Archives 101

What is an archives?
An archives is a place where people go to find information. But instead of getting that information from books as you would in a library, research in archives uses firsthand information from letters, reports, notes, memos, photographs, audio and video recordings, and other primary sources. Archivists are responsible for taking care of these materials. They select, collect, organize, preserve, and provide access to the collections within an archives.

Who uses archives?
Archives are used by people researching many different subjects, including history, literature, art, science, and social justice. Archives are used by historians to understand and interpret the past. Authors and filmmakers use archives to become familiar with the people and times about which they are writing. Genealogists rely on archival sources to reconstruct family trees and trace their histories. Archives can even be used as evidence in hearings or for issues of social justice.

How do I see what you have?
Our website has guides to our collections organized by subject and by title, including links to the finding aids for most of our collections. A finding aid is a descriptive guide for an archival collection. Typically it includes information about the origin, history, content, date, and format of the records, as well as the box and folder organization.

And of course, you can always call us at (310) 243-3895 if you have questions or need assistance.

Where are the archives?
The CSUDH Gerth Archives and Special Collections are located on the 5th Floor of the CSUDH Library South building.

When can I come by?
Everyone is welcome at the archives. We are open Monday through Friday from 9 am to 4:30 pm or by appointment. Tours of the archives can also be arranged by special request.
Archives 101 Dos and Don’ts

Do...

- Check out our collections online. We have finding aids for the majority of our collections on the Gerth Archives website or on the Online Archive of California.
- Narrow your focus. You can use our finding aids to locate specific materials from collections. When requesting an appointment, please provide the collection title and folder identifier from the finding aid.
- Make an appointment. Though we happily accept walk-ins, if you make an appointment, we can have the materials you’d like to see ready for you when you arrive.
- Allow yourself plenty of time. Archival collections are non-circulating and cannot be checked out.
- Bring a pencil and paper or a laptop to take notes. Pens, markers, etc. are not permitted near the collections.
- Ask questions! If you have a specific research question or need help finding materials, we are always happy to assist.

Don’t...

- Bring food or drinks into the archives. There is no eating or drinking permitted in the reading room.
- Try to work with more than one collection at a time. We are happy to bring you any boxes you would like to look at, but working with one box at a time prevents collections and materials from getting mixed up and misfiled.
- Limit yourself! The books in the library have a lot to offer, but there are many other materials within the archives to support your research or inspire your creativity!