

# The Venus Fly Trap: The Lure and Pitfalls of Digitizing Film Collections

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**Abstract:** The potential for tapping into the popularity of web video content has increased repository interest in digitizing film collections. The lure of instant access to digital content can attract the attention of donors and patrons. However, film digitization projects face potential pitfalls such as complicated rights issues, high costs due to the need for specialized handling procedures and labor intensive cataloging. The lack of clear preservation format standards for video content creates a preservation risk. A project at Old Dominion University to digitize a collection of five thousand 16mm films dated 1940- 1980 will be used to discuss these issues. The collection contains some 35,000 individual stories that were shown on WTAR-TV in Norfolk and created by local and national vendors, some of which are defunct. The station itself is no longer in existence. Because of the difficulty of determining ownership of the physical collection and its intellectual property rights, the films remained unused in a university storeroom for 10 years. The collection has now been deeded to Special Collections and University Archives. Publicity about writing a grant to digitize the collection has brought requests from local public school systems and libraries to use the collection in their own digital content delivery systems. These partnerships could substantially broaden use of the collection but cause concern for some who want the content only available through University portals.

## About the author:

*Sonia Yaco* is the Special Collections librarian and university archivist at Old Dominion University in Norfolk Virginia. She is the founder and co-chair of the Desegregation of Virginia Education (DOVE) Project, a history preservation initiative. Ms. Yaco is a regular contributor to scholarly archival journals on topics that include confidentiality laws, the history of school desegregation, social activism among historians and archivists, and the use of voice recognition software in oral history projects. Previously, Yaco was a reference archivist at the Wisconsin Historical Society. She holds a Masters of Arts degree from the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Wisconsin – Madison.