

PERSONAL FACULTY WEB SITES: EXPLORING ARCHIVAL ISSUES AND THE DIGITAL CONVERGENCE

BY NANCY DEROMEDI

ABSTRACT: “Wired Faculty: Research to Assess the Archival Value of Faculty Web-sites to Document Their Functions and Activities at the University of Michigan” was a one-year study that involved looking at 30 personal faculty Web sites at the UM. The purpose of the study was to discover how faculty uses the World Wide Web for teaching and research and to ask whether faculty Web sites have value as an archival documentation form. And if so, what are the challenges of this particular digital form for archival institutions.

Introduction

This paper looks at the use of on-line technologies, specifically personal Web sites created by university faculty members at one major research university, the University of Michigan (UM).¹ The purpose of this paper is to discuss how faculty are using personal Web sites² and to highlight some of the challenges and opportunities Web sites pose as an archival documentation form. The work that was the foundation for this paper was the result of an archival research fellowship project, “Wired Faculty,” sponsored by the National Historic Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC).³

The University Archives Program at the University of Michigan

At about the time universities were being shaped as modern institutions of higher education, the first president of the University of Michigan noted, “where you collect the treasures of learning and learned men, you cannot fail of a University.”⁴ It is the mission of the Bentley Historical Library (Bentley Library) to collect these “treasures of learning and learned men.” The Bentley Library, established in 1935, has three divisions: the Michigan Historical Collections (MHC), the University Archives and Records Program (UARP), and Access and References Services.⁵ The University

Archives and Records Program, mandated by the board of regents, serves as the official archives for the University of Michigan. UARP selects, describes, and makes available records created by university administrative offices, 19 schools and colleges that compose the university, numerous associated centers and institutes, special committees, and student and faculty organizations. UARP is also charged with collecting personal papers of university faculty. The main objective of UARP is to document the careers of faculty members who have “been valued teachers; have defined significant ideas; have undertaken important research and have carried out exemplary service to the university or larger community.”⁶

At the University of Michigan, faculty papers are considered personal and are not official university records. Policy on faculty works at the university states that “consistent with academic freedom and tradition, all faculty (including full-time, part-time, adjunct and emeritus faculty) own and control instructional materials and scholarly works created at their own initiatives with usual University resources.”⁷ Therefore, faculty who do transfer their records to the archives have the choice to either sign their copyrights over to the board of regents or retain copyright.

As a part of this project, an analysis of the library’s collections showed that the Bentley Library holds more than four hundred individual manuscript collections from University of Michigan faculty. This analysis showed which academic disciplines were better represented than others, the average size of the collections, and the overall representation of faculty by gender. The analysis also showed that most faculty “papers” were, in fact, paper. In an environment that has become increasingly digital since the early 1990s, this article looks beyond the traditional paper formats that have generally formed the basis for faculty collections.

Personal Faculty Web Sites and the Digital Convergence

Institutions of higher education are already showing signs of a digital future. Possibly, the future is here. Walking through the campus “diag,”⁸ students and faculty alike are visibly outfitted with digital tools—cell phones, laptops, iPods. Digital tools are being used in “traditional” settings, such as the classroom, the library, and other common areas, and they are changing the nature of these traditional settings. For example, students now attend lectures with their laptops to take notes—or students may not attend the lecture, opting instead to download the podcast version (“podcasting” is the publication of multimedia files on-line). This paper considers the challenge of the digital convergence as it relates to appraising and collecting faculty papers.

What is the challenge of the digital convergence when thinking of faculty Web sites? The challenges seem to be twofold. The first part is knowing what pieces of the archivist’s traditional practice can be applied to Web sites as a documentation form. The second part, one can argue, is working with the challenges presented by newer documentation forms. A key question that the study of faculty Web sites included was whether traditional appraisal values apply to personal faculty Web sites. Drawing on Theodore Schellenberg’s taxonomy of primary and secondary values, Gerald Ham describes the primary values as those records essential to the “ongoing, day-to-day

administrative affairs of the creator, to document legal obligations, and/or to establish fiscal responsibility and accountability.”⁹ Typically, primary values are temporary in nature. The records are created to serve a function, and once the function is complete there is a defined time period in which the record needs to be kept. Records with secondary values are those that have numerous uses beyond their original primary administrative, legal, or fiscal use. The secondary value is the “value of the information as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations and other activities of the person or corporate body that produced the record.”¹⁰ It is this secondary value that is inherent in the documentation UARP has traditionally collected from faculty to ensure institutional accountability and memory. Traditional record types with secondary value include correspondence, lecture notes, course materials, speeches, research-related records, bibliographies, curricula vitae, photographs, films, and audio- and videocassettes. To see how traditional record types converge with faculty Web sites, the first step in the analysis was to look at how a small subset of faculty use their personal Web sites.

Personal Faculty Web Sites at the University of Michigan

The “Wired Faculty” study showed that at the University of Michigan faculty create and use personal Web sites to support two main activities: to present and promote their academic identity and achievements, and to convey knowledge through the distribution of teaching and research materials. Faculty present their academic identity by posting biographical materials on their personal Web site. As Catherine O’Sullivan also found in “Diaries, On-line Diaries, and the Future Loss to Archives; or, Blogs and the Blogging Bloggers Who Blog Them,” the “About Me” section is a standard component.¹¹ “About Me” most often includes a photograph of the faculty member, contact information and a curriculum vitae (c.v.). What makes the on-line c.v. different from a printed one is that the on-line document is expandable. If the faculty member decides the document needs updating, the c.v. need not remain static on the Web. The “Wired Faculty” analysis of Web sites found that faculty provide hypertext links to their dissertations, graduate school mentors, press releases announcing awards they have received, and, more often than not, the on-line bookseller, like Amazon.com, that sells their academic publications. In a sense, the Internet promotes the faculty’s expertise by placing the “About Me” information front, center, and open to the public. On the Web, faculty knowledge is shared both locally and globally.

Faculty as Public Intellectual, Faculty as Bloggers

The globalization of faculty knowledge is evidenced in what a recent university reporter described as the “public intellectual.”¹² This new status was recently bestowed upon a University of Michigan faculty member, Juan Cole, based solely on his personal blog.¹³ Professor Cole, a specialist in Middle Eastern and South Asian history, uses his blog to publish “informed” commentary based on his academic knowledge of events in

Iraq. An average of twenty thousand viewers access the blog each day. The importance of Cole's blog can be measured by its high number of viewers, and also by Cole's invitation to appear before the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in the spring of 2006, in order to present his views on the Iraq war. When Professor Cole was asked why the committee invited him to speak, he stated that "it grew out of my increasing role as a public intellectual and commentator on Iraq affairs, and my Web log."¹⁴ How the academic institution views the blog will, in part, inform its appraisal value. This issue is currently being debated in academic circles—are blogs a new form of community service? Does blogging reflect a new form of scholarly communication? Does it further academic discourse?¹⁵

The University of Michigan provided evidence of the importance of faculty blogs as channels for intellectual discourse. The University Library, in collaboration with the Bentley Library, launched a blogging service in February 2006.¹⁶ The service, called mBlog, is open to current students, faculty, and staff.¹⁷ The system is designed to include the option for archiving the blog along with the initial "use agreement" statement. That is, the user can opt in to have his or her blog appraised by UARP staff once it is considered inactive. In a recent survey of users of the system, the reaction to the option of having blog content archived at the Bentley Library was very positive. Comments from users (faculty and students) included: "I think it is awesome. Though later the content will/should be filtered it provides a very interesting institutional time capsule," "I hugely appreciate the Bentley's participation. I am planning to create a blog for my UM work, and plan to select the Bentley archiving option for that," and "excellent to preserve information in a growing online world."¹⁸ Being part of the system design and policy formation better affords UARP the opportunity to select and preserve this new digital content.

Digital Convergence: Personal Web Sites as a Portal for Other Systems

Helen Samuels states in *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* that to understand the teaching process requires "a knowledge of who teaches, what is taught, and how it is taught."¹⁹ The "Wired Faculty" study found that personal faculty Web sites do contain evidence of what is taught and how it is taught. These core functions are represented in the inclusion of course syllabi, lecture notes, and course home pages.

Course syllabi are typically related to a faculty Web site in one of three ways. The syllabi can be stored within the faculty member's personal Web space (note that personal Web space refers to the standard computing package allotted to all current faculty, students, and staff) and are most often linked as a Microsoft Word (.doc) or PDF (.pdf) document. Second, syllabi can be part of a "course home page." A course home page is usually a Web site designed for one specific course. The course Web site is also most often located within the faculty member's personal Web space and is linked from the faculty member's home page. The course home page typically contains all the information students used to receive in paper announcements and in a printed syllabus. For example, the course home page will include contact information, course

policies, a reading list, and the course assignments and due dates. Finally, syllabi can be found linked from the faculty member's personal Web site but stored in a course management system that is external to the personal Web space. Many universities now have course management systems (CMS). These systems initially provided an integrated E-mail, announcement, and resources interface for faculty. Over the past few years, the systems have grown to include a grading interface and threaded discussion and chat rooms.²⁰ Thus, teaching materials are dispersed across systems and across formats. The creation and dissemination of teaching materials can now be accomplished through the personal faculty Web site, in the course management system, and in paper-based systems.

At the University of Michigan, no university policy mandates or suggests the use of any of the systems. Faculty are encouraged to be entrepreneurs and they are responding. Professors are exploring the new features offered in the various on-line systems, including personal Web sites, course management systems, and the mBlog service. The challenges here are clear. To obtain a complete record of a faculty member's teaching activities, the archivist may need to obtain documentation from several discrete systems. The question will be whether these systems are designed to capture materials at a specific point in time. A second challenge will be relating material from the separate systems to other materials created by the faculty member that have been appraised for retention.

In addition to providing evidence of teaching, personal faculty Web sites also contain evidence of a second vital university function: conducting research. Helen Samuels writes that "documenting research poses several documentation problems," including the need to document the process (not just the administration and final products), the dispersal of the record, the multiformat nature of the documentation, and the intangible aspects of the research process.²¹ The "Wired Faculty" study found that personal faculty Web sites can serve as a gateway to a faculty member's associated research project or lab Web sites. That is, faculty are creating or contribute to work that is documented on separate but related Web sites. As with the course home page, faculty are creating Web sites beyond their personal Web site for research and laboratory projects. These sites are linked to the faculty member's personal Web site, but might be stored in server locations external to the faculty member's space in the University of Michigan network.²²

The faculty research Web sites tell us another part of the research story through descriptions of research projects, timelines, and photographs of graduate assistants and facilities. The Web sites also provide reference links to project reports and conference presentations. These associated research sites are unique in that, as a part of the faculty Web site, they provide a snapshot of research in process. This study found that research Web sites hold the potential to fill a gap Helen Samuels found in documenting the research process. Samuels found that the dispersal of research-related documentation has been one of the problems in documenting research. The research or project Web site provides in some sense a central portal for specific research projects. The dispersal of the information, however, may still pose an issue depending on whether the documents are stored on one faculty member's server space or dispersed among project members.

Revising the Documentation Universe

Faculty Web sites are complex because the Web sites themselves are a documentation form that integrates, embeds, and distributes information. Web sites integrate information from other systems (e.g., blogs, “Wikis”—Wikipedia entries—and databases). Objects can be embedded in a Web site (e.g., objects can range from a Word document [.doc] to an executable, or program, file [.exe]). Lastly, the very nature of Web sites distributes information through hypertext links. The information can reside within the directory structure of the root Web site, or it can be linked to a domain internal to the university (e.g., to academic program information located on the Web site of a school or college in which the faculty member teaches) or external to the university (e.g., to the site of a university faculty member outside of the UM). There are no limits to the number of links used within a Web site.

Traditional appraisal values can apply to newer digital forms like personal Web sites; however, the complexity of the Web site needs to be considered when appraising for long-term use and preservation. This aspect of the appraisal process extends beyond the evidence found in the content of the record to judgments on determining how the record is structured, the extent of the record, privacy or confidentiality concerns, ownership, how and when to capture a dynamic virtual object as a record, the frequency with which the Web site should be fixed as a record, and how to best manage the record over time to ensure long-term preservation and use. This aspect of the appraisal process will address whether applications or scripting languages that provide a component of the look and feel of a Web site are essential to the record. It will also, for example, address the depth and breadth of the Web site that should be part of the capture, or “snapshot,” and whether the absence of external links and associated content will decrease the value of the Web site itself.

Applying Traditional Archival Processes to Newer Digital Forms

While traditional appraisal values can apply to newer digital forms, one can argue that it is our traditional professional practice that does not correspond as neatly to the acquisition of personal faculty Web sites. The relationship between the faculty Web site and related systems (course management and blogging systems) highlight this fact. A collection policy that specifically addresses new digital formats and other systems is key to establishing a proactive program for faculty papers in this complex technological environment.

In North America, the practice of soliciting and collecting faculty papers is a “low priority” for many university archival programs.²³ But in *The Management of College and University Archives*, William Maher advises archivists to be aggressive in collecting faculty papers within their institution. Likewise, a shift toward this more proactive approach is seen in a paper presented by Christine Weideman and Thomas Hyry, “American Appraisal Theories and Practice—A View from a Private Archives.”²⁴

A proactive approach is necessary in this new digital environment. Challenges abound on how to best manage an approach to collecting faculty “papers”—especially

with faculty who are exploring new technologies like blogs, Web sites, and podcasts to support their core functions. How does the University Archives guide close to three thousand individual record creators in diverse academic fields on best practices? Can guidance be generalized enough to form a high-level best practice, or would a more proactive approach include selecting and consulting only a small subset of faculty on their various intellectual outputs across formats and systems? Is there an institutional repository in place that works as an archival digital repository or should the archives program build its own system? These issues need to be explored and researched.

Conclusion

The digital convergence in the faculty documentary record is evidenced by the use of Web sites, podcasts, blogs, and Wikis. It is clear that faculty are creating documentation that is not bound to a single format or to a single system. Faculty have incorporated the World Wide Web and other digital systems into their core teaching activities. An excellent example of such a Web site is one completed by a University of Michigan postdoctoral fellow, Kent Kleinman, as part of the University's Public Good Council fellowship program in 2002/2003.²⁵ However, while faculty have embraced new technologies, many questions remain concerning the most effective strategy for the collection, management, and preservation of complex digital objects like personal faculty Web sites.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Nancy Deromedi is an associate archivist at the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, where she began her career in archives working on the personal digital collection of former university president James J. Duderstadt. She consults with university offices and individuals on digital records and also takes an active role in university committees charged with implementing a campuswide institutional repository and blogging service.

She would like to thank Amy Cooper Cary for her assistance in editing this paper, and her Bentley Library colleagues, Nancy Bartlett and Brian Williams, for their support on this project.

Selected Sources and Sites

1. Juan Cole, *Informed Comment*, blog, <http://www.juancole.com>.
2. Frances Fournier, "'For They Would Gladly Learn and Gladly Teach'—University Faculty and Their Papers: A Challenge for Archivists," *Archivaria* 34 (1992): 58–74.
3. Robert Haug, "An Informed Commentator," *Michigan Today* 36:2 (summer 2004).
4. Kent Kleinman, *The William Muschenheim Digital Archive and Timeline*, <http://www.umich.edu/~bhl/bhl/exhibits/musch/>.
5. William Maher, *The Management of College and University Archives* (Metuchen, NJ: Society of American Archivists and Scarecrow Press, 1992).
6. Catherine O'Sullivan, "Diaries, On-line Diaries, and the Future Loss to Archives; or, Blogs and the Blogging Bloggers Who Blog Them," *American Archivist* 68:1 (2005): 53–73.
7. Panel on the Impact of Information Technology on the Future of the Research University, *Preparing for the Revolution: Information Technology and the Future of the Research University* (National Academies Press, 2002).
8. Howard Peckham, *The Making of the University of Michigan, 1817–1967* (University of Michigan Press, 1967), and *The Making of the University of Michigan, 1817–1992*, 175th anniversary edition, ed. Nicholas and Margaret Steneck (University of Michigan Bentley Library, 1992).
9. Helen Samuels, *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (Metuchen, NJ: Society of American Archivists and Scarecrow Press, 1992).
10. Wilfred Shaw, *A Short History of the University of Michigan* (Ann Arbor: G. Wahr, 1934).
11. University of Michigan, Office of Budget and Planning, Electronic Fact Pages, <http://www.umich.edu/~oapainfo/contents.html#SectionI>.
12. University of Michigan, University Archives and Records Program, Web site, <http://www.umich.edu/~bhl/uarphome.htm>.
13. Christine Weideman and Thomas Hyry, "American Appraisal Theories and Practice—A View from a Private Archives," presentation, International Congress on Archives, Vienna, Austria, August 23, 2004, http://www.wien2004.ica.org/imagesUpload/pres_274_Weideman_Hyry_BEN01.pdf.

NOTES

1. The University of Michigan, founded in 1817, comprises three campuses. Ann Arbor is the main campus and is the focus of this paper. The Ann Arbor campus has more than three hundred major buildings. The University manages a budget of more than three billion dollars and receives more than seven hundred million dollars in research funding. Annual enrollment is more than thirty-eight thousand undergraduate and graduate students and total instructional faculty is near three thousand. Further information about the university can be found within the University of Michigan, Common Data Set, http://sitemaker.umich.edu/obpinfo/files/umaa_cds2005.pdf.
2. Web space at the university is organized by the Andrew File System (AFS). The AFS is based on a hierarchy of one root administrative cell assigned to the University of Michigan and five directories within the root cell. The five directories are class, group, system, UM, and user. It is within the user directory that faculty, staff, and students have an allocated amount of space for their personal use. In this paper, "personal Web sites" and "personal Web space" refer to this type of Web site. Currently, faculty, staff, and students have as part of the standard computing package one gigabyte of space.
3. The National Historic Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) archival fellowship was awarded in 2002/2003. The title of the study was "Wired Faculty: Research to Assess the Archival Value of Faculty Websites to Document their Functions and Activities at the University of Michigan." Further information on the program can be found at <http://www.masshist.org/fellowships/fellows.cfm?fellowship=nhrpc>.
4. Henry Phillip Tappan, 1858, quoted in Henry Howard Peckham, *The Making of the University of Michigan, 1817-1967*, (University of Michigan Press, 1967): frontispiece.
5. For further information on the Bentley Historical Library and its activities, see <http://www.umich.edu/~bhl>.
6. For this and further information on faculty papers at the Bentley Historical Library, see University Archives and Records Program, "Faculty Papers," July 2006, <http://www.umich.edu/~bhl/bhl/uarphome/facpapers.htm>.
7. Office of the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, University of Michigan, "Ownership of Copyrighted Works Created at or in Affiliation with the University of Michigan," June 6, 2002, approved by the regents November 14, 2002, <http://www.copyright.umich.edu/official-policy.html> (22 April 2006).
8. The UM diag is a large grassy area on central campus bounded by State and East University streets.
9. Gerald Ham, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts* (Society of American Archivists, 1993): 8.
10. Ibid.
11. Catherine O'Sullivan, "Diaries, On-line Diaries, and the Future Loss to Archives; or, Blogs and the Blogging Bloggers Who Blog Them," *American Archivist* 68:1 (2005): 53-73.
12. Robert Haug, "An Informed Commentator," *Michigan Today*, 36:2 (summer 2004): 2.
13. Juan Cole's blog is available at <http://www.juancole.com>.
14. Haug, "An Informed Commentator," 2.
15. Jeffrey Young, "Profs with Blogs," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 4, 2003.
16. Further information about the system can be found in "Diaries of the 21st Century: U-M Offers Free Blogs for Students/Employees," *University Record*, February 9, 2006, <http://www.umich.edu/news/index.html?Releases/2006/Feb06/r020906a>.
17. The system was officially turned on February 16, 2006, and currently has approximately two thousand users. The interface to the system can be viewed at <http://mblog.lib.umich.edu/>. The Bentley Historical Library's statement on collecting blogs can be found at <http://mblog.lib.umich.edu/>.
18. University of Michigan mBlog advisory team, unpublished data. The survey netted a response by 277 users. The purpose of the survey was to gather information about the system for the next phase of development. The quotes used in this paper are a sample from the answers to the on-line survey.
19. Helen Samuels, *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (Metuchen, NJ: Society of American Archivists and Scarecrow Press, 1992): 58.
20. The University of Michigan's system is referred to as CTools. See <https://ctools.umich.edu/portal/site!/gateway/page/1091327577209-1420515>.
21. Samuels, *Varsity Letters*, 110.

22. Other locations for this type of information include departmental servers and another Web-based publishing system called Sitemaker. As with the CTools system, Sitemaker is supported across the university.
23. Frances Fournier, "'For They Would Gladly Learn and Gladly Teach'—University Faculty and Their Papers: A Challenge for Archivists," *Archivaria* 34 (1992): 71.
24. William Maher, *The Management of College and University Archives* (Metuchen, NJ: Society of American Archivists and Scarecrow Press, 1992). Christine Weideman and Thomas Hyry, "American Appraisal Theories and Practice—A View from a Private Archives," presented at the International Congress on Archives, Vienna, Austria, August 23, 2004, http://www.wien2004.ica.org/imagesUpload/pres_274_Weideman_Hyry_BEN01.pdf.
25. This Web-based teaching tool using primary sources was completed as part of a fellowship program under the direction of the Public Goods Council at the University of Michigan. Kent Kleinman designed the Web site during his fellowship at the university during the 2002/2003 academic year. The Web site is accessible at <http://www.umich.edu/~bhl/bhl/exhibits/musch/>.