

**Simon Fraser University Fortieth Anniversary Exhibit.** SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES. Mounted at the SFU campus, September 2005–indefinitely.

In the 1960s, the Social Credit government of British Columbia supported a flurry of monumental infrastructure projects, including a new university . Unlike the hydro-electric dams and highways that form part of this legacy , Simon Fraser University (SFU) is also the result of the flurry of cultural and social disturbances that we now calmly refer to as “the Sixties.” The radical

campus<sup>1</sup> turned forty in 2005, giving the university archives the opportunity to communicate this short but contentious history to the student population, and promote the Archives as an integral part of the institutional and scholarly community. With special anniversary funding in hand they produced a series of exhibits and participated in SFU's fortieth-anniversary celebrations including a campus-wide open house in June 2006. The open house activities utilized a number of traditional and non-traditional advocacy tools: the regular swag such as mugs and t-shirts, but also fortune cookies containing specially made messages with school trivia and information. However, the real novelty of their organizing for this event was creating, in a variety of contexts and formats, a dispersed but unified exhibit, making the best use of the university's anniversary to build up their visibility.

The SFU Archives is located in the Maggie Benston Centre, a multi-floor complex of student services such as the Career and Health Centre and bookstore. To reach the ground-floor Archives, one has to leave the psychological safety of the centre's cascading ferns, dynamically arranged study carrels, and shopping mall-like ambience, and enter a long and narrow corridor of the atrium. Thankfully, the main exhibit eases this transition for the uninitiated. A large floor to ceiling display case outside the entrance to the archives houses three hanging panels, about twenty feet wide in total. No actual archival documents are used in any of the present exhibits; instead, they are reproduced on the PVC panels. This main display rotates themes every six months. The two alternating origin stories are "Movers and Makers: How the 'instant university' came to be," and "Protests and Policies: How sixties turbulence helped shape SFU." The panels combine timelines, historical photographs, captions, other graphic images from archival sources, pull quotes, and short explanatory texts, written by staff members Ian Forsyth, Frances Fournier, and Lisa Beitel. The hand of a professional graphic designer is evident and acknowledged in the display. The texts and images are well balanced, and offer content to the distracted passerby as well as the reader with few minutes to spare.

The exhibit continues down the corridor towards the archives proper. Here, a series of four 4'x5' panels focus on specific historical themes: athletics, university expansion, the arts, and women's rights. Each of the panels reproduces a number of documents from the archives, contextualized with short narratives. Each theme is also presented as a question, such as "Why does SFU have such a vibrant artistic community?" Each panel repeats the phrase "The answer is in the Archives." Each panel also includes a brief description of the records it holds relevant to the particular theme. The content of these

1 I borrow this term from the title of a new history of SFU by Hugh Johnston, *Radical Campus: Making Simon Fraser University* (Vancouver, 2005). It reflects the popular conception of SFU as a leftist counter-cultural institution, but also its centrality to changes in post-secondary education.

panels shifts from straightforward storytelling, the genre of the more public atrium display, to advocacy, promoting the value of the archives for researchers. For an audience unfamiliar with archival research, such as the odd undergraduate student, the panels not only provide a familiarizing experience, but an education in the types and variety of records available to researchers.

A fifth panel located in the hallway leading to the archives explains the services they provide. Unlike the traditional institutional archives, which primarily serve researchers, SFU Archives has embraced the continuum concept in developing its programming, ensuring their relevancy and growth. Besides the archives program, it runs a records-management program, a freedom of information and protection of privacy program, and a copyright program. As a result, the staff has also taken on responsibility for communicating to the university community the importance of current records. The information on the panels is therefore repackaged as a pamphlet. To facilitate their communication efforts, they have branded the archives, creating an identifiable image, and integrated their service message into their exhibition strategy: all the displays share a common design and color scheme. Included on every exhibit panel is the slogan: "Your Archives. Your University." The history of SFU, the ostensible content of the main exhibit, is a history of student involvement in the nature and governance of university education. The slogan effectively links a characterization of the contemporary archival mission with SFU's history.

To serve as outreach tools the thematic panels of the Archives' hallway are reformatted into seven-foot-high mobile nylon banners. These are lent out for special events such as departmental anniversaries, meetings, and reunions. A related form of tactical outreach, and illustrative of the archives' outreach efforts, is the finding-aid launch. What is a finding-aid launch? The Archives often relies on funding for arrangement and description obtained directly from the administrative units and offices whose records they acquire. When the finding aid is complete they use the opportunity to celebrate and promote the work of the Archives. When a backlog exists because of underfunding, it makes sense to combine advocacy with accomplishment. This familiarizes the clients with the final disposition of their records, and gives them a chance to tour the Archives and see the care and attention which the archives gives to their records. These clients will then be able to talk up the archives to their colleagues in other offices. Social events and a little investment in coffee and cookies can go a long way towards raising the profile of archival services.

Another interesting tactical and physical niche occupied by the Archives' exhibit is located in the administrative offices of the university, Strand Hall, named after SFU's third president, Ken Strand. The Archives was asked if it could do something with some empty vertical display cases, built to cover up electrical panels in the main hallway. This hallway is regularly traveled by the

men and women in charge of the university purse strings, so of course the Archives would be pleased to take care of this little problem. The cases now house the same thematic panels found in the Archives' hallway. One of these panels is titled, "What *really* happened? The answer is in the Archives ... for now." It relates the story of a group of teaching assistants who were fired by the Board of Governors for off-campus political activities in 1967. Segueing from oral history to magnetic media preservation, the panel includes a sampling of obsolete digital media carriers such as floppy disks, and a short recommendation on "Fighting digital amnesia." One of the archivist's greatest present challenges is now in view of the institution's policy makers.

The environment of a university campus is filled with appeals and pleas to one's attention: artwork, statues, commemorative plaques, periodicals, flyers, advertisements, posters, notices, signs, and exhibits. Rather than trying to cut through the clutter with additional clamour, the Archives' exhibition strategy has focused on the best use of specific spaces. Some of these are in temporary spaces, such as those for special events, others are opportune, such as the administration building. Much of the history of SFU, or of any university, revolves around the meaning and use of architectural space. The SFU campus is defined by its architecture: it is the first major project by the seminal West Coast architect Arthur Erickson. From the spatially and socially unifying design of Erickson's covered mall in the centre of the campus, to the impromptu and unofficial renaming of a faculty lounge, the "workers' canteen" in 1968, it is evident that campus space and meaning are intertwined. The people, activities, and meaning of the student services centre are generally not the same as the administration building. This knowledge of social space is integrated into the exhibition strategy of the Archives.

This series of exhibits offers an instructive example for those considering new approaches to archival exhibits, beyond putting a specific collection of documents on public view. For instance, the allure of original records on display is great for capturing people's attention, but is not good for preservation. Also, in this particular institutional setting, the Archives was able to resist using website exhibits as a model, which are designed to appeal to a general audience. If we call this model "lumping," then the SFU archivists are "splitters." By recognizing and addressing specific constituents, the SFU Archives has developed a modular approach to its exhibit design. Elements can be reformatted for different uses and places. The various uses of this exhibit, which can be mixed and matched, include: generating moral support from the Archives' constituency; encouraging use of the Archives and archival services; educating resource allocators; introducing primary source materials to students and faculty; establishing an identifiable image for the Archives; providing historical reflection; and reinforcing collegial values. Reproduction can be a friend of the archival exhibit designer, and not just detract from the reliance on documentary aura.

The slogan “Your Archives. Your University” is an appeal to ownership and participation necessitated by a core characteristic of the institution’s population: transience. Both current students and retiring baby-boomer faculty and staff will be replaced by people unfamiliar with the history of their institution. Through the exhibit one can get the sense that the Archives feels it is responsible for maintaining a community, as well as building strategic networks, and not just creating a sanctuary for specialists. This, perhaps as much as the interesting and provocative content and design of the exhibit, is its strength: communicating a service ethic, which seems lost in the corporatization of contemporary campus activity.

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