

Digital Collections Strategic Planning

ITS Engagement Subcommittee

Overview

This document provides a short overview of the resources and services ITS provides for the creation and use of digital collections in teaching and research. Specifically, it explains the platforms available for storing and accessing digital collections, the policies that surround their creation, use, and long-term support, training opportunities, and the personnel, and administrative structures and workflows associated with using them.

What Constitutes a “Digital Collection”?

A digital collection is any defined set of digitized materials, whether they be images, videos or audio, or documents. Archived materials can take the form of preservational archives, where the focus is on long-term preservation, or working archives, where the focus is on active use of the digital resources, such as for teaching or research. They can also be personal, shared, or public.

A digital collection may be structured, with well-defined metadata associated with the digital resources such as a slide collection in ArtSTOR, or unstructured, such as a collection of documents in a folder on a personal computer. Because it has become so easy for an individual or group to amass very large numbers of digital resources, it is important to create structured metadata for a collection or, at minimum, a clearly structured organization of folders and folder and file names so that the resources can be searched or systematically browsed.

ITS supports multiple platforms for archiving, storing, and serving out digital collections, some of which are provided directly by ITS using on-site resources and others that are provided via a hosted solution by an off-campus provider. Each platform has its own strengths and weaknesses and therefore it is important to consider the current and future use of your digital resources so that you can house them on the most appropriate platform. This report will outline the various platforms available and the process and personnel who can assist you in using them.

Additionally, ITS provides faculty training on digitization practices and standard workflows for different media types through our divisional Academic Computing Managers. ITS maintains limited equipment for faculty to use digitizing materials, which includes a variety of analog-to-digital converters for different time-based media. ITS's New Media Lab offers limited “drop-off” support for the creation of video clips under Fair Use Guidelines.

Because of copyright considerations, ITS cannot digitize entire commercial videos, slides or other media on behalf of faculty, nor does it provide formal copyright advice on the appropriateness of digitizing commercial resources, even if owned by Wesleyan or the individual making the request.

For personal work, such as documents, photos, slides, or video and audio files in analog format, ITS can advise on best-practices for digitization, but due to staffing considerations, ITS cannot take on digitizing projects without significant advance project planning and funding. There are off-campus fee-based commercial services that provide digitization of personally owned documents, negative, photos and slides, or video and audio files, also subject to Fair Use Guidelines. ITS can assist you in finding an appropriate service for your needs.

Archive Types

Personal Digital Archives are any sort of information collected and curated for personal or research use. In a research context, this can include any sort of digital media, notes, scanned documents, or data. Most commonly, personal digital archives are stored in private space, on the individuals disks and hard drives, on WesFiles or Dragon, or on hosted services like Dropbox. Often times, with personal collections organization is the key to finding items rather than the use of electronic records or a database file metadata.

In many instances, a personal digital archive might be very large and require access by a research group, such as a collection of digitized video that forms the basis of research. ITS provides a number storage platforms for different levels of access, such as frequent and repeated access to a stored file or longer term storage required by a granting agency's data management standards. Because of the highly variable nature of these requirements from one discipline to the other, it is difficult to make generic recommendations. Rather, we suggest faculty begin a discussion with their ACM who will then rally the appropriate resources and personnel to create a plan to support your needs.

Shared Archives include examples such as a library of books and the Art History slide collection in Shared Shelf. These are most commonly stored in an accessible place or platform and have been organized and described using a standard metadata schema, such the monograph acquisitions in Olin Library. Shared archives might be public, such as the student theses and dissertations in WesScholar, or private such as departmental files in WesFiles. Since these sort of archives are often large and represent the collecting activities of multiple people or services, the discoverability of both the collection and the individual items is a principle concern. Because of this, we strongly suggest you use some type of searchable metadata to describe the collection (more information about metadata can be found at http://www.wesleyan.edu/digitalscholarship/personal_collections/metadata.html). Faculty who wish to contribute to an existing shared archive, are interested in creating a new one, or need assistance finding specific resources for teaching and/or research should discuss their needs with their ACM or departmental/program Library Liaison.

Limited Access Commercial Archives are best illustrated by the online journals and databases provided by Olin Library. Generally, shared access to campus community members is provided

by a campus subscription managed by a campus administrative unit. These types of archives are highly curated and generally have excellent metadata to aid in discovery.

Consultation and Training

Various administrative units on campus provide consultation on the use of the archival services and platforms discussed here--most commonly, the librarians, Special Collections and Archives, and User Services and Academic Computing Services in ITS. Faculty with specific needs should talk to their ACM or departmental/program Library Liaison to explore their needs and the support options available on campus.

There is self-paced training available via the campus subscription to Lynda.com that includes a broad array of beginners to advanced courses on relevant topics such as understanding [metadata](#) and [organizing data](#), to more in-depth courses on specific [database programs](#), such as Bento, EndNote, Filemaker, and Microsoft Access.

If you're just starting out on a research project that involves collecting and curating data, we highly recommend you sample some of the Lynda.com beginners courses as a first step toward creating a long-term strategy for your research.

Process for Obtaining Storage

Given the ever-increasing use of video and high-quality images in research and teaching, digital storage needs can easily outstrip available space without proper planning. ITS makes considerable effort to keep ahead of the need, but it is in every faculty member's best interests to keep ITS informed of any increasing need well in advance of the start of new programs, online courses, or research projects and the like. There are many advantages to using centrally-provided storage, including the economy of scale provided by enterprise-level infrastructure designed for high availability, backup services, and disaster recovery. In addition, if shared contribution and use of archived materials is needed, we recommend using either a platform provided on campus, such as SharedShelf or WesScholar, or a hosted service such as Flickr, Diigo, or Zotero, to name just a few options.

In order to plan for the ever-burgeoning need for storage, ITS has put in place policies and processes regarding the use of space and requests for increased use. Faculty needing assistance with their digital collections should begin by contacting their ACM for an initial consultation. This meeting will establish what the faculty member's needs are and match those needs to one of the services or platforms provided by ITS. While ITS maintains several platforms that are appropriate for average use, we recognize that there are cases where the standard support model is not sufficient. Currently, the threshold for special consideration for storage space is 100 GB and/or when average file sizes exceed 2 GB.

In cases where needs transcend the capabilities of the standard platforms and quotas we support, the faculty member's ACM will schedule a larger meeting with other ITS staff to discuss the details and explore possible options, for example, to establish whether ITS needs to purchase more space for campus-provided resources. Generally, this meeting will include the faculty member, the ACM, the Director of Academic Computing Services, the Director of User and Technical Services, and the Unix Manager. For very large projects, we will establish the type of storage needed, determine rates of annual space acquisition, and discuss availability and retention needs, as well as plan for disaster recovery. A Service Level Agreement between ITS and the faculty member will be written and co-signed.