Appraisal of Faculty Personal Papers in American Public University Archives: The Public Records Retention Schedule versus Cultural and Historical Selection Criteria and the Role of the Archives in the University

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Buenas tardes, colegas. I am Ruth Bryan, University Archivist at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, KY, USA. In this presentation, I’ll be looking at appraisal criteria for faculty personal papers in American public university archives, exploring what aspects of the university can be documented through faculty papers.
Kentucky is in the southeastern part of the United States. Lexington is in the center of the state in the Bluegrass region (known for horses, bourbon, and the University of Kentucky, especially the UK men’s basketball team).
The university was established in 1865 and has a current enrollment of 30,500 students, with 18 colleges granting degrees in over 200 majors. There are 2,500 faculty and just under 14,000 staff, with an overall budget of 3,400 million dollars.
The University of Kentucky is one of 50 “1862” land-grant institutions, established in each state by money obtained from the sale of federal land. Land-grants were established to teach agriculture, the mechanic arts, military tactics, and classical studies to students who couldn’t afford to attend the existing private universities. Subsequent federal funding established two other sets of land-grants, and also established an agricultural experiment station and an extension service to disseminate research from the agricultural experiment stations in each state.

Land-grants thus have a significant state-wide service component as an additional part of their research and teaching mission.
As a land-grand institution, the University of Kentucky is a state or public agency, created and funded by the state. Thus, any record prepared, owned, used, in the possession of, or retained by the university is a public record. Public records are necessary to support each state’s open records law that ensures the public has access to public records of government bodies.
By state law, all public universities in KY must use the State University Model Records Retention Schedule to manage their records. As the university archivist, I use the schedule as *a* selection tool. Records must be kept for their retention period, but sometimes I choose to keep them permanently, even if the schedule indicates they should be discarded. This is because I’m building a university archives of records of historical value.

The records manager uses the schedule as *the* selection tool, following the retention and disposition requirements, because she is assisting administrative offices to be efficient in managing their records and helping the university save money and reduce risk.

The schedule as an appraisal tool works well for university administrative records, but what about for university faculty papers, by which I mean documents created or acquired by faculty at the archivists’ university?
The records manager reports to me, the university archivist, and both of us work in the Special Collections Research Center, a division of the University of Kentucky Libraries. Special Collections collects rare and unique materials in all formats documenting the social, cultural, economic, and political history of Kentucky. The permanent and historical records of the university, including faculty papers, are a part of Special Collections’ larger documentary mission.
That documentary mission is a combined one: Special Collections is an institutional archival repository and a collecting archival repository. This hybrid Special Collections documentary mission follows the American “big tent philosophy” coined by archivist Frank Boles (p. 41) that archival repository missions can vary. So, in the US, archives can serve as both administrative documentation and cultural documentation.
Faculty papers @ UK Special Collections Research Center

▶ “Big tent” allows SCRC to acquire faculty papers to document:
▶ University functions
▶ Evidence of the individual’s research, teaching, service
▶ Archives’ collection development policy
▶ Gaps in the university’s official records.

Agriculture Economics students, 1959

The big tent means that Special Collections can acquire faculty papers to document both university functions and gaps in the university’s official records, as well as to document the evidence of a faculty person’s individual research, teaching, and service and in support of the overall collection development policy.
In fact, individual faculty papers collections themselves can be considered both administrative records and personal papers, because of the roles faculty have at the university.

So, individual faculty papers can also be considered both public records (owned by the people through the state) and private papers (owned by the individual creator).
So, if faculty papers operate as both public records and private personal papers, but since we have a state law that mandates how we deal with and select public records, and, we have archival practice that guides how we deal with and select private records, this raises several questions:

Are the documents created and used by faculty public records, private records, or a combination? The university has a regulation that disclaims university ownership of intellectual property in traditional products of scholarly activity, but this doesn’t cover tangible property ownership. So, how much does the retention schedule apply to faculty documents? Can I continue to make appraisal exceptions to the schedule? Do I need to rethink the role faculty papers play in the archives? What should records management training for faculty consist of?
So, I decided to ask my colleagues. This summer, I sent 70 emails to 63 university archives in US land-grant universities. I asked 35 questions about whether they acquired faculty papers and how they select within and among them. I asked for their state’s public records definitions and for demographic information about their archives.
I had 26 responses, or a 37 percent response rate, with all regions of the US represented. Interestingly, the vast majority of university archives are housed within the university library.
1. 24 of 26 or 92% collect faculty papers

2. 20 of 26 or 77% have or use some kind of records retention schedule

3. Of those 20, 11 or 61% (of 18) use the retention schedule to appraise within faculty papers.

4. Of those 20, 7 or 39% (of 18) don’t use the retention schedule
Reasons for collecting faculty papers included to support the special collections collecting areas; to document faculty roles in service, academics, or both; to document underrepresented groups and events; and to document a faculty person’s entire life or career. Many respondents used the words “impact,” “success,” and “distinction” as a reason for acquiring an individual faculty person’s papers.
Reasons for collecting faculty papers:

- “We are open to faculty papers in all disciplines and formats, but focus on our historical collecting strength areas in traditional land-grant topics…” Consideration will also be given to faculty with a national reputation, a topical relationship to other collection strengths, or with connections to underdocumented communities.

- “Faculty papers offer insight into the history and operation of the University that otherwise may be lost by relying only on official administrative records…Faculty papers document the academic life of the University and relate one’s academic career to his or her total interests, thereby constituting an important record and providing a full compliment of perspectives regarding the historical activities of [the university].”

For example, one respondent said (read second quote).
Reasons for collecting faculty papers:

- “We consider length of tenure, professional standing in the faculty member’s field of study, and significance of their work to the local or statewide community.”

- “We are most interested in the papers of faculty with national reputation in their academic field and/or with significant impact at our university. We have focused attention on those faculty that have been awarded Distinguished Professor status…”

Another respondent said (read second quote).
Looking more closely at the 11 respondents, or 61%, who use the retention schedule as an appraisal tool:

1. 6 or 60% (of 10) consider faculty papers public records; 4 or 40% consider faculty papers to be private

2. 9 or 82% use additional appraisal criteria, while 2 or 18% do not

3. 6 or 60% (of 11) use a deed of gift as the acquisition form, 1 or 10% use a transfer form, 3 or 30% use different forms depending on circumstances
Respondents’ comments about faculty papers as public records included (read first and third quotes).
Of the 11 or 61% who use the schedule as an appraisal tool

Respondents’ comments on using additional appraisal criteria beyond the retention schedule (read first and second comments).

Comments on using additional appraisal criteria:
- “I look for definitive work within the faculty member’s field, data with long-term research value, and anything which documents the history of the institution and its communities.”
- “We have a guide that identifies the types of materials often found in faculty papers that we may keep and those we will not.”
- “Collection guidelines for series level content (e.g., correspondence, data files, photographs, etc.).”
- “We do not keep research files/copies.”
Respondents’ comments on using a deed of gift as the acquisition form include (read comments):

Interestingly, using a records schedule as an appraisal tool would seem to indicate that faculty papers are public records; yet, the majority of the 11 respondents use a deed of gift or varied acquisition forms, indicating that, for them, faculty papers are considered either privately owned by the faculty member or are joint private/public.
Looking a bit more closely at the 7 respondents, or 39%, who don’t use the retention schedule as an appraisal tool:

1. 4 or 57% consider faculty papers to be private, while 3 or 43% consider faculty papers to be public.

2. 6 or 86% reported using other appraisal criteria other than the records retention schedule, which makes sense, as they reported not using the retention schedule as a selection tool.

3. 6 or 86% use a deed of gift or varied forms as the acquisition form. 1 uses a transfer form

Respondents’ comments on faculty papers as public records include (read comments).

In this group, not using the schedule as an appraisal tool is aligned with considering faculty papers to be privately owned.
Some conclusions from the survey results.

1. The deed of gift is the main method of acquisition.

Regardless of whether archivists consider faculty papers to be public or private records.
Regardless of whether the records schedule is used as a selection tool or not.

2. There is quite a lot of variation in whether faculty papers are considered public records or not.
Many consider portions of collections to be public/private.

3. The records retention schedule plays a role in appraisal within collections.

Regardless of whether archivists use a deed of gift or another acquisition form.
Regardless of whether archivists consider faculty papers overall to be public or private records.
Faculty papers are collected in order to support the collecting areas of the special collections and archives; document the faculty person’s scholarship and research; provide insight into the university as a whole; and document underrepresented groups or events.

So, through the individual papers of faculty, land-grant university archives function to not only provide documentation of the university’s administrative activities and functions, but also the university’s role in research, education, and service. The archives can also function as a correction to the prevailing master narrative about groups or events by acquiring documents that provide a viewpoint different from or in addition to the official university record. Faculty papers can assist with this documentary goal, as well.

And, again, many respondents prioritize which faculty papers to acquire based in some measure of the faculty person’s success, impact, or distinction in their field or in the university.
Some directions from the conclusions based in the survey results for university archives at the university of Kentucky:

Our acquisition methods and use of the schedule practices are basically in line with our colleagues. We should move to considering faculty papers as privately owned but including public records, which means we will be using different appraisal criteria within individual collections. We still need to consider how to discuss managing those specific public records with faculty.

And, finally, because of our land-grant service mission, I suggest that we should strive to widen the collecting criteria for which faculty papers to acquire beyond distinction in career and into service more broadly.
Thank you. Here is my selected bibliography.

**Selected Bibliography**

And here is my contact information. Muchas gracias por su atencion.