

Sabbatical Report
Christopher J. Prom, PhD.
University Library/University Archives

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With generous support from the US-UK Fulbright Commission and the Council for International Exchange of Scholars, I served as a Fulbright Distinguished Scholar at the Centre for Archive and Information Studies, University of Dundee, Scotland from August 2009-May 2010.

Support from the US-UK Fulbright commission, my host institution and the University of Illinois provided an excellent basis for sustained research into the topic described in my proposal, namely practical methods to identify, preserve, and provide access to electronic records. The activities I undertook will provide a significant long-term benefit to the University, allowing the Archives to establish a formal digital archives program. As a result, the University Archives and Library will be well positioned to facilitate the development of similar programs at archives in Illinois, in the United States, and other nations, better meeting society's need for an accurate, trustworthy record of human activity.

Work Completed

Literature review, methodology and overview of results: During the initial months of my grant, I conducted a literature review and developed a research methodology. The methodology guided my work during the rest of the sabbatical and also set a foundation for additional research to be completed over the next three to five years. With Fulbright support, I attended conferences/training sessions in Edinburgh, Scotland; Bristol, England; and Bern, Switzerland. In addition, I informally consulted colleagues to glean information concerning digital preservation methods, activities, tools, and services in the UK and Europe. Using this information, I developed a barebones research methodology, which is currently being expanded into a more formal set of methods for evaluating open source software (OSS) projects in the libraries, archives, and museums sector.¹

During the spring of 2010, I installed, used and tested numerous pieces software that might be used as part of a digital archives program. Based on this experience, I reviewed the software and their associated OSS projects.² Concurrently, I developed the set of working recommendations: a suite of policy/procedure templates that archivists at 'under-resourced' archives can use to develop and implement a digital

¹ <http://e-records.chrisprom.com/?p=331>; <http://e-records.chrisprom.com/?p=1375>.

² These evaluations utilized a loose set of criteria that I developed as part of my overall research methodology. http://e-records.chrisprom.com/?page_id=175.

archives program, whatever their current resource (i.e. funding and skill) base.³ These recommendations comprise the heart of the project results.

Informal Dissemination: To openly share information, I began a blog at <http://e-records.chrisprom.com>. Occasional 'postings' describe project methodology, evaluate specific pieces of OSS or OSS projects, and provide observations regarding general approaches to electronic records. Blog 'pages' (i.e. static content available via a menu system) outline and explain the project's formal recommendations, linking to policy and procedure templates that archivists can tailor for local use. Since the sabbatical has ended, I decided to expand the blog by offering others the chance to post, starting with University of Illinois graduate students working on electronic records issues under my direction. Informally, many colleagues note that the blog has helped them. For example, a speaker at the 8th European Conference on Digital Archiving recommended that all archivists read it. In order to more formally measure the blog's impact, I will be installing web analytics software to track its usage.

I have been actively contributing to several international projects as a result of contacts made during the project. During this process, I learned much from individuals involved in digital preservation efforts in the UK, Europe, and Canada:

- I contributed to the development of functional specifications for the ArchivesSpace planning grant.⁴ The tool developed by this software will serve as a key element in future services to identify, preserve, describe and provide access to by analog and 'born-digital' materials.
- I worked actively with the PLANETS project software and plan continued involvement with the newly-founded Open Planets Foundation.⁵
- The founder of Fookes Software, whose company is developing a program that will allow archives to convert email messages to a preservation format provided me information concerning a new version of his software. In return, I beta tested the application and supplied recommendations that allowed the company to develop a low-cost Aid4Mail E-archivist package, specifically targeted for archival needs and with fairly liberal licensing terms. In the future, I may submit to a grant application, possibly with another major archival institution, to implement and test the use of this software's scripting features to convert email to an XML format.⁶
- After being contacted by the project lead, I began contributing sporadically to the "Archivematica" software project.⁷ Funded by UNESCO, the International Monetary Fund, and the City of Vancouver; and led by open source archival software consulting firm, Artefactual Systems, Archivematica will provide a turnkey solution for smaller archives or individuals that require digital

³ http://e-records.chrisprom.com/?page_id=508.

⁴ <http://www.archivesspace.org/>.

⁵ <http://planets-project.eu>, <http://www.openplanetsfoundation.org/>.

⁶ <http://www.aid4mail.com>.

⁷ <http://www.archivematica.org/>.

preservation assistance. The sabbatical/Fulbright award enabled a substantial pooling of effort with this major open-source development project, which in my opinion will serve a critical social function in allowing repositories and people of all means to reliably preserve records for future access and research.

- I have been in close contact with project principals in the Oxford University FutureArch project as well as the recently announced AIMS project.⁸ Funded by the Mellon foundation, both projects seek to develop software that, ideally, will interact seamlessly with the ArchiveSpace software (also funded by Mellon).
- I have been contributing to the development of an international standard for describing persons, families and corporate bodies, Encoded Archival Context. Contextual information recorded in this format may facilitate new methods discovering library, museum, and archival resources.⁹
- Finally, I participated in maintenance work for a tool to manage archival descriptive information, Archon,¹⁰ which will be replaced by Archives Space.

Dissemination: Presentations and Publications: During the sabbatical, I undertook several opportunities to share my findings in public presentations and to highlight the work of others. In particular, I organized the seminar “Practical Approaches to Electronic Records: The Academy and Beyond, for May 21, 2010.¹¹ Over 60 people attended the seminar and participated in a focused discussion. In addition, I gave the following presentations.

- “Tools for Implementing Digital Preservation Standards: A Preliminary Assessment,” Society of Archivists (UK) Data Standards Group, February 3rd, 2010, British Library, London.
- “Preserving the ‘Papers’ of 21st Century Science,” Niels Bohr Institute History of Science Series, March 6th, 2010, Copenhagen, Denmark.
- “Practical Approaches to Identifying, Preserving, and Providing Access to Electronic Records,” 8th European Conference on Digital Archiving, April 30th, 2010, Geneva, Switzerland.¹²
- “Building an Electronic Archives Programme on a Shoestring,” Practical Approaches to Electronic Records: the Academy and Beyond, May 21, 2010, University of Dundee, Scotland.

⁸ <http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/beam/projects/futurearch>, <http://futurearchives.blogspot.com/>, <http://www2.lib.virginia.edu/aims/>.

⁹ For example, an archival descriptive system implementing the features of EAC-CPF would allow people to browse seamlessly between digital objects, books, artwork, artifacts and archival records created by or related to Thomas Jefferson, as well as historical/contextual notes regarding Jeffersn, his relatives, associates, and colleagues, related families, and related corporate bodies such as associations to which he belonged. <http://eac.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/>, <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/~spw4s/SNAC/about.html>.

¹⁰ <http://www.archon.org>.

¹¹ More information about the seminar, which featured an internationally distinguished panel, is available at <http://www.dundee.ac.uk/cais/erm/>.

¹² During the conference, I was interviewed about my work, the interview may be found at <http://flyingreporters.ica.org/geneva2010/2010/04/30/interview-with-chris-prom-hes-evaluating-digital-archiving-software-for-you/>

Toward the end of my time in Scotland, I began publishing results from my research

- “Practical Tools for Managing Electronic Records, Midwest Archives Conference Newsletter, 37:3 (January 2010), 22-24.
- + § “Using Web Analytics to Improve Online Access to Archival Resources,” 40 page mss
- § “Re-imagining Academic Archives.” 15 page manuscript. <http://e-records.chrisprom.com/?p=1219>.
- + * “Friendly Society Discipline and Charity in Late-Victorian and Edwardian England. *The Historian*, forthcoming. 31 page manuscript.

All are sole-authored; * = peer reviewed and accepted; § = undergoing peer review; + = invited.

Value to University

Now that the sabbatical is over, I plan to establish a cutting-edge Digital Archival Program that will enhance the reputation of the University of Illinois. Properly implemented over the next few years, with adequate support from grants and from the University, the methods I have developed can be used to re-affirm, re-imagine, and transform the provision of archival services on campus. The Program I envisage will build on the University Archives’ existing strengths while better meeting the needs of campus faculty and students. Its easily adoptable methods will accrue benefits to the public, the state of Illinois, the nation and the international community.

This newly founded Digital Archival Program will reorient archival services toward identifying, preserving, and providing access to born digital records, (as well as digital surrogates of analog record), in a way that complements existing Archives and Library programs.¹³ Collaborating closely with Library and University faculty, staff, and students, I propose to implement a set of low/no cost tools and services that can routinely capture and preserve digital records, building confidence and trust in the entire archival program.

The program aims to develop context- and content-rich personal and corporate digital archives using existing and emerging open-source tools and services. While the program will not permanently ‘solve’ the puzzle of digital preservation, it will build capacity for immediate and effective local action.

¹³ Established in 1963, the University of Illinois Archives is a major center for research and learning. As of July 13, 2010, it includes 27,299 cubic feet of records, publications, and faculty/alumni papers relating to the University and to affiliated programs, such as the American Library Association Archives, the Advertising Council Archives, and the records of other professional societies. During FY 2010, the Archives’ research materials were directly or indirectly consulted 12,841 times in ‘analog’ form. In addition, 101,464 unique visitors used our website. These users viewed digital content (e.g. images and documents) 84,798 times and downloaded to user computers 11,481 times.

Based on the principles of “First, think of the user,” and “Second, do no harm,” the program will allow the Archives and Library to undertake a process of constructive evolution toward improved user access of richer archival documentation.

The program that I am proposing complements work undertaken by others within the Library and Campus, but may add significant value to the campus by capturing documentation that is unaddressed by other formal efforts. The core concepts are simple and adaptable to multiple circumstances:

1. Assess available resources (e.g. staff, technology, IT support, institutional commitment, budget.)
2. Write an electronic records program statement.
3. Engage faculty, staff, and student groups in a pilot digital archives program.
4. Implement policies and procedures concerning submission of content from creators/producers.
5. Advocate, fund, and realize a trustworthy digital repository.
6. Develop preservation and access action plans.
7. Tailor processing, preservation, and storage workflows.
8. Provide an appropriate access pathway to all records.
9. Launch and promote the full Digital Archives Program.

These steps will be implemented by adapting, applying, and testing the recommendations and templates that are made available on the *Practical E-Records Blog*.

I propose to quietly build the Digital Archives Program within the University of Illinois Archives and over the next six to nine month, working systematically with carefully selected records producers and Library Faculty. After the program has demonstrated capacity, it will be promoted more widely as a service. From the beginning, it will be promoted a set of talks and other efforts targeted toward university and public audiences.

Graduate assistant Angela Jordan will assist during the 2010-11 academic year, and I propose that the Archives and Library seek opportunities for supplemental funding for the future. To the greatest extent possible, the work detailed above and the research and service activities described below will be facilitated by external grants and donations.

Value of Fulbright Experience

The Fulbright grant was the critical element in the success of my sabbatical’s formal research and provides substantial benefits in terms of international cooperation and goodwill. Without support to work in the United Kingdom, I would have had very few opportunities to work closely with colleagues who have developed alternate approaches to digital preservation. The staff at the Centre for Archive and Information Studies, University of Dundee (in particular Pat Whatley, Caroline

Brown, Alan Bell, Michael Bolik and Jennifer Johnstone) did much to facilitate this work, not only with their gracious hospitality, but with their promotional efforts and hard work, especially when organizing and sponsoring a seminar that highlighted my work, as well as that of others in my area of research.

The research that the Fulbright funded will benefit society because it will provide for wider dispersion of techniques to preserve historical records and manuscript materials. International activities in this area have been facilitated, and I will continue to develop the contacts made (not only in the UK, but in other European Countries, such as Denmark, Switzerland, Germany, and the Netherlands.) In addition, I am currently scheduled to give workshops related to my research in Barbados, to a group of Caribbean archivists. This group is an ideal audience for my findings, since they seek to generalize abstract research to the daily practice of archival work in repositories. In addition, the research may provide a long term benefit to the dispersion of Fulbright research, as I have been asked to provide advice and assistance in the implementation of a repository of work from Fulbright Research related to Science and Technology, via the independent Fulbright Academy.¹⁴ In addition, other service and publication plans are listed below

Personally, the activities that the Fulbright enabled enriched my life, as well as that of my wife Linda and our three children, immeasurably. All of us return to the United States with a deeper appreciation for our own culture as well as that of the United Kingdom. For example, the experience of raising a family overseas has led us to see the American educational and health systems in a much more nuanced light. Over time, I will be sharing thoughts related to our personal experiences in a range of formal and informal ways.

Future Research and Service Plans

Over the upcoming year, I plan to refine and distribute results generated during the sabbatical and under the auspices of the new Digital Archives Program. I will use four main methods:

- *Augmenting and expanding the Practical E-records Blog.* Although my posting frequency may decrease, I plan to continue the blog. Comments and criticisms in regard to posts inevitably bring important information to light and build a user community around low-cost methods to implement digital archives programs. Thoughts recorded in ad-hoc fashion can later be distilled into coherent and publishable work.
- *Speaking at public events and professional conferences:* I plan to develop an active program of university and public speaking; details will be worked out over the upcoming month. Professionally, I am scheduled to present at the RLG-OCLC Partnership Forum at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, September 20–21, 2010 and the ARMA Annual Conference in San

¹⁴ <http://www.fulbrightacademy.org/>

Francisco, November 7-10, 2010. In addition, I am actively working to schedule appropriate sessions on campus, as well as at other professional conferences, such as the 6th Annual Digital Curation Conference in Chicago, Illinois, Dec 6-8, 2010 or a conference concerning literary archives and independent publishers, being organized for next summer and to be held at the University of Reading, England.

- *Publishing research findings in peer-reviewed journals.* At this time, I anticipate three pieces: one focusing on the use of Encoded Archival Context in descriptive systems for hybrid (i.e. print and electronic) records; a multipart study proposing and evaluating a formal evaluation methodology for open source software in the libraries, archives and museums sector; and a detailed analysis of the utility of open source software for archival use. These articles will be submitted to major archival and digital library journals such as *Archival Issues*, *American Archivist*, and *D-Lib Magazine*. In addition, I am toying with the idea of publishing a book, tentatively titled "Understanding Information and Recordkeeping Technologies." The book would describe and explain the technical concepts, frameworks, and software than an archivist needs to master in order to implement archival and digital library theories and practices in a working environment. It would complement existing resources, which focus more heavily on archival theory and project management skills.
- *Teaching courses and workshops:* In order to generalize the results of my research to the current and next generation of archivists and digital curators, I will develop a standard workshop that can be tailored to a specific local context. Currently, I am scheduled to offer a short workshop at the National Archives Conference for Fraternities and Sororities, Urbana, July 17, 2010 and have been asked to teach a multi-day workshop at the West Indies Federation Archives/University of the West Indies, in Barbados to an audience of archivists from throughout the Caribbean. In addition, I will be teaching the online module "Electronic Records Management" through the Centre for Archive and Information Studies, University of Dundee, beginning in September 2010 and may consider teaching a similar course through the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at a future point. (In general, I would like to increase the amount of collaboration I do with GSLIS.)