

ARCHIVAL

OUTLOOK

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Creating Innovative Programming for NONTRADITIONAL Audiences

Whether you're trying to connect devotees of Harry Potter to naval aviation, indulging folk music aficionados, or training the next generation of archives users, reaching nontraditional audiences with innovative programming can be challenging.

Seven archivists share tips and lessons learned on outreach and engagement:

Michael Barera of the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA), **Marta Crilly** of Boston City Archives (BCA), **Norie Guthrie** of Rice University, **Andrew Hinton** and **Sheon Montgomery** of the Vietnam Center and Archive at Texas Tech University (VNCA), **Marc Levitt** of the National Naval Aviation Museum (NAM), and **Brittany Newberry** of the Atlanta University Center (AUC).

Describe some of your institution's outreach efforts.

Barera: The University of Texas at Arlington has used Wikipedia and Wikimedia Commons to make its materials more accessible to a wider audience. Since early 2018, we've created articles on subjects documented in our collections (including editorial cartoonist Etta Hulme and the Berachah Industrial Home), held an edit-a-thon on campus and an editing workshop at the Texas Library Association conference, and uploaded numerous digitized images to Wikimedia Commons for use in Wikipedia articles (including a newspaper broadside of a woman named Myrtle Corbin).

Crilly: Boston City Archives is tasked with providing all Bostonians with access to their city's public records, but traditionally our public users have been largely white, English-speaking academics,

genealogists, and house historians. Our user demographics are a stark contrast to Boston's demographics. We realized that to reach a wider subset of Bostonians, we needed to start reaching out to Boston's youth via the city's public schools.

Guthrie: At the Houston Folk Music Archives, we created an ArcGIS Story Map that maps the city's folk and folk-related venues and tells their history of the music scene. For fans of Houston folk music, the map is a way to interact with our materials without visiting our reading room.

Hinton: The Archive of Modern American Warfare, held within the Vietnam Center and Archive, preserves the records of veterans who served after 1975 and has a particular collecting focus on the born-digital records of post-2001 veterans. I host an annual symposium on topics related to modern warfare to engage today's veterans, showing them examples of new knowledge born from archival research and encouraging them to donate their own materials.

Levitt: The National Naval Aviation Museum tells the 100+-year history of US naval aviation and is situated aboard a Florida military installation called Naval Air Station Pensacola. Annually, the local comic convention Pensacon brings in 35,000 national attendees. For the past four years, we sought to tap into that new audience by presenting at Pensacon to connect naval aviation to the attendees' fandom and lives.

Montgomery: Since 2011, the VNCA has participated in a local elementary school's Armed Forces Recognition Day. Teachers prepare students with history lessons about our nation's wars, students bring mementos of their family member's service, and the day is filled with activities such as raising the flag, Taps, choir concerts, and more. VNCA brings veteran-donated artifacts to talk about the Vietnam War, including a restored Vietnam War service helicopter.

Newberry: At Atlanta University Center, we are working on a maps/GIS project to provide digital access to historical maps in the papers of Grace Towns Hamilton, who was the first African American woman elected to the Georgia General Assembly. The collection includes more than 170 maps of Atlanta and Georgia counties from 1960 to 1980. Featuring them in a digital

StoryMap makes them available outside of the reading room.

What does it take to have a successful outreach project?

Crilly: Students at Burke High School used primary sources to write and analyze the history of their neighborhoods. The hyper-local aspect of this project was the greatest contribution to its success. Students researched the history of their street or their local square and connected that history to current issues and concerns that their communities are facing.

Levitt: In participating in Pensacon, we made our collections relevant to the audience's lives and interests. Connecting these two different worlds was challenging at first, but we learned from our missteps and continue to find ways to connect aspects of naval aviation to fandoms of popular culture from Star Wars to comic books to Harry Potter.

Montgomery: To plan appropriately for an off-site event at the elementary school, I spoke with event coordinators for details on the venue and vision for the event, determining the target audience's ages, interest, and information levels, as well as their expectations for the experience and takeaways for attendees. I also previewed the venue for access, size, and security and planned for onsite assistance for moving materials and setting up. For our event, we also transported a helicopter on a trailer, so pre-determining street flow was important!

What challenges did you encounter?

Guthrie: Our first attempt at making a timeline map of music history through OMEKA didn't work out, so we tried again using an ArcGIS Story Map. One interesting note is that we couldn't have completed our project without the data available in local newspapers. Because musicians and venues could submit free ads and the predominantly white folk singers played in typically white establishments, it was easy to piece this history together. I would love to replicate this for our new Houston Blues Museum Archive, but retrieving the names, addresses, and open and closing dates for black-owned music venues will not be an easy data set to create.

Newberry: A maps project can be time consuming and difficult for someone who

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Creating Innovative Programming for Nontraditional Audiences

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doesn't have a GIS background. It took a lot of research and training to fully understand how to use GIS applications to create digital exhibits that fit with the library's strategic plan and engaged our users.

Crilly: Because of BCA's location and costs associated with field trips, a class visit to BCA was impossible. The Burke has a student population that is 61% economically disadvantaged, and most of the students work when they are not in class, limiting students' ability to visit the archives on their own. A second challenge was English language skills—50% of students have a first language that is not English and 35% are currently learning English. To meet these challenges, I made a Google drive of primary source documents and came to three class sessions to work one-on-one with students. Class sessions were structured to give students multiple opportunities to receive one-on-one help in interpreting and understanding archival resources.

Levitt: We initially measured the event's success by counting the audience attendees. Once we filled the room, however, we began

measuring engagement by creating more interactive presentations. In other words, we no longer just talked *at them* about the connections between naval aviation and pop culture, but we encouraged them to make the connections themselves through activities such as a clue-based scavenger hunt and trivia questions.

Montgomery: My challenge was creating a "hook" to connect our Vietnam War artifacts with students in grades 3 to 5. At a loss, I asked an experienced teacher who advised me to talk about camouflage, a concept familiar to even the youngest students. This gave them a simple filter to think critically about why each item is or isn't camouflaged.

How do you advocate for funding and staff time to run your outreach project?

Hinton: I collaborate with different departments within the university as well as national and international veterans organizations to advertise the annual symposium, which helps to raise the profile of our archives among the veteran community and lead to material donations. I document spikes in donations following each symposium to advocate for continued funding for the project, as continual growth of the collection is a primary goal of my institution's strategic plan. I also collect correspondence from scholars who praise

the symposium and its importance to their research.

Newberry: Collaborating with a member institution has made this project possible. In addition, I created a project proposal and timeline that demonstrated how the project fits into AUC's strategic plan. As we consider this type of project for other outreach, I created a recommendation report that advocates for funding for software and servers.

Montgomery: K-5 outreach fits firmly within our mission and we have VNCA-branded stickers as takeaways. With administration and donor support we now have a no-cost Education Collection of duplicate items for a popular "touching-allowed" station.

Crilly: Boston's City Archivist and City Clerk are both strong advocates for increased access to public records and collaboration with city departments, including Boston Public Schools. BCA's project fits with both of these goals, making advocating for it easy! While the project did not require additional funding, it was time consuming. All of the class materials can be reused in future iterations of this project, which justified our initial time investment. ■

*This article originated from a presentation at ARCHIVES*RECORDS 2019.*



EDUCATION

Check Out Our Spring Course Calendar!

Managing Physical & Digital Architecture, Design & Construction Records [A&D]

March 9–10, 2020 | Aliza Leventhal & Timothy Walsh |
Williamsburg, VA

DAS BOOTCAMP | Northbrook, IL | March 23–25, 2020

Copyright Issues for Digital Archives [DAS/A&D]

March 23 | Peter Hirtle

Preserving Digital Archives [DAS]

March 24 | Lori Lindberg

Managing Digital Records in Archives & Special Collections [DAS]

March 25 | Seth Shaw

Preserving Digital Archives [DAS]

April 17, 2020 | Lori Lindberg | Fayetteville, AR

Describing Archives: A Content Standard [A&D]

April 20, 2020 | Cory Nimer | Seattle, WA

Introduction to XML Analysis & Manipulation [DAS]

May 15, 2020 | Regine Heberlein | Chicago, IL

Email Archiving [DAS]

May 22, 2020 | Patricia Patterson | Miami, FL

DAS BOOTCAMP | Greensboro, NC | May 28–29, 2020

Copyright Issues for Digital Archives [DAS/A&D]

May 28 | Joshua Kitchens

Managing Digital Records in Archives & Special Collections [DAS]

May 29 | Seth Shaw

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