

Access Strategies for Born-Digital Archives: Lessons of the International Fellowships Program Project

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Abstract:

Columbia University Libraries has recently completed a large grant-funded project to preserve and make accessible the archives of the International Fellowships Program. Active in 2001-2013, the IFP offered fellowships for post-graduate study to social justice leaders from underserved communities in Asia, Africa, Latin America, Russia, and the Middle East. The IFP records included a substantial (3.6 TB) digital component, with documents and multimedia from 22 countries in 10 languages and 7 non-Roman character sets, as well as the related web archive. This presentation focuses on strategy and solutions we employed to make these varied holdings accessible to researchers as a single digital archive.

The project included multiple entryways into the archive: the dedicated IFP Archives website, OPAC, and the archival finding aid. The digital archive had to be both searchable and browsable. Since the only file-level descriptive metadata was contained in file names and directory paths, a browsing presentation, mimicking the standard file explorer interface, has been developed. In addition, the textual materials were fully indexed using Solr to enable multi-language full-text and file path searching. The IFP Archives website was designed to support downloading of all types of materials and streaming of videos. Tiered access (online vs. dedicated reading room laptops) required additional features.

The collection has been used actively, and a usability study was conducted in the fall of 2016 on three user groups: academic researchers, students, and philanthropy professionals. The study results provide insights into user reaction to the interface and presentation of archival materials.

About the authors:

Dina Sokolova has been a Digital Preservation Librarian at Columbia University Libraries Digital Program Division since 2012. Her role incorporates development of digital preservation workflows, policies and procedures as well as acquisition, assessment, metadata capturing and creation, forensic analysis, and long-term preservation and management of born-digital and digitized materials from library's special and general collections. Dina has been employed with Columbia University Libraries since 2001 in several preservation-related positions. She holds a B.S./M.S. in Microelectronic Engineering and Masters in Library and Information Science from Long Island University.

Jane Gorjevsky holds a position of a Digital Assets Archivist at Columbia University Rare Books and Manuscript Library since the creation of the position in January 2012. Her duties include working with record creators, the Columbia Libraries staff and other stakeholders to plan and manage new electronic acquisitions as well as preservation and reformatting of legacy digital media. Jane is also responsible for developing policies and workflows pertaining to the RBML digital holdings and hybrid collections. Jane joined the staff of Columbia University Libraries in

2001 as the grant-funded processing archivist, and in 2003-2011, served as the Curator of the RBML Carnegie Collections unit, dedicated to collecting, organizing, preserving and providing access and reference to the archival records of four major philanthropic institutions founded by Andrew Carnegie. Prior to her work at Columbia, Jane was an institutional archivist for the March of Dimes foundation. Jane has an M.A. in History and M.A. in Archival Management and Historical Editing, both from New York University, and B.S. in Applied Mathematics and Statistics from SUNY, Stony Brook.