

COOPERATIVE EXPERTISE AND COST EFFECTIVENESS: DEVELOPING AN AUDIOVISUAL PRESERVATION PROGRAM FOR UCLA LIBRARY

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I. Demand For An Audio Visual Preservation Program

The UCLA Library is a producer of, and caretaker for, substantial and significant audiovisual (AV) collections. Oral histories, films, videos, and sound recordings abound in library special collections. Notable examples include recordings of the novelist Aldous Huxley; videos created by the artist June Wayne; recordings of the Ojai Music Festival; literary critic and writer Roy Newquist's interviews with artists and intellectuals; and recordings of UCLA faculty that are deposited in the University Archives.¹

The Library also often creates its own AV content. The Center for Oral History and Research records both video and audio oral histories that must be preserved and made available to researchers at the Library. With active speaker and workshop series and new facilities in the Charles E. Young Research Library, live performance capture is an important new area of emphasis. Beyond the Library, UCLA hosts, organizes, and presents frequent performances, conferences, and talks that connect the campus to a global scholarly and artistic community. The UCLA Library has a responsibility, sometimes implicit, other time explicit, to care for the creative work of the campus. Making that responsibility an operational reality requires audiovisual preservation to be an area of growth and emphasis within the Library's preservation program.

Plans for an expanded audiovisual preservation effort began with an assessment project led by Howard Besser (NYU), acting as a consultant to the UCLA Library. Dubbed "Performance Capture," this project identified activities within the Library and across the campus that had a need for preservation support. Responsibility for acting on the recommendations of the report was given to Sharon Farb, associate university librarian for collections and scholarly communication, and Jacob Nadal, preservation officer. The report outlined five areas for development – cooperation, selection, capture, preservation, and access – with key questions and issues for each. It also observed that the "Library will not be the only campus organization which will choose to collect, preserve, and make available recordings of campus performances. The Library needs to partner with other campus organizations who engage in this and offer cooperative expertise."²

"Cooperative expertise" has thus been the guiding principle in the Library's development of audiovisual preservation services. Generous support from the Arcadia Fund is helping the Library to build its services quickly, but creating a completely internal and self-sufficient AV preservation program is both unnecessary and cost-inefficient. With hundreds of audio and video production houses in Los Angeles County and several dedicated AV preservation vendors nationwide, there are many external options available.

UCLA is also home to the UCLA Film and TV Archive, second in scope only to the Library of Congress, and the UCLA Ethnomusicology Archive, one of the oldest and most significant collections of its kind in the United States. UCLA departments including music, communication studies, world arts and culture, theater, film, and television each boast top-flight faculty and students and are important centers for the creation and use of media.

Given this rich environment, the Library determined that the key strategic element a successful AV preservation program would require was an internal expert with three primary responsibilities: evaluating the Library's preservation efforts for AV media, connecting and collaborating across a variety of creators and service providers, and translating between curatorial concerns in the Library and technical concerns in AV preservation. To that end, Siobhan Hagan was recruited in the summer of 2011 to serve as the Library's first AV preservation specialist.

2. Technical Issues

In the fall of 2011, Ms. Hagan toured many different archives, museums, libraries, and laboratories to research current AV preservation practices. She met with specialists, viewed obsolete and state-of-the-art equipment, and learned of others' failures and successes in this area.

Of the places visited, preservation vendors were separated from collecting institutions and collecting institutions were sorted into those with in-house transfer capabilities and those without. To help UCLA frame its levels of need and potential areas of growth, institutions with in-house capabilities were classed as low, medium, and high, measuring the extent to which they followed preservation standards, had highly specialized and trained professional staff, and maintained high-quality audiovisual equipment in the proper set-up and environment. Finally, each site was labeled as focused or diverse, depending on the audiovisual formats they are capable of transferring, the amount of work they complete in relation to what they have in their collections, and the amount of AV content in their collections.

These categories have been used to help determine where the UCLA Library Preservation Department wants to be. Based on collections and current capacity, the goal for the next few years was set to fall somewhere within the medium range for all categories. In the more distant future, goals will be adjusted upward to the high level for adherence to standards and implementation of best practices. Future goals include the additional of specialized staff and accompanying space, equipment, and supplies, while maintaining a medium-level focus on formats, since almost every type of major audio, video and film format is likely to be reflected in Library collections. Format capabilities will increase, but the AV preservation program may never reach the point where the Library has its own film preservation lab, for example, or provides comprehensive services for all formats in-house.

Several important points stood out as a result of the site visits. First, preservation best practices must be followed without sacrificing quality or cutting important corners. In practice, this means reaching internal consensus among Library departments to define what the important corners are. All activities and decisions must be documented, and policies for everything made readily available. A major focus should be creating and documenting policies on the prioritization and selection of AV items and collections for preservation.

Adherence to standards and practices is a critical foundation, because as much as possible must be automated, while creating and following strict policies on selecting items for automation. For example, quality-assurance work will eventually be semi-automated, but a human eye and ear will always be involved (something Library curators and other stakeholders are likely to demand as well). As another example, a SAMMA robot would not be used for a collection of video art, but perhaps it would be for an access project of a large collection of professionally recorded videos.

Preservation program staff must develop strong relationships with Los Angeles-area video and audio engineers and film specialists, both production- and preservation-oriented. Any and all audiovisual equipment will be collected, either to repair for use or to harvest for parts. Therefore, relationships with knowledgeable repair people in the region will be essential, as all the equipment will require constant maintenance due to its age and the nature of this type of equipment.

The preservation department must provide training to UCLA Library staff on AV preservation issues and AV capture. Staff must also advocate the importance of AV preservation to the UCLA campus and media production, library, archive and museum professionals. Staff will be highly encouraged to highlight the UCLA Library AV collections through conferences, events, exhibits and social media.

Finally, the UCLA Library needs to conduct a survey of its audiovisual holdings. Completing such a survey may take years, but planning must begin now, which would initially include test-

ing and evaluating survey tools. However, even without a detailed survey, two major needs are clear: 1.) Lots of digital storage, ideally in three different sites that are geographically dispersed; and, 2.) Physical space that is secure, seismically sound, with good environmental controls and a reliable building envelope to guard against water, pests, or other infiltration.

3. Lessons Learned

The first year of concentrated work on audiovisual preservation has revealed some significant things beyond technical issues. One is that libraries are still developing their literacy for moving image and recorded sound media. Textual and graphic records have been at the heart of library and archival practice for centuries, but visual literacy has been increasingly important throughout the twentieth century as well. The existence of standardized vocabularies such as the Getty thesauri and the emphasis of digital library projects on bringing photographic collections to the web attest to the range of efforts devoted to these collections. Another is that the understanding of and accommodations for AV collections are still in their infancy. The work of certain specialist groups within the profession may be exceptions that prove the rule. The Music Library Association, for example, has years of work trying to adapt the library-standard MARC record to the needs of printed music, to say nothing of recorded audio and video.

Bringing an AV preservation specialist (and in this instance, one with a film and video production background) into the UCLA Library has started several positive discussions. It is important for the preservation community to understand that library and archive collections do not divide neatly along media lines and that a successful preservation staff member must have some understanding of film, video, audio and digital preservation. In the other direction, the Library's AV preservation efforts have prompted curatorial conversations of a kind not always held in research library preservation departments.

The classic model of the conservator-curator relationship asks the curator to set priorities and approve treatments with different levels of impact on the original item. The assumption is that the conservator has expertise in the materials and methods, while the curator is expert in the context and interpretation of the work.³ This is not always the case for AV formats. In libraries and archives, these works are often parts of collections with a larger thematic association. A collection of political papers might contain recordings of speeches, broadcast interviews, and film elements used in creating a documentary. The curator may be expert in politics and history, but not in broadcast journalism. This leaves a potential gap in the traditional library preservation model, and it is worthwhile to consider the ways the library as a whole, and its preservation staff in particular, fills the need for understanding material culture and media literacy.

Alongside these intellectual concerns, moving into AV preservation has exacerbated several digital preservation issues, storage chief among them. Storing AV preservation masters in multiple copies causes the terabytes to add up fast. The UCLA Library has been able to purchase relatively low-priced, dual-site disk-based storage in partnership with UCLA Information Technology Services. Current pricing for a terabyte of network storage runs \$500-\$1,000, depending on whether it comes from University of California services or external vendors. An online, cloud-like service is desirable for many reasons, but even so, part of that cost is for a level of immediacy and online access that is not strictly required for preservation masters. Prices for online storage may fall as needs rise, but even so, using data tape technology, in automated near-line libraries or as stand-alone off-line media, and planning for regular forward migrations to make projects affordable is under consideration.

Finally, Library goals for providing access to these holdings have raised a variety of technical and legal problems. The technical issues are non-trivial but solvable, and the means of providing online access to AV collections have been thoroughly discussed in the digital library literature. Legal issues are familiar territory as well, in that everyone in AV preservation has confronted questions about rights, ownership and permissions. The UCLA Library seeks to provide the broadest possible access to all of its holdings, with the most important guiding work at present

the Association of Research Libraries' Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for Academic and Research Libraries.⁴

4. Next Steps

The Preservation Department intends to build three different stations for AV preservation work. Each will be designed to be scalable in order to steadily increase our capacity. A feasibility study conducted by the UCLA Library, UCLA Capital Planning, and consulting architects Pfeiffer Partners explored the development of new workspaces for the Library's collection management operations and additional climate-optimized storage for collections. Fundraising for these spaces will be no small task, but they represent an important continuation of the UCLA Library's strategic plan for integrating AV preservation into Library operations.

The first step in the workflow is *Station A: Processing and Treatment Room*, a secure room the access to which will be limited to a select number of staff. This is presently 120 square feet, with up to 400 square feet projected in the feasibility studies. In this room collections and materials will be tracked in a database with accompanying metadata so that the Library knows at all times what is happening to these items and where they are. The items, specifically their old and new containers, will be barcoded to link the physical items to the initial metadata created in the database. Next, the materials will undergo inspection, repair, rehousing, and cleaning. After this, items will be sorted into what will be reformatted in-house and what will be sent out to a vendor. The logistics of properly packing, shipping, and receiving items from vendors will also take place in this room. The items that will be reformatted for preservation in-house will move to *Station B: Visual Playback and Reformatting Room*. All location moves and preservation actions will be noted in the tracking database that will be located on a local server.

Station B will be for the preservation transfer of select formats. This set-up will be made scalable so that other formats can be added in the future. It will be housed in one secure room of approximately 120 square feet, with plans for expansion, the access to which will be limited to a select number of staff. The video formats to be reformatted in-house are Umatic and VHS. To start reformatting audio material, compact cassettes tapes and 1/4" open reel will be transferred. These formats were chosen due to their prevalence in case study collections examined over the past six months, and their technological obsolescence, and their high possibility of degradation. Metadata will be embedded in the newly created digital files at this station. Playback of these formats and other select formats to be determined will also be offered. There will be a small reference library for information on AV preservation and paperwork and file folders that pertain to AV preservation and current and past projects worked on. This room will be locked. Shelving will house a graveyard of media equipment, although eventually a dedicated room for this will be necessary.

Station C does not need to be in a secure, locked area, although secure authentication using UCLA's Shibboleth system will be in place to control access to digital master files.⁵ The Library's Cataloging and Metadata section already maintains a space for AV playback used in their cataloging workspace, so this may be an area that serves dual functions. This will be where mostly student workers will take the files created in-house and files received from the vendors, conduct quality assurance checks, and create reports on each file in the tracking database. Further metadata will also be embedded if appropriate.

Assistance in these preservation projects will be enlisted from interns and students worker, particularly those in UCLA's Moving Image Archive Studies master's program and UCLA's Department of Information Studies. Other collaborations are planned with various departments in the Library and across UCLA that are capturing events through AV materials. Lastly, an "Audiovisual Preservation Travelling Medicine Show" has been presented to students in the UCLA Library Special Collections' Center for Primary Research and Training, which will be expanded and presented to many different departments at UCLA.

(Endnotes)

- 1 UCLA, Online Archive of California: <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/institutions/UCLA> Consulted 14 March 2012.
- 2 A version of the report has been prepared for distribution. Contact Siobhan Hagan, AV Preservation Specialist, to obtain an electronic copy: <mailto:shagan@library.ucla.edu>.
- 3 For a detailed description of this, see the American Institute for Conservation's Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice: <http://www.conservationus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewPage&PageID=858> Consulted 14 March 2012.
- 4 Association of Research Libraries. *Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for Academic and Research Libraries*. Washington, D.C. January, 2102: <http://www.arl.org/pp/ppcopyright/codefairuse/index.shtml> Consulted 14 March 2012.
- 5 Internet2 Middleware Initiative. *Shibboleth*: <http://shibboleth.internet2.edu/> Consulted 14 March 2012.