

Jump In initiative: Louisiana Research Collection response essay

Submitted by Eira Tansey, Library Associate, May 1, 2013

Identifying electronic media

For the survey, I surveyed our entire departmental holdings. Most of our acquisitions consist of pre-1950s material, so I knew we would have very little electronic media in our collections. I relied on some anecdotal knowledge of random electronic media objects donors had recently dropped off. To locate any additional items, I searched our Archon finding aid database for keywords such as 'electronic', 'disk', 'disc', and so on. Although we may have missed some items in unprocessed collections, I believe that our survey covers the majority of electronic media at the current time.

Once all the electronic media was gathered, I created a spreadsheet based on the example provided via the Jump In initiative website. In most cases, items were labeled (though sometimes vaguely, e.g., someone's name), and it was easy to identify the media type (although certain manufacturer markings were covered up by labels). At this time, we have approximately 86 GB of electronic media in our holdings.

Our current institutional state

The Louisiana Research Collection (LaRC) is part of Special Collections, a division of Tulane University's Howard-Tilton Memorial Library (the main campus research library). LaRC has not yet accepted born-digital archives on a large-scale due to a lack of staffing and system resources necessary to deal with major digital acquisitions.

LaRC has ongoing donor relationships with many community organizations, including local political groups, social welfare organizations, and houses of worship. In many of these active collections, we are experiencing a growing gap in the records-transfer process since so many of these organizations now conduct their recordkeeping largely through electronic means of creation and sharing.

In addition, the library is experiencing difficulties in implementing any large-scale digital materials ingest and preservation infrastructure due to low-staffing levels and the university's budget cuts. For example, a proposed institutional repository has been repeatedly denied funding and staffing resources for implementation.

Next steps

Given the lack of monetary and staffing resources, we will need to think creatively about our future steps in managing, acquiring, and preserving born-digital material. Putting it off until a perfect world of funding and personnel is not the answer; we will never have all the staffing and money necessary to manage digital materials perfectly.

The most critical next step is identifying the scope of future digital archives issues. LaRC maintains an ongoing positive relationship with many organizational donors who give their records to our repository. In the next few months, I plan to conduct a donor survey to assess the following criteria:

- a) How much of their recordkeeping is now conducted electronically?
- b) When did they primarily switch away from maintaining primarily paper-based records?
- c) What types of electronic documents do they create in the course of business? (e.g., email, reports, photographs, minutes, etc.)
- d) What file formats are commonly used? (e.g., Microsoft Office files, PDF, image files such as JPG or TIFF, etc.)
- e) How are they preserving your digital files now, if at all? If so, what steps are they taking?

This information will help us plan our next steps concerning what types of files we may be able to acquire at this time and potentially provide extremely basic care. We will look to the “Technical Steps for Readable Media” in OCLC’s *First Steps for Managing Born-Digital Content Received on Physical Media* (<https://www.oclc.org/content/dam/research/publications/library/2012/2012-06.pdf>) for further guidance following the donor survey.