

Accessioning College and University Publications: A Case Study

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Appraisal of printed and duplicated materials is an obvious primary responsibility of college and university archivists. Even after a sound appraisal of the long-term value of the publications has been made, however, the archivist faces another important decision. He must determine how best to obtain and accession those publications chosen for archival retention. Essentially two alternative methods are available. The first, based on traditional archival practice, is to establish schedules for periodic transfers of series of publications from the publishing office to the archives. The second is to collect current publications piecemeal through the use of a mailing list or by agreement with the publishing office.

Most archivists would agree that the use of systematic records schedules offers a tested, practical method for acquiring many types of materials. On the other hand, college publishing offices often are unwilling or unable to preserve orderly series of publications. By the time the archivist discovers this problem, the publications may be scarce or unavailable. With this in mind, compelling arguments can be made for acquisition of current publications. Why should the archivist not preserve a valuable current record when it is abundant, rather than waiting until it becomes scarce? Will the archivist who collects current records not thereby enhance his value to the institution, while developing a communication network of inestimable value to the archives' total collection program?

Although collection of current publica-

tions is often enticing, in practice it, too, may be ineffective. It may involve wasteful maintenance of duplicate files and possible confusion as to who keeps the record copy of an item. It also may result in the archives becoming a source for current information, thereby possibly unwisely expanding archival functions and infringing on the responsibilities of other offices. Finally, piecemeal acquisition may lead to accessioning items of dubious value that later must be deaccessioned.

Clearly, then, each method of acquiring college and university publications has advantages and disadvantages, and neither will work effectively in every case. Archivists therefore must determine which of the two methods will work best for a given type of publication. Acquiring materials piecemeal normally requires more time and effort than receiving them in groups. If a publishing office is likely to lose a valuable publication, however, the archives may receive copies more reliably by acquiring them when they are published. Conversely, when the publishing office can be relied upon to retain all issues, maintenance of duplicate archival copies may be judged wasteful. The archivist also must be aware that collecting copies of a publication of uncertain archival value may result in a twofold squandering of his labor, first in accessioning and later in deaccessioning. The archivist thus would be more likely to defer acquisition of publications of less certain value until they could be scheduled and transferred as a group. Finally, it must be determined whether collection

of current publications supports archival reference activities or instead attracts reference requests that should more appropriately be addressed to another information source.

Based on these considerations, the archives at Pepperdine University has identified four critical factors to consider in determining how to acquire each type of publication: (1) the ease of collecting current copies, (2) the likelihood of loss by the publishing office, (3) the certainty of archival value, and (4) the current reference value of the materials in the archives. These criteria may be used to develop models to help the archivist evaluate which records should be collected when published and which should be accessioned later in groups. The former are characterized by a regular publishing date, a reliable mailing list, the likelihood of being lost by the generating office, a relatively certain archival value, and significant current reference demand. The latter typically are characterized by irregular publishing dates, an unreliable mailing list, the likelihood of being saved by the office of publication, an uncertain permanent value, and little immediate reference use in the archives. Unfortunately, very few collegiate publications fit either of these two models exactly, and even the relative importance of the criteria will vary in individual cases. Despite such ambiguities, however, consideration of these criteria provides sound guidance for deciding how best to acquire publications. The balance of this article will explain how the models based on these criteria are used in formulating accession procedures at Pepperdine University.

At Pepperdine, class schedules, catalogs, and commencement programs seem best to fit the model of records that should be collected at the time of publication. To be sure, these are distributed irregularly, and knowledge that the ar-

chivist has a copy of a bulletin or class schedule can short-circuit queries that would be much more appropriately addressed to the registrar. On the other hand, these publications are an extremely important part of the university's historical record. Their misleading abundance along with the tendency to distribute them freely until the supply is exhausted makes collecting them immediately upon publication the wisest course for the archivist.

Student publications (the campus newspaper, literary magazine, and yearbook) and public relations magazines also are acquired by the Pepperdine archives at the time of publication. Both types of publications have proven easy to collect by means of mailing lists. Both are certain to retain their value permanently, and they immediately become the objects of numerous reference requests received by the archives. Student publications also may become difficult to find soon after publication because of the mobility of the students producing them. In contrast, public relations magazines are conscientiously filed by the generating office, but the immediate demand for their contents (often by students for class assignments) has made collection of current copies advisable.

Whether the archives should collect minutes of institutional committees has been more difficult to determine. The archives can easily be placed on a relatively reliable mailing list. This consideration is balanced, however, by the knowledge that the office producing the minutes also will assiduously maintain a set and that copies are widely and reliably distributed. The minutes are of significant archival value, however, and recent issues often are requested by researchers. Furthermore, the administrative structure of committees may make their records especially susceptible to loss. At Pepperdine, for example, the only complete

copy of the minutes of the administrative committee that established institutional precedents regarding computerization during the critical mid-1970s period was lost because the committee was discontinued and the central office inheriting the minutes did not have the space to maintain them. The potential danger of losing records of critical value thereafter has been the decisive factor in choosing to collect current copies of the minutes of several administrative committees, even though other offices undoubtedly are doing the same.

Announcements and programs for campus events, in contrast, clearly belong to the category of records best accessioned in groups by means of records schedules. Documentation of campus extracurricular activities through related publications obviously is important, yet the immediate collection of these publications seems ill-advised for several reasons. The place and time of their distribution is often unpredictable. While voluminous, the archival value of these publications may extend to "samples only" at most. Finally, there is practically no demand for information from them while they are still current. At Pepperdine, institutional peculiarities have made collecting such ephemera even less feasible. Many announcements are produced by the sponsoring office, rendering any blanket agreement with the printing office of little use. Notices of cultural events are made available in the theatre lobby on unpredictable dates. Announcements of events sponsored by the Campus Life Office must be picked up from that office, while events sponsored by the student government are usually announced only at Monday's chapel. The primary sources of programs to these various events are colleagues who attend-

ed. Retention scheduling is the obvious response to situations such as these. Collection is difficult, the archival value of such ephemera may extend only to a sample, and the expected current demand for information from them is nil.

Although similar in purpose to individual announcements, the calendars of campus events produced by public information and student services offices present a different set of considerations. Such publications announce whole series of activities and have significant historical value. Furthermore, the publishing office is much more likely to maintain a record copy. Consequently, they can be effectively scheduled in order to avoid the waste inherent in collecting current copies. At Pepperdine, the wisdom of waiting for the publishing office to inactivate this type of records series became especially clear in handling a "daily" calendar of campus events. The archivist never knew when to expect a new issue or whether he had all of the copies of this publication. Furthermore, filing the copies that were received was time-consuming. The offer by the student services office to transfer its master set to the archives on an annual basis addressed the archival need effectively.

The analysis of whether or not to collect current Pepperdine printed and duplicated materials is summarized in Table 1.

Obviously there are no final answers to any of the problems encountered in dealing with the collection of current publications. Each institutional situation is unique, and diverging judgments are reasonable even within the same institution. Consideration of established criteria and the experience of other archival institutions may, however, make the process more reliable and effective.

Type of Material	CRITERIA				Decision to collect current copies
	Collection easy	Likelihood of loss great	Archival value certain	Legitimate demand for current information	
Announcements	no	yes	no	no	NO
Calendars	no	no	yes	no	NO
Public relations publications	yes	no	yes	yes	YES
Student publications	yes	yes	yes	yes	YES
Commencement programs	no	yes	yes	no	YES
Catalogs	no	yes	yes	no	YES
Class schedules	no	yes	yes	no	YES
NOTE: Decisive factors are in bold type.					

Table 1