

Taking the Temperature on Archival Outreach

**An Examination of Donor
Outreach at Institutional
Archives**

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Project Overview

- Project was sponsored by the University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections
- Sponsor point person was Kat Lewis, Special Project Coordinator
- Project examined donor outreach strategies at UW Special Collections
- Project received IRB exemption status from University of Washington Human Subjects Division

Project Goals

1. Understand the current state of archivist and donor relationships in institutional archives
2. Conduct a broad literature review of material on the topic within the last fifteen years
3. Gain a deep understanding of donor outreach programs in institutional archives within the Pacific Northwest
4. Compare practitioner's understandings with those in critical archival theory
5. Project findings into potential future pathways

Process of Project

1.

**Conduct meta
analysis of the
literature**

2.

**Uncover donor
perspective
through
literature**

3.

**Conduct
archivist
interviews**

4.

**Aggregate and
analyze
material**



Time frame: 6 months

Archivist/Donor Outreach Literature Findings

1. In the last few years there has been a significant amount of literature about donor/archivist relationships
2. Several “How-to” manuals that link donors to the archive’s material and financial success
3. Importance of comprehensive deeds of gift for deaccessioning
4. Critical literature asserting that archivists need to specifically target material from marginalized populations when applicable
5. Some pushback asserting that archives should focus on being “representative” rather than collecting from BIPOC or Queer communities

Donor Literature pt. 1

1. Student Donors

- a. Need low barrier to entry but are open to donating material
- b. Have high rates of conceptualizing archive but low visitation rates and deeper recognition of archivist responsibilities

2. Military Donors

- a. Material donated to a virtual archive
- b. See benefits more directly, i.e. VA or family members

Donor Literature pt. 2

3. Transgender Donors

- a. Open to donating material
- b. View archival representation as important to collective memory

4. Donors dealing with Grief

- c. Often individual community members and faculty
- d. At a transitional point in their life and need to be walked through process with the archivist
- e. Can go through the 5 stages of grief over the transfer process

Archivist Interviews Structure

- 3 archivists affiliated with a University/College in the PNW interviewed
- 17 questions
 - About their institutional affiliation, donor contact and efforts to create a more representative archive
- Interviews conducted over Zoom and in-person
- Archivists given the chance to edit their interviews for clarity, accuracy and brevity

Archivist Interview Takeaways

1. Donors come to the archive with unrealistic expectations but are enthusiastic about donating their materials
 - a. General false perception among donors that institutional archives have substantial resources
2. Institutional archives lack formalized donor outreach programs
 - a. Hear about the archive through previous contact, word of mouth or outreach events
 - b. Lack of capacity impedes implementing formalized outreach programs
3. Archivists have inherited non-representative collections
 - a. Recognize this fact and working towards remedying issue

Key Takeaways

1. There is a major archivist/donor knowledge gap
 - a. Archivists are bridging gap through educational sessions and informal outreach
2. Institutional archives are inaccurately viewed as having substantial resources
 - a. Often the university/college is well endowed but this does not flow into the archive
3. Archivists are actively collecting material from marginalized communities
 - a. Student identity groups are a popular demographic
4. Capacity and processing issues are slowing or prohibiting this transition altogether

University of Washington Special Collections: An Example in Capacity Limitations



- 16 FTE
- Collection: 94,000 linear feet
- Total Space: 97,000 linear feet
- 7% of staffing and top 2% of capacity within linear feet nationally
 - Calculated using the *ITHAKA S+R A*CENSUS II Survey*
- Average archive = ~2,000 linear feet per FTE
- UW SC = ~5,875 linear feet per FTE

Next Steps

1. Continue to search the literature for more recent papers on donor outreach
2. Connect with donors to institutional archives to hear their perspectives directly, and compare it through their representation in the literature
3. Contact additional archivists to increase the sample size and reflect the diversity of the field within the Pacific Northwest