

Thursday, March 12, 2015

2:45-3:45PM

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[LINK TO CLIR CONNECT DISCUSSION THREAD](#)

The Living Donor and Archives: Strategies, Benefits, and Challenge

DESCRIPTION:

There is still much to learn regarding the benefits, challenges, and strategies that come with working with a living donor. At the David C. Driskell Center, we have had the opportunity to work directly with Professor David C. Driskell who donated his personal papers. Since the donation in 2009, Prof. Driskell, has been involved with and supportive of the cataloging of his papers by providing his time, knowledge, and resources. While this has been beneficial, it also introduces a challenge regarding how much the donor should be involved in aspects of the project including: the overall process of cataloging; reclaiming objects; changing restrictions and redactions of documents; withholding of material; visiting rights and free access to the archive; and influence the design of space and purchased of equipment.

Some of the strategies and approaches we have developed for completing a successful project began by laying the groundwork for open, unobtrusive, and thoughtful communication which persisted throughout our project. This included: a) taking advantage of the physical proximity to the donor, who lives only 10 minutes from the Driskell Center where the papers are housed; e.g. the Center was able to conduct several interviews were held with the donor before and during the accession of the collection wherein he discussed his collecting habits, organization of his papers, and contents; b) gaining and incorporating information and knowledge only available from the donor who is now 83 years old; c) utilizing accessibility to his resources, e.g. his remaining papers, assistants and family members, and supporters who helped organize the papers and could shed more light on specific objects; d) taking the opportunity to meet with the donor often since he was willing to work with the Center to identify photographs and unidentified documents; and e) utilizing our access to the donor and his circle of friends and family to secure financial support for the project.

The outcomes of our strategies have included: a) the development of an intimate, respectful, close relationship between the donor and the Driskell Center; b) development of clear restriction guidelines; c) a more thorough understanding of the provenance, history, and importance of the Driskell Papers, including clarification of information related to specific objects and identification of most of the 1,000 photographs in the Driskell Papers; d) the donation of additional material was donated to the Center as trust continues to build; and e) an ongoing advocacy by the donor and his circle of friends and family who continue to spread the word about the Driskell Center Archives.

The hope is that this discussion attracts archivists from other institutions who have been in similar situations of working with living donors. We hope to use our own experience and the knowledge of other institutions that have been in similar situations to inform a set of shared notes highlighting the benefits, challenges, and strategies used to fully take advantage of the opportunities and overcome the challenges of this particular issue.

Agenda:

2:45-3:00: Introduction of participants and projects.

3:00-3:30: Discussion of individual experiences as well as issues that participants can foresee:

- What are the benefits?
 - Better understanding the collection--how they decided what to give, what not to, general context
 - Talking with processing staff
 - Talking with reference staff--helping them understand the importance, the history, giving them a personal connection
 - Talk to researchers about objects, experiences, etc.
 - Assistance with appraisal--helping us understand what importance is of certain materials
 - Identifying specific documents/data/photographs - metadata but also importance
 - Help with collection development - bring in more collections
 - Monetary donations--funding employees, exhibitions, materials, endowments
 - Ask -- giving money allows us to process faster, provide material
 - Donation
 - Personal connection
- What are the challenges?
 - Setting appropriate expectations for their donation, your time, their collection
 - Communication paths between donor and organization--who is the owner of the relationship? Are all things being communicated to all people?
 - Funding--competition for funds, lack of knowledge on if they'll be expected to donate, what their future financial responsibilities are, misunderstanding of what it takes to process and maintain a collection
 - Making donor understand what archivists do, what archives are, ensuring that they realize what will happen with their materials

- Continued access to their collections--what are the boundaries? what are the rules? What are the expectations for future access?
- Emotional connection to collection--hard to let go of materials, assuring they feel valued
- Political correctness, bureaucracy
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- What are the strategies we can use to make this relationship as positive for both parties as possible?
 - Communicating on basic, honest, open level at the outset
 - Standardizing a worksheet/document on website or as handout to explain what will happen to their collections once they get to you
 - Clearly, accurately documenting legal issues, their rights, what legally will happen with papers
 - Diagram/document what you can/can't do
 - Setting up tours, meetings, explaining, showing what collection will look like
 - Consulting the right people (lawyers, funding departments, development office)--gaining relationship with with these people. Making personal connection with higher-ups. Give tours, help them meet the people who work with collections.
 - Being prepared for unexpected financial windfalls from donors
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- What has worked and what hasn't?

3:30-3:45: Develop a list of tips and suggestions or a set of shared notes on what has been discussed. (The format and outcome is subject to change based on the flow of the session and its participants' interests.)