Introduction:

Purdue University Libraries Archives and Special Collections (ASC) unit did not have a digital preservation program prior to the creation of the Digital Preservation and Electronic Records Archivist position, a position which I came to in December 2012. My position is tasked with strategic planning for digital preservation within the libraries. The Jump In initiative was a great chance for me to begin my new job, get to know the collections and media I would be working with, and take the first steps towards developing a sustainable digital preservation program.

Objectives:

- Develop an inventory template
- Prioritize collections for capture/preservation
- Estimate storage needs for department
- Develop guides and processes for staff

Methods:

My survey began with a search through our online finding aids and collection descriptions. I not only wanted to learn where and what type of digital content was located in the collections but I wanted to learn the frequently used terms; with the intention of standardizing some descriptions and retiring ambiguous media titles. While this search was helpful in analyzing terminology, it didn't help me to prioritize collections as I thought it would. Despite inconsistencies in terminology, quantity counts, and brief descriptions of collections, I was only able to get a quick snapshot

I directed the second phase of my survey at some of the accessioning statistics which kept a numerical record of media found in accessions. These statistics were organized first by year of accession and then by month. The list of "media" included compact discs, floppy discs, flash drives, DVDs, email files, films, audio cassettes, mini audio cassettes, hard drives, slides, video cassettes, and record albums. While not all of the fields were populated in the past two fiscal years since the statistics began being collected, the majority of media accessioned were slides, floppy discs, audio cassettes, and DVDs.

While we keep accessioning statistics on both audio/video and machine-readable media, I decided to only look at machine-readable media for the purposes of this survey. It is also my goal to separate how we deal with A/V and digital media in other aspects of our processing and accessioning workflows. Both require different approaches to physical and digital preservation and both require different analysis on the accessioning and processing stages. In the long run, this approach will allow for a more detailed analysis of the media.

The third phase of my survey involved polling the processing archivists and staff for priorities and preservation issues. They know the collections on a granular level and are often aware of which collections require the most attention and are in the highest demand in the reading room. I asked staff to focus on the following criteria:

1. Fragile media (floppies or priorities for reformatting)

2. Highly visible and frequently requested collections.
3. Networked files (files currently on our server which would be a priority for ingest into MetaArchive[1])
4. Optical media (CDs and DVDs make up the bulk of our statistics)
5. Surprises (eek!)

The collections identified by staff typically related to our main collecting focuses and recent, high profile acquisitions.

Outcomes:

I've currently tested the inventory on five of our collections (Donald N. Heirman papers, Mark Geyer papers, James R. Hansen papers on Neil Armstrong, Council of Writing Programs Administrators records, and WBAA Radio records). The collections vary in size, scope, and nature. One collection in particular includes a large number of floppy disks. The inventory process for this collection became quite tedious and time-consuming. After a while, I opted to simply take photos and fill out the inventory at a later date. Organizing the photos turned out to be another records management challenge and I'm still exploring ways to make the media photos on our local shared directory more user-friendly to our staff. Collections with larger media portions may pose a speed bump during the accessioning process.

One outcome of this survey that I am most pleased with is the increased dialog within the Archives and Special Collections unit. My ultimate goal is to increase comfort with digital materials among our staff and I believe this inventory piqued the interest of those handling and processing collections with media. This will be extremely beneficial as we acquire more hybrid collections and all digital collections.

This survey was also helpful in defining our processing and accessioning procedures. Our unit is currently revising our processing manual and I was able to work with the processing archivist to make sure that a media inventory was present at every processing level – from a basic accessioning record all the way to an item-level finding aid, if needed. A detailed record of digital media at every stage will help the unit plan for future preservation, storage, and access needs.

This survey also gave me a great opportunity to familiarize myself with other aspects of my position. I found that the survey I developed and the information I uncovered was useful in the many projects I tackled during my first six months in the position. I've been able to utilize the inventory and the statistics I collected to influence development of the digital preservation policy and to project future technological and infrastructural needs. The initiation of this inventory effort has helped me prioritize preservation activities and plan for the development of a robust digital preservation program, one that includes a web archiving component, digital forensic technology, and institutional participation in MetaArchive.

[1] Purdue University Libraries is a member of the MetaArchive Cooperative, a distributed digital preservation network utilizing LOCKSS software.

Conclusion:

While I did not have the chance to inventory as many collections as I had planned, I was certainly able to get a grasp of the current state of our digital collections. Many media was not stored in correct conditions – floppy disks were packed too tightly, removable drives were buried at the bottoms of boxes, permanent markers were used in labeling optical disks – many of the collections needed rehousing and further attention. This survey gave me a great "jumping" off place and allowed me to weave digital media management into many of our current processes.

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