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Graduate School and University Center Archives Finding Aid - Record Group V: Presidents' Files

Graduate Center Library, CUNY

GSUC ARCHIVES V

PRESIDENTS' FILES

Introduction

This record group, or, rather, series of record groups, comprises the papers of Mina S. Rees, who was instrumental in the creation of the Graduate School and served as its first President from 1969 until she retired in June 1972; Harold M. Proshansky, who had been Dean of Graduate Studies and Provost and Deputy President under Rees, became acting President in 1972 when she retired and President the following year, and died while still in office in December 1990; Frances Degen Horowitz, who was chosen to succeed Proshansky in 1991 after a distinguished career as teacher, researcher and administrator at the University of Kansas in Lawrence and served until she retired in May 2005; and William P. Kelly, who had served as Provost under Horowitz, was appointed her successor in 2005 and served as President until the summer of 2013, when he was named interim Chancellor of CUNY to succeed Matthew Goldstein. These files are labeled, respectively, V-A. "Rees," V-B. "Proshansky," V-C. "Horowitz," and V-D. "Kelly," and are shelved in this order.

As their papers were being processed it very quickly became apparent that the president was key to understanding the problems and activities, policies and operations, successes and failures of the Graduate School and University Center. Although each had a small army of vice presidents, deans, assistant vice presidents and associate deans and lower-level administrators and assistants, it was almost always the president who had to bear the brunt of criticisms (but also to receive the plaudits). It was up to the president to raise and allocate funds, to impose and defend budget cuts, to mediate rivalries and enmities, and to pacify opponents within and outside the establishment. Thus it became important to include in these Presidents' Files material about the person's background, education, family, hobbies, pre-presidential and post-presidential career, etc. – anything that would help to explain her/his personality and the reasons for their decisions.

There are considerable differences in the quantity, the kinds, and the selection of materials preserved by the offices of the presidents and by their staffs in their lifetime, and by surviving family members and employees and estate administrators after their death, and thus in what has eventually been passed on to the Archives. This naturally affects the way they are organized and presented in the Archives, but an effort has been made to treat them as consistently as possible. Also, some material germane to the presidents' files will be found in other record groups, especially "Committee Records" and "CUNY." But one of the main causes of these differences is the advances in technology, especially since the start of the 21st century: letter-writing ("snail mail") and photo-copying ("Xeroxing") went out, e-mail and "texting" and use of Web sites and "blogs" came in. The Horowitz papers are the last of the presidents' files to use paper for most communications, with even e-mail a rarity until the turn of the millennium. But Dr. Kelly used computers for most internal as well as external communications, and even his formal speeches were delivered without written texts, and with few notes if any.

The files of each president are organized in these four subgroups:
        Articles, Speeches and Other Writings
        Correspondence—Names
        Correspondence—Subjects
        Personal Materials

The subgroups are shelved in this order. While "correspondence" denotes mostly letters and memoranda it includes also reports, clippings from newspapers and other periodicals, photographs, and other documents. Papers dealing with identifiable subjects are filed in "Correspondence—Subjects" preferentially. To the extent possible, subject headings are used uniformly throughout the Archives, and include names of organizations, titles of journals, and geographic designations. "Correspondence—Names" comprises personal names listed alphabetically (last names first) for material that has no identifiable subject or in which the listed individual is the subject. The "Correspondence—Subjects" subgroup includes many explanatory notes and cross-references from synonyms or related headings to facilitate the retrieval of information; however, there are no cross-references from personal names to the subjects of the individuals' activities.

On many papers there are handwritten notes. If they are in the margins or the body of the text they can be safely attributed to the addressee. Notes in the upper right-hand corner are most likely instructions to or guides by the person(s) who were to copy, forward or file the papers before they were sent out or after the addressee had read them.

In the course of archival processing notes were added sparingly, mainly to help identify individuals and to suggest the probable dates or contexts of documents.

[revised and updated as of November 24, 2014]