

UTA LIBRARIES' SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Jump In, Too/Two Initiative Results

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BACKGROUND

The University of Texas at Arlington's (UTA) Libraries' Special Collections was founded in 1967 via the generosity of Jenkins and Virginia Garrett and the labor acquisitions of Dr. George Green. As such, Special Collections collects historical materials relating to Texas, the U.S. War with Mexico (1846-1848), Mexico from 1810-1920, and the cartographic history of Texas and the Gulf of Mexico, in addition to housing the Texas Labor Archives, the Texas Political Archives, and University Archives.

Since the majority of our collection scope is pre-digital, there was never a push to acquire electronic materials. The digital materials that were discovered during this process were acquired through regular collection accessions and not actively sought out. As with many repositories, the items were simply left within their collections and housed in acid free boxes. Special Collections is limited to electronic storage space by the university's Office of Information Technology (OIT) which controls server space for all departments on campus. Our administrative files are stored within a folder in the Libraries' dedicated server ('Q' drive), and our born-digital and digitized photographs have their own server that is secure and controlled by Special Collections staff. Any University publications, including videos, are uploaded into the Libraries' ResearchCommons, which is the institutional repository, and its 'dark archives' is also used as a storage space for digitized collections featured on our website.

My predecessor began an assessment of electronic records management but never had the chance to proceed with her research. When I started here two years ago, it was one of my goals to get Special Collections on track by creating a digital asset management program complete with policies, procedures, and resources. The *Jump In Too/Two* initiative seemed the best way to get this program kick-started and produce the data required to increase support for this endeavor. Although the survey of the collections for this project is not exhaustive, it provides an excellent initial overview of what to expect.

SURVEY

Special Collections does not utilize a collection management tool that meets the needs of an archival repository our size. We currently use MS Access to input and monitor accessions, and while it adequately serves this purpose, it is not easily searchable by non-archives library staff that have to resort to the library catalog to search for materials. Before Special Collections incorporated the use of MS Access, they used a shelf list plus a form for each collection, a system of holding files, and the library catalog to establish intellectual control. It was somewhat difficult to locate all of the holdings within the collection, so this assessment is by no means a complete survey of Special Collections' content.

As such, I chose to survey the collections by using the finding aids and inventories stored in our shared drive, in addition to the MS Access Accessions Database. The latter has a field that allows us to record the digital extent of the collections in megabytes. All of the finding aids and inventories were generated using MS Word, but I was unable to search through those documents that were protected (roughly 12). We have finding aids that are uploaded to Texas Archival Resources Online (TARO), an online consortium of Texas archival, manuscript, and museum collections, but most of those are also in the shared drive. Here is a list of the descriptive sources I looked through, all of which are in Special Collections' 'Q' drive:

- 64 Finding Aids
- 34 Pending Finding Aids (created by students)
- 194 Inventories of unprocessed collections

While searching through these documents, I used the following terms: Computer, Digital, Electronic, Compact Disc, CD, DVD, Floppy, Disc, Disk, Hard drive, USB, Flash Drive, Drive, Zip, Magnetic, and Tape. It took roughly twenty hours to assess all of these sources and write the collection inventory that accompanies this report. The materials discovered were in the following formats: CD, DVD, floppy disk, audio cassette tape, and digital audio tape (DAT).

When I initially signed up to participate in this initiative, I was hoping to have a student worker assist me with the assessment, but our budget was cut this year and we were reduced to fewer students who had projects elsewhere. Other than limited staffing to assist me, there were other challenges I encountered. The search of the finding aids and inventories was limited to the terminology and detail applied by the processing archivist. If they did not include format or exact number of items, I still included them in the survey for my own records. It is also unclear how much storage capacity was used with each item, so I recorded the maximum storage capacity in those instances, thus there will be gross estimates regarding maximum storage. For example, the UTA Department of Music Collection contains many DATs, and they have a maximum capacity of 80 GB depending on standard and compression used. Without knowing how much data was recorded on the tapes, or if they were compressed, I had to go with the maximum number, which grossly influenced the figures. Also, some of the collections listed in the inventory have digital photographs that were acquired as part the accession, and those were incorporated into the 'S' drive which serves as our digital photographs storage space.

GOING FORWARD

If anything, this initiative has brought to our attention the need to require more detail regarding size and amount of computer media when describing the collections, whether through finding aids or preliminary inventories. For example, if the term 'diskette' or 'floppy' was used, I had no way of knowing what size these were without pulling the collections, which I did not have to time to do. I would like to pull those collections that had ambiguous information in their finding aids and inventories and determine how many computer-related items they actually contain. The outcome of this project has also stressed the importance of having a dedicated workstation in Special Collections so I, and future archival staff, can determine hardware, operating systems, and software used to create the files on the media.

Not only would this help with descriptive aids, but it is necessary for properly preserving the items via a digital asset management plan.

Out of the 292 descriptive sources I surveyed, thirty-five contained computer media that was included in the collection inventory. The last collection listed, which is the dedicated server housing our digital photographs, is backed up regularly by OIT. My department head and I have been collaborating with our Digital Creations department to assess the digitization of the UTA Department of Music Collection due to the rapid degradation of the audio cassettes and CDs we have already noted. Without a more thorough assessment of each of the collections listed in the inventory, it is difficult at this time to know which ones need to be prioritized for preservation. However, the inventory does give us a better idea of those collections containing at-risk materials.

Some of the obstacles in creating a digital asset management plan include parameters for digital storage placed on us by OIT, in addition to the belief by non-archives staff that the 'dark archive' of the Libraries' institutional repository can be used to store and preserve archival digital materials. It is my hope this report, along with the collection inventory, will emphasize the importance of having a proper electronic archival storage space and digital asset management plan to suitably preserve and make accessible our digital collections.