University Archives Appraisal Guide

# Introduction

The following guide identifies the criteria for designating records as “archival” at Western Washington University. The guide describes both the field of records eligible for archival status and the criteria for designating eligible records as “archival.”

This guide acts as a companion to and under the authority of WWU [Policy U4910.01 - *Managing University Archival Records*](https://policy.wwu.edu/POL-U4910.01-Managing-University-Archival-Records).

The purpose of the University Archives is to document Western Washington University’s history and the fulfillment of its mission by:

* Preserving a continuity of evidence of official acts and decisions.
* Ensuring Western’s accountability to itself, to its stakeholders, and to posterity.
* Safeguarding Western’s archival university records.
* Providing a resource by which Western’s staff, faculty, students, and alumni can connect their work and interests with the institution’s history.
* Sharing Western’s history with the local community and the public.

# Scope of records collected

Since its inception in 1973-74, the University Archives has systematically collected university records—or more precisely the university’s *public records*. The definition of public records, as expressed in RCW 40.14 and RCW 42.56 and further discussed below, includes most of the material typical of a university archives collection. By [policy](https://policy.wwu.edu/POL-U4910.01-Managing-University-Archival-Records), the University Archives refers to the public records of Western Washington University as *university records*. As per the statutory definitions of public records, university records can come in all formats (textual, photographic, cartographic, audiovisual) and relate to all aspects of Western’s mission.

## University archival records are records created or received by Western

Records in the University Archives are selected from the universe of documentation compiled by Western in carrying out its mission. All such records are *public records[[1]](#footnote-1)* as defined in RCW 40.14 and RCW 42.56. According to those laws, “public record” is defined broadly to include any recorded information that was created or received by Western. According to RCW 42.56, for example, *public records* consist of:

* + 1. “writing” (“writing” in this case means any information affixed to a medium, not just text)
    2. prepared, owned, used, or retained by Western
    3. relating to the conduct of Western or the performance of any institutional or proprietary function.

## University archival records come in all formats

Public records are, by definition, format independent. By law (RCW 42.56), a public record consists of “writing,” which is defined as

handwriting, typewriting, printing, photostating, photographing, and every other means of recording any form of communication or representation including, but not limited to, letters, words, pictures, sounds, or symbols, or combination thereof, and all papers, maps, magnetic or paper tapes, photographic films and prints, motion picture, film and video recordings, magnetic or punched cards, discs, drums, diskettes, sound recordings, and other documents including existing data compilations from which information may be obtained or translated.

A public record can therefore materialize as a digital compilation, a photograph, or a movie, no differently than as signed meeting minutes.

## University archival records document all activities

By law (RCW 40.14), public records include not only the “official public record” (e.g., official minutes or signed directives) but also “office files and memoranda” which includes

such records as correspondence, exhibits, drawings, maps, completed forms, or documents not…defined and classified as official public records; duplicate copies of official public records filed with any agency of the state of Washington; documents and reports made for the internal administration of the office to which they pertain but not required by law to be filed or kept with such agency; and other documents or records as determined by the records committee to be office files and memoranda.

Thus, archival records include both records that document the *establishment of policy*through the decision-making process (budgets, boards, committees, executive records, etc.) and records that document the *implementation of policy*in all the various activities of Western (work product, official student activities, curriculum records, event recordings, etc.). Because public records document both the formal official acts and the less-formalized activities or work of the institution, the University Archives collection reflects this comprehensiveness.

# Common functional origins of university archival records

While university archival records can originate in any university office and document any university activity, there are broad functional areas (and related activities and record creators) that commonly accrue archival records at WWU. The following are illustrative of these common areas and related creators and records, but these are not comprehensive.

## Governance, planning, and policy implementation

### Typical record creators

Board of Trustees; administrative units (president, vice presidents, deans, directors); Faculty Senate, including committees; Associated Students Board of Directors, including committees.

### Common record types and subject matter

Minutes of governing boards or committees; reports by or to governing or executive officers; memoranda and correspondence of official nature providing documentation of official acts or decision-making process.

## Academic programs and activities

### Typical record creators

Provost, deans, departments, and program units.

### Common record types and subject matter

University-level curriculum development; departmental course content records (e.g., development of GUR or core courses in a major or minor, including selected syllabi); dean’s administrative records (including reports from departments); records documenting the histories of departments and/or individual programs (including photographic and audiovisual records, including records of events); grant records (e.g. narrative and final reporting when required of the institution); official timetable of classes; general catalog (final published version and development); faculty and staff biographical material; material documenting conference proceedings hosted by Western.

## Student governance, activities, and social life

### Typical record creators

Associated Students (including student government units and university units providing administrative support); student clubs; Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services and constituent offices supporting student activities such as Registrar, Residences, and Athletics.

### Common record types and subject matter

Student governance records (minutes, reports, studies, event records including photographs or audiovisual records); student club records (club rosters, minutes, activity reports, event records, web sites); non-personal student demographic or statistical enrollment information; non-personal residences information; records of Athletics such as game/event films, photographs, or summaries.

## Development of campus physical environment

### Typical record creators

Board of Trustees, Administrative units (president, vice presidents, deans, directors), Capital Planning, Facilities Management, affected departments.

### Common record types and subject matter

Resolutions, plans, and budget documentation relative to major infrastructure development; property acquisition files, including property appraisals; capital projects files (mostly major capital projects); campus master plans; interaction with city, county, state offices regarding construction, property development, site analysis, and inspection; “as-built” architectural drawings; property history files; public relations material including subject files, photographs, and audiovisual material; substantive reports, studies, and plans relating to major developments; outdoor sculpture collection records.

## Campus administration, services, and activities

### Typical record creators

Administrative units (president, vice presidents, deans, directors), campus-wide committees, councils, boards, and task-forces.

### Common record types and subject matter

Reports, plans, studies, and management files; records documenting the history of a program or department, including photographic or audiovisual records.

## Development of Western’s external relationships

### Typical record creators

Administrative units (president, vice presidents, deans, directors).

### Common record types and subject matter

Records documenting interaction with higher education institutions, government officials, and government agencies; records documenting interaction between Western and local communities; public-relations material including photographs and audiovisual material.

# Criteria for determining archival status

The University Archivist uses the following criteria to determine the archival status of a university record. The criteria may be applied individually but are often applied collectively—in other words, the existence of any one of these criteria may be sufficient to designate a record as “archival,” although it is more often the case that archival records meet multiple criteria.

## Official record/legal status

Is the item in question the [official record](https://recmgtdev.wwu.edu/archives-and-records-management-glossary#officialrecord) of a decision or act that must be preserved for posterity?

### Explanation

While any record created, received, or used by Western in carrying out its mission could be eligible for archival status, records that document official decisions or acts have special status. This applies to all governing and executive-level decisions that create and implement policy, such as board and committee minutes and policy directives. The records in this category must constitute the official governing and administrative records of the university. This implies that the record being preserved is in the specific form and version created by the individual or entity by whose authority it can be considered “official”—not a secondary or derivative copy of that record (there are exceptions to this rule that allow for reformatting digital files or other media for preservation purposes, even if preservation of the original might be preferable).

For example, the signed original copy of the Board of Trustees minutes is the “official public record,” not a digitized online version or an audio or video recording of the proceedings. (If the other copies or forms of the official records are also retained as “archival,” they would not be retained due to their “official” status but due to content or uniqueness criteria as described below).

The goal of this criterion is to provide continuity of evidence of official actions. For example, it is important to preserve all the Board minutes in a continuous sequence from the first record to the most recent, not just those from certain years.

## Substantive content

Does the record’s content substantively document a function or activity of the university?

### Explanation

As outlined above, university archival records document all core functions and activities of the university. Records that satisfy this criterion are appraised with respect both to contemporaneous records—in order to determine, for example, how “substantively” a record documents an institutional function in comparison to other records—and to the body of documentation that precedes it in documenting the same function (in order to ensure continuity when documenting the function).

## Research value

Does the record possess significant research value?

### Explanation

Relevance to historical research trends, subjects, and methodologies is also a factor in determining archival value. This may include records commonly created on an ongoing basis such as affirmative action statistical reports or one-time records such as a survey of residents and businesses in a local business district regarding significant zoning changes. This criterion may also apply to the form or format of a record— for example, the need for retention of electronic data sets versus printed reports.

## Uniqueness and diversity

Is the record relatively unique in what it documents or in how it documents functions, activities, individuals, groups, or subjects relating to Western?

### Explanation

Uniqueness by itself does not guarantee archival status. An individual budget status report is “unique” although not archival. However, uniqueness with respect to documenting an institutional function (the development and approval of the university operating budget, for example) will increase the likelihood of archival status.

Additionally, this criterion recognizes the distinctive experiences that individuals or groups may have at Western. In this respect, the criterion supports the goal of making the archival collection representative of these diverse experiences.

## Disclosure status

Is the public access to the record currently allowed—or might access be allowed in the future?

### Explanation

The university archives will seek records that are or will be eligible for public disclosure. This means that the records would, at a defined future date, be eligible for reference by individuals apart from the originating unit, including reference by students, faculty, staff, and the general public.

1. The term “public record” in this case does not necessarily mean a record can be disclosed to the public; “public” here simply distinguishes these kinds of records as a class, as opposed to “private”—even though the goal of the University Archives is to acquire records that can legally be disclosed to the public. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)