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Philip Doty, associate professor at the School of Information, speaks about politics and war at a panel discussion. The discussion was held in celebration of American Archives Month.

Panel focuses on politics as theme of Archives Week

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The recently declassified tapes recording Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency and the documents that helped the reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein break the Watergate case, combined with how the current administration threatens privacy through records policies, show how politics collides with archival work, three UT archival experts said Tuesday.

A panel discussed politics and archival work in the Pharmacy Building in celebration of American Archives Month and Austin's Archives Week, sponsored by the UT Student Chapter of the Society of American Archivists.

"We want the public to be involved in archives," said Melissa Guy, vice president of the student chapter. "One way to get the public involved is to have a discussion about that."

Since the inception of archives week nine years ago, Mayor Will Wynn has made an annual, official proclamation to welcome it. The week focuses on a particular area of archiving each year, with this year's theme being politics, said David Gracy II, adviser of the student chapter since 1989.

The three panelists have experience dealing with or researching political documentation and laws. Regina Greenwell of the LBJ Library and Museum is an expert on the classification and declassification process of documents; Philip Doty, an information associate professor, is an expert on federal information policy; and Steve Mielke, professional librarian of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, processed the famous Woodward and Bernstein documents that recently came to the center.

Doty spoke of the media and the conflict in Iraq and how he believes it threatens privacy and the use and abuse of records.

Greenwell followed with a presentation on the history of the declassification of documents at the LBJ Library. She recalled the passing of bills in response to presidential privacy, such as the Presidential Records Act after the Watergate Scandal and the right of the population to certain presidential information.

Mielke ended the presentations by recounting his history with the Woodward and Bernstein documents, describing the technical aspects of restricting documents in order to keep sources confidential.

Each speaker stressed the importance and value of the documents they mentioned. With this kind of emphasis, the UT Society of American Archivists hoped to spread the same message to its audience.

"Records are essential to peoples lives," Gracy said. "We should ensure record-keeping systems are managed in a responsible, ethical, technically effective way."

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