

Williams College Standards, Policies, and Procedures for Digital Collections

William T. Blackerby

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1 Introduction

According to their website,

The digital collection services of the Williams College Special Collections seeks to collect, manage, preserve and disseminate digital objects that support the educational mission of the College, are in need of preservation, are part of the history of the College, and are rare and unique. (“Digital Collections”, n.d., para. 1)

In this first part of this paper I will describe and analyze the Williams College Standards, Policies and Procedures for Digital Collections the using the framework presented in Xie and Matusiak’s *Discover Digital Libraries: Theory and Practice* (Xie & Matusiak, 2016). As part of this analysis and description, I will investigate the extent to which the Williams College digital library collection development policies take project costs and project funding into account.

In the second part of this paper, I will enumerate and describe digital services offered by Williams College Special Collections.

2 Digital Collection Development Policy Analysis

Xie and Matusiak present the California Digital Library (CDL) collection development framework as an example of a digital library collection development policy (Xie & Matusiak, 2016, p. 39).

The California Digital Library (CDL) is a “co-library” of the University of California whose primary collection responsibility is to develop electronic content and make it available to all faculty and students. Some of the electronic content will be licensed and acquired from commercial sources, and some will be produced by digitizing University collections. The same three considerations used to develop library collections in the ten UC campus libraries guide collection development for the CDL:

- The user base
- The programs that are to be supported
- The resources available to support those users and programs (“Collection Development Framework”, n.d., para. 1)

Below, I present an analysis of Williams College Standards, Policies, and Procedures for Digital Collections using the CDL framework.

2.1 User Base

Given that the Williams College Special Collections, of which the Digital Collections are a part, are housed at an academic institution, it is safe to assume that the primary user base are the faculty and students of Williams College. This is not explicitly stated within the Collection Development policies, but can be inferred from other Special Collections policies. For example, the Access and Use Policies state that items “in Special Collections are acquired and preserved in order to support research in all areas of the Williams curriculum” (“Access and Use Policies”, n.d., para. 1). Additionally, class visits to Williams College Special Collections are available for “facilitating student engagement with primary sources and object-based learning” (“Class Visits”, n.d., para. 1). Special Collections staff is also “happy to help select material and work with faculty to structure a class” (“Class Visits”, n.d., para. 2). Librarians and archivists are also available for one-on-one appointments to assist with research projects (“Research Appointments”, n.d., para. 1).

Though it is clear that the primary user base of the Williams College Special Collections is the College’s faculty and students, the Access and Use Policies clearly state that “[y]ou do not need to be affiliated with Williams in order to use our collections” (“Access and Use Policies”, n.d., para. 1).

2.2 Supported Programs

There is no explicit enumeration of programs supported by the Williams College digital collection services in the policy documents, but they do state that “[t]he development of digital collections is in keeping with Special Collections’ intention to describe, arrange, digitize, and disseminate our collections and to provide ‘the retention, preservation, and research use of its collections’” (“Digital Collections”, n.d., para. 2). More specifically, “[t]he focus of the Williams College’s [sic] Digital Collections is unique or rare content from collections owned by Special Collections or the College at large” (“Digital Collections”, n.d., Scope). In other words, the programs supported by the Williams College digital collection services are the programs of Williams College Special Collections more broadly.

2.3 Resources Available

The Digital Collections policy document states that

Digital Collections are composed of digital objects, whether born-digital or digitized, regardless of item type. Text, audio, still and moving images, datasets, etc. are all included. Collecting activities focus on content that can be made accessible to a wide audience (“Digital Collections”, n.d., para. 3).

Within the scope of Williams College Digital Collections are “other types of open access scholarly materials (for example, data sets, data visualizations, creative works, working papers, preprints, publications, etc.)” (“Digital Collections”, n.d., Scope). “Unique and rare content” from Special Collections may be made available “through digitization of selected analog materials or through the transfer of born-digital content” (“Digital Collections”, n.d., para. 3).

Furthermore,

Special Collections is highly supportive of collections that:

1. Represent the cultural, geographic, economic, and political diversity of Williams College.
2. Constitute objects for which access would be improved by inclusion in Special Collections: linking between items, innovative ways to comprehend the material,

etc.

3. May be difficult to access physically.
4. Comprise materials that are in need of preservation.
5. Complement existing digital content.
6. Have materials that are dispersed. (“Digital Collections”, n.d., Scope)

Digitization of “non-unique images for teaching” falls outside the scope of the Digital Collections policy document (“Digital Collections”, n.d., Scope).

2.4 Project Costs and Funding

2.4.1 Capacity Constraint

Weber et al. define collection management as “[a]ll of the activities that are necessary to ensure that collection material is described, discoverable, and available for use,” including “accessioning and processing, cataloging, conservation, and digitization,” the latter of which is of particular interest in this paper (Weber et al., 2021, p. 2). Weber et al. also move beyond budgetary constraints on collecting and by introducing the capacity constraint model into collection development. They define capacity constraint broadly as “[f]actors that limit production, performance, or output” and specifically in the context of collection development they say that “a capacity constraint impacts an institution’s ability to accomplish collection management activities” (Weber et al., 2021, p. 3).

2.4.2 Collaborative Decision Making

Weber et al. state that “[i]nformed decision-making around collections requires that everyone involved in the lifecycle of collection stewardship has a shared understanding of when and how various decisions are made, and by whom” (Weber et al., 2021, p. 13). Furthermore, “[e]nsuring that information is exchanged when and as needed is typically easier said than done, especially in large organizations and over extended periods of time” (Weber et al., 2021, p. 13).

2.4.3 Capacity Constraint and Collaborative Decision Making at Williams College Special Collections

Though there is no comprehensive discussion of project costs and funding, the digital collection development policy document does note that some digitization activities fall into the category of “[s]pecially-funded digitization projects made possible through grants or gifts” and “may involve additional short-term staff and will likely be subject to specific deadlines and special project parameters” (“Digital Collections”, n.d., Digitization). This can be interpreted as an increase in capacity in the short term for specific projects. There is also an endowed fund, the John T. Gibson ’35 Williamsiana Fund, for the support of Special Collections (“Giving to the College Archives”, n.d.).

The Digital Collections services of Special collections does “not digitize or accept digitized versions of inactive analog records of enduring value that have not been officially transferred to the Special Collections, though Special Collections reserves the right to make exceptions if warranted” (“Digital Collections”, n.d., Scope). This can be read as a capacity-conserving decision. In other words, digitization is not an endlessly available service, and certain channels must be followed by those who want to engaged the service.

There is also no comprehensive discussion of collaborative decision making in the reviewed policy documents. Perhaps this is because Williams College Library and Special Collections are a small organization given that Williams is a liberal arts college and not a large research university. Nevertheless, the Digital Collections policy document does note that decisions regarding the removal of materials “will be made in conjunction with the Digital Resources Archivist/Records Manager, Archivist, Director of Libraries, and others as appropriate and will be handled on a case by case basis” (“Digital Collections”, n.d., Maintenance and removal). This is in line with Weber et al.’s discussion of collaborative decision making.

3 Digital Library Services Description

3.1 Legal/Copyright Services

Williams College Library and Special Collections do not provide any legal or copyright services, per se, but they do invite patrons to “use materials in the public domain and to make fair use of

copyrighted materials as defined by copyright law” (“Access and Use Policies”, n.d., Copyright and permissions). Items “in the public domain can be added to a collection without obtaining permission from anyone” (Xie & Matusiak, 2016, p. 44). Fair use “is a powerful tool for using [copyrighted] works without obtaining permission” (Xie & Matusiak, 2016, p. 47).

Smith (2012) outlines approaches libraries can take to protect themselves from potential litigation regarding copyright violations (Smith, 2012). Williams College Special Collections emphasizes the users’ responsibility for “determining whether [their] use is fair and for responding to any claims that may arise from [their] use” (“Access and Use Policies”, n.d., Copyright and permissions). Regarding digital collections, specifically, Special Collections “may need to restrict access to the College’s records in order to adhere to copyright laws or restriction periods” (“Digital Collections”, n.d., para. 3). Special Collections encourages items and collections that “[h]ave copyright clearance if the copyright is not held by the submitter/s or Williams College” (“Digital Collections”, n.d., Scope). See the section on “Maintenance and Removal” below for more information on how Williams College Special Collections handles copyright infringement and disputes.

3.2 Personal Archiving

Williams College Special Collections “encourage[s] potential contributors interested in digitizing their own content in preparation to be added to Special Collections, to coordinate with the Digital Resources Archivist/Records Manager in advance to establish the correct digitization methods” (“Digital Collections”, n.d., Personal archiving).

3.3 Associated Analog Material

Williams College Special Collections requires that “inactive records of enduring value...be transferred to Special Collections before that content can be added to the digital collections” (“Digital Collections”, n.d., Associated analog material). This allows “staff to have continued access to analog original materials in case re-digitization is ever necessary” (“Digital Collections”, n.d., Associated analog material).

3.4 Digitization Services

“Digitization is the process of creating digital representations of information resources recorded on analog carriers” (Xie & Matusiak, 2016, p. 59). The Williams College Digital Collections policy document identifies three categories digitization work is likely to fall into.

- Ongoing digitization of whole (or large portions of) collections. This work is not subject to specific deadlines.
- Project-specific digitization work, typically tied to grant-funding or gifts.
- Scan on Demand, or digitization that is based on user request of rare or unique materials.

(“Digital Collections”, n.d., Digitization)

3.5 Metadata Services

Williams College Special Collections collects and produces metadata for collections and items in those collections. Metadata Object Description Schema (MODS) is the standard schema used, but other schemata “may be employed to support different projects/collections” (“Digital Collections”, n.d., Organization and metadata).

Before collections are digitized by Williams College Special Collections, they must be organized and described, but “item-level metadata may be created as part of the development of a digital collection” (“Digital Collections”, n.d., Organization and metadata).

3.6 Digital Preservation Services

Williams College Special Collections is the designated repository for rare books, records of Williams College, select professional work of faculty and alumni, and other collections in support of the curriculum. As such, Special Collections “assumes primary responsibility for long term preservation of its digital holdings” (“Digital Collections”, n.d., Preservation).

3.7 Maintenance and Removal

Special Collections aims to develop “digital collections that are of high quality, useful and usable, and cohesive” (“Digital Collections”, n.d., Maintenance and removal). Doing so may necessitate removal

of individual objects or entire collections “for reasons of violation of copyright or copyright dispute, inaccurate data or facts, collection weeding, storage, or the material is no longer in support of the Williams scholarly community” (“Digital Collections”, n.d., Maintenance and removal). In some cases, removal will be noted in metadata in order to preserve historical record (“Digital Collections”, n.d., Maintenance and removal).

3.8 “Collections as Data”

Browsing the Williams College Library and Special Collections web pages, I was not able to find any mention or description of text data mining services or AI/ML services. When used with the website’s search tool, the search terms “text data mining” and “AI/ML” did not return any results on the College’s library or special collections web pages. Instead, results pointed to course offerings within the College’s computer science department. Nevertheless, Special Collections does provide a web archiving service, in effect building a collection that could be mined as data, but does not appear to have been mined yet, at least under the auspices of Williams College Special Collections (“Web Archiving”, n.d.).

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