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When Crisis Comes: Rapidly Acquiring, Describing, and Preserving Community-Created Digital Collections

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Co-Sponsors:
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Note: Jeremy Boggs was unable to make it to the presentation, so Ivey Glendon and Kara McClurken wrote and presented on June 25, 2018.

When Crisis Comes

Rapidly acquiring, describing, and
preserving community-created
digital collections

Jeremy Boggs, Ivey Glendon, Kara McClurken
University of Virginia Library
ALA Annual | June 25, 2018

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Thank you for having us here today to discuss our experiences with rapid, emergency based digital collecting and beginning a conversation about how to build a national toolkit for this type of work.

Overview

- Identifying emergencies
- Major events at the University of Virginia
- Organizational expertise required for a rapid response team
- Let's talk: national toolkit for emergency digital collecting

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We'd like to give you a sense of where we are going today. We'll briefly talk about what emergency is, outline three major events at the University of Virginia, share what we've learned about the organizational expertise needed for rapid response, and then we want to have an open conversation about building a nationally available resource for emergency digital collecting.

Content Note

- Please note that the events at the University of Virginia involve the following concepts:
 - Sexual violence
 - White supremacy
 - White nationalism
 - Antisemitism
 - Neo-Nazism
 - Neo-Confederatism

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Before we begin, we wish to note that the events we describe at the University of Virginia involve concepts that are disturbing. While we will not describe these concepts in depth, they form the ideological basis for two of the crisis-related events at the University of Virginia

When crisis comes

- Crisis is:
 - Unexpected
 - Indifferent to standard business hours
- Crisis can be:
 - Natural emergencies
 - Human-made emergencies
 - A fog: where does it begin and end?

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What do we mean by crisis? The experiences we'll share with you today have some common threads. In short, crisis is unplanned, doesn't care about your schedule, and can be naturally occurring or human-made. Notably, as we have learned in our experience, crisis can have vague boundaries – where does it begin and end?

Events at the University of Virginia

2012

- Removal and reinstatement of University President Teresa A. Sullivan

2014

- *Rolling Stone* publishes "A Rape on Campus"

2017

- Far-right rally to protest Confederate statue removal

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The University of Virginia has been the site of three high-profile events since 2012. We'll briefly describe the events here, with most of our focus being on the events from last summer.

2012: a presidential crisis

- Resignation and reinstatement of UVA President Teresa A. Sullivan
- Library's response:
 - Collecting focus on tweets and other digital media
- Obstacles to Library's response:
 - Staffing
 - Timing
 - Privacy and account issues associated with social media collecting



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UVA President Teresa A. Sullivan abruptly resigned in June 2012. The University's Board of Visitors, whose rector led the campaign to oust President Sullivan, reinstated her following protests by faculty, students, and alumni.

Library staff sensed something big happening, but the path forward for a response was unclear. The Library's Digital Archivist focused on collecting tweets, Facebook posts, blogs, and other digital media to document an event that unfolded before us on a daily basis.

And we had some challenges: staffing – we basically had a team of one collecting this media. Timing – it was June; the Digital Archivist was attending a conference. Account issues: collecting social media is really challenging – especially six years ago – due to privacy and account issues.

2014: *Rolling Stone*

- Publication and eventual retraction of “A Rape on Campus”
- Library response
 - Collection of physical artifacts
 - Support for faculty research projects
 - Start to think about metadata and controlled vocabularies
- Obstacles to Library’s response
 - Rights encumbered content
 - Quality of scans



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In November 2014, some two years following the presidential crisis, Rolling Stone’s publication of “A Rape on Campus” – detailing a group sexual assault – roiled the UVA community.

Although the article was ultimately retracted, the article caused a moment of reckoning within the UVA community. As before, the Library collected physical artifacts. We also began to work with faculty researchers, including working on the “Take Back the Archive” initiative – a project to document the history of sexual assault at the University. As with the Sullivan event, our approach was patchwork and based within individual staff members, without a cohesive way to move forward. Issues related to intellectual property and quality of digital assets emerged because of the lack of holistic expertise applied to various collecting initiatives.

2017: August 11-12 rally

- “Unite the Right” rally to oppose Confederate monument removal
- Multiple events
 - Nazi and white supremacist rally on University Grounds
 - Protests and counterprotests in City of Charlottesville
 - Vehicular homicide
 - Fatal helicopter crash
- Library response
 - Different approaches than last two events
 - We’re starting to get it right



Photo by Gary Powell

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The events of 2012 and 2014 proved to be a kind of endurance training for the events of summer 2017.

In August of last year, a far-right white supremacist, neo-Confederate, and neo-Nazi groups planned the “Unite the Right” rally to protest the removal of Confederate monuments in Charlottesville. Over the course of the weekend, multiple events unfolded: a torch-lit march on the University’s Grounds (including Nazi and white supremacist chants), protests and counterprotests in the City, the vehicular homicide of counterprotestor Heather Heyer, and the fatal helicopter crash involving Virginia State Police.

When I said crisis can be a dizzying experience: this is what I meant. It is difficult to know where crisis ends and where it begins.

The Library’s response to these events was different from events past, in a few ways:

- First, we needed to acknowledge the wide range of emotions we experienced with this event. My office overlooks the field where part of the rally on University Grounds occurred. A library colleague was significantly wounded in the rally at the Rotunda. Staff retrieved tiki torches from outside the University’s gym for accessioning into University Archives. We all needed to process the anger and fear we felt following these events in our community.

- At the same time, as before, we knew we needed to come together to document this event, and this is where we think we're getting it right. We intentionally brought together expertise from several library departments. Kara led that effort, and she'll describe that now.

A New Framework: Digital Collecting Emergency Response Group

- Cross-departmental expertise
- Clearly defined functions
- Proactive rather than reactive response



Memorabilia left by Lee Statue.
Photo by Molly Schwartzburg.

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After going through the Presidential crisis and the Rolling Stone events, a number of things became clear—we didn't have any one unit that could rapidly respond to this work. We did create a new position—digital preservation librarian, and she would play a key role in the work, but we still needed a team pulled from various departments.

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We began to think of these events as the digital equivalents to a major flood in the stacks. We had workflows and procedures to address emergencies related to the physical collections—how well were we prepared for emergencies that required rapid response to stabilize and preserve digital collections? We needed to start thinking about these events, and our response, differently. We needed to be proactive, we needed to have supplies and tools in hand in advance, and we needed the various experts to come together.

August 11-12, 2018

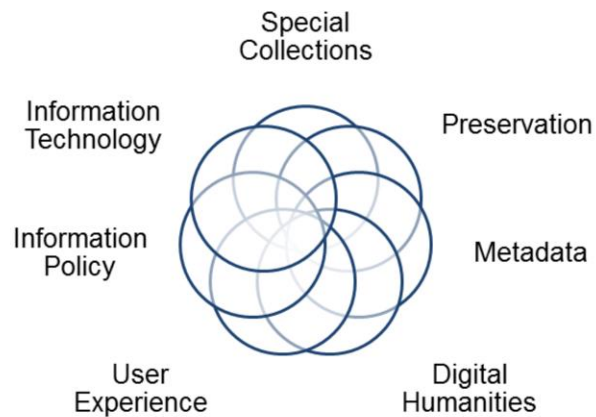
- August 11-12: Started capturing tweets
- August 13: [URL nomination form](#):
- August 14th: expand URL nomination form (Target launch date: August 17th)
- Actual launch: September 6th

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://forms.gle/1T4pCQ3W8D00yG271L>. The form is titled "URL nomination form for the Charlottesville 'Unite the Right' Rally and Community Response". It includes a brief description: "A nomination tool to aid the University of Virginia Library in the archiving of news and other online sources related to the August 12, 2017 events in Charlottesville. To submit your own digital items (photos, stories, etc.) please fill out our personal digital artifacts Collection Form: <http://digitalcollecting.lib.virginia.edu/cdf/>". Below the description is the University of Virginia Library logo. The form contains three input fields, each labeled "Full URL, link 1", "Full URL, link 2 (if nominating more than 1 at a time)", and "Full URL, link 3 (if nominating more than 1 at a time)".

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Even as the events unfolded on August 11 and 12, Library staff were watching and beginning to document. Our digital preservation librarian revised a google form we had used before that allowed folks to send us URLs that they thought worthy of collecting and she, along with folks from Documenting the Now and the Law and Health Sciences Libraries, began collecting tweets. On the morning of August 14th, the Senior Leadership team met and the Dean asked if we could quickly post a site that would allow community members to upload videos, photos, audio, and other stories from the event. We were told it had to be up by Friday or forget it. (We neither made that deadline nor forgot it.)

Organizational expertise



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But let's take a step back. This time, rather than having small groups of people working independently or haphazardly, we pulled a team together from the following areas, a team, that should another event take place here, we already will have pulled together.

Special Collections

- Curators:
 - Define scope of collection(s)
 - URL submission
- Archivists:
 - Ensure proper documentation
 - Create records
- Public Services:
 - Assist in collection intake
 - Provide input related to access needs/concerns



Photo by Gracie Hall

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Special Collections staff played several roles in the team—

The curators helped define the scope—they were the ones who decided to take all donations and create one artificial collection surrounding the events and the aftermath. (The KKK rally held in July, for example, was deemed a separate incident and collection.) The curators provided the bulk of the URL submissions and their interests were reflected in the type of submissions; one wanted to focus on official media reactions to the events (e.g. newspaper articles) while the other submitted urls from websites such as 4chan.

The archivists helped us ensure we had the proper documentation and permissions and created the initial resource records in ArchiveSpace so that we could start linking various components of the digital and physical collections to one collection. When donors had separate use agreements (e.g. a photographer who wanted to ensure that credit was given to her), the archivist worked with the donors.

Our Special Collections public services staff assisted in collection intake, both at the reference desk and through our community outreach event. They also provided input related to display and public access needs.

Metadata

- User-contributed metadata
- Structured approach
- Lightweight description

Collection Form

What type of item do you want to contribute? Video, Photograph, or Image ▾

Contribute a Video, Photograph, or Image

Upload a file
250Mb size limit.
Choose File No file chosen

Title (Required)
For example, "Police in downtown Charlottesville" or "What I witnessed from the Rotunda."


Description
Please include as much information as you can. For example: What was happening at this moment? Who is involved? What else do we need to know about this moment in time?

Date
When did this occur?

Location
Where did this occur?
Select Below ▾

Your name (Required)

Email (Optional)



Self generated metadata provided important context and allows us to make material available more quickly.

In the past, we didn't always gain input from our metadata folks before we started gathering up content.

This time, we tried to think of the various ways the content might be used and to structure it in such a way that it could be reused. For example, we added date and location options so that folks could create timelines and maps documenting the events.

We also knew that we wanted to minimize submission steps for contributors and collect data as neatly as possible at outset. The more complex metadata submission is, the less likely our users will take the time to fill it out. So we focused on Lightweight description: title, brief description, date (via calendar picker), location (via drop-down list).

Digital Humanities

- Omeka
- Templates and plug-ins
- Security and server needs



Librarians found these signs hanging on their front doors the morning of August 10th. Photo by Krista Farrell

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We quickly came to a decision to use Omeka because we had used it before, it was fairly easy for community members to upload content and because it was relatively easy for our Scholars' Lab folks to get up and running quickly. (Remember, we initially had three days to throw this up).

Moreover, we talked with other groups who had done some emergency digital collecting, and it was the platform that was most often used.

DH staff selected templates and plug-ins for Omeka, worked with IT to handle security/server needs, and set up a domain for UVA digital collecting that should we ever need it again (and we will) can be used for other events.

User Experience

- Review language
- Look at layout
- Accessibility review



Photo by Ted Glass

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UX's job was to ensure language was clear and easy to understand for non-specialists (though we still have some work to do here creating something that non-academics will find easy to use), look at the layout, and conduct accessibility reviews.

Information Technology

- Security (virus scans, etc.)
- Set up server/storage space



Photo by Gracie Hall

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IT staff helped us with setting up virus scans with ClamAV and setting up server/storage space.

Information Policy

- Write terms of use to allow broadest possible access/preservation
- Ensure institution not indemnified
- Consider implications related to use of documents in future lawsuits, etc.



Knitted kudzu leaves that were placed over Lee statue in front of Albemarle Circuit Court the day of Chris Cantwell's hearing for activities related to August 11-12—part of guerilla art installation.



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We have a fantastic lawyer who works in the UVA Library who helped ensure that we collected the appropriate rights to preserve and provide access to the content, make sure that the school could not be indemnified and helped us work through some ethical issues regarding how our collection might be used.

Preservation



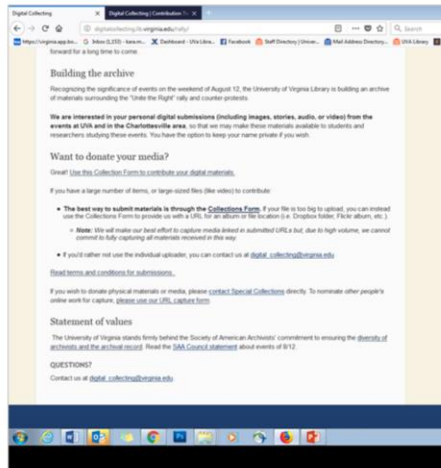
Photo by Divya Darling

- Serve as Incident Commander
- Identify tools and workflows for capture and ingest
- Implement stabilization/long-term preservation
- Write documentation for internal and external users

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Just like in a major disaster, the director of Preservation Services served as the Incident Commander. (This is FEMA language.) The Digital Preservation Librarian and AV Conservator helped identify tools and workflows for capture and ingest for all formats, wrote documentation for library staff, those helping us collect materials, and community donors. We continue to work on the ingest and long-term stabilization of content.

Bumps in the Road



- What to name
- [Ethics of collecting](#)
- Security concerns/server capacity
- Privacy
- Formatting of publicly accessible site

So we had our newly formed digital collecting emergency response team dedicated to working on this project—initially we met nearly every day.

So, Why did it take so long to launch?

We had a number of challenges.

It took us a long time just to come up with a name: “Unite the Right Rally” and Community response is DACS compliant. Some have objected because they think it gives the UTR folks more weight. Many of us informally call it the A11/12 archive.

We had some folks contact us expressing concerns that we might be gathering up content that could be used to prosecute “the good guys.” One person in particular was quite adamant that we NOT put this up. We spent a full week debating the ethics of what we were doing, hence the addition of the Statement of Values section AND some language in the terms of service articulating that items might be subject to subpoena. This was a conversation held both within the library and with University Counsel.

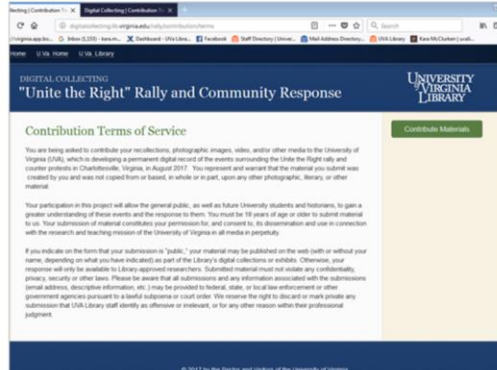
Security: There was concerns that our servers might be overrun either from huge files, large numbers of folks contributing at once, or from malicious attacks. (Our 3 week delay meant that we missed the peak window of time for submission, but we lost a week concerned with these issues and implementing anti-virus scans and protocols.) Also, we put a fairly small size limit on files that could be submitted, and

let folks know that they could contact us for alternate submission if files were bigger.

A final challenge that was more about providing access than acquisition and that is that we allow folks to post anonymously. Unfortunately, the citation information that was automatically generated as part of the template we used pulled contact information from user's log in names instead of creator and so we had to suppress the anonymous donors while we figure out how to fix that.

Successes

- [Metadata](#)
 - Allows users to title and describe
- [Terms of Service](#)
 - Grant UVA rights to preserve and provide access for research and teaching



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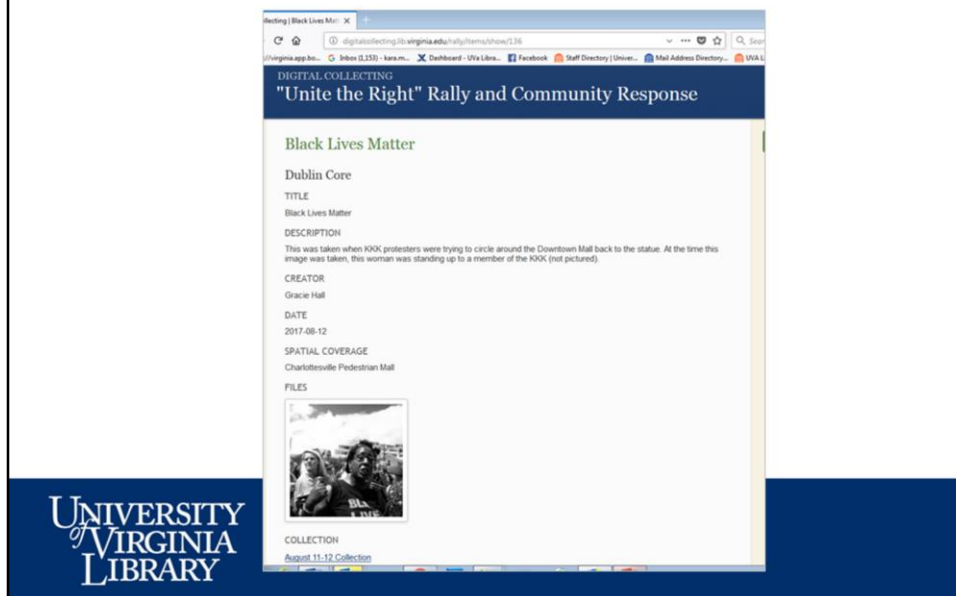
But we had some successes as well.

The self generated metadata provides important context to the submission and allows us to make material available more quickly.

The Terms of Service gives us rights we previously did not have to preserve and provide access

The Terms of Service also addressed some of the concerns re: subpoenas and provides transparency regarding how this content might be used. It is a template that we think others may find useful. (It is also full of legal jargon and we will continue to look at ways to provide some additional explanation.)

Work in Progress



This collection and its accompanying physical pieces has been prioritized for processing. We are working on getting all of the digital content, including the stuff that is accessible here, into ArchiveSpace and available via that access point.

There is lots more to do before this collection is fully accessible, but the smaller files easily donated via the Omeka instance provides a good taste of the kind of content we have in the collection, shows the value of user generated metadata, and gives the community something tangible to see rather than donating materials that remain inaccessible years later.

Next steps: Digital Collecting Emergency Response Group

- Analogous to emergency protocols for physical collections
 - Proactive response
 - Gather experts for various tasks
 - Training and Tools ready in advance→national toolkit
 - Create local/regional teams to be called in as backup/consultants
- Lyrasis Catalyst grant: Create dockerized Omeka instance with templates for less technically savvy users to implement



As we mentioned earlier, we had begun to think of collecting in times of crisis much like we think of responding to disasters. We need to develop protocols to implement that we have practiced in advance.

The experts needed to handle a digital collecting crisis are different than those needed to respond to a physical disaster. Identifying staff from across the library that are ready, willing, and eager to drop everything and pitch in is important to do ahead of time. Giving the team space to get to know each other and each other's expertise so that you minimize time spent wasted in meetings.

Practice/drill as we do with physical disasters, so we know roles and responsibilities, so we have the supplies (or in this case the tools) ready to launch on our laptops) Example: I (Kara) could not help capture the tweets because I didn't have python on my laptop and my digital preservation librarian didn't have time to load it and train me. Having that on my computer with some training in advance would have been helpful. Yesterday, in the Promoting Preservation Interest Group section meeting, we ran through a tabletop exercise so that folks could have an example of how they might talk about digital emergency preparedness at their institution.

We are working on getting templates set up—from terms of use to Omeka templates and plug ins— and to test out all features ahead of time (such as, how does Anonymous citations display?)

We want to train folks in using Twarc to gather tweets, teach them how to deploy Omeka quickly, build relationships with consortiums like APTrust so that we might borrow contracting and expander server space as needed.

Eventually, the goal is to create a comprehensive day long training in emergency digital collecting. With folks across the country trained, we hope we can create a network of experts who can be called upon to work from their home locations assist institutions and communities in times of crisis.

To that end, UVA Library has received a Lyrasis Catalyst grant that will allow us to begin this work. We will be conducting a survey, to be sent out in early August and we be working on dockerizing an Omeka instance so that institutions without a staff as large as UVA can respond quickly and effectively when crisis comes to their institution.

Next steps:
National emergency digital collecting toolkit
Audience participation piece

- What's your story? What tools or experiences did you wish you had?
- What might a digital collecting toolkit look like for you?
- How might we piggy back on existing relationships to develop local/regional networks

Jefferson statue, Take
back the lawn event,
August 16, 2017. Photo
by Kara McClurken

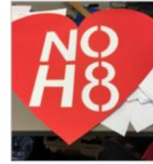


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But for all of that to work, we need your input too—so, we thought we would spend the last few minutes asking you what you all have done, what you think is needed, and places we might go to collaborate on this work.

Contact us

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Have questions? Please contact us!



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