

Student Life, Diverse Institutional Histories, and Archival Policy: Inclusion of Student Life Archival Material in University Archives' Collecting Statements

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Current literature outlines the importance of—and strategies for—collecting student life material in institutional archives but does not address the inclusion of this material within collecting statements. This study examines publicly available collecting statements from Association of Research Libraries (ARL) institutions' university archives, seeking mentions of student life archival material, diversity, and proactive approaches for collecting said material. Findings suggest that while many ARL institutions mention student life in these policies, most do not make the connection to how this material relates to diversity within the university archives, nor do they provide a proactive approach for collecting this material.

Introduction

University archival collecting practices and policies originated in service to administrative priorities. Yet administrative documentation alone can never convey the rich, complex, multiple histories of any institution. Given the history of higher education, and the predominantly white administration of large research institutions, student bodies are generally far more diverse than their faculty and administrators. Commitment to social justice requires expanding the scope of archival collections to include and uplift the voices of those the institution aims to serve: its students.¹ In addition, student success is at the forefront of university missions, so collections of student life materials document their growth on a holistic level beyond the academic realm.

The primary interest of this study is in materials that document shared student life, as well as the collective student experience on campus outside the classroom. Diversity in archival collections goes beyond having a complete record; it is a way to welcome people into a space that has not historically acknowledged and uplifted marginalized voices. Making archives inclusive spaces for teaching and learning means that students will see their experiences and perspectives reflected in the collections. As an undergraduate student, the lead author visited her institution's university archives with a student organization and had the opportunity to

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see her experience on campus reflected in the institutional history. This powerful moment is a guiding principle in her philosophy as a University Archivist, as is awareness of her privileged place in society that allowed the moment to happen. Not all students have this connection when they visit their institution's archives. Many students have the opposite experience, seeing no representation of themselves or the communities they represent. Representation and connections to the record are vital for students to feel welcome in the archives and included as part of an institution's shared histories. When students connect with something in the archives, it highlights the value of primary source research and sparks students' curiosity and engagement. The second author occupies a similar position of privilege as a white, second-generation college graduate but had no exposure to university archives as a student.

While many archival professionals have discussed methods, strategies, and case studies for collecting student materials, no study to date has been found that examines how publicly available statements address the records of campus life outside the classroom. This study investigates the ways large research universities express collection policies concerning the records of student organizations and campus life in statements that were publicly available on their websites as of the summer of 2021. This paper defines *student life archival material* as non-academic student records generated outside the classroom. In the words of John Straw, "Student life encompasses the social, recreational, cultural, political, religious, and all other aspects of the student experience beyond the classroom."² This includes the records of official student organizations as well as unofficial materials and evidence of the student experience more broadly and excludes individual student academic records, theses/dissertations, and generally, campus-wide student publications such as yearbooks or newspapers. This study's specific research questions were as follows:

- To what extent do members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) provide official archival collections policies or other statements to the public on their websites?
- To what extent and in what ways do such public-facing materials address records relating to students outside of the classroom?
 - Do the policies mention diversity or underrepresented groups?
 - Do the policies specify proactive outreach to student organizations or provide resources to guide the student organizations?

Literature Review

This study is situated in the larger literature examining how collection development policies for university archives evolved, as well as what purpose such policies serve.³ Jennifer Marshall established how the seminal work of Faye Phillips in 1984 generated consensus about the value of collection policies to guide selection priorities in college and university archives. Cynthia Sauer provides evidence that most institutions with formal policies developed them in the 1980s and 1990s, stating:

by the 1990s collection development policies and collection management strategies were moved to the shrine of archival theory—something that all repositories should have. Their actual use and development, however, was all but ignored as archivists' attention turned to other issues and challenges.⁴

Accordingly, in 2001, Marshall identified only 38 policies available to the public online (out of 884 college and university archival programs whose websites were accessible (<5 per-

cent)), and, furthermore, found few similarities in the content of policies. Marshall surmised that these public-facing documents might have been designed to address donors rather than to inform decision making.⁵

Ellen Swain traced how the emergence of social history in the 1960s eventually led some archives to turn their attention to the records of student extracurricular activities and organizations to flesh out institutional histories from the perspective of those with less power on campus.⁶ The passage of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) in 1974 led to concerns among college and university archivists about how it might limit their ability to document the student experience. It is worth noting that there is a significant literature on the challenges of archiving individual student academic records and other identifiable material affected by FERPA; however, that particular topic is outside the scope of this paper.⁷

In 1978, the Society of American Archivists declared:

From both a research and an administrative standpoint, institutions of higher learning have a special obligation to preserve the records of individual students, student organizations, and campus life. Students are the most important products of higher education. Student records are essential to an understanding of the educational process over time. The impact of higher education in America and the changing lifestyles and experiences of college students can be studied and evaluated only if institutional files are maintained and made available for research use.⁸

Decades on from this assertion, it is not clear how many university archives have collecting policies for student records beyond those mandated by institutional needs. Jessica Wagner's work suggests that the extent of archival collections on student life is small; in a convenience sample survey, 72 percent of respondents said they had no collections policy for student materials.⁹ This study found no other studies investigating collections policies for student life materials across institutions.

Numerous case studies address collections of student life materials at individual institutions; some of these mention their collection development policies.¹⁰ At Kent State, La'el Hughes-Watkins stated that,

Before engaging in outreach efforts, it was critical to strengthen the policy's language regarding efforts to acquire archival materials of historically underrepresented people and communities. Creating a clear policy sets a tone and provides official documentation of an archives' philosophy.¹¹

Similarly, Aleksandr Gelfand noted the repercussions of a lack of a focused policy for collecting online materials from student groups: a collection that grows too fast to be adequately curated, described, and preserved.¹²

There are even more case studies about how individual institutions within and outside the ARL have reached out to student organizations to fill collections gaps in this area.¹³ This suggests that a wide variety of university archives are dedicated to representing student voices, including Adelphi University, California Polytechnic University Pomona, California State University-Chico, Indiana State, Iowa State, Kent State, New York University, Princeton,

University of California Los Angeles, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, University of Northern Colorado, and Washington State University Vancouver. Archivists in these institutions have focused on a range of materials including oral histories and the online presence of student organizations, as well as a range of approaches to collecting such materials including web scraping and collaborative partnerships with student groups.

This study fills a gap in the literature documenting the growth in archival collections policies that address student life materials, particularly considering the diverse views of campus life that such materials offer.

Methods and Data

This study examined collection development policies and other public-facing statements from 114 higher education institutions within the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), excluding two member institutions that do not have a university archives program and one member institution whose website was not in English. The lead author collected the dataset in December 2020 and updated it in summer 2021. Data collection involved navigating institutional websites for archival programs to search for publicly available documents describing the collecting priorities for the institution. The study looked only at public materials to avoid comparing internally and externally directed policies. This approach also resulted in a dataset of materials that students at these institutions could readily review if interested. In other words, the documents examined are statements from the institution to the public declaring their collecting policies and practices.

It is possible that this approach missed relevant documents; the project was instructive about how differently library websites are structured and how difficult they can be to navigate, an issue that Marshall also noted.¹⁴ The authors welcome correspondence from archivists at ARL institutions whose material was inadvertently omitted from the study.

Additional data gathered about the 114 institutions are described in table 1. After this data collection, the content from the 92 institutions that had available policy documents or

TABLE 1
Institutional Data Points

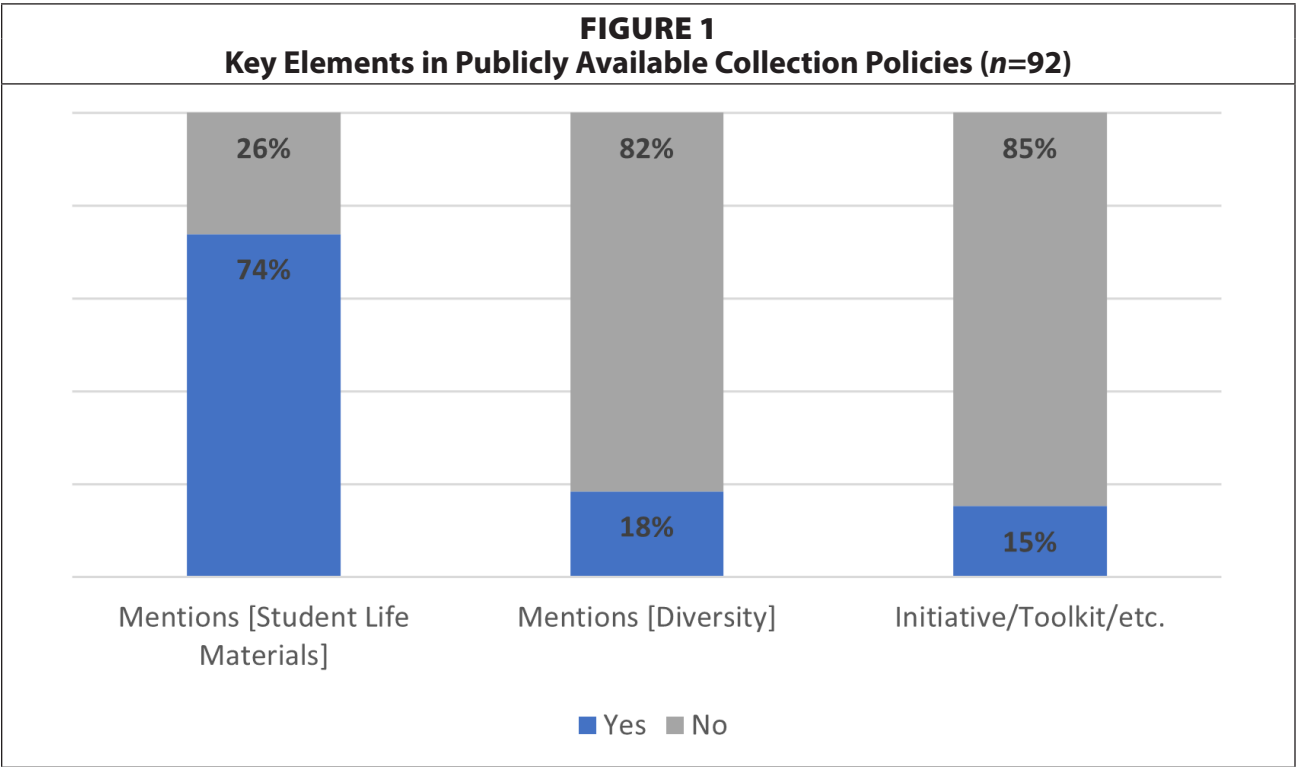
Data Gathered	Definition/Source
Organizational status of university archives program	• Standalone unit • Part of larger special collections unit
Private/public status	Carnegie Classifications ¹⁵
Geographic region	U.S. Census categories
Enrollment numbers and library expenditures	• U.S. institutions: IPEDS 2018-19¹⁶ • Canadian institutions: CARL FY2017-18¹⁷
Commitment to documenting historically marginalized student movements	Membership status in Project STAND ¹⁸
Availability of online archival collections policy	• No policy or statement available to download • Official archival collections development policy posted publicly • Statement other than a formal policy on a webpage or research guide

TABLE 2 Qualitative Coding and Definitions	
Coding Element	Definition and Terms
Does the archival collection development document mention student life material?	Included: Mentions of non-academic student records generated outside the classroom. Excluded: Mentions of general, campus-wide publications such as yearbooks or newspapers.
Does it mention diversity in the context of student life material?	Included: <i>DEI, diverse, diversity, EDI, marginalized, minoritized, minority, underrepresented.</i> Excluded: Diversity in terms of varying topics or formats, rather than creator identities.
Does it include proactive approaches for collecting student life material?	Included: Special initiative, project, research guide, or toolkit.

statements were then coded for mentions of three elements: student life materials, diversity, proactive approaches (table 2). Finally, the lead author examined in-depth documents from four (4) institutions that were coded *yes* on these three elements. This analysis included summarizing specific initiatives, projects, and/or toolkits made available, noting the role of students as outlined by the policy, and delineating why this type of work is important to each institution based on the language of the document.

Findings

Of the 114 ARL institutions included in the dataset, 92 included viable policies or statements that could be analyzed. Of these, about 66 percent (*n*=61) provided public access to the official collection development policy (either via download or posted to the website), and about one-third (*n*=31) provided a statement describing the institution’s collecting priorities. Across all



types of documents analyzed, about 75 percent ($n=68$) mentioned student life materials in some way, but only 18 percent ($n=17$) emphasized diversity as a reason to collect these materials, and only 15% ($n=14$) outlined proactive approaches. Note that of the 26 percent ($n=24$) that did not mention student life materials, there was one institution that did mention diversity. Table 3 lists the 27 institutions (roughly a third of the total 92 institutions analyzed) whose policies mentioned student life, diversity, proactive approaches, or any combination of these three elements. The first four institutions are considered to have exemplary statements, while the remaining institutions are not ranked in an order of distinction.

One finding from the data is that policies that do not mention collecting student life

TABLE 3
Institutions that Mentioned Student Life, Diversity, or Proactive Approaches in Publicly Available Collection Policies

Institution	Mentions Student Life	Mentions Diversity	Mentions Proactive Approach
University of Cincinnati	✓	✓	✓
Colorado State University, Fort Collins	✓	✓	✓
Kent State University at Kent	✓	✓	✓
Pennsylvania State University, Main Campus	✓	✓	✓
University of California, Irvine	✓	✓	
University of California, Los Angeles	✓	✓	
Georgia Institute of Technology, Main Campus	✓	✓	
University of Illinois Chicago	✓	✓	
Indiana University, Bloomington	✓	✓	
Iowa State University	✓	✓	
Purdue University	✓	✓	
Rice University	✓	✓	
University of Rochester River	✓	✓	
Tulane University	✓	✓	
University of Virginia	✓	✓	
Wayne State	✓	✓	
University of Buffalo SUNY	✓		✓
University of Chicago	✓		✓
Columbia University in the City of New York	✓		✓
University of Illinois Urbana Champaign	✓		✓
Johns Hopkins University	✓		✓
University of Manitoba	✓		✓
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	✓		✓
University of Pittsburgh	✓		✓
Princeton	✓		✓
Texas A&M	✓		✓
Rutgers University, New Brunswick		✓	

materials often do not mention students in any capacity, including as users of the archives. That is, of the policies that do not mention collecting student life materials, 83 percent use the word *student* three times or fewer. Many of the ARL institutions based in Canada focus more on records management and retention schedules, or do not have a formal university archives program.

Out of the institutions that mention both collecting student life material and materials from diverse/underrepresented populations, four institutions describe proactive collections strategies, such as guidelines/toolkits for gathering archival materials from students and/or a special initiative for collecting this material. These exemplary institutions—based on publicly available statements—are: Kent State University, Pennsylvania State, Colorado State University—Fort Collins, and the University of Cincinnati. These are all public universities, serving between 26,000 and 48,000 students. They are not the institutions with the highest total library expenditures, falling within \$491-990 per full-time equivalent (FTE) student. These university archives programs are situated within a larger special collections unit, rather than a standalone unit.

Kent State University has several collection development initiatives listed in its collection development policy. The 300+ Initiative works to bring in records from the university's student organizations and educate student groups, "on the significance of preserving historically significant materials."¹⁹ The Kent State University Black Campus Movement Project aims to collect records related to the Black Campus Movement Project that occurred on campus in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as general records related to Black student life on campus.²⁰ The third initiative is its LGBTQ Collection, which seeks collections that document LGBTQ experiences on campus and in the northwest Ohio region. These specific initiatives are targeted efforts to "enrich the historical record of Kent State University," and demonstrate a commitment to collecting stories from historically marginalized communities.

Within Colorado State University's collection development policy, there is a Student Activities section under its collection areas of specific interest. This section discusses a variety of records related to student life on campus and connects its collecting focuses to the university's larger diversity initiatives. Connecting the university archives program with university-wide initiatives is essential for any university program because it shows a commitment to common goals. The policy specifically states that a new focus for the program's outreach will be to work with the university's Student Diversity Programs and Services cluster; in addition, the policy lists specific cultural and resource centers on campus. Beyond the Student Activities section, the overall mission of the University Archives and the oral histories section mention student-related activities and students.

Pennsylvania State University is the largest of the four institutions that included all three elements. It is also the biggest spender of the four, with \$990 total library expenditures per FTE. Its collection development plan mentions students throughout as users and donors. The plan has a specific section dedicated to the University Archives; it specifically references student and campus life records, in addition to records it retains based on retention schedules. In addition to highlighting students, the section mentions a specific interest in records from "students representing historically marginalized communities."²¹ Beyond the collection development plan, the archives provide guidelines for student organization records, which give groups information about preserving their history and donating records to the university archives.

Finally, the University of Cincinnati website includes a page on "Collecting Student Life

Archives.”²² The archives’ website states that, “collecting student life is critical to preserving the diverse history of the university” and it provides three options for collaboration with the University Archives.

These four institutions all clearly state the importance of student life records, as well as the potential role they can play in building a more complete and diverse institutional record within university archives. The institutions all have targeted initiatives focused on doing this work and have stated their commitment via a public facing document. Furthermore, Kent State, Penn State, and the University of Cincinnati all provide ways for students to collaborate with the archives and state a willingness to educate students on the importance of preserving their histories.

Discussion

This study shows that few large research institutions address diversity or proactive collection strategies for student life materials in public-facing statements about archival collection development. While it is encouraging that almost three quarters of institutions with online policies mention student life, the majority do not also mention diversity in relation to student life and/or proactive approaches to preserving this material. Even more discouraging, the number of institutions that mention student life drops to 60 percent when including institutions that do not have any policies online. If archives seek to include underrepresented voices, to diversify archival records, and to actively build engagement with underrepresented student groups then—at a minimum—student life materials must appear in collection development policies. Providing students and student organizations with tools and information regarding their records lets students know that their histories matter and can be part of the institutional record. Giving student organizations options, including providing a home for their records or providing organizations with the tools to preserve their own records, shows a commitment to authentic collecting and honoring student organizations’ histories.

As noted above, institutions may still be collecting student life material and prioritizing the collection of this material even if there is no public-facing collection policy, and/or if public facing documents or statements make no mention of collecting student life materials. However, if institutions do not include this information in a public facing document or statement, they are not calling attention to its importance. The content of archival collection policies or statements indicate what is crucial to the mission and vision of the given institution. Not including student materials in a collection development policy suggests that an institution is not committed to collecting student life materials. It is difficult to assess whether institutions are starting to place more importance on collecting student life materials because the existing studies are not directly comparable. Wagner (2013) used a convenience sample in 2012 and, although all 110 respondents reported collecting student life materials, only 28 (25 percent) included student life materials in their collecting policy.²³ In the current study of 92 ARL libraries, 74 percent of publicly available policies mention student life materials, but only 18 percent of those mention diversity, and only 15 percent delineate proactive collection strategies.

Archival materials that illustrate student life on campuses may also come to the archives via administrative units on campus, such as surveys, student affairs records, or the records of cultural centers and similar units. However, this type of material is often mandated by record retention schedules and they show student life through the lens of the institution, rather than a student’s own perspective. Publications such as yearbooks or student newspapers also

illustrate student life and do typically include students' own perspectives; however, these records come to the archive through the institution rather than students, making them a default collection of student life material, rather than a proactive effort.

In addition to the findings from the content analysis, the data collection for this project highlighted how different and difficult library websites can be to navigate, as well as how wide a range of material provided online is. Special collections and university archives units are situated under a variety of different tabs on library websites, including services, tools, libraries' collections, among others. It was fascinating to observe the range of organization structures, such as institutions where university archives are external to the university library but records management is internal to the library.

As noted previously, a limitation of this study is the possible omission of collection policies or statements that are available online, but that the lead author was unable to locate. In addition, focusing only on ARL institutions excludes the valuable efforts of other kinds of institutions toward archiving student life materials.

Conclusions

Archival collections policies are the heart and backbone of any institution's mission, outlining what they prioritize and deem important. Model policies should address student life materials; the Phillips model mentions students only as potential clientele.²⁴ A core value of the Society of American Archivists is to, "Respect the diversity found in humanity and advocate for archival collections to reflect that rich complexity."²⁵ This does not mean that archivists should be collecting diverse collections for the sake of having diverse collections—which should be considered colonial collecting and which can result in tokenizing—rather, authentic collecting needs to be put into practice. This work needs to become normalized to the point where this collecting happens naturally and collaboratively to ensure that placing records with the institution does not become another way to oppress students, silence their voices, or violate their privacy and sense of safety. Rising to this new priority will stretch severely limited resources, yet it is crucial for institutions to fund such efforts.²⁶

Stakeholders in academic libraries beyond the archives can also benefit from considering student life in their practice. Liaison librarians, instruction librarians, student success librarians, and collection development librarians (to name a few) should all be looking for ways to make students feel welcome in the library. Specifically, these groups can help promote the collection and use of student life archives. Moreover, the habit of reflecting on student life holistically, with an emphasis on historically marginalized groups, can serve broader goals of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Further Research

Examination of ARL institutions is important to get a sense of how predominantly white universities are working to diversify their archives. Further research could solicit policies from institutions directly to account for institutions that have policies but are not making them publicly available. It would also be valuable to examine how archival collection development policies change over time. Would a similar analysis in 5-10 years show changes in what large research institutions say about student life materials?

However, assessing their public-facing policies is only the first step. A survey of, or interviews with, archivists at these institutions would clarify what progress they have made

in collecting student materials and how students have responded to the collections policies practices. This further research would allow for a more in-depth look at the number and size of collections related to student life. Do institutions with exemplary policies also have significant holdings of student life material, or are they still working to acquire collections? Perhaps some institutions have many collections related to student life even though their policies lack the elements addressed in this study. This is important, because collecting statements are not the only way to welcome and include people in an archive; the actual collections are what is most important and where people will find their histories reflected.

Looking beyond the ARL institutions will provide a more complete picture of how student life is reflected in archival collections, especially in the case of Historically Black Colleges and Universities and smaller regional institutions. Finally, student life records are only one avenue to diversifying archives. Other populations on campus are also omitted from the institutional record, such as staff and contract workers. Research exploring how institutions document the role of these essential groups on campus would contribute to the larger project of diversity in institutional archival collections.

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