

## **From Fiefdom to Cyber-state (of the Art): the Evolution of the Audio-Visual Department in an Academic Library**

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### **1. Introduction**

The Audio-Visual Collections and Services of Ryerson University Library are an exemplary case of the way in which an academic library has evolved to meet the challenges of managing multimedia information in the physical and virtual world, while responding to budget fluctuations and adapting to changes in the library's administrative structure.

Ryerson University, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, is a leading centre of career-focused education, currently offering more than 80 undergraduate and graduate programs, with an enrolment of over 21,000 full-time students. The Ryerson Library collection consists of approximately 500,000 print books, 3,700 print journal titles, 20,000 e-journals, over 13,000 e-books, over 6,000 videos, over 6,000 music CDs, and approximately 500 16mm motion pictures. The Library's staff is comprised of over 80 full-time positions, including 28 professional librarians. Our small collection is the result of our history as a polytechnic, only obtaining university status in 1993. For many years the library was chronically under-funded. Now that the university is moving vigorously into graduate programs, and with a new university president appointed in 2005, the administration has finally recognized the importance of a properly funded library. Building collections has become the library's number one strategic goal, but space constraints mean that we need to weed the collection almost as fast as we grow it.

### **2. The past: 1970s and 1980s**

#### **2.1. Independent fiefdom; complex and expensive technology**

Like many other academic libraries, Ryerson Library has undergone major reorganization over the past twenty years. (Cheung *et al.* 2003 ) Historically, the management and location of the Audio-Visual (AV) department has been influenced to a large extent by changes in the administrative and physical structures of the Library.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Library's 10-storey tower featured a decentralized, subject-focused grouping of collections and service points on separate floors: 6 subject collections; a Media (AV) Library; and on the main floor, an Information Centre (general reference) and three separate loans-related service points (one each for Circulation, Reserve, and book returns/fines). For many years, the AV department (or Media Library, as it was called) was an almost autonomous unit with its own secure space for physical materials, supervised by dedicated staff, with its own processing, manual catalogue, manual loans system, its own borrowing/lending procedures, collection development policies and opening hours - all different from the rest of the Library. In fact, the 1980s were an era of independent centres within the Library. The Energy Centre, the Third World Centre, the Nutrition Centre, and others, were, like the Media Library, very much separate fiefdoms unto themselves.

## **2.2. Formats, equipment and access**

The changes in media or AV formats and technologies over the years have lent themselves to the decentralization of staff resources. A new and different skill set is now necessary for staff handling the AV tasks than what was required 20 or 30 years ago. The Media Library, in the 1970's, was stocked with shelves of 16mm films, and ½" video tapes were starting to overtake ¾" tapes. Vinyl music LPs were the audio mainstay, with audiocassettes only starting to emerge. Users at that time actually had to undergo special training on how to use the 16mm film playback unit. For maintenance of a collection of 16mm films, which was expensive in comparison with today's DVDs, staff had to learn how to set up and trouble-shoot the film playback unit, clean the films (using complicated equipment which required 10 hours of training), to prolong their shelf life and do minor

repairs for damages. No wonder the supervised setting was the desirable environment, as the concern over damages and high cost of replacement was overriding.

Even with the increased popularity of VHS video tapes, laser disks, and music CDs, all of which required less complicated playback equipment, access was restricted to in-library use at dedicated listening stations. Part of the reason for this on-site requirement for VHS videos, especially feature films, was the costs associated with copyright restrictions. Public performance rights (PPR), which must be paid for, are mandatory in Canada for any public screening, even in a classroom on campus. Feature films with PPR on VHS format were leased from distributors at an average price of \$300 to \$500 CDN for a 3 to 5 year contract. No home use and borrowing were allowed. Indeed, the feature film collection before the year 2000 was dismally small, compared with the hundreds of feature films now in the Library collection. The unit leasing cost was too prohibitive for the limited AV budget.

The check-out and booking procedures of AV materials were a mystery to the rest of the Library for years. From the 1970's to early 1990's, these procedures were entirely independent of the main library policies and systems. Staff relied on kardex, card indexes, 3-ring binders, and often their own memories to remember what some professors had requested years ago, and wanted again for their classes. In 1997, the AV unit purchased a standalone computer system, Medianet, to handle AV booking (reserve or put on hold AV items for class presentations or group viewing or lending to other Ontario university AV facilities). This was the first major attempt at automating.

### **3. 1990s: Evolution and integration**

#### **3.1. Physical location and administrative changes**

During the late 1980s, particularly with the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of the curriculum, it became clear that the existing subject floors and centres were requiring expensive duplication of resources in different locations within a relatively small library.

That, combined with budgetary retrenchment and staff reductions, necessitated that the seven reference service desks be collapsed to one central Reference Desk in 1992, and the independent subject resource centres were gradually phased out. In 1993, we adopted our first integrated library system, and the AV collection then began to be centrally processed and catalogued.

In 1995, Access Services (Circulation, Reserve, and Stack Maintenance) was remodelled into one physical space; the Reference Desk was relocated to the same floor at the entrance level, and in 1996, the “Audio Visual Library” was moved and physically located adjacent to Inter Library Loans (ILL), consolidating all the main service points on the one floor. The Chief Librarian felt that Audio-Visuals must be brought into the mainstream of library consciousness and integrated into the everyday practices of the library. Technological change was one of the driving forces behind the move. We were forward-thinking, in that integration of traditional forms of reference material into multimedia would lead naturally to the integration of collections. Multimedia software and workstations had the potential to serve the purposes which were formerly filled separately by audio-visual and print resources. The digital revolution was expected to change the way the AV area provided and delivered service to the university community. Reductions in staffing also re-enforced the need for the move. Finally, in 1999, when the Library adopted the Innovative Interfaces (III) integrated library system, the AV unit began truly to fully share, with other library departments such as Reference, Cataloguing, Circulation, etc, the same automated system, using Innovative's audio-visual booking module for internal video bookings, and using barcode scanners and the III Circulation module to check out booked videos with users bar-coded library cards.

As the audio-visual collection was now accessible through the OPAC, AV reference questions could be handled by the Reference Desk. Through the library Web site, Reference staff also had access to Watmedia, a union catalogue of video holdings at universities in the province of Ontario, for tracking down items not held at Ryerson.

In addition, checkouts could be handled by the Circulation Desk, leaving the AV staff to concentrate more on internal bookings, and external borrowing and lending of audio-visual materials.

At this time, the audiovisual collection consisted of 2,500 video tapes (VHS and ¾”), 10 laser disks, 4,000 audio-tapes, 900 CDs, 1,800 16mm motion pictures, 25,000 slides and 2,700 sound recordings. The move to the main floor increased access to the AV collection and equipment, making them available all the hours the library was open, rather than their previous limited hours. There was concern, however, about the security of the collection, and it was decided that VHS tapes would be held in Reserve, along with true course Reserve materials, behind the Circulation Desk, because the videos were so expensive, and music CDs would be on open access shelves, but put in security brackets.

In April 1998, the Audio-Visual Department and Interlibrary Loans were formally merged into a single department, and a new librarian took on the administrative responsibility. AV/ILL might seem an odd marriage, but the AV service had been increasingly involved in the lending and borrowing of films and videos to and from external sources, just as ILL did with books. This new arrangement enabled staff from the two areas to share some duties and provide backup. The two AV library assistants took on responsibilities in both AV booking and ILL retrieval, dispatch and patron notification.

## **4. Revolution in the Millennium**

### **4.1. Site licenses: increased access to feature films**

Building our feature film collection had always been a costly endeavour, due to the requirement to pay for public performance rights. The fact that they had to be renewed every few years was time-consuming as well as expensive. A solution to this problem was found, when, in 2000 and 2001, Ryerson Library was among the first in the Ontario academic sector to negotiate campus-wide site licenses with the two major distributors of

feature films in Canada for classroom screenings. How much the film distributors and AV/media personnel were influenced by the “site-licensing” concept of electronic resources (CD-ROM and later online Web access subscriptions) has yet to be determined. However, the willingness on both sides to explore this new contract relationship, in which the purchased site license allows for PPR for any film title in the distributor’s catalogue, greatly increased our buying power for feature films. We were now able to buy feature films, if they were covered by one or the other of the two companies, from any source without having to pay for PPR for each individual title. In addition, we were able to accept donations of videos, if they were covered. Now that features could be replaced cheaply, they were moved from Reserve to open stacks, as were all other videos not “on” Reserve for a particular course. This move required the purchase of video and DVD security brackets and bracket openers.

At the same time, we saw a 10-fold increase in the AV acquisitions budget. Previously, with only a small budget, the AV librarian had had to persuade Subject Librarians to “share” their monograph budgets for AV purchases. Now Subject Librarians could freely select titles in their areas and recommend to the AV librarian for purchase from the large AV budget.

#### **4.2. Team Structure and physical integration**

In 2002, the Ryerson Library moved to a teams-based management structure of three teams: the Borrower Services Team, the Reference, Research and Instruction Team, and the Collections Team. The newly constituted Borrower Services Team was comprised of Access Services (Circulation, Reserve and Stack Maintenance) and Audio-Visual / Interlibrary Loan, as well as the Communications/Public Relations functions. The merging of AV/ILL with Access Services was a logical step to increase the scope of cross utilization of staff resources in units whose common goal is to assist users with their borrowing needs. Although this administrative merging occurred in 2002, it was not until 2004, when a donation of \$1,000,000 from an alumnus, enabled the reconstruction of the main floor of the library, that the two groups were finally physically located in one space.

After this renovation, the AV/ILL Desk is now located at the far end of the Circulation Desk. AV/ILL staff rotate to staff the combined service desk, adjacent to Circulation/Reserve. More complicated requests or enquiries are referred to the “back-office” of either AV or ILL. Circulation Lead Hands have been trained to do AV bookings for late evenings and weekends when the AV Desk is not staffed. This arrangement has obviously extended the service hours of the AV unit, increased flexibility of staff resources and helped to consolidate the image that AV is part of mainstream library services, operating with the same systems and applying consistently the same policies for various formats of library resources.

### **4.3. Digital media and Web delivery**

The majority of VHS, DVDs (available for 3 day loan) and CDs (available for 2 week loan) are now shelved in open access, in security brackets, in the library’s Ronald D. Besse Information and Learning Commons. Adjacent to these stacks are 10 VHS and DVD players. However, technology has blurred the boundaries of traditional “AV” and computer formats and increased flexibility of access. The 45 computers in the Commons lab are equipped to play DVDs, as are the laptops which will be available to students in the laptop loan program beginning in January 2007.

The Web has revolutionized image and sound-based resources as much as text-based materials. We have had to keep pace with these technological changes to audio-visual information access, by offering on-line alternatives to traditional physical formats, particularly as, at the same time, we have seen the exponential growth of the university’s Distance Education department. Increasingly, publishers/distributors have striven to provide simultaneous, 24/7, remote access to music or images. In the last 2 years, the Library has added the ArtStor image database, the Naxos Music Library (with classical, jazz, folk, world music) and the Alexander Street Press (with Smithsonian world sound and spoken word recordings) to its array of electronic text-based resources. Web delivery of audio-visual content was just another step in the digital revolution, alongside the

scanning of text and graphic materials to PDF for electronic transmission. Video streaming several years ago was technically and cost prohibitive for the AV unit. Ryerson Library was invited to participate in the Canadian National Film Board pilot project in the 1990's to stream NFB productions, but was unable to take part, as the delivery of one feature-length video would have taken up half the campus's bandwidth. Finally, it was the collaboration in 2005 with the University's DMP (Digital Media Project Office, the department which provides assistance in the use and production of multimedia technologies) to deliver online course readings in Blackboard, the Web based on-line course management system and the university's e-learning portal, and with the Distance Education department, that accelerated the video streaming project and made our dream a reality.

#### **4.4. Collaboration and digital rights**

Securing digital rights for online and streamed delivery has led to unprecedented collaboration with e-learning and copyright stakeholders in the university. In January 2004, the Library formally initiated E-Reserve, which provides online access to electronic course readings, by linking to articles in licensed databases, which are already copyright cleared for the university, or to scanned documents, for which the Library must request copyright permission to digitize. Initially, E-Reserves were accessed through the OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue), but soon the Library was invited by the DMP, to test E-Reserve in the new Blackboard Content module, and this proved to be a successful endeavour. (Cheung and Patrick, 2007)

In November of 2004, the Library was approached by one of the Distance Education Coordinators about digitizing and streaming a Library video and mounting it on the university's Windows Media Streaming server, to make it available through a Blackboard course page. However, there were copyright implications with video streaming. As previously mentioned, to comply with Canadian Copyright Laws, the Library must purchase public performance rights for any video to be screened in the classroom, but

these rights do not cover permission for digitization or streaming, which must be requested in addition to PPR.

For this first request to digitize and stream a Library video, the library contacted the distributor to obtain copyright permission. Distance Education subsequently handled all the technical aspects and was soon offering the streamed video through the Blackboard Content module. The students could simply click on the Content tab within their Blackboard course, then on E-Reserve, then on the video title, and the Windows Media Player opened with the streamed video.

During 2005, the Library began to receive increasing requests from DE for permission to digitize and stream Library-held videos, again linking them through Blackboard for courses in a range of subject areas. Streaming was new territory for our video distributors, most of whom did not yet have a pricing structure for digitization rights, and were operating on a case-by-case basis. Some refused outright to have their videos streamed. This includes the two main distributors of feature films in Canada. With others, we began discussions on pricing for various models of access, but very quickly, the (course-specific, password-protected) Blackboard system became the model preferred by distributors.

## **5. The Future**

### **5.1. Special Collections**

Due to several significant donations to the library, some new AV items have become a component of the Library's newly designated "special collections". The Special Collections currently include the substantial personal video archives of Dr. Joe MacInnis (the physician-scientist, author and deep-sea explorer who has led pioneering diving expeditions into the Atlantic, Pacific and Arctic Oceans and written nine books about undersea exploration. His underwater footage includes dives to such famous shipwrecks as the Titanic, the Breadalbane and the Edmund Fitzgerald) and the Kodak Canada

Corporate Archives, which have a multitude of still and moving images in a variety of photographic, negative, film and video formats. The third component of Special Collections are rare, valuable and historic photography books. Because of the unique and irreplaceable nature of these collections, they are currently housed restricted access. The position of Special Collection Librarian, located within the Collections Team, was created in November 2006, and the former Audio-Visual Librarian was appointed to the position. The position of Audio-Visual Librarian will be eliminated, and the Special Collections Librarian will have general oversight for the management of all AV collections. It might seem that we have come a full circle back to a fiefdom. However, once the MacInnis AV Collection has been catalogued and is accessible through the OPAC, it is likely that DVD viewing copies will go into the mainstream audio-visual collection in open stacks. Future plans for the Kodak Archives include digitizing much of the material and making available through our Web site.

## **5.2. More integration**

Administratively, the evolution of AV continues. The collection of AV materials, physical or online, is increasingly seen as part and parcel of the Library's overall collection. Since the beginning of 2006, collection development of audio-visuals has been done by all subject librarians as just one other aspect of their subject collections work. AV orders were no longer routed through the AV Librarian for "approval", but sent directly by Subject Librarians to the AV acquisitions staff. The AV services (internal booking and external borrowing and lending) will remain within the Borrower Services Team. The external borrowing and lending function of AV materials may be integrated with the RACER VDX interlibrary loan system, and the internal booking may be integrated with reserve services. This discussion on further integration is reflective of the inseparable link of AV with the rest of the library functions and the desire to provide users, as much as possible, with a single point of access to content, regardless of format or medium.

## **5.3. The new**

We have been collecting DVDs extensively in recent years, but there are continuing problems with damaged DVDs and they must constantly be replaced by new copies. Like the rest of the Library, the AV unit has to stay abreast of new interests and the demands of the new generation of users. What will come next after MP3, Ipod, Podcasting, tablet PC and camera cell-phone? Are CD and DVD interim technologies, doomed to be replaced by streamed content on demand ? We have to deal, however, with the added complication that some of the companies providing streamed video service are based in the United States, and may not have PPR to deliver the material within Canada. Our negotiations with a major Canadian educational video distributor for streamed content, delivered from their server, came to an abrupt halt in 2005, when the company went into receivership without warning.

#### **5.4. The old**

Paradoxically, amidst the race with technology, AV constantly has to look behind for what is worth preserving. Like other AV departments elsewhere, we have had to ride out the changes in formats, acquiring, then ultimately discarding, beta cassettes, ¾ inch u-matic tapes, laser disks, LP recordings, audiocassettes, slides, etc and the related equipment to view them. We grew to regret the disposal of equipment, however, when we received the audio-visual archive from Dr. MacInnis. Many were in obsolete formats, including Betacam SP, which is actually of archival quality, but we had no way of viewing them. Most have been transferred to mini DV cassettes by the university's Rogers Communications Centre. (Unfortunately, the university's last ¾" U-matic transfer machine broke on our first ¾" tape !, so those ¾" transfers will have to be made at a later date, most likely by out-sourcing. ) Subsequently, graduate students in Ryerson's Photographic Preservation and Collections Management masters program, employed by the library, created DVD viewing copies from the DV cassettes at the Digital Media Project Office. In the meantime, a ¾" player has been found in a "retired" equipment room, and will be brought back into service, so that the ¾" can be viewed for cataloguing purposes.

So, while a brave new world has emerged for the AV department in acquiring and managing digital resources, it is still striving to purchase and preserve older media. As long as faculty in the School of Image Arts still teach using our 16mm film collection for experimental film courses, in particular, the AV collection will need to preserve what might now appear the “endangered species” of AV resources. With a new masters program in Documentary Media set to begin in September 2007, and many instructors and researchers preferring to keep the integrity of the original format, new 16mm films are currently being added to our collection. Ironically, these films will be getting more use, at a time when the university’s Computing and Communications’ Media Services has stopped servicing the Library’s 16mm projectors. New partnerships with the School of Image Arts are being formed to insure that older equipment is being properly maintained, and not damaging the films.

The Ryerson Library has never been able to provide the appropriate physical environment for the preservation of films, and this is an area for the new Special Collections Librarian to consider. In mid 2007, the Library will be obtaining an additional floor in the existing building, and a new Special Collections Room will be constructed. HVAC and environmental concerns will be addressed, as much as is possible in a building dating from the 1970s.

## **6. Conclusion**

Crawford made an apt comment about the essence of media evolution: “The most important thing to remember about media is that new media almost always complement older media rather than replacing them” (Crawford 1999). Ryerson’s AV experience bears out the truth of this observation. The AV department has gone through dramatic changes, administratively and technologically – from fiefdom to Cyberstate, and from

limited physical access towards unlimited digital delivery. Nevertheless, these “new” changes must also accommodate the “old”, such as the emerging desire to create special collections to preserve unique content, and the integration with similar functional units to improve service. The wheel of change, no doubt, will continue for AV. Nevertheless, amidst the rapid changes, one thing is constant: librarians in charge of AV collections and services, while “preparing for a future filled with revolutions”, must be able to take stock of both content and delivery, and balance them out to suit current user expectations, regardless of the media format itself. (Widzinski 2001) The users’ needs must always remain at the forefront.

Unlike many university libraries, we are in the envious position of having had budget increases over the last few years, and expect them to continue into the future, so that we are currently able to move ahead with new initiatives. The recently appointed Ryerson president has envisaged a new library building, with state-of-the-art facilities, as a top priority. We look forward to an enhanced and enlarged physical environment, and an increase in our collections and services in the years to come.

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