HAROLD HACKER FUND FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF LIBRARIES

The Brockport Writers Forum Open Access Project

Last fall, The College at Brockport received a $1500 grant through the Harold Hacker Fund for the Advancement of Libraries. The purpose of this grant was to create an online, open access collection for a portion of the Writers Forum audio files and films to serve as the foundation of a digital humanities community, and open access to this valuable resource for innovative use worldwide. The original grant application was for $3600 to hire an intern for 300 hours to update the inventory, begin the infrastructure on Digital Commons, and move previously digitized files to the collection. The grant was funded to $1500, which allowed me to hire an intern, Ben Cherry, for approximately 108 hours (including college mandated benefits), and the library funded another 30 hours.

My top priority for the project was to complete and update the Writers Forum inventory of almost 600 forums, some of which included media in multiple formats. This turned out to be invaluable, as it identified the "*what*" and the "*where*" of the collection, as well as noting the condition and formats. From this work, we identified 49 videos that existed only as a U-Matic videotape, a discontinued media format that put these works on an "endangered" list, and priority candidates for professional digitization. These 49 videos are now the focus of an RBDB grant application.

In addition to the inventory, which took the bulk of his hours, Ben also spent time in the college archives and found the Writers Forum permission documents, and recorded his findings. Finally, he digitized some of the photos from our archives, and uploaded them to a new collection in Digital Commons http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/writers_photos/.

Results, Limitations and Lessons Learned

The grant timeline was divided into 3 sections: Spring (120 hrs), Summer (60 hrs) and Fall (120 hrs) of 2016. The funding we received took us through the work in the spring section (described above). Over the summer I worked on uploading the ten previously digitized videos, with such writers as Dan Chaon, Ray Gonzalez, Sherman Nuland and Karen Alkalay-Gut. The videos are available here: http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/writers_videos/. When completed, all of the goals for this grant will have been met. One of the needs that I did not consider when applying for this grant was how important, for accessibility purposes, captioning and transcripts would be for the videos. The library funded the captioning (about $1200), and I created the transcripts myself from the xml files. This was very time consuming, but extremely important, I believe. It led me to make sure that this was included in the RBDB grant I submitted!

The videos have been live for about a month now, and have been viewed 120 times. I have heard from four of the writers, all of whom have been thrilled to visit the past and see these videos online. As I consider the next step, I hope to find additional ways for the public to interact with these authors' works, through some sort of digital humanity project. I am very grateful to the Harold Hacker fund for providing the seed money to begin this.