



www.library.uiuc.edu/prescons/services/av_self_assesment_program.html

The Audiovisual Self-Assessment Program (AvSAP)

Do you have stacks of VHS tapes and no idea what to do with them? Do you want to know the best way to store your 16mm film collections and are unsure where to start? Do you have a limited preservation budget and want to spend it in the best way possible to preserve your audiovisual media items? The University of Illinois Library is developing the Audiovisual Self-Assessment Program (AvSAP) to address these and other media-related needs.

The AvSAP will assist cultural heritage institutions with audiovisual materials in their collections and staff who have little to no training in audiovisual preservation. Our goal is to help collections managers develop a prioritized preservation plan as well as educate them on extending the lives of their collections with the resources at hand. The kinds of materials the AvSAP covers are: film, videotape (open-reel and cartridge based; analog and digital), audio recordings (extending from cylinder and disc grooved media to audiotape; analog and digital) and optical media such as CD and DVD. The AvSAP does not address issues related to still photographic processes or prints.

Use and Downloading

The AvSAP is, essentially, a self-guided series of questions designed to help the collections manager to assess the condition of the audiovisual materials in their collection. Collection managers can decide if they'd like to download the program and host it on their own SQL server, if a server is available at their institution. They may also elect to work with AvSAP as a web-based interface; entering collection data via a web browser, with data archived by the University of Illinois.

Archon: Partner Project to the AvSAP

Archivists and programmers with the University of Illinois Archives are building the base of the AvSAP program using the Archives-developed open-source archival description tool Archon. The use of Archon as the foundation of the AvSAP program benefits each project in that they work independently or cohesively, providing description support and additional functionality to the end user. For more information about the Archon project, please see www.archon.org.

Item-by-Item vs. Random Sample Assessments

The AvSAP can be used in two ways:

Item-by-item

The first and most diagnostic option for a repository is the item-by-item assessment. In this kind of assessment, each audiovisual item in a repository is assessed. Item-by-item assessment is recommended for institutions with small numbers of AV items in their collections, or institutions with enough staff to devote to this kind of thorough assessment.

Random Sample

The second kind of assessment is based on *random sampling* of a larger collection. The AvSAP can be used to assess random samples based on format type. This is most useful for larger collections for which item-by-item assessment would be too time-intensive. In this kind of assessment, the user would use the principles of random sampling to assess a portion of a larger population of media items that accurately represent that population. In other words, a user who has 1,000 VHS videotapes to assess may, rather than assess each tape individually, set aside 64 videotapes and assess them. The results of this assessment would then *represent* the larger population of videotapes with a given accuracy.

The General AvSAP Layout

The AvSAP is broken down into three interlocking sections. Within each section, questions are nested by topic. This helps to break down the AvSAP into digestible "chunks" for the user.

Repository Data

The first section is the Repository Section and is composed of questions designed to help the user gauge the general knowledge, policies, and procedures of the institution as they relate to AV materials under their care. In this section the AvSAP asks questions of staffing, AV-related policies, playback equipment maintenance, and other repository-level issues in order to get a sense of the impact of these factors on the institution's AV materials. This section need only be completed once, preferably before the next two sections are used.

Environment(s)

The second section is the Environment Section. These questions can be used to assess the storage environments that house the audiovisual materials in a collection. This section includes questions regarding climate control, variance over time of humidity and temperature, fire suppression, and others. Because repositories often have more than one storage environment, each environment should be assessed independently and the results will be saved as multiple location options. Then, when the user accesses the item-level assessment questions (in the

next section), s/he can choose which of the saved environment descriptions applies to that item. It is important to note that the answers given in this section will affect the weights of the assessments of the items stored in that environment.

Items

The third section is the Item-level Section. This is the core of the AvSAP and consists of two parts - the graphic interface and the assessment questions, and is used with both the item-by-item and random sampling techniques. The AvSAP opens the item-level assessment section with a table of images. These images are representations of the various AV formats that the AvSAP can assess, broken down into three major headings: Film, Video, and Audio. Because the AvSAP is designed for the non-expert, the graphic interface allows the user to simply hold the AV item in her/his hand and then match it with one of the thumbnail images in the graphic interface in order to identify the item's format. Following that are questions that focus on preservation related issues such as general condition, mold exposure, format-specific decay, and so on. The AvSAP also recognizes the need to assess an item on other factors such as its accessibility and the ability of the institution to legally perform on the item the operations necessary to preserve it and make it accessible. There are many circumstances wherein an item may be in very poor physical condition but may be made to wait while another item exhibiting less decay is looked after. For example, a videotape that has little value to the repository but is in very bad physical shape may be lower in the prioritized list than an audiotape that is in very good physical condition but has great value to the institution's mission and/or patrons.

Information Kiosks

The AvSAP is being designed not just as an assessment tool, but also as an educational tool. The AvSAP provides popup windows (programmed to open within the program itself, so as not to be blocked), which we refer to as "information kiosks." These information kiosks offer two levels of assistance. Each assessment question (in all three of the main assessment categories described above) has a question mark symbol after it. When the user clicks on this question mark, a window appears in the right side of the screen. This window gives the user very basic, bullet-pointed information about the question and its content. This window can serve as the basic summation of the question and its answer options for those who don't need or want a detailed help screen.

If this help window is insufficient to answer the user's questions and the user wants more information s/he can click on a "learn more" hotlink in this window to open the more detailed help kiosk that will more provide a more in-depth explanation about the content of the question. Some of these advanced level kiosks also contain links to online resources and/or advice and information about how to mitigate the preservation issues in your own institution. The AvSAP uses images and plain language as much as possible in order to make oft-times complex concepts and jargon easily digestible for those unfamiliar with the topic. A key advantage to these kiosks is that they are totally optional - the user can click on them when they need to or ignore them if they don't need the extra help.

The Decision List

So what is the ultimate result of using the AvSAP? The result is the prioritized preservation plan, or what the AvSAP calls the *decision list*. This itemized list is ranked in order of need, from those items that are most in need of preservation treatment to those least in need. The purpose of this list is to give the user a sense not only of what items s/he has, but also what items need the most immediate care. This can help the collections manager make more effective preservation decisions with regard to their AV materials, which has the added benefit of making more targeted budgetary choices.

Who Developed the AvSAP

The University Library has partnered with several organizations to serve as test-beds and advisers for the project: The University of Illinois Archives, WILL AM/FM/TV, The Spurlock Museum, University of Illinois departments such as the Department of Dance, The Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, and the Illinois Heritage Association. A generous National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Sciences (IMLS) supports the project. The development of the program began in May of 2007 and the project will be completed in the spring of 2010.

Jimi Jones
Project Coordinator,
Audiovisual Self-Assessment Program
UIUC Library
Conservation Unit
809 South Oak Street
Champaign, IL 61820
vox: (217) 244.9901
fax: (217) 333.2630



University Library

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN