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# Archiving the Video Record of Legislatures

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C-SPAN (the Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network) is a non-profit cooperative created by the cable television industry to provide an outlet for the televised proceedings of the United States Congress. In 1979, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to permit televised coverage of the proceedings. Through C-SPAN, the cable industry created a channel to allow viewers throughout the country to see the entire congressional proceedings, live, without editing, and without commentary. The signal is unscrambled and is provided free to subscribers through cable systems. It can also be received directly via a home satellite dish.

In addition to the House proceedings, C-SPAN provides 24-hour coverage of congressional hearings, extensive campaign coverage, many speeches, news conferences, and public policy conferences in Washington and from around the country. In 1986, when the Senate voted to permit cameras, C-SPAN began a second network which also telecasts 24-hours per day.

Through a unique cooperative arrangement, U.S. public affairs programming is being preserved and made widely available for teaching and research. C-SPAN provides complete, unedited, public affairs programming from Washington and around the country on cable television systems across the country. The Purdue University Public Affairs Video Archives was created to record, catalog, and distribute all programming on both C-SPAN channels exclusively for educational use.

The Archives was created in 1987 to address an important research and educational problem. While C-SPAN was bringing over 6,000 hours of first-run programming to the nation's homes, offices, and schools, none of this programming was being preserved in any systematic way.

C-SPAN kept tapes of some of their programming but erased many others. The copies of the tapes of the House and the Senate are kept by both the Library of Congress and the

National Archives, but are not easily accessible. While many support the principle of television preservation, few are prepared for the major issues which confront both the archivist and the researcher.

The Video Archives is a nonprofit research center operated under the auspices of the Purdue University School of Humanities, Social Science, and Education.

The Archives record all programming 24-hours per day, seven days per week, on two channels. This amounts to 17,520 hours per year. Cataloging the programming is as major and important an undertaking as the recording. Every day, using information sent from Washington and gleaned from other sources, the Archives enter the entire programming schedule. This includes all the subjects, places, dates, names, titles, and affiliations of persons and programs.

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***"The mission of the Archives is to preserve this programming, to catalog it for scholars, and to provide duplicate copies to educators for classroom use."***

In order to manage this large amount of information, the entire process is computerized. Using the computers, the Archives staff can search on any of the cataloged criteria to locate the programs and help interested patrons find and use the tapes. This computerization has permitted the Archives to manage over 12,000 1/2 inch VHS tapes, catalog 6,000 programs to date, and enter the names of 5,000 persons appearing on C-SPAN programs. Two catalogs of over 5,000 C-SPAN programs recorded in 1987 and 1988 have been published.

The Video Archives, as a growing research archives is striving to make its collection as widely known and as easily accessed as possible.

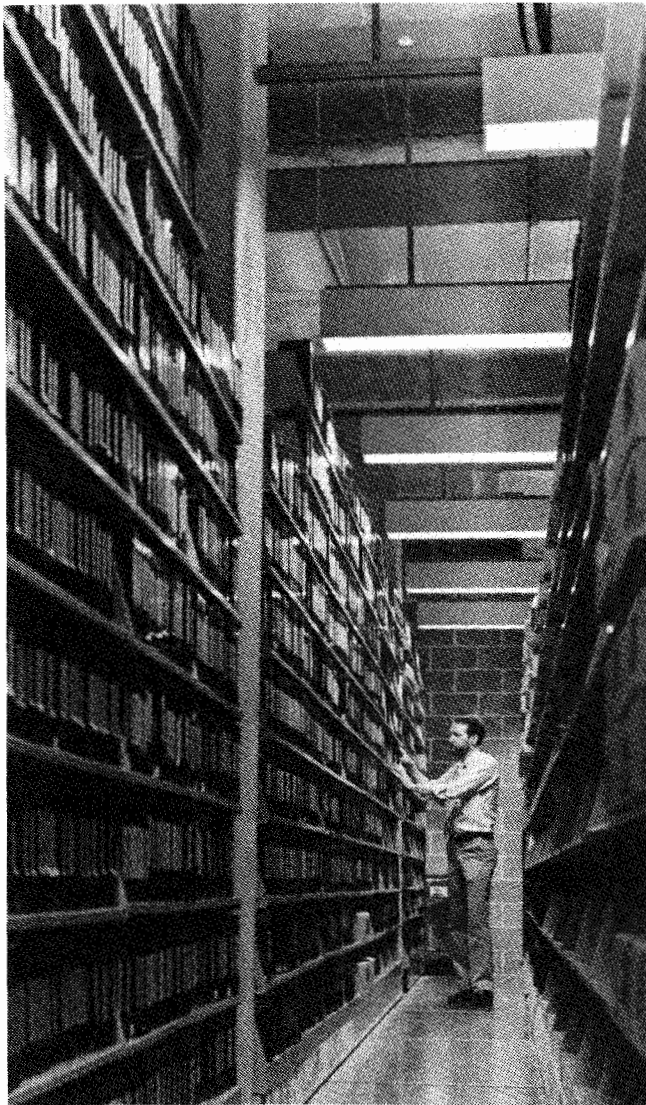
Cataloging the programming in a specially designed database is one way in which the Archives is managing to make this programming accessible to scholars. A second way

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is the openness of the Archives to the public. A third way is through the low cost charge for obtaining duplicate recordings.

Because these programs are public proceedings many presume that they are being cataloged. The transcripts of sessions of the U.S. House and Senate, for example, are available in printed and electronic form. The printed transcripts run over 34,000 pages per year. Like video records, the key access point to the *Congressional Record* is the date. The indexes to the *Congressional Record* help researchers locate the printed page on which the debate can



The Public Affairs Video Archives record all programming on two-hour tapes. Each tape is labeled with the date, channel, and two-hour time at which the recording begins. All tapes begin on the even hour. The tape for the opening of the 101st Congress is 89-1-01-03-1200 for example. The corresponding Senate tape is 89-2-01-03-1000. The first digits are the date and channel, and the last four digits are the hour.

be found. The key access point to the video record is the hour at the debate occurred.

The printed *Congressional Record* for the House also contains time codes which tell the reader at what hour the debate occurred. These time codes permit the easy cross-referencing of the printed record and the Purdue video record. The Senate, which has not been televised as long as the House, does not print time codes in the *Congressional Record*.

Other finding aids to the collection are also being developed. The Archives is beginning to put subject references in its daily catalog listings for the House and the Senate, as well as page references to the *Congressional Record*. At first the cataloging only showed the beginning and ending time of the debate. A scholar would thus first have to use another printed source to find when the debate occurred and then use the *Congressional Record* to pinpoint the hour. With our subject headings, the Archives will add the reference that debate on the trade legislation, for example, occurred on April 26, 1988.

A second finding aid is electronic transcripts of the congressional proceedings. Using these transcripts, the user can search for the exchange or debate they are interested in. Then using the time codes printed in the House *Congressional Record*, including the electronic versions, the researcher will know what Archives tape contains the exchange which they wish to view. Since members of Congress are permitted to revise and extend their remarks, the video record and the printed record will not always coincide. The existence of the video and the steps the Video Archives are taking to preserve it, may serve to remind members that what they say is what they actually said, not what they would have liked to have said.

Providing research access for scholars to this collection is only part of the mission of the Public Affairs Video Archives. The other important component of the Archives work is to bring these materials, and an increased understanding of the workings of the U.S. government, into the classroom. This is being achieved through C-SPAN's liberal copyright policy, through the Archives low prices for duplicate tapes, and through the educational materials which the Archives are now developing to accompany the tapes.

The C-SPAN copyright policy permits teachers to retain copies of C-SPAN's programming indefinitely. This applies to programs which instructors tape themselves or those which they obtain from the Archives. C-SPAN programming can only be used for education and research, not for any political or commercial uses, or re-airing. The Archives sells duplicate tapes for only \$30 per two-hour tape. Over 1,000 duplicate tapes have already been shipped to teachers across the United States. These materials are being used in classes from grade school to graduate schools.

Many teachers are surprised to learn that C-SPAN programming is not limited to House and Senate proceedings. Indeed, of the 4,709 hours of first run programming aired on C-SPAN I in 1988, only 689 hours or 14.6% were House proceedings. The others included campaign coverage, conferences, speeches, congressional proceedings, and international coverage.

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***“One professor at Purdue University has used the question period of the Canadian House to illustrate differences between the American and Canadian legislative processes. He has also obtained an American presidential news conference to show students the way in which U.S. Presidents answer questions. The Archives will soon publish a videoguide on the Canadian question period.”***

To encourage classroom use of C-SPAN programming, the Archives has begun a new educational program. Under this program, the Archives is distributing videoguides for selected tapes. These videoguides contain additional information to assist the instructor in using the tape in class. The guides contain detail on the programs including date, place, names, and length; in addition to an abstract, the context of the program, references for further reading; as well as suggestions for classroom use. Also contained is a micro-abstract which points the teacher to particular times on the tape at which interesting comments or exchanges are made which can be used to stimulate discussion or raise points of emphasis.

Others who have used C-SPAN materials in the classroom have emphasized that there is a continuum of possible uses. The easiest would be to simply have the students watch an hour of C-SPAN programming and write about what they have observed. Just as many teachers have learned that requiring students to follow current events leads to a higher level of understanding and participation in class, the same benefits can accrue from C-SPAN watching. A variant on this is to record an hour of C-SPAN programming and play portions of this tape in class. The advantage of this is that the instructor can stop the tape and comment on what the students are observing.

If one is teaching about American government or the legislative process, any hour of congressional coverage usually provides ample material to illustrate many points about the American political process. A quick reading of the publication *Gavel-to-Gavel* provides the instructor with

background information to answer questions students might have about the process. This 64 page publication is a guide to televised coverage and can be obtained for a modest price directly from C-SPAN or the Benton Foundation in Washington, DC.

Beyond this “pick-up viewing”, instructors can invest more time and develop course materials around particular tapes found in the Archives catalogs. The videoguides published by the Archives are designed to provide specific tapes which can be used as well as provide illustrative examples for teachers to use as prototypes. In addition to the videoguides which are developed by the Archives, they will also be distributing videoguides developed by others and contributed to the Archives for distribution.

The international coverage in the collection are important new resources for teaching in the United States. C-SPAN has telecast over 124 hours of the proceedings of the Canadian Parliament in 1988. This included the entire free trade debate following the November elections. In addition to this, the Archives has the leader's debate on October 25, 1988, and the election returns as aired by the CBC.

C-SPAN brings public affairs programming to all parts of the country, and now the world, without editing, and without commentary. It is left to the public to interpret and use the information. C-SPAN and its affiliated cable systems have simply lowered the cost of being informed citizens.

The Public Affairs Video Archives are extending the C-SPAN mission and commitment. We are bringing their public affairs programming to campuses and classrooms where it did not exist before. It is still without editing and without commentary.

We have simply lowered even further the cost of educating the informed citizens of today and tomorrow. ■

