Origins

Decades before university records were recognized elsewhere for their historical value, Dr. Vander Velde began already in the 1930s to search for documents throughout the University of Michigan campus that would illuminate the institution's past. At the same time as he was defining a collecting scope and strategy for the history of the state, “Dr. Van” was also looking inward, within the university’s administrative and academic offices, with the help of a Committee on University Archives and a typewritten survey for distribution throughout the campus. In its survey letter of April 1936, the new committee asked that each contacted unit supply the committee with “such essential details as the years covered, where they are kept, and how (i.e. in files, boxes, etc).”

The response was immediate. Early accessions included Regents proceedings dating back to 1845, score cards and the university athletic association’s constitution of 1891, early presidential and faculty papers (including President Angell’s own scrapbook), class memorabilia, Jasper Cropsey’s sketchbook and his painting of 1855 of the university, Alexander Jackson Davis’ plan for the university from 1838, sketches of campus by Wilfred B. Shaw, the dedication program for the Baird Carillon within Burton Tower, and an assortment of ephemera including sheet music of “The Yellow and Blue,” all duly noted by date and donor in the first accession book.

The 1936 survey instrument and the resulting accessions together characterize the aim and success of the university archives program throughout the twentieth century. Subsequent directors were just as strategic as the first, with Director Robert Warner and Curator Ruth Bordin advising in the book *The Modern Manuscript Library* in 1966 that, “to collect successfully, there must be a plan, not a spur of the moment inspiration but a carefully-drawn, thoughtful program that implements the main purpose of the library.”
University Archives and Records Program

As of the 1970s, the university’s size and modern administration were producing vast streams of documents beyond the core activities of research, teaching, and learning. In 1979, the Bentley launched what came to be known as the “University Archives and Records Program” (UARP). Forty years after the first survey was distributed across campus, another survey was created, with its emphasis a more modern one relating to costs, accountability, risks, and efficiencies. Findings from the survey substantiated the archivists’ intuition and experiences, that the university’s administrative records had indeed become more complex, voluminous, and varied in their origins, distribution, and purposes. One finds in earlier communications a consistency to the archives’ approach to appraisal and transfer of records as “an individualized approach,” within the university’s “autonomous structure,” whereby records management occurs through “individualized work” and “consensus decision making,” with an emphasis on “central administrative units, primarily the executive officers, and records of the various university deans.” Over the past two decades through the efforts of archivists Julia Young, Marjorie Barritt, and Nancy Bartlett, the Bentley Library has established regularized procedures for the holding and transfer of inactive records from the administrative offices in the Fleming Building. In 1992 the library secured space in the basement of that building for a records holding center that is operated jointly with the Executive Offices of the University of Michigan. During those same decades, the library conducted extensive review and transfer of records of the university’s schools and colleges, most notably: the Graduate School; Literature, Science, & the Arts; Law; Medicine; Architecture; and Information.

Documenting the University of Michigan

From the earliest days of the Michigan Historical Collections, faculty papers were considered essential as a source for understanding the intellectual life of the university community. The papers of faculty members such as Henry Carter Adams, Charles Horton Cooley, Elizabeth Crosby and Leslie White are among the most consulted collections in the library. The rhythms of academic careers have evolved over time, incorporating new technologies for research and communication, encouraging multi-institutional collaborations, and searching for funds for intensified research. There has emerged a greater distinction between scholarship and university administration, and patterns of mobility from one university to another. Past practice of the archives could rely on the faculty’s pattern of lifelong loyalties to Ann Arbor with preserved documents on stable media typically at the ready for transfer from faculty offices and homes to the archives at the end of a career. These earlier records contained a seamless continuity of leadership between academic units and administration in an era, especially prior to mid-century, when senior faculty wore several hats at once. Archaeologist James B. Griffin (1905-97), for example, was professor, curator, administrator, mentor, and consultant in an era when senior faculty’s names were practically synonymous with the units they led. His 215 linear feet of papers at the Bentley mirror all the roles he played.
A newer identity and patterns of productivity of Michigan’s faculty have required the Bentley’s archivists to engage with these creators of documents at a much earlier phase, even at mid-career for some designated faculty. Before any initiative to document an individual faculty member is undertaken the following criteria concerning his or her academic achievements are considered by the archivists as a team: significance of work, quality of documentation, likelihood of use by future scholars, accessibility over time, degree of identification with the University of Michigan, representation of the under-documented, and extent of leadership among academic peers.

**Digital Records initiatives**

The most dramatic intensification for the entire UARP staff is the archival appraisal, description, and preservation of digital records generated by the university. The presidential papers of James Duderstadt offered a wonderful opportunity for the UARP staff to develop a model for the archival preservation and promotion of use of records generated, used, and retained digitally. In this case, President Duderstadt generously devoted considerable time and invaluable resources to conferring with the Bentley Historical Library staff on the nature of his collection. In a series of meetings, he provided critical information on the technical attributes of his files, the methods he employed for organizing and naming his files, and the relationship of individual files to each other. In 1996-97, he contributed 2,144 computer files (160.5 megabytes) and an additional eight linear feet of paper-based records to the Bentley. Archivists Nancy Deromedi and Kathy Steiner processed the Duderstadt papers and digital files side by side, analyzing their complementarities and describing them in one finding aid, which is itself available online through the library’s website (at [http://www.umich.edu/~bhl/EAD/index.html](http://www.umich.edu/~bhl/EAD/index.html)).

Subsequent to that early initiative digital records began flowing into the Bentley Library. In 2005 the provost’s office contacted the library to announce that a pilot program was underway to transfer the promotion and tenure process in select schools to an entirely digital operation. This would mean that all documentation would be assembled digitally, circulated digitally, and then stored for posterity in digital form. Bentley staff joined in an effort to analyze relevant issues and the process of information flows to the point that now promotion and tenure records are “stored” at the Bentley on secure servers. Out of this experience the staff of the University Archives and Records Program worked in a variety of information environments to transfer born digital records to the custody of the archives amounting in the terabytes. In 2008 the UARP staff began to talk with the California Digital Library to engage their services as a place for the storage and management of web content. This fee based service proved a more efficient service that replicating the program on the UM campus. By 2011, the library has accessioned more than 600 websites. Also in that year the UARP staff was very important in assisting the director of the library in making application to the Andrew W.
Mellon Foundation for grant support to design a methodology for the archiving of electronic mail. The grant of $290,000.00 was awarded in the fall of 2010.

All this activity though concentrated in UARP for many years, began in 2009 to spill over to all aspects of the library’s work. The reference division received increasing requests for scanning of documents and images to the point that by 2011 three scanning stations were established in the library. The Michigan Historical Collections began receiving an increasing amount of material in digital form. Because of these technical pressures on the library’s operations, a new division was formed in 2011 called Digital Curation under the leadership of Nancy Deromedi. This division would have the responsibility for working with issues that derived from the particular nature of digital and born digital archival material.

**Bentley Partnership with the U-M Athletic Department**

For years, the U-M Athletic Department had been besieged with questions about the history of the university’s sports programs and student athletes. Journalists, television producers, scholars, former U-M athletes and their families, and sports buffs all sought information or images about Michigan athletics. In June 1990, former U-M Athletic Director Jack Weidenbach and Sports Information Director Bruce Madej met with Bentley administrators to discuss launching a pilot project to ensure the preservation of Athletic Department records, photographs, game films, programs and other historical materials on Michigan athletics. These records complemented the Bentley’s existing collection of materials on U-M sports, much of which was collected over the years from U-M offices, coaches, alumni, and fans. Mr. Weidenbach and Mr. Madej also sought to move the responsibility of replying to researcher requests from the department to the library, which was functionally organized to take on this task.

The pilot project lasted two years, during which time Bentley archivist Greg Kinney undertook an extensive records survey of all Athletic Department offices and storage areas, identified and transferred historical materials to the Bentley, and processed the records so researchers could have access to them. The project succeeded so well that in March 1993 the Athletic Department and the library agreed to a permanent partnership, with the Athletic Department paying for one-half of an archivist’s salary and the Bentley Library preserving and enhancing access to the department’s administrative and historical records. Through this joint venture, the Bentley now holds one of the preeminent college sports archives in the nation. Academic researchers, students, fans, and media representatives all have access to the rich documentary resources about collegiate sports at Michigan.
Student Collections

Students and alumni hold a place of honor in the archives. Their presence is immediately visible in the reading room since the registration desk itself is a student desk of the nineteenth century. Their voices linger, secure in the archives. Hear Judson Collins of the very first graduating class, the class poet for the very first graduation:

“And dark the glow
Which fitful clouds in their wandering way
They intercept the light of love cast all
Around. Enough of this. How joyous yet
How swiftly gliding were the days
Which we have spent together and the year
Seems as a pleasant dream—fading from sight.” Judson Collins, 1850

Students have ever since memorialized their experiences—both fond and rebellious, serious and whimsical, intimate and exuberant—in letters, diaries, photographs, scrapbooks, posters, recordings, and their very own publications. Among the earliest records are those of the student societies of the 1840’s and 50’s that explored issues of the day and kept meticulous minutes of their proceedings. Then there are the more than 1,500 medical school theses of the mid-nineteenth century that are a much-consulted source on medical practice. Raoul Wallenberg, an alumnus, wrote to his alma mater after graduation with a fondness and respect for the advice former faculty would still so generously give. Websites have become the latest version of student scrapbooks, with the College of Engineering Solar Car Teams’ sites among the first digital accessions transferred to the archives. The collective memories of early female students have been recently compiled both online and in print in a volume, entitled Women’s Voices, carefully prepared by two of the library’s volunteers, Doris Attaway and Marjorie Barritt.

Publications and Printed

Publications are the most sizable legacy of the founding of the university, with the private libraries of co-founders John Monteith and Father Gabriel Richard at home in the archives. As soon as printers were established in the area, the university was ready with content to be published and distributed. Regents proceedings, annual reports, campus directories, bulletins containing degree requirements, yearbooks, faculty research, and student publications have accumulated steadily since 1837. These materials are of value as they
maintain the university's profile, measure its successes and limitations, and promote campus esprit.

There are also exhibits of the creative talents of students, including Arnold Gingrich, James Earl Jones, Jessye Norman, Margaret Bourke-White, Mike Wallace, and many more who went on to such impressive careers in publishing, journalism, photography, and performance.

The very definition of “publication” today encompasses not only the printed page but also digitally delivered images, sound, and text. This radical departure from a predictable accumulation, volume by standard volume, of series dating over 150 years in duration poses one of the most significant challenges to the university archives. As of the mid-1990s, the university embraced digital delivery for much of its administration, coursework, research, and news dissemination. While addressing such formidable issues as the appraisal, description, preservation, and promotion of use of digital publications, the UARP staff continues to maintain the “individualized approach” in working with the university’s central administrative offices and academic units to ensure the smoothest possible transition into the era of digital archives.