



Library Preservation Procedures

Introduction

Athens State University is strongly committed to the preservation of its Library and Archives collections and the significant economic and intellectual value they represent. The Library mission statement emphasizes the obligation to “preserve and provide access to information and research.” Sound professional practice is necessary to ensure future access to a scholarly research collection for the University community. Handling and use of material, as well as the natural deterioration of paper, make an ongoing preservation program a necessary activity.

Direction and Supervision

Responsibility for directing the preservation program resides with the Library Director in concert with the University Archivist. These individuals develop, coordinate, and implement policies and activities. The Library strives to adhere to nationally and professionally recognized standards and techniques for the conservation of materials. Conservation experts outside the University are consulted when necessary.

Reformatting Materials for Preservation

Three technologies are used for reformatting: microfilming, photocopying, and digitization. Microfilm provides the greatest security for the future, since the master negative of the film is stored under archival conditions to assure a lifespan of several hundred years for the content of the volume. New positive copies can be produced on demand.

Preservation photocopies are made with acid-free paper that is projected to last at least a century. Unlike preservation microfilm, however, preservation photocopying creates only a single master copy for archival storage and for the production of a new copy if the first copy is damaged or destroyed.

Digital imaging is the newest reformatting technology. When it is combined with optical character recognition, it brings useful capacities for full-text searching and manipulation that neither film nor photocopies can offer. However, digital files can be quite unstable. Assuring longevity for documents in digital form requires a complex infrastructure for long-term digital archiving and format migration, about which many aspects are still evolving. Digitizing is thus, at present, the most risky and the most costly reformatting option. The Athens State University “Digital Collection Plan” document addresses the topic more specifically and in greater detail.

The Athens State University Archives employs the three technologies where each is most appropriate. We are also committed to the continuous development of our long-term digital archiving capacity in order to enable expanded use of digital conversion. The decision on how to preserve each item in the archives is made by the Archivist, and in appropriate subject areas, in consultation with staff from the Alabama Department of Archives and History. When appropriate, the Archivist also consults with relevant faculty members. Every effort is made to ensure that the most suitable preservation method is applied. In general, this means that the preferred treatment for any damaged archival material is stabilization, and in some cases a simple repair. When an item is structurally unsound, or too brittle to repair, the Archivist will try to locate a non-brittle paper copy, reprint, later edition, or secure access to an online version. Reformatting is normally the last alternative.

Protecting the Collections

- The Library and Archives facilities maintain moderate, stable temperature and humidity. Window blinds in the Archives area provide protection from direct sunlight.
- Library exterior doors have unique entry codes on a keyless access system maintained by the campus security office. For added security, the Archives room is keyed separately from the rest of the Library and other facilities on campus.
- The Archives is available only during hours when Archives staff is available.
- Researchers in the Archives are encouraged to become sensitive to preservation issues and proper handling of materials.
- The Library facility is equipped with a fire alarm system. The fire alarm system, emergency exits, and fire extinguishers receive periodic inspections from the fire marshal.
- Regular pest and termite protection, both internal and external to the facility, is provided by contract to an outside company.
- The “Library Archives/Special Collections Disaster Plan” addresses emergency procedures to be followed in the event of catastrophic occurrences.