

UNC Libraries

Policy for the Development and Access of Digital Collections

Mission

The University of Northern Colorado (UNC) Libraries develops digital collections in support of the research and teaching missions of the University. In keeping with this mission, the Libraries will select physical and born-digital materials for online dissemination that support the curriculum and research needs of the University.

Goal

The digital collections development policy outlined here guides the work of the Digital Initiatives Group (DIG), which selects and prioritizes collections for digitization and online dissemination. It provides a framework for the development, management, and preservation of digital collections by establishing guidelines for evaluating proposed digital projects.

Scope

This policy applies to historical resources housed in the UNC Libraries' Archives & Special Collections (ASC) department for inclusion in the archival repository [Archives & Special Collections @ Digital UNC](https://www.unco.edu/library/archives/pdf/collection-development-11-7-17.pdf).

- For ASC collection policies, see <https://www.unco.edu/library/archives/pdf/collection-development-11-7-17.pdf>.
- For policies and guidelines pertaining to the Libraries' institutional repository of scholarly and academic materials, Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC, see https://digscholarship.unco.edu/policies_guidelines.pdf.

Digital collections considered under this policy may also be initiated by faculty members, student groups, other campus units, or historically underrepresented populations from the local community in partnership with the Libraries.

Materials considered under this policy include but are not limited to text documents, photographs, and sound and video recordings. Materials may be born digital or reformatted from physical analog originals.

Criteria for Digital Projects: Collections

DIG will review proposals for digital projects and assess and prioritize them based on the following criteria:

1. Intellectual Content of the Collection

We seek to disseminate digital collection materials with content valuable for historians, records creators, donors, students, faculty, community members, and others. "Intellectual content" refers to the material's subject matter and informational significance.

- The materials provide information, insight, or perspectives not well-documented by other collections within or beyond the Libraries.
- The collection represents strong or distinctive holdings of the libraries.
- The materials have institutional, local, regional, national, or international significance.
- The collection supports research, teaching, and/or institutional goals.

- Digitizing the collection enhances the intellectual value by improving usability or providing access to fragile or inaccessible objects.
- The collection provides opportunities to expose hidden or underrepresented voices.
- The collection provides the ability to engage in transformative teaching, research, and/or learning.

Subjects of interest at UNC or within the broader community include, but are not limited to, the following:

- diversity, ethnicity, and gender identity in the northern Colorado plains;
- history of education and innovative educational methods;
- performing and visual arts on campus and within the community;
- alumni and faculty papers and publications that are part of the permanent archival collections;
- material documenting the history of the university and its community;
- inactive official records and publications generated by the institution;
- The life and work of James A. Michener.

2. Current and Potential Use of the Collection

- The collection has the potential for being or is already highly used.
- There is a defined set of users or anticipated users for the collection.
- The collection is rare or difficult to access or the physical condition limits its use.
- The collection will attract use from both UNC and external communities.
- Digitizing the materials will enhance the user experience or provide an opportunity for technological innovation.

3. Institutional Mission

- The collection aligns with the university and Libraries mission and strategic direction of research, teaching, and learning as outlined in the UNC Libraries [mission, vision, and values statements](#).
- The collection reflects UNC's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

4. Relationship to Other Collections

- The materials form a coherent collection.
- The materials fill gaps or complement existing collections within or outside the Libraries.

5. Community Building

- The proposed project offers opportunity for collaboration or outreach within and outside the UNC campus community.
- The materials highlight underserved populations within the larger community.

Criteria for Digital Projects: Technical

In addition to assessing proposed digitization projects from an intellectual, use, and community-engagement perspective, physical collections will be reviewed to determine how difficult it will be to digitize with respect to preservation, metadata, technology, and rights/privacy. If the materials present numerous technical challenges, then they may be deferred for digitization until the issues are resolved.

1. Preservation

The physical materials should be in good enough condition so as not to be harmed during digitization, or the gains from digitization clearly outweigh the potential harm to the original materials. If material is provided by a third party, preservation and digitization concerns will be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

The following questions provide a structure for evaluating a collection from a preservation perspective:

- Are the materials at risk of being lost due to poor condition or obsolete media format? (If yes, this weighs in favor of digitization).
- Will reformatting put the original materials at an unacceptable risk of damage? (If yes, this weighs against digitization).
- Is conservation work or physical alteration needed prior to digitization? (If yes, then this may weigh against digitization).

2. Metadata

Ideally, collections will be organized and described before they are digitized and made available online, though it is likely that additional descriptive metadata will need to be created for a digital collection. While different metadata schema may be used to support different digital collections, metadata for all projects must adhere to community agreed-upon best practices. The following questions provide a structure for evaluating a collection from a metadata perspective:

- Are the materials organized and processed, i.e. described at the appropriate level in an online finding aid? (If yes, this weighs in favor of placing the collection online).
- What descriptive metadata is already available? (if detailed metadata is available, this weighs in favor of placing the materials online; if little metadata is available, this weighs against it).
- What additional metadata is needed to enhance the discovery of, access to, and use of the digitized materials?

3. Digitization

Technical expertise and specialized equipment are required to reformat physical items into a digital collection. While different technical standards may be used to support different digital collections, the standards for all projects must adhere to community agreed-upon best practices. The following questions provide a structure for evaluating a collection from a digitization perspective:

- Is it feasible and practical to digitize the items with personnel and technology available in the Libraries?
- If an external vendor is needed to digitize the materials, are the resources available to engage them?
- Are the digitized file formats supported by the Library's digital collections platform?

4. Rights & Privacy

The Library make its digital collections freely available to a worldwide audience for research and educational purposes. The following questions provide a structure for evaluating a collection from a rights and privacy perspective:

Copyright

- Are the materials clearly in the public domain (no longer under copyright)? (if yes, this weighs in favor of placing the collection online).
- Does the Libraries have permission to digitize the materials? If not, can the copyright holder(s) be located to secure permission?

Privacy

- Does the collection contain materials with personal private information or other confidential content which, if made public, would violate privacy laws or University policies?
- Is there any other reason why it would be unwise to make the collection, or certain materials within the collection, public (e.g. third-party privacy concerns)?

Removing Digital Content

The Libraries acquires, evaluates, and manages its digital assets for long-term preservation. However, there are circumstances that may call for decommissioning digital materials and/or taking them offline, such as:

- recognizing the lifecycle of resources and information and removing materials which are no longer useable or useful;
- responding to copyright disputes or third-party privacy concerns;
- addressing preservation challenges that may lead to long-term renderability issues;
- addressing technology issues such as server space limitations.

This collection development statement is subject to change. Areas may be added and amended in response to evolving research needs, to augment existing collections, in response to new academic priorities, or to evolving best practices and standards in digitization.

Adapted from the Georgetown University Library Digital Collections Development Policy:
<https://www.library.georgetown.edu/digital-project-policy>

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