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Appraisal Frameworks Used to Deaccession Part of a University Faculty Personal Papers Collection: The Case of the Artist's Scrapbooks

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Appraisal Frameworks Used to Deaccession Part of a University Faculty Personal Papers Collection: The Case of the Artist's Scrapbooks

ICA SUV 2019, Dundee, Scotland

July 1, 2019

Ruth E. Bryan, CA

Summary

- Reflection on a deaccessioning situation
- Thank you to Marcella Huggard/SAA & to Laura Uglean Jackson



...where the son of a living donor, a member of the faculty at the University of Kentucky, requested the return of the family scrapbooks included in his father's collection. In this presentation, I'll tell the story of the deaccession, outline what "appraisal" means in this American archives context, and then I'll unpack the appraisal decision frameworks I believe were operating in this case study.

This presentation builds on work I've done over the last two years with Marcella Huggard at the University of Kansas on a webinar on appraisal basics for the Society of American Archivists' Arrangement and Description Certificate and with Laura Uglean Jackson, editor of a forthcoming book on reappraisal and accessioning. This deaccessioning case study appears in the book, but discussed from a different point of view. Slides I'm reusing from the SAA webinar will be branded with the SAA logo.

All historical photos in the presentation are from the UK public relations photographs collection. Color photos are from UK Special Collections. Icons throughout are from thenounproject.com.

Context: Setting the Stage

- University of Kentucky Special Collections Research Center (SCRC), a division in an academic, research library system with 5 branch libraries and 4 other divisions
- University of Kentucky
 - Established 1865
 - 18 Colleges
 - 30,277 students

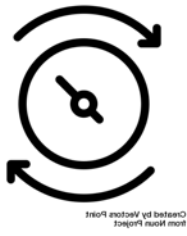
<http://ontheworldmap.com/usa/state/kentucky/kentucky-location-on-the-us-map.jpg>



The Fine Arts Library, a player in this deaccessioning case study, is one of the branch libraries.

Context: Special Collections Research Center

- Collects materials in all formats documenting the social, cultural, economic, and political history of the Commonwealth of Kentucky.
- Hybrid repository (institutional records and personal papers)
- Also records management/records retention schedule

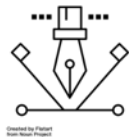


Margaret I. King Library, home of SCRC



Scenario, 2003-2007

- Identifying details changed
- No names
- 2005: Acquisition of donor's collection, following 2 years of negotiations
 - Voluminous, over 100 boxes
 - Documents creative process and life of artist and colleagues
 - Majority of collection was restricted.
 - Considered part of university archives



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So, here's the story. I've changed some identifying details and I won't be using any names, including for myself, even though I'm a player in the story.

In 2005, the Libraries acquired through a deed of gift a voluminous collection of primarily text-based artwork (published and unpublished), personal and professional correspondence, press releases, clippings, and photographs that documented the creative output of a prolific and successful artist who is also a professor in the College of Fine Arts at the university. The Head of the Fine Arts Library championed the acquisition of this collection because it is a rich source for studying the creative process as well as for studying the life and works of the artist and his circle of colleagues. The Fine Arts Library Head also had a long-standing, personal-professional relationship with the donor. Through the deed of gift, the donor imposed a substantial restriction on the collection that closed to research all parts of the collection except the art except by permission of the donor.

The collection was physically housed in Special Collections, where it was considered part of the University Archives, even though it has no records documenting the university.

Scenario, 2003-2007

- 2005-2007: Initial arrangement and description
 - Graduate fine arts student
 - Directed by records manager
- 2005-2007: Joint public programs with Fine Arts Library, College of Fine Arts, and donor
- 2005-2007: additions to the collection



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Open Source Project

UKY Fine Arts Building, 1952



In 2005, the Head of the Fine Arts Library was able to secure special funding from the Dean of the Library for arrangement and description of the collection. This was done with a graduate fine arts student under the direction of the UK records manager, who was acting as university archivist. Processing continued until about 2007, when a mostly complete finding aid was created. During this time, the Head of the Fine Arts Library worked with the donor, the Fine Arts Library, and the College of Fine Arts to produce joint public programs that related to or featured the donor and his art.

As the donor is prolific, he continued to bring additions to the Head of the Fine Arts Library, who spent hours with him reviewing his recent work and listening to his stories as part of the process of accepting additions.

Scenario, 2010-2013

- 2010-2012: New staff/staffing changes
 - New Associate Dean
 - Head of Fine Arts Library → Arts and Outreach Librarian
 - New University Archivist
- 2012: Review of collection, deed of gift, restrictions, finding aid
- 2012-2014: Restructuring and loosening
 - Finding aid
 - Restrictions

Former KY governor "Happy" Chandler and UKY President Otis Singletary examine Chandler's papers donated to Special Collections, 1979



Quite a lot of staffing changes took place between 2010 and 2013. The person who had been head of Special Collections when the collection was acquired, retired. After a few years with another Associate Dean, a new Associate Dean was promoted into the position starting in 2010. In 2012, the Head of the Fine Arts Library began a phased retirement assignment as the Arts and Outreach Librarian in Special Collections, and a new University Archivist was hired.

On review of the deed of gift, the University Archivist discovered the significant restriction on the collection, and also found that there was supposed to have been an oral history project about the donor and a public dedication of the collection. None of these things had been done, and the finding aid did not meet current professional standards and did not take the restriction into account.

The University Archivist thought that, with the change of staff, there was an opportunity to revisit the original restriction as well as significantly improve the arrangement and description for the collection. The UA asked the Librarian to work with the donor to loosen the original restrictions on the collection, which resulted in an addendum to the deed of gift that opened up for research all portions of the collection except the correspondence. This allowed the UA to reorganize the original

19 series into nine, tightening the description and providing enhanced researcher understanding of the contents.

Scenario, 2010-2013

- 2012-2013: Public programs focusing on collection
- 2013-present: Additions



Created by Vectors Point
from Noun Project

Reel World String Band celebration and
collection dedication, SCRC, 2016



Meanwhile, from fall 2012-2013, with the donor, the Librarian planned and carried out a dedication event for the papers along with a four-part lecture series using featured works by the donor.

The Librarian also continued to work with the donor to accept additions to the collection, again, involving meetings that often lasted several hours.

Scenario, 2015-2017

- 2015: Son requests return of family scrapbooks
 - Son: Belong to the family; no research value
 - Son: Expected attention
 - SCRC: Against policy; against appraisal
 - SCRC: Assumed matter resolved



Created by corpus delicti
from Noun Project

Gloria Singletary putting together scrapbook about her husband, UKY President Otis Singletary, 1980



In October 2015, the Arts and Outreach Librarian received a request from a son of the donor to remove specific materials in his father's papers. These were 3 boxes of scrapbooks containing personal family photographs, family memorabilia, and professional and local ephemera that the donor saved daily and filed in chronologically-arranged albums to detail the minutia of his life activities. The donor did (and still does) this because he considers all aspects of his life to be intimately connected with—and impossible to disentangle from—his creative output.

The son claimed that the scrapbooks belonged to the family, not to the donor, and that they had no academic research value. A complicating factor was that the donor and his wife had been divorced for several years, and the scrapbooks in the collection were from the time period when they were still married and the children were young. Because of the high level of care and interest the donor and his family had grown to expect and rely on from the Libraries overall, as embodied in the Arts and Outreach Librarian's attention, the son had every expectation that his request would, at minimum, receive attention and, at maximum, be granted.

Special Collections leadership responded to the request as they do for any return request from family members. The policy is that there no returns of donated material

after appraisal is finished. There is a clause in the deed of gift which authorizes Special Collections to dispose of material that is determined to have no permanent value. But, in this case, the scrapbooks were appraised as being historically significant.

Because in all of the previous return request situations, everyone had accepted this policy, the University Archivist and the Librarian believed they had addressed the question and resolved the matter.

Scenario, 2015-2017

- 2016-2017: Son again requests return
 - Son: Scrapbooks not relevant; father didn't own scrapbooks; family had not been consulted; material should not have been donated; material should not be available for research
 - SCRC: Scrapbooks have historical value
 - SCRC: Offered restriction and scanning
 - Son: No; scrapbooks wrongly donated



The Cummette family in their Cooperstown apartment, UKY campus, 1956.



However, about a year later, the Librarian received another email from the son, again resting the return of the family scrapbooks. At that time, he presented slightly different reasons. Rather than saying the scrapbooks had no research value at all, he argued that the scrapbooks were not relevant to the study of his father's artistic endeavor. Moreover, he stated that because of how his parents' separation agreement was worded, his father had not owned the family material in the first place; therefore, it was not his to give to Special Collections. Further, the family photographs and memorabilia in the scrapbooks reveal personal and intimate details. The son claimed that he, his mother, and his siblings had not been consulted about whether the material should have been gathered into scrapbooks and about whether the scrapbooks should have been donated. In sum, he said, the scrapbooks should not be available to others for research.

From the university archivist's perspective, however, in addition to the details and chronology of the donor's artistic output, the collection could be used to research the cultural context of a white, American, middle-class family from the mid- to late-20th century. Based in this appraisal decision--that the scrapbooks had research value--the librarian and archivist offered to close the scrapbooks for a defined period of time and to make high-quality scans of the items the son felt should be shared among the

rest of the family.

But, the son rejected all of these perspectives and suggestions. He didn't believe the personal family items were historically relevant. Neither a restriction on the material nor making copies could satisfy his feeling that the scrapbooks had been wrongly donated and should be returned.

Scenario, 2015-2017

- 2016-2017: Reasons to consider 2nd request
 - Maybe scrapbooks were improperly donated
 - Living donor, can do addendum to deed of gift
 - Ongoing relationship with Librarian = expectation of response



Created by Hyem, work
from Noun Project

UKY Chemistry professor Robert Peter
and son Alfred, 1867



The university archivist agreed to bring up the return request again with the rest of Special Collections leadership for two reasons: the main one was that the son had presented an argument about the chain of custody of the scrapbooks; that is, that they had been improperly donated. The second reason, was that, unlike other situations where family members had requested that materials be returned, in this case, the donor was alive, and thus there might be a possibility for revision or renegotiation of the deed of gift. A third--and subsidiary reason--was the university archivist's feeling that the son had a high level of expectation of being heard and responded to because of the warm and ongoing collaboration his father had with the Arts and Outreach Librarian (and thus, by extension, with Special Collections and the Library as a whole). However, if the property ownership reason and the possibility of renegotiating the gift agreement with the living donor had not existed, this third reason would have been of much less consequence.

Scenario, 2015-2017

- 2017: Decide to return scrapbooks to Donor
 - Donor must make deaccession request
 - Respond to possible chain of custody problem
 - Still against appraisal of historical value
 - Relationship of donor/donor family and SCRC also matters



Created by Drew Orsini
from Noun Project

Frank Abel, first blood donor at UKY Hospital, with doctor John A. Koepke, 1962



After months of deliberation, including consulting with the University's Legal Counsel's office, on how to respond humanely to an emotionally difficult situation for the family while remaining true to professional standards, ethics, and the gift agreement relationship with the donor, Special Collections decided that they would work with the donor to make an addendum to the deed of gift. If there was a problem with the chain of custody for the scrapbooks that stemmed from the parents' divorce and the family dynamics, it would be better to return the scrapbooks. The key thing would be for the donor to make the deaccession request, which might be something he would choose not to do, as he considers everything in his life to be relevant documentation of his creative output.

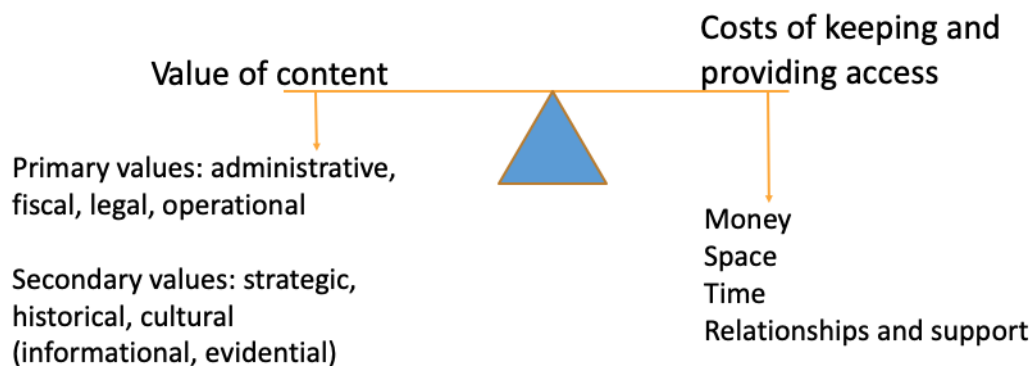
However, by late June 2017, the university archivist had received an email request from the donor requesting the return of the scrapbooks, the deed of gift addendum had been prepared and signed, and the material had been returned to the donor. The university archivist also removed the scrapbook's description from the finding aid.

Special Collections staff did end up having to give a little in their original appraisal of the scrapbooks. However, in comparison to the correspondence, drafts and final

versions of artwork, photographs, and press releases and clippings that make up the bulk of the collection, the scrapbooks were a relatively small portion overall. In this case, the relationship Special Collections and the Library overall had nurtured for at least 14 years outweighed the small gap in documentation left by the absence of the deaccessioned items.

Appraisal definition

- Identifying materials with enough archival value to be accessioned
- Basically balancing value of records' content with resources required to preserve and provide access



So there were a lot of appraisal decisions taking place in this case study. In order to reflect on them, let me first define appraisal.

I start with the Society of American Archivists Glossary definition, which in summary defines appraisal as....

By records we mean the SAA definition of information that is fixed in some kind of form that has content, context, and structure, and that is used to extend memory and/or provide accountability

Appraisal definition

- Using: “Big tent” philosophy of Frank Boles (2005)
 - Appraisal is necessary
 - Institutional mission, rather than universal purpose
 - Content and context both matter
 - Archives = organizational records & personal papers
 - Decisions have consequences



Created by Beccie
from Noun Project

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Since 1956 with TR Schellenberg at the US National Archives, several influential appraisal philosophies have been promulgated and followed by various archivists and repositories.

In general, however, today at the University of Kentucky SCRC and across many repositories in the US, we are following the “big tent” philosophy as championed by Frank Boles in his SAA fundamentals manual on appraisal. First, that appraisal is necessary because of the volume of modern records in relation to the resources we have to preserve and provide access to them. Appraisal is also necessary because we have an obligation to increase the documentation of marginalized and underrepresented groups in archives. We can no longer be passive keepers of records that come to us. I think some of the appraisal decisions in the first years of this case study stemmed from this earlier concept of archivists as keepers.

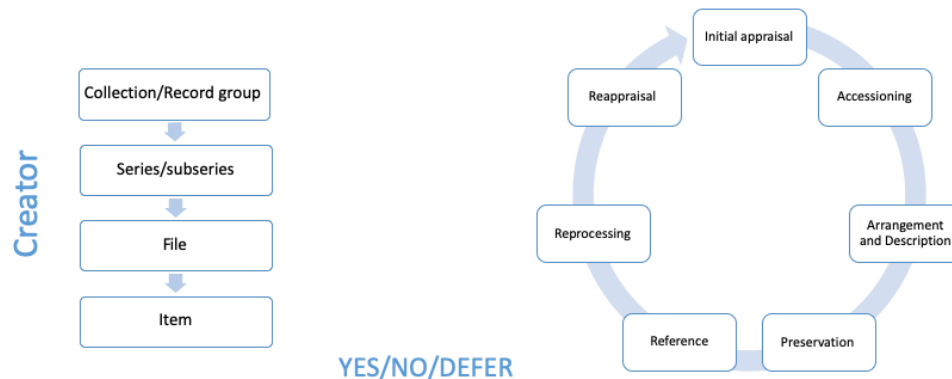
Second, institutional mission will affect what you keep and don't keep in your archives, rather than all archives having a universal, overarching purpose. Third, both the content of the material and the context in which it was created and is being offered to your institution matter in appraisal. Fourth, appraisal should be carried out on both organizational records and personal papers.

And, fifth, although appraisal is necessary for most efficient use of resources, it is also by nature subjective. Our personal and group identities, interests, and relationships influence our decisions to keep or discard groups of records or subsets of records within groups, which then has an impact on what documents are preserved and accessed. We work against this subjectivity, but it is always present.

Appraisal definition



- Selection can occur at any point in an item's existence



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Appraisal decisions can occur throughout an item's existence from creation to destruction or preservation or reappraisal. An appraisal decision might not be "yes" or "no," it might be "maybe" or "defer," where the archives consciously—but more often unconsciously—accepts a group of records knowing that because of physical format, preservation needs, politics and relationships, or an urgency, there will probably be other appraisal decisions later. It turns out that the collection in this case study is an example of this.

Appraisal can also take place at any level of description from collection, record group, or fond to item. Appraisal thus is linked to and ideally should have an impact on the arrangement and level of granularity of the the description for the collection and the groupings within the unit of description. In my opinion, in this case study, there was a disconnect between some of the arrangement and description of the collection and the historical value of portions of it.

Appraisal definition



- Mission statement/collecting policy
- Records retention schedule(s)
- Ownership transfer arrangements (i.e. purchase, deed of gift, etc.)
- Available resources
- Politics and relationships
- Cultural protocols and repatriation requirements
- Federal, state, and local law



Chloridea obsoleta,
color variations, UKY
Agricultural Experiment
Station, 1918

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All of this makes it sound like there are no actual guidelines at all for appraisal. How do you actually do it in practice? There are guidelines and factors that are applicable in most situations, some of which were in evidence in the case study. For example, in appraisal decisions, the specific repository's documentary mission, the resources available to preserve and provide access to the collection, and the content of the records and the context in which they were created will all have an impact on individual appraisal decisions by individual archivists. There will be variation across archivists (one will have a different approach from another) and there will be variation in time, as staff and repositories change. A lot of the time, there are no actual right or wrong appraisal decisions, but perhaps there are better or worse ones. These changes are what we experienced in Special Collections in this case study.

Unpacking the case study: 2003-2007

- Content of the collection
 - Significance of donor; documenting the creative process
 - No university records
- Documentary mission and collecting policy
 - Hybrid repository; Kentucky-focused



Created by gilbert bages
from Noun Project



UKY Art Club officers, 1960

So, to reflect on the appraisal decisions in this case study. To start, for the first years of the case study, from 2003-2007, this faculty personal papers collection was acquired to document this particular artist's creative process or research. It was not acquired for other reasons faculty papers usually come into the archives: as evidence of university functions or to fill gaps in the university's official records. This appraisal decision was possible because SCRC is both the repository for university records as well as a collecting repository for Kentucky-focused primary sources.

Unpacking the case study: 2003-2007

- Relationships/politics
 - Donor relations style: personal relationship; always say “yes”
 - Acquisition driven by Fine Arts Library; SC not really on board (personal subject interests)
- Resources required
 - Initial funds for processing
 - Processing directed by records manager; can’t use records schedule for guidance
 - Restriction not taken into account; collection processed at item level
- Overall, “keeper” appraisal philosophy (personal papers vs university records)



Author and faculty member Lee Pennington and students, 1978



Created by Ricardo Moreira from Noun Project

Also in the first years of the case study, the library staff involved had a donor relations style that was very personal. Staff tended to say “yes” to all donor requests, which in this case drove the initial decision to accept the collection with the restrictions and extra public activities as outlined in the deed of gift. In addition, although the collection was housed and managed by Special Collections, in fact, it was the Head of the Fine Arts library who pushed for the acquisition. The Associate Dean and other archivists in Special Collections at this time tended to be more focused on collections and donors within their personal subject interests and were less interested in pursuing and putting resources toward donors and collections not in those personal subjects. There was also not much collaboration between Special Collections and the branch libraries.

So, although the Head of the Fine Arts Library obtained initial funds for hiring a student assistant to process the collection, Special Collections did not provide appropriate staff to supervise the collection. The records manager was the person selected. She was not trained as an archivist, was accustomed to making appraisal decisions on university records using the records schedule--which in this case had no applicability, as there are no university records in the collection--and had an item-level approach to archival processing. This item-level approach assumed that all

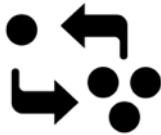
items in the collection had the same value, which in practice meant that even the significant portion of the collection that was restricted was described in great detail.

In general, I believe the records manager was operating within a keeper appraisal philosophy: that is, because these were personal papers and not university records, everything in the collection was equally valuable.

Unpacking the case study: 2010-2013

- Documentary mission and collecting policy
- Content of the collection
- Relationships/politics*
 - Donor relations style no. 1: personal relationship; always say “yes”
 - Donor relations style no. 2: partnership; sometimes say “maybe” or “no”
 - SC now on board (professionally interested in anything with historical value)
 - Fine Arts Library and SC now working together

*Change



Created by Jenie Tordella
State Normal Project

Dinner at opening of UKY's Commonwealth
football stadium, 1973



In the next years of the case study, the SCRC documentary mission, collecting policy, and overall appraisal value of the content of the collection didn't change.

But, relationships and resources changed significantly. Retirements, new staff, and advancement of existing staff into new positions brought into SC professional archivists who were less likely to always say yes to donors and to all materials in a collection. Also, these were professional archivists who were willing to preserve and describe in a professional way any collection with historical value—that is, they were interested in all subjects and formats. Also, this change in leadership allowed the Fine Arts Library and SC to collaborate on collections of interest to both. An archivist was now involved with donor relations and collection management, which was not the case in the first years of this case study. This enabled the renegotiation of the restrictions on the collection.

Unpacking the case study: 2010-2013

- Resources required*
 - Arrangement redone
 - More efficient use of processing staff
- Appraisal (yes/no/defer) decisions are part of archival work and must be ongoing*
 - Portions of the existing collection are noted as being out of scope
- Active/proactive appraisal*

*Change



Panel discussion for UKY radio station WBKY, 1950s



Changing the restrictions on the collection enabled the UA to redo the finding aid, incorporating additions, accommodating the new restriction, and being more careful about where item-level description was used and where item-level preservation measures were taken.

Appraisal decisions were now part of the collection's lifecycle and were ongoing. In fact, during this time period, some portions of the existing collection were now appraised as out of scope. The UA asked the Arts and Outreach Librarian to ask donor if he would take these portions back. He said "no," and because the librarian was still the primary donor contact, these items ended up staying in collection.

Overall, SCRC staff and leadership made active appraisal decisions, rather than keeping everything or preserving and processing all items at the same level of granularity and resources.

Unpacking the case study: 2015-2017

- Documentary mission and collecting policy
- Resources required
- Relationships/politics*
 - Son's return request
 - Librarian's full retirement
 - Donor relations style no. 2: partnership; sometimes say "maybe" or "no"
 - Donor relations style no. 3: policy
- Content of the collection*
 - Scrapbooks in relation to majority of collection have less historical value

*Change



Created by Anna Tordella
Illustration by Anna Tordella

Whistle blowing for class change, 1918



In the last years of this case study, the documentary mission, collecting policy, and resources required were unchanged from 2010-2013. However, the son's request to return the scrapbooks and the upcoming full retirement of the Arts and Outreach Librarian once again changed the relationships and politics around the collection. The UA began to be the primary contact for the donor. No longer would there be a personal relationship that included hours-long meetings. The UA worked with the donor to bring in additions to the collection on an annual, rather than ad hoc, basis.

The UA and SC leadership considered the son's return request because one of his arguments was that his father didn't own the scrapbooks and thus shouldn't have donated them, thus suggesting that the chain of custody for the scrapbooks was not clear, and that this was something that needed to be cleared up. They were able to use policy to work with this living donor on deaccessioning material that he wished to have removed (which was prompted by the son's request). They were also able to return the material that was appraised as out of scope in the second round of processing.

However, the appraisal of the content of the collection did change. The overall historical value of documenting the creative work and process of this university professor and artist was unchanged. But, the UA and other SCRC leadership consciously went against their initial appraisal of the historical value of the scrapbooks. The value of the scrapbooks was less than the rest of the collection, and the value of the relationship (or the way the relationship has been carried out over time) outweighed the value of the scrapbooks.

Final thoughts

- Overall collection appraisal did not change
 - Hybrid repository
 - Faculty papers can be acquired for multiple reasons
- Staff changes also changed institutional context:
 - Active, iterative appraisal decisions
 - Professional and/or policy-based donor relations
 - Collaboration across branches and divisions
 - Subject and format expertise working together
- Personal style with donors has a long-term impact



Tim Futrell, UKY Student Government President, shakes hands with a Sigma Chi fraternity member, 1969



Created by DewDrops from Noun Project

So, in summary, some final thoughts on this case study of appraising faculty papers. The overall reason for acquiring the collection in the first place didn't change, but other aspects of appraisal—especially relationships and politics—did change. This is because the documentary mission and collecting policy of Special Collections as a hybrid repository allows for the papers of faculty to be acquired for multiple reasons: in this case, this collection documented the significant creative work of a long-time KY resident who is also a professor at the university.

Staffing changes, which over time are inevitable, also changed the institutional context of appraisal: moving from keeper appraisal frameworks to active and iterative appraisal decisions; moving from personal and special donor relations to professional and policy-based donor relations; and moving from siloed to collaborative relationships within the library, where subject and format experts can work together on a collection that has value for both.

And, one of the biggest things I've learned from being a part of and reflecting on this case study is that the way individual librarians and archivists interact with individual donors has a long-term and repository-wide impact on appraisal in the repository over the lifetime of a collection. We are always dealing with the appraisal decisions

of the staff that built the archives before us, and those that come after us will be alternately praising and cursing our decisions.

Thank you so much for listening to the presentation!

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