Developing the Open University Digital Archive (OUDA)

Anne Gambles
Digital Services Project Manager
Library Services
The Open University
anne.gambles@open.ac.uk

As a distance-learning institution the Open University has been at the forefront of technology-enhanced learning. Increasing amounts of our teaching and learning are being delivered through online means. For the University Archive, with its mission to preserve material from the university's activities, research, people and places, that means that there is a growing focus on preserving and providing access to digital content. Digital preservation is important so that the OU's born-digital content is not lost and it can continue to be accessed alongside digitised items (e.g. photographs and study materials) by staff and (where possible) the public in the future.

The OU Digital Archive system (OUDA) will support preservation activities and provide access to selected OU heritage materials. The materials range from television and radio programmes to images of the university and to events such as graduation ceremonies and digitised printed materials. OU staff will have access to the full range of OUDA material. OUDA will also provide a 'taster of the history of the OU' for OU students and members of the public through a selection of clips from non-current study materials, photographs and other OU Archive content.

The development project

The project to develop this system has covered technical infrastructure development; content planning, selection and rights clearances; metadata review and development; services definition and workflow specifications; service resource and skills planning; and digital preservation requirements development.
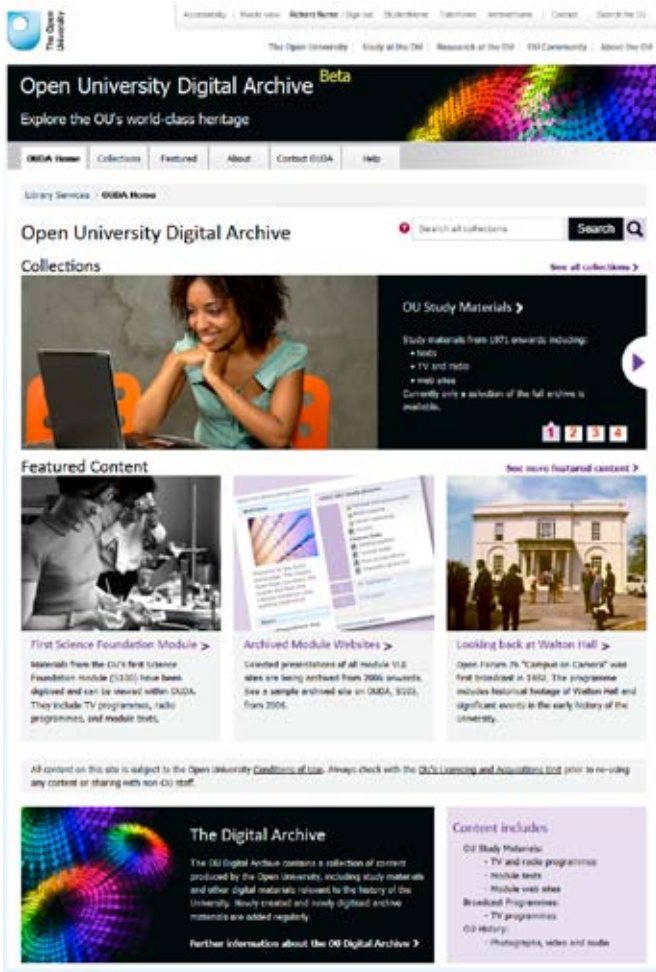
Fig. 1   OUDA homepag

REPOSITORY SELECTION CRITERIA

New items will be added to OUDA in accordance with the OU Digital Preservation Policy selection criteria and will be managed through a content plan overseen by a Governance board.

INFRASTRUCTURE

OUDA is based around Fedora, an open source, community-based initiative that uses highly flexible XML-based digital library architecture to store and describe content. The software sits on a robust and resilient infrastructure with mirrored-servers and a staging environment.

The desire to provide access to a growing number of collections and a broad range of content types to a variety of stakeholders has led us to design a front end working with a designer from the university's Learning and Teaching Solutions unit. User-interface development has been iterative, drawing on expertise from within Library Services and working with the OU's Institute of Educational Technology. Two rounds of usability testing with staff from across campus have informed the design and enabled us to identify

and resolve issues. We have implemented a range of tools and functionality within the interface, including a page-turner to display digitised printed materials, a media player and search facets.

By adopting a linked data approach (using the outcomes from the Jisc-funded STELLAR[1] project), OUDA is able to make use of this technology to link easily to other datasets. So alongside content contained in OUDA there are links to related material in OpenLearn http://www.open.edu/open-learn/ and iTunes U http://www.apple.com/uk/education/itunes-u/.

METADATA

Currently there are four main collections of OU archive materials within OUDA available to OU staff: OU study materials (including archived Virtual Learning Environment [VLE] websites); historical OU TV and radio; historical OU Images; and broadcast (non-teaching) programmes. As there are several different types of material within the collections (e.g. archived websites, printed materials, images, video and audio), several metadata profiles have been developed based on international metadata standards (e.g. MODS, VRA Core4, EBUCore, XCRI).

Within the OUDA study materials collection we aim to show the various different types of materials that are included within a taught module (previously known as a course). The OUDA module record includes links to digitised study materials that are part of the module, such as audio and video programmes or text materials. This relationship structure is complex and has needed significant effort to describe. Digital items may also have related materials, for example a video may have a digitised transcript. Archiving and enabling users to explore the connections between inter-related distance-learning materials within a Fedora digital library is a unique approach. For the first time we are able to view all the materials for a module in one place due to the relationships we have made in the metadata (see Fig. 2).

LAUNCH PLANS

The OU Digital Archive is being launched as a pilot to staff in the OU in early 2014, prior to public release later in 2014.

Fig. 2 OUDA module and video record

FUTURE PLANS

We shall be adding more content into the site over time, including more than 800 archived VLE websites from 2006 onwards (available to OU staff). These have been archived from the VLE into a standard website archive format (WARC, an international standard). Other content collections are being explored for inclusion in the digital archive. We also have further work to do to build more features into the digital archive, to improve the way we track preservation actions, to update our metadata profiles to the latest versions and to build more features to help us administer the collections.

To find out more about the project and keep up to date with progress go to: http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/OUDL/

REFERENCE

1   http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/stellar