives must balance their role in supporting scholarly research and access to historical materials with the additional functional role of supporting the institution's business and legal purposes. Established lines of communication with academic administrators and/or legal counsel is particularly helpful in guiding the archivist as they perform administrative services.

a) Administrative Service.

Depending on departmental policies, college and university archives may perform several basic services to administrators, faculty, student governing bodies, and other campus units, e.g. alumni, development, physical plant, and public relations, including:

- providing information regarding the history, policies, personnel, and decision-making processes of the institution;
- providing copies of documents, images, and other materials;
- providing finding aids, catalogs, or other guides to facilitate access to specific information;

College and university archives should provide all offices with information about its collecting scope and its access and reference service policies and procedures (See Appendix 2 for example institutional policies and procedures).

b) Educational and Research Services.

Archives should support the mission of the college or university, as well as its library (if associated), which typically involves serving the academic community, scholars, and the public in information discovery. Archives should serve all interested persons as a source of information and materials related to the history of the institution. Archivists may engage in virtual and/or in person reference, instruction, class visits, creation of exhibits, and individual research consultations, among other services.

Archivists engaging in instruction and reference services should adhere to [SAA-ACRL/RBMS Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy](). Additionally, in 2018 the SAA-ACRL/RBMS Joint Task Force released its approved [Standardized Statistical Measures for Public Services in Archival Repositories and Special Collections Libraries]() guidelines. This standard provides archivists and special collections librarians with a set of precisely defined, practical measures based upon commonly accepted professional practices that can be used to establish statistical data collection practices. These practices support the assessment of public services and their operational impacts at the local institutional level.

Facilities, Equipment, and Accessibility

Space requirements and facilities will vary with the size of the institution and the development of the archival program, as well as institutional placement. Planning for archival facilities should include consideration of the potential types of physical and digital collections to be stored, the archives' organizational environment, the potential clientele for the archives to support and serve, and the types of functions and services the program will provide. The following recommendations are for minimal facilities and equipment for the proper functioning of college and university archives. Opportunities for external review are encouraged.

Archives should provide services and spaces that are accessible and inclusive. Archival services should be in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and should adhere to accessibility standards like *Guidelines for Accessible Archives for People with Disabilities.* Archives should conduct comprehensive periodic reviews of services for accessibility and inclusivity.

A. Facilities for College and University Archives

1. General considerations

   a) Type of building
      i) Fire safe with proper building materials, signage and fire suppression
      ii) An archives should have convenient access to a loading dock and elevators as required.
      iii) Ability to control environmental conditions
         1) Archivists should be familiar with professional and industry standards for their range of record storage media. Suggested ranges are—temperature of 60-70ºF. (16-21ºC.) and relative humidity of 40-50%, with further recommendations for specific materials. It is especially important to minimize fluctuations within the suggested ranges.
         2) The use of proper equipment is necessary to achieve standards; use thermohygrometers and/or dataloggers
         3) Lighting: All windows and fluorescent lighting in the archives should have appropriate ultraviolet light filter screens, particularly display areas and areas where archival material is on open shelves.
   b) Security and safety protocols for collections, staff, and patrons
      i) [ACRL/RBMS Guidelines Regarding Security and Theft in Special Collections](#)

      ii) Procedures for fire, water, hurricane, personal safety, including disaster planning

2. Other considerations

When planning for space and functionality, budget and scalability are important as well as IT and other infrastructure considerations.

a) Managerial Functions:

The below are functions conducted in the management of spaces and access points. Privacy and security of patron and donor data are paramount considerations and may be dependent on local, state, and federal statutes and regulations as well as ethical concerns.

- Patron registration, materials charge-out management tool, gate count/tracking materials usage for statistics (e.g., Aeon)
- Accession log (e.g., ASpace, Access database, or Excel spreadsheet)
- Reference request tracking for future similar inquiries (e.g., LibAnswers, LibInsight)
- Standardized Statistical Measures and Metrics for Public Services in Archival Repositories and Special Collections Libraries:
- Project management, including collection processing status (e.g., Trello, Freedcamp)

b) Work areas:

Designated work areas should include space for:

- Quarantine
- Preservation, conservation, and exhibit preparation
- Processing space for arrangement and description work
- Photographic and other format duplication equipment or services
- Designated staff workspace
- Meeting and instruction (in-person and virtual)
- Storage of supplies

c) Reference/research area:

The area where archival materials will be used should provide:

- a separate space and facilities for checking bags, backpacks, and coats;
- space for user registration;
- an area for discussing researchers' needs without disturbing other researchers;
- space for reference collections and to access web-based services and finding aids;
- a space separate from, but convenient to, storage and work areas;
- spaces that have appropriate supervision for use of materials;
- enough space to accommodate several users;
- adequate lighting;
- access to the public, i.e., not a staff area;
- appropriate furniture and accommodations for laptop computers and other electronic devices if the archives' reference policies permit their use;
- accessible tables and other equipment (see SAA Guidelines for Accessible Archives for People with Disabilities); and
- support for best practices that foster positive user experience and access to digital materials.

d) Storage practices:

Considerations should be made for local and state requirements regarding the storage of public records.

- Storage spaces that comply with guidelines set by the National Archives and Records Administration may meet physical and environmental requirements: https://www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/storage-standards-toolkit
- The Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) provides many resources regarding proper storage of materials: https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/4.-storage-and-handling/4.1-storage-methods-and-handling-practices

e) Other areas:

- Exhibits and public programs spaces
- Spaces for digitization or access to other media
- Space for researchers to view finding aids and digitized/born digital materials that may require assistance or mediation from a staff member.

B. Equipment and Supplies

Archives should have enough shelving for present holdings and for five to ten years of projected growth. It should be constructed of material that is safe for archival records with adjustable shelves to accommodate the types of materials and containers used for storage.

Special equipment required will depend upon the types of records and their potential uses. Other items to consider include public access and network computer terminals and printers, and a flatbed or other scanner as needed to access various formats of materials.

As formats continue to evolve, particularly born digital and audiovisual formats, equipment to support access to these formats will be required.

Appendix 1: Types of Academic Records

The following list of types of records in most college and university archives is *suggestive*, not exhaustive. The relative importance of such records will vary with each institution in accordance with the institution's and archives' mission statements. Documentation need not be restricted to these types, nor should archivists substitute this list for analysis of their institutions' archives. These may all be in paper or digital format.

1. Legal or constituting documents (e.g., charters, constitutions, by-laws), vital records or security copies produced by any campus vital records program, policy statements, and reports (along with their supporting documents), minutes, substantive memoranda, correspondence, and subject files of the institution's:

- governing board;
- chief executive, academic, legal, financial, student affairs, and administrative officers;
- heads of units operating with a high degree of independence, e.g., branch campuses, universities' colleges, medical and law schools, and research institutes;
- major academic and administrative committees, including the faculty senate.

2. Reports of:

- self-studies and accreditation visits;
- annual budgets and audits;
- offices of admissions, institutional research, university relations—public relations both on- and off-campus—and development (fundraising);
- research projects, including grant records.

3. Records of:

- departments, e.g., minutes, reports, syllabi, faculty vitae, and sample test questions;
- retired, resigned, terminated, or deceased personnel the school employed;
- the registrar, e.g., calendars and class schedules, noncurrent student transcripts, enrollment records, graduation rosters, and other reports issued on a regular basis;
- academic, honorary, service, and social organizations of students, faculty, administrators, and staff on campus.

4. Publications, newsletters, posters, or booklets about or distributed in the name of the institution or one of its sub-units, e.g., books, posters, magazines, catalogs, special bulletins, yearbooks, student newspapers, university directories and faculty/staff rosters, alumni magazines, and ephemeral materials.

5. Non-textual materials documenting the operation and development of the institution, such as:

- audio, audiovisual, and multi-media productions—still photographs, slides, and negatives, motion picture films, audio and audiovisual cassettes;
- oral history interviews with their transcriptions;
- maps, blueprints, and plot plans of the campus and its buildings.

6. M.A. and Honors theses and Ph.D. dissertations.

8. Artifacts related to the institution if space permits and the institution has no museum.

9. Vertical files of primary and secondary sources for quick responses to general reference questions. Vertical files of secondary sources may be in the reading room for researchers.

10. Records and papers produced by school-related organizations, groups, and individuals while actively connected with the school, such as personal papers of faculty members produced while working with or for the school; as well as manuscript collections related to the school—unless the archives is in a division with a manuscripts department. Some archives have

greatly increased the documentation of their institutions by having all records and papers produced by school personnel in the course of their profession during their employment at the school, accepting personal correspondence, lecture and research notes, and products declared official school records.

11. Student records are created in a variety of contexts, and care must be exercised when administering those which are subject to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) or other statutory or policy-based restrictions. While an institutional archive may have such records in their custody, access to those records must be restricted in compliance with federal and state law, and with the institution's policy. Records documenting the student experience, such as club and organization activities, personal journals and social media, correspondence, course notes, yearbooks, student newspapers, and other material are generally not subject to such legal or policy restrictions, and may be desirable to collect.

Appendix 2: Select Bibliography for Academic Archivists

Periodicals — *American Archivist* and *Archival Outlook* *(Society of American Archivists)*, *Archivaria (Association of Canadian Archivists)*, *Archival Issues (Midwest Archives Conference)*, *Provenance (Society of Georgia Archivists)*, and *Records and Information Management Report (Greenwood Publishing Group)*.

SAA C&UA's Archival Innovators Toolkit – The Archival Innovators' Toolkit site is intended to be a community-created and curated resource for archival practitioners.

Dictionary: https://dictionary.archivists.org/

Collection Development and Management (including Records Management)

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