



Columbia Free University (Columbia, Mo.) Records (C4776)

Collection Number: C4776

Collection Title: Columbia Free University Records

Dates: 1970-1971

Creator: Columbia Free University

Abstract: Records of the school include note cards with student and instructor information, as well as course titles and the students enrolled in the course. Course titles include "Peace Tactics," "Beginning Crochet," "Hitchhiking Discussion," "Mysticism," and "Community Radio," among a variety of other counterculture subjects.

Collection Size: 0.5 cubic foot
(6 folders)

Language: Collection materials are in English.

Repository: The State Historical Society of Missouri

Restrictions on Access: Collection is open for research but may be stored offsite. This collection is available at [The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Columbia](#). If you would like more information, please contact us at columbia@shsmo.org. Collections may be viewed at any research center.

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Preferred Citation: [Specific item; box number; folder number] *Columbia Free University Records* (C4776); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Columbia [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-Columbia].

Donor Information: The records were donated to the University of Missouri by Al Tacker on December 1, 2010 (Accession No. CA6411).

Related Materials: Additional materials related to the Columbia Free University Records can be found in the following collections:

[*Everyday People, Inc. \(Columbia, Mo.\) Records*](#), (C3809)

Processed by: Autumn Cuddy, November 6, 2025

Historical Note:

The New Missouri School for Thought and Action (NMSTA) was established in Columbia in 1970. The school was created as an alternative to traditional education, particularly the kind provided by the University of Missouri, although enrollment was open to students of all ages. A particular concern addressed by NMSTA was the use of grading and examinations in traditional education, a system not included in the courses offered at the New Missouri School. The school, quickly renamed to Columbia Free University, provided instruction on any course for which a willing instructor was available, including courses on various religions, philosophies, racial issues, gender, politics, musical styles, artisan crafts, alternative lifestyles, and many others. Students could also enroll in a course to contribute to the school's "Community Newsletter" publication. Courses could be proposed and offered by any member of the public at a low registration fee - two dollars for the first course, one dollar for each additional course, or four dollars for unlimited registration per semester - although fees were waived for students with economic hardships.

The first instance of free university operation in Columbia came in 1967, when a series of Marxism-based courses were offered by members of the Students for a Democratic Society, although this did not continue the following year. Columbia Free University was the culmination of efforts by two separate groups comprised primarily of former University of Missouri students disillusioned with the rigidity of traditional education. The two groups merged to meet their shared goals, drawing inspiration from the free university movement launched in Berkeley, California, in 1964, as an off-shoot of the free speech movement. Founders of the school include Stan Kreis, Doug Hilmer, and Steve Fuchs, among others.

The opening semester of Columbia Free University included 20 courses with a total enrollment of 160 students by the start of the term in February 1970. Administrative office space was rented from Everyday People, a local service group, at 508 S. Ninth Street, and included a library of donated books, records, and alternative newspapers. Courses were held in the Everyday People space or in the instructors' homes. In lieu of grading rubrics and test scores, instructors based their courses around group discussion and practical activities and students did not receive credits or degrees for their enrollment.

Columbia Free University dissolved in 1971, after other local institutions started offering similar activities, including adult education courses offered by Columbia Public Schools and the Communiversity, hosted by the University of Missouri YMCA.

Arrangement:

The collection has been arranged alphabetically by enrollment year.

Scope and Content Note:

This collection consists of catalog cards of registration information for each student enrolled in Columbia Free University, followed by volunteer information and course enrollment cards.

Container List:**Correspondence**

f. 1-2	Registration Cards, 1970
f. 3-4	Registration Cards, 1971
f. 5	Volunteers and Master Course Catalog, 1970
f. 6	Master Course Catalog, 1971

Index:

Index Terms	Folder	Medium	Image
Alternative education	5, 6		
Columbia Free University, Columbia, Missouri	5, 6		
Counterculture	5, 6		
Free Speech Movement (Berkeley, Calif.)	1-6		