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The Organization and description of the UNLV archives

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UNLV Libraries’ Special Collections was established in the 1960’s. A University Archives was later created in the 1970’s. However, the Archives have never had a University Archivist to oversee its material. The existing inventories were originally organized into discrete manuscript collections. It was then roughly reorganized into series and sub series. In July 2006, I became the newest Archivist within the UNLV Special Collections. I was given the responsibility to refine and expand upon the current organization of the archives. The main areas of focus for this project were organization, a new classification system, and an increased Web presence. The goal of this presentation will be to demonstrate how an archive went from a rough organization to a more refined one and included a modern Web site.
The original physical and intellectual organization of the archives was reviewed by staff of the Special Collections in the summer of 2006. There were already several series created for the current material in the archives. However, there was a belief that it could be reorganized into more series. The thought was that by creating more series for a researcher it would allow them to locate the information that they are looking for in a more expedient manner. Originally, there were four series in the archives. It included an alpha; records; board of regents; and faculty publications series.

The next step taken for the project was reviewing literature on the subject of organizing university archives. The book entitled, *The Management of College and University Archives* by William J. Maher was the primary book utilized in the physical and intellectual organization of the UNLV Archives. It was decided early on in the project by staff that aspects of the University Archives would reflect the school’s academic and administrative organization. This was especially helpful in the organization of the Record Series where the origin of the material was stressed.

The next step for the organization project was investigating other university archives Web sites. The point of this exercise was to get an idea of how other institutions organize and describe their own materials. It also provided an opportunity to see how archival information is being presented on the Web. There were several university archives Web sites reviewed for this project.
It included the archives at the University of Virginia.
It included the archives at DePauw University in Indiana, as well.
However, Oregon State University’s Web site was chosen as a model because it organized and described its material in such a manner that it closely reflected the goals of the UNLV University Archives reorganization project.

The Oregon State University Archives' Web site included an “Institutional Records” page. This page included a link entitled, “List of All Record Groups.” The “List of All Record Groups” link takes you to a page that includes a comprehensive list of all the groups of institutional records in the Oregon State University Archives.
The list is arranged in alphabetical order. However, some of the record groups are listed together under subheadings. The subheadings included colleges & schools, committees & councils, and student organizations. The “List of All Record Groups” page includes an index, as well. Most of the letters on the index have a link within them. A letter with a link takes you to its related record groups.
Most of the record groups on this list have links embedded in their title. There are record group titles on the “List of All Record Groups” page that take you to a separate page with a brief description of the related material. The record groups listed on this page include basic accession information. For example, if you clicked on the link for the Department of Public Health it will take you to a separate page with a brief description on it.
Specifically, this separate page contains a record group’s title, dates, extent, and a brief description of the material within it. The organization and description of the records within these Web pages became the model for the UNLV University Archives Web pages.
The next step for the organization project was consolidating the UNLV material into the current series. The current series now included Publications (formally alpha), Records, Library, Board of Regents, and Faculty Papers and Publications. This meant going through all of the series and moving similar material together. There were several instances where material from one series ended up being moved to another. For example, the Student Senate Minutes were originally located in the Publications series. However, after each series was redefined for this project the Student Senate Minutes were moved from the publications series into the record series. Once the consolidation step was completed it was time to expand upon one of the series.

The record series would end up being expanded upon the most. The plan for the record series would be to organize its material according to UNLV’s current academic and administrative organizational structure (e.g., colleges, schools and offices). Therefore, a review of the current administrative and academic units within UNLV was needed to accomplish this new organization of the records series.
The next step in the project was to now physically move each series' boxes around according to the established intellectual organization of the archives. Space became an issue during this step of the project. Like most archives, there is only so much space to go around for its materials. UNLV Special Collections is located in Lied Library. This is the main library for the university. It is a 302,000 square foot facility that was completed in 2000. However, like most new libraries space fills up fast. Therefore, the UNLV Special Collections needed to move material around in its closed stacks in order to make more space for the newly organized and expanding University Archives.

The next step in the project was to assign a new numbering system to the material within the record series. The original record series included record group numbers (e.g., AC #). However, a new numbering system was needed to accommodate the reorganization of the record series. This was due to the fact that some boxes were added and taken out of the record series during this project. Therefore, this became a good time to apply a new numbering system. The new system would reflect a rough version of the university’s structure. Ultimately, this new system within the record series will help researchers find what their looking for in an expedient manner.
The next step to reorganizing the UNLV Archives was the creation of descriptions for the items within each series. Staff utilized the database software MS Access for this step. A table was created for each series that would include similar aspects like contents, dates, and extent. However, not every table contained the same type of information.

For example, a column heading for subjects was included in the record series table. This column allowed staff to intellectually organize material into related groups. The subjects used in this column included colleges, offices, and organizations.

Each database record that was created within the record series table included a description at the record group level. The description of the record series meant that each group of related boxes would have a database record that included information on contents, dates, extent, and subject. Once a patron locates a record group number that they need from our reports then they’ll use it with our in-house inventory lists that were created for the record series. These in-house inventory lists provide descriptions at the folder level.

On the other end of the spectrum, the database records within the Faculty and Publications series table were be described at the folder level. The nature and smaller size of this series allowed staff to describe it in this manner. The database records created for this series included information on the authors name, dates, contents, extent (i.e., folders), and box number.
The next step to this organizational project was placing the record descriptions on the University Archives Web pages. This process involved multiple steps itself. First, a report was created from the MS Access tables for each University Archives series. Each report would contain specific information pertaining to each series. It would need to be the type of information most useful to a researcher of the University Archives.
Here is a snapshot of the current University Archives homepage. It now includes a link to the University Archives Series page.
Here is a snapshot of the University Archives Series page. It lists a brief description of all five series in the Archives. It even includes links to other helpful Web pages on the UNLV Web site.
The electronic report for the Publications Series was created in MS Access and can be exported into a Word file. The information from these files were then copied and pasted into the Web pages of the University Archives. However, it is important that the Word file be converted to a rich text version. This avoids any formatting problems one runs into when copying and pasting information from one electronic file to another. Rich text is a very basic version of a word processing file. It doesn’t contain any of the extra html coding included in a Word file. Ultimately, the information on the Web site should mirror what is in the Publications Series report. Finally, the rich text file can be printed out and made available to researchers visiting the UNLV Special Collections.
The updates to the University Archives Web pages became important for several reasons. First, it was a great way to provide access to UNLV’s rich and diverse history since it began fifty years ago. Second, these updates will help promote the university to not only its students, faculty and staff, but to the surrounding community during the campuses 50th Anniversary in 2007. This type of promotion helps build pride and support for a local institution.
There were several University Archives Web pages created as the 50th Anniversary approached in 2007. The goal of these new anniversary related pages was to be able to provide an online space that would answer the types of general questions UNLV Special Collections receives regarding the history of the school. There wasn’t an online space up to this point that provided answers to these types of questions.
Here is the updated homepage for the University Archives. It will include a photograph of the UNLV campus back in 1959.
[CLICK]
This photograph comes from the UNLV Photograph Collections.
The updated University Archives homepage will include links to new pages like “UNLV Presidents”, “Timelines”, “FAQs” and “UNLV Bibliography.” Later, a link to UNLV’s 50th Anniversary Celebration page was added to this list. This page was created by UNLV Web Communications for the Office of Community Relations.
The “UNLV Presidents” Web page includes a brief biography of each UNLV president since the campus was relocated to its current location in 1957. The goal of this Web page was to be able to create a place that would answer basic information about each president that has served UNLV. This page even contains a photograph of each president. This page also includes hyper links within certain words in the biography paragraph of a president. If you click on one of these links it will take you to a page with more information on that related word or words. For example, if you click on the words UNLV Alumni Association within President Donald Moyer’s biographical paragraph, then it will take you to the official Web site for this organization.
[CLICK]
Eventually, there will be record group links added to this page. The record group links will be located just after the biographical paragraph of the president. These links will take you to a specific record group number on the records series Web page. The information found next to the record group number will be related to that specific UNLV president. This will give a patron the opportunity to continue their research on a particular UNLV president.
The “Timelines” page includes links to other pages with significant dates regarding the university. Specifically, it links to pages regarding important events in the university’s history, enrollment numbers, university names, and university building completion dates.
The “Timelines - University Building Completions” page provides links to various UNLV Campus Maps Web pages. Each UNLV Campus Maps Web page provides a current photograph, completion date and other relevant information regarding a specific building on campus. For example, if you click on the link John S. Wright Hall, then it will take you to its related UNLV Campus Maps Web page.
The “Timelines - University Building Completions” page includes links to several older photos, as well. These particular links take you to an older photo that has been scanned and placed on the University Archives Web directory. For example, if you click on the older photo link next to the building name John S. Wright Hall, then it will take you to an image that was taken many years ago.
[CLICK]
We have included the collection and photo number within the images URL so that our patrons can locate these images more easily when visiting the UNLV Special Collections onsite. The original prints can be found within the UNLV Photograph Collections.
The “FAQs” page helps answer several general questions regarding the university. Specifically, it helps answer questions ranging from the school’s mascot to the previous names of the university. For example, one of the questions listed on this page is “Who was the first UNLV President?” Another question that gets answered on this page is “How many times has the university changed its name in the past 50 years?” There are a few links embedded within this page that can take you to an actual photo from UNLV Special Collections. For example, when you click on the link “Maude Frazier Hall” it will take you to a photo of the building taken in 1957.
[CLICK]
The “FAQs” page is one of the few places on the UNLV Web site that provides answers to these types of questions in an interactive way.
The “UNLV Bibliography” page was created to provide students, faculty, and researchers a list of print and electronic records on the history of UNLV. It includes several books covering a wide range of topics ranging from student studies to enrollment reports. Hyper-links were created within each title to allow users the ability to access its bibliographic record located within the UNLV Library Catalog.
From there a user can confirm that the material is available to research.
The UNLV’s 50th Anniversary Celebration link was added to the University Archives homepage to allow users access to a Web site with information on the upcoming events on campus. This page is maintained by the Office of Community Relations. It includes the links: “Events and Activities”, “History of UNLV” and “Memorabilia Exhibit.” The link to the UNLV’s 50th Anniversary Web site allowed the University Archives the opportunity to bring its own records together with the campus celebrations. Users can not only locate the university’s historical records online now but have access to the many upcoming anniversary events.
The reorganization and description of the UNLV Archives was an important project for the UNLV Special Collections. The main areas of focus for this project became organization, a new classification system, and an increased Web presence. The goal of this project was to take an archive from a rough organization to a more refined one and include a modern Web site.

This project even provided an opportunity to tie in with UNLV’s 50th Anniversary celebrations.

Ultimately, this archival organizational project will aid researchers in locating the type of historical material they are looking for in an expedient manner.