

Campus Archives in the Shadow of Campus Sexual Assault

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Abstract: Campus sexual assault is a wide-spread problem in institutions of higher learning across the world. In the United States, the civil rights law, Title IX, demands that students are not denied the benefits of federally funded educational programs on the basis of their sex. Though prevention of sexual assault and sexual harassment fall into Title IX protections for students, the rates of sexual assault have not decreased on federally funded campuses in the United States since the implementation of the law in 1972. In fact, estimates indicate that as many as 29% of college women are sexually assaulted in the United States (Rennison and Addington, 2014). This has led to a number of Title IX lawsuits against colleges and universities where students have been raped and sexually assaulted.

This situation provides campus archivists with a quandary regarding what records they should collect regarding campus sexual assault. Additionally, campus archivists are faced with questions on how to best describe records that contain information on sexual assault. These decisions can be especially difficult in a campus environment where the administration, either tacitly or explicitly, downplays the problem of sexual assault on campus. However, as many campus archives' mission statements unequivocally state, the college and university archive acts as a repository of campus history. If campus archives are to document campus history, what happens when that history is part of an enduring difficult reality?

Through a systematic investigation of US campus archival finding aids, collection policies, and mission statements, this ongoing study interrogates the role of campus archives and campus archivists. Many questions have arisen through this process: What responsibility do campus archivists have in collecting materials about aspects of campus life that the administration does not wish to highlight? Can campus archives center survivors of sexual assault while protecting survivors' privacy? Should the descriptive language in online finding aids explicitly reveal when records include information on difficult topics like sexual assault? How can we apply archival theory to not only the appraisal of such records, but to their description as well? The purpose of this paper is to explore these questions in order to reach an understanding of how campus archives are responding to the problem of campus sexual assault in the United States.

About the Authors:

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Currently in the third year of her PhD program, Ana's research interests include collective memory, digital humanities, and community-based participatory archives.

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