

Preservation, Perseverance, and Pedagogy: Teaching Media Archives

Hugo Ljungbäck and Christian Balistreri

Introduction

We took side streets all the way. The trunk was loaded up with a pair of 16mm projectors, a couple of rewinds, a Moviscop viewer, a few splicers, and an assortment of other editing equipment, along with about 100 rusty cans of 16mm film. They rattled, clanged, clattered, and clacked as we took the long way back to campus. It was fall 2018 and, together with film studies professor Tami Williams, the two of us had spent the past year laying the foundation for a student-run media archive at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee (UWM). Christian had just graduated with his bachelor's degree in English and film studies, Hugo was still a junior in the film production department, and on this day, we were bringing the archive's third collection of films—around 60 orphan films from a retired English teacher and film enthusiast—back to Curtin Hall, our makeshift headquarters. Christian had already been inspecting and repairing films from the archive's "founding" collection—a teaching collection consisting of about 75 16mm prints of classic films from cinema's dawn through the 1960s—when the film studies program was gifted four boxes of instructional films from another local university, and Williams asked Hugo to join their preservation project. We all saw the significant pedagogical value of these film collections, so when a third was offered, we did not hesitate to take it. Over the next several years, we became deeply devoted to turning these films into a useful educational resource.

This special issue grows out of our eight-year collaboration around film preservation and media-archival pedagogy, which began with our makeshift film archive, developed into several conference sessions and grant-funded research projects, and has now materialized in the present volume, which surpasses the scope of

anything we could have conceived of eight years ago, and we hope can serve as a useful teaching resource for archivists, scholars, and teachers far beyond our beloved undergraduate institution. This issue also responds to a recent surge in interest in media-archival education, as evidenced by a 2018 special issue of this journal on the institutionalization of media-archival training and graduate education, a 2019 focused section of *The Moving Image* on archives and pedagogy, and a 2017 issue of the *Cinema Journal Teaching Dossier* on teaching with primary sources. Building on these inspiring publications, and the innovative pedagogical initiatives they describe, the present issue seeks to add to this growing literature on media-archival pedagogy by offering new perspectives on graduate and undergraduate education, the practical and logistical challenges of training and instruction, and the development of curricular and extracurricular programs, initiatives, and activities. What actually happens in the classroom, or in the archive? How does one “teach media archives”?

Featuring eighteen articles and essays by archivists, librarians, scholars, and teachers, the contributions to this special issue include discussions of existing and imagined graduate programs; detailed descriptions of internships and standalone graduate and undergraduate courses focused on film preservation, restoration, cataloguing, and programming; proposals for new digital pedagogical tools and new locations for media-archival pedagogy and collaboration; guides for anticolonial description, inclusive archival practice, and accessible course design for neurodivergent and disabled archivists; and reflections on media literacy, student-led initiatives, and the state of media-archival education nationally and internationally. Taken together, these articles and essays provide an expansive view of media-archival education today, encompassing both advanced, professional training for careers in media archives as well as more general introductions to archival concepts and practices within film and media studies, art history, and information science curricula.

This introduction begins with a short survey of the rise of media-archival education over the past 50 years, before discussing our own do-it-yourself efforts to teach media archives at UWM by training undergraduate students in film inspection, incorporating film prints in film studies courses, organizing screenings and lectures focused on film and media preservation, and developing courses about media-archival practice and theory. The introduction concludes with an overview of the eighteen contributions to this special issue, which model practical, experiential, and collaborative approaches to training the next generation of archives professionals, bridging the gap between film and media education and the archival profession, and bringing both students into the archive and the archive into the classroom.

Media-Archival Pedagogy

Training in film, media, or audiovisual preservation, conservation, or archiving is still a relatively new phenomenon. Until the end of the twentieth century, most audiovisual archivists did not receive formal training in audiovisual preservation before entering the archives, but learned their trade on the job—as Ray Edmondson put it, there “was no other way” (1995, 252). While some archivists may have trained in related “collecting professions”—some of the skills and concepts relevant to film

preservation could be learned from library and information science, museology, and other heritage professions—audiovisual materials presented unique technical, material, and epistemic challenges and required specialized knowledge that could only be acquired through experience or passed down from senior staff to new hires.

In the introduction to their *Synoptique* special issue, Philipp Dominik Keidl and Christian Gosvig Olesen (2018) trace the institutionalization of the audiovisual preservation field to the early 1970s and the emergence of professional organizations and the codification of best practices and standards, including through the launch of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) *Information Bulletin* in 1972 and the first FIAF Film Preservation Summer School in 1973. Gregory Lukow traces the field's further professionalization to the 1990s and the development of more advanced philosophies and codes of ethics, greater awareness about the importance of audiovisual heritage, and the founding of the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA), the first association to welcome individual archivist members rather than only institutions and organizations, which significantly broadened the scope of the field by bringing together a wider range of professionals to recognize and strategize around their common needs. Yet, as Lukow notes, early efforts at developing audiovisual archives “training” (as opposed to “education”) were generally targeted at “staff” rather than “students,” were envisioned to take place at archives rather than in universities, and were primarily modelled on the transmission of specialized technical skills rather than an academic curriculum that incorporated interdisciplinary perspectives (2000, 137).

While several short-term courses and workshops, like the FIAF Summer School, were offered throughout the last quarter of the twentieth century, these educational initiatives were infrequent and unsystematic, and a more formal system for the training of the next generation of film and media preservationists remained a central concern for the field. In 1990, attempts to formalize audiovisual preservation training saw the inauguration of the first MA in film archiving at the University of East Anglia, which combined courses in the university's existing film studies curriculum with practical training at the university's East Anglian Film Archive (Lukow 2000; Elsaesser 2018). Similar programs, building on the strengths of well-established film studies departments and their proximity to local archives, followed at the University of California, Los Angeles, New York University, and the University of Amsterdam in the early 2000s, the latter of which also included a significant focus on curatorial practices (Lukow 2000; Elsaesser 2018; de Valck 2015). The L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation at the George Eastman Museum—“the only full-time course offered within a film archive or museum,” which combines classroom lectures with weekly rotations throughout the museum's different departments—has also run continuously since 1996, and in 2005 began to offer a similar MA program in partnership with the University of Rochester (Yeager 2018, 36). These foundational MA programs collectively produced the first generation of academically trained film and media archivists, in turn setting new expectations around professionalization and the necessity of educational credentials to enter the field.

The 2010s saw another rise in the development and establishment of more

graduate programs as well as the first undergraduate degrees in film and media preservation—many of them in Germany (Campanini et al. 2018; Ruedel and Koerber 2018; Hanley 2018). While some were modelled on close connections to film studies curricula, a few instead developed strong relationships with local film heritage and culture institutions or forged new alliances with library and information science, museology, and conservation and materials science programs. Marijke de Valck worries about this recent shift away from the field's historical association with film studies, especially at a time when the humanities is under increased pressure to move toward vocational training: "How can archivists and scholars really engage with the preservation of moving images if they are not academically formed in the appreciation and conceptualisation of the objects, their dispositifs and transformations?" (2015, 8). At the same time, the growing scope of our field requires increased interdisciplinarity, as more complex media objects and environments confront audiovisual archivists with new needs, novel challenges, and emergent areas of expertise (Masson and Fossati 2018).

The rise of digital humanities and the increased digitization of archival materials through a wide range of sites and projects, including the Internet Archive and the Media History Digital Library, has also seen the emergence of a new kind of media-archival pedagogy, as it is now possible for film studies instructors to incorporate primary sources and archival research methods in their undergraduate courses, often introducing students to archives for the first time. This increased interest in having students interact directly with archival media or primary documents related to media history has sent students on scavenger hunts through digitized archives and allowed students to develop their own original media-historical research (Montgomery 2014; Horwitz and Comiskey 2014; Carman 2017; Groening 2017; Keidl 2021; Teperman 2022; Clarke 2022; Hoyt and Morris 2022).¹ While the mass digitization of archival records has made it possible for students to undertake original research without ever setting foot into a physical archive or speaking to an archivist, Vincent Longo (2019) notes that increased availability of materials does not necessarily equal increased accessibility: students and other users must still be taught where to find archives and collections, how to read a finding aid, and how to make use of their materials. As such, these courses and assignments have sometimes become opportunities to discuss the work that archives do and introduce students to archival tasks and processes through innovative assignments (Johnson 2017; Ehrick 2017). While usually not their primary purpose, these activities can help students learn about, and maybe even pique their interests in pursuing, the archival profession.

As Caroline Frick (2018) notes, the professionalization of the field, especially through the requirement of expensive advanced degrees, has limited who is able to pursue a career in media archives and who is able to call themselves a media archivist, inhibiting diversity within the field. While efforts like the recent AMIA Pathways Fellowship, intended to provide funded internships, mentorship, and professional development seminars to students from underrepresented groups, are very welcome initiatives to make the profession more diverse and inclusive, we see the development of introductory media preservation courses at both the graduate and undergraduate

level—which can be incorporated into existing degree programs in film production, media studies, information science, art history, and adjacent fields—as a promising and necessary way to introduce a broader range of students to the work of media archives. It was with these things in mind that we saw the opportunity to activate a dormant collection of 16mm films at our own university to teach students about the work of film archives and the practice of media preservation.

Teaching Media Archives at UWM

Our efforts began with a collection of about 75 film prints (just over 150 reels) that had been held in an art history department storage room for fifteen years. The Patricia Mellencamp 16mm Film Print Collection was named after the distinguished professor emerita of art history who had collected the films as a faculty member in the Department of Art History, where she taught film history, theory, and criticism for three decades until her retirement in 2002. She was instrumental in founding UWM's interdepartmental film studies program in the early 1970s—one of the first in the nation—and in developing the study of film and television in the humanities throughout her career. The collection had been amassed as part of her teaching, and primarily represented a canonical history of classical cinema: Alfred Hitchcock, Buster Keaton, Orson Welles, Sergei Eisenstein, and D.W. Griffith were among the auteurs best represented; Germaine Dulac and Maya Deren were the only women. The films were used throughout her courses until her retirement, upon which her successors swapped the bulky projectors and heavy reels for VHS cassettes, laserdiscs, and DVDs.

The collection came under the stewardship of newly hired art history professor Elena Gorfinkel in 2009, who cared for the collection until her departure at the end of 2016, at which time film studies professor Tami Williams became the collection's de facto steward. Christian had met with Gorfinkel throughout the fall 2016 semester, and under Williams' mentorship, he started inventorying the collection and evaluating the condition of the films, funded by a Support for Undergraduate Research Fellows (SURF) Grant, sponsored by the university's Office of Undergraduate Research, which paid students to assist faculty mentors on their projects. He taught himself the basic standards of film handling, inspection, cleaning, repair, and projection by consulting *The Film Preservation Guide* (National Film Preservation Foundation 2004), purchasing the necessary supplies out of pocket from a local record store that kept film leader and splicing tape in stock for film students. He also maintained detailed reports on the condition of each reel and extensive notes about his interventions.

In fall 2017, Hugo received SURF funding to work with Williams on researching the history of the film studies program at UWM. During the first week of classes, however, another local university asked Williams if the film studies program would be interested in some old 16mm films they were going to discard. A couple of days later, four large boxes filled with a mix of more classic film prints as well as educational films were delivered, and Hugo quickly shifted his attention from his initial research project toward cataloguing the new collection and evaluating its con-

dition. Having already worked with 16mm film as a production student, he adapted those production skills to the preservation workflow Christian had already developed, which included inspecting and cleaning the films, repairing or making note of any splices or other damage, adding and labelling head and tail leader, and—eventually—rehousing the films from rusty cans or damaged cardboard boxes into new archival plastic cans.

At the time, the collections were housed in two different locations—the Mellencamp materials were still in art history storage, and the new collection was taking up most of Williams' office. Our first priority was to pool our resources and combine these collections, while being mindful of their distinct provenance. The three of us approached Richard Grusin, the director of the Center for 21st Century Studies, an interdisciplinarity humanities centre originally founded as the Center for 20th Century Studies in 1968. He was enthusiastic about Mellencamp's collection and her connection to the centre's history (it was a central intellectual home for Mellencamp, who organized and participated in several of the centre's conferences), and he offered us an unused office on the centre's floor. We graciously accepted his offer and spent winter break lugging large, heavy metal cabinets through the snow so that both film collections could be brought to their new home before the spring 2018 semester began. Now that we had a dedicated office in which to inspect, catalogue, store, and care for these films, we started to think about the collections and our new space as an archive.

At the beginning of the spring 2018 semester, with Williams serving as faculty advisor, we founded a student organization, the Moving Image Society, through which we recruited several more student members to help inspect films, to host and organize film screenings, to invite visiting speakers, and to raise funds for the archive. Founding a society, we thought, would not only increase the archive's visibility on campus and make us eligible for university funding—it would also ensure continuity and that others would keep up our efforts long after we had graduated. The society's charter declared its express purpose as maintaining the archive and providing students with hands-on training, practical experience, and professional development opportunities in film studies-related careers like film preservation and programming, while energizing and building community within the film studies student body.

After our newly formed organization was denied a student government grant to purchase new archival film canisters, supplies, and equipment, we decided not to wait around for the next application cycle and instead explored other fundraising options. That summer, together with a few other students and alumni, we curated a benefit film festival consisting of three hour-long programs of recent found footage films, films about archives, or films made on celluloid or analogue video, as well as a program of two slapstick films from the archive with live musical accompaniment by Renato Umali, a faculty member in the film production department. Through donations and filmmaker submission fees, the inaugural Save the Archives Film Festival, hosted in Mellencamp's honour at the UWM Union Cinema that September, raised over \$1,500, which went toward new film canisters, a new set of rewinds, and various supplies and materials for inspection and repair, including splicing tape,

photographic emulsion cleaner, non-abrasive wipes, gloves, masks, and loupes. The festival also helped garner some attention for the archive and our activities, including through a profile in *UWM Report* (Hackett 2018; see Figure 1). The festival was followed a month later by Mellencamp's own return to campus for the Center for 21st Century Studies' 50th anniversary conference and a celebratory dedication of the archive, which occasioned another screening of a Buster Keaton film. Screening prints at events across campus was a relatively easy thing to do, but the ways in which it made students aware of and curious about film as a material object assured us that incorporating materials from the archive into film studies courses would be a success.



Figure 1: Posing with a daylight spool of unidentified film for a *UWM Report* profile. Photo by Troy Fox, courtesy of the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee.

In fall 2018, following Gorfinkel's departure, Williams was asked to teach the early film history course, covering 1895–1945, which she had previously taught between 2003 and 2008. Inspired by the Domitor conference on Provenance and Early Cinema held at the George Eastman Museum that summer, which Williams co-organized as Domitor president, and seeking to use the collection in her course, we decided to screen several 16mm prints from the archive in lieu of a DVD or Blu-ray. Since most of the students were not familiar with the difference between film and video, we began by unspooling a short compilation reel of Lumière films across the large lecture hall, letting students touch it, feel it, look through the transparent film base, and examine the individual frames, before placing the reel on the projector at the end of class and letting the still images come to life on the screen—a technique Williams had been inspired to use following a visit to UWM by experi-

mental filmmaker Peter Kubelka in 2005. Allowing students to interact directly with the material, even in this brief encounter in a large lecture hall, helped them better understand the mechanics of early film technology, and piqued at least a few students' interest in film preservation. Later in the semester, local pianist and composer Anthony Deutsch performed a live musical accompaniment to a print of a German expressionist film, his improvised score emphasizing the performative live aspects of early cinema and recreating the conditions of early moviegoing. These experiments were well received by students and proved that the film collections could be useful to help broaden students' understanding of film history.

Once the next student government grant application cycle opened, we were better prepared, and ready to think bigger. In addition to requesting more supplies (which we were granted this time) we also planned our inaugural Symposium on the Moving Image. The resulting spring 2019 Women Film Pioneers Symposium—hosted in conjunction with a series of film programs curated by Williams at the Oriental Theater, a local arthouse—brought silent film experts Jane Gaines, Shelley Stamp, Jennifer Bean, and Maggie Hennefeld to campus to discuss early women filmmakers, film preservation, and archival research. A few undergraduate students helped introduce the speakers at the symposium, while another assisted Williams with the logistics of her film and music program, gaining practical experience in event organizing, public speaking, and silent film programming. Over the next few semesters, we continued to host more visiting lecturers, including Dan Streible and Kim Tomadjoglou for a fall 2019 event focused on preserving orphan and amateur films, in an effort to drum up excitement about the orphan film collection we had acquired a year earlier. In partnership with the UWM Union Cinema, we also hosted several visiting artists, including Sandra Gibson and Luis Recoder, whose “projection performance installation” refracted the image of an archival film print across the theatre (and whose artwork beautifully illustrates the front and back covers of this issue).

By summer 2019, we had acquired several more collections—including 12,000 35mm teaching slides used by Mellencamp and others to illustrate their course lectures, which had also been stored with the Department of Art History—and more than five undergraduate research fellows and volunteers were working on cataloguing, inspecting, and rehousing the films, following the protocols developed by Christian. As a result, we were quickly outgrowing the office space we had been allotted just a year and a half earlier. Hugo had previously worked as a production assistant with the campus television studio, which had closed down at the end of 2016, and had since been working on a parallel project preserving and digitizing some of the remaining videotapes. In summer 2019, it occurred to him that the old studio control room could be repurposed as an archival space, and the separate collections of film and video could be joined together for greater synergy, so he drafted a proposal outlining how this merger could benefit both the individual departments as well as the larger university community (Ljungbäck 2025, 216). The old control room would become our new workspace, with rewinds, light tables, projectors, screens, and supplies, as well as video decks of various formats, from MiniDV and VHS to Betacam, U-matic, and 1” Type C. The old tape room would be converted

into the new “vault,” where all the collections could be stored together, while the two adjacent offices would be turned into an administrative office and storage for paper collections. The proposal meant that the archive could keep acquiring new collections and several students and faculty could be engaged in collaborative research and preservation projects, workshops, or training at the same time, while the smaller, more centrally located office could be used as an administrative meeting space.

The Vice Chancellor was receptive and excited about the prospect of turning these vacant facilities into a teaching space, and in February 2020, after several months of rescheduled meetings, revisions to the proposal, and approval from various university committees, the agreement was finally signed. We had just begun moving equipment over and making adjustments to the space to accommodate its new use as the home of the Patricia Mellencamp Film and Television Archive when COVID-19 shut campus down and ground our efforts to a halt (Ljungbäck 2025, 216). The second Symposium on the Moving Image, to be hosted that spring, was postponed, and eventually hosted virtually the coming fall. Two pending collection acquisitions were put on indefinite hold, including a large collection of soap opera magazines previously stored with the journalism and media studies department, until they could proceed the following summer. At that point, however, we were both alumni of the program—Christian since 2018 and Hugo since 2020—and contributing only on a volunteer-basis. The pandemic had largely destroyed the continuity we had hoped the Moving Image Society would ensure, and although student interest was revived in summer 2021, it has remained sporadic ever since.

One of our most ambitious efforts had been creating courses focused on archives and media preservation, a goal which finally came to fruition in 2022. That fall, in an effort to restore momentum, Williams taught a “Film and Media Archives Practicum,” which included several guest presentations by archivists and scholars, site visits to the UWM Archives, and lectures on handling, inspecting, and projecting small gauge film. As part of Williams’ seminar, Christian taught students about small gauge film identification and co-taught a lecture with Shiraz Bhathena, digital archivist at the UWM Archives, on 16mm film handling, splicing, and projection, in preparation for the first Milwaukee Home Movie Day, co-organized by Bhathena, Williams, and colleagues in the film studies program and film production department. Involving students in the hands-on work of home movie day and film inspection provided the students with insights that typical lectures could not (Tepperman 2021; Lameris and Flueckiger 2019). Williams’ archive practicum was followed in spring 2023 by a theoretical seminar—“Film Historiographies and Archives,” taught by Jocelyn Szczepaniak-Gillece—combining training in historiographic methods with archival theory. While this course sequence has not been taught again since, our hope is that it will be brought back and become a staple of the film studies program, so that future students can be introduced to the work of archives and media preservation, and maybe find their way back to the Mellencamp Archive.

We both stepped down from active roles in the project at the end of 2022, after the third Symposium on the Moving Image—the aptly titled Teaching Media Archives Symposium, co-organized with Allison Farrell—but we continue to serve

in an advisory capacity. Since then, things have largely slowed down. While Williams applied for two SURF grants for fall 2024, the requirements for grants had changed, and the unsuccessful applications meant that interns had to assist her on a voluntary basis. The majority of the films are still stored in the Center for 21st Century Studies office in Curtin Hall, unused, in the same type of cabinets we had hoped to rescue the Mellencamp collection from eight years ago. But the fact that things have slowed down does not mean that the work we did failed. For a couple of years, there was a flurry of archival activity, which brought a wide range of archivists, scholars, and artists to campus to interact with students. Several of these students had their first experiences with preservation and programming initiatives through the archive, some of whom are now working in archives or film culture organizations professionally. Christian graduated from the L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation and is now working as an Archives Technician at the Library of Congress; Hugo is a doctoral student at the University of Chicago, where he worked with the South Side Home Movie Project; two other students involved with the archive went on to pursue their MLIS degrees and are now working in the field; and other students have worked or are working with local and regional film and media organizations.

Several years removed from the project, we have been able to reflect on many of the factors that played a part in its (short-term) success. We were lucky to be able to receive a wide variety of forms of support: the Moving Image Society was able to fund the purchase of archival supplies and equipment and pay for travel and honoraria for visiting speakers with minor, but regular, student government grants; through our affiliation with the Center for 21st Century Studies-sponsored Media Studies Research Collaboratory, led by Williams between 2019 and 2023, we were able to receive research funding that could be used for visiting speakers, consultants, and supplies; the Office of Undergraduate Research generously funded over a dozen student research fellowships to work with the archive; the Save the Archives Film Festival fundraiser, which we hosted twice, in fall 2018 and 2019, brought in a limited amount of money for supplies; and we received several in-kind donations of equipment and materials, as well as a generous donation from Mellencamp herself in support of our activities.

Williams' consistent enthusiasm and support as our faculty mentor also allowed us to get students involved in a variety of capacities: as members of the Moving Image Society, assisting with fundraising activities and programming initiatives; as volunteers, devoting a few hours each week to inspect film prints and gain hands-on experience; as paid undergraduate research fellows sponsored by the Office of Undergraduate Research's SURF program, working ten hours per week on film inspection and other research tasks; and as unpaid interns, receiving film studies course credit while gaining professional experience in film studies-related professional work. While this level of flexibility allowed students to pursue the specific tasks and projects they were most interested in, it also made for a somewhat unstable structure, as students had various levels of commitments and did not always feel compelled to remain with the project longer than a semester—or even a few weeks. Sustainability of both student participants and funding remains the greatest challenge. Without

dedicated captains to steer the ship, and institutional support to develop new initiatives, the project risks coming to a standstill. We still want to see the archive continue to grow, prosper, and attract new students to discover the exciting work of film preservation. But having nursed the project for over five years, even long after we both left Milwaukee, we felt it important to step away and let new students discover these collections, and activate them in whatever way they see fit.

Our greatest asset may have been the scrappy can-do attitude we learned to adopt at our public research university, where scarce funding forced us to make use of any and all resources we could find, and where we were empowered, especially by Williams, to create our own opportunities and to make things happen ourselves. When furniture, equipment, or films needed to be moved across campus—even in the January cold—we grabbed a cart. When we could not get our hands on a rewind table, we built our own. And when a donor reached out, offering us their materials, we drove to their home and packed them up ourselves. As a result of our efforts, the archive now holds close to 250 film prints, several hundred master videotapes from the television studio, a couple of dozen Laserdiscs, 12,000 teaching slides, and over 2,000 books and periodicals across its collections. The primary goal of the archive was not necessarily to preserve all of these objects—though we certainly hoped to do that, too—but to introduce students to the work of archives, archivists, and the practice of media preservation, to get them interested in unique materials that may not (yet) exist in digital form, and to make them realize that they, too, can play an active role in the preservation of media history—and on that count, the project succeeded many times over.

Overview of the Contributions

We offer this modest discussion of our own efforts at UWM in the hope that it can provide models to develop similar initiatives at other institutions, in the same way we envision the following contributions will. The eighteen articles in this special issue are organized into three sections. The first, “Students in the Archives,” focuses on practical and theoretical training in audiovisual preservation work for students pursuing careers as archivists. The second, “Archives in the Classroom,” offers several case studies about incorporating archival materials and primary source research into undergraduate courses. The third, “Beyond the Archive and Classroom,” proposes new and overlooked sites of media-archival pedagogy and practice. Readers will find that these separations are somewhat arbitrary, as each section often overlaps thematically with the others. In putting together this issue, we have also sought to include a wide range of article types, combining a mix of peer-reviewed articles and thought pieces, as well as an artist statement and a roundtable, to allow for different kinds of knowledge to emerge, and different voices to participate.

Ben Harry kicks off the first section with “Teaching Media Archives and Performing Film Reconstructions with Undergraduate Students,” in which he provides a detailed description of an undergraduate internship he has led at Brigham Young University since 2021. After providing a thorough overview of the informal discussions he engages in with students interested in archives and the preservation

process—an overview which itself could serve as a roadmap for an introductory media archives syllabus—Harry describes how he was able to make use of film elements produced by the BYU Motion Picture Studio, which are now part of BYU Special Collections, to start a semester-long internship focused on film restoration and reconstruction. Through this internship, students learn to identify, inspect, and describe film materials, edit, reconstruct, and colour grade digitized film elements, and present the restored film to an audience, encompassing all steps of the film restoration process.

Internships remain the focus of “Praxis is Paramount: NYU MIAP’s Approach to Educating Media Archivists Today for Collection Stewardship Tomorrow,” in which Kimberly Tarr discusses the central role internships play to New York University’s Moving Image Archiving and Preservation program. In addition to describing the hands-on components of several courses taught as part of the curriculum and giving an overview of the logistics and administrative aspects of MIAP’s internship program, Tarr emphasizes the importance of creating opportunities for students to critically reflect on their practices and experiences—an element crucial to fostering what Paulo Freire calls “praxis.” Concurrently with students’ internships, they participate in a seminar that Tarr leads, which is designed to address issues that emerge during their internships and provide a structured space for self-reflection and dialogue around the preservation practices they are engaged in, so that these practices may be changed, adapted, or improved.

Based on his research on the accessibility of media-archival education for disabled and neurodivergent students, and on his own experience as a film archivist with epilepsy, Michael Marlatt discusses strategies that archivists and instructors can employ in their teaching to account for students’ unique needs and situations. “Supporting the 36%: A Teaching Guide on Student Mental Health in Media Archival Education” provides several concrete suggestions that instructors can follow, including having proactive discussions with student accessibility services, being upfront about the different challenges archivists face as part of their everyday tasks, introducing students to existing professional networks and support structures, and familiarizing themselves with resources and research on mental health. By following these recommendations, Marlatt proposes, we can not only make media-archival education more accessible, but the larger field and profession more equitable and inclusive.

Concluding these discussions of internships, Tyisha Murphy draws on their own experience as an intern to reflect on archival labour and embodied knowledge. In “Reparative Description in ‘Project Naming’: Toward an Anti-Colonial Practice,” they discuss Library and Archives Canada’s “Project Naming,” which sought to identify photographs of Inuit community members taken by ethnographers and explorers throughout the twentieth century, as a successful example of “reparative description” work. By working directly with community members to identify their ancestors in the photographs, LAC archivists ceded their authority as custodians of the archive to learn from the communities depicted and develop new systems to account for this updated information. Yet, as Murphy notes, this kind of work can be difficult to

sustain as archives rely on short-term contract workers, who may be unable to devote the time, energy, and care necessary to ensure that descriptions and finding aids accurately and respectfully reflect a collection's contents.

Staying within the realm of archival description, the next article in this section explores two experiential learning courses on video preservation, cataloguing, and digital curation. Grounded in queer archival theory and practice, “‘In A Way I’m Coming Out to All of You Tonight’: Activist Media, Digital Curation Pedagogy, and the Future of Queer Archives” describes a graduate practicum and an undergraduate seminar that incorporated digitized videos from the LGBTQ+ Columbia History Project documenting South Carolinian queer history and activism. Travis L. Wagner discusses how these materials not only became a practical case study for library and information science students learning about preservation, digitization, cataloguing, and database management, but also introduced students to the unique challenges and ethics of preserving and making LGBTQ+ media accessible, including the complexities of gender- and identity-inclusive description practices, the conflicting needs of queer representation and privacy, and the benefits of involving community representatives in the archival process.

To conclude the first section, Paolo Cherchi Usai proposes a radical new film preservation curriculum. In “Obscure Cinema,” he presents the outline of a seven-year program that intends to give equal weight to film studies, filmmaking, film technology, and film preservation. His expansive, ambitious, and holistic curriculum, which requires an almost complete abstinence from audiovisual media for the first five years, is structured around a gradual (re)exposure to and (re)familiarization with moving images and sounds stripped to their most basic elements. Students receive training in all aspects of film, from cinematography, editing, and the craft of filmmaking to film inspection, identification, projection, and curation—even the manufacture of eco-friendly film stock and the disassembly and reassembly of a film projector. This radical, utopian proposal responds to the social, political, and environmental crises of the twenty-first century, and is an inspiring call to reckon with and rethink the status quo of media-archival education today.

The first article in the second section, Brian Meacham’s “Teaching ‘The Film Archive’ at Yale University,” describes a graduate course Meacham has taught since 2016 that introduces doctoral students in film and media studies to film preservation practices. The first half of the course surveys different film technologies, processes, and formats—gauges, stocks, colour, and sound—as well as preservation and restoration concepts, curatorial practices, and the history of film archives. Students are also trained to think about films as material objects and to pay attention to the physical condition of films as they are being projected. In the second half of the course, students are asked to acquire a film print for the Yale Film Archive, which they are taught to inspect, repair, catalogue, scan, and present to an audience at the end of the semester.

In her article, Marina Hassapopoulou discusses several courses and projects she has taught and developed at New York University centred on obsolete, interactive, complex, and ephemeral media that make use of collaborative and DIY research

and preservation strategies. “Ephemeral Media: Countering Transience through Alternative and Participatory (Meta-)Archiving” recounts how the participatory and amateur archival processes that students employ as part of her courses to research and preserve the histories of neglected media formats and objects, while perhaps not living up to the standards of institutional archives, have allowed her to build several alternative online archives devoted to these unique media. Across her discussion, Hassapopoulou also stresses the important contributions that the students make to both pedagogy and scholarship, as these non-traditional, multi-authored research platforms become a way for students to present their intellectual labour in a public-facing venue.

In “Film Programming as Archival Research at the University of Leicester,” David Christopher discusses a first-year undergraduate course where students work to develop and realize their own film programs or media exhibitions. Through a detailed breakdown of the syllabus, he describes how students are trained to develop transferable skills in research, administration, design, and communication as they work in groups to develop a program idea, explore potential film or media objects to include in their program, build a website to promote their event, and finally present the program to an audience. Throughout his article, Christopher reflects on how he has tried to encourage students to pursue more rigorous and original archival research as part of their project development, and how the limitations of the various iterations of the course have curtailed these efforts, encouraging him to continually modify the syllabus.

Returning to description and cataloguing, in “Guerrilla Television Out of the Box: Exploring the Raindance Foundation Video Archive at ZKM | Karlsruhe with Students of Art History,” Barbara Filser and Felix Mittelberger discuss a series of three seminars taught in the art history program at Karlsruhe Institute of Technology in collaboration with ZKM | Karlsruhe, making use of archival video from the Raindance Foundation Video Archive. These courses tasked students with cataloguing and describing digitized videos from the archive, entering metadata into ZKM’s database, and researching and identifying the individuals, organizations, locations, and events depicted. In addition to serving as an introduction to the history of early video—a history typically overlooked in art history programs—the course also allowed students to develop an understanding of the archival labour that is necessary to verify historical data and make materials available for art-historical research.

In “Les archives télévisuelles, génératrices d’histoire(s) de l’art,” Marie-Odile Demay makes a case for the historical value of early television programs and broadcasts focused on the arts. She suggests that early interviews with artists and recordings documenting their practices and exhibitions which were aired on TV could serve as useful primary sources for art-historical research. However, as she shows, many of these materials have not been preserved in a systematic way, and they remain overlooked by art historians. Providing a history of earlier efforts to produce, promote, and preserve films and television programs about art, she discusses the contemporary challenges to preserving these television broadcasts and her own difficulties researching, finding, and accessing them. Throughout her essay, Demay conveys the urgency

of curating, contextualizing, and making these materials available to researchers, students, and the public alike.

Concluding this section, in “Creating an Educational Common: Activating Vulnerable Media Archives in the Classroom,” Chloë Brushwood Rose and Axelle Demus describe several educational guides they developed for both high school and undergraduate students as part of the Canadian research project *Archive/Counter-Archive*. Built around digitized archival media that have in different ways been “marginalized”—a notion they complicate in their article—the authors describe the development of two of these guides, the first centred on a cable access program about HIV/AIDS, and the second on Margaret Perry’s promotional government films. In both case studies, Brushwood Rose and Demus reflect on how these historical materials can be activated in the classroom to teach about specific Canadian histories, about the subjective nature and limits of the archival record, and about political resistance, civic engagement, and community building, in order to create what the authors describe as an “educational common.”

The final section begins with “The Pedagogic Paradox: Addressing Audiovisual Archiving Education in India,” in which Madhavi Reddy, Aparna Subramanian, and Shruti Hussain discuss the state of media-archival training in India. The authors provide an overview of the development of some of the country’s national film and media institutions, and the policies and practices that have prevented them from developing audiovisual archiving training to support their own missions. Summarizing the few educational opportunities available for audiovisual archivists in the country, they describe many of the challenges to establishing professional training, including the film industry’s focus on creating new product rather than caring for its back catalogue, and the lack of recognition and professional status accorded to film archivists in India. Informed by interviews with two regional archivists, as well as their own experiences, the authors provide a roadmap for developing a robust audiovisual archiving “ecosystem” to support both preservation and education in the country.

Patricia Ledesma Villon retains the focus on professionalization and professional identity as she makes a strong case for recognizing the unique knowledge and skills of film workers labouring outside the archive. In “Photochemical Pedagogy: Film Preservation Education beyond the Archive,” she gives due to the artists, lab workers, and other practitioners who keep analogue film alive as a contemporary art form. As Villon argues, an expanded view of what counts as “preservation” could acknowledge that these film workers help preserve analogue film practices and processes by passing down the technical skills necessary to make, process, and project films—skills that archivists often do not possess. The archival community, she suggests, rather than eyeing the artist-run film lab community with suspicion, would only benefit by inviting them to share their knowledge and collaborating with them to find solutions to the issues both communities have in common: obsolescence, technical malfunction, and lack of resources.

Moving from the film lab to film schools, Luiza Gonçalves and Lucas Larriera propose a new method of digital linear editing using the archival tool FFmpeg, which can be used to introduce filmmaking students to archival concepts. In “Ar-

teleku No-GUI: Using Digital Linear Editing to Teach Archival Practices at Film Schools,” they suggest that editing in the command line, without the mediation of a graphical user interface, can help students and editors better understand the technical transformations that happen in the background of editing applications and make more conscious choices about their edits. In addition to describing how they developed this method to create their own short film, Gonçalves and Larriera suggest that this lossless process can also counteract the effects of generation loss and compression for orphaned digital materials. A detailed breakdown of the entire process, including the FFmpeg recipes necessary to execute the edits, is provided in the appendix to their article.

Nicholas Caluda, in “Gauging Interest: Media Preservation Literacy and the Public Library,” examines how public libraries can become sites of media-archival pedagogy. Based on a public program he hosted at the public library branch at which he works, he shows how exposing patrons to a 16mm film print as part of the library’s classic movie night allowed him to introduce them to basic media preservation concepts, including information about ideal storage conditions for film, magnetic media, and optical discs. He assesses the success of his program with a survey, which reveals that participants feel better prepared to preserve their own media collections after attending the program. As Caluda argues, the public library often gets overlooked as part of media-archival efforts, but its accessibility and openness can make it a valuable collaborator for local archives and museums to engage with new audiences.

The final section concludes with Petra Totten’s video essay, *When We Gather Round the Giant Stone Peacock*, which turns our attention to another library: the John P. Robarts Library at the University of Toronto. The Robarts Library becomes the focal point for Totten’s reflections on the hierarchies of value ascribed to academic, archival, and personal kinds of knowledge production—hierarchies the video flattens by treating them as equally important. Engaging with queer and trans theory, Totten reflects on the ways in which trans experiences have been excluded from the archive and historical record, the ways in which trans lives have persisted, and the ways in which trans people gather to engage in their own collective creation. The ten-minute video is available in its entirety on the *Synoptique* website, and readers are encouraged to watch it before reading the accompanying artist statement included in these pages.

Having kicked this issue off by discussing our own efforts to develop a student-led teaching archive at UWM, it seems fitting to conclude with a roundtable about a similar initiative at Purchase College. In “Now or Never: Teaching 16mm Archiving and Preservation at Purchase College,” Oscar Becher, J.M.S. (Andi) Emberley, Camila Garcia Cabrera, Nathan Holmes, and Lindsay Miller discuss Holmes’ efforts to activate a 16mm film collection at his liberal arts college as part of an undergraduate course he redesigned, and later through a student society. Holmes shares his perspective as the instructor and faculty advisor, Becher and Miller discuss their efforts as professional archivists to support both instruction and preservation work, and Emberley and Garcia bring us full circle by describing their experiences

as students taking the course and remaining active with the Purchase Film Archive through the student society. Their wide-ranging conversation ends this issue on a hopeful note about students' interests in archival work and their willingness and initiative to take an active role in preserving our collective media histories.

When we set out to guest edit this issue, we posed several questions we hoped our contributors would respond to: How can we make the work of archives and archivists more visible to students? How do you balance teaching practical, hands-on preservation skills with theoretical and historical training in archival practice? How do you teach media preservation with limited or no access to physical archives? How can working with archival media as primary research documents, as creative source material, and as heritage artifacts build a historical appreciation and analytical understanding of the materiality of media and the politics of preservation? And how can we ensure that archival instruction—and the archival profession—is accessible and inclusive to students from historically underrepresented groups?

The contributors to this special issue have gone above and beyond in responding to these prompts, providing practical lesson plans and describing innovative assignments; reflecting on students' reactions to and engagement with their course materials, projects, and experiences; and discussing the limitations, challenges, and opportunities presented by access to resources, and the collaborations and partnerships they built both intra-institutionally between siloed departments and inter-institutionally with archives and museums. As these contributions show, audiovisual preservation education has grown to encompass a wide variety of media and can take place in a variety of settings. We hope this special issue can serve as a useful handbook, and that it will inspire and empower other archivists and instructors to develop their own media-archival pedagogical initiatives. For our part, we are full of new ideas, and excited to get back to the classroom.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the journal's editors-in-chief, Jared W. Aronoff and Thomas Gow, for their faith in our proposed theme and collaboration over the past two and a half years; the contributors to this issue, for sharing their work with us, and for their patience throughout the prolonged editorial process; the peer-reviewers, whose generous and thoughtful feedback helped strengthen and clarify the interventions of the peer-reviewed articles; Zeynep Aras, for carefully shepherding this issue through the copyediting process, Will Riley, for his close attention to detail in the design of this issue, and the rest of the *Synoptique* Editorial Collective, for all their behind-the-scenes work to make this issue happen; and the Pordenone Silent Film Festival, whose enthusiasm for this issue made a limited print run possible. We also thank Kyla Esguerra, Linda Corbin-Pardee, Leigh Mahlik, Richard Grusin, Maureen Ryan, and Mary Baylor for their sustained support of our archival efforts at UWM, and, most importantly, Tami Williams, whose constant support, encouragement, mentorship, and collaboration has fuelled our own interests in media archives and pedagogy for the past eight years.

Notes

¹ See also the resources for educators, including sample assignments, available through the Media History Digital Library: <https://mediahistoryproject.org/about/educators.php>.

References

- Campanini, Sonia, Vinzenz Hediger, and Ines Bayer. 2018. "Minding the Materiality of Film: The Frankfurt Master's Program 'Film Culture: Archiving, Programming, Presentation.'" *Synoptique* 6 (1): 79–90.
- Carman, Emily. 2017. "Film History Comes Alive: Primary Materials Research as Participatory Pedagogy." *Cinema Journal Teaching Dossier* 4 (3).
- Clarke, Liz. 2022. "Digital Archives and Creative Assignments." *JCMS Teaching Dossier* 7 (3).
- de Valck, Marijke. 2015. "Poetic Objects or Open Data? Challenges and Changes to Contemporary MA Programmes in Audio-Visual Archiving, Preservation and Presentation." *Film Studies* 12: 3–9.
- Edmondson, Ray. 1995. "Is Film Archiving a Profession?" *Film History* 7 (3): 245–55.
- Ehrick, Christine. 2017. "Teaching Radio History to Help Save It?: Listening, Radio Preservation, and the History Classroom." *Cinema Journal Teaching Dossier* 4 (3).
- Elsaesser, Thomas. 2018. "A Look Back: The Professional Master's Program in Preservation and Presentation of the Moving Image and How It Came to Amsterdam." *Synoptique* 6 (1): 72–78.
- Frick, Caroline. 2018. "What Price Professionalism?" *Synoptique* 6 (1): 23–25.
- Groening, Stephen. 2017. "Teaching Local Television History with Primary Sources." *Cinema Journal Teaching Dossier* 4 (3).
- Hackett, Claire. 2018. "Students Breathe Life into a Long-forgotten Film Archive." *UWM Report*, September 18. <https://uwm.edu/news/students-breathe-life-into-a-long-forgotten-film-archive/>.
- Hanley, Oliver. 2018. "Upholding Tradition: The Master's Program in Film Heritage at the Film University Babelsberg 'Konrad Wolf.'" *Synoptique* 6 (1): 97–101.
- Horwitz, Jonah, and Andrea Comiskey. 2014. "Case Studies of Local Film Exhibition: An Undergraduate Research Assignment." *Cinema Journal Teaching Dossier* 2 (3).
- Hoyt, Eric, and Jemery Morris. 2022. "Teaching with and through Media History: PodcastRE and the Media History Digital Library." *JCMS Teaching Dossier* 7 (6).
- Johnson, Martin L. 2017. "Traversing the Scales of Archival Research." *Cinema Journal Teaching Dossier* 4 (3).
- Keidl, Philipp Dominik. 2021. "Useful Cinema and Its Institutional Contexts: Archival Finding Aid Research Assignments." *JCMS Teaching Dossier* 6 (1).
- Keidl, Philipp Dominik, and Christian Gosvig Olesen. 2018. "Introduction." *Synoptique* 6 (1): 6–11.

- Lameris, Bregt, and Barbara Flueckiger. 2019. "Teaching the Materiality of Film." *The Moving Image* 19 (1): 93–101.
- Ljungbäck, Hugo. 2025. "Preserving Campus Television, or, How an Undergrad Found Willem Dafoe in the Archive." In *The Archivability of Television: Essays on Preservation and Perseverance*, edited by Lauren Bratslavsky and Elizabeth Peterson, 203–21. University of Georgia Press.
- Longo, Vincent. 2019. "Model Archives: Pedagogy's Role in Creating Diverse, Multidisciplinary Archival Users." *The Moving Image* 19 (1): 63–74.
- Lukow, Gregory. 2000. "Beyond 'On-the-Job': The Education of Moving Image Archivists—A History in Progress." *Film History* 12 (2): 134–47.
- Masson, Eef, and Giovanna Fossati. 2018. "Interdisciplinarity, Specialization, Conceptualization: Archival Education Responding to Changing Professional Demands." *Synoptique* 6 (1): 26–30.
- Montgomery, Colleen. 2014. "Surfing the Archive: Teaching Humanistic Approaches to Historical Research Using Online Media Archives and Digital Databases." *Cinema Journal Teaching Dossier* 2 (3).
- National Film Preservation Foundation. 2004. *The Film Preservation Guide*.
- Ruedel, Ulrich, and Martin Koerber. 2018. "The Materiality of Heritage: Moving Image Preservation Training at HTW Berlin." *Synoptique* 6 (1): 91–96.
- Tepperman, Charles. 2021. "Taking a Turn on the Rewind: Strategies for Experiential Learning in Nontheatrical Film History." *JCMS Teaching Dossier* 6 (1).
- Tepperman, Charles. 2022. "Touching All the Bases: Assignments for Experiential Learning in Film History." *JCMS Teaching Dossier* 7 (3).
- Yeager, Caroline. 2018. "The Jeffrey L. Selznick School of Preservation: Changing the Field." *Synoptique* 6 (1): 34–37.