**Drawing a fine line between promoting use
and preserving access to new media**

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Abstract:

Over the last decade, the media collection development and curation policies at the University Library of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign moved from a strong emphasis on restricting access to media content for faculty and classroom use only to a more open philosophy committed to supporting media needs across the curriculum for patrons at all levels, for promoting personal growth, and supporting the enrichment of student life and culture. The Library now actively promotes the use of media content in a variety of forms, including a new gaming collection, and media collections continue to grow in popularity, as evidenced by high circulation and demand for new titles. These changes in the proposed uses of media, as well as multiple changes in available formats and forms of access, present the institution with significant preservation challenges that need to be addressed in order to ensure the ongoing availability of these resources.

Background

The University Library's central media collection is housed in the Undergraduate Library, and has changed in composition, focus and scope dramatically over the past decade. Ten years ago, the collection consisted of mostly VHS tapes, many of which were educational documentaries, and the circulation policies were quite restrictive in nature. Faculty could check out titles for very limited amounts of time to use in the classroom, or

1

occasionally for personal research. Graduate instructors, after confirmation of their teaching status, could do the same. The Undergraduate Library maintained viewing equipment for all formats in the collection, and undergraduate students were restricted to in-house viewing of the collection. These somewhat draconian measures were enforced with the best of intentions, namely to preserve the collection so it could fulfill its primary function of classroom support.

In the early years of the last decade, the University Library began rethinking existing collection development and circulation policies for media collections with an eye toward expanding the services that the University Library offered to the campus community. This philosophic change marked a departure from local practices in managing media collections. But, it actually brought the management of these collections into closer alignment with the Library's policies for other resources and long-standing philosophical commitment to providing broad access to members of the campus community. It also reflected a response to patron demand; as technologies changed and DVD players became ubiquitous, our community regularly requested to borrow DVDs. By adopting a philosophy of supporting media needs across the curriculum for patrons at all levels, for promoting personal growth, and supporting the enrichment of student life and culture, the University Library believed that developing a collection that included more 'popular' resources would result in a net benefit to constituents across campus. Initially, the new collection was split between a small, browsable, circulating collection open to all patron types, and titles purchased at faculty request and housed in the closed collection circulating only to faculty and instructors. The open collection was purchased with new funds that were specifically earmarked to support popular culture and student life, while the titles purchased for the closed collection met more traditional collection development criteria, including classroom use and educational content.

As students became increasingly aware of the availability of resources that specifically catered to popular interests and enhanced student life, the lines between the two collections became blurred. Students wanted access to many educational titles, and faculty were using as many if not more titles from the popular culture collection as they were from the more scholarly closed collection. This subsequently led to broad circulation policy revisions; within the space of a few years the library moved the media collection into open stacks, and circulated materials freely to all patron types. Faculty and instructors moved towards relying on course reserve services to limit access to those titles which they required for classroom or independent viewing in a particular semester, and otherwise took advantage of the relaxed circulation policies for personal use. Of course, these changes significantly affected existing practices with respect to access and preservation.

One of the earliest concerns that the University Library negotiated during this transition focused on developing a process for displaying and circulating the media collections that welcomed users and did not deter them or create unnecessary work for library personnel. Access to media collections in the United States has frequently been a mediated activity, requiring library personnel to retrieve every item that patrons requested. In addition to its staff intensity, this operational model's difference from normal library operations requires additional workflows, additional training for staff, and inhibited browsing on the part of our patrons. However, this enhanced access carried risks in the form of a higher probability of theft. Preparing for this new model required finding a solution that balanced our commitment to access against the potential for theft. Initially, this effort focused on the acquisition of unsatisfactorily bulky, protective sleeves and expensive display furniture that would deter theft by making the individual DVDs too bulky to easily conceal. Eventually, the University Library settled on housing the DVDs and newer gaming collection in less

expensive, standard-sized, locking DVD cases as a theft deterrent. Combined with an aggressive replacement policy for any titles damaged or missing, this addressed most of the common issues with maintaining access to a media collection of this type.

However, higher use of the collection unquestionably leads to higher risk for damage or loss, so questions regarding the long-term preservation and access of the collection remained. Even though the circulating media collection is generally seen as geared towards current use rather than future need, promoting use of the collection vies with preservation concerns of longer-term access to the content. In addition to the central media collection housed at the Undergraduate Library, there are also many media materials collected and stored in the University Archives and elsewhere within the Library and across campus that have great enduring value and require additional considerations for preservation purposes. Naturally, the University Library applies greater restrictions to collections of this nature.

The Current Environment

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign operates a well-established preservation and conservation program; yet, the preservation of media collections remains in its infancy. Given the current budget environment for libraries in general and the institution's long-standing commitment to preserving access to its collections, much thought was given as to how media content could be both made as accessible as possible and preserved for longer-term use. Purchasing multiple copies to meet increasing demand, replacing copies (when possible) of damaged or lost materials, and providing multiple formats of single titles are all expensive propositions. Ideally, of course, the steps taken to promote use would also preserve content. The evolving digital environment and changes in the sales and distribution of digital media offer a number of ways to accomplish both aims, including locally loading and delivery of streaming content, relying upon vendors to host acquired content, and leasing content from service providers. In much the same way that libraries simultaneously serve the needs of multiple users through e-journals, electronic reserve systems that provide multiple, simultaneous users with online access to digitized print content around the clock, and digitized books serve as surrogate use copies (copyright considerations notwithstanding), providing access to media content online offers similar solutions to preservation and access needs. The initial acquisition of this digital media was supported by a campus Library/IT Fee and streams 24/7, giving faculty, staff, and students at Illinois improved access to digital media—all through password-protected access. Content is licensed for educational use, so classrooms, groups, and course reserves all benefit. As an early indication of use, the original 260 titles purchased from Films Media Group and made available through the Library's Helix server were accessed 1,578 times during the 2009/2010 fiscal year, which is significantly higher than would have been possible for physical circulations.

However, the benefits of streaming media must be weighed against a number of underlying new and ongoing concerns. Library patrons are well accustomed to the online environment, and are not shy about demanding instantaneous access to content across the board, even when that is not feasible for reasons ranging from a lack of resources to commercial unavailability. Consequently, the need to manage expectations becomes increasingly important. Unlike purchasing a physical DVD, where if there is a pressing need Library staff can either find a local copy of the title or rush order a copy and get it processed for the collection within a matter of days, licensing the digital rights to stream the content requires compliance with a whole different set of acquisitions procedures, institutional regulations, and state procurement laws. Unfortunately, unless there is already a standing

license in place with a particular vendor, the process of obtaining an appropriate signed license through both parties is often lengthy and complicated, which negates the Library's ability to fulfill rush requests at point of need. Much greater forethought and advance planning is required in order to provide content when needed in support of the curriculum. Also, though the Library can purchase and circulate both popular feature films and educational media content in physical formats without distinguishing between the two, the online environment is largely restricted to educational content only given the lack of availability of digital rights for the more 'popular' content.
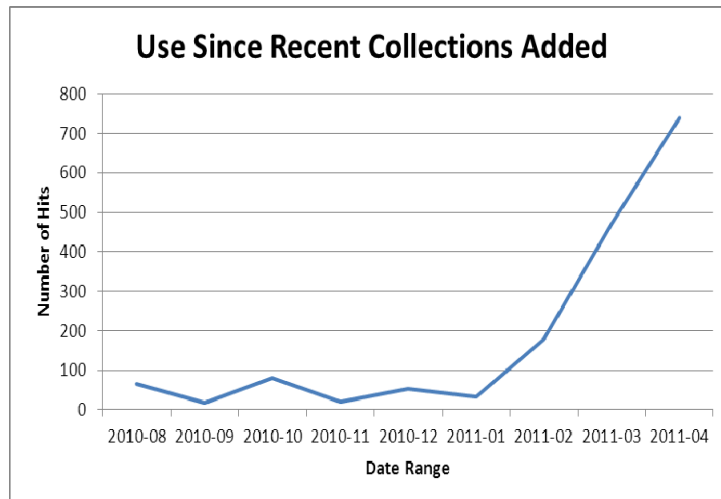
Challenges and Concerns

Personnel within the University Library contemplated the implications of investing additional resources into streaming media for some time before diving in. However, the significant advantages for multiple persons to have simultaneous access and for the University Library to be able to serve developing distance education programs quickly outweighed the requirements to adjust locally managed workflows and processes. Yet, there are a number of concerns that warrant further discussion. One of the biggest initial stumbling blocks to entering the digital rights environment was that locally streaming commercially acquired digital media requires certain technical expertise. Initially, the Library attempted to house and stream the digital files from a Library-owned and -maintained server, but rapid changes in technology coupled with insufficient IT staff to dedicate to a service which was small in comparison to other Library needs quickly led to outdated technology and inadequate expertise in this specialized area. Consequently, success required that the University Library draw upon the expertise of others on campus. Working closely with ATLAS (Applied Technologies for Learning in the Arts and Sciences), an office on campus that provides information technology services that support and enhance the educational, research, and administrative activities of students, faculty, and staff in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, the University Library developed a mechanism for processing and locally hosting the significant number of digital titles acquired.

Another significant hurdle resulted from the University Library's long-standing prejudice toward only purchasing/licensing content in perpetuity in order to avoid expending the media budget annually only on renewing access to content rather than the acquisition of new content for the collection. As we hope to preserve access to the content indefinitely, a licensing model that did not allow the Library to archive the master file was deemed inappropriate for our large research collection. Though some distributors allow for licensing the content in perpetuity while still accessing the content from their site, the added complication of multiple user interfaces that introduces to the equation was considered unacceptable in an already complicated end user environment.

Tracking differing licensing models would also place an additional burden on existing Library personnel dedicated to electronic resource management, and complicate further the acquisition process. It is our goal to help influence and shape the developing licensing models in directions that balance appropriate compensation for rights holders with sustainable models of access for library patrons. The current Library collection of commercially licensed streaming media is close to nine-hundred full-length titles, and that number is expected to double in the next several years as a higher percentage of the existing media budget is expended on digital rights for streaming media as a supplement to or even replacement for our current reliance on physical media. The more standardized our model is, and the more underlying licenses we can put in place to facilitate faster acquisition of content at point of need, the better the services we will be able to offer our patrons and the better access we will

be able to provide to this content in the long-term. It has only been within the last few months that the newly purchased collections have been available through the outsourced model for streaming and cataloged appropriately in the library online catalog. As indicated in the graph below, campus users are quickly embracing the enhanced access. Web logs show that patron use of the digital media collection has grown from under 100 hits per month to well over 700, with every indication of continued growth.

Use Since Recent Collections Added

Number of Hits (y-axis: 0, 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700, 800)

Date Range (x-axis: 2010-08, 2010-09, 2010-10, 2010-11, 2010-12, 2011-01, 2011-02, 2011-03, 2011-04)

As noted earlier, the availability of some streaming media does not mean that all media is available. However, many users do not inherently understand the reasons for why some items are available and others are not. Consequently, a significant part of the University Library's efforts at promoting the new streaming services has been devoted toward emphasizing what is available and the often lengthy delay created by the aforementioned acquisitions and licensing process between content being requested and its eventual availability online.

Future Directions

The University Library considers its first foray into acquiring and streaming digital media a success, and it appears unlikely that the pendulum will swing back in terms of proportion of our resources that are devoted to acquiring tangible media formats. However, there are some issues developing that will require attention in the next several years. Digital access and preservation is typically viewed as solving numerous problems simultaneously, and while in many regards that is a correct assumption, there are often hidden costs and longer-term problems associated with heavy reliance on digital access. One issue which we expect to quickly become a factor in the next few years is allocating the necessary funding to reformat existing legacy collections. The demand for new content, often at high institutional level pricing, limits the amount of funding available to work to preserve and increase access to existing collections.

Counter to initial expectations, the unexpected cessation of support by our campus' classroom technology office for VCRs in smart classrooms has benefited our campus. The lack of ongoing support for the physical playback equipment, coupled with competing demand for DVD copies when available, highlighted the need not only for reformatting older formats but also providing greater and longer-term access by reducing reliance on physical formats. The inherent problem with this approach is that too often the assumption is that once the content has migrated to a digital, streaming format the preservation and access pieces of

the equation are done, when in fact they are just beginning. Once the content is available online, there is an ongoing need to assess current and upcoming best practices in the technological methods of storage and delivery. Much as ¾" U-matic tapes were considered the industry standard for many years and are now obsolete, there is a great danger in assuming that the current master files, in whatever format currently considered adequate for preservation purposes by the Library and others, are therefore in their final state. Some savvy distributors are licensing digital rights for the life of the current master file, so that if at some point the Library needs a master in a different format, additional resources would be required to acquire the title in the new format – a process that mirrors the cyclical need to keep acquiring titles as tangible formats changed from film, to videotape, to laser disks, to DVDs. Others license the digital rights in perpetuity completely, leaving any new master or derivative files to the discretion of the Library. While there is then no additional resources are required to license the new master file, hidden costs exist in maintaining appropriate expertise and equipment remaster the files locally. Currently, the Library houses the archival master files, while outsourcing the derivative streaming files elsewhere on campus. There are significant costs associated with storing archival media files given their large size, and migration may introduce a need for duplicate file formats.

Even before the current preservation quality archival files need to be migrated to new formats there will need to be changes in the way the derivative files are streamed and delivered to patrons. In the few short years the University Library has been providing streamed access to commercial media content, we have already undergone one complete system change from streaming Real media files delivered to users with RealPlayer, to an Adobe Flash environment. As we migrated from Real to Flash, there was already discussion underway on campus about potentially moving to an html5 standard as soon as possible, with the goal of minimizing problems of different users with varying hardware trying to access the content.

Conclusion

Perhaps one of the only certainties that libraries face in the coming years is the certainty of change. Within a few short decades, the delivery of media collections in research libraries has shifted from a model that required patrons to use classrooms equipped with film projectors to one that seeks to deliver as much of the content as possible to our users dorm rooms and desktops. While this change has addressed some of the challenges that libraries faced in delivering content to our users and preventing them from damaging what were frequently expensive materials, it has led to a new series of challenges. In the case of supporting a collection that is open for browsing and general use, the titles suffer from more wear and tear due to their higher use. Of course, that is the point in building a collection – developing something that will be used by our community. The challenges associated with the streaming collections are different, and more complex – namely the need to address the initial licensing and ongoing preservation needs of streaming media. However, those costs must be weighed against the desires of our users, the high level of demonstrated use that this material receives from on-site students, and the potential use that this material can receive from our campus' fastest growing body of students – those securing higher educational opportunities from the University's many distance education programs.