
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?

3 Benoit III, 24.
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. 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.”

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.