ETD Preservation and Archiving: Can Old Strategies be Applied to New Media?

Third International Symposium on Electronic Theses and Dissertations

St. Petersburg, Florida • March 18, 2000

Julia Blixrud • Association of Research Libraries / SPARC

Overview

- Preserving Print Collections
- Preservation Strategies
- Print Environment Factors
- Digital Environment Factors
- Library Concerns
- Library Expectations of Producers
- What Libraries Can Do

Preserving Print Collections

- Early Library Preservation Efforts
  - Repair and rebinding
  - Reprints or facsimiles
- 1960s: Growing Recognition of Problem with Brittle Books
  - ARL survey of member collections
  - CLR sponsored study of effects of environment on longevity of books
  - 80 million books in danger, 12 million unique
- 1970s: Growth of Preservation Programs, Education and Training, Research
- 1978: Title II-C Funds for Preservation

Preserving Print Collections

- 1989: Brittle Books Program
  - 20 year plan to preserve 3 million books
  - Appropriate to National Endowment of the Humanities of $12.5 million
  - Components
    - Microfilming
    - Encourage use of alkaline paper
    - Encourage research on deacidification

Library Preservation Activities

- 1996-97, ARL Libraries spent
  - Over $80 million on preservation
  - 9% from external sources
- Preservation expenditures were about 8% of library materials expenditures and 3% of total library budget
- Preservation activities included
  - Conservation treatment
  - Mass deacidification
  - Commercial binding
  - Microfilming
  - "Digitizing"

Success?

- 320 million volumes in research libraries
- 80 million books in danger
- 12 million unique
- Plan to microfilm 3 million
- 850,000 preserved thus far
- NEH projected funding level never achieved
- Number of volumes microfilmed by ARL libraries dropped 37% over past two years

Preservation Strategies

- Build a coalition of key stakeholders
- Launch nationwide program
- Implement cooperative projects
- Improve capacity of research libraries
- Increase financial support
- Establish professionally managed programs
- Expand range of strategies and techniques to improve efficiency

Print Environment Factors

- Archival technology was available
  - Microfilming began in the 1930s
- Libraries owned copies of the materials and preservation activity was supported by copyright law
- Federal funds were available to support filming activity
  - Encouraged cooperative projects
  - Supported development of infrastructure
- Rise of some commercial interest in filming
- Understanding of why print deteriorated led to strategies to help prevent the problem
  - Environmental controls
  - Standards for alkaline paper
  - Standards for library binding

Digital Environment Factors

- No proven archival technology or methodology exists
- Libraries do not necessarily own copy of the resource
- Time to deterioration is very short (5-10 years?)
- Limited federal funding for digital preservation research (DLI)
- Commitment of some publishers and some organizations to assume responsibility to preserve digital resources
- No consensus on standards, although there is understanding of the problems and complexities

Library Concerns

- Can we trust producers to take responsibility for preservation?
- Can we afford to take this on ourselves?
  - We don't know what it costs
  - We don't know what "it" is
- Can we afford to pay others for it?
- Can we convince funding sources of the need for support?

Library Expectations of Producers

- Take responsibility for archiving your products
- Develop resources with preservation issues in mind
- Adopt standards and best practices that are currently available
- Document standards and practices used
- Migrate, if appropriate
- Run routine back-ups
- Create periodic archival copies on industry standard media, store copy off-site
- Create plan for transferring files to an archival library or agency should the company go out of business or decide it is no longer able to maintain the data; devise the access terms that will dictate access and use of these files

What Libraries Can Do

- Work to raise awareness of issues
- Participate actively in the development of standards and best practices
- Help identify content for preservation
- Lobby for federal funding to support research and development in these areas
- Encourage computer scientists on our campuses to become engaged in the issue
- Recognize that libraries will need to pay for preservation of resources
- Begin identifying archival libraries and agencies

Further Reading

- Issues and Innovations in Preserving Digital Information (ARL Transforming Libraries series) http://www.arl.org/transform/pdi/index.html

- Preserving Digital Information: Report of the RLG/CPA Task Force on Archiving of Digital Information http://www.rlg.org/ArchTF/

- Strategic Policy Framework for Creating and Preserving Digital Collections / Arts and Humanities Data Service http://ahds.ac.uk/manage/framework.htm