

Organizing and Administering a University Archives

University archives are being established in an increasing number of institutions. Their proper nature is defined, and practical suggestions concerning their management are proposed. These include remarks on appraisal of material, sources of data, arrangement and description of archives, their appropriate statutory basis, and staff and spatial requirements for their satisfactory operation. Also described are proper conditions for the utilization of university archival material.

IN 1949 the Committee on College and University Archives of the Society of American Archivists surveyed institutions of higher learning to determine the number and type of archival programs.¹ The survey was limited to one hundred and fifty colleges and universities, which included institutions of differing sizes, classes, and geographical locations.

Because of the new interest in college and university archives induced by the 1949 survey, the Committee followed the first with a second survey that attempted through a questionnaire to determine trends in archival programs operating in 1962. Approximately two hundred colleges and universities were added to the original one hundred and fifty sampled, making a new total of three hundred and fifty. As in the earlier survey, the institutions were selected on the bases of geographical location, kind,

and size.² The reports of these surveys constitute prime sources of information on academic archives.

Another source of information on university archives is *College and University Archives in the United States and Canada*, a directory of archival agencies and personnel.³ Compiled in 1965-66 and published in the latter year by the Committee on College and University Archives of the Society of American Archivists, this source is based upon a questionnaire which sought to elicit information regarding the personnel in charge of college and university archives and to outline briefly the holdings of their institutions. Only four-year colleges, universities, and seminaries accredited by one of the regional accrediting agencies were included in the compilation. The United States Office of Education's *Education Directory, Part 3* was used to determine the list of institutions to be polled.

¹D. H. Wilson, "Archives in Colleges and Universities; Some Comments on Data Collected by the Society's Committee on College and University Archives," *American Archivist*, XIII (October 1950), 343-50.

²Philip P. Mason, "College and University Archives: 1962." *American Archivist*, XXVI (April 1963), 161-65.

³*College and University Archives in the United States and Canada*, compiled by the College and University Archives Committee of the Society of American Archivists, Robert M. Warner, chairman (Ann Arbor, Mich.: 1966).

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From these data the following generalizations and conclusions can be made regarding university archives: (1) there is currently considerable activity and interest in university archives administration, and since 1949 there has been a significant acceleration in programing, with the 1960's showing the greatest gain; (2) present personnel is by and large untrained in archival science, with few institutions having archivists who give their entire time to the university archives; (3) there is widespread confusion as to the scope of a modern institutional archives; (4) there are startling misconceptions about the nature and meaning of archives; (5) there is need for a standardized and uniform statement of procedure (preferably evolved from the Committee on College and University Archives of the Society of American Archivists) for the creation and administration of a university archives.

Inasmuch as new university archival programs are being created at a relatively rapid rate, and since there is indication that this rate will be accelerated in the next few years, the following remarks are offered in the hope that they will help fill a need for administrators of institutions of higher learning which are contemplating the formation of university archives. Of necessity the statement is brief, presenting only general guidelines, principles, and techniques. It is the result, however, of an analysis of the literature, formal training, and experience in the creation and administration of a university archives.

MEANING AND NATURE OF UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

University archives are records of enduring value created by an institution of higher learning as it accomplishes in official ways and activities the purposes for which the institution exists. Records of any kind of institution have a life history, proceeding from the current (ac-

tive), through the semicurrent (semi-active), to noncurrent (inactive). It is at the point or time when records become noncurrent that they become archives. Thus the official noncurrent records of the university first become university archives and then, following appraisal, become archives of enduring value. They become the "official memory" of the university and the source for the record accumulated experience of an educational community.

Archives usually are created by some planned activity or transaction related to university life carried on by faculty members, administrators, and students. They are the graphic products recording what was at one time the living experience of constituent units and members of the university community.

A listing of university archives would include the official records of the various offices, departments, and schools; the personal papers accumulated during the tenure of individual members of the faculty; such official publications of the university as circulars of information, catalogs of course offerings, and bulletins; monographs and serials published by the university press; theses and dissertations; and official publications of the student body and alumni associations. A good rule to follow in determining what types of material constitute university archives is that anything produced *by* the university in a planned and official way is archival. All material *about* the university is nonarchival. The historian's distinction between primary and secondary sources is helpful here; that is, records created by an individual or institution are primary source materials whereas those about an individual or institution are secondary source materials.

The rationale of a university archives is found in the uses to which it is put. It has administrative, research, and teaching uses. It assists in the administration of the university by having in

one central location and under single supervision the records of enduring value. All legal documents are likewise in one repository where the greatest security and protection are given. Each of these uses contributes to administrative efficiency and to financial and spatial economy when the operation of the university as a whole is considered.

The research value of archives is patent to the social, cultural, intellectual, educational, or economic historian. The disciplines of personnel management and institutional organization sometime find here ample grist for their research mills. Research energizes and illuminates teaching. The university archives is in some ways a research laboratory, and when functioning as such it makes its contribution to the processes of teaching. It is well to note here that most universities known for their excellence in teaching and research, especially on the graduate level, also have creditable archival programs.

APPRAISAL AND TRANSMITTAL

When organizing an archival program at a university, one of the first questions asked by the archivist is: Where are the university archives and how much material is there? An answer can be found by means of a preliminary survey of all possible locations and kinds of archival material.

The survey will entail conferences with all deans of schools, heads of departments, student leaders such as editors of student publications and fraternity presidents, and executive personnel of all non-academic administrative units. Such material may be located in all parts of the campus. In many instances its original order may have been destroyed and the importance of its preservation and security ignored. Unfortunately, moreover, important files may well have been destroyed through impulsive weed-

ing by sincere but misguided personnel of high or low station.

By means of such a survey one accomplishes many things in addition to obtaining an answer to his original question. The contacts made with faculty, administrators, and students and the knowledge gained of the history and organization of the university are absolutely necessary. Without these assets appraisal, transmittal, and arrangement of the archives would be ineffectual and would come to naught.

The survey by the archivist should in effect contribute to the bulk of material that the institution's officers have already decided to be archival. The paper wrapped bundles found in vaults, the old metal file cases transferred to some closet, or the jammed transfer file cases indiscriminately piled in some out-of-the-way place, may well form the nucleus of the archives. During the preliminary survey and inventory, consultation with the academic and administrative officials in charge of such material should elicit decisions as to whether it should be disposed of, selected from, or transferred *in toto* to the archives.

The criteria of evidential and informational value are always used to distinguish "high content" from "low content" archives. Evidence and information regarding the transaction of official business in relation to policy matters, especially where changes are made, produce archives of great value and thus must be preserved. "High content" archives will seldom exceed 10 per cent of the total archival material; a decision as to amount is always made in relation to such considerations as space and future evidential and informational value. It is here that professional training in archival administration, history, and institutional organization serves the archivist particularly well.

The transmittal of university archives usually takes place following initial ap-

praisal in the office of creation, with appraisal often continuing after the records are transmitted. Each administrative and academic unit ideally should have a planned schedule for the transmittal of its archives. It is in the transmittal of records that the archival program needs most to be undergirded by university authority.

At the outset the archivist of any institution greatly needs a clearly defined status, if he is to be really effective. He should be authorized and supported by the administration through action of the board of trustees or by a directive from the office of the highest executive of the university. An archivist can do much through persuasion and reason, but soon or late the occasion will arise when even these tactics are not able to penetrate fixed misunderstandings and prejudices. In some instances the archivist's position is further strengthened through an archives committee composed of the principal university representatives whose interests are involved and whose advice is needed.

The issuance of a charter or notice of regulations by the highest executive to the archives-producing offices of the institution can be helpful in notifying the educational community of what the archival program aims to accomplish. In this communication, the archivist's position and full authority has to be made clear. Heads of academic and administrative units are at times reluctant to give up to an "outsider" records of a school, a department, or administrative agency. This attitude is often based on a misconception that there is no distinction between the private papers, which are a product of the personal activities of an official, and the records which result from his work for the institution. He has no right willfully to destroy or to keep the latter, since they are the records of the institution and not his personal property. Hence the need

is often for more than information and education carried on by the archivist; it is for administrative force and clarification.

After a "Transmittal of Records" form has been filled in by the archivist, which includes a general description of the material and other appropriate information, the archives are transferred to the university archives area where they are accessioned and held for arrangement and description.

ARRANGEMENT AND DESCRIPTION

The principles for arranging and describing archives are equivalent to those for classifying and cataloging books. The primary objective of both the archivist and the librarian when following these procedures is the same; it is to gain control of the material under his supervision.

The records that eventually become archives should be kept as they were originally filed. Every basic unit (or records series, in the terminology of the archivist) should be preserved. Examples of this might be the minute books of a particular faculty or the file of correspondence of a dean's office. These should be preserved as they originated in the issuing office, and no attempt should be made to integrate them with a file of someone's correspondence, annual announcements, or any other item in a chronological or subject arrangement. The original order which an organic body of records assumed as it was being created and formed is inviolable to archivists. All attempts to group letters by subject matter or to run together disparate materials such as alumni bulletins, promotional material, and correspondence into one file because they were produced in the same year, or to unify the records of different offices, are to be shunned. If this system of integration of archival material were followed, the result would be confusion. Honoring the

principles of provenance has been found through practice by American archivists to be the best way of gaining control over archives.

The principle of provenance forces the archivist to disapprove of persons sending small batches of material that are parts or will later be parts of an organic body. Individual documents or small batches of records should be considered a part of a definite series of records with its own organic unity. If broken by such a process of selection—consequently isolation—the precious items are rendered less understandable.

The archivist preserves and uses the arrangement given the records by the university agency of origin on the assumption that this arrangement had logic and meaning to the academic or administrative agency and that if the personnel of the agency could find and use the records when they were active, in connection with the many daily transactions and housekeeping activities of the agency, the archivist can do the same when the records become archives. Revision of the order in which the archives come to the university destroys what archivists call the principle of provenance. This principle is indicated on an upper level by the expression *respect des fonds* (maintaining the natural archival bodies of creating agencies or offices separately from each other) and on a lower level within the *fonds* by the phrase *respect pour l'ordre primitif* (respect for the original order). Stated in a simple general way, arrangement then becomes for the records of any one university agency the task of determining and verifying the original order, filling and labeling of the archives containers to reflect it, and shelving of the containers in the established order.

The preservation and natural arrangement of records according to the office of their origin and, whenever possible, according to the order or system in

which they were formed and created gives to the university archives a clearly defined diagrammatic unity. The whole is made up of parts called record groups, *i.e.*, the records of the board of trustees, of the president, of the various schools and subordinate departments according to the date of establishment, and so on down the hierarchical arrangement. Thus according to this arrangement the organizational history of the university is reflected and easily recognizable. Moreover, as offices continue despite changes in personnel, so the documentary artifacts of their work, which are in time the main evidence of their accomplishment, continue in unbroken and distinct lines.

The arrangement scheme for archives can be thought of as proceeding from the general to the particular. This is a general equivalent for the librarian's principle for the classification of knowledge when cataloging books. Oliver W. Holmes alludes to the principle of going from the general to the particular when he writes of archival arrangement in five different operations at five different levels.⁴ Though Dr. Holmes is thinking of his five levels of arrangement as the depository level, the record group and subgroup level, the series level, the filing unit level, and the document level in the context of United States archives, they are nevertheless pertinent to the over-all arrangement of university archives as well. Going from the general to the particular, the levels are (with some modification) illustrated as follows: allowing the university archives of a particular educational institution to represent the first depository level, the school of arts and sciences (or engineering, etc.) the group level, the department of chemistry (or history, etc.) the sub-

⁴For a detailed discussion of the five levels see, Oliver W. Holmes, "Archival Arrangement—Five Different Operations at Five Different Levels," *American Archivist*, XXVII (January 1964), 21-41.

group level, the official minutes of a department the series level, and the official minutes of a single meeting of a department the document level.

As can be interpreted, the five steps above refer to the arrangement of the records themselves, independently of their containers. They suggest and establish the order or sequence in which records ought to be placed in containers, labeled, and shelved.

When all of these steps are completed the archives of an institution of higher learning may be said to be under control. Complete item control may never be established, for time and expense necessary at the document level may not justify such detailed and refined arrangement. Because finding aids must refer to specified units in an established arrangement, however, control must be established to an acceptable degree before description of the records is possible.

When applied to documentary material of which university archives are an excellent example, description of the holdings of the archival depository covers all activities that must be performed in preparing finding aids. They are of various types, being comprehensive or limited in their coverage, general or detailed in their descriptive information, and pertaining to records units of various sizes. These aids may include guides, inventories, calendars, catalogs, lists, and indexes.

The qualities by which archives are described are both substantive and physical. They may be described substantively in this instance in relation to the corporate body—the university—that produced them, the functions that resulted in their production, and their subject content. They may be described structurally as to their physical type, volume, composition, and other physical characteristics.

An archivist may well spend his en-

ergies on unproductive projects if he does not develop a sound descriptive program. Furthermore, an improper program will lead to confusion and defeat of the major objective for which the program exists, that of control of the archives. Here the technique of collective description provides a good way to attain control over the documentary data or holdings of a repository. It will provide for the archivist the method for first describing archives collectively by groups and series, and, thereafter, only if their character and value justify individual treatment, by single items.

A descriptive program for university archives should be designed to produce finding aids in a form that will best make known the content and significance and best facilitate the use of the archives. The two forms are card and page. The card form is more appropriate to archival finding aids whenever the archival unit to be described is a discrete entity and it is desirable to indicate where information on specific subjects is to be found in the archives. Information concerning certain kinds of documentary material can be made more quickly apparent and can be more fully presented, however, in page form. The page form is better suited to the description of archival series that have an organic or other relation to each other. The page form gives greater space for the provenance of the series which usually cannot be indicated in a few words. The content, arrangement, and significance of particular series thus have the greater space of the page form.

STAFF, EQUIPMENT, AND LOCATION

Staffing, equipping, and locating the university archives will in most cases be determined by the educational standards, economic resources, amount of archival material, and the student-faculty-administrative population of the uni-

versity. The current status of American university archives runs the gamut from poorly to excellently trained staffs; from archaic to functionally, aesthetically superior equipment; and from being located in small, isolated rooms of the library building or some other edifice to spacious and easily accessible quarters in the main library or administration building.

The most important member of the university archives is the archivist whose academic training should be commensurate to that of the best trained members of the faculty of the university. Graduate training, preferably in history, is a necessity. In addition to this scholarly training, specialized training in the principles and techniques of archival administration is a desideratum. Fortunately, this can be got in the graduate departments of history of a few universities, counting towards degree requirements in history. Also, for many years creditable institutes and seminars in archival administration (in conjunction with major universities) have been offered annually in various centers of archival activity. To procure an imaginative and competent archival administrator, trained on the doctoral level in history (or a closely allied discipline of learning) and in archival science, the Committee on College and University Archives of the Society of American Archivists has suggested that it may be necessary for the university to grant at least the academic rank of associate professor. With the appointment of the archivist, the number and kind of staff assistants can be determined. A small university archives will begin with the minimum of an archivist, an assistant processor, and a secretary.

The facilities and equipment of a university archives will be oriented toward receiving, processing, storing, and utilizing the archives. A good functional depository will consist of administrative

offices, a search room, a processing room, and a housing area for the archives. Each office and room will have the appropriate equipment and furniture such as typewriters, tables, archives boxes, labelling set and paper, acid free folders, and a paper cleaning kit. It is usually best to have such processes as fumigation and lamination done initially by a commercial firm. Until it is determined whether or not there is and will be enough archival material needing these technical preservative measures to justify purchasing such expensive pieces of equipment, the university archives will probably want to contract them.

The location of university archival depositories on campuses at institutions of higher learning in the United States has most often been either in the central administration building or in the main library building. The vast majority are located in the main library. One institution is in the formative stage of erecting a single building.⁵ Whatever its location—whether a division or department of the library, the president's office, or an independent agency within the organizational structure of the university—the university archives must function at an independent level if it is to fulfill the principles and techniques of sound archival administration. Its internal organization is independent of all other administrative units but interdependent with the total educational function of the university in its teaching, research, and administration.

UTILIZATION

The archives of a university are records of enduring value and as such are to be used with care and under conditions of security. They are to be used in the search room under the supervision

⁵ The merits as to location of the university archives is discussed by John Melville Jennings, "Archival Activity in American Universities and Colleges," *American Archivist*, XII (April 1949), 155-63.

of the archivist or an assistant, only by those authorized by the head of the issuing office and the university archivist. In many instances the archivist or a member of his staff can assist the user by telephone or written communication. Authorization, however, for giving information contained in the archives must still come from the proper source.

Either oral or written instruction describing the care and use of the archives is given to each user. All of this may appear to the person using the archives as an exercise of undue security measures and of venting compulsions of control and possessiveness. An explanation, however, that the material is documen-

tary data can go far towards dispelling the feeling of undue restrictions to the user.

The major activities and objectives of a university are teaching and research, cooperatively pursued and furthered by students, faculty, and administrative personnel. The dimensions in which these have occurred, do occur, and will occur are the past, the present, and the future. The university's existence and rationale in this continuum are known only through its documentary data. If its past is to illuminate the present and give planned guidance to the future, the university archives are a necessity. ■■

