Archives & Special Collections Digital Preservation Policy

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The University of Louisville’s Archives and Special Collections (ASC) has a primary responsibility for preservation of digital content in their possession, including content donated by community members. Responsibility for preserving University records in electronic format is shared across the University; all content creators and custodians of permanent records or records with long-term value have a responsibility to actively assist with fulfilling this policy by adhering to ASC’s recommendations for file formats, metadata, and related preservation activities. Community members who donate digital materials have a similar responsibility.

Policy Statement
ASC’s mandate to preserve digital content (born-digital and digitized) has the following legal and ethical bases:

1. University Archives and Records Center (UARC), a constituent part of ASC is identified in 2.5.6 of the Redbook, the University of Louisville’s governance document, as the official custodian of University records. In addition, UARC is charged to “preserve proper and adequate documentation of University policies, decisions, procedures, functions, and essential transactions.”

2. Kentucky Revised Statute (KRS) 171.640 requires “The head of each state or local agency…to be made and preserved records containing adequate and proper documentation of the organizational functions, policies, decisions, procedures, and essential transactions of the agency.”

3. Digital preservation planning is part of the University Libraries’ strategic plan, in support of the goal to “Provide thoughtfully chosen and curated resources to better serve the University and our research communities.”

4. ASC is obliged to preserve digital content as part of its commitment to donors and to the community. The community donates their records and creative content, trusting us to preserve it so future generations may learn about and from them.

5. As part of the archival profession, ASC adheres to the Society of American Archivists’ Code of Ethics for Archivists, which calls upon archivists to “take steps to minimize the natural physical deterioration of records and implement specific security polices to protect digital records.”

Scope
ASC is responsible for identifying strategies to provide long-term preservation of and access to select digital objects. Both born-digital and digitized objects are identified for long-term preservation based on ASC’s collecting policies, professional appraisal standards, and state retention requirements. ASC is committed to the following priority areas, depending on sufficient financial and human resources:
1. Born-digital objects: The highest effort will be made for accessioned, permanent records for which no analog instance has ever existed. These include university records as well as community collections and metadata created for digitized collections.

2. Digitized objects with no available or an unstable analog resource: Every reasonable step will be taken to preserve materials without a print analog when re-digitization is not possible. Also included are analog resources that are physically unstable, where digitalization would compromise the resource.

3. Digitized materials with an available analog resource: Reasonable measures will be taken to extend the life of digital objects with readily-available print analogs that are typically of a unique nature. These include university records as well as community collections. The cost of re-digitizing will be weighed against the cost of preserving extant digital assets as needed.

Conversely, materials that are already commercially available elsewhere or that have short-term or temporary value are beyond the scope of this policy.

**Selection Criteria**
ASC preserves and provides access to primary resources for research, study, and teaching within the University's instructional programs, and offers distinctive and unique resources for the region and the scholarly community worldwide. The units of ASC: University Archives and Records Center, which also administers the University's Oral History Center, Digital Initiatives, Photographic Archives, and Rare Books, may accept gifts, in any format, which support this mission.

Some digital objects may be technically challenging and thus expensive to preserve and ASC cannot be expected to commit to preserving these objects without a clear understanding of what that entails and how it will be funded. Conversely, ASC should not limit its commitment to preserve technically challenging content just because it is technically challenging as in many cases the content’s value may justify additional expense.

Therefore ASC will not limit content accepted for preservation provided the following are agreed upon at point of deposit:

1. What content in the submitted digital objects needs to be preserved;
2. What dependencies the digital objects have;
3. What preservation activities will need to be undertaken to preserve the content;
4. How the preservation of the content will be funded.

**Strategies**
1. ASC faculty, staff, and students create digital surrogates of analog primary source materials in ASC collections in order to reduce wear and tear on a fragile original or in order to provide access, via our Digital Collections website; outreach; or patron request (for personal use or publication/broadcast).

Even when the access copy will be low-resolution and/or compressed, we produce uncompressed high-resolution files as our preservation masters, and store them on virtual servers that are maintained by the Office of Libraries Technology (OLT). OLT servers back up changed data every night, and a fresh backup is done every two weeks.

Collections proposed for digitization are approved by the Digital Initiatives Librarian. Upon completion of a digital collection, master files and metadata will be submitted for preservation
in the MetaArchive Cooperative’s distributed digital preservation network, within which six geographically-distributed partners harvest and preserve our digital files using open source Lots of Copies Keep Stuff Safe (LOCKSS) software.

2. ASC also receives born-digital files in a variety of formats from community donors as well as university employees. We have less control over the format(s) and resolution(s) received, although we encourage donors to follow Library of Congress recommendations whenever possible (for which see http://www.loc.gov/preservation/resources/rfs/). The curator responsible for accessing the collection (University Archivist, Archivist for Records Management, Archivist for Manuscript Collections and Co-Director of the Oral History Center, or Photo Curator, as appropriate) will make selection and preservation decisions about born-digital materials received, in accordance with the Selection Criteria listed above.

3. We also now receive electronic copies, in Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF) format, of students' theses and dissertations in lieu of bound paper copies. These files are directly deposited in the servers operated by the vendor, Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress), which runs nightly backups in triplicate and offsite on Amazon Glacier, and monthly backups to tape (maintained for one year).

4. Consistent, thorough metadata, including following standard filenaming procedures and creating collection-level and item-level records as appropriate, will enable long-term access to digital objects.

Permissions/Access
ASC limits access to preservation copies held on our servers. These files are not available to the public. Derivative digital files may be made available in accordance with any relevant state and federal laws, institutional regulations, licenses, and donor agreements.

Challenges
Digital preservation is defined as “the series of management policies and activities necessary to ensure the enduring usability, authenticity, discoverability and accessibility of content over the very long term.” (JISC, 2006)

Digital preservation differs from analog preservation in several ways. The primary difference is that digital preservation requires active management. While many analog materials, such as books, can survive for years when simply stored in a climate-controlled environment, digital materials that are left alone for long periods of time are much more likely to degrade beyond repair, and this degradation is generally not discovered until there is an attempt to use the data. Additionally, the preservation needs of analog materials, such as books, journals, film, and tape, are well understood and have not greatly changed over time. Digital preservation, however, is a developing field with standards that are always evolving. New tools and technologies will require that digital preservation activities be responsive and adaptable.

Specific challenges include:

1. Technology: Identifying and keeping pace with developments and changes in technology.

2. Costs: These include accounting for and addressing staffing, equipment, software, infrastructure, and miscellaneous other costs.

3. Developing and sustaining a network of relationships: A central component to the success of ASC’s digital preservation strategy will be developing and maintaining a framework of communication that can adequately identify and address changing needs, practices, and values of key constituencies within ASC, administrators, and users.
4. Maintaining a focus on preservation: preservation planning or work can sometimes be seen as something that can be put off, or neglected in favor of immediate access. Preservation is an essential component of ASC services as it enables long-term access, and as such it requires sustained attention.

**Outreach/Education**
ASC will provide open access to this policy by including it with related policies and forms available online and will engage in training opportunities surrounding the policy and its implementation as needed. ASC is dedicated to providing appropriate training and staff development in areas related to digital preservation while maintaining its ongoing commitment to education in managing public records.

**Date/Authors**
This document was created by a working group consisting of Carrie Daniels, Heather Fox, Kyna Herzinger, Rachel Howard, and Elizabeth Reilly, in December 2016.

**Related Documents**
Ekstrom Emergency Procedures [http://louisville.edu/dehs/emergency/emergency-procedures](http://louisville.edu/dehs/emergency/emergency-procedures)