

Archives and Special Collections Strategic Plan – 2013-2018

Introduction

The Archives and Special Collections Department (A&SC) operates under one guiding principle – the unique resources under our care are meant to be accessed, used, handled, researched, and shared. We see ourselves as an active learning laboratory, where the interaction between patron and materials is critical to the processes of discovery, analysis, and knowledge creation. We seek to facilitate those processes through a user-centered approach to service and access.

As our aim is to support and promote the interaction between our patrons and our materials, we measure our success based on how well we can facilitate that interaction. In order to achieve success, we rely heavily upon collaboration with and assistance from our colleagues throughout the college. We rely on our fellow librarians, who are similarly charged with managing informational resources and educating others about their value and complexity. We rely on colleagues who manage hardware, software, and their own technical expertise, since the preservation of information today is almost entirely an electronic enterprise. We rely on individuals in campus offices to be mindful of their own activities, and how evidence of those activities needs to be consciously preserved for future use. And we rely on faculty, students, and other researchers to make discoveries within our resources, and to share these new ideas and new knowledge with the wider community.

This strategic plan has been drafted in order to articulate the principal responsibilities and aspirations for A&SC as reflected in our mission and through our strong commitment to access and service.

Goal 1: Enhance and expand online presence.

A&SC launched a new website in the fall of 2012. The new site provides a place for much of the content from the older “Chronicles” website, and is extensible in its architecture to allow for new content to be created and shared in various ways. The new site, for the first time with any A&SC website, also provides places for both collection-level finding aids and item-level descriptions of resources.

Besides the departmental website, resources of A&SC are shared via multiple project-based college websites, including “Women’s Experiences at Dickinson College,” “Slavery & Abolition in the US,” the “James Buchanan Resource Center,” “Their Own Words,” “Three Mile Island Emergency,” and the “Chronicles.” In addition, resources are shared via Flickr, an external image-sharing service that helps to make our resources more discoverable and accessible to wider audiences.

By enhancing and expanding our online presence, we seek to improve the visibility and accessibility of our unique resources.

- Objective 1: Complete the transfer of appropriate content from the “Chronicles” site to the new A&SC website.
- Objective 2: Add content regarding the history of the college to the new website.
- Objective 3: Digitize and upload photographic images of college people, places, and events.
- Objective 4: Complete process for describing content of digitized *Dickinsonian*.
- Objective 5: Explore the possibility of digitizing other college publications for web delivery.

- Objective 6: Digitize and upload select audio and visual materials reflecting the history of the college.
- Objective 7: Explore the creation of subject-oriented resource guides to A&SC holdings.
- Objective 8: Explore the use of other external services to share unique resources.

Goal 2: Make resources more searchable and discoverable.

A&SC has, in past years, shared information about its holdings only after a collection is fully processed, with a reasonably detailed and descriptive finding aid being uploaded to the library website as a PDF document. This approach ensures that contextual information about the collection is available at the point of discovery in order to make the materials more understandable to potential patrons.

As the volume of material being generated and added to the collections greatly exceeds the ability to fully process those materials, a more minimal initial approach to processing is warranted. These minimal approaches may take many different forms and be customized depending on the material. The result is that we can make basic information about all of our resources available on the web, rather than having detailed information about only some of our resources. More detailed processing of select materials can subsequently be considered based on past usage, expressed interest, and available resources.

By improving the amount of basic descriptive information available online, as well as improving the usability of our website, we seek to increase the usage of our resources by patrons of all types.

- Objective 1: Upload all finding aids for fully processed archival and manuscript collections, as well as for collections that are only inventoried or partially processed.
- Objective 2: Upload images and descriptions of select resources to the document content type.
- Objective 3: Create inventories for all archival and manuscript collections not yet processed, and consider more detailed processing only if and when focused interest is evident, or appropriate resources become available.
- Objective 4: Explore modules, plug-ins, and other enhancements to the current website to improve the searchability of resources within the site.
- Objective 5: Examine the viability of implementing a software tool designed specifically to manage archival and manuscript holdings.

Goal 3: Increase onsite usage of resources by patrons.

The changing of the curriculum through the years, the increased availability and greater convenience of informational resources online, and the specialization in areas of faculty research has the result that the unique holdings of A&SC are often overlooked or else viewed as less relevant by Dickinson students and faculty members. While usage by researchers external to the college community has generally increased merely through the somewhat passive act of sharing more resources via the web, usage by internal audiences increases only through constant, proactive efforts to raise visibility of and interest in these unique materials.

As a means of enhancing both the curriculum and the co-curriculum, we encourage exploration and seek to increase usage of our resources by the college community.

- Objective 1: Develop targeted approaches for making faculty members aware of available resources that may be relevant to their teaching and research.
- Objective 2: Explore opportunities to enhance the co-curriculum by working closely with student organizations and their representatives.
- Objective 3: Experiment with new programming initiatives to raise awareness about A&SC throughout the Dickinson community.

Goal 4: Shape the collections to more closely reflect the needs of faculty and students.

The holdings of A&SC are, to at least some extent, fluid and organic. New subjects being taught and new methods of teaching may require the addition of unique resources in support of these curricular changes. In addition, faculty members and undergraduates may generate new resources in the course of their researches that are appropriate for deposit among the special collections. At the same time, materials acquired in the past will not necessarily be of use to students and faculty members today.

In order to fulfill our mission in support of the educational program of the college, we seek to improve our special collections holdings to meet the ever-evolving teaching and learning landscape.

- Objective 1: Acquire new material to complement and enhance existing holdings, allowing for increased depth in areas already identified as collecting strengths.
- Objective 2: Work with faculty members to identify areas of collecting interest that would support the curriculum and enhance the teaching process.
- Objective 3: Review and update the collection development policy to ensure that it reflects new areas of interest as well as new procedures for acquisition and deaccession.
- Objective 4: Continue to identify materials deemed inappropriate for A&SC and remove them from the collection.

Goal 5: Ensure the proper preservation and dissemination of the burgeoning college archival record.

The activities of A&SC are not limited to managing and handling records of the distant and recent past. They also include attention to and management of the documentary record that is currently being created and will be created in the future. Organizational structures grow and evolve, institutional activities and responsibilities change, technologies are developed and replaced, and the sheer volume of informational resources being generated continues to increase, all at a relatively rapid pace when compared with the past.

To support the administration of the institution, we seek to secure an appropriately comprehensive and balanced record of the college and to guarantee the long-term viability of these informational resources.

- Objective 1: Explore new technologies and new techniques for acquiring and maintaining the college archival record.
- Objective 2: Communicate with offices and departments about the changing needs and expectations regarding their record keeping practices.
- Objective 3: Continue to articulate the importance of a centralized, institution-wide approach to records management.