

Faculty Papers and Special-Subject Repositories

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THE GROWTH OF college and university archives, and the proliferation of repositories collecting documentation of specific subjects, have created a complex situation regarding the disposition of papers of college and university faculty members. Neither university archives nor special-subject repositories are accountable to a central authority, and both have developed individualized collecting policies. As a result, the papers of women and minority faculty members, and others working in fields for which special-subject archives exist, may be sought by two or more competing institutions. In other cases, important faculty papers may be lost because there are no appropriate subject or university archives, or because existing archives underestimate the value of such material. This paper reemphasizes the utility of faculty papers in general, discusses their importance to

college and university archives in particular, and suggests ways, other than by direct solicitation, by which special-subject repositories can and should participate in the documentation of academic life.

The immense research value of faculty papers has been stressed by archivists and historians alike,¹ but many university archivists remain unconvinced. The members of the Joint Committee on Archives of Science and Technology (JCAST), in their preliminary report last year, noted that "a discouraging number of universities do not consider the papers of faculty and research staff to be their collecting responsibility. Thus even the papers of Nobel prize-winning scientists at elite universities like Columbia or the University of Pennsylvania are not being sought by their archivists."² One reason for the reluctance of college and university archi-

¹Maynard Brichford, "The Illiarch," *Illinois Libraries* 52 (Fall 1970): 182-95; Maynard Brichford, "University Archives: Relationships With Faculty," *American Archivist* 34 (April 1971): 173-81; Walter Rundell, Jr., "Personal Data From University Archives," *American Archivist* 34 (April 1971): 183-88; Edith James Blendon, "University Archives: A Reason for Existence," *American Archivist* 38 (April 1975): 175-80; David F. Noble, "Higher Education As an Industrial Process: What University Archives Reveal About the History of Corporate Scientific America," *Midwestern Archivist* 2, No. 2 (1977): 35-53; Maynard Brichford, "Appraisal and Accessioning," in *College and University Archives: Selected Readings* (Chicago, Society of American Archivists, 1979): 8-18; Laurence R. Veysey, "A Scholar's View of University Archives," in *College and University Archives: Selected Readings*, pp. 145-54.

²Joint Committee on Archives of Science and Technology (JCAST), "The Documentation of Science and Technology in America: Needs and Opportunities," May 1980, p. 9. The joint committee is made up of members of the SAA, the History of Science Society, and the Society for the History of Technology.

vists to go after such prized collections may be the very nature of the material. While records of the registrar or the president's office may be routine, or at least in English, faculty papers can take any conceivable form and concern esoteric aspects of disciplines with which the archivist may have not even a modest familiarity. These disciplines are, however, what make up the university community, and to ignore them is to compile a glaringly incomplete record and to miss some of the most interesting and challenging aspects of college and university archives work. As Maynard Brichford has written, "If you find the transition from historian to physicist to agronomist to architect difficult, you should not be a university archivist."³

Other college and university archivists cite as reasons for not collecting faculty papers their limited time, space, and budget, and the feeling, in some cases, that the professors at their institutions are not sufficiently illustrious to warrant their attention. It cannot be disputed that the papers of many of the more than 800,000 faculty members in this country do not deserve permanent retention. But this is just another way of saying that faculty papers, like all other kinds of archival materials, require intelligent appraisal. If good judgment is exercised in the allocation of resources for all aspects of archival work, some faculty papers can be included. And if an academic institution bothers to have an archives at all, then a proportion of its holdings should be carefully selected faculty papers. These collections usually best document the extent and nature of instruction and research, the real business of the institution.

University records managers generally do not concern themselves with faculty papers as such, placing a higher priority

on the more bulky administrative records and preferring not to challenge professors on the messy question of who owns faculty papers. They have recognized the importance of certain record series commonly produced by faculty members, such as records relating to the planning and teaching of courses and records of faculty committees and organizations, but the records managers are wrong in assuming that these are contained in official university or departmental files.⁴ Such records often are, of course; but in many cases they exist only among the personal papers of faculty members, and are beyond reach of the records management system; the archivist's role in soliciting such collections then takes on even greater importance. In colleges and universities lacking a well-established, comprehensive, records management program, faculty papers are often the only source of departmental policy records and other important administrative material.

To be fair, let us be aware that some college and university archivists have worked hard to acquire collections of faculty papers and have, at times, felt their territories to be invaded by other archivists soliciting valuable faculty collections for deposit in special-subject archives. The archives of both Harvard University and UCLA, for example, have lost collections to out-of-state repositories;⁵ and a Texas institution recently offered to purchase the papers of Stanford University Professor Paul Ehrlich.⁶

Charging college and university archives with responsibility for faculty collections may give the impression that any concern shown for the papers by special-subject repositories establishes them as robber barons of the archives world. Special-subject repositories have traditionally col-

³Brichford, "Appraisal and Accessioning," p. 10.

⁴William Saffady, "A Filing System for Official University Records," *ARMA Records Management Quarterly* 6 (July 1972): 16-20.

⁵Telephone conversations with Clark Elliott, University Archivist, Harvard University, and with James Mink, University Archivist, UCLA, January 1981.

⁶Telephone conversation with Roxanne Nilan, University Archivist, Stanford University, September 1980.

lected papers in their respective fields regardless of the origins of the collections, and many do own faculty papers. These cannot, however, be assumed to have been stolen from the grasp of more appropriate institutional repositories. Special-subject archives are, rather, the only appropriate repositories for some faculty papers. Although the number of college and university archives has risen dramatically in recent years, there are still many institutions with no archival program. In these cases, where valuable faculty papers have no *natural home* and a special-subject repository exists, it is certainly preferable to preserve collections away from their origins than not to preserve them at all.

And, as noted earlier, some existing college and university archives, embracing the narrowest possible interpretation of their responsibilities, do not collect faculty papers. In these cases, where important papers are not welcome in their natural homes, special-subject repositories do researchers a service by rescuing those papers.

Although most share a common origin in their recognition of the need to preserve such neglected collections, the philosophies and practices of special-subject archives differ widely. Some concentrate on collecting papers, while others do not view themselves primarily as repositories.⁷ Those collections that stay in special-subject archives of any kind are, of course, processed and used away from the institutions in which they were created. It should not be assumed, however, that, because they are unfamiliar with the campus milieu, special-subject archivists treat papers with any less skill, understanding, or perspective. Their approach is just different.

Colleges and universities are not, after all, islands. As well as responding to influences within their own academic communities, professors work in the contexts of their disciplines; and these cut across insti-

tutional and even national boundaries. Because they do not have to consider the entire spectrum of academic disciplines, special-subject repository staff bring to the papers a broader understanding of the single field in question, and offer a depth of subject expertise which college and university archivists can only infrequently muster.

Some special-subject archivists may bridle at the suggestion that they should limit their collecting of faculty papers to what can be considered random homeless collections and the rejects of other archives. They may feel that the documentation of a discipline takes precedence over the documentation of an institution, and that scholars are better served when papers, including faculty papers, on a given subject are gathered in one repository. But, despite these compelling arguments and the valuable perspectives and knowledge that subject-archivists may have, there are several good reasons why they should refrain from competing with college and university archives for faculty papers.

A good university archives is a dynamic, integral part of an active institution, and the ongoing services it provides to that institution can be severely hampered by the loss of key collections of faculty papers. The goal of establishing a reasonably complete college or university archives is a realistic and attainable one, and university archivists should be encouraged in efforts to assemble any material, including faculty papers, that can assist their universities.

Special-subject repositories, on the other hand, whether centered around an ethnic or religious group, an artistic or academic discipline, a social movement or a famous person, are, in a sense, artificial. Their responsibilities and interests are not with a single institution, but cover large and considerably less cohesive groups of people. Furthermore, the task of physically assembling all the worthwhile documen-

⁷An example of the latter, the American Institute of Physics, has even negotiated the return of faculty collections it originally accepted (and processed) before the appropriate university archives were established or upgraded.

tation on a subject as broad as labor, or broadcasting, or women, for example, is simply impossible. There will always be huge gaps in such a collection.

Some scholars of a particular discipline will undoubtedly be inconvenienced by having to travel from one university archives to another, but there are also benefits to examining collections on the campus at which the donors taught. Just as they contribute to the record of the school's activities, faculty papers are themselves understood more fully in the context of that record. Individual collections of faculty papers are often seen as distinct, unrelated units, separable from the papers of other professors in the same academic department or from the official records of the institution itself with no loss in meaning or perspective. As it is, however, faculty papers are best appraised, processed, and used in the context of the academic communities in which they were created. When examined in conjunction with other faculty collections, student papers, organization files, and the school's official records, the work of each professor becomes more understandable, and the influences and interrelationships of the academic community are brought to light.

Obviously, some collections will be more intimately related to the institutional picture than others; and there will always be a few which give the impression of having been created in a vacuum. Most, however, are clearly part of a larger body of documentation. This is especially true of science, where team research is common. In some disciplines, such as experimental high-energy physics, there is virtually no such thing as individual research, and any one person's papers make good sense only when viewed with records of the collaboration in which the work was done. But professors of journalism, Asian studies, or theater might be just as likely to be influenced by circumstances on campus and the composition of the academic community.

College and university archivists sometimes compete with one another for the papers of itinerant faculty members who spent some years in their institutions. In many instances, the allegiance of these professors is to a discipline more than to any single institution, and the papers they create at different universities are parts of a whole not easily nor advantageously divisible. Where no one university emerges as an obvious choice, depositing the papers in a special-subject repository may be an option. In many other cases, however, a collection documents a series of distinguishable involvements with a series of institutions. Here, unless the individuals are of superstar caliber and likely to be the subjects of biographies, it may be advisable to divide (or maintain existing divisions in) each such collection among the universities at which it was produced. University archivists should make themselves aware of faculty members who change institutions in mid-career, and encourage them to leave behind, when appropriate, inactive files relating strictly to the first school.

Perhaps the strongest argument against the active solicitation of faculty papers by special-subject repositories, however, is that it necessarily curtails the ability of those repositories to document the non-academic aspects of their subjects. As important as faculty papers are, it is debatable whether they merit as much of our attention and limited resources as they get. Although some archivists with faculty status may disagree, there is a sense in which faculty members are, by virtue of that standing alone, members of an elite. And, while archivists compete for the papers of a highly educated, prestigious, influential, and predominantly white male group of people, other important but less conspicuous and less easily obtainable documentation is neglected. Many in and outside of our profession have stressed the importance of documenting the lives of women, minorities, and the powerless;⁸

⁸See Howard Zinn, "Secrecy, Archives, and the Public Interest," *Midwestern Archivist* 2, No. 2 (1977): 14-26; Sam Bass Warner, Jr., "The Shame of the Cities: Public Records of the Metropolis,"

but even collections attempting to document predominantly underprivileged groups still abound with papers of elite members of those groups.⁹ Repositories focusing on the records of a particular race, ethnic group, or sex, in seeking papers of women and minority faculty members, have the potential to perpetuate the bias in documentation and to jeopardize the integrity of college and university archives.

Archivists of scientific papers, who, similarly, have much work ahead in documenting the experiences of the armies of laboratory technicians, scanners, accelerator operators, and other support staff that modern science requires, have, even in collecting the papers of scientists, concentrated on faculty members. The joint committee (JCAST) notes that "archival projects devoted to science and technology records . . . have been overwhelmingly concerned with academic science" at the expense of attention to government, industry, and the private sector.¹⁰ Clearly, special-subject repositories could leave faculty papers to college and university archives and still have a wealth of documentation.

While it is important to follow collecting policies that respect the efforts of college and university archivists and that recognize the contributions of non-academic constituents, special-subject archivists can do much more. The expertise and perspective they bring to the archival profession, while extremely useful in working with individual collections, is not as essen-

tial there as it is in other, larger applications. Subject repositories are particularly well suited to serve as regional, national, or even international centers for the collection and dissemination of information about research resources in their respective fields. A good example of this service is shown by the new Charles Babbage Institute for the History of Information Processing, which described its philosophy thus in a recent newsletter article on its archival collection: "The main intent is not to attempt to centralize the physical location of all important documents, but rather to centralize (and then distribute) information about where things are. . . . CBI will continue to collect those materials for which no other home can be found."¹¹

An increasing number of special-subject archives already maintain collections of finding aids and microfilm copies of faculty papers and other collections from other repositories, and aid archivists in colleges and universities and in general repositories in understanding materials in their subject specialties. They can also encourage and assist in the establishment of networks and inter-institutional databases, and contribute to the development of standards and guidelines for the handling of archival materials in their fields.

Perhaps the most important role that special-subject archivists can take on, however, is the coordination of documentation in their subjects.¹² They can undertake necessary studies, such as the investigation by the AIP Center for History of Physics

Midwestern Archivist 2, No. 2 (1977): 27-34; Eva Mosely, "Women in Archives: Documenting the History of Women in America," *American Archivist* 36 (April 1973): 215-22; Patrick M. Quinn, "The Archivist as Activist," *Georgia Archive* 5 (Winter 1977): 25-35; Nicholas V. Montalto, "The Challenge of Preservation in a Pluralistic Society," *American Archivist* 41 (October 1978): 399-404; Susan E. Davis, "Special-Subject Repositories: Rationale and Present Dilemma" (paper presented at the Society of American Archivists annual meeting, Nashville, 5 October 1978); Eva Mosely, "Sources for the 'New Women's History,'" *American Archivist* 43 (Spring 1980): 180-90; and others.

⁹See Jesse Lemisch, "The Papers of a Few Great Black Men and a Few Great White Women," *Maryland Historian* 6 (Spring 1977): 60-66; and Linda J. Henry, "Collecting Policies of Special-Subject Repositories," *American Archivist* 43 (Winter 1980): 57-63.

¹⁰JCAST, "Documentation of Science and Technology," p. 5.

¹¹"CBI's Archival Collection," *The Charles Babbage Institute Newsletter* 2, No. 2, 30 June 1980, p. 5.

¹²F. Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," *American Archivist* 38 (January 1975): 5-13; John A. Fleckner, "Cooperation As a Strategy for Archival Institutions," *American Archivist* 39 (October 1976): 459.

of documentation at Department of Energy contract laboratories. Special-subject archivists are often best suited to identify gaps in the documentation, and to urge changes in collecting emphases to bring about a more complete and accurate record. They can establish and maintain close ties with other special-subject repositories

in their own and related fields. And they can continue to serve as "archives of last resort" for faculty papers and other collections, while working for the establishment of new repositories where needed, and urging college and university archivists who do not already do so to welcome faculty papers into their natural homes.

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