

A Digital Curation Planning Project at Michigan State University

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Abstract: Like other research universities, Michigan State University has amassed a growing body of digital information—some of which only exists in digital form. Without an active, well-considered plan for managing and preserving these resources, they will eventually become inaccessible due to the ever-changing nature of technology. The Michigan State University Archives & Historical Collections (UAHC) recently spearheaded a year-long digital curation planning project designed to help ensure the trustworthy preservation, management, and stewardship of the university’s digital assets, and intellectual property. Project activities included a campus-wide survey followed by in-depth interviews with select units. In the interests of developing best practices guidelines, the units were asked about types of digital content created and file formats; storage practices; use of content management system and/or digital repository software, including workflows; metadata schema; and file naming conventions. University Relations, which handles public relations for Michigan State, was identified as the “prototype” unit for developing inventorying and appraisal guidelines for digital assets, as well as storage options and processes for transferring electronic records of enduring value to UAHC. Rather than supporting the establishment of a single institutional repository or even broadly applicable curation guidelines, a preliminary analysis of project results points to the need for different approaches to digital curation depending on content type. Four content types were identified: university publications; digital content that documents the history of the university; non-MSU-specific digital content; and research data. This presentation will review the evolution of MSU’s digital preservation planning project, the research methodologies used, an analysis of research results, and the next steps that can be taken to ensure good digital curation practices at Michigan State and other institutions.

About the authors:

Cynthia A. Ghering received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Western Michigan University in 1991 and Master of Science in Archives and Records Management from the University of Michigan in 1999. Prior to assuming her present role at the Michigan State University, Cynthia spent nearly a decade with the Ohio Historical Society where she started as the Collection Access Coordinator, cataloging and digitizing archival, library and museum materials, then becoming Head of the Manuscripts and Audiovisuals Department and later the Assistant Director of the Curatorial and Collections Services Department. In January of 2008, Cynthia became the third Director of MSU’s Archives and Historical Collections in its 40-year history. As part of the University’s Libraries, Computing and Technology unit, MSU Archives and Historical Collections maintains responsibility for the preservation and access to the University’s historical and business records and over 1,000 non-university historical collections for the research and study of Michigan State University, central Michigan, agriculture, farming, lumber and automobile industry. In 2009 NHPRC funded the Spartan Archive project to develop policies and procedures to appraise, ingest, process, describe and preserve institutional electronic records. The University Archives also provides records management training and services to academic and administrative units and facilitates public access to these collections both onsite and online. Cynthia is the chair of a cross-institutional

team investigating the university's digital curation practices and is co-chair of the University Collections Committee.

Lisa Schmidt is Electronic Records Archivist at the Michigan State University Archives & Historical Collections. In October 2007, Lisa began working for MATRIX: Center for Humane Arts, Letters, and Social Sciences Online, a digital humanities research center at Michigan State. Her work at MATRIX included an NHPRC-funded project to assess and improve the preservation practices for the H-Net academic e-mail lists. In a joint appointment with the MSU Archives as digital preservation analyst, she engaged in a project exploring digital curation practices at the university. She is now working full time on electronic records projects for the MSU Archives. These include such projects as managing the development of the NHPRC-funded "Spartan Archive" preservation environment for electronic institutional records and creating appraisal, transfer, and storage plans for the university's digital content of enduring value. Lisa received an MS in Information Studies from the University of Texas at Austin in August 2007. Prior to joining the information studies field, she enjoyed a successful career as a high technology marketing communications professional in the San Francisco Bay Area and Austin. She also holds a BA in history and an MBA, both from the University of Texas.