

**"Wisely Selected ... Carefully Preserved" — 60th Anniversary of UCLA's University Archives.** Shown at Powell Library, UC Los Angeles, from September 22 to December 5, 2008.

In celebration of its 60th anniversary, the University Archives of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) mounted an exhibition in the undergraduate Powell Library in late 2008. The exhibit, which consisted of several display cases, showcased notable items from the history of the campus. Counting among its checklist both three-dimensional artifacts and paper-based materials, the exhibit sought to illustrate the range of activities that have occurred in the last century by the efforts of students and organized groups on the Westwood campus.

The exhibit featured photographs and documents that have defined the history of the university, and which demonstrated impact of a particular social or intellectual nature. Items included bear paws from a mascot costume (ca. 1980s), a student newspaper article describing the evacuation and relocation order issued for Japanese residents (1942), a flier for a conference held regarding "American-Russian Cultural Exchange" (1945), and several black-and-white and color photographs of the early Westwood campus (from 1929, several years after the university's founding). The objects were accompanied by informative captions and mounted in such a way as to allow clear viewing as one progressed through the exhibit. Attention was given to the preservation needs of items by restricting the amount of sunlight received and, in a very few cases, presenting a reproduced surrogate of fragile documents. The exhibit was prepared by librarians of the University Archives (a unit within the UCLA Library) in coordination with the Young Research Library's Exhibition Committee and the UCLA Alumni Association. The inclusion of a range of items—including administrative documents, scholarly publications, and student-created materials—demonstrated a concerted effort to showcase a balance of both print and non-print material by the archive. The display cases were physically situated in a manner which complemented the architecture of the Powell Rotunda. Perhaps the most notable element of this exhibition was the exhibitors' adoption of "interactive" museum display techniques, in particular the central placement of items within the room (in contrast to locating the items adjacent to a wall). This practice allowed visitors and students to view materials from *all* angles (not solely the obverse), engage in conversation with one another, and read detailed captions with personal inspection.

The placement of archival materials within the public space of the library corroborates the importance of this collection in context of the shared university—for in this setting, the visitors are simultaneously the owners and content creators. When viewed as a collection of items by and for "the people of

California,” the exhibition surely provokes an inter-generational and personal response, an emotional impact which may be ostensibly difficult to measure. Additionally, the collaborative efforts of library and archival staff speak to the current movement among members of the information community towards cooperative partnership; that is, the recognition that information resources can be utilized for purposes which transcend the expected role of the particular institution to which the materials belong (see Zorich, Waibel, & Erway, 2008)<sup>1</sup>. Archival objects, in this case, were not viewed in their natural habitat (the archive), yet their value was no less diminished when brought "out" into a new space for new interactions.

The exhibition's placement in the undergraduate library is also notable as this location brings a previously "hidden collection" to the eyes of college students, faculty members, and librarians. If the archival function is to preserve the history of institutions, it is essential that tangible archival items in all forms be incorporated into the documentation of legacy of the institution. By introducing these items into the public presentation space of the library—a place of daily study and learning for hundreds of students—the University Archives achieved a form of active engagement with the university community. Through this exhibit, real campus history—the "stuff" referenced in on-campus tours and documented in student fliers and institutional publications—was made palpable, brought out in full view of its creators who continue to actively contribute new efforts year after year. As a representative and visually engaging sample of over 22 million items in possession by the University Archives today, this exhibit provided attendees with a sense of evidentiary connection to the university, and it is indicative of a strong and persistent institutional drive to document acquired knowledge and activity within the local community.

While the exhibit focused on visual materials, such as Thelner Hoover's on-the-ground and aerial photographs which document the campus from the late 1920s to 1960, the University Archives also presented some print items from before its formal establishment, and even before the university's founding in 1919. The University Archives holds materials dating from as early as 1882, including student registers from the California State Normal School, a teacher's college which was incorporated in 1919 as part of the University of California (UC). Institutionalization of the University Archives merely formalized a pre-existing collection which had accompanied early administrations of the university. (Similarly, the National Archives and Records Administration, founded in 1934 by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, holds materials pre-dating its establishment by several hundred years.)

The University Archives was established in 1948 by UCLA Provost Clarence Addison Dykstra.<sup>2</sup> Dykstra, who served as UCLA's third and last provost from 1945 to 1950, left a lasting impact on the Westwood campus which,

in addition to his establishment of the University Archives, included creation of the first two student housing dormitories, one of which bears his name today. The Archives were to be, in Dykstra's words, the "official depository for all University publications and for noncurrent records of departments and other administrative divisions of the University [of California] at Los Angeles<sup>3</sup>." At the time of its founding, the University Archives was formalized as a unit within the Library's Department of Special Collections. Fourteen years later, in 1962, the UC Office of the President mandated the designation of a campus archivist and the establishment of an archival repository by the University Librarians of all UC campuses. Today, the University Archives staff reports to the Associate University Librarian for Collection Management and Scholarly Communication, and processed manuscripts are administered in cooperation with the Department of Special Collections' Manuscripts Division.

This exhibition demonstrated the importance of raising awareness about archival materials among the student population. At UCLA, the University Archives provides access to its records through reference conducted both in-person and electronically. Students and faculty members study materials for scholarly research purposes, and administrators rely on the University Archives to retain inactive transactional records of departments and units. The 60th anniversary exhibition demonstrated the University Archives' continued performance of a vital role in preserving the continuity and recorded knowledge of activity within its Los Angeles campus. As professors and teachers increasingly look to archivists to enliven the teaching of history and social movements by incorporating "real" archival materials into lesson plans and encouraging use of rare primary materials in student research projects, this exhibition may serve as a model for archivists seeking to introduce their most popular materials to a broad academic clientele.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Zorich, D., Waibel, G., & Erway, R. (2008). *Beyond the silos of the LAMs: Collaboration among libraries, archives and museums*. Report produced by OCLC Research. Published online at: <http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2008/2008-05.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> University of California History Digital Archives (<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/uchistory/>) and "UCLA's Past Leaders" (<http://www.pastleaders.ucla.edu/dykstra.html>).

<sup>3</sup> Dykstra, C. (1948). "Statement of Establishing the University Archives." Referenced in "Statement of Responsibilities—UCLA University Archivist" administrative file (2004).

### **Reviewer**

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