

Virtual Footlocker Project: Developing a User-centered Framework for Digital Preservation of Active Duty and Veteran Personal Records

The Virtual Footlocker Project (VFP) is a three-year research project conducted by Dr. Edward Benoit, III, an Assistant Professor and the Russell B. Long Professor in the School of Library & Information Science at Louisiana State University. This Early Career Development project proposal requests \$377,069 from the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program under the National Digital Infrastructures and Initiatives category. The research will investigate best practices and protocols for archivists assisting veterans and active duty personnel with preservation of their personal digital archives.

Statement of Broad Need For generations, soldiers documented their wartime experiences in personal diaries, photographs, and correspondence. Often veterans kept these treasured personal collections long after their service, and handed them down to family members with some eventually donated to archives and museums. These personal military service accounts serve a vital role in humanizing wartime sacrifices and experiences. The contemporary 21st century soldier no longer creates and maintains the same analog personal archives with the shift towards digital technologies over the past twenty years, thereby creating a critical future gap in the record. The proposed project will develop a user-centered framework to create best practice digital preservation protocols for assisting veterans with preserving their personal records.

Although several projects and scholarship identify common trends in social media use and the shift towards digital formats, few focus solely on military personnel.¹ The PI conducted a broad survey of veterans' and active-duty personnel's use of communication and documentary methods to begin identifying the population's particular needs.² This research found veterans relied on a combination of cloud-based and local storage for digital media, and used wide range of social media and email platforms.³ Unlike Schumm et al.'s findings that peacekeepers preferred analog formats to emerging digital technologies in the 1990s, the PI found "modern soldiers are adapting to newer technologies more quickly than before."⁴

The proposed project builds off the PI's previous VFP research and experience as a veteran, in addition to his research on community and participatory archives.⁵ Likewise, it is grounded in prior archival research on digital preservation and curation, personal archiving, and community archives. This includes, but is not limited to, the work of Christopher Lee, Margaret Hedstrom, Pat Galloway, Richard Cox, Andrew Flinn, Sue McKemmish, Eric Ketelaar, Anne Gilliland, Amelia Acker, Paul Conway, Devan Donaldson, and Lorraine Richards.

Project Design Occurring over three years, the project will incorporate three phases with two years of graduate student and postdoctoral support. The research will address the following questions: What are the digital preservation concerns of contemporary active duty and veterans? What are the technical and descriptive requirements to meet these needs? Which existing open source tools and practices can be adapted and modified for assisting digital preservation, where are the gaps, and how can they be filled?

¹ For example the Library of Congress Twitter Archive, https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/files/2017/12/2017dec_twitter_white-paper.pdf; and Pew Research Center, "Social Media Use in 2018," <http://www.pewinternet.org/2018/03/01/social-media-use-in-2018/>.

² Edward Benoit, III, "Digital V-Mail and the 21st Century Soldier: Preliminary Findings from the Virtual Footlocker Project," *PDT&C* 46, no 1., 2017: 17-31.

³ Benoit III, 24.

⁴ Walter R. Schumm et al., "Expectations, Use, and Evaluation of Communication Media among Deployed Peacekeepers," *Armed Forces & Society* 30, no. 4, Summer 2004: 649-662; Benoit III, 24.

⁵ Edward Benoit, III, "#MPLP Part 1: Comparing Domain Expert and Novice Social Tags in a Minimally Processed Digital Archive," *American Archivist* 81, no. 2, 2017: 145-176; Edward Benoit, III, "#MPLP Part 2: Replacing Item-level Metadata with Social Tags," *American Archivist* 82, no. 1, 2018: 38-64; Edward Benoit, III and Alexandra Eveleigh, eds., *Participatory Archives: Theory & Practice*, (London: Facet Publishing, forthcoming in 2019).

Year One will address the first question through following user-centered design (UCD) approaches, mainly a series of comprehensive focus groups with active duty and veteran personnel from each of the five service branches. Working with the graduate assistant, the PI will create and test focus group protocol, including methods to ensure privacy and confidentiality of all participants, and submit it for IRB approval. Each focus group location will include separate sessions for enlisted and officers to ensure candid answers. Additionally, the focus groups will be recorded and transcribed for open coding analysis. Participants in the focus groups will be compensated for their time, and will be selected based on the process detailed in the Diversity Plan section.

Year Two will address the second research question based on the analysis of data from the previous year. The PI and postdoctoral associate will map the technical requirements for digital preservation based on existing standards, identify challenges, and propose a functional framework for initial protocol design.

During *Year Three*, the PI and postdoctoral associate will identify existing open source tools, such as APIs, that could be adopted to meet the technical requirements. Subsequently, the PI will analyze digital curation models and emerging research for additional methods to fill the areas without existing support. Based on this analysis, the PI and postdoctoral associate will update and finalize the best practices and protocols. The project findings will be shared at several national and international conferences including SAA, AERI, and the Personal Digital Archiving Conference, multiple journal articles, and an open report of the findings.

Throughout the project, the PI will meet regularly with two advisory panels to receive feedback on the project's progress and development. One panel will include archival scholars and practitioners, including representatives of the Library of Congress' Veterans History Project and digital preservation scholars. The second panel will include stakeholder representation from service organizations and other veteran groups such as the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA). The panel members will be compensated for their time with a small stipend.

Diversity Plan The project focuses on 21st century active duty personnel and veterans. Additionally, the PI will use the U.S. Department of Defense reporting of military demographics to ensure proportional and equitable gender, racial, and ethnic representation in the focus groups and advisory panels.⁶ Finally, veterans will be given hiring preference for the project's student and postdoctoral positions.

Broad Impact The proposed project builds on the PI's previous research, and the anticipated findings will be used to secure additional funding from governmental or private sources to develop and implement personal digital archiving workshops for veterans and active duty personnel. While the project aims to address the specific needs of military personnel, its findings could easily be adapted for personal information management (PIM) and personal digital preservation needs. Additionally, the findings from the focus groups will illuminate the information practice behavior of an under-analyzed group. Likewise, the suggested adaptation of existing open source tools will highlight their availability to outside LIS researchers and practitioners thereby addressing the NDP's call for highlighting more "shared solutions" and "open and interoperable technologies."⁷

Budget Summary The proposed project costs will be \$377,069 with no cost sharing. This includes \$45,752 in PI summer salary, \$28,000 in student support, \$90,000 in postdoctoral associate support, fringe benefits of \$59,731, and tuition remission of \$9,800. The budget includes \$35,000 for faculty and staff to travel to focus groups and conference travel, \$11,000 for supplies, transcription, and advertisements for participant recruitment, and \$22,000 in advisory board stipends and focus group payments. Finally, indirect costs of \$75,786 are included, using LSU's federally negotiated off-campus rate of 26% MTDC.

⁶ CAN Resource Analysis, *Population Representations in the Military Services*, 2016, <https://www.cna.org/research/pop-rep>.

⁷ Institute of Museum and Library Services, *National Digital Infrastructures and Initiatives: A Report on the 2017 National Digital Platform at Three Forum*, 8-9.