

## **INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY AND THE *LONGUE DURÉE*: STRATEGIC PRESERVATION OF ARCHIVAL RESOURCES**

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## **1 ABSTRACT**

*Many alumni practitioners and emeritus faculty wish to donate valuable collections of slides, videotapes, or drawings to their alma mater. Such archives provide invaluable data for future researchers in our field. However, enormous volumes of archival material in institutional storage is inadequately housed, conditioned, evaluated, or accessed. This study reports on an on-site inventory and assessment of a century-old archive held in the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Containing over 35,000 separate objects, its diverse categories of holdings include student drawings, research data, lecture videos, personal notebooks, sketches, slides, photographic plates, as well as specialized equipment acquired to view these artifacts. This paper describes the first stage of procedures for inventory and assessment of the Illinois holdings in order to prepare strategic priorities for future conservation actions. The project team includes an historian-educator in landscape architecture, a trained archivist, and a library media preservation specialist. Overarching project goals are to balance the optimal stability and condition of the collection with open access for students and scholars and, possibly, new capacity for collections growth. Based on these goals, a decision-model was developed to assess the collections. Using a basic spreadsheet inventory, first-stage project objectives were to: 1) describe the range of formats contained in the collection, 2) annotate format descriptions with any clearly visible content data and 3) assess evident condition of artifacts. Although this project is ongoing and its outcomes continue to unfold, several lessons may inform others facing similar challenges. There are practical, professional, and low cost ways to stabilize and protect institutional legacy; protocols are simple but slow and time-consuming; to protect momentum, small archives need individual "champions" inside and outside the institution to drive forward; the availability of expert advisors and other University resources is essential for success; and thoughtful discussion of unit values, mission, and identity must guide any decision-making processes.*

### **1.1 Keywords**

institutional history, archives, media preservation, strategic planning, decision model