Digital Preservation Policy of The Cooper Union Archives and Special Collections

Summary Statement

This document outlines The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science & Art's policy for the Archives & Special Collections (hereafter referred to as "Archives") for acquiring, preserving, and providing long-term access to archival digital objects, including digitized and born-digital materials. It is intended to guide archival staff, institutional stakeholders, and donors in supporting a sustainable, secure, and accessible digital archive aligned with the mission of the Archives: to support teaching, research, administration, and service through the management of information resources created by, for, or about The Cooper Union.

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Contact	Calista Donohoe, Digital Collections and Services Librarian (calista.donohoe@cooper.edu)
Recent Changes to this Policy	N/A

I.   PURPOSE

The Archives curates a collection to serve the students, staff and faculty of the college; academic researchers; the surrounding community; and the broader public. To accomplish this mission in an increasingly digital world, this policy establishes a framework for the acquisition, preservation, and management of digital objects as an expansion of the Collection Management Policy of the Cooper Union Archives and Special Collections. It ensures that such materials are appraised, described, and stored using sustainable practices and professional standards. It also provides guidance towards continued access to materials, with the exception of those records that are restricted in accordance with institutional policies and/or federal law.

II.   STRATEGY ALIGNMENT

The following principles serve as a guide to this policy's interpretation and application. This section will explain how this policy supports the overarching mission and vision of The Cooper Union.

1. **Institutional Memory:** Institutional memory is the total collected knowledge possessed by a group of people, in this case the students, faculty, and staff of The Cooper Union from the day of its founding through the present moment; an institution's archive is the repository for its institutional memory.

    a. This policy recognizes the role of institutional memory in (1) shaping the identity of an institution; (2) allowing newcomers the opportunity to place themselves within its context; and (3) facilitating growth by creating opportunity to look back at who we used to be, and how we got to where we are today.
    b. This policy recognizes that preserving historical materials is critical for maintaining institutional memory, and that successfully and meaningfully preserving digital objects presents unique challenges. File types and repositories evolve; link rot leads to dead-end pathways; hardware dies; and the cloud is vulnerable to breaches. A good digital preservation strategy accounts for all possible changes that could compromise preservation to ensure access twenty, fifty, or a hundred years into the future—longer than the concept of digital material has existed.

2. **Intellectual Discovery:** As an institution that has been open to and involved with the public since its inception, the memory of The Cooper Union is much larger than its immediate community. The Archives hold records of public events and involvement, as well as documentation of the accomplishments of alumni, faculty, staff, and founders. Although files are more easily sharable and distributable than physical materials, they are still protected by Archives permissions procedures as outlined in the Permission and Use Agreement. By preserving this history and making it accessible—either on-site or online—the Archives create a multitude of avenues for intellectual discovery on the part of Cooper Union community members as well as outside researchers.

3. **Accountability & Transparency:** The Cooper Union is committed to maintaining an honest relationship with its past, present and future students, as well as faculty, staff, and other community members. To this end, the Archives maintain records that document institutional decisions and reactions and make them accessible. This policy recognizes the

vital role that archival record-keeping plays in maintaining institutional transparency and accountability.

III.   SCOPE

This policy applies to all digital materials collected, created, or acquired by the Archives, including born-digital and digitized content, along with associated metadata and documentation necessary for interpretation and access.

In Scope:

- Born-digital documents, images, audio, video, websites, and email related to The Cooper Union's institutional, cultural, and/or administrative history. For a list of what this might include, see CUASC Processing Procedures, as cited in VIII. Related Documents.
- Digitized versions of analog archival materials
- Digital institutional records transferred per the Records Retention Schedule (see Section VII).

Out of Scope:

- Digital content unrelated to The Cooper Union's institutional, cultural, and/or administrative history
- Secondary source materials or duplicates
- Materials held by The Cooper Union's other repositories (e.g., School of Architecture Archive, Herb Lubalin Study Center)

IV.   POLICY PRINCIPLES

- Acquisition, transfer and ingest
    - Digital materials are acquired through supervised transfers (e.g., SharePoint, Dropbox, physical media, etc.). Ingest involves file format validation, metadata assignment, and secure transfer to preservation storage as detailed in the CUASC Accession and Processing Procedures (see Section VII).
- Bitstream preservation
    - Once processed, redundant copies of digital archival objects are maintained on both secure cloud storage and local hard drives to prevent loss from media failure.
- Community
    - The Archives are open to the public and prioritize increasing accessibility through digital means (excluding those records that are restricted in accordance with institutional policies and/or federal law).
- Content preservation
    - The Archives prioritize open, sustainable formats (e.g., PDF, TIFF, MP4, CSV). Migration strategies are used to ensure ongoing usability.

- Continuous improvement
  - Preservation strategies are reviewed and updated regularly to incorporate best practices and evolving technologies.
- Digitization strategies
  - Physical materials are selected for digitization based on a number of criteria. These include, but are not limited to, available funding; material fragility; research value to the institution and/or the public; user demand; and if there are no restrictions upon the material. The decision to digitize in-house versus through a vendor is largely dependent upon collection size and condition, as well as funding and labor costs.
- Discovery and access
  - Digital objects are described in finding aids and – if permissions allow – made available through the Archive's online portals (e.g., Hyku, Voices from the Great Hall). Public access is granted unless restrictions apply.
- IT capability
  - Digital preservation may involve collaboration with the Office of Information Technology to ensure secure storage, reliable backup, hardware maintenance, and support for format migration and obsolescence monitoring.
- Legal and ethical
  - The Archives ensure legal ownership or donor agreement before preservation. Materials may be subject to copyright, access restrictions, and data protection obligations. Additionally, to ensure the security of potentially private information, materials will be processed at secure workstation.
- Policy and strategy
  - Digital preservation aligns with institutional policies for collection management, records retention, and access. Digital preservation in the Archives is governed by this document and evaluated periodically.
- Metadata management
  - Descriptive, administrative, and technical metadata are created for all digital objects to support discovery, preservation, and rights management. Periodic collection-level metadata reviews may be performed and remediated as necessary.

V.   ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

- **Digital Collections & Services (DC&S) Librarian:** In consultation with the Archives Librarian, the DC&S Librarian manages the accessioning of digital files, including the inventorying and duplication of digital objects. The DC&S Librarian also performs fixity checks and manages all aspects of the Archives' digital platforms, including but not limited to file uploads; collection organization; metadata entry; linking across platforms; liaising with vendors; and deploying data remediation strategies. The DC&S Librarian is responsible for the proper handling, disclosure, secure storage, retention, and the proper disposal of private

and/or restricted information. The DC&S Librarian serves researchers both remotely and on-site and performs activities related to fundraising, education, and outreach.

- **Archives Librarian:** In consultation with the DC&S Librarian, the Archives Librarian initiates the accession of hybrid collections. The Archives Librarian also collaborates with the DC&S Librarian on the following: prioritizing digitization projects; creating policy and procedure documentation; establishing metadata and naming conventions; and promoting digital collections and projects.
- **Library Director:** Supports the work of the DC&S Librarian through regular strategy meetings; identifying funding sources; and hardware and software oversight and advocacy.

Per the Society of American Archivists' College and University Archives Guidelines, **The Cooper Union administration** is expected to provide support for the following to ensure the ongoing function and success of the archives program:

- Professional staff to implement and manage the program
- Facilities to house staff and collections in a stable, secure environment
- Equipment and supplies that meet the needs of the program
- A technologically current environment

VI. STANDARDS & MODELS

The Archives abides by the following professional standards and models:

- [SAA Guidelines for College and University Archives](#)
- [FERPA](#)
- [FADGI Guidelines](#)
- [Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS)](#)

See procedural documents (Section VII) for current practice and updates.

VII. RELATED DOCUMENTS

- [Collection Management Policy of CUASC](#)
- Library Collection Management Policy
- Records Retention Policy
- Records Retention Schedule

VIII. GLOSSARY

1. **Digital preservation**: Digital preservation combines policies, strategies, and actions to ensure access to reformatted and born-digital content regardless of the challenges of media

failure and technological change. The goal of digital preservation is to accurately render authenticated content over time.

2. **Born-digital:** Born-digital items are distinct from digitized items, such as scans of paper manuscripts or photographs Born-digital items are materials created in a digital format, including:
    2.1. Websites
    2.2. Email
    2.3. Digital photographs
    2.4. Electronic records
3. **Digital object:** A discrete unit of digital information composed of one or more digital files and associated metadata; together, these are treated as a single, identifiable entity for the purposes of preservation, management, access, and use. *Digital objects may be comprised of born-digital files and/or digitized surrogates.*
4. **Obsolescence:** There's no purpose in preserving a document that you won't later be able to decipher, or an image that you can't really make out. Digital preservation prioritizes (a) the quality of the digital object, and (b) the universality (or adaptability) of the file type, in order to ensure that quality over time.
5. **Digital Archive**: There are two ways in which the term "digital archive" is used, defined below. When not specified, "digital archive" in this document refers to the storage location as defined in 4.1.:
    5.1. A place of storage for the safekeeping of born-digital information. This type of digital archive is accessible only to <u>archives personnel,</u> though unrestricted materials from such an archive can be served to researchers.
    5.2. An online portal for remotely accessing born-digital or digitized materials. This type of digital archive is typically publicly accessible.
6. **Institutional Repository (IR):** A public-facing site that stores and allows distribution of the intellectual output of a college community, e.g., publications by faculty, raw data collected for projects, etc. Unlike other modes of digital distribution, IRs are generally owned by the college and thus their assets are retained and maintained by the college. The rights to deposit are generally determined by an author's contract with their publisher.
7. **Web archiving**: The process of collecting portions of the World Wide Web, preserving the collections in an archival format, and then serving the preserved pages for access and use. Typically, web sites are collected as WARC files via "web crawlers" which download code, images, documents, and other files essential to completely and faithfully reproduce the web site at the time of capture through dedicated software.
8. **Cloud storage**: A service model in which data is transmitted and stored on remote storage systems, where it is maintained, managed, backed up and made available to users over a network.
9. **Fixity:** The property of a digital file remaining complete and unaltered over time. Fixity is verified through methods such as checksums or cryptographic hash functions, which detect unintended changes to a file's bitstream. Regular fixity checks are an essential component of digital preservation which ensures the authenticity and integrity of digital objects.
10. **Hybrid Collections:** Collections that include both physical and digital materials. Hybrid collections may consist of born-digital files, digitized surrogates, and physical items such as manuscripts, photographs, or audiovisual media. Managing hybrid collections requires coordinated policies for both traditional and digital preservation to maintain consistent access across formats.
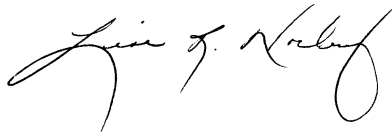
11. **Metadata:** Information that describes, explains, locates, or otherwise makes it easier to retrieve, use, or manage an information resource. In digital preservation, metadata documents key aspects of a digital object, including its provenance, technical characteristics, rights, and preservation history. Metadata ensures that digital objects remain discoverable, understandable, and authentic over time.
12. **Restricted or Private Information:** Private and Restricted Information is information which can be used to distinguish or trace an individual's identity. The college is obligated to keep private and restricted information confidential and secure during collection, processing, maintenance, disclosure, storage, retention and disposal. Private and restricted information may include but is not limited to the following: address, SSN, driver's license, account/financial information, date of birth, phone numbers, email addresses, and personal health information.

X. CONTACT

Questions can be advanced to archives@cooper.edu

IX. DOCUMENT CONTROL

Approved by The Cooper Union Library Director, 12/15/2025

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