7-2015

Strategic Planning and Collaborative Effort to Preserve the University's History

Xiaohua (Cindy) Li
Sacred Heart University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/library_staff

Part of the Archival Science Commons, and the Collection Development and Management Commons

Recommended Citation

Li, X. (2015, July). Strategic planning and collaborative effort to preserve the university's history, *Annual IATUL Conference.* Hanover, Germany, 4-6 July. Retrieved from https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/iatul/2015/ddp/5/

Strategic Planning and Collaborative effort to preserve the university's history

Li, Xiaohua
Colgate University
13 Oak Drive, Hamilton
New York, U.S.A
xli@colgate.edu

Abstract

Since established in 1963, Sacred Heart University has accumulated tens of thousands of photographs that have recorded the significant moments or important occasions in the university's history. Over the years, more and more photos have been taken but the effort to preserve the valuable information has not been up to the pace of the photo accumulation. Realizing some photos started to deteriorate due to the physical space in which these images were stored and the university was about to lose the visual data, the Office of University Advancement (OUA) began to seek a long-term solution that would help them manage the data in 2008. After discussing with OUA, the library took over the project because the library had the expertise to implement the project, and the project would resonate with the library's digital strategy. This paper focuses on the significance of planning strategically when partnership and collaboration across divisions occur. It also examines the outreach strategies that would get various interested constituents from in and outside the university involved in this project. In addition, the paper discusses how the archival project has naturally triggered sub-projects such as using Yahoo Flickr to bulk load photos and getting information about the photos through the users' contribution. Nevertheless, the ultimate goal of the paper is to instigate further discussions from peers about the project's sustainability and best practices of managing such projects.

Keywords

digital archive, preservation effort, strategic planning, collaboration, partnership, sustainability, community involvement, digital project management

Topics

Library Strategy and management
Strategic Partnerships
Digital Preservation

"Strategic planning is essential to all organizations. Without strategic plans, organizations lose their direction and purpose. Organizations are required to develop sustainable and valuable vision and mission statements, core values and objectives to reflect their strategic relevance and intent" (Murungi, 2006).

Background Introduction

Sacred Heart University was established in 1963 by the Most Reverend Walter Curtis, Bishop of the Diocese of Bridgeport as a Catholic school. Originally, the goal of the school was to provide liberal arts education to the local community until late 1980s when the university expanded dramatically to enhance the undergraduate education. Several important building construction projects marked the "changing face" (Sacred Heart University News, 1993) of the university from a commuter school to residential, progressive university. Over the years, the university has expanded from one building that hosted original class size of fewer than 200 to 10 residential buildings that allow over 70 percent of more than 6000 full-time students to live. The creation of new degree programs and majors in relevant disciplines exemplified the effort that university strived to augment the students' educational experience. The establishments of five colleges, the construction of Pitt Health and Recreation Center, and realization of wireless campus demonstrated the determination of the university to excel. Sacred Heart now has become the 2nd largest Catholic university in New England. Unsurprisingly, the growth of the university has been recorded by the photos taken at various important moments of the university's development.

It is not often known to the university community that the photos of more than 50-year history have been casually boxed and stored in the basement of the University Advancement, which were rarely used. In 2008, the former University Librarian (UL) happened to know that the Office of University Advancement (OUA) was considering archiving these photographs because some of the images started to deteriorate due to either the unsteady temperature of the room or the exposure to the acid environment. At the time, the library was revising its 5-year strategic plan, in which developing digital initiatives was an important part of planning. The UL believed that undertaking the project would be an opportunity for the library to implement and practice its digital strategy. The implication of the undertaking, however, was the preservation effort could become the legacy passed on to the future generations and therefore, an integral part of the university's identity.

Considering the library had the capability of digitizing the photos, incorporating metadata and delivering the information, the UL initiated the conversations with both OUA and the Department of Digital Library Development (DDLD) of the library. After several preliminary discussions, OUA agreed to have the library start the experiment of scanning some photographs. There were no plans, however, in terms of developing a strategy in the long run.

Initial Experiment

In the spring semester of 2008, the library picked up around 1000 both black-white and color photos in a paper box (labeled as Box 1). When examining the photos, the staff of DDLD discovered that the photos were organized in a random way: some images and the films (from which the images were developed) were put together in various types of envelops; others were simply stacked in the box. Most of the images were in usable conditions; however, the colors of some photos began to fade and some black-white photographs had turned yellowish. Majority of the photos had no recorded information with the exception that a few photos had dates or brief information handwritten on the back of photos or envelops. The project was doubtlessly more complicated than what DDLD expected. As far as the digitization was concerned, it was not easy to discern the best practice because the condition of each photo varied; it was not feasible to describe the images since not much was known about the photos. After internal discussion, DDLD listed their questions, concerns and suggestions and invited OUA to join the discussion. OUA and DDLD got the consensus that the priority at the time was to recognize a solution to preserve the information.

The digitization did not kick off until the summer of 2008 when the university commencement was over and most of students left the school for summer break. Before beginning the digitization, DDLD laid the groundwork for the project:

1. File format: the digitized images would be saved in two file types: TIFF (Tagged Image File Format), the standard format for archiving and JPEG (Joint Photographic Experts Group), which was easy to access due to its smaller size.
2. PC and Scanner: a Dell PC was set up as the digitization station which had Adobe CS3 installed. At the time, the library had two scanning devices: a Fujitsu: fi4220C2 with both flatbed and auto feeder and one HP ScanJet8250 flatbed. DDLD stuff were aware that these scanners were not designed to digitize the photos for preservation purpose, but the scanning was more experimental. DDLD was hopeful that the university would fund for a high-quality scanner in the future.
3. Scanned Color: the black and white photos would be scanned in grayscale and color ones in 24-bit color
4. Metadata: the available information on either the photos or envelops would be recorded in a spread sheet. For those with no information, DDLD would make notes in the Excel file. The file name convention would indicate the difference too.
5. Storage: the scanned photos would be stored in an external hard drive that was solely designated for the project.
6. Labeling: the photos would be labeled with box number, envelop number and set number for those that were in the box.

It was the common understanding that the digitized photos would not be edited or enhanced with software and DDLD would consult with OUA about the outcome of scanned photographs before making further efforts.

The first envelop that contained around 20 photos was scanned in August and the UL showed the result to OUA. OUA's response was generally positive, but they wished the quality could be higher.

Admitted the limitations of the scanners, OUA asked DDLD to continue the digitization. When the summer was over, DDLD had digitized around 2 hundred photos in Box 1.

While the scanning was underway and DDLD kept receiving more boxes of photos from OUA, the UL expressed his vision that the project should not be confined to mere digitization. The visual information should be available to benefit larger audience. In addition, a long-term solution of storage was necessary to ensure the accessibility of the digital contents. With the consent of the UL, DDLD looked into some digital repository platforms. There were several repository systems available including both open source such as DSpace developed by MIT and HP, and commercial platform like ContentDM from OCLC. With no projected budget, DDLD naturally explored the open source possibility. Though DSpace had the features that enabled DDLD to store their digital contents and organize the associated metadata, the installation of DSpace was eventful. The digitization PC was installed with the university's standard image, which had the security restrictions preventing DDLD from configuring the PostgeSQL and Apache; the DSpace development was at its early stage and therefore, the documentation was not very intuitive; DDLD did not have external assistance except the attempt from DDLD itself. The efforts were eventually paid off when DDLD was granted the admin privilege after negotiating with the university IT, and DSpace was installed.

The period of dormancy

From 2009 to 2011, the project went into a sluggish mode. Despite the fact that lots of businesses had demonstrated strong interest in preserving their data in digital forms, the slow realization of such importance from Sacred Heart was evident. Other than the sporadically scanning routine on the library side, the project seemed forgotten. OUA stopped sending photos; the library rarely communicated with OUA. It was speculated that several factors had possibly contributed to the stagnation: the former university librarian resigned at the beginning of the year. The absence of the key leadership left DDLD in limbo. The communication between OUA and DDLD was inactive or if there was, it was one way most of the time. The library saw little interest from OUA in the further development of the project. It was discovered later on that OUA was also undergoing the changes of personnel. The person who used to coordinate the activities between OUA and DDLD left the university in the same year. The new person lacked the background knowledge of the project since not much of the communication was left. Nonetheless, the DDLD was unwilling to abandon the effort that took them not only the staff time but also the incessant experiments on both digitizing and incorporating the contents to DSpace. Paradoxically, such staleness was not without merits. It gave DDLD extra time to understand and experiment on the digitization and the functionalities of DSpace.

In 2011, the head of DDLD was selected as an international consultant to provide support to Albanian government in establishing its first national digital library. The experience became her case study presented at TPDL (Theory and Practice of Digital Library) in Berlin. The presentation seemed to instigate much interest from the attendees. Inspired by the response from peers and impressed by the DL development movement in Europe, she organized a meeting with the interim UL and the vice president (VP) of OUA as soon as she came back from Europe. Both of them agreed on the importance of preserving the university's history. As such, they promised to work together with DDLD to find a long term strategy to execute the project.

Collaborative Efforts

2012 was an important year for both the digital project and DDLD. As the university's 50-year anniversary was approaching, the preparation for the celebration gradually unveiled. Apart from the university's construction projects such as building a new university Chapel and new student center, other marketing projects were underway, which means not only the university may need the photographs to reach out the alumni and other interested parties but also it could be an opportunity for the library to get funded for the project. In addition, in July, 2012, the head of DDLD was promoted to Director of Digital Library Technology & Services. Although changing the title had no obvious influence on the photograph project, it did empower her leadership role in the communication between the library and OUA. The more active communication between two departments shed much light on what role the project could play to such a big event in the university's history. The VP of OUA expressed his interest in using the digital photos to reach out; both OUA and the UL consented that they would provide as much support as they could. Thanks to the joint effort, the university approved DDLD's request to acquire a more advanced scanner. Although the fund was not sufficient for a sophisticate scanning device based on the professional standard, it indicated the change of the university's attitude toward digital preservations. In March of 2013, the library got the scanner, Book2Net, a German engineering technology.

With the improved technology in place and the accumulated experience of digitizing the photographs, DDLD revised the digitization guideline based on the capacity of the new scanner. Besides what had been defined, DDLD added more specifications including trying to capture as much the original quality as possible when digitizing. Adobe Photoshop would be used to edit the image if necessary and any change related to the project should be documented. In order to increase the efficiency of the workflow, the DDLD staff trained 3 student employees to assist the digitization process.

In terms of metadata implementation, the Technical Department (TD) had the trained professionals in data control and the collaboration between the two departments was consistently steady. Nevertheless, what concerned the two departments was that little information came with these images. Even though TD had the metadata experts, without information about the contents, there was not much they could do. More importantly, lack of metadata would make these digital contents hardly usable and discoverable.

The UL called upon all the library staff for brainstorms. Some librarians pointed out that since the university was fairly young, it was not unreasonable to think that most of the people in the photos or associated with the pictures were still alive. Provided that the people could help to identify the information in the photos and were willing to share what they knew, the information would be the source of metadata. The idea was constructive, but question is how to reach these people? One of the suggestions was to contact the university's Alumni Relations Office (ARO) because they would possibly keep the contact information of the alumni and their families. The director of DDLD took the suggestion and made the contact with ARO after consulting OUA. Both the director and assistant director of ARO were very excited about their involvement in the project. They believed outreaching the people would help strengthen the relationship between the university and the people who care about the institution.

The leadership in three departments agreed that OUA would provide and/or use the images, the library was to execute and manage all aspects of the project, and ARO would advocate the course by reaching any potential interested parties. Now that the new communication channel was formed, ARO's question was how to make the photos available to the people they would contact. It would be unrealistic for them to send the photos via email attachments because of the number of images and the size of files. DDLD had to identify a platform that would not only allow them to upload photos but also enable viewers to interact with the contents. They knew DSpace was not a good choice because it was not designed to serve such purposes. After doing some research, DDLD decided to load the photos to Yahoo Flickr.

Flickr is an image and video hosting site that enables users to load, share and interact with the contents. The commenting tool would be helpful for DDLD to collect the information contributed by the people. TD could then process the collected data based on the current standard such as Dublin core or MODS. Given the quantity of photos they would deal with, DDLD realized that it would be too time-consuming to upload the images individually or even certain numbers of photos simultaneously. It was essential for them to automate the loading process and save time to focus on processing the images or data. In 2013, one of the conference presentations at LITA (Library Information Technology Association) attracted the director's attention. The presenter discussed how his organization took advantage of Flickr's API (Application Programming Interface) to bulk load images and download the usage data. Enlightened by the very idea, DDLD staff spontaneously signed on another project triggered by the photo project. Using Flickr API would require programming knowledge. Even though both the multimedia specialist and the director of DDLD had some programming knowledge, there was a learning curve for them to customize and make the program work the way they desired. They asked for help from the online community and received overwhelming support. The collaboration resulted in a robust program that helped them to fulfill the task. By the fall of 2014, DDLD had uploaded more than 1000 digitized photos to Flickr (https://www.flickr.com/photos/128076509@N06).

While the project seemed to make progress in an anticipated direction, DDLD performed a more thorough review of DSpace. Though DSpace was a popular platform and free, to set up a full scale repository would need substantial technical skills, which DDLD did not possess, not mentioning that the potential support would demand extra staff time and efforts. In order to make the university's history available to both the university community and the rest of the world, a hosted repository platform would be more realistic. Thanks to the university's acknowledgement of the value of the project, in November, 2014, the UL got approval from the university that the library could subscribe to Shared Shelf, a repository management system that enables users to load, catalog and share the digital collections.

What's next?

The long overdue digital project finally got into full swing at the beginning of 2015. The more visible and active collaboration within the university and among the university community invigorates the project and pumps much energy to the library staff to move the project more vigorously.

More than 5-year experiments, speculation and lessons have clearly demonstrated the significance of strategic planning. As soon as the spring semester started, DDLD began to review and update their 3-year and 5-year strategic plan. The past lesson was clear: the goal was ambiguous within and outside the library, the objectives were obscure. More importantly, the project was poorly planned since the direction of the project was never overtly defined. Unsurprisingly, the strategy of "playing by ear" resulted in the poor execution.

When revising the plan, DDLD unequivocally outline the short-term and long-term goal. The immediate goal is to reach an observable end result measured by the execution of one or more objectives within the specified timeframe. The objectives include the quality control of digitization, metadata implementation and data management. The long-term goal is to make better decisions by analyzing the outcome of the short-term plan. The objective is to examine the methodology of the project management through UX (user experience) study. It is understandable that a good plan in place is the premise to reach the goals. Both DDLD's short and long term plans emphasize the necessity of regular communication within and beyond the university so as to keep the project viability.

Notwithstanding the promising future for the project illuminates, the concerns are lingering. The foremost perceivable challenge facing the project is the issue of sustainability. The learned lesson warns DDLD that the rapid development of technology could make the digitized contents unusable and inaccessible and therefore, it is not an option for the leadership of all aspects to keep vigilant of the possible repeat of the past. Sustainability also involves in the volatility of personnel. The leaving of the former University Librarian crippled the project in the way that the key communication between OUA and the library turned quiescent. The departure of the director of DDLD in February, 2015 adds a layer of enigma to the fate of the project. Such fluctuation is not uncommon in most of organizations but it requires the leadership to be open-minded and formulate a strategy to ensure that the impact of such transition would be minimal. In "Principles for Digital Library Development", McCray and Gallagher listed the principles for building digital libraries, and on top of his list is "expect change". Since change is omnipresent, the project management team obviously has no choice but to be sensible about changes and deal with them wisely.

Conclusion

Though digital content preservation in 2008 was not considered being at its early stage, the Sacred Heart University photo project was the pioneer in the realm of the digital world for the institution. 7 years have elapsed; the interest in carrying out the project was almost vanished, but survived. The acknowledgement from the university and the community that the project is of great value in preserving the university's history impels the library and DDLD to endeavor, but issues still need to be addressed. It has been evidenced that the collaboration within the university and beyond requires more strategic plan that will not only ensure the sustainability of digital contents but guarantee the vitality of the project. Failing to do so would destine the failure of the effort.

Reference

Bawden, David, and Polona Vilar. "Digital Libraries: To Meet or Manage User Expectations." *Aslib Proceedings* 58.4 (2006): 346-54. Web.

Hirtle, Peter B. "The history and current state of digital preservation in the United States." *Metadata and Digital Collections: A Festschrift in Honor of Tom Turner*. Cornell University Library. Web. May 2015. <http://cip.cornell.edu/cul.pub/1238609304 >

Hulser, Richard P. "Digital Library: Content Preservation in a Digital World." *DESIDOC Journal of Library & Information Technology* 17.6 (1997): n. pag. Web. May. 2015

Lawlor, John E. "The Importance of Strategic Planning." (2006): *Practical Decisions*. 2006. Web. May 2015. <http://www.practicaldecisions.com>.

Mccray, Alexa T., and Marier E. Gallagher. "Principles for Digital Library Development." *Communications of ACM* 44.5 (2001): 48-54. ACM. Web.

Murungi, Wendy. "Strategic Planning Practices Adopted by Milk Processors in Kenya." *University of Nairobi Digital Repository.* (2011). Web. May. 2015. <http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke:8080/xmlui/handle/123456789/12188>

Sacred Heart University News, 1993. Box 1, Folder 1. University Advancement Photo Project. Sacred Heart University Library, Fairfield CT. March 2015.