Who has a beanie? More specifically, who has a freshman beanie from Southwest Texas State Teachers College, a photo of a student wearing the beanie and a story to go with it? Beanies were big on American college campuses in the first half of the 20th century.

“We would like to have some freshman beanies if any exist. That was a part of our history for a number of decades,” says Kristine Toma, university archivist. “Artifacts are the fun part; visually interesting they tell a story. They kind of augment the story that the records tell.”

Building the university archives is a relatively recent focus for the library, says Joan Heath, associate vice president/university library. She says a lot of progress has been made since the archives were established. “I credit my boss Van Wyatt, but also President (Denise)
Trauth for recognizing the need. It is an interesting story: When you have a university that is over 100 years old and you are just starting your archives, what’s involved? There is a whole back-of-the-house aspect,” she says.

Toma joined the university in 2006 as Texas State’s first full-time archivist. Today she and assistant archivist Megan North work on the fifth floor of the Alkek Library where, in addition to collecting, cataloging, digitizing, researching and sometimes teaching, the archivists work with faculty, staff, students and members of the public.

Retention schedule
“This is my third, and I plan for it to be, my final job. I’ve worked combined records and archives jobs my entire career,” Toma says. “I had about 10 years’ experience when I came in. The first thing I did was create the Records Retention Schedule (RRS).” The State of Texas requires all state agencies to have a retention schedule in place. Records management, she explains, involves the systematic organization of all records across an organization. Rules for keeping and disposing must be followed. “The retention schedule helps us know what we should have,” she says.

Toma explains that they use the RRS itself to document the functions of the university, confirm what to dispose (via records disposition logs) and to identify what records have historical value. “It’s a tool to manage university records – so we can dispose of what we don’t need and preserve what has value,” she says. “We have to retain those logs for 10 years as proof that we disposed of records according to the retention schedule, but I’ve rarely – if ever – had cause to look through the logs once they are approved and filed.”

The archivists also provide instruction to campus support staff through professional development each semester. Toma, who has been teaching this for seven years, says employees have uncovered materials from the 1960s. “People thought we had to keep everything,” she says with a sympathetic smile. Student advising files are one thing that staffers thought had to be kept forever; they don’t.

“The thing I like about it – and the reason I like doing both retention and archives – is it gives us a chance to appraise our records, determine what should go to archives and then in that retention schedule where it says

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— KRISTINE TOMA
‘disposition instructions’ it reads: ‘these records have archival value, contact the university archives.’ So for the first time in our history we are actually channeling administrative records into the archives on a regular basis and do so intentionally.”

Projects can vary, on this day Toma is sorting through commencement folders. What she is preserving are the ceremonial items such as programs, press releases, photographs, transcripts of the speeches and biographies of the speakers.

As a research collection, the archivists do a lot of work for the university. It could be a request to document a department’s anniversary, or a grant applicant who needs to pinpoint when a department was created, or even facts and photos to decorate a new residence hall.

Timeline of campus life

The staff spent hundreds of hours gathering information for the 100-year timeline featured in a common area of the Chautauqua and Gaillardia residence halls. Staffers combed through presidential reports, photographs, University Star newspapers and old Pedagog yearbooks. The finished product is on the second floor in the Traditions Room.

“Our main mission is to collect information related to the administrative function of the university – like what does the university do? That’s what we want to document,” Toma says.

The archives are part of the curriculum with undergrads in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication. Senior lecturer Elizabeth Clark has the News Writing/Reporting I classes utilize the archives as a primary source. “I want them to understand that not everything is available on the web,” she says. Using microfilm copies of the Star, students enjoyed seeing what the campus was like 50 years ago. “They made some delightful discoveries,” she says.

Using the archives, she explains, offers “not only a glimpse of American and world history, but also media history.” Students complete Back in the Day assignments that are posted on a blog: http:// txstatebackintheday1.blogspot.com/ and http://txstatebackintheday2.blogspot.com/

Dr. Lynn Denton has students from a public history class use Pedagos from 1904 to 1955 to compare and analyze information. The class also participates in a project at historypin.com that utilizes photos and
fact from the archives. “Doing primary source research gives students public history experience, and they come out of it saying ‘I never knew that about the university,’” Denton says.

Genealogy requests

Family genealogy requests from the archives are especially popular following holiday get-togethers, Toma says. Recently, North assisted a woman who wanted a photo of her husband in his Bobcat basketball uniform. Using a light board, the woman searched the negatives until she spotted him.

An author writing a book set during World War II visited the archives to research a character he placed at the university. Toma says he was delighted to peruse copies of the Pedagog.

“Archives are all about relationships,” Toma said. She cites the donation of a 1918 class ring and a panoramic photo of the class of 1922, both currently on display, as the result of a relationship formed.

Another source for materials is eBay. Toma paid about $10 for a 1928 Glee Club program that included the students’ names and the songs they performed, along with ads from local businesses. eBay is where they find antique postcards showing the campus and San Marcos. North has made these cards available on a web page; the archives’ first effort into making original materials available digitally. See it at: https://digital.library.txstate.edu/handle/10877/4742.

Toma stresses that space is limited, and while they don’t want to always turn down donations, there comes a point when they must determine if an item has research value or is a personal memento.

“A letter sweater is nice. We have two, including Coach Oscar Strahan’s 1960 national basketball championship – but that is a memento,” she says. However, a roster of players with names and pictures could lend itself to a research paper on college athletics.

Potential donors are invited to talk with an archivist to discuss materials that may be appropriate for the archives. General inquiries are welcome, as are requests for research appointments. To reach the office, email UnivArchives@txstate.edu.