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Management of Archives and Special Collections

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Final Report: Processing the Theoharis David Papers

I. **Introduction**

For our final project, we processed the Theoharis David Papers, a collection made up of

paper-based and digital materials that current Pratt Institute architecture professor Theoharis David

collected over the past 6 decades. The materials were created between the years of 1961 and 2018 and

donated by David to the Pratt Institute Archives in a series of installments. The collection reflects both

David's professional career as a working architect and his professorship, with one of the largest chunk

of materials being the many publications (magazines, school newsletters, newspapers, and more) that

mention David and/or his work. In addition to these publications, the Papers include a sizable selection

of David's original architectural drawings, done on tracing paper and depicting a diverse set of the

projects he worked on over the years. Some other types of items that can be found in the collection are

exhibition and event flyers, catalogs, and reports, teaching materials such as syllabi and lecture slides,

collages, digital files of student work, and photographs of David. Since David is still a working architect

and professor at Pratt, we expect that he will be donating more materials in the near future.

II. **Context and background**

This collection was created by Theoharis (Theo) David, an architect and educator. David was

born in Farmingdale, New York to Cypriot parentage and received his B.Arch. from Pratt Institute and

M.Arch from Yale University. For over five decades, David has taught as a professor in Pratt's School of

Architecture, where he has been recognized as a distinguished professor and has previously served as

graduate architecture chair. He is also a visiting professor in

Cyprus. He has been in private practice in New York and

Greece since 1974, and he is a Fellow of the AIA. As

demonstrated by the collection, David's projects range in

purpose, including sports arenas, private residences,

residential complexes, religious structures, and beyond. He

has presented a multitude of lectures, received various

architecture awards, and had a solo exhibition of his

projects, models, and plans, "Built Ideas: A Life of

Teaching, Learning, and Action, 1969-2012," at Pratt in

Theoharis David with an architectural model, found in a folder marked "Personal."

2013. The collection was donated by David in five parts between the years of 2015 and 2019.
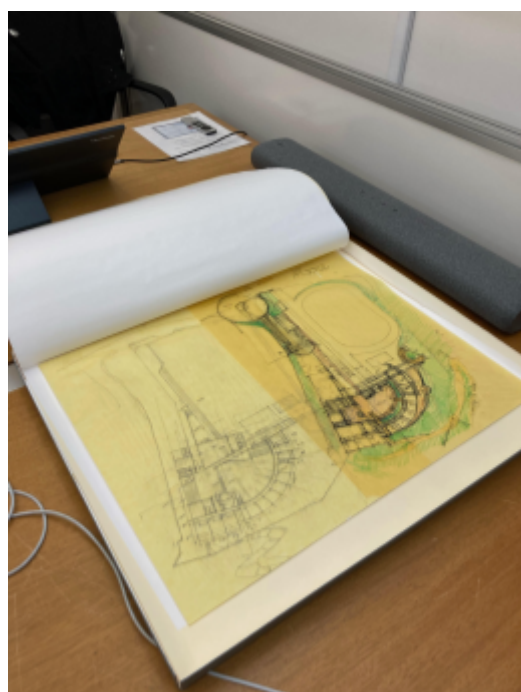
One of David's oversized architectural drawings on tracing paper.

The formats we encountered while working through the

collection included publications (i.e., magazines, journals,

newspapers, and scanned press clippings), flyers, invitations,

collages, three photographs, two exhibition catalogs, two flash

drives, and oversized architectural drawings. The publications

within the collection are all related to Theoharis David,

containing articles written by or about him. They primarily

relate to projects he has worked on. Many include sticky notes

inserted by David to demarcate the page on which he is

mentioned. Materials are in English and Greek, as well as one publication in Croatian. The flyers and invitations pertain to exhibitions, lectures, and symposia that David participated in. The exhibition catalogs were published in conjunction with the aforementioned exhibition, "Built Ideas," in 2013. The flash drives contain powerpoints and materials related to courses taught by David.

III.   Methodology

To start processing the collection, we first did a survey of all the materials to get a general sense of the items. To do this, we created a Google Sheet and worked together to go through each folder, envelope, or loose item in the boxes and record the following information: current housing (is it in a folder/envelope/loose in the box?), current folder/item title (many of the folders were labeled with sticky notes), accession number (if labeled), physical location (which box did we find it in?), general content (a brief summary of the types of records within the folder/envelope), tentative series, date range, and any notes we had about the material.

This 1994 newspaper was found in a folder David had marked "Personal." The yellow sticky note marks the article that mentions him.

After we had completed the survey, we discussed possible series at length and ultimately decided on three: Projects, Academic Materials, and Publications. After deciding on our series titles, we created a new tab on our Google Sheet and began going through the materials and creating files, which we then sorted into series. We made sure to record the new file name, where the materials in the file were previously stored (ex. original box number,

original folder label, if the file was created by splitting up the contents of a folder into multiple parts),

the year span of the file, and any general notes we had about the file.

After finishing the initial intellectual re-organization of the materials, we began physically

placing the files into new folders. To prepare for this, after examining the materials within the original

folders and determining that the items themselves didn't seem to be in any particular order, we decided

to sort the items within our files in chronological order so that it would be easier for researchers to find

what they were looking for. Then, we split some large folders into two or three files that represented

One of our new legal document cases containing re-foldered material.

different date ranges of the same content type. We then re-foldered each file, labeled each folder, and removed all metal staples and paper clips from the materials. We also flagged any oversized materials that would need to be flattened and stored separately in our Google Sheet. For the large flat box of architectural drawings, we kept the file

names essentially the same as the folders were labeled, added the files to our Projects series, and

determined date ranges for each file.

After physically rearranging the collection, we went into ArchivesSpace and began creating a

finding aid for the papers. To determine the format and content of our entries, we often referred to

Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS) (Society of American Archivists, 2022) to make

sure our finding aid would comply with professional standards and offer the same information as other Pratt Institute Archives finding aids. First, we added entries for the collection's basic information, languages, and dates. We then created three children at the series level to establish our series, adding titles, basic information, language, dates, and scope & contents notes for each. We then added children for each series at the file level, adding basic information, dates, and instance information for each. While adding in these files, we went in the order that they were in the boxes so that we would avoid adding files twice or creating multiple instances for the same box. We ultimately decided to add a sub-series for the oversized architectural drawings, so researchers could easily navigate to these records while viewing the finding aid. We created file-level records for each folder in the large flat box and described the drawings depicted in the images

Our final four boxes housing the entire collection (except for the drawings that were not able to be transported and physically arranged).
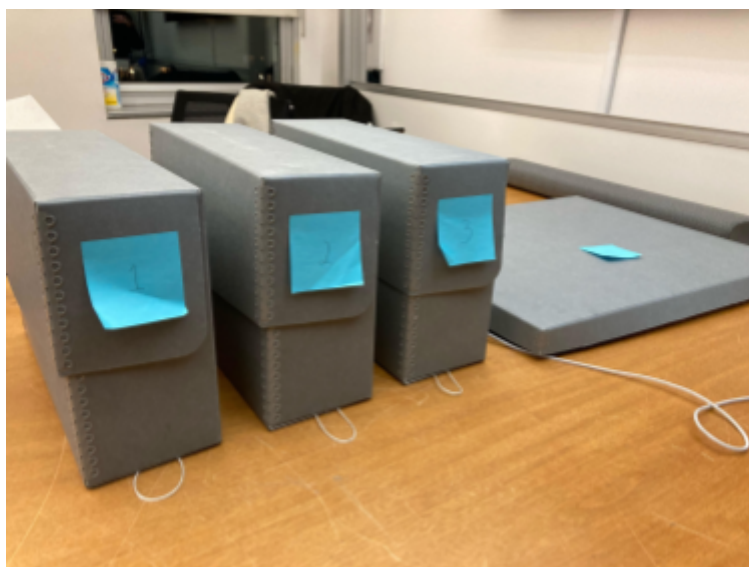
provided to us at the item level. We chose to do this because there was a relatively small number of these drawings, and they had already been partially described in the image titles. We also knew that Prof. Fontánez Rodriguez would ultimately be dealing with the physical organization of those items, and we didn't want to leave her guessing which items belonged in which file, so we did away with files altogether for those items.

Once we had completed this initial construction of the finding aid, we went back and calculated the extent of the collection, added agent links, subjects, the abstract, the scope & contents note, preferred citation, conditions governing use and access, related materials, a biographical note, and arrangement, processing information, acquisition, and accrual notes for the collection as a whole. We double-checked that we had included all the files and items in the finding aid, and ultimately exported it.

The approach we took allowed us to first become familiar with the scope and formats of the materials in the collection, which made processing and developing the finding aid a smoother process. Prioritizing the survey informed the level of processing we would do, as well as how we would then divide the collection into series. Having an understanding of what is in the collection made it more clear how to divide the materials to best serve future researchers. While processing, we also tried to keep in mind that the collection would likely expand, as David is still an active professor and architect, who lectures, publishes, and exhibits. This informed how we chose to organize and divide materials.

We divided the collection into three series: 'Projects', 'Academic Materials', and 'Publications'. These three delineations seemed to make the most sense considering the nature and subjects of the materials, as well as the fact that there is considerable overlap between his professional life as an educator and practicing architect. Our three series also align with the titles and divisions of the collection that had already been imposed by the creator, as there were folders titled for specific projects as well as writings, personal, and academic materials. Within the latter three, they all primarily contained publications that fit into the series for 'Academic Materials' or 'Publications.'

Further, these series would be helpful to users, who we assumed would be researchers interested in topics like architectural history, architectural pedagogy, and the history of the Pratt School of Architecture's faculty. Because David was simultaneously an internationally practicing and renowned architect and has taught as a professor at Pratt and abroad for decades, his impact and the understanding of this collection seemed best suited to include directions for those interested in primarily his projects (architectural practice) or academic materials (architectural pedagogy and affiliation with Pratt Institute), with another section dedicated to publications that could be referenced in a user's research process.

IV.   **Challenges**

Our main challenges while processing the collection were overthinking and perfectionism. Both being inexperienced when it came to processing an archival collection from start to finish, we often found ourselves debating structure and series names for long periods of time, trying to find a way to perfectly and succinctly describe chunks of the collection that were diverse in format and content. We also struggled with categorizing items that didn't really belong in any of the series, as well as items that could easily fit into multiple series. For example, we found three photographs of David during our survey, but we couldn't confidently tell why the photographs were taken or what function they provided. Though we ended up placing them in the Publications series because it seemed to make the most sense, we spent some time wondering if we should change the title to "Publications and Photographs." In the end, we realized that it wouldn't make sense to edit an entire series title just for three items.

We also spent time deciding if Pratt and other academic publications should all belong in the Academic Materials or Publications series. We ended up splitting them between the two series based on content, with Pratt publications that mentioned David as an architectural professional in the Publications series and Pratt publications that mentioned David's students or his work as a professor in Academic Materials–this is how David had them organized when we received the collection. We did, however, struggle for a while with the idea that we would have publications present in the collection that were not part of the Publications series. As novices in the field, we had a hard time taking the knowledge about provenance and original order we had gained from the readings and applying it to a real-world situation. Striking a balance between keeping the collection organized as the creator (David) had intended and making it easily navigable for researchers was a struggle for us.

To solve these issues of overthinking and perfectionism, we usually reached out to Prof. Fontánez Rodríguez for guidance and to help us get out of circular thinking traps. She helped us understand that we could always change things along the way as we processed the collection, and that we shouldn't worry too much about making everything perfect. Other things that helped us get out of our heads were remembering that it is not the archivist's job to do research for the users–researchers are perfectly able to explore collections themselves even if there are small inconsistencies in the arrangement. By adopting more of a big-picture perspective on the exercise as a whole, we were able to ultimately get things done in a timely manner

One other aspect of processing the collection that we struggled with was the language barrier. As a Greek American with an office in Cyprus, David has been mentioned in numerous publications written in Greek. Neither of us fluently read Greek, so we were often unable to determine the year that

Greek magazines or newspapers were published or what the content was. One way we solved this issue

was by using the Google Translate photo tool. With this tool, we could simply take a picture of the

article and the app would usually be able to translate the year it was published and most of the words in

the title. Using this information, as well as the contextual information we gained from examining items

that were housed nearby, we were able to sort the items correctly in chronological order and make

educated guesses about their content.

Since the collection included different material formats such as letter or legal-sized papers,

magazines, newsletters, bound catalogs, flash drives, collages, and architectural drawings, we sometimes

were too focused on the physical state of the items rather than primarily trying to impose intellectual

order. When we couldn't physically file certain items together, we had to remind ourselves that it was

perfectly normal for items in the same series or file to be stored separately, and this shouldn't affect our

arrangement in a significant way.

We had to leave some tasks incomplete due to logistical issues: separating and flattening folded

oversized materials from the letter or legal-sized papers, transferring the flash drive contents to the

institutional online drive, and re-foldering the architectural drawings that weren't transported to the

Pratt campus were left up to Prof. Fontánez Rodríguez and her team at the Pratt Institute Archives to

complete.

V.   Reflection

Overall, this was a positive experience–we worked well together as a team, and we learned a

great deal about the logistics of archiving and the archival profession. The collaborative process we

engaged in during this project helped us work through questions that came up and decisions that

needed to be made. We didn't agree on everything–talking through our perspectives and making compromises helped us make more informed choices and perhaps enhanced the final product as we were encouraged to consider how different people (each other and users) might view the collection.

Neither of us has fully processed collections in the manner we did, using DACS and informed by the content of this course. We learned a lot along the way from hands-on experience, as well as the assigned readings, media, and class discussions throughout the semester. The theory of Meissner, especially the tenets he outlines like arrangement being an intellectual exercise, serving users as the archivist's main priority, and provenance and original order are key (Meissner 2019, 1-32). While we did learn a lot, Morgan thought it was difficult to refrain from doing research and was not fully on board with the concept of MPLP (More Product, Less Process). As time went on, she was able to better understand that the goal of archiving is not to fully articulate to users what the materials and the information contained are; rather, while having an interest in the content is beneficial, ensuring the collection is processed and with an available finding aid helps improve usability and facilitate research. As Meissner suggests, serving users is paramount.

It was also difficult to grapple with our role and responsibilities as 'archivists'. We felt the power and gravity of making decisions, which connected to concepts from throughout the semester about the power and politics of archives. This dilemma reminded Morgan of an archive event she attended and reported on hosted by the Barnard Center for Research on Women, which was in regards to the acquisition and processing of the Coalition of Women Prisoners collection by the Barnard Archives. This idea was also resonant with the suggested reading by Duff and Verne, who argue that "When archivists describe records, they can only represent a slice, or a slice of a slice, or a slice of a slice

of a slice, of a record's reality. Therefore, it is imperative that we expose our biases and investigate how they shape and obscure the meaning of records" (Duff & Verne 2002, 278). This knowledge made decision-making more difficult, and sometimes prompted us to overthink or aim for perfection. However, having this awareness inform our work seemed to be a step in the right direction.

We also kept in mind the terminology and intentions used by the creator versus what is standard in archival work. David had labeled an incredibly overstuffed folder as 'Personal,' but its contents didn't seem to align with what we considered to be personal. We might think of journals, diaries, and letters as personal items; David included publications related to his education and professional life in the field of architecture as a practitioner and professor. While the name he gave to this assemblage of materials was 'Personal,' we thought it might not be as informative for users. As such, we divided the materials into separate files with different titles, all within the 'Publications' series. Considering language and intentions seemed to be a crucial aspect of archiving, which relates to our earlier point about the power and politics of archiving. While this was more of a semantic matter than an issue of bias, coming from the perspective of someone whose work is very much entwined with their life, it still seemed like an important decision that we took considerable time to think over and discuss.

We are both proud to have processed the collection, and satisfied with our results.

References

Duff, W. M., & Verne, H. (2002). "Stories and Names: Archival Description as Narrating Records and Constructing Meanings." *Archival Science*, 2, 263–285.

Meissner, D. (2019). The Context and Significance of Arrangement and Description, & Principles of Archival Arrangement. In *Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts* (pp.1-32). Archival Fundamental Series. Vol. 2. Society of American Archivists.

Society of American Archivists. (2022). *Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS): Version 2022.* https://saa-ts-dacs.github.io/

Appendix

[Inventory Google Sheet](#)

Flash drive contents:

No. in finding aid:	Visual desc.:	Notes on date range:	What's on it:	Next layer, and so on -->			Notes:
1	"Scans/submitted Oct 2017" envelope; white flash drive	Identified files from 2011, 2015. A lot of undated stuff.	Two folders: Handover October 2, Scans; Misc	In Handover October 2, Scans: Scans of drawings and collages, symposium ppt, inventory of handover. Two folders in Misc: Arch 463 2011 New PPT Lectures; Burn Folder (.fpbf file).	19 folders in Arch 463 2011...: (Weekly topics for the semester, containing ppts, slides to print, diagrams, etc. -**instructional material**)		
2	In "2018.05 "envelope ; silver and black flash drive	I think the materials are from 2017. This seems to have been a class, Design 3 Arch 703 held in the Fall semester of the 2017-2018 academic year.	File: Advanced Design F18 PPT; Folder: Sem 3	Folders in Sem 3: (names of students?): Carlos Anaiz; Erich Schoenenberger; Kutan Ayata; Maria Sieira; Stephanie Bayard; Sulan Kolatan.	Folders in Carlos Anaiz: Boyungjae Kim; Kennedy Phillips; Sarah Suarez. Folders in Erich S...: Elham Goodarzi; Elise Hoff; Kenith Mak. Folders in Kutan Ayata: Amir Mohebi Ashtiani; Mor Segal; Sandra Nataf. Folders in Maria Sieira: Aslihan Avci Aksap; Colin DaPonte; Zhizhong Deng. Folders in Stephani Bayard: Jiratt Khumkomgoo	Folders in Boyoungjae Kim: Digital; Model. Folders in Kennedy Phillips: Digital; Model. Folders in Sarah Suarez: Archive submission form (file); Digital; Model. Folders in Elham Goodrazi: Archive submission form (file); Digital, Model. Folders in Elise Hoff: Form (file); Digital; Model. Folders in Kenith Mak: Digital; Model. Folders in Amir Mohebi Ashtiani: Form (file); Digital; Model. Folders in Mor Segal: Form (file); Digital; Model. Folders in Sandra Nataf: -; Form (file); Digital; Model. Folders in Aslihan Avci Aksap: Digital; Model. Folders in Colin DaPonte: Digital; Model. Folders in	This flash drive contains materials related to a class led by Theoharis David, including student work.

					l; Melanie Pak; Yanzhen Qiu. Folders in Sulan Kolatan: Anthony Mull; Daniel Salvador; Wenze Chen.	Zhizhong Deng: Form (file); Digital; Model. Folders in Jiratt Khumkomgool: Form (file); Digital; Model. Folders in Melanie Pak:Form (file); Digital; Model. Folders in Yanzhen Qiu: Form (file); Digital; Model. Folders in: Anthony Mull: JPG (file); Digital; Model. Folders in Daniel Salvador: Form (file); Digital; Model. Folders in Wenze Chen: Two forms (two files); Digital; Model.	

Oversized items requiring flattening and rehousing (organized by series and file title):

Projects

- <u>G.S.P. Stadium + Athletic Centre 1997-2012</u>

    AIArchitect January 1997 and Greek publication marked "Olympic Stadium Nicosia, Cyprus"

    1973

Academic Materials

- <u>Drawings & Collages 1984-2013 and undated</u>

    Architectural drawing labeled "Mr. Amir Mawji", undated

- <u>Publications (Students and Professorship) 1961-2013 and undated</u>

    The Cyprus Weekly 1997, 1993, and 1984 (newspapers/scans of newspapers); Prattfolio

    publication vol.3/no. 2 spring 1985; Pratt Reports Winter 1981, and 1979, and June 1977;

    Gateway, April 3, 2009

- <u>Exhibition & Event Materials 1971-2016 and undated</u>

Gateway 2008, Greek Pamphlet "Arxitektonikh" 1996, Pratt Graduate Architecture

"Reflections" 1983, Pratt Campus 1981, and Greek newspaper (name unknown) 1983

Publications

- <u>Pratt Publications 1961-1998</u>

  Pratt Campus 1981

- <u>Pratt Publications 2001-2013</u>

  Gateway 2010, Gateway 2009, and Gateway 2008

- <u>Misc. Publications 1964-1999</u>

  The Greek American 1994, The Cyprus Weekly 1992, Greek publication [1983?], and The

  New Haven Register 1964

- <u>Misc. Publications 2000-2016</u>

  Sunday Mail "Living" Section 2013, The Cyprus Weekly 2009, Greek publication labeled

  "Interview Politis (?) Newspaper" 2007, and Constructs Architecture 2006

- <u>Writings 1973-1984</u>

  Pamphlet from 1980

- <u>Writings 1985-1999</u>

  The Greek American newspaper from 1988

- <u>Writings 2000-2016 and undated</u>

  Unidentified Greek publication from 2006; NYT scan from May 2002

Finding Aid

Processing Our Collection: The Theoharis David Papers

Althea Meer and Morgan Yanni
Christina Fontánez Rodríguez
Info 625
Fall 2022

Source: Pratt Institute

Creator: Theo. David, architect and educator

- B.Arch., Pratt Institute; M.Arch., Yale
- Distinguished professor in Pratt's School of Architecture (50+ years)
- Practice based in New York and Cyprus since 1974
    - *Projects*: Athletic centers/arenas, educational and medical facilities, religious structures, residences, etc.
- Recipient of various awards and accolades; FAIA
- Continues to lecture, exhibit and publish internationally

David in Cyprus. Source: TDA

David with graduate students at Yale. Source: Pratt Institute

Creation and Formats
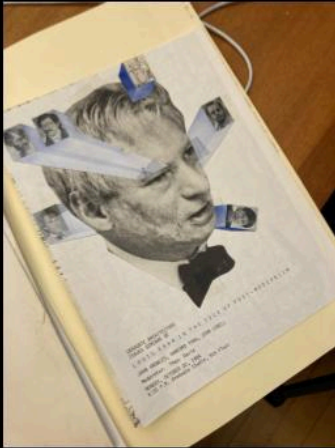
Original collage (copies were also included)

Photograph of Theo with a model!

- *Creation*: Assembled by the David
- *Formats*:
  - Publications (i.e., magazines, journals, newspapers, press clippings)
  - Flyers and invitations
  - Collages and photographs
  - Exhibition catalogs
  - Flash drives
  - Oversized architectural drawings

Processing and Arrangement

Steps:

1. Survey
2. Determine processing level and series
3. Create files & sort into series
4. Organize items chronologically within files
5. Fill and label folders, remove staples & paperclips
6. Create finding aid

Processing and Arrangement

Series:

- Projects
- Academic Materials
- Publications

Processing and Arrangement

Processing and Arrangement

Challenges

Overthinking

Perfectionism

Language barrier

Varied formats

Solutions

Asking lots of questions

Focusing on the user

Recognizing that we can always make changes later

Google Translate photo tool

Big-picture perspective
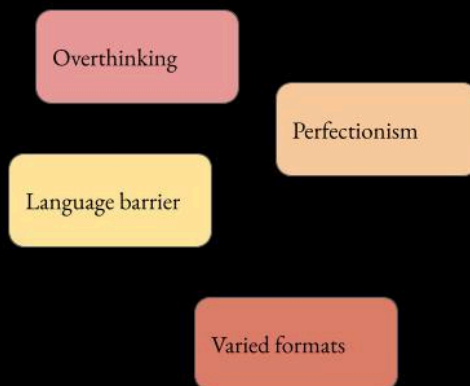
Playing off each other's strengths
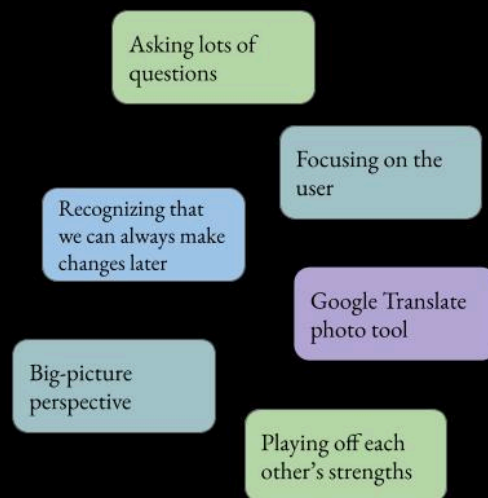
Reflection: A positive experience

- Collaborative process
- Incorporating theory → Meissner [1]
    - Arrangement is an intellectual exercise
    - Serving users is paramount
    - Provenance and original order
- Encountering realities of the archival profession
    - Making decisions to categorize information
        - Our role and responsibility in processing and description
            - Theory → Duff & Verne [2]
    - Research is not our priority
    - Consideration that the collection will expand
    - Creator vs. archivist; e.g., what is 'personal'?

"When archivists describe records, they can only represent a slice, or a slice of a slice, or a slice of a slice of a slice, of a record's reality. Therefore, it is imperative that we expose our biases and investigate how they shape and obscure the meaning of records." (Duff & Verne 2002, 278)

[1] Meissner, D. (2019). The Context and Significance of Arrangement and Description, & Principles of Archival Arrangement. In *Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts* (pp.1-32). Archival Fundamental Series. Vol. 2. Society of American Archivists.
[2] Duff, W. M., & Verne, H. (2002). Stories and Names: Archival Description as Narrating Records and Constructing Meanings. *Archival Science*, 2, 263–285.

Finding Aid

Theoharis David Papers	Collection		
⌄ Projects, 1970-2018, Undated	Series		
G.S.P. Stadium and Athletic Centre, 1997-2012	File	Mixed Materials	Box: 1, Folder: 1
Cyprus International Fair Pavilion, Undated	File	Mixed Materials	Box: 1, Folder: 2
University Settlement, 1998-2001	File	Mixed Materials	Box: 1, Folder: 3
Bethelite Church, 1988-2007	File	Mixed Materials	Box: 1, Folder: 4
Publications (Miscellaneous Projects), 2003-2006, Undated	File	Mixed Materials	Box: 1, Folder: 5
Publications (Miscellaneous Projects), 1970-1999	File	Mixed Materials	Box: 1, Folder: 6
> Oversized Architectural Drawings, 1980-2004, Undated	Sub-Series		
⌄ Academic Materials, 1951-2017, Undated	Series		
Drawings and Collages, 1984-2013, Undated	File	Mixed Materials	Box: 1, Folder: 7
Publications (Students and Professorship), 1993-2013, Undated	File	Mixed Materials	Box: 1, Folder: 8
Publications (Students and Professorship), 1961-1989	File	Mixed Materials	Box: 1, Folder: 9
Exhibition Catalogs, 2012	File	Mixed Materials	Box: 2, Folder: 1
Exhibition and Event Materials, 1971-2016, Undated	File	Mixed Materials	Box: 2, Folder: 2
> Digital Materials, 2011-2017, Undated	File	Electronic media	Box: 3, Folder: 6
⌄ Publications, 1961-2016, Undated	Series		
Pratt Publications, 1961-1998	File	Mixed Materials	Box: 2, Folder: 4
Pratt Publications, 2001-2013	File	Mixed Materials	Box: 2, Folder: 3
Miscellaneous Publications, 1964-1999	File	Mixed Materials	Box: 3, Folder: 1
Miscellaneous Publications, 2000-2016	File	Mixed Materials	Box: 2, Folder: 5
Photographs, Undated	File	Graphic Materials	Box: 3, Folder: 2
Writings, 1973-1984	File	Mixed Materials	Box: 3, Folder: 5
Writings, 1985-1999	File	Graphic Materials	Box: 3, Folder: 4
Writings, 2000-2016, Undated	File	Mixed Materials	Box: 3, Folder: 3