

Can you talk about the logistics of organizing this project?

Ulman: You know we started, your original emails were dated in 2005 and just as a touchstone or milestone for that, we flipped the switch to open the DALN to public contributions in the summer of 2008 so we're talking three years to handle the first IRB and then the infrastructure, finding a host for it.

Selfe: Applying for grants, getting programmers, setting up all that infrastructure took three years.

Ulman: The big issue in those two stages was the IRB clearance and then finding a host, a platform, a place to put it. The big issue in the first one was the IRBs insistence on the term research. And we kept, if you read our original IRB protocol we keep saying this is not a research program, it is the DALN itself, that does not mean you cannot do research with the materials in it.

Selfe: But that's not the purpose of it, the purpose of the DALN was to archive and preserve and collect first-hand accounts of literacy from people from all ages, and from every walk of life and anywhere in the world, so we didn't see it as a research project, we saw it as a project of preservation, archiving and collection and contribution because people can contribute from any machine, anywhere as long as they have access to the Web. I would add a third stage, so the first stage was getting IRB clearance, the second stage was programming and setting up of the infrastructure, and the third stage was seeding the collection with some very special narratives that we thought would be the kinds of stories that we would like to see in it, so Brenda Bergerman helped us with stories of deaf and hard of hearing individuals. We interviewed those people with her help and with the help of interpreters. So we got Brenda Bergerman's help along with the help of translators and interpreters for the deaf and hard of hearing collection. We also got the help of Beverly Moss for our collection on black women academics and so we had to find people who were members of communities that we really wanted to see participate in the DALN, and those were two key communities. And after that other communities have followed, we've gotten a number of narratives for instance from various black Columbus communities both church communities and community members who might be black jazz musicians for example. We've gotten lots of narratives from autistic activists who work online because Melanie Yergeau studied here and that was her passion. Deborah Cazowa has really enriched the collection around GLBTQ citizens and so she is absolutely committed to building that collection and later thinking about her own dissertation research in that area. Kate Stachi for instance, a student who works with Louis is very interested in active duty military and veterans and so she has been working to build that collection.

Ulman: That stage taught us a couple of things. One of the things we wanted to do is work against whatever first impression somebody might have so when we first introduced this to people or asked them to contribute a literacy narrative they almost inevitably focus on how they learned to read. So we built protocols to try to suggest a greater variety of practices and periods in your life that would be appropriate, and we wanted as Cindy said to make it clear that we are interested in all sorts of stories, from all sorts of people, from all walks of life, and all different communities. The other thing it taught us is that, at first, we were doing very formal interviews, and there was a reason for that, especially with the deaf and hard of hearing because we needed to have video, and we needed it for the American Sign Language interpretation, but some of those were an hour and half long.

Selfe: We also needed turn-taking in those situations which is different from hearing conversations, and deaf and hard of hearing people are very attuned to taking turns.

Ullman: So those are wonderful narratives to have in there but it also made us realize that we wanted another kind of diversity as well and that is some more varied, more structured, longer narratives would be welcome, we had the space to do it but we also realized that that wouldn't scale very well, it would stay a small collection if everybody felt that had to do an hour and half literacy narrative, so we also tried to pilot some shorter form narratives. So I think we have a broad mix now of different kinds of narratives across a number of different dimensions – length, formality, circumstances, whether they're more organized by a larger project or not.

The other thing you go back to though, that was the third stage, which was a very key stage in thinking through the project. The question of finding a host though – a place to put it, we had to deal with two things that really defined the project in the early days, one was money, we didn't have any and so we wanted to build this on the margins of institutional investments in infrastructure, in digital-cultural-heritage infrastructure, and find someplace that already had that kind-of infrastructure and we'd say to them – “you ought to be doing this, this is an important program” and the other was deciding that archiving was going to be the number one concern. It had to be some institutional host that would be responsible for managing these materials in the long run, beyond our involvement in it, our careers and our lives, because that was the point of collecting narratives at the beginning of the 21st century was to create an ongoing archive and that created a lot of...you went past a lot of choice points. We had to say well, it's not going to be the fanciest looking thing, at first, because we have to again, work on the margins of an institution. At first we were working with Ohio State and their institutional repository, that didn't work out because we also had a second absolute, non-negotiable point, which was it had to be open to the public, and their structure for the institutional repository just wasn't set-up that way so we ended up working with the state of Ohio and the digital resource commons. But just, things like that, you say we want this to be available in the long term and we want it to be open to the public, those two seemingly small things started to shape the whole project.

Selfe: They are not small, especially for universities because often universities are so committed to students and faculty that they forget about the public and open-access. We did not want access to be closed, and we also wanted these to be free and downloadable and we wanted historical preservation. We felt very strongly that this was a project that would trace historical changes in literacy activities and values and practices across time, and so preservation was key. And as Louis kept pointing out, long after our careers were done, so our goal was to set-up a situation where the archive can continue as long as the Ohio resource commons will house it.

Ullman: In 2005, no one was doing that, any kind-of cultural archive. So we really got in in the very formative stages of the digital resource commons of Ohio through OhioLink and they're still working out the long-term design of that system so that's something we still are coping with right now, saying, oh they're making these decisions in order to manage these cultural heritage collections across dozens now of universities and it's affecting us in various ways because we're kind-of an outlier we're the one project that's not a library, and that is open to the public. So that choice to make it public means that

certain things matter more to us than they do to anybody else on this system. The logistics are ongoing, that's why I joked about, "how much time do you have?" We don't need to go into them too much more but they are a big part of it and something that I don't think people in the humanities have had to deal with much before.

Selfe: And it's one of the reasons you don't want to tackle a project like this without collaborators because those kinds of issues go on forever and one person can't always pay attention; it takes the attention of several people, in several different ways. There has to be ongoing efforts to encourage people to contribute to the archive. There has to be ongoing efforts to think about the repository and the infrastructure, so these are large-scale efforts that require more than one person. This is not a project to undertake alone.