



InterPARES 3 Project

International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems

TEAM Canada

Title: Case Study 09 – Alma Mater Society of the University of British Columbia: Policies and Procedures for Web Site Preservation

Workshop 03 Action Item 21 – Reappraisal of AMS Web Site Content

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1.0	2009-04-20	H. Callow, E. Shaffer	Discussion draft prepared following identification of action items for CS09 at TEAM Canada Plenary Workshop 03.
1.1	2009-04-28	R. Preston	Minor content and copy edits.
1.2	2009-05-06	H. Callow	Incorporation of additional comments from S. Goldfarb and the AMS Communications Manager.
1.3	2013-05-23	R. Preston	Minor content and copy edits for public version.

Action 21: S. Goldfarb, with assistance from the Graduate Research Assistants assigned to case study 09, to conduct a (re)appraisal of the AMS Web site content, based on further clarification of what material the AMS wishes to preserve and why (L. Duranti)¹

Introduction

The University of British Columbia (UBC) Alma Mater Society (AMS) Web site is created to disseminate information. Primarily, the Web site informs members of the Society about the services, resources and opportunities that the AMS provides. In addition, the Web site exists to inform the entire campus community as well as the general public about news, events and issues affecting the student population at UBC.

Providing publicity for events, news affecting the student population, and job/volunteer opportunities are important functions of the AMS Web site as a whole, in addition to the specific informational nature of each individual service and business web page.

Reappraisal

Upon reappraising the AMS Web site with all available information, it was concluded that no records exist on the site. Documents on the Web site, such as minutes and budgets, were initially identified as records. However, it was subsequently discovered that these records are in the AMS Archives and only copies of these are posted to the Web site.² It has come to our attention that this is not a consistent practice and that records may in fact be present on the Web site.

There have been instances where documents made or received in the course of a practical activity as an instrument or a by-product of such activity, and set aside for action or reference were believed to have been transferred to the AMS Archives; however, these were later found to have only existed on the Web site. A recent example involves documents that were needed by the executive to carry out core business functions of the AMS. Although the “final” versions of the documents had been posted to the Web site, none of the original files, in either digital or hard copy, had been accessioned into the Archives or been passed on to the subsequent executives of the AMS.³

Although it does not contain records, the AMS Web site does “contain information that seem[s] to exist only on the Web site (e.g., the Execs’ blogs) [which, therefore,] might be useful to preserve.”⁴ Additional reasoning by the AMS archivist behind preserving the AMS Web site is

¹ InterPARES 3 Project, “TEAM Canada Plenary Workshop #03: Action Items and Decisions,” 4.

² E-mail from Sheldon Goldfarb to Elizabeth Shaffer, April 16, 2009: “The minutes exist elsewhere. The new mandate really just means a copy of the official record is being put on the website. The official record is still the hardcopy version we receive in the Archives of the minutes; we also get an electronic version.”

³ E-mail from Sheldon Goldfarb to Helen Callow, January 22, 2009: “there’s a document* *we should have* (the federal budget submission) that didn’t get sent to the Archives either electronically or in hardcopy, but which exists on the website.” [italics are ours] *In fact we have identified two documents from this same incident.

⁴ E-mail from Sheldon Goldfarb to Elizabeth Shaffer, April 16, 2009.

to preserve the Web site in its entirety as a record of its contribution to the institutional memory.⁵ Other publications identified in the CS09 Contextual Analysis Report, such as job postings, event postings, AMS Art Gallery exhibitions, calendars, constituencies and clubs, again may or may not exist solely on the Web site. Overall, the AMS wishes to preserve the ephemeral nature of the Web site. The AMS wishes to preserve the Web site as a whole to act as an historical record of the Web site's existence. The entire Web site would provide the context necessary to understand the site's components.

The AMS Archivist has indicated the desire to save the AMS Website in its entirety as a record of the AMS Website and its contents:

After engaging in discussions during and after the November Interpares conference, my view since then has been that appraising the website with a view to picking and choosing which items to save and which not to is not the way to go. There are both theoretical and practical reasons for this.

First of all, on the theory side, the whole AMS website is a record of the AMS, a record of one of its activities (producing a website). To save the website is like saving bound volumes of our student newspapers or other AMS publications. To see the website as a website with all the material on it in context is valuable in itself.

Also, we cannot say for sure which pieces of information are going to be valuable in the future. Ideally, all the material going onto the website should be saved elsewhere, but in practical terms I would in fact like the website as a backup location for information. If the information cannot be found elsewhere, it would be useful to have another place to look for it. A large part of my job as AMS Archivist-Researcher is to obtain information for AMS executives and managers wherever I can find it, whatever the source.

From a practical point of view, it also seems to me that appraising with a view to selecting specific parts of the website to preserve will lead to a large expenditure of time and resources. Thus if technically and financially feasible, my preferred option would be to preserve the whole website. This raises questions about storage space, frequency of saving, the technical aspects of saving the website, and also of course cost.⁶

We have made suggestions for the technology options to support this in the Action Item 22 report. However, we have also noted that saving the entire Web site indefinitely every time a change of content is made is not feasible due to the associated storage costs and time spent in performing the captures.

⁵ [To] "preserve the website as a record of our having a website." E-mail from Sheldon Goldfarb to Elizabeth Shaffer, April 16, 2009.

⁶ E-mail from Sheldon Goldfarb to Randy Preston, Elizabeth Shaffer and Helen Callow, April 28, 2009.

On reappraisal of the AMS Web site, it was discovered, aside from the instances above, that no identifiable records reside on the site. However, we are not confident that we have been able to establish a full understanding of what exists uniquely in either the AMS Archives or on the Web site due to a lack of documentation. Until the AMS has a clear, enforceable recordkeeping system in place that includes a records schedule that determines what is transferred to the Archives, the frequency of transfer, and what is only published on the Web site, it is impossible to carry out a comprehensive appraisal.⁷

The organizational culture of the AMS is such that it is not conducive to rigid recordkeeping practices. This made it difficult to determine what exists only on the Web site. To effectively reappraise the AMS Web site, we recommend that the AMS establish a clear and enforceable recordkeeping system that includes both policies and procedures for the scheduling and transfer of the AMS records into the Archives. This system should also include reference to documents that exist both on the Web site and in the Archives, as well as those documents that only exist on the Web site.

The presence of an effective recordkeeping system is critical to an environment such as the AMS because of the high student/staff turnover. Students and staff, as well as student electives, come and go on an annual basis. A system that contains procedures for the transfer of critical documents to a centralized place such as the AMS Archives would benefit incoming staff and executives as they could immediately trace core documents to one location. Additionally, the Web site archiving program should not be utilized as an ad hoc recordkeeping system to preserve records that should have been sent to the Archives, but were not.

Additional Findings

Through attempting a reappraisal of the AMS Web site, it was discovered that a recent change to the Code of Procedures⁸ mandated that the minutes of the various AMS committees be posted to the Web site after approval. Subsequent correspondence with the Archivist found that: “In addition to planning groups and commissions, all our committees and Council itself posts minutes to the website.”⁹ Although the Archivist states that such directives are internal matters and, therefore, not subject to the imposition of penalties in the event a directive is not carried out,¹⁰ it was thought that this may become an issue in the future.

Additionally, the varied and unpredictable nature of the Web content makes it difficult to predict future research needs. A unique example of lost content that was encountered by the AMS is

⁷ E-mail from Sheldon Goldfarb to Helen Callow, April 20, 2009. “Unfortunately, there is no real records schedule for most AMS records. There is an informal system by which I remind people periodically to send materials to the Archives. When I said that particular record should have come to the Archives [see footnote 3 above], I meant that it was an important, substantive record of the sort we want to preserve, and so the people producing it should have made sure the Archives received a copy.”

⁸ The full policy document can be downloaded as a word document from http://www.amsubc.ca/index.php/student_government/category/about_student_government/.

⁹ E-mail from Sheldon Goldfarb to Helen Callow, March 17, 2009.

¹⁰ E-mail from Sheldon Goldfarb to Elizabeth Shaffer, April 16, 2009: “I never thought of the Archives as being the place to preserve evidence that a Council directive was being carried out. Since Council is part of the AMS, i.e., the directive is internal, it’s not as if we have to produce information to an external regulatory body. If Council wants to see if its directive is being carried out, I think it would look to the current version of the website rather than ask the Archives to look back over past years. (There is also no penalty involved here, really; it’s an internal matter of Council saying all its committee minutes should go up on its website.)”

when it failed to preserve evidence of an AMS Gallery exhibition. An art student was looking for confirmation of past exhibitions of her own work. The exhibition information that was posted to the Web site had since been removed and no hard copy had been preserved.

Content can change on the AMS Web site on an almost daily basis; most of these changes are semantic and therefore are not necessary to save in their daily iterations. However, certain times throughout the year have been identified as being more consequential. For example, the beginning of Term two of the winter semester is an important time within the AMS organization with the student elections taking place. The Web site is increasingly becoming a major communication device in terms of candidates speaking to their voting public. At this time of year the Web site changes quite dramatically as candidate biographies are published as well as events connected to elections and the final electoral results.

Additionally, with the arrival of the newly elected AMS executive, comes their commitment to utilize the AMS Web site more frequently. Recent communications with the AMS Communications Manager have discovered that significant content changes to the News and Executive Blog sections of the Web site occur on a weekly basis. The AMS Archivist may wish to take this information into account when determining the frequency of collection.

The creation and maintenance of authentic, reliable, accurate and durable evidence of Web-based activity is essential if the AMS is to retain institutional memory and meet community expectations. The organizational culture has been identified as a factor in the effective implementation of any solution. Recommendations are to solidify and better identify the requirements of the Web site preservation program, along with implementing policies and procedures that reflect this activity and take into account the organizational culture of the AMS.

Due to these additional findings, the GRAs continued with their research. Action Item 22¹¹ will address strategies for preserving and storing Web content, such as frequent and infrequent snapshot Web crawls (entire site), and infrequent snapshot crawl plus activity log, as well as identify the tools (open source, proprietary or outsourcing options) needed to accomplish these activities. Action Item 23¹² will address the costs associated with these options.

Reappraising the Archives Preservation Program

Even when an enforceable, efficient recordkeeping system is in place at the AMS, it is recommended that the AMS Archives reappraise its preservation collecting program on an annual basis. This recommendation is because the AMS elects a new student council on an annual basis and each new council may bring with it new ideas on how to effectively use the Web site for dissemination of ideas and policy. An annual reappraisal will ensure that each new initiative is captured and set aside for future needs.

¹¹ InterPARES 3 Project, TEAM Canada, “Case Study 09 – Alma Mater Society of the University of British Columbia – Workshop 03 Action Item 22: Technological Option(s),” (May 2009). Available at: www.interpares.org/ip3/display_file.cfm?doc=ip3_canada_cs09_wks03_action_22_v1-2.pdf.

¹² InterPARES 3 Project, TEAM Canada, “Case Study 09 – Alma Mater Society of the University of British Columbia – Workshop 03 Action Item 23: On-going Costs of Implementing Identified Technological Options,” (May 2009). Available at: www.interpares.org/ip3/displayfile.cfm?doc=ip3_canada_cs09_wks_03_action_23_v1-3.pdf.