

Western Washington University University Archives Appraisal Guide

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.”

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 general public

I. Scope of records collected

Most college/university archival collections contain documentation, generally, from 5 broad areas: university records, faculty papers, university publications, alumni materials, and material about the institution that has been donated from private individuals. In short, a university archives is typically the official, final repository for the historical records of or about the institution, its people, its students, and its activities.

Much of the documentation identified in the preceding statement falls within the scope of collecting outlined below for the University Archives. However, it is worth noting that due to the separate collecting histories of multiple programs on Western’s campus, some of the material described above has been collected into repositories other than the University Archives. Faculty material, privately donated material about Western, and university publications have also been collected by the Center for Pacific Northwest Studies (donated faculty material having to do with Pacific Northwest studies) and the Libraries Special Collections (university publications, masters theses, faculty material, and privately-donated & alumni material). The broad range of material that constitutes “university records” has been collected systematically by the University Archives since 1974.

The University Archives has operated as part of the University Archives & Records Center operation at Western since 1973 (first accessions were in 1974). Its focus since inception has been on university records, chiefly “public records” as defined in law and elaborated more fully below. The definition of “public records,” as expressed in RCW 40.14 and RCW 42.56, is quite comprehensive and includes most of the material already identified as typical of a university

archives collection. Indeed, much of that material comprises the core University Archives collection that has accrued to date. It includes material in all formats (textual, photographic, cartographic, audiovisual) and relating to all subjects relevant to Western.

Furthermore, the University Archives collects records for use by the institution itself—as an administrative need—and also to fulfill the research needs of students, faculty, staff, visiting scholars, and the general public. Material in the University Archives contains both historical evidence of the decisions and functions of Western and also historical information pertinent to countless subjects and of use to researchers in many fields.

The following items further define the field and nature of records which comprise the University Archives.

1. Archival records are selected from all records created or received by Western in the course of its activities

Records in the University Archives are selected from the universe of documentation compiled by Western in carrying out its mission. By definition, all such records are *public records*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” includes:**

1. all “writing” (“writing” = 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.

Thus, as noted above, “public records” includes a great deal of what typically would comprise a university archives collection, and this is reflected abundantly in the material collected over the years in the University Archives at Western.

2. 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

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.

recordings, and other documents including existing data compilations from which information may be obtained or translated.”

A public record can therefore be manifest in a digital compilation, a photograph, or a movie, no differently than in a bound volume of signed meeting minutes.

3. 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 all “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 *expression of policy* in all the various activities of Western (work product, curriculum records, conferences, performances, activities, procedures, etc.). In other words, since public records document both official acts and “non-official” activities or work product of the institution, records in the University Archives reflect this comprehensiveness. Archival records are so designated because they document *any* function of the institution (and in any form) not according to whether they document a *particular* function, contain a select sub-species of information, or exist in a particular format. The records that comprise the University Archives collection document *comprehensively* the activities of the institution in carrying out its mission.

II. Identification and selection of archival records

1. Archival records document the major functions of the institution.

These include:

a. Governance, planning, and policy implementation

- i. Typical record creators:** Board of Trustees records; President's administrative records and subject files; administrative records of vice presidents and major program units; records of committees; Faculty Senate, including committees.
- ii. Common record types & 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. This would include such documentation as President or Provost records relating to accreditation, both in the information gathering/reporting phase and in the response to the accreditation report; development of institutional budgets including coordination with state-level budget process and impact within WWU; and documentation on all subject matter relative to the institution that informs official action.

b. Academic programs and activities

- i. Typical record creators:** Provost, deans, departments, and program units.
- ii. Common record types & subject matter:** University-level curriculum development records (majors, minors, both internal and HECB records); departmental course content records (e.g., development of GUR or core courses in a major or minor, including syllabi); dean's administrative records (including reports from departments); departmental meeting minutes and reports; individual program records (such as Vehicle Research Institute, SMATE, or Center for Service Learning); grant records (final product and reports); official timetable of classes; general catalog (final published version and development); faculty biographical material; material documenting conference proceedings; records (including photographic and audiovisual records) documenting department history or department- or university-sponsored events, including intellectual, theatrical, musical, and other artistic performances.

c. Student governance, activities, and social life

- i. Typical record creators:** Associated Students (including student government units and university administrative

- support of same); student clubs; Student Affairs & subordinate offices such as Registrar, Residences, and Athletics; Alumni Office.
- ii. **Common record types & 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 (hall council reports, RA duty logs); records of Athletics such as game/event films, photographs, or summaries; alumni event and outreach records.
- d. **Development of campus physical environment**
- i. **Typical record creators:** Board of Trustees, President, Provost, Business & Financial Affairs, Facilities Management, affected departments
 - ii. **Common record types & subject matter:** Resolutions, plans, and budget documentation relative to major infrastructure development; property acquisition files; 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 such as the waterfront development or a new building; outdoor sculpture collection records.
- e. **Campus administration, services, and activities**
- i. **Typical record creators:** President, campus-wide committees, Provost, VP Information Technology; VP Business & Financial Affairs; administrative units such as University Communications, Equal Opportunity Office, University Planning & Budgeting; Western Gallery; PAC
 - ii. **Common record types & subject matter:** Reports, plans, studies, and management files of campus departments and program units (e.g., Equal Opportunity Office diversity handbook; faculty code; University Communications records); records of Western Gallery & outdoor sculpture collection management; records of Performing Arts Center Series; records documenting the history of a program or department, including photographic or audiovisual records.
- f. **Development of Western’s external relationships**
- i. **Typical record creators:** President, Provost, VP External Affairs; VP Business & Financial Affairs; Washington

Campus Compact; Center for Economic Vitality,
University Communications.

- ii. **Common record types & subject matter:** President's records documenting interaction with higher education institutions, state & local government, federal agencies; records documenting interaction between Western and local community; Washington Campus Compact secretariat records; public-relations material from University Communications including subject files, news releases, photographs, and audiovisual material.

2. University Archivist determines and assigns archival status

- a. **Appraisal methodology.** The University Archivist usually arrives at an archival designation after an independent analysis of a record's content and functional context, in addition to consultation with record creators (see also list of criteria to follow). The designation typically occurs during the records retention scheduling process, but it can occur at any time, even in the absence of a retention schedule, providing the records are eligible. The following methodologies have affected and will affect the appraisal framework:
 - i. **Hierarchical model.** The appraisal methodology to date has largely followed a classic hierarchical appraisal model. This model presumes the institution is a hierarchical administrative organization with a vertical reporting structure. In this model, executive-level offices are presumed to accumulate more substantive documentation than program-level offices. This model has served reasonably well in times when a predictable and static reporting structure is in place.
 - ii. **Functional model.** The intent of the functional appraisal model is to account for the flattened hierarchies and changing administrative structures of modern organizations. In this framework, records are appraised not solely according to their place in a reporting hierarchy but rather according to the degree to which they document the essential functions of an institution. This does not invalidate a hierarchical approach, but the hierarchical approach can be effectively enhanced with a functional/institutional framework. Indeed, the best appraisal strategies employ a rational combination of both models.

- b. Appraisal criteria.** In determining the archival status of an individual record, the archivist will use the following criteria. These may be applied either individually or collectively—in other words, *the existence of any one of these criteria may be sufficient to designate a record as “archival.”*
- i. Official public record status:** Is the record the official documentation or evidence of a decision or act that must be preserved for posterity?
- 1. Explanation:** While any record created, received, or used by Western in carrying out its mission is 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. 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 *evidence* and *continuity*.
- ii. Substantive content:** Does the record’s content substantively document a function or activity of the university?
- 1. 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).

- iii. **Research value:** Does the record possess significant research value?
 - 1. **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 by a WWU program 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.
- iv. **Uniqueness:** Is the record unique in what it documents or in how it documents an activity, individual, or subject relating to Western?
 - 1. **Explanation:** Uniqueness by itself does not guarantee archival status—an individual budget status report is “unique”—but 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.
- v. **Disclosure status:** Is the record currently or will it in the future be open to the public?
 - 1. **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.