STRATEGIES FOR DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Strengthening Accountability & Inclusion in McDaniel College Archives

Abstract
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Introduction

This document recognizes that archives have a legacy of complicity in upholding white supremacy and other systems of power. It maintains that archival professionals must actively work to address these issues within our profession and institutions.

While these policies were developed in response to campus-wide initiatives to support and empower communities of Color, they seek to address disparities across all underrepresented and underserved populations.

The policies below intersect both internal institutional goals and external outreach initiatives in the hopes that, together, they may create sustainable change and a new, more inclusive paradigm for archival practice. They will evolve over time as we incorporate process feedback and suggestions for improvement from all archival stakeholders.

Responsible Parties

The policies and practices below were developed by the College Archivist and Hoover Library Director in collaboration with the College Administration and Faculty. Day-to-day implementation of guidelines is carried out by the College Archivist and relevant parties, with ultimate responsibility for compliance resting with the Library Director.

Immediate Goals

None of these policies can be implemented without additional preparation and administrative work.

They are predicated on the principle that responsible record care begins with a thorough understanding of the collections. These policies are enacted alongside a comprehensive collection survey of all archival materials, which is in progress. When completed, this review will allow the archivist to:
- Locate offensive material in the collections
- Understand where gaps in the documentary record are
- Locate marginalized voices in the collections

 To that end, the following goals have been set to make implementation possible:

- Review and revise existing archival policies and practices that may hinder inclusivity and accessibility
    - Increase transparency around archival processes and decision-making
- Build respectful and mutually beneficial relationships with underrepresented communities, including students, staff, faculty, and alumni
    - Develop a legacy of trust around the archives as an ally
- Promote diverse narratives using archival collections
- Address and contextualize legacies of white supremacy, heteronormativity, ableism, and sexism in archival collections while protecting archival users from potential reactivation of trauma
- Empower students, staff, faculty, and alumni from underrepresented communities to document and preserve personal and group narratives

Policies

Offensive Material in the Archives

- Scanned and born-digital objects will be kept in their original state. Include warning messages and disclaimer messages on each item with offensive material and on the Archives' website.
  - o The message should include a warning that the item contains potentially offensive material that may trigger some users, that the images and texts are not endorsed by the Library or College, provide historical context about the image or text, and explain why the archives has kept the material.
  - o This action aligns with professional best practices that support open access to all types of information while preserving the archival record in its original state. This approach has been endorsed and adopted by many leading academic archives (see, University of Maryland) as well as the leading professional organization (see Society of American Archivists) in an attempt to engage honestly, transparently, and critically with uncomfortable parts of institutional history.
- For criteria on identifying offensive material, see Appendix A

Internal Policies & Procedures

- o The archives' mission statement will reflect diversity and inclusion
- o The vision statement will emphasize working towards a more inclusive experiences in archival collecting, instruction, and outreach
- o Collection policy will prioritize materials from underrepresented populations
- o Collection description procedures will incorporate anti-racist terminology and description practices
  - ▪ Contextualize legacy description tools with offensive or antiquated terminology
- o A diversity and inclusivity marker will be added to digitization planning to increase findability of underrepresented experiences in archival collections
- o Ethical guidelines for collecting and digitization will protect vulnerable populations from possible retaliation
  - ▪ Guidelines incorporated into donation agreements that thoroughly inform potential donors about the risks in donating material to the archives
- o Prioritize professional development opportunities that enable skill development for handling records with offensive material, building relationships with underrepresented communities, and incorporating diversity initiatives into archival practices
  - ▪ Document completion of the Society of American Archivist's training on Cultural Diversity Competency
- o Restricted document policy will enable equitable access to institutional records

Outreach & Instruction

- o Forefront narratives will highlight underrepresented groups in archival exhibits and community outreach initiatives
- o Instruction:
  - ▪ Prioritize materials that highlight diverse experiences in instructional sessions
  - ▪ Incorporate information on archival theory and use to help students become informed and confident users of archives
    - Emphasize the role of archives in social justice and achieving accountability with people and institutions in power

- Lesson plans will address archives' legacies of colonialism, white supremacy, heteronormativity, ableism, and sexism
  - Use archival silences to emphasize how documentary evidence elevates certain historical narratives and diminishes others
- Community Building:
  - Partner with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and Office of Student Engagement to learn about ways the archives can support minority students
  - Research community building projects in archival literature for approaches and models for creating mutually beneficial partnerships with student groups
- Alumni
  - Work with the Alumni Office to incorporate archival material into publications and events in ways that elevate and empower alumni from underrepresented groups

Appendix A: Identification of Offensive Material

Introduction:

The guidelines below were developed in full recognition that identifying and labeling material as offensive is a culturally prescriptive, subjective act that is bound by the norms and standards of the time during which it was undertaken. As such, this document makes no hard claims to identify what is and is not considered offensive for a particular group or individual.

Identifying Offensive Material

Records with offensive material contain biases against a person or group based on their alignment (real or perceived) with a particular group, such as race, religion, gender, sexuality, disability, etc. Offensive material is not incendiary or defamatory text or depictions directed at an individual.

It is not the Archivist's position to censor materials in any case; rather, records with potentially offensive or triggering subject matters will be provided with suitable warnings to protect users and archives' staff from the reactivation of trauma.

As the primary person in charge of arranging, describing, and providing access to the College's records, the Archivist is the first line for identifying potentially offensive material in the Archives. These instances may be obvious but sometimes they are not. In all cases, the Archivist should make full faith efforts to:

- Consult with communities and group depicted in or related to the records
- Consult with professional literature and other specialized guides
- Analyze the motivations and historical context surrounding the creation of the record
- Research the symbols and events recreated or referenced in the record

In addition, archival users and stakeholders are encouraged to bring questionable records and archival descriptions to the attention of the Archivist and Library staff.

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