Streaming the Archives:

Repurposing Systems to Advance a Small Media Digitization and Dissemination Program

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Abstract: In 2013-2014, Brooks Library at Central Washington University (CWU) launched library content in three systems: a digital asset-management system, an institutional repository (IR), and a web-based discovery layer. In early 2014, the archives at the library began to use these systems to disseminate media recently digitized from legacy formats. As the project progressed, the archives noted that these systems—while providing valuable storage and discovery capabilities—posed challenges when it came to metadata, interoperability, cost, preservation, and ease of access. This article details the experience of the archives in its first year using these systems.

Keywords: content management, streaming media, digital asset management, archives

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Founded in 1891, Central Washington University (CWU) is a public institution with more than 10,000 enrolled students (Central Washington University, 2014). The university is situated in rural Kittitas County in central Washington state. It boasts some 150 majors, with regionally distinguished programs in music, geology, para-medicine, physics, and education. Distance education has been a growing emphasis at CWU, with eight bachelor’s programs and seven master’s programs now fully online.

Brooks Library, with a contingent of some 40 faculty and staff, provides primary research support for the Central Washington University community. Within Brooks Library is housed the CWU Archives and Special Collections Department, a small but growing program, currently staffed by a university archivist/faculty chair, one faculty librarian, and one to two student workers. The archives has worked to expand its reach since 2011, when an archivist was hired after a 3-year vacancy in the position. The newly revitalized program soon turned its attention to media digitization in an effort to preserve the some 7,000 hours of media housed in the archives on deteriorating analog formats, including cassette tapes, reel-to-reel tape, compact discs, microcassettes, VHS, Betamax cassettes, VHS-C cassettes, and UMatic tapes. The archives considered its options until 2014, when it settled on media digitization and dissemination workflows involving three systems—a digital asset-management system to store media
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(MediaAMP), an institutional repository to contain the metadata (Digital Commons), and a web-based discovery layer to assist in exposing content for library users (Primo).

**Literature Review**

Systems like MediaAMP, Digital Commons, and Primo that provide comprehensive search and management tools have been on the rise in libraries for the past several years. Breeding (2015), library technology consultant and editor of *Library Technology Guide*, commented on this trend in a white paper commissioned by the NISO Discovery to Delivery Topic Committee. Breeding notes that libraries are currently moving toward “web-scale discovery services” with a “large central index populated by metadata, full text, or other representations of the content items in a library’s collection” (p. 2). These next-generation systems are designed to simplify search and discovery for users. In addition, they integrate functions within the organization such as “acquisitions, circulation, workflow, analytics, discovery, and metadata and license management of print, electronic, and digital collections” (Enis, 2014, p. 32).

Many studies have considered selection, implementation, and use of content-management systems and discovery layers like Primo, MediaAMP, and Digital Commons. However, less common are discussions about the integration of multiple systems to preserve and disseminate archival media. This article seeks to add to that conversation by laying out a case study for a small archives program. Relevant pieces of this conversation can be seen in articles that discuss inclusion of archival content in individual system types—discovery layers, digital asset-management systems, and institutional repositories. The following takes each system type in turn and considers relevant literature for each.
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To date, research on next-generation discovery layers has typically focused on implementation, product selection, usability, technical infrastructure, and impact of the discovery layer on other library systems (Lundrigan, Manuel, & Yan, 2015; Way, 2010). Of primary concern for many of these studies is discovery and use of electronic and physical resources—staple fare at the library. However, few have examined discovery and use of archival objects via discovery layer, though this work will continue to evolve in the future as institutions explore integration of discovery layers with content management and digital preservation. For instance, the National Library of New Zealand chose in 2011 to adopt Rosetta, Ex Libris’ digital preservation solution that is meant to “help institutions in collecting, managing, archiving, and preserving their digital collections, ensuring its data integrity and access over time” (Peled, 2011, p. 23). The national library reported that Rosetta helped respond more adequately to society’s move from the “hegemony of the record” to the “hegemony of the digital object” (Knight, 2010, p. 89). Rosetta appealed to the library because it integrated content management with indexing, collection management, and discovery. Similarly, libraries in the Pacific Northwest are beginning to explore consortium-wide integration of bibliographic records, electronic resources, and digital objects via a shared discovery layer (Matthews, Henry & Merrill, 2014). This use for web-based discovery layers is as yet evolving and more work is bound to appear in time.

More extensive is the literature surrounding digital asset-management systems and efforts to implement streaming media solutions in academic libraries. In higher education, much of the conversation around digital asset-management systems has focused on their use in delivery of educational content for coursework and their use in improving student performance in distance education programs. Business concerns are often highlighted as cause for adoption of these systems. For instance, studies have suggested that streaming media can provide more prominent
branding for the academic institution, increased quality of education, increased enrollment, and streamlined management of organizational content (Cohen, 1997; Mullins-Dove, 2006; Sanders & Morrison-Shetlar, 2001; Shephard, 2003).

While educators argue the value of streaming video in online courses, libraries and archives have also worked to disseminate their collections via streaming media solutions. As with discovery layers, researchers in this area often discuss selection of streaming video services, workflow, and implementation of systems while highlighting factors such as cost, access, and interoperability. Taking these factors into account, many libraries have adopted free streaming media services like YouTube as tools for instruction and marketing (Little, 2011). Less common but still accepted is the view that academic libraries can use services like YouTube to collect and curate content (Cho, 2013). Some choose to use YouTube or Vimeo in conjunction with other services, such as an institutional repository or content-management system, to maximize both access and preservation (Tucker, 2013; Garrison, 2013). Other universities have opted to create their own video portals rather than housing content in YouTube. This choice appears to stem from the branding needs of the project, available expertise, and funding (Biemiller, 2013; Organ & Daly, 2014).

Another set of conversations surrounds institutional repositories (IRs), which have traditionally been used to house scholarly output at academic institutions. Studies on IRs have usually focused on this primary mission with little attention to subsidiary concerns like preservation of institutional history (see Johnson, 2002, and Lynch, 2003, for a classic consideration of institutional repositories). However, some programs have chosen to integrate archival and scholarly content in their repositories and have expressed satisfaction with the choice to do so. For instance, Bruns and Knight-Davis (2013) have argued that libraries can
“jump start” faculty interest in sharing scholarly work by stocking their repositories with archival content (p. 2). Other universities have employed this strategy to a greater or lesser extent, as suggested by the gallery of archival and special collections published in the Digital Commons repository (Berkeley Electronic Press, 2015). DSpace has similarly attracted clients like West Texas Digital Archives (WTDA), which used the system to showcase a range of archival collections, including photographs, newspapers, yearbooks, oral histories, maps, and audio files (West Texas Digital Archives, 2015). Though these examples exist, more work could be done to document the success of archival programs in using institutional repositories to disseminate and preserve their material—particularly for those academic institutions where scholarly and archival content are integrated in the same system.

For its media dissemination project, the CWU Archives chose to use and integrate systems in somewhat unorthodox ways, as suggested by the literature cited above (Johnson, 2002; Lynch, 2003; Lundrigan, Manual & Yan, 2015; Mullins-Dove, 2006). This article seeks to contribute to the literature by presenting the archives’ perspective on these systems, including advantages and disadvantages posed by each, individually and in sum. Overall, this case study speaks to the complexity of the current digital environment in which shifting technologies open opportunities for sharing content while also raising new challenges related to interoperability, sustainability, access, and preservation.

The Project: An Overview

In 2014, media digitization became a pressing concern for the CWU Archives as a local company—Suncadia Resort, LLC—presented the department with a set of oral histories and requested that they be digitized and disseminated online. The oral histories constituted interviews with immigrant and coal-mining families in Roslyn, Ronald, and Cle Elum, Washington, where
the Northern Pacific Coal Company had operated mines in the 19th and 20th centuries on the site of the current Suncadia Resort. With support from Suncadia, Frederick Krueger—a local social studies teacher—had collected these interviews between the 1970s and 2000s in hopes of constructing an educational exhibit describing the cultural, linguistic, racial, and socioeconomic history of the region. To expedite these efforts, Suncadia Resort chose to partner with CWU Archives in 2014, presenting the program with 130 recordings on VHS, Betamax, CD, and cassette tape. The archives immediately began to formulate a media digitization and dissemination process to respond to this need (Suncadia Legacy Collection, 2015).

For the Suncadia interviews on Beta cassette, the archives elected to outsource digitization to George Blood, LP. This choice was made because Betamax player equipment was not available in the library and, given the time allotted for the project and the rarity of the material at hand, the external expertise proved welcome. As the project progressed, the archives began to digitize VHS tapes, cassette tapes, and CDs in-house, drawing on expertise and equipment in the university’s Media Production and Development Department, which is conveniently housed in the library. Taken together, the outsourced and in-house content comprised some 611 files totaling over 220 hours. Preservation copies of the files were stored on library servers, and access copies were prepared for dissemination online. The archives then turned to questions of access and dissemination.

In order to share the content digitized as part of the Suncadia project, the archives turned to three systems, all of which launched at Central Washington University in 2013-2014. In 2013, Information Technology Services (ITS) at CWU began to license services from MediaAMP, a digital asset-management system developed at the University of Washington. MediaAMP is a cloud-based, turnkey solution for storing and disseminating media. As such, it offered a
centralized mechanism for managing media content on campus and embedding that content in other venues like course-management systems and social media. These services were particularly appealing to departments on campus with the greatest investment in media—Multimodal Education, Public Affairs, Theatre Arts, Communication, and the CWU Archives. By selecting this system, the ITS department hoped to identify CWU with forward-thinking technological solutions in higher education (Hopkins & Young, 2014). In the proposed business plan, ITS noted, “MediaAmp has the potential to heighten the CWU brand, providing the opportunity for increased student recruitment, and providing employers of our CWU graduates with a more ‘tech-savvy’ work force” (Central Washington University Enterprise Information System Committee, 2013, p. 5). The creators of the plan highlighted the business motives for undertaking the service—superior branding as well as improved training for students, and therefore superior performance by graduates on the job market.

Because MediaAMP provided a readily accessible mechanism for managing media content, the archives decided to store the Suncadia oral histories in the newly licensed system. The library became an early adopter in the launch, working with other campus stakeholders to select a metadata schema and test workflows for delivering content to users via MediaAMP’s streaming media player.

In April 2014, the library also launched its first institutional repository with the intent of hosting a wide range of materials, including journals, conferences, scholarly work, and archival collections. The library selected Digital Commons by Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress) to host the repository, following the example of other small- to mid-sized libraries that have benefitted from outsourcing web design and technical support on the repository front.
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From the beginning, the archives planned to use MediaAMP in conjunction with the institutional repository. This choice was made because MediaAMP did not (and currently does not) expose content for discovery, though the company is working to create a discovery portal that provides a YouTube-like experience for university communities (Central Washington University Project Management Office, 2015). In addition, the library’s contract with bepress initially stipulated a 10 TB cap on storage for all content in the repository while MediaAMP did not specify storage limits at the outset. These factors prompted the archives to place media in MediaAMP and descriptive metadata in Digital Commons.

In December 2014, Brooks Library implemented a final system that provided access to archival media—Primo by Ex Libris. CWU migrated to Primo as part of Orbis Cascade Alliance, a consortium of 37 libraries in the Pacific Northwest that decided in 2012 to implement a shared integrated library system (ILS). By January 2015, all participating libraries had completed the migration to Primo. To date, this is the largest alliance of libraries that has attempted to use a shared discovery layer (Bhalock, Dorhofer, & Arnold, 2014).

Like other federated search systems, Primo integrates access to physical, electronic, and web resources. It also permits the library to harvest its institutional repository, as Digital Commons is compliant with the Open Archives Initiative, Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH). Upon launching Primo, the library began to harvest the repository by several Dublin Core fields—most notably, dc:type and dc:format. The type field was populated in Digital Commons using qualified Dublin Core while the format field used simple Dublin Core. By mapping to these values, Primo soon harvested all records in the repository and integrated them into the shared ILS. Archival media was therefore housed in MediaAMP, described in Digital Commons, and harvested into Primo.
Outcomes

At the end of its first year digitizing media, the archives had disseminated more than 475 hours of audiovisual material in 1,000 separate files, which were viewed by users more than 7,000 times between March 2014 and March 2015 (MediaAMP media requests usage report, generated May 2015). After completing the Suncadia Legacy Collection, the archives expanded its digitization efforts to other projects: a set of interviews conducted with retired faculty and staff members, footage aired on campus television, and a set of lectures recorded at Brooks Library in the 1950s-1980s. Access to this material was facilitated through seven separate collections in Digital Commons.

Reflecting on the first year of its media digitization program, the CWU Archives has had occasion to consider the advantages and disadvantages of its selected systems. As criteria for assessing these systems and their integration, the archives chose to consider ease of access, quality of metadata, intellectual property rights management, and cost and sustainability. These factors are discussed below.

Challenges and Opportunities

Ease of Access

The systems used in this project speak to a desire to simplify discovery of resources. Digital Commons, as used by CWU, combines archival and scholarly content in a single platform. Similarly, MediaAMP is meant to provide access to all media content at the university. Primo also promises federated searching across electronic, physical, and web resources, as well as greater integration of management tools. By using these systems, the archives hoped to open opportunities for reaching users in new ways, and further for studying the impact of integrated
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systems on the use of archival materials. Such studies are relatively uncommon, but there is potential for future work in this area.

Although integrated systems may hold promise for the future, the archives encountered difficulties in ensuring interoperability amongst MediaAMP, Digital Commons, and Primo. For instance, the department had initially hoped to embed MediaAMP’s media player in Digital Commons, but this proved untenable as bepress opted not to share its application programming interface (API) for this purpose. Ultimately, as a workaround, the archives chose to link from Digital Commons to content in MediaAMP rather than embedding. This solution is functional, but the links are less apparent to users than embedded media would be. Links to MediaAMP are buried still further when harvested into Primo. The embedding issue has added to the archives’ interest in using YouTube or Vimeo to disseminate media, as Digital Commons allows media from these services to be embedded in the repository. Even so, the embedding problem highlights larger concerns about working with proprietary systems and ensuring interoperability between said systems. Based on its experiences with MediaAMP and Digital Commons, the archives would certainly join Breeding in his call for an open API ecosystem (2015). Overall, although these systems have improved access and hold interesting possibilities for improving discovery, interoperability remains a concern.

Metadata

When it came to metadata, both MediaAMP and Digital Commons allowed the archives flexibility in selecting and customizing fields. The archives could—and did—select fields as appropriate to individual collections, though metadata selections were, by and large, mapped to Dublin Core elements. Some administrative metadata was included in these selections, and the
archives established structural relationships by pairing together primary and secondary files in Digital Commons and by creating list players in MediaAMP.

Although this flexibility proved useful when constructing new collections, the archives did encounter some difficulties with metadata as the project progressed. Digital Commons, for instance, required title, author, and date fields across all collections. While these requirements are sensible for scholarly material—the typical fare of institutional repositories—they can be problematic for archival collections where creators and dates may be unknown. The archives compensated for this requirement by describing undated materials with the present date and further by incorporating an “approximate date” field to clarify matters. However, this solution may have caused confusion for users—more so because Digital Commons produced automatic citations incorporating the present date rather than the “approximate date” provided by the archives. The date problem may have been a minor quirk, but it did highlight the problems of using a system that was not originally designed to feature archival content.

On the structural level, Digital Commons permitted the creation of associations and hierarchies, but it lacked some complexity. Of concern for the Suncadia project was the repository’s handling of primary and secondary files. Associated or secondary files can be individually added to a primary record, but this content does not receive a full set of metadata, nor can it be harvested by Primo. This content enriches records and demonstrates relationships between items, but it lacks descriptive metadata and interoperability with other systems. Although the content is still discoverable via search engine, the repository loses something when it cannot show complex structural relationships—especially for collections that are difficult to locate by subject or keyword (Gilliland-Swetland, 2000).
The archives also encountered problems in facilitating discovery. Digital Commons permits search by a limited number of fields, including title, abstract (or description), subject, author, institution, document type, date, and publication. Because of these limited search parameters, users may have difficulty calling up results for more specialized fields in use for particular collections. In a similar vein, until the beginning of 2015, Digital Commons did not expose specially requested fields for search by users (Bankier, 2014). The archives employed workarounds to address this problem—repurposing searchable fields for particular pieces of metadata—but this solution made metadata entry less intuitive for student assistants who helped create collections. Digital Commons also did not provide an ideal means of browsing by material type, such as image gallery or audio recording. Rather, the repository allows searching by collection, discipline, and author—again reflecting the scholarly nature of its origins. While understandable in their context, these issues did complicate presentation of primary source material to users who may have needed other entry points to encourage them to engage with the media in question. On the plus side, bepress has demonstrated a commitment to expanding its services at the user’s request. If other institutions begin to use Digital Commons more heavily to feature archival collections, these concerns could be addressed in time.

MediaAMP brought other discovery issues to the fore. As noted previously, MediaAMP endeavors to serve constituents across the CWU campus, including Brooks Library, Multimodal Learning, Public Affairs, DE-ITV, Athletics, Communication, and any others who wish to share their media via streaming player. At the outset, early adopters at CWU met to select a common metadata schema. Although this group agreed on an original set of fields, each unit may add, delete, and adapt as needed. As MediaAMP moves to implement a discovery portal, some worry that the lack of common standards will hamper search and discovery in the future. The lack of a
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common controlled vocabulary, or policies for selection and use of controlled vocabularies, may also pose challenges for discovery. As Gilliland-Swetland has noted, in the future it may well prove difficult to balance the “rich and complex metadata sets that individual communities have developed” against the “simpler metadata sets that are easier for non-specialists to use and systems designers to maintain” (Gilliland-Swetland, 2000, p. 32). The CWU campus will need to collaborate to reach solutions to these concerns in the future.

As the archives is harvesting Digital Commons and presenting repository records in Primo, this process has exposed some additional metadata concerns. As one might imagine, shortcomings in repository metadata are uncovered in the harvest. For instance, author names are often entered into the repository using variant combinations of first, middle, and surname. Similarly, subject headings are applied on an item-by-item basis, sometimes with little consideration for existing controlled vocabularies. When this content is harvested into Primo, users may feel the effects of limited authority control as they attempt to browse author and subject headings in the system. In addition, Primo renders some metadata in a format that may be unintuitive for users. For instance, Primo interprets particular punctuation marks as text delimiters and thus breaks some subject headings in the harvest. Also, per ISO 8601, Primo displays harvested dates in a format that users may not understand—yyyy-mm-ddThh:mm:ssZ. Although these problems can likely be resolved by implementing new best practices, in the meantime they present additional barriers to finding and selecting appropriate primary source material.

Intellectual Property Rights Management

Both Digital Commons and MediaAMP permitted the archives to manage intellectual property rights as needed for the media collections in question. Rights statements could be
placed in both systems, and access to items or collections could be restricted by IP range and ezproxy. In addition, the streaming media player placed an implicit restriction on adaptation and reuse. All of these features were useful to the library, though to date the archives has had little need for access restrictions as Central Washington University holds the copyright for the archival media that has been shared online. Compared to other constituents on campus who wished to stream copyrighted content to students, the archives had relatively little use for complex rights management options, and this factor was less critical overall to assessing the systems in use.

Cost

Cost (and, therefore, sustainability) is an essential factor for Brooks Library as it, like many other libraries and cultural heritage institutions, often finds itself short on funds. Unfortunately, as hosted service solutions, the three systems treated in this article all came at substantial cost, though these costs were partially, or largely, absorbed by grant funding and support from partnering organizations. As noted above, Brooks Library initially subscribed to Digital Commons with the help of Suncadia Resort, which provided grant funding in exchange for the digitization and dissemination of local coal-mining histories. Multimodal Learning and Information Technology Services bore the cost of implementing and licensing MediaAMP services, which will total nearly $900,000 over 5 years (Central Washington University Enterprise Information System Committee, 2013, pp. 7-8). Finally, Brooks Library also implemented Primo in partnership with 36 other libraries in the Pacific Northwest. This alliance reported that, by pooling resources, the group achieved greater cost-efficiency since Primo integrated services such as link resolvers, servers, and stand-alone ILSes that alliance libraries had previously purchased separately (Orbis Cascade Alliance, 2011).
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Collaboration certainly helped to offset costs for Brooks Library, but these hosted services did come with a high price tag, leading the archives to question the sustainability of media dissemination over time. In addition to costs cited above, staff time posed an additional concern for the archives (a factor considered under advisement from Hammond & Davis, 2009). Although the library’s choice to use hosted services did cut down on staff time needed for technical support, web design, and data maintenance, the process of disseminating content via two systems introduced a degree of inefficiency into the project. Digital Commons did not permit the archives to push metadata directly from MediaAMP to the repository, meaning that staff members routinely kept up two sets of metadata even though the two systems did not double the access points for any given item. In addition, because the archives was testing a newly developed media player and player-builder tools, problems arose with links early in the project. A certain amount of time was invested in replacing broken links and updating players that had unexpectedly become inaccessible. Overall, however, using hosted solutions appears to have accelerated the library’s process, as relatively inexperienced faculty and staff could be quickly repurposed to assist with these projects with the support of external service providers.

Leaving aside staff time and hosting costs, MediaAMP and Digital Commons provide a potential cost benefit as yet unnoted—the ability to secure financial support for digital projects by improving institutional branding. In theory, branding raises an institution’s profile and, among other things, alerts users to the extent and cost of digitization projects—thus prompting their support. Evens and Hauttekeete spoke to this point when they remarked in 2011 that cultural heritage institutions should use strategies like branding to improve profitability and sustainability, since “few…are fully recovering the costs of digitization from the revenues of…digital services” (p. 160).
MediaAMP and Digital Commons both provided institutional branding via players as well as web and cover pages, lending support to the archives’ decision to use these solutions in lieu of free services like YouTube. However, as another drawback of being an early adopter, the archives encountered difficulties during its first year using MediaAMP’s branded player. Because features were yet in development, it proved difficult to embed the branded player in social media sites or to collect in-depth statistics about use of the player. These functions work well for MediaAMP’s generic player, but that player negates the branding advantage secured with MediaAMP. Due to these drawbacks, staff members in the archives began to feel that a service like YouTube could more suitably disseminate the library’s collections to the general public. Indeed, Evens and Hauttekeete (2011) also pointed to concerns like these when they noted that revenue-making priorities can sometimes compete with a cultural institution’s “public and cultural goals” and “may hamper the broad accessibility of digital collections” (p. 160). This push and pull between business concerns and accessibility certainly affected the archives’ decision-making process, causing staff members to consider a mixed-method approach for disseminating content to capitalize on strengths of various systems.

Next Steps

Taking into account the factors cited above, the CWU Archives may add YouTube as another means of disseminating its content. Although YouTube has less robust metadata and rights-management offerings, its content can be easily shared and embedded in social media and in the institutional repository. The archives may well reach a wider audience through YouTube, and may glean more granular information about use of its content. Additionally, this solution may also prove more cost-effective for the library as a whole.
Although YouTube holds appeal, the archives will likely continue to disseminate content via multiple venues. MediaAMP still provides numerous advantages, including the ability to manage high-resolution content in a centralized location while pushing access copies to other services like YouTube. Additionally, by making its content available via the MediaAMP portal, the archives may be better able to reach CWU faculty and students in search of primary source material. MediaAMP may also provide a more economically viable model for collecting and preserving media produced by other units on campus. Via MediaAMP, the archives might be able to quickly identify campus partners and work with them to preserve important pieces of media produced outside of the library. MediaAMP might also put the archives in closer touch with the needs of the campus community. As Gilliland-Swetland (2000) notes, digital asset management systems like MediaAMP tend to respond “organically” to an organization’s activities and thus provide the “agility sufficient to respond to emerging institutional priorities” rather than relying on assumptions about uses for content (p. 35). MediaAMP could help the archives improve its services to the campus community by keeping the program in touch with needs as they evolve. The results of the MediaAMP portal have yet to be seen.

Overall this project points to opportunities in academic institutions to capitalize on available content-management systems to disseminate media materials. As described above, the CWU Archives successfully advanced its media dissemination program, even while using systems that were not originally designed to describe and store archival content. Opportunity exists here for embedding archival material in integrated systems that encompass various collection types, disciplines, academic units, and university campuses. However, this integration raises concerns about ease of use, metadata, and cost. A mixed-method approach may allow the library/archives to capitalize on the best of each system. Still, questions remain about the
sustainability of these solutions as staffing and funds shift over time. The archives must work out how to balance its ultimate priorities—preservation and access—against the need to brand and market services in hopes of securing financial support for its programs. These are questions raised in the first year of the CWU Archives’ media digitization and dissemination project, and ones that will be considered further in the future.

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