

Success and Silences: Diversifying the Purdue Archives and Special Collections

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Archives exist to document and preserve the cultural and historical record for current and future generations. Despite the United States' increasingly diverse population, the bulk of archival records collected by archives, libraries, historical societies, and museums remain homogenous, reflecting the biases and privileges inherent in prioritizing the lives of those in power, which has overwhelmingly been white men of wealth and status. In this paper, we address how the Purdue University Archives and Special Collections staff are altering their practices as collectors of the historical record and forming partnerships with underrepresented communities to diversify collections. We begin by discussing how and why archival institutions and archivists collect materials, the implications this has for the representation of women and people of color in archives, and how these practices have excluded women's experiences in the Purdue Archives. We discuss the development of the Susan Bulkeley Butler Women's Archives as a response to the underrepresentation of women in the Archives, as well as how the collection is used to support teaching and research. Finally, we address how the initial focus of the Women's Archives on "notable" women led to the absence of minority women's experiences and the recent steps archivists have taken to address these silences and diversify perspectives in the historical record.

Purpose of Archives

Archival institutions house primary source records that document the history of society. These records are the original source documents used to understand and interpret people, their activities, and events of the past. Archival institutions collect predominantly unpublished materials such as correspondence, memoranda, speeches, lecture and teaching notes, early drafts of publications, photographs, scrapbooks, and audio-visual materials in both physical and digital formats. There are many different types of archival repositories: academic, government, and museum archives; historical societies and archives of religious orders; corporate and private archives; and more. Each has its own focus and intended audience or user base, but the common thread across archives is that they collect unique documents that record the past and are intended to remain valuable in perpetuity.

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Recommended Citation: Watson, Katey and Morris, Sammie L. 2019. "Successes and Silences: Diversifying the Purdue Archives and Special Collections." *Susan Bulkeley Butler Center for Leadership Excellence and ADVANCE Working Paper Series* 2(2): 25-36.

An archivist's primary responsibilities are to identify and acquire collections that align with the collecting focus of their institution and to maintain those collections. This includes a multitude of tasks such as building relationships with potential donors; organizing, inventorying, and preserving those collections while ensuring they are easily accessible; and promoting their use through teaching, exhibitions, publishing, digitization, or other means.

The primary collecting focus of the Purdue Archives is to document and preserve all aspects of Purdue history and the people, places, and events represented in that history. The Purdue Archives collects papers of faculty, students, and staff; records created by Purdue's colleges, schools, and academic departments; and rare books. When the Special Collections department of the Purdue Libraries began, the precursor to the Purdue Archives and Special Collections, staff initially collected materials of noteworthy faculty and alumni, primarily upper-class white men, whose stories were deemed important to preserve. Purdue University's status as a land grant institution of higher learning also shapes the collecting focus of the Purdue Archives. Archival collections reflect Purdue's historical strengths in agriculture, engineering, science, and technology, which presents challenges for diversity when documenting predominantly "male" professions. This problem reflects the larger national problem of archives and special collections libraries primarily serving as places of reverence for "great men."

The materials preserved by archives and libraries in the United States do not reflect the nation's diverse population. In North America, records preserved in archival institutions overwhelmingly document white men in positions of power. In recognition of the need for archivists and archives to be inclusive, the Society of American Archivists (2018), known as SAA, lists diversity as one of its eleven core values for archivists. As the nation's professional organization for archivists, SAA (2019) has advocated that "the relevance of archives to society and the completeness of the documentary record hinge on the profession's success in ensuring that its members, the holdings that they collect and manage, and the users that they serve reflect the diversity of society as a whole." It is for this reason, the recognition of the absence of gender diversity, that women's archives in the United States increased in popularity in the 1990s (Mason and Zanish-Belcher 2013b). This trend of recognizing the absence of women's experiences, along with the support of alumna Susan Bulkeley Butler led to the formation of the Susan Bulkeley Butler Women's Archives at Purdue.

Establishing the Women's Archives

In 2006, University Archivist Sammie Morris gave a presentation on women in Purdue history as part of the University's Women for Purdue philanthropy programs. Susan Bulkeley Butler, alumna and trustee, attended the event, which included a small display of materials from the Purdue Archives. Morris explained that the exhibit on women in Purdue history was challenging to compile due to the lack of original source material documenting women. Morris' concern that women were being left out of Purdue's history resonated with the audience, which was comprised primarily of alumnae and supporters of Purdue.

As a result of the presentation, Butler expressed interest in helping the Archives develop a program to collect information on women in Purdue history. Butler was the first professional female employee hired at Arthur Anderson & Company in 1965 and she became the first female partner of Anderson Consulting, now known as Accenture. As a Purdue alumna who had broken

ground for women in business and witnessed first-hand the challenges they face in receiving recognition and support for their careers, Butler was and still is passionate about advancing women and recognizing their contributions. She pledged a \$1 million deferred gift to create a Women's Archives in her name, allowing the Archives to create programming centered around women in Purdue and Indiana history, acquire collections of key women's papers, conduct oral history interviews with women, and process and preserve these collections to prepare them for use in teaching and scholarship.

The Susan Bulkeley Butler Women's Archives was established in 2006 and Butler's gift was announced in press releases and at events launching the Women's Archives. Butler's generosity enabled the Libraries to hire an archivist to begin building women's history collections and raising awareness of the Women's Archives.

Early steps in starting the Women's Archives included identifying collections the Archives already possessed on women and bringing those together, as well as identifying women participants and leaders in Purdue's history who could be contacted about donating their papers. The first Women's Archivist, Stephanie Schmitz, began reviewing existing collections on women, which although sparse included some collections of well-known women such as those of engineer and mother of modern management, Dr. Lillian Gilbreth, and noteworthy pilot, Amelia Earhart.



Select materials from the George Palmer Putnam collection of Amelia Earhart papers, MSP 9.

Identifying other women in Purdue history, many of whom witnessed and participated in key events and eras, was challenging. There were no written histories of women in Purdue history to use, so Schmitz began reviewing existing books on Purdue history to identify women mentioned. She communicated frequently with Butler and other early supporters of the Women's Archives to help document the names and backgrounds of women alumnae, retired faculty, and staff who she could approach about donating collections. Through these connections, early supporter and advocate for the Women's Archives Betty Nelson provided the Archives with an unpublished manuscript about women in Purdue history. This manuscript was instrumental in identifying women to contact or deceased women whose families might still possess papers documenting their lives and work.

After thirteen years of collecting, the Women's Archives now possesses more than 140 collections documenting women in Purdue's history. The success of this initiative has provided scholars, faculty, and students with evidence of women's experiences at Purdue, which have been instrumental in the publication of women's histories and the development of course curricula.

Learning and Scholarship

Prior to the development of the Women's Archives, researchers had little documentation of women's experiences at Purdue and women were often overlooked in early written histories of the University. Professors teaching courses on women's history and gender studies had access to few primary source collections they could draw upon in their curricula.¹ Today, the Women's Archives collections enable scholars from across Indiana, the United States, and around the world to learn about Purdue women and their successes, resulting in the production of new scholarship on women in Purdue history and the integration of women's collections into student learning and assignments.

International scholars have conducted academic research using collections in the Women's Archives, culminating in the publication of theses, journal articles, blogs, books, films, and more. Papers created by women such as Dr. Lillian Gilbreth and Amelia Earhart, Purdue deans, students, and early suffragists have attracted researchers from Germany, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland, to name a few.² To encourage this type of far-reaching scholarship, we offer research grants to assist with travel costs for visiting scholars. These grants have enabled distant researchers to use collections for research on topics such as student sexuality, women's health movements, women in design, and more. Since 2015, we have provided research travel grants to four scholars, three of which have used our materials for external publications.³

Local researchers have also made use of the growing collections on women in Purdue history. Since the founding of the Women's Archives in 2006, Purdue University Press has published three books documenting the lives of women for its Founders Series and local authors have

¹ Only two significant collections existed. Most other women's collections contained a few of publications.

² Since 2010, the Archives has record of eight international scholars visiting to access collections in the Women's Archives. However, not all researchers provide their country of residence.

³ Not all researchers inform us of the publications they produce following their research.

written books that provide in-depth looks at women's roles in developing and furthering home economics, extension, and women's equality at Purdue and in Indiana.⁴

Purdue faculty have also utilized the Women's Archives to teach students about archival research. Archivists at Purdue regularly guest lecture for courses across disciplines to engage students with original primary sources and highlight women in Purdue's history. These courses have included Women and Health in America, STEM and Gender, Sexual Regulation, Issues with Feminist Research and Methodology, and more. Students are taught the basics of conducting primary source research, visiting archives, and analyzing historical documents while learning about women's experiences in Purdue's history.

In 2019, Dr. Nancy Gabin, Associate Professor of History and American Studies, along with the authors of this paper, used the Women's Archives to teach an Honors College research course on Women and the Gender Revolution at Purdue University. Students in the course were exposed to original documents and archival evidence that directly demonstrates the impact of gender disparities. This course would not have been possible prior to the establishment of the Women's Archives, as the source materials used in the class have primarily been collected over the last decade.

The Women's Archives has helped to give women a voice in Purdue's history. However, not all women are represented within our collections. Although the Women's Archives was established in an effort to diversify the Purdue Archives, our collections predominantly represent white, middle-class women and have not included many papers of women of color and diverse backgrounds.

Representation in the Women's Archives

Since its inception, the Women's Archives has focused on "documenting the pioneering women who helped shape Purdue and Indiana history" and placed special emphasis on "women who have succeeded in largely male-dominated professions" (Susan Bulkeley Butler Women's Archives n.d.). This collecting mandate aligns the focus of the Women's Archives with that of Purdue, placing special emphasis on women in science, technology, engineering, agriculture, and mathematics (STEAM). Collections acquired under this mandate include those of women in high-level administrative roles such as University President France A. Córdoba and collections documenting significant "firsts" like Purdue's first African American Homecoming Queen Kassandra Agee Chandler. The Women's Archives has also acquired papers documenting women in traditionally male professions and programs like the papers of firefighter Diana Hardy and records of women-centric curricula such as Purdue's Women in Engineering program.

The examples below provide a snapshot of the types of women represented in the Women's Archives: high-achieving, successful, predominantly white women with a strong focus on STEAM. However, the focus on notable or exceptional women and particularly women in male-dominated careers has left significant gaps in the collections, particularly in the College of Liberal Arts. There are only three collections of papers from female professors in Liberal Arts and few papers from alumnae. Though there are materials from programs within the college,

⁴ Publications include *Queen of American Agriculture* by Fred Whitford; *Divided Paths, Common Ground* by Angie Klink; and *The Deans' Bible* by Angie Klink.

such as the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies program, the records of women students, faculty, and staff in the humanities and liberal arts are underrepresented.



Select materials from the Women in Engineering program records, UA 7.

Similarly, by focusing on collecting records of notable or exceptional women, we have captured what Gerda Lerner (2013:15) states is “the history of the exceptional, even deviant women” while missing “the experience and history of the mass of women.” Most women represented in the archives were either middle or upper-class women when they began their careers or women who were able to attain this status professionally. This has left the Women’s Archives with a gap in documenting the experiences of women who may not have succeeded in their careers, struggled financially after graduating, did not graduate, or worked clerical or service-level positions. As Lerner (2013:16) states, “women of different classes have different experiences.” Therefore, the records preserved in the Women’s Archives only tell part of the story of Purdue women, with gaps for the experiences of average, working class, or underprivileged women.

One of the most significant gaps is one of racial and gender identity. Nearly all the women represented are cisgender women of European descent. Less than five percent of the collections in the Women’s Archives represents women in non-majority groups such as women of color and LGBTQ+ women. The Women’s Archives has acquired some collections from significant African American women, such as Dean of Libraries Emerita Emily Mobley, entrepreneur and Purdue’s first African American Homecoming Queen Cassandra Agee Chandler, and freedom fighter and Purdue’s first female African American faculty member Helen Bass Williams, but these are the exception. Women from underrepresented groups are represented predominantly through the records created and donated by Purdue’s various cultural centers, which are often lacking in gender representation. Similarly, women in the LGBTQ+ community are seldom

represented in our collections. There are only two collections of papers from women who identify with the LGBTQ+ community and there is a small selection of relevant records in the Sisters for Health Education records, LGBTQ Center records, and the LGBTQ+ Student Alliance records. However, the latter two collections focus predominantly on male experiences.

There are many possible causes for the lack of non-majority representation in the Women's Archives. However, the most likely candidate is that Purdue has been and still is a predominantly white institution. Representation of women on campus has significantly increased since the 1930s, but major initiatives to increase racial diversity at Purdue did not occur until the 1970s. In the fall of 1989, minority enrollment constituted less than 15 percent of students across all Purdue campuses and there is no statistical information on how many of those students were women (Purdue University Archives and Special Collections 1989).⁵ Purdue continues to struggle with enrollment and retention of minority students.⁶

Traditionally, women belonging to minority groups have not reached out to offer their papers to Purdue. Archives staff typically receive collections passively, as donations from faculty, staff, and alumna who either know about the Women's Archives or learn of us from an acquaintance. These individuals often have positive feelings about Purdue, as former students who are proud Boilermakers or faculty who take pride in their research accomplishments. Individuals who have experienced discrimination by their peers, an institution, or institutional policies are less likely to offer their papers to us. Understandably, they may not have the same positive feelings or trust for the institution in which the archives is situated, or they may not feel that their stories and experiences would be valued. Finally, women's archives also tend to be associated with women's movements, which have historically left out women of color and women in the LGBTQ+ community due to discrimination within the movement (Caldera 2013; Mason and Zanish-Belcher 2013b).

These gaps significantly affect the learning and research potential of the Women's Archives and can negatively affect our research environment. Absences or silences in the Archives leave researchers with little information about non-majority groups and few if any records available for faculty and staff to use in courses about the history of non-majority groups. Archives that promote and regularly highlight their "noteworthy" collections of recognizable upper-class white people without applying the same time and resources to promoting their non-white collections contribute to feelings of marginalization in institutions that are already overwhelmingly catered to white users (Farmer 2018).

Building More Inclusive Archives

To establish a more accurate representation of women in Purdue and Indiana's history, archives staff must take action "to document gaps in the historical record... and not fall into the habit of collecting only what is easy" (Mason and Zanish-Belcher 2013a:133). Now that the Women's Archives is well established, it would be easy for us to passively collect papers that are offered;

⁵ Data retrieved from report by the Office of the Registrar for Fall 1989-1990. Minority enrollment includes Native American (196), Black (2,097), Hispanic (1,213), Asian or Pacific Islander (1,132), and International (2,338). Total student population (57,650).

⁶ Data available through Purdue Data Digest. For more information, see: <https://www.purdue.edu/datadigest/>

however, this would only perpetuate gaps that already exist in the collections. As Mason and Zanish-Belcher (2013a:134) argue, women's archives "must widen their scope, making it a priority to document hitherto neglected groups." Therefore, we are expanding the collecting focus of the Women's Archives, actively soliciting collections from minority groups, and drafting policies to address the inherent biases in archival work in an attempt to create a more diverse representation of women's history at Purdue and a more inclusive research environment for archives users.

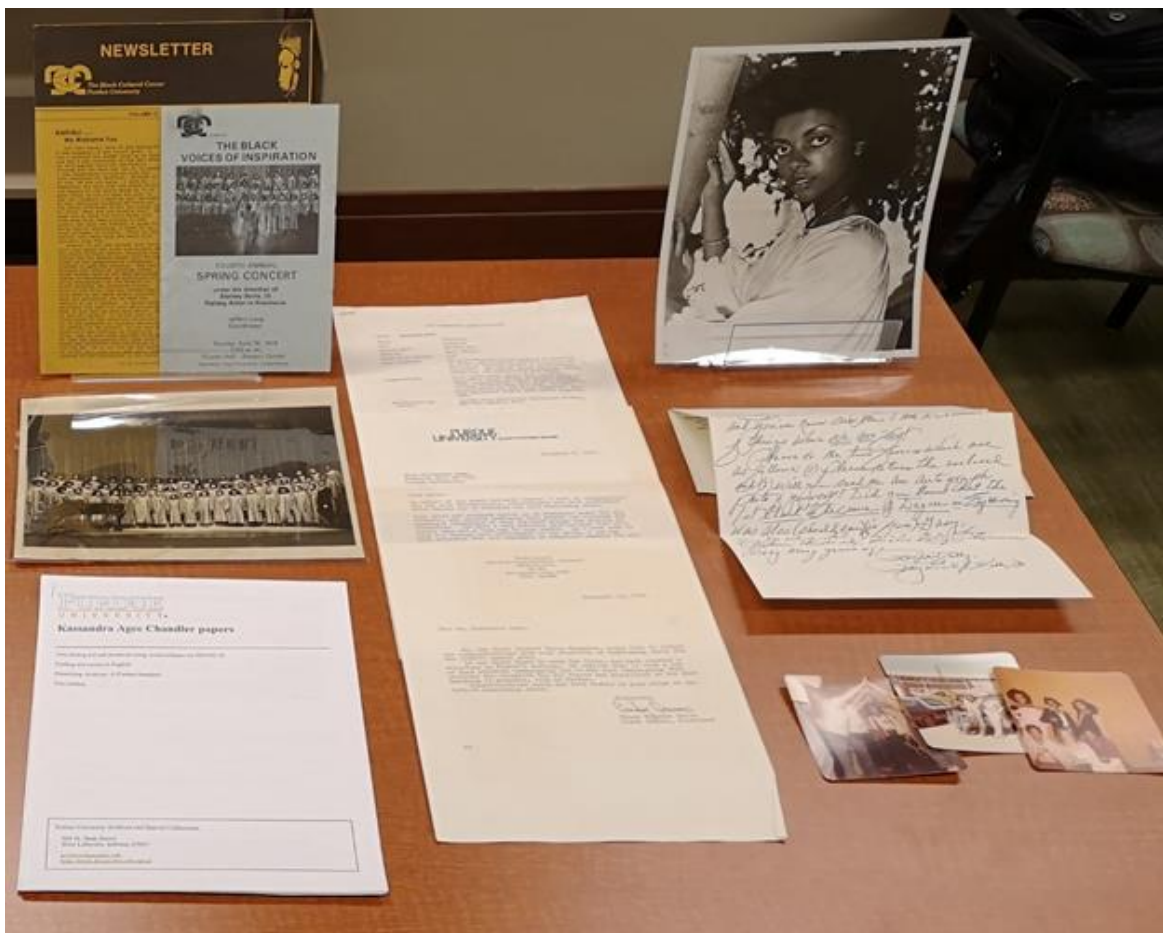
Collection development policies guide archival selection and acquisition by outlining collecting focus areas for archives. The collecting focus provides a road map for staff and donors to identify whether materials fit within a particular collection. The original focus of the Women's Archives was to collect records of "pioneering women... [and] women who have succeeded in largely male-dominated professions" (Susan Bulkeley Butler Women's Archives n.d.). Over the past year, we adjusted the focus to document "the often overlooked and under-represented stories of women and their communities in Purdue and Indiana's past" (Susan Bulkeley Butler Women's Archives 2019). The new focus also explicitly states that the Women's Archives collects records "that represent women from diverse backgrounds, women of color, women in the LGBTQ community, and women who have challenged traditional gender roles" (Susan Bulkeley Butler Women's Archives 2019). With the launch of a new Women's Archives website in 2020, the new collecting focus will be available to the public and may help encourage women from these groups to donate their papers.

We are also actively soliciting papers from women of diverse backgrounds and non-majority groups via direct contact and relationship building. Most archival institutions passively collect; potential donors contact the institution and the archivist decides whether or not to accept the collection. This type of passive collection is unlikely to help document gaps in collections; archival institutions are predominantly white institutions and are therefore more likely to attract white donors. Active collecting and outreach by archivists to individuals and communities "demands a significant commitment of time and energy on the part of staff" as it involves identifying members of non-majority groups and reaching out to them, explaining the institution's interest in their experiences, and convincing them to donate their papers (Mason and Zanish-Belcher 2013a:134). The Women's Archives has employed this process which requires us to conduct significant research to identify non-majority women in Purdue's history for whom little information exists; locate the appropriate contacts as individuals may have retired, moved, or be deceased; and draft convincing statements as to why the Women's Archives is the best place to donate their records. Rather than this work being accomplished in one or two exchanges, convincing donors to give their personal papers and records of their lives, work, and achievements can take numerous interactions. Relationship building is key in establishing trust between the potential donor and the archives.

Since early 2019, the Women's Archives has identified and reached out to six individual women from underrepresented groups to seek the donations of their papers. Three of these contacts were non-responsive: the contact information for one was incorrect and staff received no response from the other two. However, we received positive responses from three: two are currently reviewing their personal records to identify papers to donate and the third contact resulted in the acquisition of the Helen Bass Williams papers from Dr. Mary O'Hara. Williams was the first

African American woman faculty member at Purdue and a civil rights activist who advocated on behalf of black students, faculty, and staff. Purdue archivists were previously unaware that these papers existed, as Williams passed away in 1993 with no known relatives. However, after locating Dr. O'Hara's thesis on the life of Williams, we contacted her to ask if she still possessed the materials used to write her thesis. This resulted in the donation of four boxes of records including oral history interviews, correspondence, photographs, newsletters, genealogical records, and more documenting Williams' life, achievements, and career. Since its acquisition in 2019, this collection has already received significant interest from students, faculty, and staff, with plans for the Archives to collaborate with the Black Cultural Center (BCC) in raising awareness of the collection.

In addition to soliciting donations from specific individuals, Purdue archivists also engage in outreach initiatives to encourage women from various backgrounds to donate their papers. The Women's Archives participates in university-wide media campaigns, external filming requests, and community events; creates exhibitions; and advertises on social media and in traditional print to reach a wider audience. As part of this work, archives staff highlight non-majority groups when pertinent collections are available to show potential donors that the archives collects materials documenting women of all backgrounds. As one example, in 2019 Purdue



Select materials from the Purdue Women in Leadership Conference workshop on radical archiving, Kassandra Agee Chandler papers, MSA 363.

archivists participated in the Purdue Women in Leadership Conference where we provided photographs and biographies of women in Purdue's history for conference table displays and included women of African American and Latinx descent. We also presented at a workshop on radical archiving, highlighting materials in the collections while encouraging participants to think about how the records they collect will tell their stories to future generations.

These types of programs help publicize and raise awareness of the Women's Archives while providing opportunities for archivists to meet potential donors from various social classes and backgrounds. Since these events are visible and accessible to people across the community, they are more likely to reach a wider audience and encourage the donation of materials from diverse groups of women.

Purdue archives staff are also working toward promoting a more inclusive research environment by drafting guidelines to create more inclusive and representative descriptions of collections. The way archivists describe collections impacts how they are found and used by researchers. Archivists apply standardized subject headings to collections to increase their discovery across different catalogs and databases. Unfortunately, many official subject headings reflect the prejudices of the times in which they were created, potentially alienating and oppressing marginalized communities. Additionally, historical materials often include depictions or terminology that are offensive but were commonplace at the time.

As an example, after acquiring the Helen Bass Williams papers, it was evident that we needed to re-evaluate descriptive practices to include guidelines on how to describe collections containing derogatory terminology. Williams' papers document her work in the civil rights movement and reflect the backlash against it, including derogatory language used to oppress African Americans. Archivists are tasked with accurately representing the historical records in their care, which has typically been interpreted as transcribing titles of documents, publications, photograph captions, and audio transcripts verbatim. However, "in reproducing offensive language we are endorsing or perpetuating systems that have caused great injustice and harm" and this can create an unwelcoming, hostile research environment for people belonging to these groups (Find and Connect 2011). In response to these concerns, Purdue archivists are reviewing archival literature and soliciting input from the archival community on how to create descriptions that adhere to professional archival standards while also ensuring they are not perpetuating systems of oppression. We are currently preparing guidelines on local archival description practices that include creating accurate titles in place of discriminatory ones while still capturing original titles in a subsection of the description; adding disclaimers to descriptions of materials that contain derogatory, offensive, and racist terminology; and applying subject terms to descriptions of records that contain materials documenting oppression. These steps aim to provide users with accurate information without erasing the history of oppression represented in materials. Purdue archivists are continuing to identify the best language and techniques to use to warn researchers when materials contain offensive representations and how to locate materials in the Archives' collection documenting this history. This is a challenging area where the Archives seeks to distance itself from the derogatory terminology of the past (as represented in the collection captions, folder titles, and such) while also ensuring that the good intent of the archivists does not result in the loss of such historical evidence of discrimination towards marginalized communities.

Antiquated and inaccurate subject terms reflective of their times are still used to locate, for example, LGBTQ+ collections. The Women's Archives includes two collections of papers from women who openly identify as LGBTQ+, however currently there are no subject terms associating these collections with the LGBTQ+ community. Assigning subject headings that accurately identify individuals as part of the LGBTQ+ community is challenging due to the nuances of gender identity descriptions and the lack of fulsome standard subject headings. Archival literature critiques the lack of appropriate subject headings to describe the LGBTQ+ experience, and "in many collections, the sexuality of the creator or subject is not explicitly stated or documented in the materials, so the assignment of an LGBT subject heading is questionable" (Caldera 2013:235). Some donors also may not want their sexuality documented publicly. However, "the alternative is to not name, to not categorize, to continue the silence, and to perpetuate the invisibility" (Caldera 2013:234). It will take significant research and consultation with archivists, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and LGBTQ+ donors to address these issues properly. Though the Purdue Archives has not begun this process, staff recognize it as an area where they need to develop standards to ensure researchers are able to locate records associated with the LGBTQ+ community and to create a more inclusive, respectful research environment.

Many of the initiatives mentioned in this paper are works-in-progress and require consultation with both the archival community on professional standards as well as the communities of people represented in the collections. Both authors are white and the majority of professional archivists working in the United States are also white. It is therefore crucial for archives staff to connect with the communities they seek to document. Archivists at Purdue have established relationships with cultural centers on campus to seek advice on how best to acquire records documenting these groups. Connections with centers such as the Black Cultural Center and LGBTQ Center have enabled the Archives to acquire collections from women of color and members of the LGBTQ community. Archives staff are expected to participate in diversity and training initiatives and to make diversification and inclusion of collections and programs a top priority. Archivists are attuned to evolving standards and best practices and actively seek to identify emerging solutions in the field. These efforts ensure that staff continue to keep up-to-date on the changing needs of researchers, are cognizant of the research environment they create, and remain "ever vigilant about who is represented in [their] collections and who is not" (Mason and Zanish-Belcher 2013b:287).

The impact of the Women's Archives on learning and scholarship has already been significant, enabling the Archives to promote Purdue women's history through publications, international research, and in-class, experiential learning. However, we can only promote the use of collections that are available. The absences in the Archives have inadvertently silenced the diverse experiences of women. To continue to positively impact research and learning at Purdue, archives staff must continue to address issues of representation within the archives by proactively seeking collections that diversify their holdings, working with women in underrepresented communities to represent their experiences, and analyzing descriptive practices to accurately represent and create inclusive research environments for non-majority groups. These steps will bring the Women's Archives closer to creating a representative history of

women at Purdue, allowing faculty, staff, students, researchers, and the public to learn about the diverse experiences of women in Purdue's history.

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