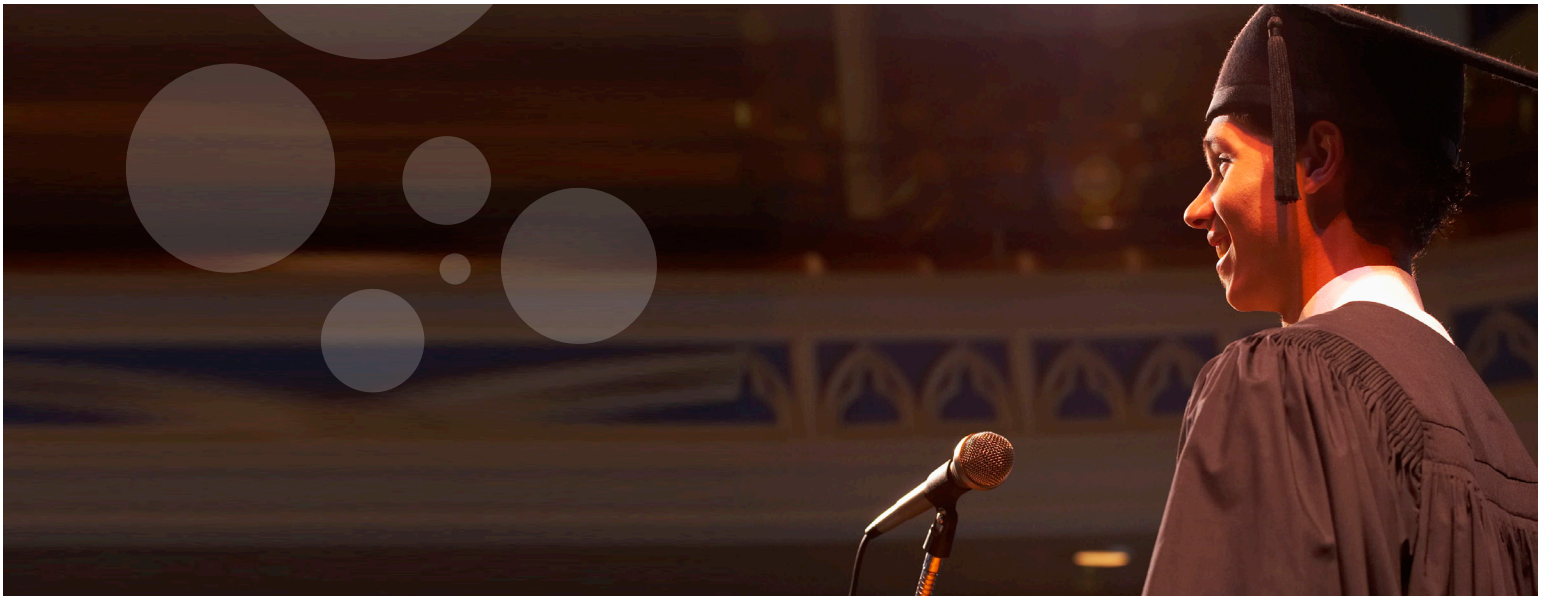
CASE STUDY: VIDEO PRESERVATION AND DISCOVERY SERVICE

Dartmouth College

ProQuest®



One of the first institutions to use ProQuest Video Preservation and Discovery Service (VPDS) was Dartmouth College. Its holdings comprise several thousand video tapes of events, speakers, and lectures that depict life on campus at Dartmouth. Examples include speeches given by past presidents before embarking on their political life; Kurt Vonnegut giving a lecture at the college; Sun Ra leading a jazz master class; and Al Gore delivering a talk as part of a business school lecture in the late 1980s.

Although these instances occurred at Dartmouth, their historical importance means they are of high interest to students and scholars of politics, literature, history, philosophy, and more around the world. However, the physical media on which they are recorded is fast becoming obsolete.

Regarding its participation in VPDS, David Seaman, Associate Librarian for Information Management at Dartmouth, said, "We were really pleased to work with ProQuest on this project. We have thousands of videotapes that chronicle several decades of Dartmouth history. The physical media is at end-of-life and we wanted to address this problem cost-effectively and at scale. ProQuest offered an all-inclusive service, one whose design we could participate in. We wanted to learn more about it and address the needs that were not being met by other services that we use for our video content, for example discoverability."

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The institution currently uses a number of solutions to make digital content accessible. Web splash pages are created for historic films which get picked up by Google, and other collections are delivered via Dartmouth's YouTube channel. Discoverability of this content is largely through the library catalog which feeds OCLC WorldCat and the institution's discovery platform, ProQuest's Summon® Service. While the videos get good views, there is a lack of tools to enable them to be fully integrated into research and teaching workflows. "Our media delivery. infrastructure has been weaker than our content. We have a streaming server with limits on how much content it can hold," said David. "We wanted to address this issue and through the VPDS service, we had the flexibility to approach these challenges in a way that met our digital preservation objectives."

For institutions, the first step in the process is to identify which of its holdings should be considered for preservation. However, with potentially thousands of files to consider, including rough cuts, final film and potentially multiple copies of the same file, content selection is not a simple task. Dartmouth's media team has meticulously recorded their video holdings over the years but even with this level of detail, it was inevitable that some files were missed. As David further explained, "The time taken to assess the collections and decide which items to preserve is a key consideration. For videos that have not been cataloged, the only way to know what they contain is to watch them, take notes and then determine the most appropriate keywords for indexing. Ironically, given the fragility of older video tapes and risk of damage if played on video machines, in many cases it's necessary for files to be digitized before it's possible to access contents."

Once Dartmouth had finalized its content selection, the files were submitted to ProQuest. "What we discovered quite early on," said Sarah Scully, Dartmouth's Media Services Librarian, "was the need to be very precise when outlining what we expected from the preservation service. It's important for institutions to clearly articulate their expectations as you are working with a vendor who does not have the history and experience of your collections. For example, stating explicitly the file types required, the level of quality expected for transcripts, the types of metadata to be harvested from the transcripts and so on. Once these have been clarified, the process runs smoothly."

Inevitably, there will be certain collections which an institution may prefer to digitize in-house, such as rare footage and other materials for which condition issues are a concern if taken out of the library. For Dartmouth, the main concerns which the VPDS helped address was storage of large master digital files, as well as the ability to handle large scale digitization projects.

"Dartmouth is by no means unique with regards to how video and multimedia content is used and recorded," said David. "We have invested heavily in unifying our media infrastructure and have put considerable effort into cataloging and digitizing our video collections."

Dartmouth's long tradition of documenting itself in film, video, and digital formats means it has a rich media landscape with regards to creating media and using it in the curriculum and in field research. To date, the institution's online video collections include films from the 1930s-1960s which provide a historic look at the College as well as over 1,000 contemporary College videos on YouTube. These collections have been produced by Dartmouth directly, so how does the process compare with working with an external vendor? "The major benefit is the scale of project that can be handled by an external vendor. For institutions it is finding the time to coordinate and execute large-scale digitization projects as well as budget and resource that are the main considerations. Dartmouth had funds available and a collection that we had been hoping to digitize for a number of years, so we wanted to try ProQuest's service to see how it worked," said David. "Dartmouth and ProQuest have continued to refine details through the first official batch, but now it is moving along. It is very good to have such a service available and for us to be able to say that we've preserved content from the magnetic format. We are looking forward to the chance to share some of these videos with the wider public and continuing our digitization program in the future."

Since 1938, ProQuest has been preserving scholarship on behalf of libraries around the world. Utilizing a range of technologies, ProQuest has ensured that millions of vital research works remain accessible for future generations of students and scholars.

ProQuest's experience and knowledge of preservation across multiple formats has resulted in the development of services that have helped streamline the research process and disseminate essential knowledge far beyond the reach of the host institution.

The use of video content in research and in the classroom has grown as more historic video and film collections become available online. In-house production of video and multimedia content is also growing as course lectures, guest presentations, and student talks are captured. By making these collections more accessible, institutions can showcase their rich heritage and enhance teaching and research. However, effective curation of this content requires the development of scalable solutions that address the volume and complexity of institutional media, the diversity of media and file formats, rights management, and closed captioning and accessibility requirements.

In response to this growing trend, ProQuest developed the Video Preservation and Discovery Service, a full service offering that includes digital conversion, transcription, metadata creation, and optional hosting and streaming.

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