INTRODUCTION

What are archives and why are they important? Archives document and are intertwined with culture. An archive or archives represent an accumulation of historical records, or the physical place they are located. The Society of American Archivists (2013) defines archives as collections of “materials created or received by a person, family or organization, public or private, in the conduct of their affairs and preserved because of the enduring value of the information they contain as evidence of the functions and responsibilities of their creator, especially those materials maintained using the principles of provenance, original order, and collective control: permanent records”. Archival records are normally unpublished and almost always unique, unlike books or magazines for which many identical copies exist.
There is a large body of literature tracing the origin of archives. Posner (1972) provides an in-depth analysis of archives in the ancient world beginning with early examples of clay tablets from the third and second millennia B.C. in the ancient Near East and on writing tablets or papyrus in the empires of ancient Greece and Rome.

Hunter (2003) traces the beginning of modern archives to establishment of the General Archive of Simancas, Spain, in 1543. The principles and practices of archival management used in Europe and North America were derived from those established in France as a by-product of the French Revolution (Hunter, 2003; Panitch, 1965). Although the French National Archives was created in 1790 during the Revolution, national archives were late to develop in England (1838) and the United States (1934). In addition to national archives, other types include academic, business, government, non-profit and other.

ACADEMIC ARCHIVES

Academic or university archives may be defined as “an archival depository, whether it is a division of the library, a manuscript depository, the president’s office, or an independent agency within the structure of a university”. (Tweedale, 1965) Academic archives preserve and celebrate the history of the university and academic community. The archival collections may include items such as the administrative records of the institution, papers of former professors and presidents, official publications of the university and campus units, and memorabilia related to school organizations and activities (Hunter, 2003; Tweedale, 1965).

In their overview of the development of university archives and records management programs in Canada and the United States, Schina and Wells (2002) suggest that North American academic archives are a phenomenon of the post-World War II era. They describe surveys conducted by the Society of American Archivists and others from 1949 to 2002 to identify staffing, reporting structures and institutional records management programs of academic archives. The surveys identified the following characteristics of North American academic archives: inadequate staffing, small holdings, backlogs of unprocessed materials, limited financial support, limited space and lack of campus-wide records retention and management programs.

INSTITUTIONAL SETTING: UALR

The University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) is a comprehensive doctoral/research institution. Established in 1927 as Little Rock Junior College (LRJC), the University became a four-year institution, Little Rock University (LRU), in 1957 and a member of the University of Arkansas System in 1969. Within this system, UALR is state supported and operationally separate. The University currently enrolls over 13,000 students and offers a wide range of undergraduate, graduate and professional programs through the doctorate in humanities, social sciences, sciences, business, education and professional studies.

The libraries supporting UALR and its predecessors grew from LRJC’s small collection of books borrowed from the high school library to dedicated libraries at LRU’s and UALR’s current location in west Little Rock (Lester, 1987; Elkins, 1963). Ottenheimer Library at UALR opened in April 1976. The library’s Archives and Special Collections department was established in 1978 and the first archivist hired in 1979. The department contained materials that were historically significant to the University as well as the State of Arkansas. The collections included materials from 19th and 20th century documenting the state of Arkansas, including those related to the 1957 Little Rock School District desegregation crisis. By the 1980s the collections had grown to include a significant number of books on Arkansas, information on the Trans-Mississippi West, and extensive materials related to Arkansas’s experience in the Civil War including, notably, the J.N. Haskell Civil War Collection. In addition to manuscripts, pamphlets, photographs, architectural drawings, and maps the collection included the gubernatorial collections of five former Arkansas governors – Carl Bailey, Winthrop Rockefeller, Dale Bumpers, Frank White and Jim Guy Tucker.

At times, the Archives department was the site of intense activity and had copious funding. For example, not long after the merger with the University of Arkansas, the University built state-of-the-art archival facilities and hired staff to develop and maintain the collections; and in the 1980s, the Archivist
collected the records of major departments within the University, while at the same time successfully soliciting the records of five Arkansas governors (Kenamore, 2012).

In the 2000s, the status of the Archives changed completely. The Arkansas Collection and the Archives staff moved downtown to the Arkansas Studies Institute (ASI), a new structure, created by joining three buildings (two restored historic buildings with a 21st century construction) to house under one roof many of the states’ premier historical and political collections in order to provide one facility for study, teaching and research. The University Archives remained at UALR. Immediately after the move, the Archivist and her staff divided their time between ASI building and the University Archives at Ottenheimer Library. In 2010, however, the Archivist and staff moved to the ASI on a full-time basis. While still under the aegis of the University, the Arkansas Collection is no longer connected to the Library; instead, the Archivist reports to the Dean of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences. Since 2010, no staff has been assigned to the University Archives, except the Director of Public Services, who occasionally searches for information among the records. (Kenamore, 2012)

After the removal of the Arkansas materials, the materials remaining at the Library include the University Archives (papers of the Chancellor and Provost, minutes of university bodies, university publications such as course catalogs and directories). There are approximately 380 linear feet (115.8 meters) of records, including those of Little Rock Junior College, Little Rock University, and UALR. There is only one small box of records from the Ottenheimer Library and its predecessors.

In order to assess the records remaining at UALR, the Ottenheimer Library hired an archival consultant who spent three days examining the collections, staffing, acquisition and appraisal, accessibility (physical and intellectual), preservation/conservation, and reference/outreach. The consultant was also asked to recommend a plan of action to collect, preserve, catalog, and provide access to the holdings. The consultant’s report (Kenamore, 2012) provided an unbiased assessment of the current state of the records and facility and a “blueprint for the future growth of the Archives”.

CONSULTANT’S ASSESSMENT

The consultant found that although the holdings remaining at UALR are significant”, they do not fully document UALR history, because the Archives has not had an acquisitions plan in the form of a records management policy for offices in the University or collecting policy for outside donors. Accessions are uneven, because various offices do not know what is archival and what is not; and outside donors are unaware of the types of records of value to the University. None of the records are processed and cataloged, so access to information is nearly impossible. Preservation of the Archives is, on the whole acceptable, and facilities are excellent. The Archives has little reference access, because no regular staff is available to service researchers”. (Kenmore, 2012).

Collections. The consultant’s report also noted that the collections documenting the history of the University “are by no means complete. For example, the minutes of the Board of Directors were carefully accessioned during certain periods, while ignored at other times; some chancellors and provosts have given their records to the Archives, and some have not; only a handful of notable professors have donated their papers, and the photographic record is non-existent prior to the 1960s.1

In addition to the records already transferred to the Archives, a significant amount remains in certain offices. For example, the current Chancellor and Provost have a total of 260 linear shelf feet (79 meters) of records in their offices and storage rooms. While all is not archival, a sizeable portion will go to the Archives when they leave office. The Provost’s Office also has a library containing strategic plans, tenure policies, Board of Trustees minutes/reports, Annual Reports, Undergraduate and Graduate Council records, chronology files, and more. Most of the records in the library are archival; yet, many of them are not found in the Archives holdings.

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1 Kenamore reported “It is unusual that the Archives has no original photographs documenting the early years of the Junior College or LRU. In my experience over 35 years, this is the only collection I have ever encountered that does not have early photographs of people, buildings, and events/activities. My experience leads me to believe they must be somewhere. The ASI Archivist, however, said in an interview on October 10, 2012, that they never existed. She noted that the only early pictorial record is found in the yearbooks. Currently, the Communications Department is building an archives of current photos. It is hoped that the Department and the Archives will cooperate to preserve future, as well as current photographs”. 
Staffing. The consultant noted the Archives department was currently without staff and that, even when the Department was fully staffed, the Arkansas Collection [materials related to Arkansas history and politics] received most of the attention. As a result, collection growth of institutional materials “has been uneven, virtually nothing has been processed and cataloged, and little attempt has been made to highlight the usefulness of the University Archives and make the holdings accessible to students, faculty, staff, and alumni”. (Kenamore, 2012).

CONSULTANT’S RECOMMENDATIONS

The consultant submitted a written report in December 2012. The report outlined steps necessary to make the UALR Archives into a true archive documenting the history of the University, the Library and other units. Although the steps outlined below refer to the institutional archives at one specific North American university, they also provide guidelines for libraries wishing to start an institutional archive or to assess one currently in place.

1. STAFFING: A Director of the University Archives, Assistant Archivist, Student Assistants:  
Director: Qualifications:  
• Master’s degree in Library Science or history/related field, with training in Archives management;  
• 5 years professional archives experience;  
• Archives certification through the Academy of Certified Archivists;  
• Excellent oral and written communications skills;  
• Master’s degree in Library Science or history/related field, with training in Archives management;  
• Interest in institutional history;  
• Ability to work with outside departments to collect and promote archival materials;  
• Knowledge of archival cataloging software;  
• Familiarity with concepts of Web site development;  
• Experience using social media to promote collections.

Assistant Archivist: Qualifications:  
• Master’s degree in Library Science or history/related field, with training in Archives management;  
• 1 year professional archives experience;  
• Eligibility for Archives certification exam through the Academy of Certified Archivists;  
• Excellent oral and written communications skills;  
• Interest in institutional history;  
• Ability to work with outside departments to collect and promote archival materials;  
• Knowledge of archival cataloging software.

Student Assistants: Qualifications:  
• History majors preferred;  
• Interest in institutional history;  
• Excellent oral and written communications skills.

2. COLLECTIONS:  
• Develop a records management policy with retention and disposal schedules for all major departments in the University, to identify and preserve current records of permanent historical or administrative value for ultimate transfer to the Archives;  
• Develop a collecting policy listing for acquisitions from outside donors. The policy should contain a list of desired materials and a list of records the Archives will not accept;  
• Process and catalog the University Archives holdings according to archival standards, so the information will be accessible to faculty, staff, students, alumni, and other researchers;  
• Using software designed for archival cataloging, establish a database and place the catalog online for maximum access.
• Identify selected images/documents for digitization and placement on-line;
• Establish regular hours of operation, when Archives will be open to researchers.

3. PRESERVATION:
• Archivist should be proactive in planning for the day, when the Archives will run short of space;
  o Factor storage space into acquisition policies and plans;
  o Obtain engineer’s evaluation for floor capacity to support compact mobile shelving;
  o Prepare cost figures for floor reinforcement (if necessary) and compact mobile shelving before added shelf space is needed;
• Keep the storage areas locked and not accessible to anyone outside Archives staff;
• Limit keys to full-time Archives staff;
• Register researchers and require identification to use the records;
• Do not allow any archives materials to leave the department at any time;
• Supervise researchers at all times -- easily accomplished through the design of the reading room and adjoining, elevated office that has clear sightlines to readers;
• Follow normal security guidelines for users.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS:
• Use a hygrothermograph to monitor the Archives storage room on a 24-hour basis to ensure that the storage area has the desired temperature and humidity. It should be noted that archival standards for temperature and humidity on a continuous basis are 70 degrees, +/- 2 degrees and 30-50% humidity;
• Do not allow any food or drink in Archives reading or storage areas;
• Maintain a clean department to avoid dust, dirt, and other damaging agents;
• To protect against UV light:
  o Turn off lights, when room is not in use;
  o Box all materials to avoid exposure to UV light
  o Purchase UV protection sleeves for fluorescent lights.

5. DISASTER PLANNING:
• Box and shelve all materials, as the first defense against flood or fire;
• Install a fire suppression system. Consider a simple sprinkler system that is effective and is less expensive than chemical systems;
• Develop a disaster plan that identifies risks and compiles procedures for disaster response.

6. REFERENCE AND OUTREACH:
• Develop a reference policy with attention to off-site, as well as on-site users;
• Open the department to users, first on a limited basis, and as more holdings are cataloged, for eight hours/day during the week;
• Develop outreach program to publicize collections and encourage use.

CONCLUSIONS
This paper reports the case study of one North American university library that discovered its institutional archives had serious flaws and was not fulfilling the mission of documenting and preserving its history and the history of its parent institution. The transfer of some archival records and the archives staff to another location was the critical incident that prompted an evaluation of the remaining archives. The lessons learned include: know what you have, how it is processed and how it is managed. If you do not have staff qualified to conduct an evaluation, call in an expert to evaluate holdings, processes and facilities to make recommendations for the future. The evaluation should include:
1. An inventory of archival holdings
3. An assessment of acquisitions and appraisal: assessment. Are there policies for Records Management and Collecting (accepting materials from donors)? For electronic records?
4. An assessment of intellectual and physical access to archival collections: cataloging/processing, archival software, physical access

Institutional support is necessary. Use the information from the expert’s assessment report to request support from the parent institution and to apply for outside funding.

There are limitations to this case study: it was limited to the institutional archives at one North American academic library and the results may or may not be generalizable to all academic libraries. The findings indicate the need for more research and comparison to practices at other academic libraries.

References