

Erica Titkemeyer
Access to Moving Image Collections
Nancy Goldman
Assignment #2: Access Policies and Comparisons

Academy Film Archive and Avery Fisher Center

Introduction

Research into the access component of a particular memory institution must begin with questions of purpose. While preservation is said to be done for access, that doesn't necessarily promise limitless admittance to all. Libraries, museums, and archives all contain their own set of missions, preservation plans, and policies affecting the degree of access that can be permitted. While most libraries function as a major destination for open access, archives aren't going to be as quick to bestow full access to preserved works in their holdings.

In this paper, the virtual, intellectual, and physical access of the Academy Film Archive, and the Avery Fisher Center for Music and Media at New York University's Bobst Library will both be compared and commented upon. The Academy Film Archive is located in Hollywood, contains more than 140,000 film and video assets, and more than 70,000 titles¹. The holdings contain various collections that have been acquired via donations from notable directors and actors, and also every feature length and documentary film Academy Award winner. The Avery Fisher Center holds more than 36,000 videos and 87,000 audio recordings, both of which cover a wide scope of film and musical genres².

¹ "About the Academy Film Archive" *Oscars.org Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences*, accessed November 5, 2011, <http://www.oscars.org/filmarchive/about/index.html>.

² "New York University Bobst Library: The Avery Fisher Center for Music and Media," *New York University Libraries*, accessed November 5, 2011, <http://library.nyu.edu/afc/>.

As an archive invested in the preservation and protection of its holdings, Academy Film Archive will most likely prove the point that as a repository, it will have built in boundaries and policies regarding access, compared to a university library collection like the Avery Fisher Center. It is also important to consider the difference in formats available from each institution. Along with more contemporary formats, the Academy Film Archive contains films of varying gauges, ages, and condition, while the Avery Fisher Center holds VHS, DVD, CD, and LP materials.

Virtual Access

The Academy Film Archive's website is situated within Oscars.org, a site dedicated to providing the historical background of the Academy and its current events and activities. The pages specific to the archive provide collective descriptions, organizing its holdings within different contexts (such as the Jim Henson Collection, or the Saul Bass Collection). Much information can be sought pertaining to the donors and collection in its entirety, but an exhaustive list of these individual 140,000 assets is nonexistent on the site.

A side link titled 'Projects' provides entrance to a comprehensive list of films specifically preserved by the archive, which can be arranged by title, director, year of release, and year of preservation. This list does not provide any more metadata in the way of each individual title, nor does it lead the user to more titles within the collection. There is also a search bar at the top of each page, which acts as a search engine for all of Oscars.org. Searching a specific filmmaker or film might lead to the list of projects, but does not work as a catalog or database for the complete holdings. The site specific to the

archive does not provide instant access (such as streaming), or downloads of materials, but with some navigation through alternative Oscars.org pages, it is possible to find some streaming clips from the War Film Collection.

The Avery Fisher Center for Music and Media works in congruence with the BobCat search engine within the New York University Libraries site. Through searching “Books & More”, not only print listings of a subject will appear, but audio and video recordings as well. This database will be discussed later within the intellectual access section, and the focus for now will be on the page specific to the Avery Fisher Center.

The main page for the center connects the user to other areas of the library, but also provides a more simple and confined search for materials within the center (categorized as video, audio, and scores). The search also provides a full listing of the available materials, giving the user full disclosure of the resources that are attainable. Compared to the Academy Film Archive, this page has no agenda other than to service the user searching for materials, through creating a simple interface with links to helpful, scholarly information. Lastly, there are links to information pertaining to physical access, as well as a list of services and borrowing policies.

Intellectual Access

None of the databases embedded within Oscars.org concern the moving image materials in the archive. There is access to a list of Academy Award winners, screenplays, acceptance speeches, etc., but nothing in the way of the films contained within the archive. As mentioned before, films are only described within the context of their wider collection, omitting metadata for singular materials. Without many options for

the user to explore the holdings, there is very little intellectual access. This works in accordance with the statement that an archive might show less willingness to publicly disclose its materials compared to a library.

In being situated within the rest of the Bobst Library's collection, the Avery Fisher Center provides many beneficial and intellectual resources for a user searching for moving image materials. BobCat provides numerous entry points and search options, and although this is primarily for researching articles, E-journals, print materials, etc., it still provides a similar format for displaying expansive metadata (credits, distributor, year, notes, keywords, etc). Results are also not contained to only the Avery Fisher Center, but other locations within the NYU community.

Physical Access

The primary route into having access to the Academy Film Archive collection would be to actually go to the Academy Film Archive. Unfortunately, just as finding a listing of the materials on the site is difficult, finding a way into a screening room on site is not easily done. The site lists its various physical access policies, explaining that anyone with a legitimate research project can view materials, only they have to prove that they have made a significant effort to find the film elsewhere (the site lists video stores and university libraries as sources for duplicate materials).

Viewing is on-site only, where there are individual screening rooms available for patrons with appointments that have been made over the phone or via email. Also, there is no guarantee for access to all the materials, as some might not be in stable condition, might not have cleared viewing rights by the donor, or might need permission from the

copyright holder first (which is the duty of the researcher to obtain). While it's not easy to gauge the uniqueness of the materials without having a complete list of the collections, it's quite clear through the restrictive physical access that these films are valuable and handled carefully.

The biggest hindrance for an individual at the Avery Fisher Center looking to view materials would be their status as an NYU student. The collection can only be accessed by NYU undergraduate and graduate students, as well as consortium students. If the user meets this requirement, they have unlimited access to what is available through the catalog. Exceptions include reserve DVDs and CDs, videotapes, and LPs, which all must remain in the building. Some materials may only be loaned out for 2-4 hours, while others must be returned by closing time. Late fees do apply to each category.

The center provides physical access information both online, and on site through flyers at the reference desk, and placards placed on the walls. Computers are present to allow the user to search for materials and call numbers.

The viewing area consists of two adjacent spaces, one having dim lighting and the other not. Users are free to choose which carrel to sit at (about 80 in total-although not all contained headphones or playback machines, and were presumed out of commission), and are free to handle the materials and the remote control, which is checked out along with the research items. There is very little supervision in these areas, but student employees are available at the reference desk to provide assistance when needed.

Conclusion

While Academy Film Archive technically allows access to the entire public, and the Avery Fisher Center only admits NYU students, it's still clear from other

observations of their virtual, intellectual, and physical access, that the Avery Fisher Center values open access to moving image materials more so than the Academy Film Archive. Both institutions are providing a service, only the Academy Film Archive promotes preservation and the safekeeping of their collection, which keeps users at a distance. Alternatively, the Avery Fisher Center's purpose is to create an environment in which a researcher can best navigate and obtain access to materials.

Bibliography

"About the Academy Film Archive." *Oscars.org Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences*. Accessed November 5, 2011.

<http://www.oscars.org/filmarchive/about/index.html>.

"New York University Bobst Library: The Avery Fisher Center for Music and Media." *New York University Libraries*. Accessed November 5, 2011.

<http://library.nyu.edu/afc/>.