

Appraisal Procedures

- Before any archival appraisal is commenced a thorough understanding of the history of YSU (documenting people and organizations that are associated with YSU, materials that are of significant research relating to YSU, and materials of special interest that involve YSU and its role within Ohio and US History.) and its geographical context is required.
- Survey the social and geographical environment for existing documentation (records retention schedule, finding aids and surveys). Use Web 2.0 tools and databases to gather additional material not already in repositories, such as WIKI's and Blogs. Note: If material of a subject, theme, or person is found in another institution, all effort should be made to see that material is transferred to such institution.
- The following questions should be answered: What documents do we need to collect in order to capture the mission, goals & policies of Youngstown State University Archives & Special Collections? What events and phenomena should be documented which fall under our mission and collection policies? What records are not duplicated in other sources (See Acquisition Policy)?
- Documenting the historical development of the local culture using a documentary matrix composed of the following (within Western, U.S. and Ohio History): intellectual, religious, social, economic, political, and military.
- Once you have gathered material you can appraise following several methods.
 1. Evidential and Informational values
 2. Historical Use
 3. Past and present Historiography (philosophy of history)
 4. Documentation strategy: (see above matrix)
 5. Topologies
- Evidential and Informational values: value of the information as evidence of the "organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations and other activities" of the person or corporate role that produced the

record.¹ Informational values of records pertain to the usefulness of records in documenting varying aspects of culture.

- Historical Use: Knowledge of past and current historical use, great emphasis is placed upon precedent.
- Philosophy of History: closely following Historical use, this method uses several methods of historical philosophers to identify areas of history that need to be addressed in appraisal and acquisition.
- Documentation Strategy: Selecting documents that focus on events and phenomena, also refers to using matrixes that capture subject areas.
- Topologies: this method incorporates the study of societal structures and how individuals and organizations create, modify and are affected by such relationships.

Once macro-appraisal is done, a micro record analysis can begin of the documents themselves. Some of these steps will be replicated from macro-appraisal analysis.

Record analysis procedures:

- When were the records created?
 1. Are the records from an important period?
 2. Are the records scarce?
 3. Are the records old?
 4. Do the records cover a long or short period of time?
- Where were the records created?
 1. Location of creation (geographic and structural)
 2. Environment (what were the conditions)
- Why were the records created?
 1. Which agency or person created the records?
 2. What were the principle functions of creating entity or person?
 3. How well do the records document the function, policies, structure, of the agency or person?
 4. What were the circumstance in which the records were created? Legal, fiscal, Administrative purposes?
- What is in the records?

¹ Schellenberg, *The Appraisal of Modern Public Records*, 6.

1. Do the records cover important activities and events?
 2. Do the records contain information about significant people, events trends, and topics effecting the history of YSU?
 3. Do the records provide information, insight, or perspectives not documented by records currently maintained by the archives? Does it complement other records?
 4. Are these records an important resource of information? Do they follow our Collections policy?
- How were the records created?
 1. What medium was used originally?
 2. Were the records transferred to other mediums?
 - Who created the records?
 1. What is the official position of the person who created these records?
 2. Was the creator personally involved in the events recorded?
 3. Did the creator have the expertise necessary to understand the events recorded? Or what was the level of knowledge by the creator?
 4. Does the creator exhibit a bias? And what would that bias be?
 - Object Analysis.
 1. Does the record have intrinsic value as a particularly significant or revered document, or because of the author or an original signature.
 2. Is the physical form, material, or design of the record unique, special, or important?
 3. Is the medium upon which the information is recorded difficult to access or preserve?
 4. Condition.
 - a. Is the record intact?
 - b. Will conservation measures be necessary?
 - c. Is the value, accessibility, or reliability of the records content affected by its condition?
 - Accessibility and Use.
 1. Assess the anticipated use of the materials based on past reference activity and the significance and popularity of the topic.
 2. Assess the potential increase in the value of the record to future researchers.
 3. Are there legal or donor imposed restrictions on the use of the records?
 4. Can the archives preserve and use the record in its original format? If not, does an alternative format affect the value of the record and the information it contains?
 - Cost Benefit Analysis.

1. Does the value of the record, especially compared with current holdings, warrant the time, cost, and space that will be required to maintain it?
2. Does the value of the record justify the application of needed conservation measures?
3. Can the archives adequately store and access the records?
4. Does accessing the information on the record require the acquisition of special equipment or materials?

Some important points to remember about Appraisal:

1. appraisal is not a science, not a mechanistic or formula driven process that somehow magically produces a definitive, correct, infallible answer;
2. appraisal is not free of bias and subjectivity; its results reflect the cultural and other values of the time;
3. appraisal is *the* primary archival function on which all other functions depend – you can't provide access or do 'a & d' on material which doesn't exist; our very definition of what archives are is directly tied to appraisal; in both the traditional and newer meanings of appraisal; some even say consigning records to the furnace is our professional 'rite of passage';
4. the great trinity mystery:
 - apart from some exceptional cases, it is beyond our resources and power to keep all records; which is a pity, because
 - beyond their original use, all records conceivable have their uses; we've come to expect unexpected uses and yet
 - it is almost impossible to accurately predict future use, and when we try, the passage of time can cause serious havoc with appraisal judgments (examples?)
5. destruction to protect privacy is not appraisal, though sometimes very attractive to politicians, privacy extremists, community groups⁽²⁾, and those with a self appointed role to keep the family legends intact;
6. disposal doesn't just mean perpetual preservation or eventual destruction; it includes alternative custody e.g. material which lacks enough significance to be state archives offered to local historical societies or 'places of deposit';
7. it is very easy to justify retaining or accepting something;(we're preservers by nature), but intrinsically difficult to justify destruction or refuse an offer;
8. we've always been reluctant to copy then destroy archival records,⁽³⁾ even though we nominate very few items in our holdings as having 'intrinsic' value;

9. the older records are, and the fewer there are to choose from, the more inclined we are to keep them.²

² <http://www.archivists.org.au/sem/misc/piggott.html>