

Looking at the Past to Enhance the Future: AALS's Archival Legacy

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Any professional organization that has existed for nearly 100 years produces an extensive documentary record. Certain of these records are important to retain indefinitely as archives because of their continuing value for providing evidence of the existence, functions, and operations of the organization as well as for scholarly research. Most fundamentally, archives provide the organization and society with a memory and a means to verify, refute, or modify the recollections of its members and the outside community about its past. By preserving a comprehensive record of an association's activities, archives become an important teaching tool to help the organization benefit from the past to change and improve its future.

The AALS is no exception. In 1989, recognizing that the resources of the AALS did not permit it to develop its own professional archival program, it entered into a deposit agreement with the University of Illinois to ensure that the AALS's documentary heritage would be available to the organization for future research on the association and on the development of legal education and the legal profession. The AALS archives has grown from 16.5 cubic feet of records arranged in 16 record series to its current size of 156.5 cubic feet (the equivalent of over 438,200 pages) in 52 record series.

Included in the AALS archives are materials on the relation of legal education to issues such as academic freedom and tenure, minorities and women in law, law school curriculum and faculty, and academic and legal ethics. Papers of past AALS presidents and biographical sketches of law teachers and academic administrators serve as important research tools. Copies of AALS publications such as the Directory of Law Teachers, AALS Proceedings, the Journal of Legal Education, and audiotapes and conference materials from annual meetings and workshops provide a picture of the work of the AALS.

The University Archives, with the financial support of AALS, has arranged and described the AALS archives to make them accessible to the Association, students and scholars. The AALS and the University of Illinois have developed guidelines governing the use of the archives. The level of access provided to users is determined by guidelines based on a three-part categorization of archival holdings: open, restricted and confidential. Record series in the open category may be accessed with permission of the University Archivist, but both restricted and confidential series may only be accessed if the AALS Executive or Deputy Director provides the Archivist with prior written permission.

As of this writing, the AALS Archives Assistant is working on providing additional access to the AALS Archives by way of a "page" on the World Wide Web. A complete listing of the record series including information on access status, inclusive dates and number of cubic feet will be provided. There will be a link to the Archives web page from the AALS website as well as from the University Archives homepage where information is available on archival principles and documentary programs.

Inquiries regarding the AALS Archives may be made to: William J. Maher, University Archives, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 19 Main Library, 1408 West Gregory Drive, Urbana, IL 61801; telephone: (217)333-0798; Internet: w-maher@illinois.edu