

# **Donating Materials to the Northwestern University Archives: Student Organizations, Students, and Alumni**

In addition to the papers of faculty members and the records of University offices and departments, the University Archives is happy to receive materials from students, student groups, and NU alumni. These materials shed light on student life and on the academic experience at NU, and also help us complete our holdings of student- and University-produced publications.

## **Typical items welcomed by the University Archives include:**

- **Records of student organizations** (meeting minutes, founding documents, reports, publications, flyers, photographs)
- **Publications** (newsletters, programs, flyers, yearbooks)
- **Artifacts** (buttons, memorabilia)
- **Materials that describe or document your personal experience** at Northwestern (scrapbooks, diaries, correspondence with faculty, administrators, fellow students, and family; photographs, audio-visuals)

Donations of these materials are considered gifts to the University Archives. Donors are asked to sign an agreement which formally signifies that the materials become the actual property of the University Archives. The Archives only accepts materials as permanent gifts and cannot take them as loans or on a temporary basis. As part of the Archives' permanent collection, your materials will be organized according to archival principles, stored in secure, climate-controlled conditions, and will be made available to researchers on a non-circulating basis.

*If you have materials that document your student days at NU, please [contact us!](#)*

## **Frequently asked questions about donations to the University Archives:**

### **What are the benefits of donating papers, records, and other materials to the University Archives?**

You can be confident that:

- your materials are preserved in a secure, climate-controlled environment, and that fragile items will receive consideration for conservation treatment as needed
- information about your materials will be made available through descriptive inventories and, as appropriate, through announcements in newsletters, blogs, or exhibits
- access to the materials will be provided consistently and professionally to onsite and offsite researchers by knowledgeable staff
- your donation will benefit future generations by promoting research, perpetuating NU traditions, and creating new knowledge.

### **Exactly what happens to materials after I donate them?**

After the University Archives receives your donation, whether it consists of one item or many boxes of papers or records, you will be sent a donor agreement to sign, transferring ownership to the archives. Then your materials will be rehoused in acid-free containers as needed, and an accession record will be created to document the receipt and general content of the donation. If collections of papers or records are donated, the Archives staff will follow archival principles and standards as they analyze and organize the materials, including noting or addressing any conservation problems that are found. A finding-aid (also known as a descriptive inventory) ultimately will be produced to help researchers learn about the collection.

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### **Will you take everything in my basement?**

Although the University Archives may not be able to accept everything offered, we welcome the chance to review material; if it is not [appropriate for us](#), we may be able to recommend another repository.

Additionally, once the Archives takes in the materials you donate, we may discover duplicate or unrelated items that we do not wish to retain. We will discuss with you whether you would like these items returned, transferred to another repository, or discarded.

### **Do I need to organize everything before I donate to the University Archives?**

Material need not be organized, but photos and individuals should be identified as much as possible. Archivists are experts at assessing the research value of materials. Because this may be diminished if items are removed or rearranged, you are encouraged to [contact us](#) before discarding, boxing, or reorganizing papers, records, and other materials.

After the Archives receives the materials, we will organize them according to our standards, and will not necessarily retain their original order or format.

### **Who has access to my collection, and can I restrict access to sensitive material?**

You, as the donor, certainly have access to your collection.

The goal of every archives is to make materials accessible to researchers as soon as possible. We may hesitate to allow full access to researchers until the collection is thoroughly analyzed or arranged. There may be conservation issues or confidential materials that may need to be restricted. Sensitive material should not be removed by the donor. Instead, you should discuss with us the possibility of placing reasonable and equitable restrictions on all or part of the collection for an appropriate, limited period of time.

### **Who owns copyright to my materials?**

Assignment of copyright is often complex, and you will want to work with the Archives' staff to clarify issues of copyright ownership. Generally, copyright belongs to the creator of writings and other original material (such as photos and music), but can be transferred legally to others. Moreover, ownership of copyright is separable from ownership of the physical item (the letter or photo). We prefer that donors give not only the physical papers but also any copyright that they might own.

### **Can I take a tax deduction, and can you appraise my collection?**

In certain circumstances, a donor may be able to take a tax deduction for the donation of a materials to an archives. Please discuss this possibility with your tax accountants or attorneys before you donate the materials. *Due to the potential for conflict of interest, the staff of the University Archives cannot give tax advice or provide lawful appraisals of a collection for tax purposes.*

### **How do I donate records, papers, or other materials to the University Archives?**

[Call or email us at the University Archives](#) to talk about what you would like to give us. Once we determine that your donation would be appropriate for our collection, we will arrange with you the best time and way to transfer the items or boxes to the Archives. We look forward to hearing from you!

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