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Archives Annual Report, 2009-2010

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Illinois Wesleyan University

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To: Karen Schmidt, University Librarian

From: Meg Miner, University Archivist & Special Collections Librarian

Date: September 2, 2010

Re: 2009-2010 Tate Archives & Special Collections Report

Correction for last year

In preparing this report I noticed one of our calculations for last year was off. Our total research requests were actually 142 and the column was mistakenly doubled when tallied for the report. The table we use for the library statistics page has been corrected.

Service Summary

Six student assistants helped me provide access to Tate Archives & Special Collections material during 2009/2010; I also employed two students over the summer. Our total holdings grew by 25 linear feet to 1,129.

During the year, Archives & Special Collections was visited by 70 people with students and alumni comprising 64 of that total. My archives assistants and I researched and replied to 134 inquiries received via email, phone, walk in or appointment. Researchers not directly associated with IWU were the largest patron group again this year, but there were just a few more of them than there were of students/alumni and faculty/staff. Most research requests were initiated by walk-in patrons.

The biggest research project we conducted was related to the School of Nursing's 50th Anniversary Celebration of the Baccalaureate program. Ultimately four exhibit cases, two walls and over 300 photographs were compiled into a visual and textual narrative of this program's foundation and development. Two alumnae and two emeriti faculty helped compile information and artifacts for these exhibits. Several of my Archives Student Assistants were involved in processing requests for scanned materials, and one library staff member assisted with the final installation. I used my experience in creating exhibits in determining how to showcase a variety of materials and coordinated the efforts of the others. I didn't go into this experience with outreach to alumni as a goal; I was responding to a request in my role as Exhibits chair for the library and as historical collections manager for the University the connection was clear. But the feedback from faculty and alumni made it clear that if they did not know they had a willing partner in safeguarding their history before, they do now! The archives acquired six linear feet of documents and artifacts and 130 new photographs as a result of supporting this event.

Archives Accessions and Activities

We recorded 33 accessions this year totaling approximately 25 linear feet of organizational records and publications as well as photographs and memorabilia of students, alumni and faculty. Our rarest donation was a set of gold cufflinks presented to the first class of nurses graduating from the Baccalaureate program. We also acquired several uniforms from different eras of the program.

Our most difficult acquisition came from Titan TV; this material is unusual for us in that it comes in a variety media formats including some digital recordings loaded directly to an external hard drive. Many of the tape formats we cannot play today, and the digital content is in danger of obsolescence. The content of these files was determined to be archival following a conversation with the former Titan TV manager who selected the material based on criteria I gave him. How we preserve these formats and others remains a concern for me.

I did not make any progress on our campus records management inventory this year. However, I believe I have visited enough offices to determine our overall records' needs. The next phase of this will be establishing records disposition schedules and following up periodically to ensure compliance.

Special Collections Accessions and Activities

We only accessioned three items into Special Collections this year but they are all unusual. Two are books by noted pre-Beat era writer Bob Brown and one came with a signed, inscribed drawing with a poem on the back of a separate typescript letter. This material was purchased in direct support of a student research project. The final item is the only known recording we have of Dr. Abram Plum, electronic music composer, whose family donated all of his printed works to Special Collections following his death.

Preservation and Digital Projects

Last year's digitization of student and alumni publications from the 19th Century have been uploaded and made available in CONTENTdm. As I had hoped, they have greatly improved our research services and no fewer than five reference questions as well as a talk I gave to the Greek Alumni Network benefited from having the ability to search these documents.

We used the last of our previously-deposited funds to send out 60 year's worth of yearbooks for scanning and text-rendering services at Northern Micrographics. Due to the now-annual request from the Alumni Relations, I chose to have the most recent yearbooks sent out first instead of the oldest as I mentioned last year. Therefore, books from 1895-1939 have not been scanned. Additionally, there were not enough funds to microfilm the yearbooks but I am more confident of our ability to preserve the originals of these books than I was of the newspapers and other periodicals.

Our growing oral history project caught the attention of Alumni Relations this year and one dedicated alumna organized an afternoon of interviews that yielded conversations with eight alumni and a retired staff member in a local retirement community. Almost all are transcribed and available in Digital Commons. The challenge now is finding enough interviewers to keep the effort going. One student volunteer has emerged, but my long term goal is involving alumni around the country in talking with people in their areas.

2010/2011 Goals

Our reformatting work with Media Preserves, a division of Preservation Technologies, on selected audio and visual recordings was completed last year, but these records have not been made publicly accessible yet. Some subjects have been identified but this work needs to be completed and transcriptions made for the material before making them available to researchers.

Two newly discovered issues of previously digitized publication (one Argus and one from the 19th Century group) need to be digitized and uploaded as well as printed and filmed to match the work done previously. A cost estimate of this work will be available in early October.