

The Jump-In Initiative at Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University

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My first reaction to the announcement of the Manuscript Repositories Section's Jump In Initiative was one of passing interest. I thought that the goal was worthy, but I wondered how I would ever find the time to review all 3000 linear feet of holdings. A few days later several of my colleagues on campus asked me to consider joining them as part of a university-wide commitment to assessing the types and amounts of digital data in our repositories. It is because of their infectious enthusiasm that I reread the guidelines, explored the sample forms, and signed the pledge.

Four months later I am glad to report success. Between mid-January and mid-April, two student workers and I opened more than 4000 archival boxes, reviewed the contents, and took notes on electronic data storage devices found therein. The resulting inventory lists the locations of 53 3.5" floppy discs (@ 1.44 MB), 110 CDs (@ 700 MB), 36 DVDs (@ 4.76GB), and 1 flash drive containing 59 GB of data. Altogether the archives at Bridwell Library currently include up to 307.5 GB of electronic data.

The small number of data storage devices (less than 200 in 3000 linear feet of boxes) did not surprise me. Most of my repository's collections of professional papers and institutional records predate the personal computer age. However, that trend is changing. An estimated 90% of the electronic data storage devices in the archives have been accessioned since my arrival in 2009. Clearly, the electronic data flood gates have opened! In order to serve the best interests of my institution, I realize that it is time to begin actively managing inflow, preservation, and access.

Participating in the Jump In Initiative has provided me with more than just statistics. From the experience of personally reviewing storage device labels, I have come to realize that our collected electronic data suffers from lack of appraisal and selection. At least half of the floppy discs are software installation backup and emergency reboot discs for computer systems no longer in use. A few CDs and DVDs are commercially-produced media that belong in the general collections rather than in the archives. Some discs are redundant copies of promotional media mass-produced by the library or the School of Theology. Additionally, unlabeled discs abound. Weeding out the blank and redundant discs will require a great deal of staff time, but continuing to store them makes no sense.

From this day forward, I plan to work closely with donors and records-transferring programs explaining the need to label everything and limit their contributions to archival data. Working with other campus archivists, I hope to develop a set of archival electronic data guidelines. Such

guidelines will be a helpful step forward in the process of creating campus-wide records management policies and procedures.