Preserving Electronic Materials  
Current Issues Roundtable  
EDUCAUSE 2001 - Indianapolis  
Monday, October 29  
4:55 p.m. - 6:10 p.m.  
Senate III, Westin Hotel  

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The Preserving Electronic Materials Roundtable discussion began with the description of a request by a faculty member for a university library to accept responsibility in perpetuity for an electronic archive. The request was summarized as follows: a digital gift (the electronic records, images, reports and publications of an archeological dig) has been offered to a private research university library by a soon to be retired faculty member. The faculty member has prepared a *Statement of Requirements* for the donation, which asks that the library assure ongoing functionality of archive software programs and provide continuing access and distribution of the electronic materials, reports, and publications. He requests that archive functionality be increased overtime with new materials added to the archive as they become available.

Although negotiations on the disposition of the donation began months ago significant issues (procedural, technological, legal) remain to be resolved all of which relate to electronic preservation. These include:

- Development of a legal, binding, *Deed of Digital Gift* document (approved by university’s legal counsel)
- Development of a preservation strategy (technology choice, metadata standard, etc.) or contract for preservation services with a commercial vendor
- Development of a business model for sustainability taking into account the requirements for enhanced functionality and publication of new material

Roundtable participants contributed similar examples including a college president who has given or plans to give his papers to the institution’s archive on a laptop. Policies designed to deal with paper-based transactions and processes clearly do not suffice in a digital world.

In some cases legislation requires policy change to accommodate new formats. For example, law in Texas requires state institutions to retain records in order to respond to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. Therefore the University of North Texas takes and preserves a snapshot of the campus web site once a month.

The discussion raised the following questions but did not provide many answers.
What are the legal obligations regarding the provision of materials (electronic information) in perpetuity of a company like netLibrary that goes bankrupt?

Who is responsible for preserving online instructional materials (Blackboard, WebCT, etc.) over time?

Should the content of course related chatrooms be preserved?

If creators of courseware and administrators determine that the materials should be preserved should they be archived by the library?

What needs to be preserved among the voluminous documentation, communication, information generated by institutions of higher education?

An analogy was made between digital content in terms of sheer volume and industrial waste.

Two roundtable participants described projects that demonstrate digital preservation models are emerging:

The University of North Texas Libraries and the U.S. Government Printing Office, as part of the Federal Depository Library Program, have created a partnership to provide permanent public access to the electronic Web sites and publications of the following defunct U.S. government agencies and commissions. Early users of the site named the collection the “Cybercemetery”. For example UNT has established a site to provide permanent public access to the publications of the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Office of Technology Applications, which officially closed February 2, 1999. This site exists exactly as it did when the Office of Technology Applications closed operation in February 1999.

At the University of Michigan – Dearborn, the library director has convened a representative group from the library, registrar’s office, institutional research, sponsored research, and information systems to find a way to preserve electronic records that are of high value to the institution. All members of the group have agreed that they have a responsibility to formulate a strategy.

The discussion concluded with agreement the preserving electronic information (materials, records, etc.) is a high priority issue that has yet to be addressed by institutions of higher education.