

Archon MATC Award Interim Report (Public)

To: Mellon Foundation

From: Chris Prom, Assistant University Archivist and Associate Professor of Library Administration

Scott Schwartz, Archivist for Music and Fine Arts and Associate Professor of Library Administration

Paul Sorensen, Lead Archon Developer

Re: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Mellon Award for Collaborative Technology: Archon Project

Date: January 31, 2010

This document provides a brief report of activities undertaken between January 1 and December 31, 2009 regarding the above award. In our original plan of work dated August 22, 2008, which we filed after receiving notice of the MATC award, we stated that we would use this award to accomplish three specific outcomes: 1) to enhance core programming for the Archon application; 2) to develop an ongoing business plan for the long-term maintenance of the software and support for the larger Archon user community; and 3) to expand Archon functionality to enable the ingest, management, and access of electronic records and other 'born-digital' materials (e.g., email). This work was scheduled to begin January 1, 2009 and conclude December 21, 2011.

Over the summer of 2009 we revised our original MATC work plan to address the anticipated joint planning with the Archivists' Toolkit team and other vested stakeholders, including the Mellon Foundation, to develop a single unified collections management software tool through the "Building a Next-Generation Archival Management Tool" project. Specifically we made the following changes to our anticipated work plan: 1) accelerate the programming work for the 3.0 release of Archon—two months earlier than planned (December 2009); 2) allocate additional programmer time to the maintenance of the Archon software; and 3) incorporate the outcome of Prom's sabbatical research into an expanded electronic records component with the Mellon AT-Archon project team with an eye toward factoring this work into the planning/development of a unified tool. These revisions were made with the assumption that much of the work that we planned to complete with the MATC award will move toward the goal of creating a single re-factored Archon/AT tool.

We have made considerable progress toward both the programming of the Archon 3.0 release and the development of draft functional specifications for a re-factored Archon/AT collections management tool.

Archon/AT Integration Project and Sustainability Planning

Subsequent to our planned start for the MATC-funded project, we began discussions, facilitated by the Mellon Foundation, with the principal project staff of the Archivist Toolkit application. As a result of these conversations, the University of California at San Diego, NYU University, and the

University of Illinois applied for and subsequently received a Mellon planning grant. Since the new grant's main objective is the development of functional specifications, high-level technical plans, and a sustainability plan for a merged Archon/AT application, some of our initial sustainability planning developed in our first MATC work plan has been superseded by this second project. In regard to our sustainability planning and Archon application development associated with the MATC Award we have completed the following outcomes:

Sustainability Planning

- Participation in development of a Mellon planning grant.
- Development of draft functional specifications for the new application.
- Consultation with Archon/Archivist Toolkit community, and other members of archival community, concerning the draft specifications.
- Completion of activities under track one of the Mellon planning grant, specifically the development of high-level functional requirements, which were delivered to the grant management team in January 2010. In addition, we undertook the initial stages of a migration analysis.
- Development of Sourceforge site with Bazaar based concurrent versioning system and code checkout.
- Support for archon website and forums (available at <http://www.archon.org>).

Archon Application Development/Interoperability

In late 2008, we projected that application development funds would be expended over the three-year period beginning January 1, 2009 and ending December 21, 2011. As the attached financial documentation shows, we have spent \$24,728 over this period. Of this amount, all but \$120 was devoted to personnel costs.

Regarding the work on the development of the Archon 3.0 application during 2009, we focused our attention on completing a redesign of the core programming interface and the staff-side user module. These changes are nearly complete and will provide the basis for additional work to be undertaken during the planning phase for the new Archon/AT application. In particular, the revised API and user interface may serve as a model for the new Archon/AT interface. In addition the experience that our lead developer has gained from redesigning the Archon application will be used for the development of the technical specifications for the new integrated application.

A beta release of Archon 3.0 is currently available on the Archon website, and a stable version 3.0 will be released before the end of February, 2010. Version 3.0 of Archon will include the following new or enhanced features:

- New user interface, making extensive use of AJAX programming techniques to generate rich, interactive user interface (see figure one on next page).
- Redesigned core API to increase application efficiency and to facilitate rapid development of new modules.
- Enhanced Creator/names manager, including support for new EAC-CPF standard.
- Support for alpha-numeric values in the content manager.
- Improved digital library, allowing more robust access controls and better object management.

- A “book manager” to allow simple description of books attached to archives or manuscript collections.¹

After version 3.0 has been released, we will complete development work on Archon’s Audiovisual Self-Assessment Program² which will included in a final 3.1 version of Archon planned for release in either late March or early April 2010. Once version 3.1 has been released all further development work on Archon will stop. We will concentrate our efforts on work necessary to facilitate the migration of data into the new system and to increase its interoperability with other systems (such as digital object repository systems) into which users of an existing Archon instance may wish to migrate data.

Subsequent to the final release of 3.1, we intend to complete the following work, which will support the current user community while preparing for the migration of data from Archon to a new application.

- Maintenance releases (to include bug fixes and minor changes to the staff user interface based on usability problems identified by the user community).
- Batch exporter for EAD/MARC files.
- Batch exporter for digital object metadata.
- Development of file-based storage for digital objects stored in Archon and migration script to convert digital objects to file based storage.³
- Engagement in all aspects of planning grant process as specified in the planning grant application.

Those aspects of our original August 2008 MATC work plan that were not included in the above list of planned accomplishments will be addressed during the planning phase of the new Archon/AT application.

¹ This feature will not be migrated forward as a formal part of the new application, but may be developed as a plug-in using University of Illinois resources.

² This work began in early 2008 and was separately funded under an IMLS grant (see http://www.library.illinois.edu/prescons/services/av_self_assesment_program.html).

³ Archon currently stores all digital objects uploaded into the system as binary (blob) objects directly in the source MySQL or SQLServer database. In order to migrate these objects to the new system or a repository application, it will be necessary to extract digital objects to a file system. This will be an enhancement to this existing Archon functionality and may serve as a model for similar functionality that will be required in the new Archon/AT application.

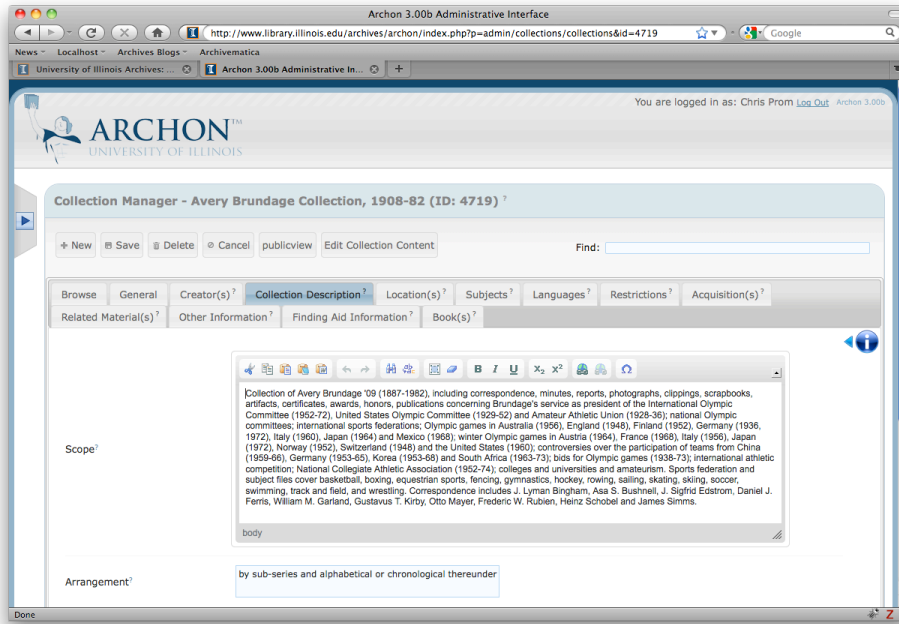


Figure 1: Archon 3.0 Interface

Project Staff

Chris Prom, Assistant University Archivist and Associate Professor of Library Administration

Scott Schwartz, Archivist for Music and Fine Arts and Associate Professor of Library Administration

Paul Sorensen, Lead Archon Developer