



To Scan or Not To Scan

Should you scan those paper records?

These women pioneers in Columbia history provide the questions you should consider before taking on a scanning project.

Why scan paper documents?

- Offices scan paper documents to **facilitate retrieval**. Electronic records are easily accessible (even remotely) and searchable.
- Offices scan paper documents to **decrease storage space needs**. Paper records take up a lot of space.
- However, scanning is a time-consuming and sometimes expensive proposition.



Winifred Edgerton Merrill (Astronomy) - First PhD recipient, 1886

Which records should you scan?

- Scanning is a means to increase efficiency so look for documents with **high reference value** and **high accessibility needs**.
- Only scan records you **often refer to** and/or those that multiple users need access to. If you (and others) need to look up information **frequently**, these are good candidates for scanning.



Mary Letitia Caldwell (Chemistry) - First Assistant Professor, 1929

Which records should you NOT scan?

- If you do not consult the records regularly, then the time and effort can be best used elsewhere.
- This is a big resource investment so you should not scan “just in case.”



Ruth Benedict (Anthropology) - First Associate Professor, 1937

Do you need to keep these records?

- You should not scan records to free up **storage space**. Think about what is taking up that space and whether or not you need to keep them.
- Some records may already be past their retention period, that is, the required storage time.



Marjorie Nicolson (English) - First full Professor, 1941

Do you need to keep these records?

- Do these old paper records have historical value and thus, belong in the University Archives?
- Or are they routine, every-day records which could be securely destroyed or recycled?
- Not sure? Please email records@columbia.edu and we'll be happy to help you make those decisions.



Ruth Bader Ginsburg - First law faculty member, 1972

Do you need to keep these records?

- If you do need to hold on to the records, could you **store them offsite**?
 - It is both cheaper and quicker to send files offsite than it is to scan them.
 - Just don't forget to create an inventory of anything you decide to send offsite so you know what is there!



Martha Twitchell Muse - First Trustee, 1973

Are the records ready for scanning?

- Are the files systematically organized and clearly labeled?
- Do you need records to be scanned as units (a whole folder) or as individual items?
- Are there any fasteners, such as staples or paperclips? These will have to be removed.



Barbara J. Fields - First Black tenured professor in History, 1987

Are the records ready for scanning?

- Are the files all on the same size paper (letter or legal)?
- Are there any Post-It notes?
These will have to be removed as well and scanned separately.
- Are your documents one-sided or double-sided?
- Do you have the time and staff to prepare the documents for this scanning project?



Caroline Bynum (History) - First University Professor, 1999

How will the records be scanned?

- At what resolution will the scans be made (how many dpis)?
- What format will they be (PDFs)?
- Will you require text recognition?
- Who will do the scanning?
In-house or vendor?
- What kind of quality control will be in place?
- Will you run with a pilot or test?
- Do these records contain any sensitive or confidential information?



Michele Moody-Adams - First Columbia College Dean, 2009

What will you do with the scans?

- Where will the scans live? Where will they be stored? Who will be able to access them?
- How will they be organized? How do they fit in with the rest of your digital records?
- How will each scan be named? What are the filenames?
- What will you do with the originals?



Mary C. Boyce - First Engineering Dean, 2013, and first Provost, 2021

Have more question?

- If you need assistance as you make these kinds of decisions, the staff of the University Archives is here and ready to help.
- Please feel free to email us at records@columbia.edu and we can help you get your scanning project started (or not).



Image information

- Winifred Edgerton Merrill, 1883 by Pach Bros. New York (Scan 4259) Historical Photograph Collection, University Archives.
- Mary Letitia Caldwell (Scan 4833) Historical Photograph Collection, University Archives.
- Ruth Benedict, by Blackstone Studios (Scan 0717) Historical Photograph Collection, University Archives.
- Marjorie Nicolson (Scan 0779) Historical Photograph Collection, University Archives.
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- Michele Moody-Adams, 2009, by University Photographer Eileen Barroso (DSC_7239) Office of Public Affairs Photograph Collection, University Archives
- Mary C. Boyce by Jeffrey Schiffman, [Office of the President Announcements](#) (accessed February 26, 2021)