Convergence and Change in Visual Resource Libraries

Rebecca A. Moss – Respondent for Visual Resources
ARLIS/NA – Plenary Session – April 18, 2009
Visual Resources

Visual Resources Center, College of Liberal Arts, University of Minnesota
Change can be defined these ways:

- cause to change; make different; cause a transformation
- an event that occurs when something passes from one state or phase to another
- undergo a change; become different in essence; losing one's or its original nature
- become different in some particular way, without permanently losing one's or its former characteristics or essence
Convergence can be defined these ways:

- the occurrence of two or more things coming together
- the approach of an infinite series to a finite limit
- overlap: a representation of common ground between theories or phenomena
- the act of converging (coming closer)
Old tools of the trade
Storage formats have progressed..
...and so has software
The result?

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Caught in the cycle of planned obsolescence

But also...

- Satisfaction (if you like learning new tricks)
- Better results
- Increased productivity
Recent posts on VRA and ARLIS/NA listservs

• Have any museum art libraries digitized their slide collection?

*In 2009, how can this not be commonly known information? But, where would you go to get this information? Have we done a good job of really reaching all slide collections?*

• Changing priorities in VRL’s?

*I am feeling overwhelmed by where to go next. To me it's as though digitization was a big juncture, but we are sort of past that in a way and at another juncture almost as big. I feel like an IT person- managing projectors, laptops and other equipment, training others in their use, attempting to get student help in web site building, while in the background my little mice are scanning their hearts out (and no one really cares that much since they are 'finding' what they need elsewhere anyway!). Krista Smith, U. of Maine.*
Other pressures

- Stock market crash
- Closing of collections
- Reductions in staffing
- Reductions in support
- How to justify our costs?
- How to justify our resources? (those big slide rooms)
Convergence can be defined these ways:

• the occurrence of two or more things coming together
• the approach of an infinite series to a finite limit
• overlap: a representation of common ground between theories or phenomena
• the act of converging (coming closer)

What should we be converging?
UCAI Report

- Union Catalog for Art Images, Mellon funded, report issued in 2006.
- Their vision: Enable the cultural heritage community to share rich, authoritative, and descriptive records for art objects and other cultural materials.
- An early attempt at combining our collections. Not a failure, but an acknowledgement that our collections are just not there yet.

UCAI Findings (not all)

- Need more standards
- Need more consistency in records
- Should not need thumbnails  
  *(I disagree with the report on this)*
- Manual cleanup is necessary  
  *(only so much can be done automatically)*
- Need for authority records
- Need unique identifiers
Since that report

- ARTstor
- VRA Core 4.0
- Cataloging Cultural Objects
- Wiki cataloging
- Flickr and other online image collections

But still no centralized place to share records
Nine dots puzzle
What next?

- Expand to all cultural heritage materials and beyond and include video and audio.
- Put our talents to use for more people.
- Give away tasks that others do better.
- Concentrate on our unique strengths.
- Learn to give up some control.
- Keep the focus on the convergence that is happening and figure out how we can contribute to it.
Change is ongoing. Convergence is inevitable.

But if we are prepared, we can still thrive.
Thank you

Rebecca A. Moss
Coordinator of Visual Resources
Office of Information Technology
College of Liberal Arts
University of Minnesota
mossx014@umn.edu