

The Solicitation, Appraisal, and Acquisition of Faculty Papers

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This paper investigates the collection of faculty papers, one of the most intellectually significant types of manuscripts available to repositories today. It examines the criteria and methodology for determining which faculty member's papers to solicit and discusses the appraisal and acquisition of such papers and the problems associated with each activity.

In order to obtain the data necessary for examination of the topic, a questionnaire was sent to college and university archives in the United States and Canada. This is the first time a survey on faculty papers has been conducted. The data gathered by the questionnaire are discussed and conclusions drawn.



he collection of faculty papers should be considered essential by college and university archivists. As Maynard Brichford has noted, faculty papers offer an insight into the history and operation of the institution, that otherwise may be lost by relying only on official administrative records.

They (faculty papers) reveal professional interests and opinions that frequently clarify matters mentioned in the official files of the president, deans or departments. Faculty papers relate a man's academic career to his total interests and constitute an important historical record. Personal viewpoints expressed in private correspondence and documentation resulting from service on the faculty committees may provide a better basis for understanding the institution than a much larger volume of official records from the office of a governing board or an executive officer. Without a broad range of faculty papers the formal official accounts of the college or university are often misleading or unintelligible.¹

Faculty papers also document an institution's research activities. Academics have played a major role in the intellectual history and acculturation of society, but

archivists have only recently attempted to systematically collect and preserve faculty records.²

METHOD AND DEFINITION

In order to obtain more comprehensive information on the definition of faculty papers and other related issues, a questionnaire was sent to over fifty college and university archives in the United States and Canada, of which thirty-eight responded. Only four of the respondents had a published statement defining what they considered the official records and property of the institution to be, and which were considered the private papers of faculty. In most instances, the archives having such statements were state supported, thus protected by a public records act. Questionnaire respondents unanimously agreed that records pertaining to administrative functions, but carried out by faculty, were official records, whereas papers such as research materials, student records, and curriculum materials were considered faculty property. Whatever legal claim the institution could make for

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property rights to this material, the sheer volume of it is reason enough to preclude such a position, let alone that of faculty reaction. A published statement defining what constitutes official college or university records would be advantageous to the archivist as well as faculty. Further, such definition could help archivists classify the arrival of official records in an orderly and systematic fashion, rather than the possibility of official records arriving at some later date in a collection of faculty papers.*

CRITERIA

Some type of criteria on which to base the decision to solicit papers should be determined that could measure their desirability and long-term value. While uniform appraisal criteria might be desirable, the questionnaire clearly indicated that this was not the case, and the likelihood that such criteria would be adopted in the near future was small. Factors such as the age of the institution, its size, recognized areas of excellence, and others, all affect the appraisal criteria for faculty papers.† The most significant appraisal criteria is the judgment of the individual archivist, which automatically places subjective consideration into the situation. Even with these variables, the more systematic the approach, the better the collection of faculty papers will be.

In 1971, Harley Holden, Harvard University Archives, wrote that Harvard's policy was to solicit the papers of all tenured faculty.³ Such policy has appeal, in that it relieves the archivist of deciding which faculty member to solicit, since the decision was made when tenure was granted. Also, tenured faculty would know that the archivist wanted their pa-

pers. However, such a policy is practical only at colleges and universities where the accomplishments and reputations of their tenured faculty justify the preservation of their papers, and where the archives have sufficient staff and facilities to accommodate a large volume of documents. Or, small institutions having prestigious faculty who spend the majority of their academic career at that institution may find it practical to implement a policy similar to that of the Harvard University Archives. However, most college and university archives do not have the staff or facilities to collect papers from all of their tenured faculty. Furthermore, it is doubtful that there are many institutions whose entire tenured faculty warrant the preservation of papers. In fact, Brichford has stated that approximately 90 percent of the significant work produced at colleges and universities was done by 10 percent of the faculty. Even a quota of 10 percent, if implemented, could impose an unacceptable burden at a large institution's archives. Thus, discrimination is necessary in the solicitation of faculty papers.⁴

In the survey of current policies and practices for appraising and soliciting faculty papers, three criteria were consistently cited for determining which faculty member's papers to solicit. One, national or international reputation in one's respective field, was foremost. This is also one of the easiest criteria to identify in an academic environment. One of the early faculty members at Michigan State University was William J. Beal, whose research with corn hybrids established his worldwide reputation. Included in his papers is a note from Charles Darwin complimenting Beal on his research and urging him to continue his work.

*The statement at Michigan State University by the Board of Trustees reads, "the records of the official activities of the University officers and offices are property of Michigan State University." The Board specifically noted faculty papers in its resolution creating the University Archives and the types of materials appropriate for it to collect.

†For example, Michigan State University, originally the Agricultural College of the State of Michigan, was founded in 1855 and served as an educational model for the 1862 Morrill Land Grant Act, which established the basis for the federally supported land grant colleges in the United States. The Michigan State University Archives and Historical Collections has a Land Grant Research Collection of manuscripts, primarily on microfilm, which specifically documents the land grant movement in the United States.

Unfortunately, not all faculty papers worthy of archival preservation are as easily identifiable as Beal's.⁵

The second criterion for determining which faculty member's papers to solicit is a record of service with the institution and a contribution to its growth and development. John A. Hannah spent his entire academic career at Michigan State University as a poultry specialist in the agriculture/cooperative extension department, and eventually as MSU's president for twenty-seven years. While this is a somewhat atypical example, numerous faculty play similar roles in the evolution of their institutions.

The third and final criterion cited by questionnaire respondents was an active role in the community. This is irrespective of the contributions faculty members made to the institution or their particular disciplines. A current faculty member at Michigan State University has been involved in state and national politics for more than two decades, including the formation of a recognized third party in Michigan. His papers have been solicited, and, hopefully, will be placed in the university archives.

DETERMINING FACULTY QUALIFICATIONS

Once the criteria for collecting faculty papers have been determined, then the qualifications of the faculty can be established. Whatever process is used for determining faculty qualifications, certain advantages and disadvantages become apparent. If the archivist determines the qualifications, they will be based on archival principles, professional judgment, and general experience. This procedure, however, makes the archivist solely responsible for the decision-making process. Academic disciplines are becoming increasingly specialized and diverse, and the assumption that any one individual has the expertise and knowledge to properly evaluate the contributions of all faculty is highly presumptuous and erroneous.*

A screening committee could provide

the intellectual diversity and specializations that archivists may lack. Further, committee decisions may help to protect the archivist from charges of bias in potentially politically sensitive decisions. For example, the Michigan State University Archives recently conducted an oral history project in an attempt to document areas of excellence in the university over the past twenty-five years. Ten faculty members were interviewed about a variety of subjects as part of the project. A committee structure was used in deciding which faculty members to interview, as well as the choice of subject areas for discussion. In this case the committee approach was the most viable arrangement, both from the standpoint of subject expertise, as well as political implications of the project. Another advantage or disadvantage, depending on one's point of view, of the committee structure, is that the members may also serve as unofficial field staff for the archives and their potential donors. The problems with the committee approach, however, are fairly obvious: the process is cumbersome, committee members are not necessarily knowledgeable about archives and archival procedures, and they can be subjected to rivalries between departments and disciplines.

Interestingly, the overwhelming response to the survey (79 percent) was that the archivist or archive's staff should make the decisions about which faculty members to solicit for papers. The use of some informal committee structure is bound to increase, given the size and complexities of colleges and universities today, and shrinking, underfunded archival staff resources. The most desirable technique depends on the archivist, repository resources and funding, availability of qualified people to serve on a solicitation committee, and the institution's internal policies.

SOLICITATION

The actual solicitation of faculty papers is generally similar to those methods used for obtaining other private papers and rec-

*For example, Michigan State University has approximately 3,500 faculty members.

ords. However, there are a few problems specific to the acquisition of faculty papers. Faculty, like the rest of American society, have been quite mobile in the past two decades, which makes it harder to determine when to solicit their papers. If approached too early, the archives may be left with a fragmented set of papers when a faculty member moves to another institution. Yet, if the individual is not approached until retirement, or later, the archives may not receive any papers: they may have already been deposited at another institution(s), lost, or even destroyed.* The Michigan State University Archives recently obtained the papers of a distinguished faculty member by going through his trash baskets, because the faculty member had started to throw his papers away! All too often, an archivist hears about the disposal of such material only after the fact. Collectively, however, faculty generally tend to recognize the significance of their contributions, and the concomitant willingness to have them preserved in archival repositories.

PROBLEMS AND CONSIDERATIONS IN COLLECTING FACULTY PAPERS

Another problem associated with the collection of faculty papers is the likelihood of their being fragmented among several different repositories. Faculty mobility, allegiance to an alma mater or favorite institution, subject archives, and public service are just some of the rationale for scattering papers. Survey respondents were unanimously opposed to dividing faculty papers among several different repositories. Many stated that they would be willing to return, or make copies of official records from other institutions. Others indicated that they would consider transferring papers if they believed they would be more appropriate at, or desired by, another repository. Any transfer would, of course, occur with the consent

of the donor or the donor's family, and would have to be allowable under the provisions of the original deed of gift. All survey respondents indicated that it was better to keep papers intact, whether they were maintained at what was thought to be the most appropriate repository or not.

Inevitably, many university archivists will be offered faculty papers without prior solicitation. Sometimes these are welcome additions to the collections, but in some instances they will not meet established appraisal criteria and will waste space and staff time. Yet, for any number of reasons, the archivist may accept the donation, even if with reluctance. The status of the contributor, pressure from administrative superiors, monetary contributions or the possibility thereof, from faculty members or heirs, are just a few reasons for accepting otherwise unsolicited papers. As with all papers, but especially in cases such as these, the property rights and the right to dispose of materials in the collection must be secured. Defining copyright status and determining restrictions, if any, are also essential tasks for the archivist. Anytime a donor requests access and use restrictions for his papers, the repository must decide if the papers are valuable enough to warrant the problems such restrictions create.

Once faculty papers have been given or promised to the college or university archives, their assessment can take place. If the archivist has an opportunity to examine the papers *in situ*, decisions can be made at that time resulting in fewer papers being shipped to the archives. In general, faculty papers are similar to other twentieth century paper collections, but there are, however, certain other problems which are peculiar to faculty papers.⁶ The most obvious problem in this context is the publications produced by faculty. The archivist has several options when dealing with faculty publications, and it is apparent from the questionnaire that there is no uniform opinion regarding this

*Henry Kissinger is a good example of just such an individual. His public papers while national security advisor and Secretary of State are held by NARS and the Library of Congress. Harvard is a likely depository for his faculty papers.

problem. The practice at any one repository is determined by the individual archivist, institution, and the specific characteristics of the publications. Faculty publications can be housed with individual holdings, or they can become part of a general faculty publications collection. It is this author's opinion that, whenever possible, a bibliography of faculty publications should be created, but the publications should not be held in the archives. The primary advantage of this would be saving space, which in large archives having numerous collections can be significant. However, according to the survey, this practice is not a common one. In fact, many archives solicit faculty publications even in the absence of any other material from the faculty member being considered.⁷

Professional papers and publications collected by faculty members, other than their own, are also common to faculty collections. These can usually be discarded after a bibliography is made unless they bear directly on the collection. An example of this is the early books about flight which were owned by Wilbur and Orville Wright, containing the Wrights' handwritten comments on the writers' statements. These notes indicate that the Wrights' ideas about flying developed earlier than their biographers had originally thought.⁸ Another factor to consider when dealing with the papers and publications written by someone other than the faculty member, but contained within that faculty member's collection, is the copyright status of unpublished manuscripts. Under current copyright law the creator of the material retains copyright until it is transferred to another individual, organization, or to the public. Student papers and copies of unpublished papers reviewed by the faculty member also fall into this category.

Curriculum materials are also commonly found in collections of faculty papers. Only in the last two decades have there been detailed and documented procedures at Michigan State University for the revision of curriculum. Faculty records on the subject are often far more detailed and comprehensive, and frequently dis-

cuss both intellectual and political reasons for curriculum changes. Also, for the earlier years of an institution these sources may be the only records, other than announcements in the college catalog, of curriculum changes. Use of these records by people studying curriculum development has demonstrated their research potential.

Student records, which are common to most faculty material, also present several problems and legal considerations. Class papers, grade books, correspondence, personal evaluations, and letters of recommendation can all be found in faculty papers. These records are often quite extensive in scope and content compared to the statistical types of student records maintained by the institution. For this reason the material has considerable research potential.⁹ It also presents numerous administrative problems for the archivist: because of the changes in copyright law which were effected during 1978, student papers are now automatically copyrighted at the time of their creation. In addition to the various right to privacy and confidentiality statutes, as well as institutional policies regarding access to student records, there is also the Buckley Amendment which limits access to evaluative materials such as grades or recommendations about the student. Student records in a collection of faculty papers may be protected by copyright, university policies, the Buckley Amendment, or federal and state freedom of information statutes and right to privacy laws. Needless to say, the archivist must be aware of all the legalities regarding the use and publication of such records, which can make the administration of these records extremely difficult for the archivist. Caution and professional judgment are absolutely vital.

Documentary material, sometimes overlooked when faculty papers are requested, are the personal or nonprofessional papers and records of the individual or his family. These may often pertain to the family or to special interests of the person, and may provide a different perspective about the faculty member's history. Besides providing a more comprehensive view of the faculty member,

nonprofessional documents can reveal the academic's role in the institution, the non-academic environment, and correlations between the two.

Faculty papers do not differ from other types of collections in that they will often contain nonmanuscript materials such as photographs, sound recordings, movie film, scrapbooks, and artifacts. These materials involve problems in determining their value to a collection, as well as special storage and preservation considerations.

CONCLUSION

The inclusion of faculty papers in college or university archives provides a vital and significant addition to the other records solicited and held by the repository.

These papers enable the archives to fulfill their designated function in a more comprehensive manner, reflecting a cross section of all university jobs, methods, and activities. These collections are often also of major intellectual value. Each archive needs to develop its own criteria for soliciting and collecting faculty papers, considering the repository's overall program, responsibilities, resources, and goals. The highest priority for any college or university archive is the collection, preservation, and accessibility of the records and papers that document the institution's history. Faculty records are the index of human exchanges and endeavors that cannot be gauged from the official reports and statistical evidence that so often are taken as the sole record of the college or university.

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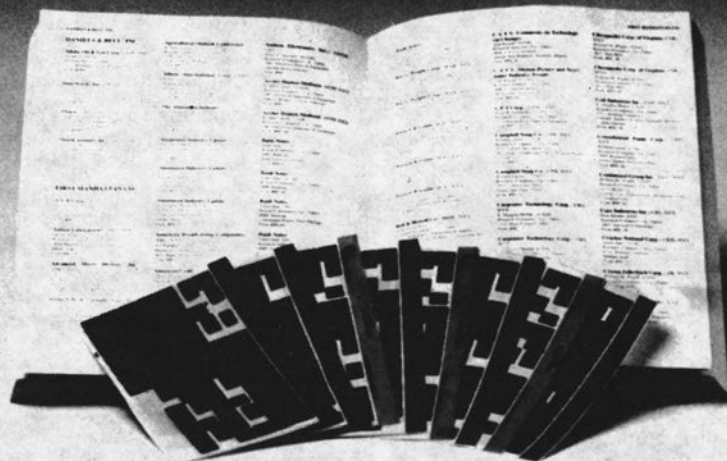
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