Introduction to University Archives

The Special Collections Research Center is home to the University of Chicago Library’s archival, manuscript, and rare book collections. We welcome people from around the world to our reading room. You do not need to be affiliated with the University of Chicago to visit us, nor do you need special credentials or reasons for using our collections. [Images of the Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center front door and reading room, as well as a photograph of a woman using a library card catalog at the turn of the 20th century.]

This video is an introduction to the University Archives. [Aerial photograph of the University of Chicago campus.]

The University of Chicago Archives collects and preserves official records, documents, publications, audio-visual media, and other materials in all formats documenting the history of the University of Chicago and the work of its trustees, faculty, administrators, staff, students, donors, and alumni. The University Archives is constantly being updated and expanded. [Images of archival boxes on shelves and collections being organized. These images are followed by a photograph of John D. Rockefeller and UChicago President William Rainey Harper walking together on campus.]

The University Archives has many collections that highlight campus business: Board of Trustees records, University President and Provost records, records from all academic divisions, professional schools and departments. [Images of a reading room at the turn of the 20th century, UChicago President Hanna Holborn Gray, and UChicago faculty members Edith Abbott and Sophonisba Breckinridge.]

We also house the administrative records of places such as the University of Chicago Press, University Libraries, Alumni relations and Development. [Images of UChicago Press typesetting room at turn of 20th century and an artist’s rendering of the Joseph Regenstein Library.]

We collect materials highlight student life such as student publications like the Maroon, records of student organizations of both past and present, and alumni collections highlighting individual experiences at the U of C. [Images of the front page of a 1913 issue of The Chicago Maroon newspaper, UChicago students protesting during WWII, and UChicago students socializing at a party in the 1950s.]

Some of our most rich University Archives collections are those of our faculty: The Archives contains the papers of Nobel Prize winning economists such as Gary Becker and Robert Fogel. Great literary collections such as Saul Bellow and Norman Maclean; Scientists like Enrico Fermi and Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar. Just to name a few. [Images of fall foliage on UChicago campus, Gary Becker, Robert Fogel, Saul Bellow, Norman Maclean, Enrico Fermi, and Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar.]
What if the Special Collections Research Center is closed, or what if you do not live in the Chicago area? We are always working to digitize collections. You can browse all of the archival and manuscript collections that have been digitized and shared online. Many of the finding aids for University Archives collections contain at least some digital material. [Image of closed sign hanging on door, the homepage of the Center’s website, and the Center’s online finding aids database.]

To learn about more digital resources, watch the video “Introduction to Digital Resources.” [Image of a guide to digital collections and resources in Special Collections.]