

Activism in the Archives: A Guide

“Archives are the bulwark of a free society.” – Desmond Tutu

Why the Archives

Archival research and primary source materials help students...

- Raise questions about epistemology and the construction and transmission of knowledge.
- Understand the relationship between materiality and meaning, evidence and events.
- Consider the perspectives of people interacting in different times and spaces.
- Reflect on individual and institutional legacies and their impact on the current moment
- Connect larger historical narratives to regional and local history
- Experience the excitement of discovery and original research.

Instructional Support

Instructors are encouraged to work with a staff archivist in planning and implementing a class session at the Archives and Special Collections. Archivists can discuss with students what sorts of materials are housed in archival repositories; what primary sources are; and/or how to navigate and search for collections. Archivists can also help devise in-class activities in order to allow students to handle and analyze historical documents. [Schedule a class visit](#) (please schedule at least two weeks in advance).

In-Class/Onsite Activity Ideas. *In a small group...*

- Activity #1: Examine one of the radical student newspapers. What were Purdue students concerned about at the time? What does the writing and content suggest about the paper’s audience?
- Activity #2: Examine one item on “student unrest.” Determine the following information about it: who (creator), when (date), where (location), what (form and subject), why (function), and for whom (audience).
- Activity #3: Look through Barbara Cook’s “Student Unrest Binders” and choose a clipping that stands out to you. Explain why the clipping is meaningful to you. How does it contribute to our understanding of leadership, social justice, or change?

Independent Assignments or Long Term Project Ideas

- Analyze in-depth one alternative student newspaper. Create one issue of a new alternative student newspaper for Purdue’s campus today. What would its purpose, philosophy, and aesthetic be? What content, voices, and issues would it highlight?
- Choose 3-5 documents from a collection that represent the perspectives of key players – for example, students, faculty, administration – on one issue with which student activists were concerned. In a paper, analyze what tactics institutional powers used to negotiate or constrain student unrest. What strategies did student activists employ to push back?

- Choose a more recent student demonstration or action (for example, Take Back the Night or the die-in of Nov. 2014), or issue around which Purdue students have organized. Research it, collect items, and create a digital archive for *their* activism.

Possible Readings for Students

- Zanish-Belcher and Anke, eds. *Perspectives on Women's Archives*. Society of America Archivists, 2013.
- Eichhorn, Kate. *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order*, American Literature Initiative, 2014.

Links of Interest

- **Archives homepage:** <https://www.lib.purdue.edu/spcol>
- **WITNESS**, <https://witness.org/> - This international organization trains and supports activists and citizens around the world to use and preserve video safely, ethically, and effectively to expose human rights abuse and fight for human rights change.
- **Interference Archive**, <http://interferencearchive.org/> - exploring the relationship between cultural production and social movements.

USEFUL COLLECTIONS

[MSF 150 Sisters for Health Education \(S.H.E.\) records, 1978-1982.](#) Sisters for Health Education (S.H.E.) was a Purdue University student organization which functioned to inform, support and provide referrals to women in the Purdue community regarding birth control, problem pregnancy, rape prevention and counseling, and general women's health concerns.

[MSF 467 Barbara Cook papers, 1932-2007.](#) Cook came to Purdue in 1956 as a counselor in the Office of the Dean of Women. Over the years, she served many roles at Purdue and has been nationally recognized for her efforts in promoting career opportunities for women. This collection also includes Cook's two "Student Unrest Binders" from the 1960s.

[UA 11.01 Purdue University Executive V.P. for Business and Treasurer records, 1921-2000, Box 9.](#) This box in the collection contains documents relating to various campus demonstrations of the late 1960's to early 1980's, debates about how best to address student unrest at Purdue and nationally, and creation of Purdue's Student Bill of Rights, and free speech and speaker policies.

[MSF 495 William Buffington Collection of Student Protest Papers, 1967-1984.](#) This collection documents student protests against U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia that took place on and off Purdue's campus. This collection also documents student activism against tuition hikes, as well as the university and police action taken against protestors. Most material focuses on the years 1969-1970.

[MSP 99 Collection of Student Newspapers at Purdue University, 1942-2008.](#) This collection of alternative student newspapers at Purdue University documents newspapers produced by students at Purdue University and the Greater Lafayette area. It primarily features underground newspapers that reflect the counterculture of the 1960s-1970s. Other newspapers, primarily from the 1990s-2000s, feature varying political perspectives, such as the conservative *Purdue Review*.