

The Alpha Chi Archives: Procedures and Practices

Alpha Chi National College Honor Scholarship Society

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As Archivist of the Alpha Chi National Honor Scholarship Society, I have prepared this document at the suggestion of the Executive Director and the National Council of Alpha Chi. It has basically a threefold purpose:

1. To introduce and provide some information on the Alpha Chi Archives
2. To give some suggestions on the type of material desired for the collection, and to motivate new contributions, especially from local chapters and sponsors
3. To provide some helpful guidelines for chapters, sponsors, members, and others who are considering the submission of materials to the Archives

The Alpha Chi Archives: An Introduction

The collection of materials known as the Alpha Chi Archives is housed at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas as a part of that library's Special Collections. In volume, the collection presently occupies perhaps a little more than the space of a full, floor-to-ceiling bookcase of four-foot width, plus a few bulky items. Most of the collection is comprised of documents, letters, publications, photos, and the like, although there are a few memorabilia-type items such as T-shirts and framed awards. As is true of many special collections, the material is primarily contained in rigid cardboard library boxes. Access to it must be gained through the Special Collections office and use is confined to a staffed reading room.

Currently, most of the documents contained in the collection are items of importance submitted by the National Council, regional and other officers, and local chapters. These documents relate to matters as diverse as National Council attendance and business over the years, convention programs, correspondence regarding the formation and operation of local chapters, and local chapter actions. Some of them are originals or good copies of significant materials from the early days of Alpha Chi. Although not a chronological or complete collection, this assemblage of materials provides an excellent, detailed overview of the organization and a window into its continued interaction with the culture of the time.

The materials are being well cared for by the library staff at Southwestern in the same manner as other important collections in the Special Collections of that Library, a fact for which we who are associated with Alpha Chi can be very appreciative. There is good housing of the materials and security in connection with their use, as is typical of such special collections managed by well-run libraries. The Library itself has attractive and convenient facilities, and the personnel are extremely cooperative. The collection is currently (2013) under the care of librarians Kathryn Stallard, Head of Special Collections, and Anne Veerkamp. Careful use of the collection for research or informational purposes is welcomed.

As is true of many special collections with ongoing additions, much of the material in the collection is not organized chronologically or otherwise, which of course is expected due to the nature of its random, progressive acquisition. However, the overall content and grouping are well cataloged (by computer) and the collection is straightforward to use with a little experience. It is anticipated that new additions will be cataloged regularly in a similar manner. With perhaps more detailed expansion of this cataloging over time, we might anticipate that specific ranges of items will be immediately identifiable by computer, and that more of the collection will be available digitally.

One major objective of continuing to build a good archive base is to provide materials for an updated published history of Alpha Chi, probably for release in time for its centennial (2022) year. For anyone preparing to use the Archives, or just to gain a good understanding of Alpha Chi, I suggest reading the following outstanding hardcover **history of the organization**, which is available through the national office:

*Dr. Robert W. Sledge, **Scholarship and Character: Seventy-Five Years of Alpha Chi** (Searcy, Arkansas: Harding Press, 1997, copyright, the National Council of Alpha Chi)*

What kinds of contributions are sought for the Alpha Chi Archives?

New contributions to the Archives are actively sought. The collection already contains a considerable amount of significant correspondence of the national office and the National Council, as well as that of several regions. It is of course expected that additional material of this kind will be contributed annually. ***In addition, we are particularly interested in seeking important correspondence and other significant materials regarding regional and local chapter activities, especially from regions and chapters which have not contributed actively to the Archives already.***

Since the collection is maintained in a Special Collections room within the library of a small University, there is valid spatial concern about its potential growth. For this reason, it is important that potential contributors review their materials carefully and choose only what are considered significant items for submittal. **Important correspondence, documents, minutes of significant meetings, recent or historic photographs, descriptions of community activities, etc. are very desired.** Large memorabilia items (e.g., large posters and banners) and small bulky items such as T-shirts and mugs are in most cases not as desired simply because of the space they require. Framed items of historical significance to Alpha Chi (such as a plaque or old historical photo relating to the organization or its location), however, are some possible exceptions, as well as a few small representative souvenirs.

These statements should NOT be construed to indicate a lack of interest on the part of the Archives in acquiring materials, in whatever form they are, that relate in a significant way to the organization, nor do we wish to discourage any chapter from considering submissions to the Archives. On the contrary, I welcome a call or email from anyone who wishes to contribute materials of whatever form. We would simply ask that you be aware of the possible limitations on space that may accrue to the collection as time goes on, and help us by identifying what you feel is important to retain for posterity. It is my objective to rely heavily on the discretion of potential contributors in this matter, since it might be easy for others to overlook potentially valuable materials that might otherwise be lost. Having worked with libraries and museum collections before, I am concerned that much material of potential interest to future generations is routinely lost or destroyed, so I wish to emphasize the (often underestimated) value that the typical chapter can add to the Archives.

How do I submit material to the Archives?

Let's suppose that you have identified some materials that you feel are of importance to the Archives; for instance, a letter from a prominent person in support of a chapter activity, or a file of old newspaper clippings that chronicles some interesting period in your chapter's life. Or perhaps you have a well-organized file of interesting correspondence, a history of your local chapter, a copy of a scrapbook detailing its activities, or perhaps a file of induction-ceremony programs or lists of speakers from ceremonies over the years. Some chapters or regional officers might even have digital copies of materials on CD or DVD (these are easy to ship and store, and might often be the best way to submit important material to the Archives by those who desire to keep the original documents). Perhaps you might have an unusual plaque, pin, or other award that is of great significance in your chapter's recent history that you feel should be preserved for later Alpha Chi generations.

Probably the best first step is to contact me by phone or email (see below) to talk about what you wish to submit. Through a brief conversation or interchange of emails, I can help you determine if your collection seems to meet the objectives of the Archives (and in most cases it no doubt will, since the reader of this will already have a motivation to preserve important records). Material can then be mailed to me at the address given below. Note that I have provided a building address as well as a university mail code, to meet the needs of different delivery services.

There is no deadline for communicating or submitting this material, except that I would suggest (as with anything else) that you begin the process while you are seriously thinking about it! Certainly if there is some imminent danger of loss or discard of materials you feel are important, you should consider preparing them for submittal. My plan is to convey received items into the Archives perhaps once or twice each year, or more frequently if warranted. That way they can be cataloged and made available in a timely way.

Thank you for your interest in maintaining and expanding the Alpha Chi Archives! We look forward to hearing from you at any time.

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