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From OASIS to Samvera: Three Decades of Online Access to OSU's Archives and Special Collections

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Three Decades of Online Access to OSU's Archives and Special Collections

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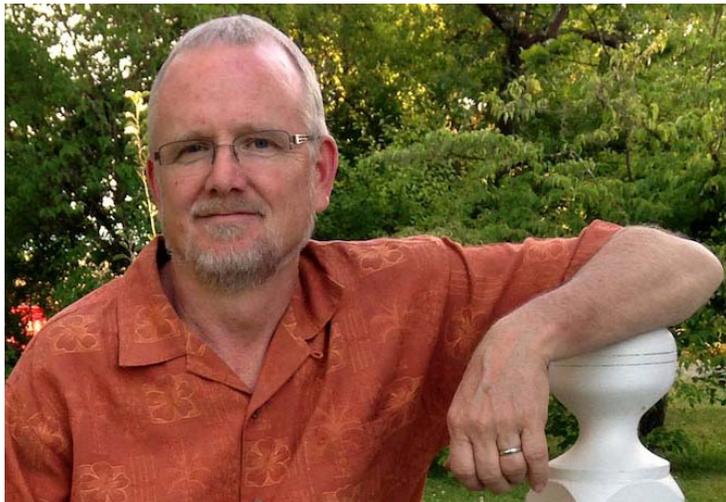
LARRY has been director of the OSU Libraries and Press's Special Collections and Archives Research Center since 2011. He has worked as an archivist at OSU since 1991, and has been active with creating digital collections and online access to collections.

Oregon State University has been a leader in making unique resources accessible via the Internet. Individually or with collaborative partners, OSU made collection information, exhibits and entire collections available online. This timeline article presents OSU's major projects and developments to promote online accessibility over the past thirty years.

Background

For several decades, Oregon State University has been at the forefront of making library and archives resources available online. Many of these efforts have been collaborative in nature; OSU has worked with a broad range of library and archives/special collections partners in Oregon and the Northwest.

Within the Oregon State University Libraries and Press (OSULP)[1], the University Archives (Archives) and the Special Collections, in collaboration with other library units, both utilized digital technology to enhance access to collections and collection-related information. This enhanced access has increased since the 2011 merger of the units into the Special Collections and Archives Research Center (SCARC).

OSU's experience is not unique, though it serves as a valuable example of the transformation of Oregon's libraries and archives in the digital age. The timeline that follows outlines some of the critical developments and experiences in OSULP's quest to make archives and special collections materials more accessible through digital technology.

1989

OSULP's online catalog, OASIS, went public on January 1, and "within a few minutes, users were beginning to discover the joys of online searching" (Wilson, 2004, p. 10). Although the online catalog initially provided access to books and journals, its launch set the stage for similar access to archival and manuscript materials in the future.

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[1] For purposes of this article, OSULP refers to the OSU Libraries, even before the addition of the OSU Press in 2007.

1991

Early that year, the University Archives (not part of the OSULP at the time)[2] began using MicroMARC:amc for accessioning new materials and creating catalog records. The software was developed by Michigan State University for use on stand-alone PCs. A long-term goal of the Archives was to make the catalog records created by the system available through a university-wide network. Special Collections was also using MicroMARC:amc around this time to catalog the scientific offprints in Linus Pauling's papers.

1993

In June the Archives initiated online delivery of finding aids, the Archives and Records Management Handbook, and the university's records retention schedule through OSU's Gopher server. The Archives was an early Gopher adopter. Among the first finding aids made available via the Gopher included the College of Forestry Records and the papers of economist Emery N. Castle. In 1994 the Archives added to the OSU Gopher descriptive information of complementary state records held by the State Archives of Oregon in Salem (OSU Archives, 1993, unpaginated insert).

1994

Special Collections began mass digitization of the Ava Helen and Linus Pauling Papers. The project used Laserfiche imaging software and optical character recognition (OCR) software developed by Calera. The intent was to make the entire collection accessible online, with researchers able to view the original document and the OCR text side-by-side. Online access to large parts of the collection was ultimately abandoned because of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, which would have inhibited the ability to publish anything not authored by Pauling. However, this work set the stage for Special Collections' later digital projects that featured aspects of the Pauling Papers and Pauling's work (OSU Libraries and Press, 1994, p. 4).

In August the Archives and State Archives of Oregon collaboratively developed the first archival online exhibit in Oregon, "Fighters on the Farm Front: Oregon's Emergency Farm Labor Service, 1943–1947." The exhibit, made available through the State Archives' web server, was an expanded, digital version of a successful traveling exhibit of the same name that had been developed by the OSU Archives and funded by the Oregon Council for the Humanities. The State Archives web site, launched in 1994, was purported to be the first institutional archives website in the world (Northwest Archivists, 1997, p. 5).

In collaboration with the OSU Libraries' cataloging unit, the Archives began submitting MARC records for its manuscript collections to the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections, which in turn loaded them into the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN). By 1997, approximately 40 MARC records had been submitted (Nielsen, 2003, p. 28).

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[2] The University Archives was established as a department of OSULP in 1961. In the late 1960s, due to its increased emphasis on records management, the Archives became part of the university's central administration. After a reorganization within the central administration, the Archives again became part of the Libraries in 2000. Special Collections was established in 1986 as a department within the Libraries. The two departments merged in 2011 to form the Special Collections and Archives Research Center (SCARC).

1995

On March 8 the Orbis consortium (established in 1993) launched its online union catalog, which included records from five of Oregon's public higher education institutions and two private institutions. Patron initiated borrowing became available to the twelve consortium members in March 1997. OSULP joined the Alliance in 1996, and its bibliographic records were made available in early 1999 (Chmelir, 2015, pp. 2–3, 5).

On September 1, the Archives launched its website. It offered graphics, hyperlinking and a much larger file handling capability than the Gopher. It initially included program information, OSU's Archives and Records Management Handbook, information about and links to other archival repositories and organizations, and links to finding aids still on the Gopher. The first finding aids were made available via the website later that month. Special Collections also had a website by this time.

1996

The Archives developed the first exhibits for its website. They included a chronological history of OSU (which still exists as an Omeka exhibit) and the "Gallery of Presidents of Oregon State University" (Northwest Archivists, 1996, p. 15). The exhibits were developed using basic HTML encoding.

1997

The Archives' Gopher was discontinued early in the year.

2000

The Archives retired MicroMARC:amc, as it was not Y2K compliant.
The Archives became part of OSULP. This administrative move jump-started work begun in 1993 to create and upload MARC records into OSU's online catalog. In September, the first MARC records of Archives holdings were loaded in the OSU online catalog, OASIS, as well as the Orbis catalog and OCLC.

2001

OSULP selected CONTENTdm as its digital collection platform for images. In October 2002, the libraries launched its first digital collection using CONTENTdm—the "Braceros in Oregon Photograph Collection." This collection was selected because it was relatively small, yet had a high scholarly profile. The parent company of CONTENTdm at the time, DiMeMa, featured the Braceros collection in December 2002 (Landis & Fernandez, 2012, pp. 23–24). This collection is now part of Oregon Digital—https://oregondigital.org/sets/braceros.

At the Online Northwest meeting in Portland in January, the Archives and several other archives and special collections in the Pacific Northwest agreed to collaborate on developing a union catalog of archival collection finding aids. The group selected the name Northwest Digital Archives. With OSULP as the lead institution, the group applied for—and received—funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Thirteen institutions participated in the grant, which began on July 1, 2002, and ran through December

31, 2004.[3] The finding aids utilized the Encoded Archival Description (EAD), a metadata schema for presenting archival finding aids online. The grant also required the creation of collection-level MARC records for all collections included in the database. The NWDA database was launched in October 2004.

2002

Special Collections created its first digital collection featuring content from the Ava Helen and Linus Pauling Papers—Pauling's forty-six research notebooks. The first documentary history website pertaining to Pauling's career was launched in 2003—"Linus Pauling and the Race for DNA" (re-released 2009). It was followed by six subsequent documentary histories and a highly respected blog, The Pauling Blog, which was established in March 2008. The multimedia websites include photographs, documents, publications, and videos were built using an XML-based platform developed by Special Collections faculty and staff.

2005

OSULP and its partner institutions applied to the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) for a second grant to support further development of the Northwest Digital Archives. This successful grant of $300,000 enabled the NWDA consortium to add several partner institutions, add considerable content to the finding aids database, and develop a long-term sustainability plan. The NEH also designated the NWDA as a "We the People Project," a designation created in 2002 to honor projects that enhance the teaching and understanding of American history. The phase II project ran from July 1, 2005, to September 30, 2007 (Landis, 2007, pp. 2–3, 8).

OSULP launched its institutional repository, ScholarsArchive@OSU. Its primary purpose was to serve as a repository for online access to the scholarship of OSU faculty and graduate students, though a secondary purpose was to provide a repository for key born-digital university records. It was originally configured using the DSpace platform, designed by Hewlett-Packard and MIT. In its early years, ScholarsArchive consistently achieved high rankings among U.S. university institutional repositories by Webometrics.

2007

The Northwest Digital Archives became a program of the Orbis Cascade Alliance at the end of its phase II NEH grant. This resulted in eight new members joining the NWDA.[4]

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[3] Participants in the initial NWDA grant project were Oregon State University (University Archives and Special Collections), the University of Oregon, the Oregon Historical Society, the University of Washington, Washington State University, Montana Historical Society, University of Montana, University of Idaho, Whitworth College, Western Washington University, Washington State Archives (Main and Central Washington branches), Seattle Municipal Archives, and Pacific Lutheran University. The initial NEH grant support was approximately $350,000.

[4] The new member institutions were Portland Community College, Central Oregon Community College, Oregon Institute of Technology, Western Oregon University, Oregon Health & Sciences University, Eastern Washington University, Central Washington University, and Willamette University.

2008

OSULP digitized all of the university's general catalogs, from 1866–67 to present. This was the first in a series of projects that provided online access to key OSU historical publications series in support of OSU's sesquicentennial celebration, OSU150, in 2017–18. The catalogs were initially made available through ScholarsArchive@OSU, and were moved to Oregon Digital in 2016, after a new Hydra based version of ScholarsArchive was developed. Subsequent OSU publications series that have been added to Oregon Digital include yearbooks, the alumni magazine, commencement programs, sports media guides, and *Oregon's Agricultural Progress,* a quarterly review of agricultural research at OSU. All publications that are continuing are added annually. The yearbooks site has had nearly 100,000 views since its release.

2009

OSULP began implementing Omeka, an open source digital exhibits platform developed by George Mason University. The first two exhibits developed using this platform were Special Collections' "A Short History of the Seed and Nursery Catalogue in Europe and the U.S." (http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/omeka/exhibits/show/seed), released in January 2010, and an updated and expanded version of the Archives' "Fighters on the Farm Front" (http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/omeka/exhibits/show/fighters), released in August 2010.

OSULP and the University of Oregon Libraries collaborated on a joint digital collection featuring historic maps from each university's collections. This project was undertaken as a contribution to the state's sesquicentennial celebration and set the stage for the future development of digital collections infrastructure.[5]

OSULP received an LSTA grant of $69,000 for development of a digital resources portal that would allow users to search digital collections from the seven Oregon University System (OUS) institutions, and other academic libraries, museums and archives around the state. Terry Reese, OSULP's Gray Chair for Innovative Library Services, was the principal investigator for the Oregon Digital Library Project. It utilized LibraryFind, an open-source search tool previously developed by OSULP with LSTA funds. Additional grant funding from the Oregon Heritage Commission enabled Reese to work with the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center and the Oregon Coast Historical Society to investigate models for large cultural heritage organizations to provide cost-effective assistance to smaller archives and museums. Although his concept proved feasible, there was no lead institution that could commit to hosting the portal long-term.

2010

OSULP and the UO Libraries formed a joint task force to begin looking at a replacement system for CONTENTdm, which was not meeting the needs of the two libraries. One of the outcomes of this group was the hosting of both libraries' CONTENTdm collections on the University of Oregon's sever in order to reduce licensing costs and to provide a cross-functional set of collections. A new URL was adopted—https://oregondigital.org/catalog/—which formally established the Oregon Digital partnership that continues today. In its November 2010 report, the task force reported on three systems that had been selected for user testing, out of a total of twelve that had received an initial review. Of the three, Fedora Commons (Islandora

[5] The collection is still available in Oregon Digital at https://oregondigital.org/sets/ormaps.

and Hydra/Blacklight) was the most promising, though it was felt there was not yet the programming capacity to develop a new platform. As an interim measure, CONTENTdm was upgraded to a newer version.

2012

In February, OSULP and UO Libraries agreed on the development of the new Oregon Digital platform using Hydra, and in November commenced building a prototype. By July 2013, the prototype of the site was available for review by key faculty at both institutions, and Oregon Digital became a Hydra Partner (OSU Libraries & Press, 2013, p. 1).

2014

In May, after nearly eighteen months of development, the new Hydra based Oregon Digital platform was launched. Improvements included faceted subjects, mobile device compatibility, custom image (zoom-and-pan) document (page turning) viewers, and greatly improved search functionality.

2015

After investigating several digital asset management systems, OSULP began development of a new platform for ScholarsArchive@OSU. The Hydra/Sufia platform (now known as Samvera) was selected as the replacement for DSpace (Van Tuyl, Zhang & Boock, 2015, p. 2).

The Orbis Cascade Alliance launched a substantially redesigned and improved site for the Northwest Digital Archives and renamed it Archives West. The new name reflected the addition of partners in Utah—Utah State University, University of Utah, and the Salt Lake County Archives.

2016

SCARC began using OSU's MediaSpace platform for delivering digitized video and audio content. Since 2016, SCARC has made 1,698 media files available via MediaSpace, including more than 450 moving images.[6]

2017

SCARC implemented the Oral History Metadata Synchronizer (OHMS), a tool for describing oral history interviews developed by the University of Kentucky. It combined this tool with Omeka and custom .css and .php files to create a visually appealing, functional, and easy to use content management system for its oral histories. The first SCARC project to utilize the hybrid tool was its "Voices" project, a series of subject-based oral history collections (Petersen, 2018, pp. 6–7).

In the Fall, SCARC launched the OSU Sesquicentennial oral history project, its website of oral history interviews that supported OSU's 150th-anniversary celebration. The site features

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[6] SCARC content on MediaSpace can be found at
https://media.oregonstate.edu/category/Special+Collections+and+Archives+Research+Center/2947392

full video interviews, transcripts and background information for more than 240 OSU faculty, staff, students, alumni and friends. See http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/index.html.

The new Samvera based version of ScholarsArchive@OSU went live in November.

2018

Oregon Digital began participating in the DPLA through the Mountain West Digital Library (MWDL). Discussion of this started in 2017. By early 2019 SCARC content in the DPLA included the Ken Gray Insect Image Collection, OSU Yearbooks, and OAC Illustrated Booklets (Mountain West Digital Library, n.d.). Several other collections were pending.

OSULP and UO Libraries began development of Oregon Digital 2 (OD2), the next iteration of its joint Samvera based digital collections platform. The launch of OD2 is slated for Fall 2020. As of early 2019, Oregon Digital consists of more than 115 digital collections (sets) comprised of unique digitized and born-digital materials—including photographs, articles, publication series, sheet music, manuscripts, and ephemera. It consists of more than 257,000 digital objects, including 217,000 images, nearly 34,000 files of textual documents, 2,165 moving image files, and 242 sound files (University of Oregon Libraries & OSU Libraries & Press, 2019). OSU's Historical Images of OSU is the most frequently used resource in Oregon Digital, having received more than 54,000 views (7.2% of all views) since early 2017.

Conclusion

Looking ahead, SCARC and OSULP are well situated to continue their leadership in enhancing online access to unique collections and materials. Their culture of experimentation and collaboration is well ingrained and forms core components of the OSULP strategic plan. Oregon Digital 2 will greatly improve access to existing digital collections, and the continuous improvement of the Orbis Cascade Alliance's Archives West will ensure easy access to contextualized information about archival collections. 🦫

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