Reassessing A/V in the Archives: A Case Study in Two Parts

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ABSTRACT

Audiovisual (A/V) materials in archival collections require unique consideration during archival processing. Historically, A/V materials have often been underdescribed, or relegated to a "Multimedia" series at the end of a finding aid with little detail related to format, condition, or content. This article examines past approaches to processing audiovisual materials in archival collections through a review of the literature, open-source tools, and local processing manuals. This study includes two case studies, a high-level, department-wide survey and a large-scale, item-level inventory, and demonstrates the value of gaining intellectual control of A/V materials in the archives. The article argues that many legacy finding aids, including those created with a "minimal processing" approach, are often not detailed enough for the accurate, holistic evaluation necessary when planning for A/V preservation and digitization projects. The article concludes by describing the positive outcomes of reevaluating legacy finding aids and conducting an item-level accounting of A/V holdings.

KEY WORDS

Audiovisual archives, Archival processing, Minimal processing, Access

The presence of large quantities of audiovisual (A/V) materials uniquely characterize archival collections from the twentieth century. While the first commercial sound recordings became available in 1877 on cylinders, the advent of more accessible recording techniques led to an explosion of A/V production. A/V media became widely available and increasingly affordable beginning with film in the 1890s and transcription discs in the 1920s in broadcast and corporate settings, and growing exponentially with broadcast video formats (e.g., ¼″ and ½″ open-reel audiotape, 1″ and 2″ open-reel video, U-Matic, Betacam) and consumer-friendly home recording formats (e.g., 8mm film, ¼″ open-reel tape, compact audio cassettes, and VHS videotapes). While A/V materials were entering archives by the 1950s and 1960s, not until the twenty-first century, as the use of mechanical A/V formats declined in favor of born-digital production and anxiety over the long-term access and preservation of these items mounted, did archival processing guidelines begin to address the specific needs of these materials. This study demonstrates an approach to addressing legacy finding aids that tended to place all of the A/V in a series (and often a box) together at the end of a collection with scant details on quantity, format, condition, or content. Through two methods, a survey and an inventory, this article illustrates an effort to identify all A/V materials in one library's Special Collections to gain a holistic understanding of the formats present in archival collections and of cataloged materials to establish preservation priorities.

Background

The University of Houston Libraries (UHL) Special Collections was established in 1968 with a focus on acquiring archival collections related to Houston and Texas. In the 1980s, the University Archives was established, and, over the subsequent decades, additional subject-specific collection areas were formed, including the Houston Hip Hop Research Collection; the Carey Shuart Women's Research Collection; the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History Research Collection; and the Performing and Visual Arts Research Collection, among others. To date, UHL Special Collections is home to 475 archival collections.

The majority of UHL Special Collections' archival collections were created in the twentieth century, and, like many contemporary archival collections, a significant portion of these archival collections are "mixed," containing paper-based, A/V, and born-digital materials. Houston's public television station, KUHT, donated the largest collection of A/V items to Special Collections. The station, known locally as Channel 8, was founded at the University of Houston in 1953 as the country's first station to operate under an educational nonprofit license.[1] KUHT, along with Houston's public radio station KUHF, is now administered

by Houston Public Media and owned by the University of Houston System. An initial deposit of KUHT materials was donated in 1997 to University Archives as the KUHT Collection. Since then, numerous subsequent accessions have been added to the collection, which boasts over 14,000 moving image assets and over 200 linear feet of documents, photographs, and ephemera.

In response to the growing need to manage these A/V assets, many of which are on formats at high risk for degradation, UHL created the new position of audiovisual archivist. While the position was largely created in response to the demands of the KUHT Collection, the audiovisual archivist was intended also to actively manage audio and moving image materials found throughout UHL Special Collections' archival and cataloged collections.

In the spring of 2015, I joined UHL Special Collections as the library's first audiovisual archivist. After an initial assessment of the A/V holdings, two aspects became clear. First, although most of the paper portions of the KUHT Collection were processed, the film and video holdings, housed haphazardly in cardboard boxes, had no intellectual control and were therefore inaccessible to researchers. Second, although a large portion of archival collections likely held A/V items, many finding aids did not clearly identify the formats or quantities of these assets, making it difficult to gain a holistic understanding of UHL Special Collections' A/V holdings.

Because of these gaps in information and requests for on-demand digitization, I set three key priorities. First, I planned to conduct an assessment to identify all audio and moving image assets stored in Special Collections. Second, I aimed to simultaneously improve the storage conditions and gain intellectual control over the sprawling and uninventoried KUHT Collection. Finally, based on these findings, I hoped to establish a workstation to digitize the most common A/V formats in UHL's Special Collections.

Literature Review

In the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions' (IFLA) 2017 *Guidelines for Audiovisual and Multimedia Collection Management in Libraries,* the authors write:

> Whilst audiovisual works have been present in library collections since their mass production and public availability, they have often been regarded as the anomaly given the complexities associated with non-print material and the specialist skills need[ed] to manage them.[2]

This approach of considering archival A/V items as exceptions to the standard of paper-based formats is also evident in the field of archival processing,

with a relatively small body of literature historically devoted to the unique challenges of processing A/V materials to aid in access and preservation planning.

Mike Casey's *Indiana University Bloomington Media Preservation Survey* presents the urgency of identifying and prioritizing audiovisual collections and planning for their digitization. Casey cautions that "there is a 15- to 20-year window of opportunity to digitize existing analog audio and video materials before degradation and obsolescence make these efforts impossible or too expensive."[3] With support from Indiana University Bloomington's (IUB) Office of the Vice Provost for Research, survey staff undertook data collection of audiovisual holdings from eighty campus units. Casey's survey, administered through on-site interviews and inspection of each unit, collected various data points, including format, uniqueness, creation date range, and content significance, and also storage condition information. The results were an estimated 569,000 sound, video, and film holdings, 44% of which are described as unique or rare.[4] Furthermore, survey staff identified an estimated "180,000 items held by IUB . . . as high or very high risk for loss of content" due to degradation or unavailability of playback equipment.[5] This ambitious project undertaken at IUB is a unique example of a comprehensive, institution-wide initiative to identify all audiovisual holdings and address the most pressing preservation concerns.

In 2010, "Taking Our Pulse: The OCLC Research Survey of Special Collections and Archives" described the preservation requirements of audiovisual materials as "staggering."[6] Echoing the urgency expressed in Casey's report, 61% of survey respondents characterized the preservation needs of their audiovisual materials as "high."[7] This considerable concern over preservation was coupled with increased demand for access, with 64% of respondents with A/V collections reporting an increased demand for these materials.[8] The OCLC survey further revealed that of the 128 responding institutions, only 25% reported having A/V materials described online in catalog records and 35% reported them described within archival collections, although what level of description this alludes to was not defined.[9]

The 1998 UHL Special Collections Archival Processing Manual makes only one reference to A/V materials in the archives. In a section discussing levels of arrangement, the manual explains that a series can be based on form and provides "Photographic materials, films, or videotapes" and "Sound recordings" as two examples. The manual makes no reference to special considerations related to the identification, description, storage, or preservation of A/V materials, other than to note that they may need to be stored separately.

A much-updated processing manual from 2013 features a section titled "Processing Challenging Materials, Audiovisual Materials." Student processors are advised to "sort audiovisual formats by type and list them using whatever information can be determined from physical examination." The manual

instructs the processor to create a separate series when there is a "large quantity of A/V material," but that small quantities of A/V can be interfiled with the paper portions of the collection. While the updated guide instructing the processor to list all A/V materials in the collection is a major improvement, the processing manual does not provide any resources to aid in the identification of A/V formats. Although the later manual is improved, these two processing guides reflect the more general lack of attention in the literature on processing A/V items in archival collections.

Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner's foundational 2005 article, "More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing," argues that to effectively tackle the enormous backlogs of unprocessed archival collections, archivists must reconsider traditional approaches to arrangement and processing and move to a more minimal approach for baseline processing to decrease backlogs and increase accessibility to researchers. Centered on research related to large twentieth-century archival collections, Greene and Meissner advocate for collections to be described in aggregate rather than at item level, with "the series level as the standard baseline level for arranging collection materials"[10] and minimal preservation intervention in most cases. This extremely influential article, which essentially advocates for the mindful allocation of resources and application of a decision-making framework to "serve the preeminent goal of maximizing user access to archives,"[11] has aided in increased accessibility to numerous modern archival collections. While the scope of Greene and Meissner's research is twentieth-century archives, only two questions from Greene and Meissner's survey are concerned with A/V materials, and these relate to reformatting rather than format, condition, or content.[12] The authors make no other reference to the unique demands of A/V materials.

In a 2010 follow-up article, "More Application while Less Appreciation: The Adopters and Antagonists of MPLP," Meissner and Greene consider community reactions, both enthusiastic and critical, to their earlier article and address misconceptions about MPLP. The authors identify the central point of misunderstanding to be a "reductionist error that mistakes some pointed, but rather situational, advice for the main message,"[13] and reminds archivists:

> MPLP cannot be adopted as your go-to manual for arrangement, description and conservation specifics. . . . MPLP recommendations are broad strokes that can help archivists make decisions about balancing resources so as to accomplish their larger ends and achieve economies in doing so. Practitioners must shape them into their own institutional contexts.[14]

A similar sentiment is present in Mark A. Greene's "MPLP: It's Not Just for Processing Anymore." Greene primarily focuses on applying the MPLP premise to other facets of archival administration, including appraisal, preservation, and digitization. As in "More Application while Less Appreciation," Greene asserts

that the goal of the original MPLP article was not to be prescriptive, saying "the article did *not* maintain that minimal processing must become universal within a repository, arguing rather that some series and some collections could certainly justify more traditional processing approaches."[15] Greene reiterates the recommendations presented in MPLP that preservation is most effectively administered at the aggregate level, that controlled storage conditions should aim for better climate controls, and that "archivists should only devote conservation and restoration measures to exceptional cases."[16] In the section devoted to the application of the MPLP framework to digitization, Greene notes it is a "fallacy that we really need to predefine and describe items during processing to facilitate their digitization,"[17] saying that well-described series will create adequate access to digitized documents and questioning whether digitization "must—or even should—be focused on individual items."[18] Greene seemingly only considers manuscript and photographic materials in his discussion of digitization and does not acknowledge the complex item-level format and condition information required to digitize A/V materials.

In 2012, Joshua Ranger wrote on the AVP blog an article titled, "Is the Product of Less Process Sufficient for Audiovisual Collections?," in which he argues that the answer to this question is "no." Ranger acknowledges the value and practicality of Greene and Meissner's call for the application of the MPLP framework to paper and photograph collections, but he disputes their omission of A/V materials in the discussion of "late twentieth-century" collections. In Ranger's reading of Greene and Meissner, the goal of MPLP is the creation of a "finding aid and moving collections towards access." Ranger states that the "desired product from processing audiovisual materials is not a traditional finding aid, but an item-level accounting of the assets . . . something that at least touches on the technical data points."[19]

In 2017, Ranger followed up his 2012 blog with a white paper, "What's Your Product? Assessing the Suitability of a More Product, Less Process Methodology for Processing Audiovisual Collections." Ranger there argues that MPLP is not an appropriate approach to A/V archives. He states that the

> MPLP approach presents numerous holes in its application to audiovisual or other complex media collections that benefit more directly from item-level documentation. . . . The issue is that MPLP-derived outcomes and metrics used to plan processing projects and measure their success have not been and cannot be extrapolated directly to audiovisual materials.[20]

Ranger describes how a collection manager might develop more nuanced processing plans, at either the "item-ish" or "collection-ish" level, that address many of the shortcomings of an MPLP collection-level approach, while acknowledging that not all collection managers will have the time or resources for a true item-level inventory.

While Ranger presents his desired product (an item-level accounting) as a counterpoint to Greene and Meissner's (a finding aid described at the series level), a close reading of Greene and Meissner's initial MPLP article and of the subsequent Meissner and Greene and Greene articles could allow for both desired products within the MPLP framework. The authors write that they "are not arguing that some exceptional collections do not deserve more meticulous—even item-level-processing."[21] To reach this compromise, though, requires promoting A/V materials to a special status—as "exceptional."

Existing literature supports the exceptional treatment of A/V collections. In *A Manual of Sound Archive Administration* (1990), Alan Ward shares a descriptive schema wherein "sound recordings preserved for reference may be categorized and processed by analogy with textual documentation, and that some, therefore, require 'archival' arrangement and treatment."[22] Ward devotes the subsequent 200 pages to all matters of administration, appraisal, and preservation of sound archives, but of particular interest for this case study is the section "Manual of Description (2nd edition): Special Format for the Description of Sound Archives." Although Ward, writing in the 1990s, assumes that practitioners will provide access to playback equipment for most recordings, his advice is equally applicable to scenarios where the archivist plans to digitize for access. In the "General Rules," Ward cautions that "sufficient technical information must be included in any description to allow for conservation, retrieval and use." He further advises that these collections, which are "not often self-explanatory and may be particularly dependent on the evidence of their provenance and context," should be approached by creating a "macro description" for context accompanied by a "sound recording index."[23]

Pam Hackbart-Dean devotes two and a half pages of *How to Manage Processing in Archives and Special Collections* (2013) to A/V materials. In her book, focused on the archives manager's responsibility to prioritize collections and establish standards and best practices for processing, she argues that because item-level description of A/V assets is labor intensive, these materials might best be processed at the series or collection level, saying "the formats may be different, but these collections should be processed in line with the levels of processing used for other collections."[24]

Daniel A. Santamaria's 2015 book, *Extensible Processing for Archives and Special Collections,* recommends an iterative approach to processing based on demonstrated user demand, with higher demand resulting in more thorough arrangement and description. Like Hackbart-Dean, Santamaria dedicates only a few pages to the unique requirements of A/V items. In a section titled "Non-Paper Formats: Photographs, Audio, Video," Santamaria echoes Greene and Meissner, saying, "Describing materials in aggregate groups, whether it is folders of

photographs or groups of recordings, can often be an effective and efficient way to provide access to these types of materials."[25] He says,

> [Archivists can] rely on information provided by donors or on labels on recordings or containers to provide basic description in aggregate groups, particularly when there is a large volume of it. In the case of sound recordings, for example, reels of the same size and playback speed can be described as a group, which enables researchers to discover the material.[26]

Anthony Cocciolo provides case studies and practical advice on the management of A/V collections in *Moving Image and Sound Collections for Archivists* (2017). Cocciolo encourages archivists to notice "the quantity of [audiovisual] items, specific format, and any physically obvious condition issues"[27] as part of the accessioning process. He also indicates that "creating item-level records is becoming increasingly important for preservation. . . . Further, providing access to audiovisual recordings almost always requires item-level records."[28]

Tools

Several tools are available to facilitate the creation of an item-level inventory and to aid in the appraisal of and preservation planning for A/V collections. Among these, AVCC, an open-source application developed by AVP, allows users to create an inventory on a web-based platform. It provides the flexibility to create minimal records based on a few required fields or an inventory with more robust records that can include a description, whether the recording is a unique or commercial production, and genre terms. The data collected in AVCC can be exported in reports that "calculate potential file sizes, linear footage needs, and a prioritization score based on the IU MediaScore tool."[29] The tool and inventory data storage are free for accounts with under 2,500 records, but have a subscription fee structure for hosting larger inventories.[30] In her favorable review of AVCC on the *American Archivist Reviews Portal*, Allyson Smally describes several useful features, such as bulk editing, and specialized fields like a drop-down menu to record acid detection strip readings.[31]

Another web-based application is the Preservation Self-Assessment Program (PSAP), developed by the University of Illinois Libraries with the support of an Institute of Museum and Library Services National Leadership grant. Expanding on the Audiovisual Self-Assessment Program (AvSAP), a previous tool, PSAP is intended to help collection managers identify and assess A/V, photographic, and paper materials, and other objects in their collections. PSAP allows users to create item-level inventories or collection-level assessments on a web-based platform. With the information provided, PSAP determines a score for each item to help the user determine preservation priorities, and it can also be used to evaluate

items at a collection level and to consider larger questions of storage conditions. Furthermore, PSAP features a valuable Collection ID Guide, a comprehensive visual guide to audiovisual formats produced in the United States.[32] Jennifer Hain Teper notes in "The Preservation Self-Assessment Program: A Tool to Aid in Preservation and Conservation Prioritization" that "while the PSAP project very purposefully does not provide next steps toward preservation, the website does offer many helpful resources . . . including short tutorial videos, a quick start guide [and] complete user manual, full bibliography, and glossary of terms."[33]

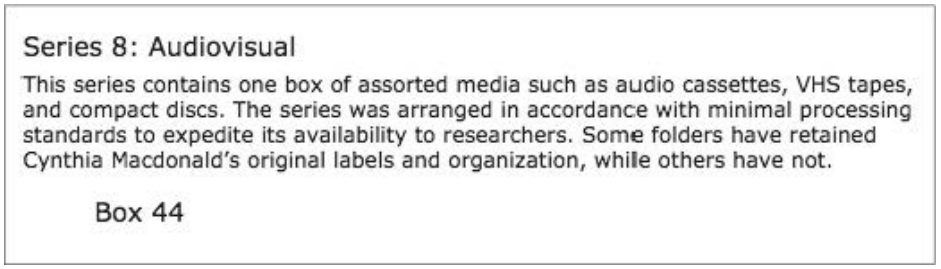
Other tools include Columbia University Libraries' Audio/Moving Image Survey Instrument, a Microsoft Access-based database created in 2007,[34] which supports both item-level and random-sample surveys. New York University's ViPIRS (Visual and Playback Inspection Rating System) was developed starting in 2006 to assess magnetic media including video and audiotape, and a playback inspection component to aid in preservation planning "at any number of stages—from acquisition to ingest to processing."[35]

A/V Survey

For purposes of this project, I limited the survey scope to processed archival collections and cataloged A/V items, deeming it too difficult to tackle unprocessed collections where audio and moving image items might or might not exist and where such items could be spread throughout many boxes, tucked into folders, or perhaps even destined for deaccession during processing. By eliminating unprocessed collections (except the KUHT Collection, which will be addressed below), I counted 321 archival collections within the scope of this assessment. Due to the large quantities of A/V assets I anticipated finding in these collections, I did not include descriptive information in the inventory and instead focused solely on format data to gain a holistic view of A/V holdings across collections. This method echoes the desired product described by Joshua Ranger's approach—an item-level accounting that touches on technical data points.[36] Given the limited scope of my data collection—not even including titles or unique IDs—I opted not to use one of the available open-source tools and instead worked in a spreadsheet that allowed me to record information in aggregate. Listing all processed archival collections down the first column and the formats I anticipated finding across the top row, I began to work expecting that this list would grow as I discovered some less-common formats.

Survey Method for Processed Collections

The survey consisted of a two-pronged approach: searching UHL Special Collection's sunsetted Archon-based finding aids and physically sifting through


Series 8: Audiovisual

This series contains one box of assorted media such as audio cassettes, VHS tapes, and compact discs. The series was arranged in accordance with minimal processing standards to expedite its availability to researchers. Some folders have retained Cynthia Macdonald's original labels and organization, while others have not.

Box 44

FIGURE 1. Finding aid with minimally processed audiovisual materials

collections to count items. The finding aids found at UHL Special Collections have been written by dozens of authors over many decades, and, unsurprisingly, the approaches for describing A/V materials varied widely. While some finding aids featured detailed inventories that clearly and precisely identify format and quantity, more commonly, formats were not specified (see Figure 1). Several finding aids included series described only as "Multimedia" or "Audiovisual," with no specific formats identified, or included only a general descriptor such as "tapes." Based on the scant A/V-specific information provided in legacy processing manuals, I was also concerned that even identified formats might be misidentified.

I searched the Archon finding aids for a wide range of terms, including alternative spellings and formats, hoping to identify all collections that contained A/V materials. Search terms included

- film
- video
- audio
- tape
- cassette
- disc/disk
- record
- reel
- recording
- LP
- CD
- DVD
- VHS
- U-Matic/Umatic/U Matic
- Betacam
- multimedia/multi-media

In a relatively small portion of search results, I deemed the descriptions in finding aids specific and trustworthy and added the quantities to the spreadsheet. In the majority of cases, the information discovered in finding aids was

not precise, or I hesitated to trust the accuracy of format identification and therefore followed up with a physical search of these collections. As the survey progressed, the list of formats grew, reflecting the emergence of unanticipated formats. When possible, I also opted to make some distinctions within a given format based on preservation concerns, such as CD-ROM versus CD-R/CD-RW.[37]

Of the 321 processed collections surveyed, about one-third contained A/V materials with a total of 14,495 items and 35 formats (see Figure 2). Unsurprisingly, the two most common formats, representing almost 40% of the total collection, were VHS tapes and compact cassettes—both ubiquitous consumer formats in the last part of the twentieth century. The next-most common formats, digital audio tapes (DATs) and compact discs (CDs), were both developed in the 1980s and have been exceptionally popular into the twenty-first century.

Survey of Cataloged A/V Materials

Following completion of the archival collection survey, I expanded the scope of the survey to include all cataloged A/V materials in Special Collections. I expected this process to be much more straightforward than the process for archival holdings. I relied solely on the UH Libraries' discovery system to search

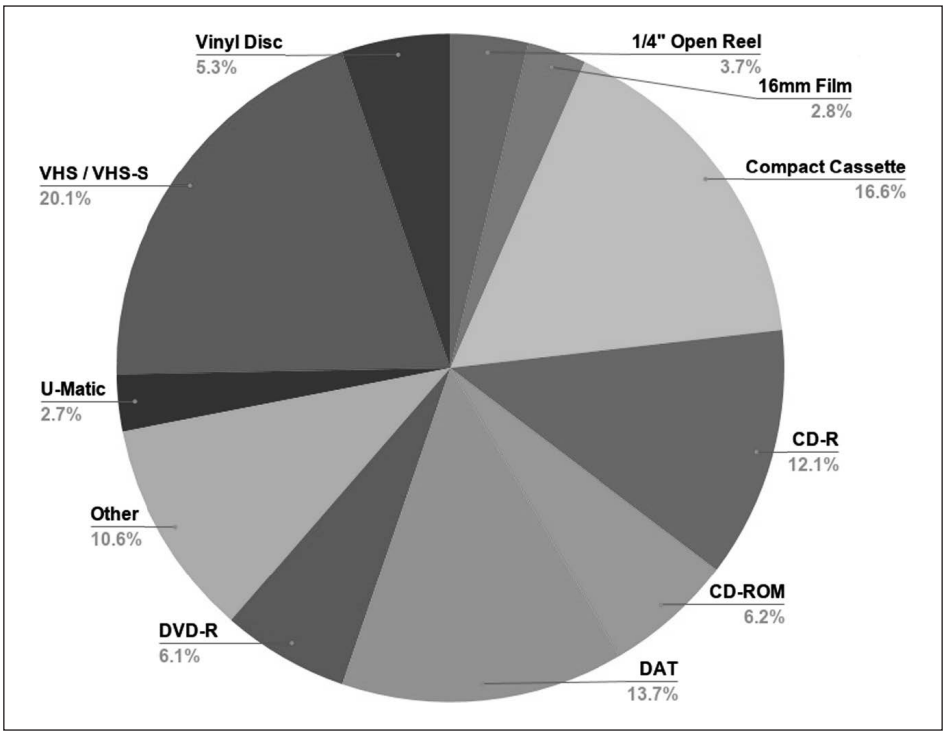


FIGURE 2. A/V formats in processed collections

by format for all A/V holdings. Using the advanced search option, I conducted wildcard searches, limiting the subcollection to Special Collections and the format to audio CD, audio cassette, Blu-Ray, DVD, film, LP/vinyl, and video cassette. While effective for identifying A/V assets, I soon discovered that while the system counts "items," it does not count parts of items. One example is "Recorded interviews for Twelve fighting years," which at the top level of the discovery system appears as a single item but actually consists of 25 CDs (see Figure 3). Fortunately, the "detail" view of item records includes both format information and quantity in the description field, enabling the running of a report that accurately includes all A/V records and the number of individual components of a given item record.

UHL Special Collection's cataloged materials featured only a small portion of A/V materials, with just over 3,000 items, compared to about 50,000 cataloged books.

KUHT Inventory

The second phase of this project was an inventory of the KUHT Collection. As previously mentioned, the KUHT Collection was both vast and disorganized. It had been delivered to Special Collections from the station in numerous additions over more than a decade. When I arrived, the initial accessions acquired between 1997 and 2009 of non-time-based materials, including correspondence, memoranda, publications, clippings, and photographs, had been processed and totaled 162 boxes. The A/V portion of the collection comprised over 300 boxes of videos and audio reels and several shelving units of stacked 16mm films.

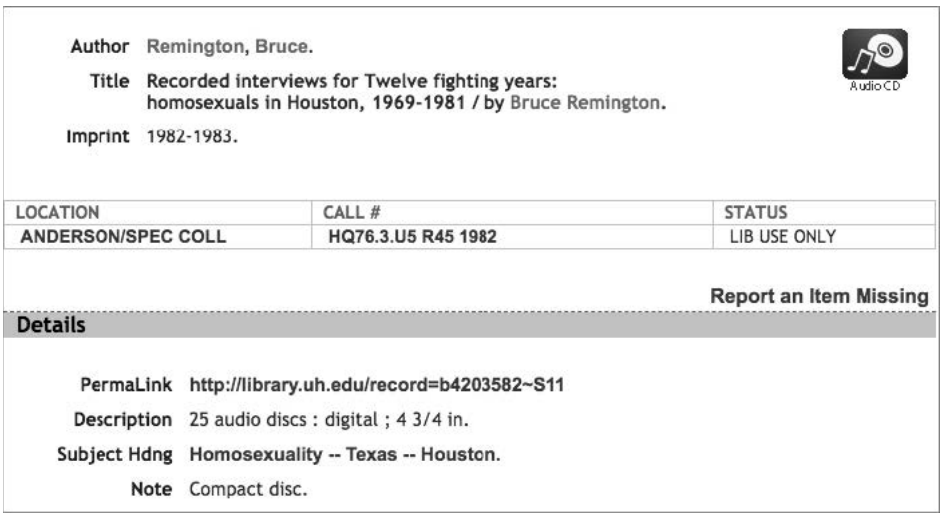


FIGURE 3. Detail view of catalog record for A/V in Special Collections

These materials were donated without inventories, and, to complicate matters, they had been moved and reboxed several times over the decades since their creation. Thus, the box order did not reflect any original shelf order that may have existed at KUHT's facility. In the months after I arrived at UHL Special Collections, KUHT deposited over 900 1-inch videos to the collection delivered loose in a flatbed trailer, along with approximately 100 more boxes of video cassette tapes packed by program series in labeled boxes.

As suggested in Santamaria's *Extensible Processing for Archives and Special Collections*, I took an iterative approach to processing the thousands of items that comprised KUHT's A/V holdings. While I found the robust reporting functionality of the AVCC tool especially attractive, I ultimately decided a spreadsheet was the most expedient option for two reasons; first, the student employee I was working with was already familiar with creating inventories in a spreadsheet and would need no additional training beyond access to a format identification guide. Second, I anticipated that the inventory would include a large number of records and take many months to complete, and I did not have a budget to cover subscription fees. Prior to my arrival at UHL Special Collections, several ranges of dedicated A/V shelving had been installed and earmarked for this collection. With the help of indispensable student employees, I began the process of inventorying while simultaneously improving storage conditions.

I began working with the easiest and most organized materials: 900 1-inch videos and the last accession of boxes, which were labeled and grouped by project or series title. Because the 1-inch videos were delivered loose, in a trailer, I organized, inventoried, and shelved concurrently, recording the format, ID number, title, and runtime on a spreadsheet. The boxes included both produced episodes and unproduced elements. These videos, created in the 1990s–2000s, were mostly Betacam, BetacamSP, or Digital Betacam. As I unboxed, I used an "enhanced for A/V" minimal processing mindset that served two purposes: creating series-level intellectual control of content, as proposed in the MPLP framework, and gathering basic item-level technical specifications influenced by Joshua Ranger's work.[38] To maximize efficiency, I used the box labels to identify the series, then counted the number of items per box, noting series title, format, maximum runtime, and location, and entered these details into the spreadsheet and shelved the tapes without reordering them.

In the next phase of the project, I tackled the 300 boxes of video, mostly created in the 1970s to the 1990s and that had no apparent order. Rather than reflecting a produced series and all of its elements, assets in this part of the collection tended to be singular items, such as episodes, documentaries, and B-rolls. This portion of the collection had a greater variety of formats, including short open-reel video, U-matic, VHS, Betacam, and some audio formats. The "enhanced for A/V" minimal processing approach that I used in the earlier phase

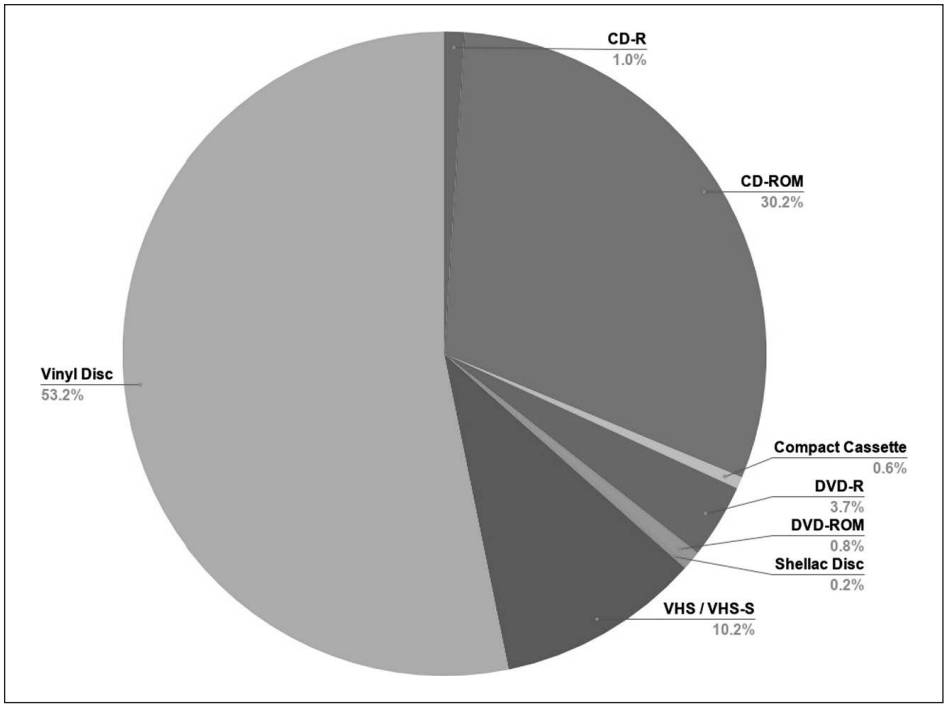


FIGURE 4. A/V formats in cataloged collections

was efficient and effectively created series-level access to the materials but did not apply to this disorganized and varied portion of the collection. Ultimately, I decided that the only reasonable approach was an item-level accounting of these assets. Returning to the spreadsheet, I added columns for the title (to be used for the specific episode or a general title for items that were not part of a series), production date, air date, additional label information, and actual runtime (if specified) for each item. I eventually used OpenRefine to clean and normalize the data, which a student employee and I had entered over a two-year period, to improve accuracy.

The last phase of the inventory was dedicated to the 16mm films in the collection. While the basic workflow remained the same, I compiled these on a separate spreadsheet to capture unique attributes, such as length and color or black and white. Unlike the first two phases, in which most of the items were labeled, a significant portion of the films were not.

Once completed, the KUHT Film and Video Collection inventory totaled 14,060 items. The most common formats in this collection reflected those in the broadcast industry: Betacam, Betacam SP, Digital Betacam, 16mm film, U-matic, and 1-inch Type C video (see Figure 5).

The inventory spreadsheet is updated as portions of the collection are digitized or research yields new information. Based on research demand that

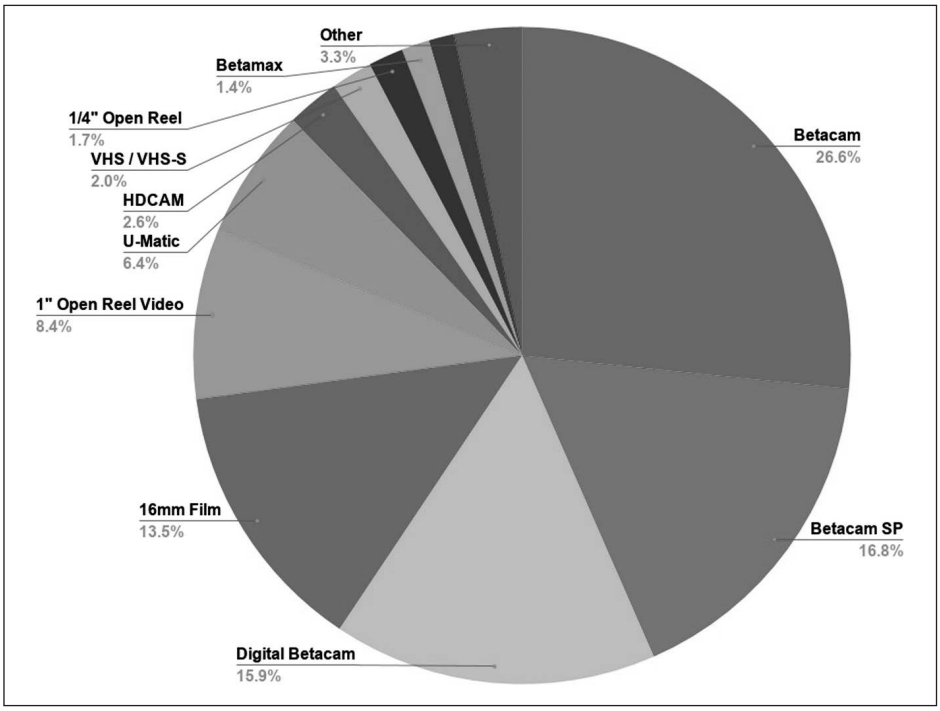


FIGURE 5. A/V formats in the KUHT Film and Video Collection

frequently includes requests for B-roll footage of specific subjects (i.e., an interview subject in a documentary or specific footage such as the Houston skyline), I eventually returned to the first section, which had been inventoried at the series level only, and completed an item-level accounting. The inventory is also reflected in an updated finding aid, published online to increase discoverability.

Outcomes

The two phases of this project, surveying archival and cataloged A/V in Special Collections and creating an item-level inventory of the KUHT Film and Video, have yielded several valuable outcomes. The survey data was a valuable tool in planning and securing funds for digitization and preservation planning. With an accurate accounting of the extent of A/V materials in Special Collections, I demonstrated to administrators their formerly unknown volume—almost 32,000 items, not including unprocessed archival collections—and the risk of inaction based on format information.

Since the project's completion, I acquired a dedicated workstation with machines to handle on-demand digitization requests for five of our most common formats, which would not have been possible without the high-level snapshot that the survey and inventory provided. The process of creating the

inventory also improved my understanding of storage conditions for A/V materials throughout the collections. As I conducted the KUHT inventory, I was able to conduct A–D testing and based on the information gathered, planned and budgeted for rehousing the 16mm films and acquired a frost-free freezer for storing films exhibiting signs of advanced degradation.

The data collected during this project were crucial in informing the design of three A/V digitization grants, resulting in access to over 800 previously unavailable films and videos. The first, a $24,304 TexTreasures Grant from the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, funded the digitization of 503 news and public interest programs, migrating them from vulnerable U-matic and 1-inch video. In 2017, TexTreasures once again funded UHL with a $24,750 grant for the digitization of 112 raw interviews from a documentary titled *This Is Our Home, It Is Not for Sale,* which chronicled how "anti-Semitism, racism, and profiteering shaped what was once one of Houston's most affluent neighborhoods."[39] Shot on a double system of 16mm film with full-coat magnetic soundtrack,[40] these films had been stored in suboptimal conditions and were exhibiting signs of advanced deterioration. Most recently, UHL received a $23,500 grant from the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) Recordings at Risk program to digitize 16mm films from KUHT's early years in educational programming.

Item-level inventory data have also aided ongoing conversations with the UH Libraries' IT department about long-term storage needs. The first A/V digitization project I undertook, an internally funded project to digitize 100 films, highlighted the limitations of storage capabilities to handle the large files produced. Since then, using the survey data, I have been able to better estimate storage needs for various projects and to make forecasts for future storage needs. This information has contributed to UHL's digital storage capabilities more than doubling in the years since that first A/V digitization project.

Finally, this project helped me to craft guidelines for working with Special Collections curators when new collections containing A/V are acquired. It has become standard practice for the curators to consult with me when A/V is accessioned with archival collections to ensure best-practice storage and to begin discussions about possible digitization options. The MPLP framework is most applicable during this accessioning phase. The "enhanced for A/V" minimal processing model is applied to arriving materials—a basic inventory with quantities and format information to ensure proper storage and aid in planning for access. An item-level inventory with more detailed technical specifications is created when the collection is deemed a high priority and resources allow.

One unexpected outcome from the A/V survey was a better understanding of the born-digital assets in the collections. Assets like floppy discs and data CDs were often grouped into the general heading of "multimedia" or "audiovisual" in finding aids and were returned in my search results because of the common

vocabulary across A/V and data assets. As I was already engaged in an item-level search of the collections, I also opted to record these data, although these totals were not included in the survey results.

Conclusion

The two parts of this multiyear project, the A/V survey and the KUHT inventory, demonstrate the importance of reexamining the A/V portions of previously processed archival collections and of using a more granular approach when processing A/V materials in archival collections. Previous processing guidelines and approaches like MPLP tended to focus, sometimes exclusively, on paper-based materials, and the result in UH Special Collections was an incomplete understanding of A/V holdings.

The survey and inventory processes I describe in this article were undeniably time-consuming and demanding undertakings. Both phases required the assistance of a student employee and substantial time to complete. In writing this case study, I am not suggesting that everyone should go to their archival storage and begin counting every single tape, cassette, and film reel they see. Rather, I am advocating for a nuanced approach to both addressing under-described A/V legacy collections and processing newly accessioned A/V collections. By applying modified "minimal processing" strategies to A/V that extends beyond the series-level description advocated in much of the literature, and in some cases a more labor-intensive item-level inventory, UH Special Collections has improved access, identified preservation needs, acquired digitization equipment, and is better prepared for the A/V materials that continue to flow into the archives as more mid- and late twentieth-century archival collections are acquired.

Notes

The author would like to thank Julio Moreno (UH Engineering, '17) for his indispensable contribution to the KUHT Film and Video inventory.

1 William Hawes, *Public Television: America's First Station* (Santa Fe: Sunstone Press, 1996), 7.

2 Sonia Gherdevich, "Guidelines for Audiovisual and Multimedia Collection Management in Libraries," International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), 2017, 1, https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/avms/publications/ifla_avms_guidelines_revision_final_draft_april_2017_for_publication_00000002.pdf.

3 Mike Casey, Patrick Feaster, and Alan R. Burdette, *Indiana University Bloomington Media Preservation Survey: A Report* (Bloomington: Indiana University Bloomington, 2009), v, https://mdpi.iu.edu/doc/survey.pdf.

4 Casey, Feaster, and Burdette, *Media Preservation Survey*, 5.

5 Casey, Feaster, and Burdette, *Media Preservation Survey*, 33.

[6] Jackie M. Dooley and Katherine Luce, *Taking Our Pulse: The OCLC Research Survey of Special Collections and Archives* (Dublin, OH: OCLC Research, 2010), 11, https://www.oclc.org/content/dam/research/publications/library/2010/2010-11.pdf.

[7] Dooley and Luce, *Taking Our Pulse*, 33.

[8] Dooley and Luce, *Taking Our Pulse*, 37.

[9] Dooley and Luce, *Taking Our Pulse*, 46.

[10] Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner, "More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing," *American Archivist* 68, no. 2 (2005): 246, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.68.2.c741823776k65863.

[11] Greene and Meissner, "More Product, Less Process," 240.

[12] Two questions from the survey refer to A/V materials, both intended to be answered on a scale from "never" to "always." These questions are in the Processing Tasks section, subsection Preservation. "Question 19: Make use copies of all A-V material," and "Question 20. Make use copies of A-V material on demand." Greene and Meissner, "More Product, Less Process," 260.

[13] Dennis Meissner and Mark A. Greene, "More Application while Less Appreciation: The Adopters and Antagonists of MPLP," *Journal of Archival Organization* 8, nos. 3–4 (2010): 175, https://doi.org/10.1080/15332748.2010.554069.

[14] Meissner and Greene, "More Application while Less Appreciation," 176.

[15] Mark A. Greene, "MPLP: It's Not Just for Processing Anymore," *American Archivist* 73, no. 1 (2010): 176, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.73.1.m577353w31675348.

[16] Greene, "Not Just for Processing," 182.

[17] Greene, "Not Just for Processing," 193.

[18] Greene, "Not Just for Processing," 193.

[19] Joshua Ranger, "Is the Product of Less Process Sufficient for Audiovisual Collections?," *AVP* (blog) (March 22, 2012), https://avp.weareavp.com/is-the-product-of-less-process-sufficient-for-audiovisual-collections.

[20] Joshua Ranger, *What's Your Product? Assessing the Suitability of a More Product, Less Process Methodology for Processing Audiovisual Collections* (New York: AudioVisual Preservation Solutions, 2012), 1, https://www.avpreserve.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/WhatsYourProduct.pdf.

[21] Greene and Meissner, "More Product, Less Process," 254.

[22] Alan Ward, *A Manual of Sound Archive Administration* (Aldershot, UK: Gower, 1990), vii.

[23] Ward, *Sound Archive Administration,* 209–10.

[24] Pamela S. Hackbart-Dean and Elizabeth A. Slomba, *How to Manage Processing in Archives and Special Collections* (Chicago: ALA editions, 2013), 48.

[25] Daniel A Santamaria, *Extensible Processing for Archives and Special Collections* (Chicago: Neal-Schuman, 2015), 131.

[26] Santamaria, *Extensible Processing*, 133.

[27] Anthony Cocciolo, *Moving Image and Sound Collections for Archivists* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2018), 24.

[28] Cocciolo, *Moving Image and Sound Collections for Archivists,* 33.

[29] *AVCC Help Guide* (Brooklyn, NY: AVP, 2018), https://www.weareavp.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/AVCC_Guide_Aug2018.pdf, 4.

[30] *AVCC Help Guide*, 4–5.

[31] Allyson Smally, "AVCC," The American Archivist Reviews Portal (July 27, 2016), https://reviews.americanarchivist.org/2016/08/01/avcc.

[32] University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, "Preservation Self-Assessment Program," https://psap.library.illinois.edu.

[33] Jennifer Hain Teper, "The Preservation Self-Assessment Program: A Tool to Aid in Preservation and Conservation Prioritization," *MAC Newsletter* 43, no. 4 (2016): 31, https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1097&context=macnewsletter.

[34] Columbia University Libraries, Preservation and Digital Conversion, "Audio/Video Survey," https://library.columbia.edu/services/preservation/audiosurvey.html.

[35] NYU Libraries, "Library & Archives Preservation: Media Preservation," https://guides.nyu.edu/preservation/media-preservation.

[36] Ranger, "Is the Product of Less Process Sufficient?"

[37] There are three basic types of CDs and DVDs: -ROM is read-only, -R allows a user to write-once, and −RW/-RAM allows a user to potentially rewrite the disc multiple times. Each of these discs is created from data layers, but the types of materials used to create these layers vary by format, creating unique preservation concerns based on format. Northeast Document Conservation Center, "Inherent Vice: Optical Media," https://www.nedcc.org/preservation101/session-6/6inherent-vice-optical-media.

[38] The literature includes many examples of the ways Greene and Meissner's MPLP framework has been adapted to fit the needs and priorities of specific institutions, such as Robert S. Cox, "Maximal Processing, or, Archivist on a Pale Horse," *Journal of Archival Organization* 8, no. 2 (2010): 134–48, https://doi.org/10.1080/15332748.2010.526086; Adrienne R. S. Harling, "MPLP as Intentional, not Necessarily Minimal, Processing: The Rudolph W. Becking Collection at Humbolt University State University," *American Archivist* 77, no. 2 (2014): 489–98, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.77.2.563004228307n2m3; Anne L. Foster, "Minimum Standards Processing and Photograph Collections," *Archival Issues* 30, no. 2 (2006): 107–18.

[39] Emily Vinson, "This Is Our Home, It Is Not for Sale," University of Houston Libraries Online Exhibits, https://exhibits.lib.uh.edu/exhibits/show/thisisourhome.

[40] Full-coat magnetic tracks are one method of creating a film soundtrack, identifiable by oxide coating (opaque and brown in appearance) covering the entire film surface. Experts note that "Films with magnetic tracks (and especially separate full-coat mag tracks) have shown to be more susceptible to vinegar syndrome, and should be monitored more closely than silent films or reels with optical tracks." Jean-Louis Bigourdan, Liz Coffey, and Dwight Swanson, "2.4 Soundtracks, Film Specifics: Stocks and Soundtracks," Film Forever, "The Home Film Preservation Guide," http://filmforever.org.

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