



Smithsonian

National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Elaine Ostroff Universal Design Papers

NMAH.AC.1356

Alison Oswald

2016

Archives Center, National Museum of American History

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Elaine Ostroff Universal Design Papers
Date:	1965 - 2009
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.1356
Creator:	Ostroff, Elaine (Creator)
Extent:	16 Cubic feet (37 boxes, 1 oversize folder)
Language:	Collection is in English. Some materials in German, Japanese, Spanish, and Taiwanese.
Summary:	Collection documents activist and educator Elaine Ostroff who advocated for improved access for people with disabilities in public places, co-founded the Adaptive Environments Center and who taught universal design in several institutions.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Donated to the Archives Center by Elaine Ostroff in 2015.

Related Materials

The *Universal Design News* is a quarterly publication that Ostroff edited from 2000-2012 and wrote column on international design education. A full run of the newsletter is available the website for [Universal Designers and Consultants, Inc](#) .

Materials at the Archives Center

Target Stores Collection of Fashion Advertising Using Disabled Models (AC0436)

Accessible Snowboard Collection (NMAH.AC.0747)

Disability Reference Collection (NMAH.AC.1319)

Safko International, Inc. Records (NMAH.AC.0911)

Harriet Green Kopp Papers (NMAH.AC.1130)

Processing Information

Collection processed by Alison Oswald, archivist, 2016. Additional historical information about the universal design movement contributed by Cathy Keen, archivist, 2016.

Preferred Citation

Elaine Ostroff Universal Design Papers, 1965-2009, Archives Center, National Museum of American History

Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Reference copies for audio and moving images materials do not exist. Use of these materials requires special arrangement. Gloves must be worn when handling unprotected photographs and negatives.

Social Security numbers and other personally identifiable information has been rendered unreadable and redacted. Researchers may use the photocopies in the collection. The remainder of the collection has no restrictions.

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Biographical Note

Elaine Phillips Ostroff was born on February 27, 1933 and grew up in Fall River, Massachusetts. She graduated from Durfee High School (1951), received a B.S. from Brandeis University (1955), was awarded a Radcliffe Fellowship (1970) and an Ed.M from Harvard University (1972). In 1978, Ostroff co-founded with Cora Beth Abel the Adaptive Environments Center (now the Institute for Human Centered Design (IHCD) to confront the barriers which prevent persons with disabilities and older people from fully participating in community life. In 1989, with support from the National Endowment for the Arts, she developed the National Universal Design Education Project (UDEP) at Adaptive Environments. A national project, UDEP sought to incorporate universal design in professional curricula. Ostroff coined the term "user/expert" in 1995 to identify individuals whose personal experiences give them unique critical capacity to evaluate environments.

As an educator, Ostroff has been involved with the accessible environments effort on a national and international level since 1971. She was the former director of training for the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health where she developed graduate programs and courses to sustain community based living for people with disabilities. In 1977, she was the United States representative to the United Nations meeting on the Rights of Children.

She convened the national seminar on Design for All People that provided the framework for the UDEP in 1982. In 1986, she developed the "Best of Accessible Boston," an awards program honoring the architects and owners of buildings that exemplified good as well as accessible design. Ostroff is internationally renowned for her role on the team that created the Principles of Universal Design. The Principles are taught to designers including architects, landscape architects, interior and product designers and their students and used in design, constructions and product development. In 2001, she was the senior editor of the "Universal Design Handbook" used as a textbook in educational settings. In 2004, she was the first American, and first woman, to receive the Misha Black Medal from the Royal College of Art. In 2006, the American Institute of Architects awarded her the Honorary AIA designation. Ostroff's experience emphasized creating educational programs for non-designers, facilitating their design advocacy as well as collaboration with design professionals. She has written and produced technical assistance materials on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) that were used in the National Network for ADA Technical Assistance. She married Earl Carlton Ostroff (1931-2006) in 1953. The couple had three children, Rebecca, Joshua, and Sam.

Historical Note

The Universal Design Movement is an international effort advocating design for disabled persons to enjoy access, independence, and convenience. It also is known as design-for-all, accessible design, inclusive design, and human-centered design. It is applied to buildings, consumer products, packaging, appliances, tools, and devices. It can aid persons with mobility, visual, hearing, cognitive, developmental, neurological, and other disabilities.

The Universal Design movement has its roots in the disability rights movement, in the post-World War II era. Previously and especially before the First World War people with disabilities were members of a small minority and persons with severe handicaps tended to have short lifespans. The world wars caused a huge influx of disabled veterans into the population. Advances in medicine and drugs and better sanitation enabled increased lifespans resulting in a higher population of older and disabled people. Awareness of the problems and limitations experienced by people with disabilities has increased.

The "Barrier-Free" movement in the 1950s was born of the demands by veterans and their advocates to participate equally in educational and employment opportunities enjoyed by the non-disabled population. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s influenced the rising Disability Rights Movement. Legislative changes in the 1960s and 1970s prohibited discrimination against persons with disabilities and mandated access to some, though not all, public spaces, public transit, and places of public accommodation.

The progression from the Barrier-Free movement to the Universal Design movement was aided by several pieces of national legislation and activism on the part of numerous organizations. The Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 required buildings designed, built, altered, or leased with federal funds to be made accessible. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was the first civil rights law for disabled people. It prohibited discrimination against people with handicapping conditions, but again, only applied to institutions or groups receiving federal funding. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 required educational institutions to provide a free education to handicapped children. The Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988 expanded the requirements of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 to include disabled people. This applied to both public and private properties. The biggest change came in 1990 with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. This broad and sweeping legislation raised public consciousness about disability rights as a civil rights issue. It prohibited discrimination in employment, access to public accommodations, services, programs, public transit, and telecommunications. The law mandated the removal of physical barriers and the development of non-discriminatory policies.

The Universal Design Movement sought to integrate people with disabilities into the mainstream, and to promote inclusion by reducing the physical and social barriers that exist between people with disabilities. As planners, builders and architects struggled to meet the demands of the ADA, they realized that segregated accommodations were costly, unattractive, and unfair. They also realized that improvements in the built environment not only benefitted people with disabilities, they benefitted all users. According to the Center for Universal Design, "Recognition that many such features could be commonly provided and thus less expensive, unlabeled, attractive, and highly marketable, laid the foundation for the universal design movement."

Against this background, Ostroff's own special interest was improving the environment for people with developmental disabilities. She initially worked with teachers in the Department of Mental Retardation (State of Massachusetts) to help them transform their classrooms into more engaging and supportive environments for young children with disabilities. She was inspired by Gunnar Dybwad (1909-2001), a prominent international international advocate who fought for community living and the de-institutionalization of people with developmental disabilities and Raymond Lifchez (1932-), professor of architecture and city and regional planning at the University of California, Berkeley. She also worked closely with, and learned from, Ron Mace (1941-1998), FAIA, the architect who powered the accessibility movement through his personal experience of disability along with his architectural training and experience.

Scope and Contents

The papers include correspondence, reports, photographs and slides, course-related materials, evaluations, printed publications, lectures and presentations, grant applications, conference materials, audiovisual materials and newspaper clippings documenting the career of Elaine Ostroff, an activist and educator of universal design.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into seven series. The arrangement follows Ms. Ostroff's original file order which for the most part has been retained.

Series 1: Personal/Biographical Materials, 1967-2008

Series 2: Subject Files, 1965-2008

Series 3: Universal Design Education Project (UDEP) Files, 1993-2008 (bulk 1993-1998)

Series 4: Adaptive Environments, 1978-2009

Series 5: Japan, 1996-1999

Series 6: Photographs and Slides, 1971-2002

Series 7: Audiovisual Materials, 1974-2004

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Architectural design
- Disabilities
- Playgrounds

Types of Materials:

- Audiocassettes
- Correspondence -- 1960-2000
- Correspondence -- 21st century
- Grant Proposals
- Photographs -- 1960-2000
- Photographs -- 21st century
- Reports -- 1960-2000
- Reports -- 21st century
- Theater programs -- 1970-1980
- Videocassettes

Container Listing

Series 1: Personal/Biographical Materials, 1967 - 2008

Scope and Contents: This series consists of biographical materials about Elaine Ostroff, namely resumes, awards, book proposals, and interview transcripts.

The Looking Glass Theatre (LGT) materials document a children's theatre company founded in 1962 in Providence, Rhode Island by Elaine Ostroff. LGT was created to be a participatory touring company of adults that presented original plays designed to engage young audiences. The theatre later expanded to include the Summer Street Theatre, *Let's Pretend*, a creative dramatics series that was performed in libraries throughout Rhode Island, The Workshop School, The Saturday Workshop Company, and the In-School Workshops and Consultant Service. The first performance was *The Story of Ferdinand* performed in the round, close to the audience at Brown University. Some past productions include *The Reluctant Dragon*, *The Sky is Falling*, *Canterbury Tales*, and the *Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. LGT incorporated in Rhode Island as a non-profit organization dedicated to educational theatre, and it was the first children's theatre company to receive Title III funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act passed by Congress in 1965. The materials consist of notes, proposals, correspondence, brochures and fliers, play programs, budget data, sketches for costumes, scripts, evaluations, photographs, and newspaper clippings.

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Series 2: Subject Files, 1965 - 2008

Scope and Contents: This series contains files maintained by Ostroff during the course of her career. Many of the materials relate to her teaching at the Massachusetts College of Art, where she developed the Arts and Human Services, a multidisciplinary graduate program that emphasized the role of designers and artists in creating community based projects for people with disabilities; and an earlier graduate program, "Planning for Play" at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Both projects were funded by the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health through the Western Massachusetts Training Consortium to develop leadership that would support deinstitutionalization. The files contain research notes and papers from students, syllabi, course evaluations, fliers for public programs and performances, teacher workshop materials, agenda and exercises, correspondence, photographs, notes, brochures, university forms, and materials created by others, especially by Ostroff's students, such as course papers.

Ostroff taught many courses through the Arts and Human Services Project, a Manpower Training Program within the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health. Beginning in 1974, the program focused on preparing artists and special educators for leadership roles in education and developing new services for children with severe disabilities and their families. Several programs were developed: Play Laboratories, Resource Centers, After-School Programs, Family Internships, Family Festivals, the Creative Learning Laboratory, and the Creative Play Center. The materials are arranged alphabetically.

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Series 3: Universal Design Education Program Files, 1993-2008 (bulk 1993-1998)

Scope and Contents: This series consists of materials about the Universal Design Education Program created by Ostroff in 1989 as a project of the Adaptive Environments Center. The program awarded grants through a national competitions. It was partially funded by the National Endowment for the Arts to increase the understanding of universal design concepts across curricula in interior design, architecture, landscape architecture, product design, and urban planning. Ostroff was the project director. Many of the organizations awarded a grant held universal design conferences, symposia, and charettes.

The materials are arranged alphabetically by name of the academic institution (e.g. Michigan State University) and consist of correspondence, memoranda, proposals, reports, photographs, slides, diskettes, questionnaires and evaluation data, financial data, case study comments, and conference-related materials for each school that was awarded a grant. Additional materials documenting the UDEP program are also included. This includes presentations and materials for the First International Conference on Universal Design (1998) held at Hofstra University in New York.

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Series 4: Adaptive Environments, 1978 - 2009

Scope and Contents: Ostroff cofounded Adaptive Environments in 1978. It is now called the Institute for Human Centered Design. In 1989 she developed the Universal Design Education Project (UDEP) at Adaptive Environments, a national project with design educators that has become an international model for educating about universal design.

The series documents Adaptive Environment's work, especially the Access to Design Professions Project, a program established to honor Ron Mace (1941-1998) FAIA, the founder and program director of the Center for Universal Design. Daniel Hunter, landscape architect, was the project research associate. The project encouraged the participation of people with disabilities in the design professions in order to strengthen the practice of universal design. Also included are materials related to Building Careers in Design, a national web-based technical assistance and training project that addressed needs identified in Access to Design Profession's initial research with designers with disabilities.

The materials consist of correspondence, emails, memoranda, reports, proposals, and printed slides for power point presentations.

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Series 5: Japan, 1996 - 1999

Scope and Contents: This series relates to Ostroff's work about universal design and travel in Japan. There are brochures, newspaper clippings, articles, presentations, and notes. The materials are arranged alphabetically.

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Series 6: Photographs and Slides, 1971 - 2002

Scope and Contents: This series contains slides, photographs, negatives, and contact sheets depicting Ostroff's work with children and others. Many of the slides were used in presentations given by Ostroff, and some of the photographs were used in publications, particularly *Humanizing Environments: A Primer* (1978). The materials are arranged chronologically.

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Box 36	Universal Design Education Project (Build Boston, Boston Society of Architects), 1994 22 Photographs Notes: Includes images of Ron Mace, Gunnar Dybwad and Ruth Lusher
Box 36	San Francisco State University, workshop and student work, 1996 27 Slides
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Box 35	European Design for Aging Network 50+, undated 20 Slides
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Box 31, Folder 15	[Iris], undated
Box 31, Folder 16	[Katie?], undated
Box 31, Folder 17	Leadership Training Program, undated
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Box 32, Folder 5	Outdoor Play in Sweden, undated
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Series 7: Audiovisual Materials, 1974 - 2004

Scope and Contents: This series contains audio cassettes, 1/2" videocassettes (VHS), a DVD, and one sound disc. Many of the videocassettes document conferences Ostroff presented at or attended.

Subseries 7.1: Audio Cassettes, 1974 - 2003

Restrictions: Only reference copies of audiovisual materials may be used for research. See repository for details.

Box 34, Item AC1356-OT0001	[Griselda's class, infants], 1974 - 1974 1 Cassette tape
Box 34, Item AC1356-OT0002	[Changing Places?], [1974?] 1 Cassette tape
Box 34, Item AC1356-OT0003	Evening with Elaine at Project Place, 1982 November 14 1 Cassette tape
Box 34, Item AC1356-OT0004	Elaine Ostroff, keynote address, 1990 November 15 1 Cassette tape
Box 34, Item AC1356-OT0005	Home Modifications, Susan Klein and Elaine Ostroff, 1990 November 15 1 Cassette tape
Box 34, Item AC1356-OT0006	Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), 1990 1 Cassette tape
Box 34, Item AC1356-OT0007	CJRT-FM, Open college, 1992 1 Cassette tape
Box 34, Item AC1356-OT0008	Ethics, Architecture and Making of Place, 1999 March 21 1 Cassette tape
Box 34, Item AC1356-OT0009	Elaine Ostroff, Champion of Disability Rights Movement, 1999 November 1 Cassette tape Notes: Interview by Julie Werb of Newton North High School.

Box 34, Item AC1356-OT0010	Design for the Lifespan, Tape 1-A, 2001 February 21 1 Cassette tape
Box 34, Item AC1356-OT0011	Design for the Lifespan, Tape 2-A, 2001 February 21 1 Cassette tape
Box 34, Item AC1356-OT0012	Design for the Lifespan, Tape 1-B, 2001 February 21 1 Cassette tape
Box 34, Item AC1356-OT0013	Design for the Lifespan, Tape 2-B, 2001 February 21 1 Cassette tape
Box 34, Item AC1356-OT0014	National Architectural Accreditation Board, 2003 November 20 1 Cassette tape
Box 34, Item AC1356-OT0015	Elaine Ostroff Presentation, National Endowment for the Arts panel, undated 1 Cassette tape
Box 34, Item AC1356-OT0016	Workplace accommodation, Katie 1 Cassette tape
Box 34, Item AC1356-OT0017	Design Faculty Seminar, Tape 5, undated 1 Cassette tape

Subseries 7.2: Videotapes, 1993 - 2004

Restrictions: Only reference copies of audiovisual materials may be used for research. See repository for details.

Box 33, Item AC1356-OV0001	Universal Design Education Program, colloquium, 1993 May 6-7
Box 33, Item AC1356-OV0002	Access to Design Professions, panel discussion footage, 2002 November 12 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 33, Item AC1356-OV0003	Harn Museum of Art, Elaine Ostroff Lecture Designing for the 21st Century, 2003 February 4 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 33, Item AC1356-OV0004	Misha Black Awards, Royal College of Art, Elaine Ostroff receiving award, 2004 March 16

	1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 33, Item AC1356-OV0005	Sir Misha Black Awards, 2004 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 33, Item AC1356-OV0006	Design for Accessibility, undated 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 33, Item AC1356-OV0007	Designing Schools with Universal Design (Iowa), undated 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 33, Item AC1356-OV0008	Concrete Change, Building Better Neighborhoods, undated 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 33, Item AC1356-OV0009	Universal Design Education Program, Searching for Universal Design, undated 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 33, Item AC1356-OV0010	Elaine Ostroff, Program Accessibility, Atlanta, undated 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 33, Item AC1356-OV0011	Elaine Ostroff, Program Accessibility, Atlanta, Tape 2, undated 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 33, Item AC1356-OV0012	The Power of 504, undated 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 33, Item AC1356-OV0013	Universal Design Education Project Colloquium, Tape 2, 1993 May 6-7 1 Videocassettes (VHS) Notes: Sessions 2, 3 and 4; Day 1 (part); Day 2
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Box 33	Humanizing environments, undated 1 Sound disc
Box 33	Massachusetts Parks, Access for All, undated 1 Electronic discs (DVD)
Box 32, Folder 15	Elaine Ostroff, Champion of the Disability Rights Movement (transcript), 1999 November 29 Notes: Interview conducted by Julia Werb of Newton North High School.

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