USING EXISTING INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES FOR ESTABLISHING AND PRESERVING AUDIO-VISUAL COLLECTIONS

Toby Seay, Drexel University, Philadelphia

Introduction

In 2005, Drexel University in Philadelphia, PA received a donation of over six thousand reels of audiotape from the now-defunct Sigma Sound Studios vault. This collection contains music recordings by major popular music recording artists such as Patti LaBelle, Teddy Pendergrass, Grover Washington, Jr., Melba Moore, Gladys Knight, Gloria Gaynor, and many others. These recordings are the creation of musicians and producers associated with what is known as the "Sound of Philadelphia" (Cogan, Clark, 2003). Rooted in gospel and rhythm & blues, the musical output of Sigma Sound Studios developed into musical genres such as funk and disco and surpassed Motown in the 1970s "as the most visible and representative symbol of black capitalism" (Shapiro, 2005). When Sigma ceased operations, the collection owners sought to find a home for this historical resource when it became infeasible to continue properly storing it. Due to the nature of this collection, the donation was made to Drexel's Music Industry Program to provide a resource for studying popular music production and maintaining the legacy of the Philadelphia music community.

Archival preservation requires specialized skills in handling specific media. For instance, the audio objects of the Sigma Collection require professional audio playback machine operation skills and knowledge of magnetic tape handling. These specialized skills are different than those needed for handling rare books or manuscripts. Because these skills can be found among the faculty and staff of the Music Industry Program and because this program's students provide an internal user group, a commitment was made by Drexel University to accept the donation and to provide resources to house and maintain it. However, it became quickly evident that the Music Industry Program alone would not be able to handle all duties needed to preserve the Sigma Collection. Therefore, a collaborative approach was designed to handle the needs of the collection. This paper will discuss the importance of collaboration within an academic institution, the model created for collaboration and the issues involved with implementing this model. It is the desire of this paper to provide a model for creating effective partnerships with existing institutional units, which can increase the number of potential audiovisual repositories and to create greater educational opportunities within the field of audiovisual preservation.

Collaboration

In looking at literature regarding collaboration within archives, there is a wealth of articles available. However, most articles are focused on self-contained archives and how they can best serve their institution. For instance, collaboration is often used in the context of communication, such as an academic history department collaborating with the archives in developing resource materials for specific classes. While this type of collaboration is vital to institutional success, especially with regards to records management, this view differs from the model described in this paper where differing institutional units collaborate to serve the needs of a repository.

The strengths of collaboration in the context of this paper's model, however, are described in a number of articles of note. For instance, Joan Lippincott (2004, p.150) lists these goals of collaboration.

- Provide seamless services to users
- Leverage the various talents that different professional groups can bring to a service
- To pool institutional resources

Furthermore, the Society of American Archivists discusses collaboration in their publication 'New Skills for a Digital Era' and states:"…collaborative initiatives…take advantage of the skills of others [and] [n]o single skill set will fill all jobs" (2006, p.31).

These articles point to the myriad duties needed to provide a fully functioning repository and suggest that it is impossible to fill those roles with a single person or single institutional unit. For instance, the following is a list of archival duties performed within a repository. Though this list is by no means comprehensive, it serves to show the breadth of the skills needed within an archival institution.

Collection Development
- Appraisal
- Assessment

Collection Management
- Arrangement
- Description
- Database Management

Public Services
- Reference Services
- Outreach
- Public Relations

Preservation
- Object Handling
- Equipment Operations
- Format Specific Procedures
- File Management

Systems
- Equipment Maintenance
- Storage System
- IT Support

Management
- Institutional
- Project
- Policy Statements

In looking at these duties, it is apparent that a fully functioning repository is a team effort. For instance, in an audiovisual archive, it is unlikely that a specialist in audio engineering will also possess the skills needed for database management or reference services. In addition, a metadata specialist may not possess the skills necessary for proper audiovisual equipment operations or maintenance. Therefore, it is necessary to fill these skill gaps with specialists. Within an institution, however, these specialists may already exist in separated units and can often be found outside of the archives or records management units.

Institutional Units model

Drexel University's commitment to preserving the Sigma Sound Studios Collection was based on its benefit to a built-in user group: Music Industry students. Music Industry students would be able to use this resource for the study of music production, copyright issues and audio object preservation. With this user group in place, the University was able to justify the costs associated with accepting and maintaining an audiovisual collection. However, since this dona-tion was made to the Music Industry Program, not an archives or library sciences program, there was very little planning with regards to a preservation methods, use restriction policies or arrangement. All of the archival duties previously discussed were not considered beyond what the faculty and staff of the Music Industry Program could perform due to their expertise in audio technology. This initial plan can be seen in Figure 1, which displays a monolithic ap-

proach to archival operations. Here, all archival operations are handled by and for the Music Industry Program.

Figure 1 Drexel University Audio Archives inadequate monolithic plan

This initial approach proved inadequate, and was made apparent when seeking external project funding. Within funding proposals, it was impossible to show how archival duties could be well implemented by a single unit. While the collection would remain under the purview of the Music Industry Program, it was necessary to revise and implement a new plan that would adequately cover all archival functions to the benefit of the collection and its users. Research and outreach to the Library & Information Sciences Program helped design and shape a new approach to preserving the Sigma Collection. This new preservation plan not only fills the gaps in archival duties, but it opens the door to new user groups by expanding the scope of operations. For instance, with the inclusion of the Library & Information Sciences Program, students from that program can develop audiovisual preservation techniques in conjunction with their archival studies.

The approach taken was to implement a cross-disciplinary approach that fitted within the University's strategic initiatives. The result was a plan that includes three academic colleges and two administrative offices. Figure 2 graphically displays these internal collaborators and their areas of expertise. The Music Industry Program uses its expertise in audio technology to maintain and operate audio playback equipment, create digital preservation files and capture preservation and technical metadata. The Library & Information Sciences Program uses its expertise in information management to arrange the collection, create databases and finding aids and capture descriptive metadata. The College of Engineering is able to provide system design and IT support through the Computer Science Program while customized software for equipment process modeling is performed through the Electrical & Computer Engineering Program. The University's Office of General Counsel oversees collection policies, such as user access and donation contracts, and copyright compliance. And, finally, the University Research Office provides grant-writing support in seeking external funding.
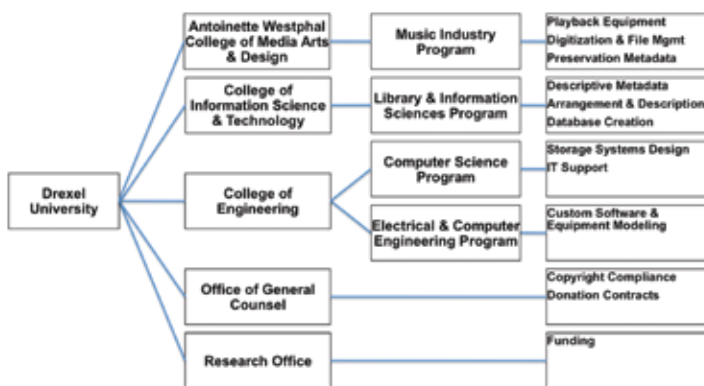

Figure 2 Drexel University Audio Archives internal collaborators

Not all aspects of audio preservation can be covered within the institution, however. When equipment and software vendors are needed, as well as workflow consultation, external collaborators are necessary. With most institutions, it is important to use limited funding in the most effective manner possible. It was determined at Drexel that project consulting and the

acquisition of obsolete playback equipment were areas where the costs represented great value. Looking externally for these one-time expense events is a way to maximize efficiency. For instance, having an external vendor research, locate and refurbish obsolete playback equipment saves valuable time to the institution while also providing warranty service to expensive equipment. Figure 3 shows the external collaborators and how they were used for the Drexel Audio Archives. These external collaborators helped shape and design the needed systems for a proper preservation environment and fill the gap in planning expertise with regards to workflow, preservation methods, and metadata design. The Board of Advisors is the only continuous external collaborator. These experts from industry oversee preservation standards and methodology while providing project support.
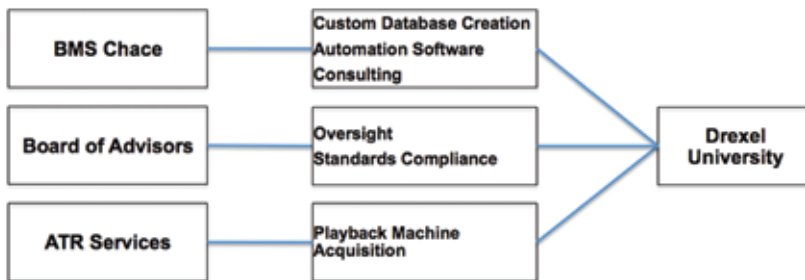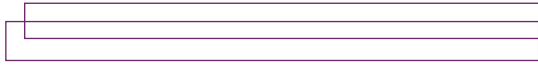

Figure 3 Drexel University Audio Archives external collaborators

There are some institutional units that are conspicuously missing in these collaboration models. For instance, the university library and the university archives are noticeably not included. Their exclusion is not due to any unwillingness for collaboration. Rather, their exclusion is due to different priorities and focus. For instance, the library and archives serve the informational needs of the entire university. Their priority must be to serve the traditional role of an academic resource provider. While these units are not currently internal collaborators, they are supportive of the Drexel Audio Archives and reside on the list of potential internal collaborators. Along with these potential internal collaborators is the potential for external collaborators. For instance, the Drexel Audio Archives could provide services to an external for-profit institution on a specific project with unique educational and historical opportunities. While there is no specific plan in place to do so, the potential benefits are not overlooked.

User groups

While the initial plan for the Sigma Collection was to provide primary resources for Music Industry students, the implementation of the Institutional Units Model expands the reach of the repository to a greater number of users. For instance, while Music Industry students can use these resources to study record production techniques, copyright and legal issues, and audio object preservation, Library & Information Sciences students can use these resources to study metadata and database design as it relates to audiovisual collections. Electrical & Computer Engineering students can study systems design and audio equipment design as it relates to an audiovisual repository. Maintaining an audiovisual collection not only provides a resource for research into its content, but also into its preservation and structure. Defining these internal users is an important step in determining if the creation of a repository is worthy of institutional commitment. Without a stable source of internal users, a case would have to be made for the demand from external users, making funding commitments more difficult for the institution.

However, a fully functioning repository is made possible by implementing the Institutional Units Model, which allows the initial intent to serve an internal user group to be expanded to serve an external one. For instance, musicologists need primary resources for popular musicological research and for research into music production trends. Having a popular music repository

serves this need while preserving the cultural heritage of the music community. The original collection creators', record labels' and publishers' interests can all be served by providing a cost effective means of preservation. When justification for funding is always a struggle, expanding the number of research users is of great benefit to the repository as it will "reinforce the value of the archival program and may provide the basis for appealing for additional resources" (Dearstyne, 1997, p.194).

Implementation

There are many benefits to implementing the Institutional Units Model in forming an audiovisual repository as well as some barriers to efficient implementation. While these barriers are not insurmountable, they do have costs. For instance, each institutional unit, while being committed to the project, has separate agendas and priorities. While these separate agendas rarely pose a direct conflict with the project, they do present barriers in efficiency. Where one unit is ready to pass a project on to the next unit, there may be gaps in readiness, which can slow the overall pace of the project. Project leadership can also pose a barrier to progress. For instance, unless there is a defined project leader, each unit may struggle with project "ownership". The responsibility for seeking project funding and determining who benefits from that funding must be clear. While these struggles can be managed, any ambiguity in leadership can have a great effect on the project.

Since this model is based on an academic institution, much of the project workforce comes in the form of students. While this provides a large cohort from which to choose workers, there are difficulties in managing a schedule. Due to academic scheduling, every faculty member, staff member and student has a different schedule each term. This schedule change can lead to quick turnover in the repository workforce. Managing this schedule and keeping projects on task is a high priority in repository leadership. Funding a full-time archivist to manage the repository may be money well spent.

However, having multiple units involved in a project provides valuable insight and perspective to those working in the repository. It is under these collaborative conditions that the cross training of skills can be accomplished. The educational opportunities that can widen a student's horizons and skill sets are numerous when working in proximity to others outside their respective field. Training audio engineers in database management and training catalogers in media identification are a few examples of broadening knowledge within the audiovisual preservation field. The Institutional Units Model also provides the opportunity to turn tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is difficult to convey. In his paper on organizational knowledge, Dick Stenmark states: "Tacit knowledge not being available in an explicit form makes it difficult if not impossible to quickly spread or share it within the organization" (2000, p.11).

However, by intertwining participants from multiple units, the ability to convey tacit knowledge is made easier. For instance, each unit provides specialized skills to the repository. While implementing these skills in a working repository, each participant will be able to express their knowledge to students and other project participants. A sound engineer, for example, could demonstrate playback machine quirks that, while not expressed in the operations manual, are known through experience. This practical aspect to the field of audiovisual preservation serves to reinforce the theoretical aspects that are more explicit in nature.

Conclusion

It is important to find effective partnerships that work best for the institution, the collection and resource users. Done well, constraints in funding are eased by the use of shared resources and individual expertise can be focused where it best suites. Since there are many educational institutions that feature similar programs as Drexel University, there is a potential for establishing more repositories for similar collections if donors and institutions can connect. And finally, with internal collaboration, students from each discipline can glean perspective from each other and improve the awareness of preservation issues. For instance, music students will gain

knowledge about information sciences and library and archives students can gain knowledge about audiovisual materials. By leveraging the skills from individual institutional units within academic institutions and the high educational value that this collaboration presents, both the institution and the collection benefit, providing researchers with greater resources.

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