

# Dissertation Enhancement within the Department of Typography

## Context

Undergraduate students in the Department of Typography and Graphic Communication are required to complete a dissertation of 10,000-12,000 words, relating to the history, theory and/or practice of typography and graphic communication. However, students lack awareness of the potential of collections for research dissertations as well as the skills for working with archival material. Oral history in particular is not fully utilised as primary source material. In addition, student access to the collections is restricted through inadequate storage and insufficient organisation and description of materials.

## Aim

The aim of the project was generally to remove barriers to student access to the collections, and to raise students' awareness of the collections and their potential for research dissertations. The primary focus however was on oral history, which is not fully utilised as a primary source material for dissertations.

## Resources and Processes

The project was run through the collections officer based within the department, supported by a project officer. There were several strands:

- the general re-organisation and re-housing of the collections;
- the construction of a database of previous dissertations and theses;
- the organisation and cataloguing of the sound archives to enable the use of primary source material by students for their dissertation. This also included installing a wireless network to enhance access to electronic resources; and
- the redesign of the research skills workshops for students choosing their dissertation topic to include additional training in handling archival material and techniques for dealing with oral history.

## Results

Overall, students awareness of and access to the collections generally has increased through their greater accessibility. The project has created a fully searchable database of past students' dissertations and theses, which did not previously exist.

In relation to oral history, a further database was created with the collection of tapes, CDs and minidisk recordings input. It was immediately made available to students, with the result of 3 students using it for their dissertations the following academic year. A further 10 used collections of various sorts as their primary resource.

*'it seemed remarkable that as an undergraduate I could have access to such rich material and be allowed to handle, photograph and study it.'*

The aim now is to develop a culture of using recorded interviews for dissertation purposes, and house student-made recordings for future dissertations and research.

## Sustainability

The database of student dissertations and theses will be updated each year by administrative staff.

The Sound and Film archive will be sustained through students depositing their material, and cataloguing it, as part of their dissertation preparation.

## Further information

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