

Extending the Reach of Digital Preservation Practice: a Program to Teach Practitioners in Small Institutions

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Abstract— Many working in small libraries, museums, archives, and historical societies have been actively engaged in creating digital collections, but often these collections are not being digitized to standards, are presented to users via a web page and are not preserved in any meaningful manner. How do the people in these scenarios discover that there is a problem before they lose content and more importantly how do they learn what to do about it? The Library of Congress Digital Preservation Outreach and Education Program (DPOE) is taking a proactive approach to extending digital preservation education across the United States in a scalable way.

Keywords- digital preservation; education; practitioners; training

I. INTRODUCTION

Many working in small libraries, museums, archives, and historical societies have been actively engaged in creating digital collections, but often these collections are not being digitized to standards, are presented to users via a web page and are not preserved in any meaningful manner. How do the people in these scenarios discover that there is a problem before they lose content and more importantly how do they learn what to do about it? The Library of Congress Digital Preservation Outreach and Education Program (DPOE) is taking a proactive approach to extending digital preservation education across the country in a scalable way. This presentation will address these issues and describe how DPOE is meeting digital preservation education needs.

II. WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

There is lots of information available about digital preservation. Presentations, conferences, webinars and articles abound. There are grants from various agencies available to institutions to have a digital preservation readiness survey done to assess where organizations are to start. Consultants can be hired. This only goes so far, however. While education about digital conversion, digital preservation and digital curation is readily available to those who seek the information, those who are affiliated with smaller independent organizations are not likely to have the information they need. They may realize that they don't know what to do, but for them to acquire the right information may be an

insurmountable obstacle. If they look at the standards that are published they may not understand the terms used or the technology involved. Do they have good content that would contribute to the record of our cultural heritage? Most certainly they do. Is the digital content at risk of being unable to be useful in the future? Unfortunately, the answer is also yes. Unfortunately many institutions are spending valuable resources and a great deal of effort to create digital objects that may prove to be a waste of time and money as the files become obsolete and the work is unsustainable.

III. A NOBLE EFFORT

In 2009 some key staff at the Library of Congress had some conversations with key individuals from around the United States on the pressing issues around preserving the digital content around the country. The primary issues they named were education and training. Concurrent with this, conversations were happening among many professionals in the digital preservation community about the need to train professionals in libraries, historical societies and other organizations who are responsible for creating and preserving digital representations of our cultural heritage. In a country as large as the United States how would this best be extended to those at "the end of the road"? How could a training program reach those who needed it the most?

Staff at the Library of Congress and others in the digital preservation community conceived of the Digital Preservation Outreach and Education (DPOE) program. From the beginning the DPOE team has been active in researching and developing a program that can meet the digital preservation education needs of individuals currently working in the field. This is not targeted at large institutions who are generally better prepared in this area, but rather is aimed at those small to medium institutions who are uncertain about which actions to take and who have limited funds for training.

In the summer and fall of 2010, a needs assessment survey [1] was conducted with 868 archivists, librarians, information officers, corporate executives, and similar professionals responding to the survey. The breakdown of respondents was as follows: 40% of the respondents were libraries, 34% were archives, 16% were museums, 4.5% were historical societies

and 0.9% were research groups. The majority of respondents (48.3%) were from academic organizations; 9.6% were from county or municipal government; 7.7% were from federal government; and 6.7% were from state government. 25.5 % responded as "Other" (many of these identified themselves as non-profit organizations). By regional breakdown 25.7% of respondents were from the Northeast region, 22.4% were from the Southeast region, 21.3% were from the Midwest region, 14.7% were from the Southwest region, 10.3% were from the South central region, and 5.3% were from the Northwest region.

The respondents were largely from smaller organizations, with 50.6% from organizations with fewer than 24 staff members. The survey revealed that the respondents preferred technical training (to assist practitioners in understanding and applying techniques) that was close at hand and with duration of a half day to a single day. Overall, nearly 50% indicated a preference for small workshop format.

During the winter of 2010 DPOE reviewed the curricula of five digital preservation training providers, including Cornell University-ICPSR Digital Preservation Management Workshops, Educopia Institute, MetaArchive Cooperative, LYRISIS, University of Arizona School of Information Resources and Library Science, Graduate Certificate in Digital Information Management program, and the DigCCurr (Digital Curation Curriculum) program at University of North Carolina. This review helped the DPOE team to craft a more targeted curriculum for working professionals.

Dr. Nancy McGovern (then at the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) and now at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) was contracted to draft the basics of the DPOE program. She developed the train-the-trainer content and approach and developed the core principles that are the foundation of the program modules. These modules are intended to be foundational and support the training events that are offered to appropriate audiences by the trainers that are trained through the DPOE program. Dr. McGovern has deep experience with digital preservation training. In developing the DPOE modules she drew upon her experience derived from delivering more than 40 workshops in the very successful Digital Preservation Management Program that she developed with Anne Kenney when she was at Cornell University in 2003. Dr. McGovern states, "The objectives of DPOE were to raise awareness about digital preservation - to make awareness pervasive, to provide training in manageable chunks ... to build a base of trainers by giving really novice trainers an opportunity to learn how to be a trainer by presenting really basic information to a novice audience - then move on to mentor others and present more advanced content."

The modules that were developed represent the fundamentals of digital preservation practice. They are intended to be accessible to novices and to be practical so that

people can easily put the concepts into practice as they handle their digital content. The modules were loosely modeled after concepts outlined in "A Framework of Guidance for Building Good Digital Collections" by the National Information Standards Organization (NISO). [2]

And thus, the Digital Preservation Outreach and Education program was established. The mission of DPOE is to foster national outreach and education about digital preservation by building a collaborative network of instructors and partners to provide training to individuals and organizations seeking to preserve their digital content. This is a train the trainer initiative. The DPOE National Trainer Network works to build relationships with organizations to make digital preservation training more widely available to working professionals. The National Trainer Network is made up of working professionals who attend a DPOE Train-the-Trainer workshop. DPOE Trainers provide digital preservation training to other working professionals in their communities.

The first Train-the-Trainer workshop was held in September 2011 at the Library of Congress where 21 participants from across the country were trained in the DPOE Baseline Curriculum and the fundamentals of managing workshops. The training was not aimed at teaching managers or administrators, but rather at novice practitioners. Following the weeklong workshop, the newly minted trainers committed to teaching one or more sessions in their region.

The second DPOE workshop was held in the summer of 2012 in Indianapolis at the Indiana State Library where another 23 participants were trained. Workshops are scheduled for the summer of 2013 in Illinois and Alaska where an additional 38 participants will be trained. Thus by the end of 2013 more than 80 trainers will have been trained to present the DPOE curriculum.

IV. THE IMPACT

Within six months of receiving the DPOE training, each group of newly minted trainers had done at least one training session with some of the trainers far exceeding their obligation. The sessions ranged from small one-time workshops to webinars offered in conjunction with the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL), the largest regional library consortium in the United States. Over 1,500 people have participated in DPOE workshops in the first two years since the program was initiated.

In follow-up surveys participants of the workshops that the trainers held offered comments such as, "[the course] gave guidance and best practices with practical information on moving forward managing digital content." and "The course content was very practical - I was immediately able to think of ways in which it applies to my current job. I got the feeling that people working in different environments could all take something of value from the course. I also appreciated that the course didn't try to cover too much ground, rather it focused on small steps that can actually make a difference."



The DPOE program is a scalable way to make a real difference to many curators, managers, librarians and archivists who are responsible for valuable content in places that are not able to readily participate in the larger digital preservation community. It is hoped that once the participants have the basic concepts mastered they will seek out more complex, higher level training. But until then, they are much better able to responsibly manage the content in their care.



REFERENCES

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