**Jump In, Too/Two Survey Report**

**Maine Women Writers Collection, University of New England, Portland, ME**

**Cathleen Miller, curator & primary surveyor**  
  
After the completion of a week-long seminar at Rare Book School on born-digital materials a few years ago, I spent some time thinking about my institution’s approach to computer media, and realized that I needed help to get started. I reached for “You’ve Got to Walk Before You Can Run” and completed a survey of one small collection to try it out. It was a helpful tool, and I had every intention of continuing the project in all of our collections, but daily work began to get in the way and I dropped it.

Prior to my employment as curator, there was no plan for digital materials at all, and an attitude of “we’ll figure it out later,” common in our profession, was the dominant view. Even with my urgent feeling that we needed to create a cohesive plan for all of the computer media in our collections and the materials that we were creating daily, there was always another pressing task that took my attention. My goal in pledging to participate in this year’s Jump In survey was to give this particular task my full attention. As the lone full time employee in a small special collection, this proved more challenging than I had hoped, and while our survey was not as comprehensive as I had envisioned, it is better than what we had when we started.   
  
I decided on a primary focus of our “Media collection,” which has been in need of attention for many years. In the past, one of my predecessors decided to pull all of the non-paper items out of collections to be housed separately. Some of these items (like cds, cassettes, dvds, etc.) ended up being listed in an Excel spreadsheet titled “Media collection.” Most of these items were not otherwise discoverable, and not necessarily noted as belonging with a specific author’s papers. Choosing to survey this group of materials served two functions for us: it covered a lot of the computer media in our collection, and helped to identify materials that were associated with authors’ collections as distinct from materials that the Maine Women Writers Collection created for our own purposes. We are in the midst of reorganizing our administrative records, so the timing of this survey was perfectly aligned with that project.  
  
While I was the primary surveyor, the MWWC’s other employees (Catherine Fisher, Assistant, and Laura Taylor, Cataloger) helped during the process. We spent about a week total pulling together materials, deciding on our approach, and finishing the physical survey. Laura Taylor helped to begin the process of looking at the Media collection and Catherine Fisher finished surveying the last few boxes. Because Catherine Fisher was working on processing the Lael Morgan papers, we included this collection in our survey as well. What we found in the survey as a whole was varied.   
  
The Lael Morgan papers contain a small amount of computer media, but house the first hard drive we have accessioned. Morgan painstakingly labeled everything in her collection, noting the photographs associated with the Lightroom files on the 500GB external hard drive, making the survey of this collection quite simple and clear. We have identified this collection as a priority for preservation, and are working to develop a cohesive digital preservation plan this year.  
  
The Media collection proved to be much more challenging to survey than I had anticipated. The spreadsheet that was used as the finding aid for the collection appeared in two separate versions. It was at first unclear which spreadsheet was the definitive version, but then it became clear that neither was accurate. As we went through each box, some were delineated by media type—VHS or cassette tapes only—and some were a mixture of 5mm reel to reel, zip disks, cassette and VHS or miniDV tapes. Many items listed on the inventories were not in the boxes, which raised questions about their current locations.   
  
The Media collection currently consists of approximately 40 compact disks, 45 DVDs, 120 cassettes, 80 VHS tapes, 7 5.25” floppy disks, 3 5mm reel to reel audio tapes, 3 16mm reel to reel films, 1 Beta tape, 6 DAT tapes, 1 zip disk, and 25 mini-DVs. The date range for the material on all the media is 1970-2011, undated. Some items had very detailed complete labels, and others were very unclear in labeling—the best were items marked as poor quality with a note to deaccession. Often, it was hard to tell who had created the material or what collection it was associated with. In order to get a true picture of the holdings, we will have to actually access the relevant files for description.   
  
What became clear from the survey is how much work there is yet to do to simply organize the material, let alone the consideration of preservation, which will be our next step after reintegrating media into authors’ collections and adding a series to our administrative records for media that we created.  
  
We are lucky that most of our collections are entirely paper-based at the moment. Given the fact that most writers currently compose digitally, this survey offered us the opportunity to look seriously at our current state of ill-preparedness to deal with the coming onslaught of digital media that we hope to soon be accessioning. When I discuss the purchase or donation of authors’ papers with them, I want to be able to provide a cohesive plan about how we will deal with their born-digital records. I am committing myself to doing as much as possible this year to make this a reality. This goal has moved from somewhere in my mid-range goals to the top of my list, and though I did not have as much time as I had hoped to devote to this survey, I am very glad to have at least taken the first steps to actually “Jump In” to this essential task.