Mission & Philosophy

The Emerson College Archives & Special Collections (“ECASC”) seeks to develop digital resource collections that will promote creativity, academic excellence, diversity, and lifelong learning within the Emerson community as well as among outside researchers and the public.

The development of digital collections is an important part of ECASC’s goals to collect and preserve primary resource materials of significant interest to the Emerson community as well as to provide free access to our materials for as wide an audience as possible.

Scope

ECASC collects, manages, preserves, and provides access to unique or rare digital materials that are transferred or donated to, and owned by ECASC. This includes both born-digital materials (those materials whose original format was digital rather than hard copy or analog) and digitized materials (those materials that were originally created in non-digital formats, but of which digital versions have been made) of all types, including text, audiovisual materials, artifacts, and datasets. ECASC focuses on making these digital collections accessible online but will restrict materials according to our Access & Restriction Policy as well as other College/ECASC policies and applicable laws.

Collections Criteria

When determining whether to digitize analog materials and/or place born-digital materials online, ECASC places the utmost importance on the content and research value of collections. In ECASC’s judgment, collections must have significant scholarly, academic, teaching, and/or research value to be the focus of a digital project.

Intellectual Content

ECASC digital projects will concentrate on collections with significant intellectual content that support the College’s research, pedagogical, and/or institutional goals. This includes:

- Materials that contain information and perspectives that represent the cultural, geographic, economic, and social diversity of Emerson College.
- Materials that provide insight into subjects or perspectives not well documented in other collections held by ECASC and/or other archives.
• Materials that represent the dominant themes and subjects contained in ECASC collections.
• Materials with significant institutional, regional, national, or international importance.
• Materials of interest to Emerson College students, faculty, and staff, especially those that reflect the subjects in the College’s core curriculum.
• Materials for which online access would improve intellectual value, such as allowing new and innovative ways to analyze information.

Current and Potential Use

ECASC digital projects will focus on materials which:

• Are currently used frequently and/or have the potential to become high use if they are available online.
• Have a defined set of current or potential users.
• Are difficult to access physically.

Institutional Mission

ECASC digital projects will focus on materials that complement the College’s mission and goals. This includes materials that reflect Emerson College's dedication to inspiring and advancing:

• Respect for, equal treatment of, and sustained discourse between people of all backgrounds, orientations, beliefs, and physical capabilities.
• Social justice and civic engagement in the greater Boston community, region, nation, and world.
• Scholarship, creative thinking, and lifelong learning.

Relationship to Other Collections

ECASC digital projects will focus on materials that build upon, or fill gaps within, existing digital collections created by Emerson College or other institutions. Doing so provides the opportunity to increase the research value of the materials and/or enhance research on the topics contained within them. Another important factor is whether projects present the opportunity for collaboration with other departments and/or institutions.

Prestige, Innovation, Inspiration, and Funding

ECASC is more likely to consider potential digital projects if they:

• Bring distinction and prestige to the Archives, Library, and/or College.
• Offer the opportunity to use technology in innovative ways.
• Inspire transformative research and educational activities.
• Present an opportunity to attract additional funding for ECASC activities.

**Technical Criteria**

The creation of digital collections requires the use of technical skills, specifications, equipment, and standards developed by ECASC and the broader archival community. In order to determine whether a set of materials can be included in our digital collections, ECASC must address preservation, metadata, and technological issues.

**Preservation**

ECASC can only undertake digitization of physical materials if the benefits of doing so outweigh the risk of damage to materials during the process. In some cases ECASC may digitize materials in extremely poor condition to create a preservation copy and to allow for use of the digital file rather than the original document.

Born-digital content may be at risk of obsolescence, degradation, corruption, or failure due to older/unsupported file formats, software, and media carriers. This might require ECASC to migrate materials to more stable formats before ECASC can include materials in our digital collections.

In order to determine whether to proceed with a digital project, ECASC must answer the following questions:

- Would digitization alleviate or exacerbate preservation concerns?
- Is conservation work required prior to digitization?
- Can born-digital files be accessed and preserved in their current formats?
- Will born-digital files require migration or software emulation?
- Can ECASC properly preserve the digital files?

**Metadata**

ECASC will ideally organize and describe collections before they are included in a digital project. However, rich metadata is essential in ensuring that materials are adequately accessible, and it is therefore likely that ECASC will require additional metadata. In order for ECASC to evaluate materials from a metadata perspective, ECASC will consider the following questions:

- Have the materials been organized and processed?
- Is there an appropriate amount of metadata or is there a plan in place to produce it?
- What level of metadata description is needed? Will metadata creation be especially difficult or time consuming?
Technology and Equipment

Digital projects require specialized technology and equipment to reformat, store, and provide access to content. It is essential that ECASC have the appropriate resources to complete these tasks. Before embarking on a new project, ECASC must evaluate the answers to the following questions:

- Does ECASC have the necessary technical equipment for digitizing materials?
- Would any formats prove difficult to digitize?
- Does ECASC have adequate storage space for the file types and metadata required?
- Can our systems properly support the file types in the collection in terms of storage and accessibility?

Rights, Privacy, and Confidentiality Criteria

ECASC desires to make its digital collections freely available to the public for research and educational purposes. In order to do this, the library must analyze any potential rights and privacy issues within its collections. ECASC will work with the Office of the General Counsel as needed to determine any restrictions on access to our materials.

Rights

Candidates for digital projects will most likely fall into one of the following categories:

- Materials are in the public domain or created under a valid open access/Creative Commons license.
- Emerson College holds the copyright and/or other rights.
- ECASC has obtained written permission from rights owners to digitize and/or make materials freely available online.
- ECASC has determined that digitization and subsequent use fall under Fair Use protections.
- ECASC has determined materials to be orphan works.

Privacy & Confidentiality

Materials proposed for online display must not:

- Contain items with personally identifiable or other confidential information that would violate applicable laws or College/ECASC policies if made public. Examples of pertinent policies include the College’s Written Information Security Policy, Data Governance Policy, and Copyright Policy as well as the Archives’ Access & Restriction Policy.
- Have high risk for publicity rights issues.
- Possess other qualities that would make it unwise to have all or part of the collection publicly available.
**Standards**

ECASC adheres to archival community best practices and standards in order to digitize, describe, store, preserve, and make accessible our digital collections.

Institutional master files are stored in an OAIS ISO 14721 compliant digital preservation platform. ECASC monitors the master files, and ECASC runs regular fixity and integrity checks. ECASC migrates obsolete formats to best preservation formats set by industry standards.

When creating descriptive metadata we employ national metadata schemas, such as Metadata Object Description Schema (MODS) and Dublin Core (DC), and use controlled vocabularies, such as the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), Art and Architecture Thesaurus (AAT).

Our technical specifications for digitization follow preservation and industry standards outlined by national organizations such as the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and Society of American Archivists.

**Digitization Project Types**

The majority of ECASC's digitization projects fall into one of the following categories:

- Ongoing digitization of entire collections or large portions of collections. ECASC staff, student workers, and/or interns will complete these activities. There are usually no specific deadlines for these projects.
- Projects that are made possible through grants or other gifts of funds. These projects may involve temporary staff, special project parameters, and specific deadlines.
- Digitization projects requested by users of rare materials that meet the criteria above.

**Personal Archiving and Analog Documents**

Individuals, departments, groups, and organizations looking to digitize their materials and then transfer the surrogates to ECASC are encouraged to contact the digital archivist in order to ensure that all appropriate digitization methods and standards are utilized.

Individuals and groups transferring or donating digital items with metadata should contact the digital archivist to facilitate the transfer of the metadata along with the digital assets. If no metadata is available, the digital archivist will work with the donor to create or extract metadata information.

In general, all associated analog records must be transferred to ECASC before these digitized permanent records can be included in ECASC's digital collections. This will ensure that ECASC fulfills its duties as caretaker of permanent records and will allow for re-
digitization if it becomes necessary in the future. ECASC may make exceptions if deemed appropriate.

**Policy Review**

ECASC will review and evaluate this policy periodically as needed to ensure that the mission of the Archives is being met.