

CASE 20

Rethinking Record Groups and University Archives Classification at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas

AUTHORS: **TAMMI KIM** | tammi.kim@unlv.edu
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
University Libraries, Special Collections and Archives
<https://www.library.unlv.edu/speccol>

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ISSUE: This case study describes a multi-year project to reclassify the University of Nevada, Las Vegas' (UNLV) University Archives. UNLV's Special Collections and Archives decided to rethink and reorganize University Archives based on data collected during an archival collections survey. The steps included moving away from the existing record series classification and implementing a new collection classification schema that will improve discovery and access. This study outlines steps taken during the survey and describes how staff analyzed existing collection records and metadata in order to create more cohesive intellectual control of archival materials across the Special Collections and Archives Division. This study also provides details on the outcomes of this reorganization project and outlines future actions.

KEYWORDS: Access interface
Content management systems
Metadata
Collection Management

Introduction

This case study describes a multi-year project conducted at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) to reclassify and reorganize the University Archives to improve discoverability and access to records. The project was a result of a ten-month survey conducted by UNLV's Special Collections and Archives (SCA) from 2015 to 2016 to identify all hidden collections. The survey results revealed a lack of consistency for describing records in the University Archives, which were discoverable in a homegrown online database but otherwise not described in catalog records or DACS-compliant finding aids. Staff discovered that most of the University Archives were classified in record series while other records, such as faculty publications and faculty papers, were never assigned any collection identifiers.

Additionally, collection use statistics from 2005 to 2016 showed few patron requests for University Archives. Staff posited that perhaps one of the reasons for low use was a lack of understanding of how to search and access materials by record series numbers. Determining how to assign and sustain the record series numbering system thus posed several challenges for collection management and access. Following the collection survey, SCA developed a strategy for reclassifying University Archives holdings that would improve discovery and access.

This University Archives project is part of the UNLV Archival Backlog Elimination Project, which includes a broader initiative to process hidden and under-described collections.¹ At the same time, SCA began planning for implementation of a new Digital Asset Management System (DAMS). The new DAMS will provide a single user interface for researchers to search across different types of materials held in SCA, including digital collections and finding aids. Reclassifying the University Archives and creating finding aids became a top priority to ensure that descriptions are discoverable in the DAMS. This case study explains steps to reclassify and reorganize holdings according to current descriptive practices. It outlines the reason for moving away from the existing record group classification and implementing a new collection classification schema in order to improve collection management, discovery, and access of the University Archives.

¹ Backlog Elimination Project staff website: "The aim of the Archival Backlog Elimination Project is to eliminate or substantially reduce the backlog of archival processing in UNLV Special Collections & Archives. Processing the backlog of collection of UNLV Special Collections and Archives will increase the availability of collections to research and increase the discoverability of information." <https://sites.google.com/unlv.edu/lib-special-tech-services/projects/backlog-elimination>, accessed 2020 April 15.

Institutional background

In 1967, Special Collections was established at Nevada Southern University in Las Vegas, Nevada. Special Collections was considered the first central repository for preserving and documenting the history of southern Nevada. Nevada Southern University was officially renamed the University of Nevada, Las Vegas in 1969 by approval of the Board of Regents.² As of 2020, SCA is comprised of three departments (Digital Collections, Public Services, and Technical Services) and two research centers (the Center for Gaming Research and the Oral History Research Center).

Special Collections and Archives Technical Services (hereafter referred to as SCATS) was formed in 2014 specifically to enhance intellectual and physical access of archival collections housed at UNLV. SCATS' primary responsibility is to support the lifecycle of collection materials—regardless of format—throughout accessioning, processing, description, and preservation. This includes collection management of manuscripts, photographs, oral histories, and the University Archives.

Over the years, SCA utilized different collection numbering schemas for identifying collections. One of SCATS' first tasks was to implement ArchivesSpace as a new collection management system to create finding aids for all collections. Another major task for SCATS was implementing a classification system that would apply consistent and sequential collection identifiers across all holdings (see Table 1 for an example of converting different collection numbering systems into one consistent schema). Four new collection classifications were established: manuscripts (MS), photographs (PH), oral histories (OH), and university archives (UA). These classifications were established to reflect existing collecting areas. The new classifications also mirrored the existing discovery user interfaces, which are comprised of four homegrown online databases for manuscripts, photographs, oral histories, and university archives. This allowed SCATS to continue using the existing collection information in the existing databases. In many cases, SCATS updated existing database entries with the new collection identifiers and a link to a DACS-compliant finding aid (in PDF format) exported from ArchivesSpace.

Table 1. Examples of Legacy and New Collection Identifiers.

Old Collection ID	New Collection ID	Collection Title
1031-9	MS-00124	Charles Lanman collection
T01 / 1973-001	MS-00125	James B. Wilson collection

² "History of Special Collections," UNLV University Libraries Special Collections and Archives, accessed 2020 April 15, <https://www.library.unlv.edu/speccol/about/history>.

Archival Collections Survey

In 2015, SCATS began a ten-month project to survey all collection holdings at UNLV. The Archival Collections Survey project team assessed all manuscripts, architectural records, photographs, and university records held at SCA. The project team assessed and identified the level of processing performed on collection materials and the level of description available. The survey team also searched for collection descriptions across the following: the UNLV Libraries' online catalog, legacy paper inventories, ArchivesSpace, and the homegrown online databases accessible from the SCA website.³

The survey data provided the foundation for reorganizing and reclassifying the University Archives. Staff discovered that the University Archives had been restructured and reorganized in 2006. Prior to the 2006 reorganization, the University Archives were organized into four records series: alpha, records, Board of Regents, and faculty publications. During the 2006 reorganization, additional series were created with the intention of improving discoverability and access.⁴ Staff consulted *The Management of College and University Archives* by William J. Maher to determine the best way to represent the physical and intellectual organization of the University Archives. Consequently, a record series numbering system was implemented based on the academic and organizational structure at UNLV at that time.⁵

This record series numbering system accommodated reorganization of the previous classification series and provided structure for anticipated transfers to the University Archives. Certain decisions were made during this reorganization, such as reassigning records from one series to another. This brought back together some records that had been displaced from their originating office. An example of this was the Student Senate minutes which were previously placed in a "Publications" series and then subsequently moved into a record series for the Student Senate.⁶

Table 2. Record Series Examples.

Original Collection ID	Record Series Number	Title
AC 79	2.6.6	Department of Theatre
AC 13, AC 60	2.7	Graduate College

³ UNLV Archival Collection Survey background and documentation:
<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B25SSpmxsyXOLVp3UjZSWFJMR00>.

⁴ Tom D. Sommer, "The Organization and Description of the UNLV Archives," presentation, Society of Rocky Mountain Archivists & Conference of Inter-Mountain Archivists Spring Joint Conference, Colorado Springs, CO, January 2007.

⁵ Sommer, 2007.

⁶ Sommer, 2007.

Issues with Maintaining Record Series Numbering

During the collection survey, the project team and SCATS staff were faced with the quandary of how to navigate and manage the record series numbering schema, which did not align with the classification scheme utilized for other materials in SCA. The way in which records were described in the SCA online databases also posed a challenge. Each grouping of records assigned to a record series number was described in separate database entries (see Figure 1 for an example). Beyond conducting a keyword search, there were no other methods for users to connect and contextualize all records belonging to a similar provenance.

Several units were assigned record series for subject files, which followed Maher's recommendation that archivists can establish record series for documents that have a common arrangement and relationship to the functions of the office that created them, such as subject files and correspondence files.⁷ Staff also discovered some idiosyncrasies, such as record series numbers created for units that never transferred any records.⁸

Furthermore, records management at UNLV has never been centralized on campus and SCA was never designated as an official records repository. Over the years, the Nevada System of Higher Education has mandated that individual units within campuses shall be responsible for their own records management and retention, including the potential deposit of archival records to the University Archives.⁹ However, transfer of archival records from campus units to the University Archives was not a regular occurrence.

Converting Legacy Metadata to Finding Aids

Beyond concluding whether record series numbers were sustainable or not, staff were also faced with the issue of figuring out how to remediate legacy metadata from multiple database entries for each record series into a cohesive finding aid. An example of this can be found with the database entries describing different record series for the Consolidated Students at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (CSUN). CSUN's original transfer of records to the University Archives included several binders of Senate meeting minutes

⁷ William J. Maher, *The Management of College and University Archives* (Metuchen, NJ: Society of American Archivists and Scarecrow Press, 1992), 80.

⁸ See Appendix for example.

⁹ Nevada System of Higher Education, "Records Retention and Disposition Schedule" (Board of Regents, 2018): 2.

and agendas spanning the mid-1970s until the mid-2000s. Each binder, representing one Senate term, was described in a separate database entry.

Total matching records in University Archives collection: 101	
► Consolidated Students of the University of Nevada (CSUN) - Student Senate Minutes : <i>Records Series</i> . May 14, 1974-April 29 1975 ... Session 3 Senate Meeting Minutes ... Student Organizations ...	
► Consolidated Students of the University of Nevada (CSUN) - Student Senate Minutes : <i>Records Series</i> . May 13, 1975-April 27, 1976 ... Session 4 Senate Meeting Minutes ... Student Organizations ...	
► Consolidated Students of the University of Nevada (CSUN) - Student Senate Minutes : <i>Records Series</i> . May 11, 1976 - May 10, 1977 ... Session 5 Senate Meeting Minutes ... Student Organizations ...	
► Consolidated Students of the University of Nevada (CSUN) - Student Senate Minutes : <i>Records Series</i> . May 24, 1977 - April 11, 1978 ... Session 6 Senate Meeting Minutes ... Agendas ... Student Organizations ...	
► Consolidated Students of the University of Nevada (CSUN) - Student Senate Minutes : <i>Records Series</i> . May 2, 1978 - April 24, 1979 ... Session 7 Senate Meeting Minutes ... Student Organizations ...	
► Consolidated Students of the University of Nevada (CSUN) - Student Senate Minutes : <i>Records Series</i> . May 1, 1979 - October 30, 1979 ... Session 8 Senate Meeting Minutes ... Agendas ... Student Organizations ...	
► Consolidated Students of the University of Nevada (CSUN) - Student Senate Minutes : <i>Records Series</i> . November 6, 1979 - April 29, 1980 ... Session 9 Senate Meeting Minutes ... Agendas ... Student Organizations ...	
► Consolidated Students of the University of Nevada (CSUN) - Student Senate Minutes : <i>Records Series</i> . May 6, 1980-October 28, 1980 ... Session 10 Senate Meeting Minutes ... Agendas ... Student Organizations ...	
► Consolidated Students of the University of Nevada (CSUN) - Student Senate Minutes : <i>Records Series</i> . December 2, 1980-October 27, 1981 ... Session 11 Senate Meeting Minutes ... Agendas ... Student Organizations ...	
► Consolidated Students of the University of Nevada (CSUN) - Student Senate Minutes : <i>Records Series</i> . November 3, 1981-October 26, 1982 ... Session 12 Senate Meeting Minutes ... Agendas ... Student Organizations ...	

Figure 1. SCA online database search results for “Consolidated Students at the University of Nevada.”

Having several database entries for each record series made it difficult for users and staff to contextualize each group of records in relation to each other. Some campus units were only assigned one or two record series numbers, which typically resulted in a small number of database entries. Other units like CSUN, with records that comprise several linear feet, included dozens of separate database entries. Staff discovered that what worked for documenting and describing discrete transfers over time did not necessarily work for describing and representing the records as a whole in a finding aid. How could this existing metadata be repurposed into a DACS-compliant finding aid?

Renumbering the University Archives

Rather than creating separate resource records in ArchivesSpace for each record series, SCATS decided to evaluate all the record series and group together records with common provenance into a single collection. Staff went back to the data collected during the survey to evaluate the collections. They examined the record series numbers, record creators, and any available descriptions of the materials to figure out what the originating unit was that created the records. Once the originating unit was identified, staff were able to group together records associated under a particular record number (whether it be at the record group, subgroup, or series level) and assign them a new collection number using the following collection classification schema: UA-#####. Thus, all the records

listed under subgroup 8.1 for CSUN have now been merged as part of a single collection (UA-00029). Records of the Department of Theatre (originally record series 2.6.6) that had three record series assigned for business files (record subseries 2.6.61), scrapbooks (record subseries 2.6.62), and subject files (record subseries 2.6.63), are now together as part of collection UA-00008.

The project team noted during the survey that public descriptions were only available through the SCA databases. University Archives had not been described in any legacy online finding aids or MARC records, giving staff latitude to assign new collection numbers using the UA-prefix without having to remediate metadata in other systems. The new classification allows SCATS to reassess holdings and bring separated materials and descriptions together. It also provides flexibility for adding future transfers as accessions rather than trying to fit them in with an existing record series number or assigning a new number. Implementing this new classification system provides more flexibility for overall intellectual and physical control over the records. It also makes it easier for processing archivists to apply archival arrangement and description practices to the records rather than trying to adhere to a classification system that was more appropriate for serving an administrative purpose and documenting transactional decisions.

Integrating University Archives into the Backlog Processing Workflow

Once new collection numbers were assigned, staff began to integrate the University Archives into the Archival Backlog Elimination Project work, which began in fall of 2017. This project, which occurred concurrently with SCA's DAMS development, also gave staff a deadline to describe all holdings by September 2020, the scheduled soft launch of the DAMS. Since the DAMS will publicly display collection descriptions directly from ArchivesSpace, it became imperative that every collection in SCA's holdings, including legacy collections, have *at least* a collection-level resource record in ArchivesSpace.

The goal to have a collection-level record for all holdings follows core archival principles to approach processing iteratively, which offers flexibility for SCATS to further process and enhance selected collections as needed.¹⁰ This means that some collections like the President's records, which total over 190 linear feet, were minimally described as part of the backlog project, but will be slated for further review and additional processing at a later date.

¹⁰ Society of American Archivists' Technical Subcommittee on *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (TS-DACS). "Statement of Principles" (Society of American Archivists, 2019), https://saa-ts-dacs.github.io/dacs/04_statement_of_principles.html.

Name/Unit: Consolidated Students of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Records
Number: UA-00029
Previous Number: Record Group 8.1
Dates: 1965-2016
Extent: 38 boxes and 1 flat file (20.84 cubic feet, 21.06 linear feet); 25 digital files (0.00301 GB)
Contents: Records are comprised of meeting minutes, agendas, publications, funding and planning documents, and memoranda created by the Consolidated Students of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (CSUN) from 1965 to 2016. CSUN is the undergraduate student government of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. The records include information about how CSUN operates on a daily basis as well as the type of activities CSUN sponsors. Records in the University Archives are open to representatives of the originating office, but are closed to public access until the records have been reviewed for protected information. Protected information includes: personally identifiable information, personal health information, student records, records regarding disciplinary procedures, records that compromise security or operations, legal communications, and legal work product.
Subject: n/a
[Link to Collection Guide](#)

Figure 2. Updated collection record for the Consolidated Students of the University of Nevada. The new record references the previous record group number and also links to the finding aid.

The overall goal for processing the University Archives is to ensure that each collection has a publicly accessible record. Staff conducted minimal physical processing to make sure that all the newly assigned collections had a published resource record in order to meet the September 2020 deadline.

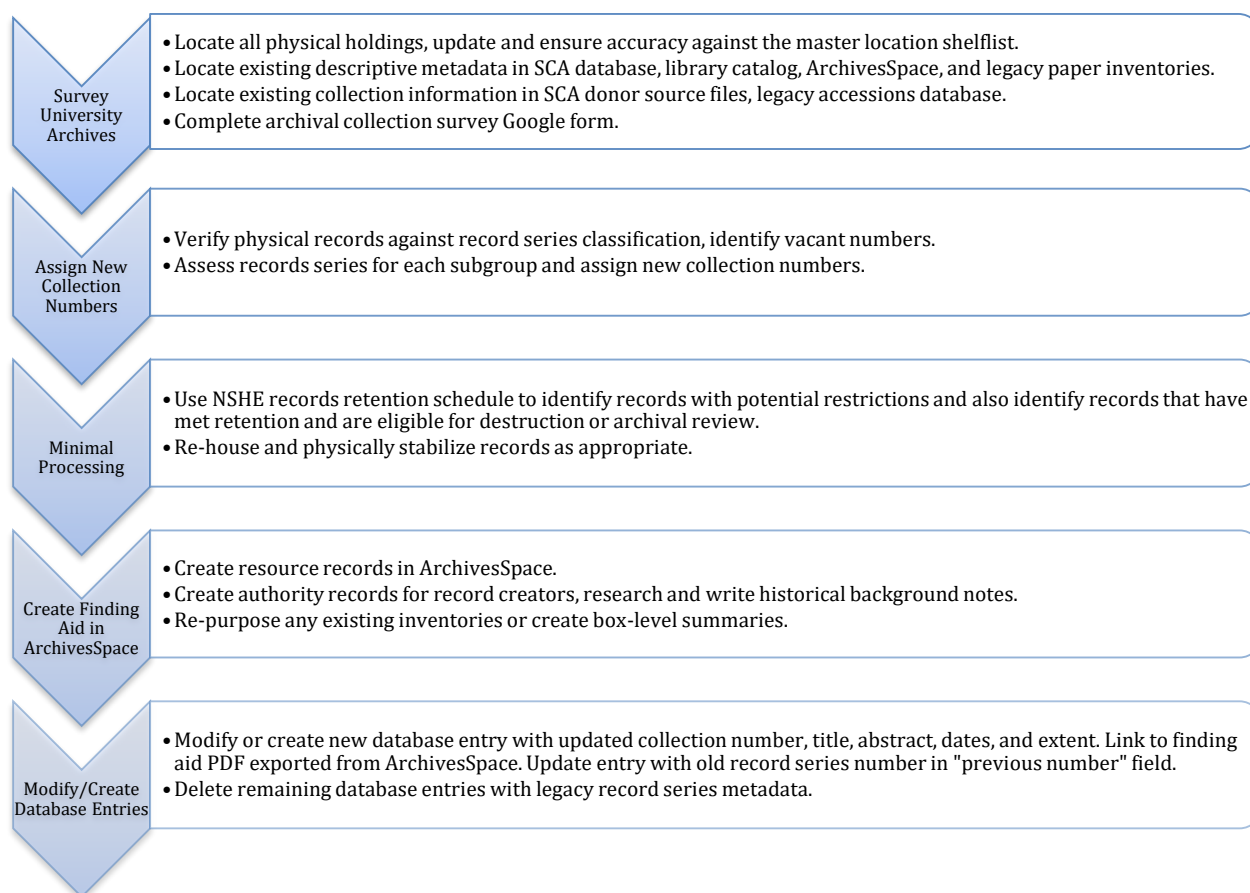


Figure 3. University Archives backlog processing workflow.

Staff encountered some obstacles when they began processing the faculty publications series. The faculty publications were organized and described in much the same way as the other University Archives records—housed together in one, central, physical location with a general listing of the originating unit and number of boxes. The boxes for the faculty publications lacked consistent and sequential box numbers, which hindered discovery and access for staff and researchers. While most of the faculty publications consist of pre-prints of articles or conference reports, staff also discovered faculty’s personal research files, notes, and correspondence. These materials are now treated as faculty papers and assigned their own UA collection numbers. The remaining faculty publications then became a single collection.

Improved Physical and Intellectual Control

This added descriptive metadata and the inclusion of materials’ physical location information (such as consistent non-repeating box numbers) in the collection record will enable better discoverability and accessibility of the materials. The previous practice of physically and intellectually managing the University Archives separately from other holdings proved to be unsustainable over time, as SCA received sporadic record transfers. The primary form of physical control relied on the record series number. This meant that the University Archives were physically organized by the record series number with shelving ranges assigned to store specific series. Over time space issues eventually made storage and retrieval challenging as certain record series grew and exceeded their assigned shelving capacity. Having all physical location information recorded in a central document along with the newly updated collection names and identifiers offers more flexibility for staff to search for information by keyword rather than having to remember and rely on the record series classification system.

Table 3. SCA’s master shelf list records storage area, shelf location, collection information, and container numbers.

Area	Location	Collection Number	Collection Title	Container Number
SC Main Stacks Industrial Shelf	10.01.1	UA-00001	Department of Athletics	5 boxes
SC Main Stacks Industrial Shelf	10.01.1	UA-00001	Athletics Scrapbooks	1 box
SC Main Stacks Industrial Shelf	10.01.1	UA-00001	UNLV Sports Promotional and Outreach Materials	3 boxes
SC Main Stacks Industrial Shelf	10.01.2	UA-00001	UNLV Sports Promotional and Outreach Materials	1 box
SC Main Stacks Industrial Shelf	10.01.2	UA-00001	UNLV Sports Promotional and Outreach Material Clothing	1 box
SC Main Stacks Industrial Shelf	10.01.2	UA-00015	Department of Foreign Languages	2 of 2
SC Main Stacks Industrial Shelf	10.01.2	UA-00013	University of Nevada, Las Vegas Department of Anthropology	01-11
SC Main Stacks Industrial Shelf	10.01.3	UA-00014	Department of English Subject Files	4 boxes
SC Main Stacks Industrial Shelf	10.01.3	UA-00015	Department of Foreign Languages	1 of 21
SC Main Stacks Industrial Shelf	10.01.3	UA-00016	Department of Philosophy Course Catalogs	1 box
SC Main Stacks Industrial Shelf	10.01.3	UA-00017	Department of Political Science Correspondence	1 box
SC Main Stacks Industrial Shelf	10.01.3	UA-00019	University of Nevada, Las Vegas Department of Biology Scrap	1 of 1
SC Main Stacks Industrial Shelf	10.01.4	UA-00020	Department of Mathematical Sciences Research Records	1 box

With the reorganization and reclassification, collections in the University Archives are now integrated into the regular collection management workflow rather than being treated as an exception. Expanding physical storage of University Archives beyond the original “records series” ranges also gives staff the opportunity to take advantage of alternative storage options such as the automated storage/retrieval system utilized by the Libraries.

Future steps

Overall, more than three hundred individual record series numbers were assessed, reorganized, and reclassified into around 100 individual University Archives “collections.” In the future, based on demonstrated use of the materials, staff plan on revisiting certain University Archives collections to assess further processing needs. More immediately, SCATS staff will work on enhancing authority records for university units and record creators in ArchivesSpace. This will include the creation and inclusion of biographical and historical information, chronologies, and name variants. The finding aid interface in the new DAMS will display all the descriptive information and relationships between agents. This will be especially helpful for users to see links between record creators and trace the provenance that authority control provides.¹¹

Consolidated Students of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Organization

Found in 1 Collection or Record:

Consolidated Students of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Records

Collection Identifier: UA-00029

Abstract Records are comprised of meeting minutes, agendas, publications, funding and planning documents, and memoranda created by the Consolidated Students of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (CSUN) from 1965 to 2016. CSUN is the undergraduate student government of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. The records include information about how CSUN operates on a daily basis as well as the type of activities CSUN sponsors.

Found in: University of Nevada, Las Vegas. University Libraries. Special Collections and Archives. / Consolidated Students of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Records

More about 'Consolidated Students of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas'

Related Names

Earlier/Later Relationship

- Confederated Students of Nevada Southern (Later Form of Related, Organization)

Figure 4. Authority record for the Consolidated Students of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, which points to the Confederated Students of Nevada Southern, an earlier variant name.

Another major change with new finding aid interface will be the ability to conduct full text searching within the finding aids. This will be a major departure from the homegrown databases which allowed for keyword searching within the database records but not within the finding aid PDFs attached to the records.

¹¹ Gorzalski, Matt, "Reimagining Record Groups: A Case Study and Considerations for Record Group Revision," *Provenance, Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists* 32, no. 1 (2015), <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/provenance/vol32/iss1/5>

Future initiatives to continue reorganizing University Archives will include a project to assess university publications such as course catalogs, yearbooks, newsletters, and media guides. The university publications also represent a body of materials that were described inconsistently. Some publications, such as the student newspaper and yearbook, are described in the Libraries' online catalog *and* in SCA's online databases. Other university publications are described in either one or the other. There are also university publications that are not described in any type of public record, essentially making them hidden and inaccessible to both staff and researchers.

The first phase of rethinking and reclassifying the University Archives at UNLV revealed the importance of approaching the materials as archival records, first and foremost. The previous practice of approaching University Archives from a records management perspective was unsustainable in accordance with collection management practices at SCATS. New workflows and processes for managing the University Archives and assigning collection numbers so far has proven to be more sustainable and logical than adhering to the record series system. Going forward with the next project, SCATS will continue with this strategy of prioritizing provenance when assessing and managing the University Archives.

Appendix

Example 1

Vacant record series numbers assigned for records that were never transferred. In this situation the only records in SCA's custody are the scrapbooks (2.14.32), which are now assigned collection number UA-00019. See full finding aid at <http://n2t.net/ark:/62930/f1nw4g>.

RECORD GROUP 2	Colleges, Schools, and Departments
Record Subgroup 2.14	College of Sciences
Record Series 2.14.1 (vacant)	Department of Chemistry
Record Series 2.14.2 (vacant)	Department of Geoscience
Record Series 2.14.3 (vacant)	School of Life Sciences
Record Subseries 2.14.31 (vacant)	Cooperative National Park Resources Studies Unit Publications
Record Subseries 2.14.32	Scrapbooks

Example 2

Record subgroup 8.1 and all associated record series are combined into collection number UA-00029. The record series were assessed and rearranged to form four series: Executive Branch, Judicial Branch, Legislative Branch, and Publications. See full finding aid at <http://n2t.net/ark:/62930/f1m614>.

RECORD GROUP 8	Student Organizations
Record Subgroup 8.1	Consolidated Students of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Record Series 8.1.1	Senate Meeting Minutes and Agendas
Record Series 8.1.2	Evaluations
Record Series 8.1.3	CSUN Presidential Notes and Documents
Record Series 8.1.4	CSUN Executive Board Meeting Minutes and Agendas
Record Series 8.1.5	Judicial Council Majority Opinion
Record Series 8.1.6	Subject Files
Record Series 8.1.7	Correspondence