
This paper presents the findings of a case study in evaluation and preservation of a title held in a collection of historic Latin American newspapers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The Academic Affairs Library holds in storage the complete run from 1911-1945 of the Venezuela newspaper *El Universal*, which has been continually published in Caracas since 1909. Although the newspapers are embrittled and their bound folio volumes damaged, they nevertheless represent a considerable information resource. Not only does this paper outline the issues related to evaluating, preserving, and providing access to this particular title, it also provides a framework to guide the process that is applicable to other collections of historic newspapers in academic research libraries.

Headings:

- College and university libraries
- Collection evaluation
- Newspapers
- Preservation of library materials
- Latin America
SAVING *EL UNIVERSAL*: A CASE STUDY IN EVALUATION AND PRESERVATION OF A HISTORIC LATIN AMERICAN NEWSPAPER

by
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Advisor
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Introduction

This paper will present the steps, findings, and future options of a collection evaluation I completed with respect to UNC-Chapel Hill’s collection of historic Latin American newspapers. All of the newspapers in the collection are bound into folio volumes and occupy about five full rows of shelving on the fourth floor of the Wilson Library Annex. They are in poor condition; nearly all of the titles have become very brittle and practically cannot be used without destroying the content. Damage from water and environmental conditions have affected some of the volumes over the years. Sooner or later something will have to be done with the collection and it is my hope that this research will serve as a framework and guide for making decisions, not only as they apply in this particular situation, but also in similar situations involving historic newspapers within the academic library environment.

Several factors have contributed to the need for this kind of collection evaluation. The first is that circulation managers constantly seek to maximize storage space in Wilson Library Annex, an on-campus site where space is limited. Space to store materials in an ever-growing academic research library collection is always needed and it is not clear whether or not which, if any, of the newspapers are worth keeping. In 2003, with the planned moves of the Music Library and the Chemistry Library to temporary spaces in the Annex, it is especially imperative that storage space for collections be optimized in order to serve patrons effectively.

A more compelling reason for this collection evaluation is that the Latin American/Iberian Resources section (LAIR) of the Davis Library is at a crossroads
of sorts with the relatively recent arrival of a new Latin American bibliographer in March 2000. Since beginning her position, there have been inevitable changes in the way the section operates and the focus of collection development.

A new bibliographer at a large research university must develop knowledge of the library’s collection. This does not happen overnight but is a continual process as the collection grows and its scope expands. There are also the bonds that must be established with other librarians and, most importantly, faculty that inform the selection process. And with a large budget that often exceeds six figures, there are always new decisions to be made about the allocation of funds. In addition to these universal adjustments experienced by all bibliographers new to a position, specific changes that have occurred at UNC include such things as the creation of the LAIR website, the implementation of new approval plans, several changes in vendors, and finally, new strategies to adequately provide resources for the needs of the university’s faculty and students.

As part of these changes, a newspaper cleanup was done by the previous Carolina Academic Library Associate (CALA) student, Sean Knowlton, who held my position as the LAIR research assistant before graduating from the School of Information and Library Science in May 2002. During the summer of 2001, Sean undertook a massive preliminary cleanup of the unorganized that resulted in hundreds of newspaper folio volumes in storage being organized and inventoried while others were deselected and discarded. However, that was only the first step, leaving the task of what to do with remaining titles in storage since that time. Table 1 is the inventory of these titles.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>UNC HOLDINGS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universal, El (Caracas)</td>
<td>1911-1945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dia, El (Montevideo, Uruguay)</td>
<td>Apr-Jun 1915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diario de Noticias</td>
<td>1946-1956 (gaps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diario Oficial (Mexico): del supremo gobierno de los EU Mexicanos</td>
<td>Jul-Dec 1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estrella de Panama</td>
<td>Mar-July 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heraldo de Cuba</td>
<td>May-June 1932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imparcial (Guatemala)</td>
<td>1952- Jan 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1846-53; 1914-; 1923-45, 1950-53 (gaps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jornal, O (Rio) &quot;revista&quot;</td>
<td>Oct 1925; Nov 25-1949; 1923-1945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May-Dec 1936; May-Jul 37; May-Jun 44; Aug-Oct 44; Apr-Jun 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nacion (Buenos Aires)</td>
<td>1933-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pais Excelsior (Cuba)</td>
<td>1952-53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sol, El (Quito, Ecuador)</td>
<td>1924; Jan-Feb 1928; March-April 1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May-June 1937; Nov-Dec 37, 1933-37; Jan 48-Feb 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal, el (Mex. City)</td>
<td>May 52; Mar-Apr 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comercio (Peru)</td>
<td>1998-1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comercio (Quito, Ecuador)</td>
<td>Jun-72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diario Las Americas (Miami)</td>
<td>May 1911-Jun 1914 (missing Jan-Feb 1913)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estado de Sao Paulo, O</td>
<td>1907-1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imparcial (Mexico)</td>
<td>May-July 1945; Nov 66-Dec 66, Jan-Nov 67, Nov-Dec 68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finally, and most importantly, there is the fundamental need to provide the best service possible to our users. In the research library environment, newspapers have traditionally been considered “lowbrow” literature. The availability of newspapers in a collection has often been viewed as a function for the public library rather than the academic \[1\]. In recent decades however, historic newspapers from years past have risen in scholars’ estimation for their unique ability to offer a picture of society and culture from a specific time period. With the proliferation of interdisciplinary studies in the humanities and social sciences, newspapers are now seen as an invaluable resource for research in many areas of study. Only newspapers can offer a “snapshot” of a given time period and cover such a wide breath of political, societal, and cultural perspectives that are unclouded by subsequent reflection, prejudices, and hindsight. The understanding that comes with the passage of time is altogether different from the dynamism of the moment that newspapers strive to capture in regular and frequent intervals.

T. F. Mills says “The newspaper is indeed often the only source of information of the social, economic, and political development of a nation, region, or community, and as such is an indispensable resource for researchers in the social sciences and humanities \[2\].” Geoffrey Hamilton goes further, stating that newspapers are the “first draft of history” and that “through their reporting and commentaries they influence politics, make or break public careers and even decide the fate of governments \[3\].” But the most succinct endorsement of newspapers’ role in the academic library environment comes from a recent article on historic newspaper digitization, noting that “there is no other medium in our history that
records every aspect of human life over the last 300 years – on a daily basis – like newspapers[4].”

The question of what to do with historic newspapers is not always clear. Nicholson Baker has been the most prominent critic of libraries’ preservation and collection development decisions with respect to historic newspapers. Writing in popular publications like The New Yorker, Baker takes his argument to the public arena and has done much to initiate discussion about the issue of historic newspaper preservation[5]. In his opinion, libraries have done a poor job preserving newspapers and their claims about the problems with storage and embrittlement are exaggerated. Intoxicated with new technologies and federal funding for microfilming projects, Nicholson believes that libraries have rushed to microfilm as a panacea for newspapers’ storage and preservation problems. Baker’s main concern is that upon reformatting newspapers to microfilm, libraries will discard the newspapers and, if no other institution is found who wants them, they are destroyed. The Modern Language Association (MLA), while trying to remain as neutral as possible about the related issues of preservation and access and, contrary to Mr. Baker, extolling libraries’ preservation efforts, has also come out in favor of preserving texts in their original format “whenever possible”[6]. However, the MLA doesn’t really address the logistics of a library’s operation although it does discuss the need of organizations to work together to address the problems. The age old question “artifact” vs. “content” is an issue tied to the preservation of historic newspapers. Is it the information content that is important or is the information inherently tied to the physical object and therefore partly lost through migration to other formats? The
position advocated by the MLA of preserving original formats “whenever possible”
would ideally mean that all newspapers were preserved and made available to
patrons.

Richard Cox and others have recently advocated moving away from the
perceived “either – or” option and pushed for making selective decisions regarding
historic newspapers that take into account “intrinsic value” among other
considerations [7]. This seems obvious given that selection and evaluation have
always been one of the major jobs of libraries and especially archives. Just as it is
not possible to acquire all materials, it is also not possible to preserve all materials.
Informed decisions must be made in order to create a collection that most effectively
matches the mission of the institution and thus the needs of its users both now and in
the future. Such decisions can only be made after research into a given situation and
the factors surrounding it.

I have decided to focus on one newspaper title in particular for this study.
Originally, I had the ambitious notion that a collection evaluation could be made for
all of the twenty-plus newspaper titles in storage but this is not realistic for several
reasons. The obvious reason is that all of them require individual considerations and
research beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, I would like to focus on one
specific newspaper in our collection. The title is El Universal, a Venezuelan
newspaper published continually in Caracas since April 1, 1909. It represents that
largest collection by far among all of the other Latin American newspaper titles;
almost thirty years and a little over one hundred bound folio volumes on two full
rows of shelving out of the five total rows. The steps I have taken, with minor
modifications, could be applied in a future comprehensive evaluation involving either the entire collection or other individual titles. This is especially true for preservation and access issues that are essentially the same for all newspapers regardless of national origin.

Poet Andrés Mata and writer and lawyer Andrés Jorge Vigas founded El Universal in Caracas in 1909. Although today it averages a circulation of around 250,000, the first publication run consisted of only 8,000 copies. In the first years of publication it focused on politics, economics, and societal events of common interest. Over the years the newspaper gradually incorporated other sections dedicated to comics, sporting events, and literary happenings, but editorial content was limited due to the periodic censorship imposed by the dictator Juan Vicente Gomez. Soon after his death in 1936 El Universal was able to regularly publish an editorial page generally described as moderate.

As a point, I determined exactly what I was dealing with in terms of the range of issues, the physical dimensions of the folio volumes, and the newspapers’ condition. Although Sean Knowlton had made a preliminary inventory a year and half ago and I anticipated that the newspapers had not been touched since, it was still necessary to verify what Sean had discovered as well as determine other things that had not been recorded. After being cleared by the Circulation Department and checking out the key, I visited the Wilson Annex with a notebook and tape measure. I recorded the specifications in Table 2.
Table 2: Description of UNC’s holdings of *El Universal*  
(Caracas, Venezuela: 1909 - present)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Wilson Annex 4th floor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shelving requirements</td>
<td>2 full rows of shelving, each measuring 33 ft. x 2ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bound folio volumes</td>
<td>110 volumes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bound folio dimensions</td>
<td>22” x 17” x 2”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dates of collection</td>
<td>1911—1945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contents of each bound volume</td>
<td>Three months per volume, each volume contains 720 total pages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical condition</td>
<td>All newspapers are embrittled and fail double fold test. Some volumes have issues detached from binding.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Decisions, Decisions

Upon discovering exactly what I was dealing with in physical terms, the immediate question to consider with this collection is do we want to keep this? It is a deceptively simple question. Determining the answer to the question is quite complex, after all, how does one ascertain the value of a resource in any systematic way? It’s much easier to rely on hunches or gut feelings rather than plan and carry out a methodology for evaluation. This is not to say that hunches or gut feelings are totally absent from any decision making process, but when dealing with such a vast and potentially valuable resource it is necessary to rely more heavily on decisions that have been informed through reasonable investigation.

Looking to the library’s mission statement is the primary place to find out what is important to the institution and it should always be considered the authority for library policy-making and decisions. At UNC, the central mission is to “provide access to cumulated human knowledge in all formats for the University's students, faculty, staff, associated researchers, and the citizens of North Carolina in support of their study, research, teaching, scholarship, publishing, community service, and cultural enrichment” [8]. Finding out exactly what are the subjects of study, teaching, publishing, etc. and concluding whether or not they correspond to having the newspapers in the collection would be a good start. Given that we are dealing with a Venezuela daily newspaper from the turn of the century, I suspected that the Humanities and Social Science departments would be the main places to look for evidence that the collection would support the university curriculum. My research
revealed that there is indeed a strong correspondence between the collection and the research, teaching, and publishing at UNC.

Among the research interests of UNC faculty members are topics intimately tied to the content found in the pages of *El Universal* and many of the other papers in storage. These research interests, which extend to material covered in courses taught at UNC, include studies in Latin American history and literature, political science, gender theory, and journalism. In fact, they are valuable to research and teaching in almost any discipline with a historical context. LAIR has acquired substantial runs of newspapers from decades ago to support these interests. The most recent was a faculty request for microfilm of a six-year run from the 1950s of Cuban newspaper *Revolución*. In short, *El Universal* is part of a collection that has documented use and relevance to support the curriculum of the university.

Given the present crisis in Venezuela and the volatility of regional politics, the collection acquires great importance in understanding some of the historical, political, and socio-economic factors that have contributed to the present-day confrontation between the government headed by Hugo Chavez and opposition groups currently seeking to oust him from power. *American Diplomacy*, a periodical web publication of the UNC Department of Political Science, has recently contained articles on the current state of affairs in Venezuela[^9]. Undoubtedly, the recent shakeups, strikes, and general strife that have focused the world’s attention on the country have strong ties to historical events recorded in *El Universal* that continue to influence Venezuela over fifty years later.
An important factor to guide collection development decisions is the part of UNC’s mission to “cooperate with other organizations for the advancement of scholarship and effective utilization of the records of human experience and knowledge”. In fulfillment of this mission, an important partnership is a cooperative collection development agreement with Duke University. Starting in the 1940s UNC, Duke, and Tulane University developed a cooperative program, based upon the geographic boundaries of Latin America, South America and the Caribbean, in order to build research level collections in Latin American resources. Although Tulane later dropped out of the program, UNC and Duke have maintained their cooperation and strengthened it through the creation of the Duke-UNC Program in Latin American Studies in the late 1980s. Although both universities collect core materials from all regions, they share responsibility for acquisitions at the research level. The responsibility is divided along geographical lines with UNC collecting for Venezuela, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, and the insular Caribbean, with an emphasis on Cuba, while Duke collects for Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia, Mexico, Central America, and the English-speaking Caribbean. Given the focus of the universities’ respective curriculums in the humanities and social sciences, the areas of political and institutional history, labor history, political economy, sociology, women's studies, demography, anthropology and archeology, and international and inter-American relations are particularly emphasized. According to an article written by two of UNC’s bibliographers and published in College & Research Libraries, one of the reasons for the program’s success has been that the simplicity of the agreement and the interdisciplinary nature of Latin American
studies make it easy for faculty and librarians to support[^10]. In fact, the geographic model of cooperation has become the main strategy for cooperative collection development in foreign area studies among institutions. The research-level collecting responsibilities between Duke and UNC can be seen in the following graphic.
UNC-Duke Cooperative Collection Agreement

Duke University = DUKE BLUE
UNC-Chapel Hill = CAROLINA BLUE
Shared collection responsibilities = PURPLE
In addition to this cooperative collection agreement with Duke, UNC also has an agreement with the Association of Research Libraries to collect a comprehensive level of materials related to Venezuela. A comprehensive level is generally characterized as collecting nearly everything published in relation to a particular topic. With respect to Venezuela, this certainly seems to include a thirty year run of the country’s major daily newspaper.

A final compelling reason to retain the print holdings is that my research indicates print holdings of *El Universal* are extremely rare among North American academic research libraries. In order to determine exactly who holds what, I consulted the OCLC database WorldCat, which contains over forty million bibliographic records. I searched the title and filtered the results in order to discard those newspapers with the same title published in other countries. The name, “*El Universal*”, like “*Times*”, “*Herald*”, or “*Post*” in English, is a common name of Spanish language newspaper titles. In fact, one of Mexico’s largest newspapers has the same name and is among the other titles stored in Wilson Annex. Once I was certain I had the correct title, I eliminated for the moment those records of the title on microfilm. The institutions that are listed in WorldCat as having print holdings for *El Universal* are: the Library of Congress, the University of Miami North-South Center Library, Harvard University, Cornell University, and the University of Texas at Austin.

I visited the Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC) of these libraries to search the range of holdings. Unfortunately periodicals, which are published continually, often appear only by the title, as do books, with no mention of exactly
which issues are held in the collection. Often, it is necessary to search in other places among the website, for example in the Serials Department pages, to determine if holdings are listed. In order to determine the holdings not given, I contacted reference librarians at the respective institution, explained my project, and asked if they could tell me exactly what was held in their library. From the University of Miami, I was told that they had actually had no holdings. Perhaps they did at one time and thus were listed in WorldCat as such, but now no longer do. Harvard University said that they have a group of short runs of newspapers in storage and that they held only fall 1993 to spring 1994 of *El Universal*. Although the title is currently received, it was their intent at the time of cataloging to retain the latest three months only. Curiously, Cornell University was listed as having holdings because they used the OCLC record for *El Universal* to catalog two anniversary supplements, the 75th (1984) and 80th (1989). While technically permissible to do this (cataloging them as monographs would have been more accurate), it is somewhat misleading. Using WorldCat, the only institutions determined to have original formant holdings are: Harvard University and the University of Texas – Austin.

However, it is necessary to note that not appearing on the list does not mean that an institution lacks holdings. There are several reasons why a library holding *El Universal* in its collection would not appear. For example, it could be that the library does not use the OCLC catalog record for its holdings, but instead simply has a shelf list of newspapers. This would be likely at a relatively small public library providing the latest issues to a Hispanic community of patrons, but probably not at a large,
academic institution. More likely, as is the case with UNC, is that a collection is very old and therefore not only absent from the electronic card catalog, but also in poor condition, in storage, and not made available to patrons unless they know from serial lists, union catalogs, or some other bibliographic control method dating back to the 1960-1970s, that the newspaper is held by the library. The newspapers probably sat in the library for a couple of decades until they were transferred to storage before the advent of the electronic catalog and the revised estimation of newspapers in research, either because they were deemed low collection priority, or because they were in such an embrittled state that they could no longer be used. Thus, they have been kept in storage, uncataloged electronically, and virtually unused since.

I suspected that *El Universal* was held in more libraries than those appearing in WorldCat so I consulted a print reference source of library holdings. The title, published in 1969, is *Latin American Newspapers in United States Libraries: A Union List compiled in the Serial Division, Library of Congress*[^12]. Arranged alphabetically by country, it gives not only the libraries holding specific Latin American Newspaper titles, but also the range of their holdings. Out of the ten libraries reported as holding *El Universal*, nearly all of them had only scattered, single issues from a couple of years that have probably been discarded at some point in the thirty years since. Nevertheless, it was helpful for giving information about the substantial collection held by the Library of Congress, Princeton University, and the University of Virginia, which did not appear in WorldCat. It also enabled me to determine more accurately the extent of the University of Texas – Austin’s collection of the earliest issues that do not show up in their OPAC; probably because they are
in such poor condition they cannot be used. By combining the information from this
print resource with that given by WorldCat, I came up with a list of the libraries
having substantial holdings of the title in original format and the range of issues in
their collection (Table 3).
| Princeton University | 8-12/1963 (gaps); 1964-1965 (gaps) |
| University of Virginia-Charlottesville | 10-12/1952; 1953-1954 (gaps) |
Microfilm holdings are another consideration since the information content of the newspapers is really of more importance than the original format text. As the MLA Statement on the Significance of Primary Records advocates, having a resource in original text format is the ideal. But as far as the intellectual content available to scholars and students is concerned, microfilm is sometimes the only reasonable option. After repeating the search process in WorldCat and Latin American Newspapers in United States Libraries, it was found that five institutions have microfilm holdings of El Universal. The institutions and their holdings appear in Table 4.
Table 4: Microfilm holdings of *El Universal*

|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
Among these collections, coverage for the last half of the twentieth century is reasonably complete. With enough lead-time, a researcher could acquire microfilm via interlibrary loan of nearly any issue since the mid-fifties. But what about the first forty years of publication? The Library of Congress holds original issues back to 1925, but it is very unlikely that they would allow them to circulate or that they would provide photocopies for more than a few issues. For researchers in North America, having access to the information from the 1925–1940 is indeed difficult, and for the years before that almost impossible. I say North America because El Centro de Documentación de la Fundación Andrés Mata, a research center named in honor of the founder of El Universal, purports to have a microfilm copy of every issue available for consultation \[13\]. Traveling to Caracas, however, is not an option for most scholars and the Foundation does not loan their microfilm to other institutions.

The conclusion I have drawn after connecting our holdings to the mission statement goals of UNC regarding the support of university research, teaching, and cooperative collection responsibilities, as well as investigating the holdings of other institutions, is that UNC has a very important opportunity to preserve this valuable resource for present and future scholars. It is far too late to ever hope of acquiring a collection of this kind in the original format. Although options for preservation remain to be examined, it is my opinion that the collection of this title is worth maintaining and should not be discarded or destroyed. Not only will it be of value in and of itself, but it will also complement UNC’s recent purchase of microfilm for issues from the past five years.
So what now?

So now that we have decided to keep this wonderful collection, two big questions remain: preservation and access. Access will be discussed shortly as preservation of the newspapers is the immediate concern once it has been decided that they will be retained. Preservation is a double-edged sword. On one hand the library wants patrons to be aware that this resource exists and for them to use it, but on the other hand, once it begins to be used its condition will deteriorate rapidly in two ways: physically and chemically. Simply repairing the damaged volumes as best we can, cataloging them, and making them available to be used anywhere in the library is not a realistic option, not only with respect to *El Universal*, but with the entire collection of historic newspapers. Although it is unlikely that the titles would receive casual use from patrons since the content is of interest primarily to scholars, even these users can defy their careful and attentive stereotype.

Brittle paper is not a problem if it is handled gently, but library books are available to the fastidious, the ham-handed, and the careless alike. American researchers’ demand for free and open access to information and the ethics of librarians put that access as the first priority. But allowing access to fragile materials is a problem, especially when most libraries are understaffed. One aggressive research can destroy a brittle book or newspaper in only one use \(^{14}\).

When this destruction inevitably happens, not only is the information lost to the patron of the holding library, but also to its consortium partners relying on the institution’s stewardship of the materials.

The problem with putting the materials into the general collection involves their physical and chemical composition. The largest component of groundwood pulp, the material of choice for newspapers for over 150 years, is cellulose fiber. These fibers are thin, short strands intertwined with one another that are inherently
weak. However, an even greater problem exists. The second largest component of groundwood pulp is lignin, an impurity that deteriorates rapidly creating acid. This acid combines with acid from inks used in printing and thus begins a chemical snowball effect. The acid has a proton that picks up an electron from cellulose fibers, leaving an atomic space to fill. When the cellulose fiber comes into contact with light and moisture from the atmosphere, it will pick up an electron from the moisture in a process known as acid hydrolysis. After a few decades, the paper begins to yellow and becomes so brittle that it is nearly impossible to use without destroying. The paper crumbles from the “slow fire” that eventually “burns” it up.

The library has attempted to restrict the amount of light that the newspapers are exposed to by binding them into folio volumes. Another more complex solution has been mass deacidification. Mass deacidification bathes newspapers with a non-aqueous solution of chemicals that attempts to slow the acidic snowball effect. However, recent research has called into question the effectiveness and feasibility of mass deacidification and it is generally agreed that, while both of these solutions can slow the deterioration process, neither can stop it completely.[15]

Environmentally friendly storage space is another matter. Although the Wilson Library, which houses special collections, is more tightly controlled, the Wilson Annex has a relatively unstable environment due to several factors. High windows on the south side facing the Bell Tower means that sunlight can enter and greatly affect the standard temperature of 70°F. Relative humidity (RH) is another problem that has been documented repeatedly on hydrothermagraph readings showing it sometimes varies by 10% over a twenty-four period. According to the
nonprofit organization SOLINET, a nationally respected source for preservation information, newspapers in storage should have a temperature no more than 60° F and an RH of 40-50% \[^{16}\]. More importantly, temperature and RH should not have rapid fluctuations as they cause the most damage by speeding up the rate of deterioration and eventually causing other problems such as pages separating from bindings and the emergence of mold and pests. Maintaining the temperature and RH at a constant level thereby minimizing daily and weekly fluctuations is by far the most important consideration when it comes to storing collections.

Keeping the newspapers in the Wilson Annex in a semi-state of benign neglect is an option, despite less than ideal environmental conditions, but what is another option that would demonstrate more of a commitment to the long term preservation of the materials? Off-site storage in a rigorously controlled environment is an excellent solution if the library has the resources to make it a reality. The recently opened Duke University Library Service Center is a valuable resource for institutions with space and preservation concerns. In the spring of 2001, inaugural remarks by Nicholson Baker opened the state of the art facility designed to meet the long-term storage needs of Duke University, as well as those of its partners in the Triangle Research Libraries Network (TRLN). It measures 15,000 square feet and is divided into two three-aisle sections that can accommodate 2.5 to 3 million volumes \[^{17}\]. The temperature is a stable 50°F with 30% relative humidity year-round. For brittle materials such as the newspapers, it is an ideal solution. UNC recently put 290,000 volumes of materials into storage at the center and it is also used by the Durham Public Library and Forest History Society among others. Not
only would off-site storage provide a stable environment for materials, it would also encourage selective use of the original print materials in a fashion similar to that of special collections since they are not stored either in the stacks or in a nearby unit where they could be paged within hours.
Yes, but….

What about the information content of the papers? This is a consideration of at least equal importance as preservation since library materials are of no value, irrespective of their condition, unless they are used by patrons. This is a fundamental tenet of librarianship. Special collections of rare books and manuscripts, no matter how valuable as a commodity, are worthless in an academic sense if they are not utilized to further the scholarship and education of the institution’s patrons. Putting the newspapers in offsite storage and assigning them special collection status will not adequately address the needs of students and researchers who require access to the information within the pages of *El Universal*. To make the content available to these users I offer an immediate solution: microfilm.

Microfilm has been the format of choice for newspapers for nearly the past fifty years. Although microfilm is nearly as old as photography itself, it is only within the past half century that libraries have begun actively incorporating it into their collections. Preservation issues involved in the creation of microfilm vary between microfilm produced by commercial vendors and that produced by academic sources, but the process is essentially the same. It begins by producing a master negative from the original newspaper that nobody touches and that is to be stored exclusively for preservation and posterity. The master negative is used only to produce a print master which libraries can then use to reproduce reels of working copies, called positive microfilm, for use by their patrons. If properly stored and
maintained, microfilm will last hundreds of years and take up far less space than original newspapers.

A great benefit of microfilm is the ability to increase access to the newspapers’ information without endangering the original artifact. In the past twenty to thirty years, national cooperative microfilming programs have been created in order to preserve and make more widely available historic newspapers. Two of the largest are the United States Newspaper Project (USNP) and the NEWSPLAN 2002 project in the United Kingdom. Both programs provide funding for the filming of local newspaper collections in order to preserve publications that are in danger of becoming lost to the perils of time. A contingent of project funding is that libraries must make the microfilm available to other institutions once the process is complete. The result is a cooperative exchange that makes newspaper collections among numerous institutions available to all of the member patrons and researchers. This would have never been possible with the original newspapers given the dangers of damage and loss in interlibrary loans. Also, the programs allow more bibliographic control since the disparate publications are migrated to a standardized format that can be readily indexed once their preservation has been assured.

The biggest obstacle to microfilm is its difficulties of use. It is almost universally viewed as cumbersome since it requires loading onto a microfilm reader and careful winding and rewinding in order to locate needed information. The image is not as sharp as the original and illustrations are especially affected. Relaxed browsing is almost impossible and color microfilm’s exorbitant price precludes its availability in most institutions, although color is not an issue with *El Universal.*
Strategic compromises such as those concerning original artifacts and surrogates are invariably faced by academic librarians. While they certainly pose a dilemma in courses of actions that involve making choices among options that are in opposition, compromises are often necessary to preserve and protect resources, yet still provide for scholarship and economy. This has been a constant theme in librarianship and is unlikely to disappear anytime soon as we enter the dawn of the digital age.

Nevertheless, microfilm remains a valuable resource not only for its proven use for preservation and access, but also for its potential for future digitization. Already some of the United States’ major newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* have been digitized back to their first issues in the mid 1800s, and projects are underway to digitize other papers from around the world such as the *Times of London*\(^{[18]}\). Microfilm will probably still continue to be a valuable resource for libraries, especially in the area of long-term preservation, but it appears that technology will soon enable users to rely more and more on digital resources derived from microfilm for increased access and searchability.

In 1997, an article written by Alan Howell looked at some of the current projects underway and discussed the advantages and disadvantages of digitizing newspaper from preservation microfilm\(^{[19]}\). This was soon followed in 1998 with an article in *International Preservation News* elaborating on emerging best practices\(^{[20]}\). In both articles Howell noted that newspaper microfilm lends itself to being digitized for several reasons:

- Anything that can be photographed (microfilmed) can be digitized and there will still be a backup copy of preservation microfilm.
• There is an abundance of existing microfilm in libraries and conversion speeds are high.

• Broadsheet newspapers’ size in original format precludes them from being used on flat-bed scanners which are usually no more than 17 x 10 inches. Digitization from microfilm is a better option.

• Newspapers need only be legible to convey their meaning as opposed to visually complex documents such as photographs.

• Newspapers belong to a category known as “text and line-art docs” which includes books, serials, and manuscripts. Text-based documents can be compressed in lossless (reversible) mode very efficiently given that the background is nearly always white (binary 1s). This increases the effectiveness of compression from the TIFFs (tagged image file format).

However, he also mentioned the disadvantages of digitizing from microfilm:

• The digital image is a second or third generation of the original material.

• Newspapers may have deteriorated and require substantial repair before being microfilmed and/or digitized.

• Older microfilm often contains scratches, splices, or gutter shadow and may be in very poor condition.

• Irregular undocumented filming, size variations and indexing issues may interrupt production mode.

Howell suggested that digitization has the potential to complement microfilm as a preservation strategy if three criteria are met. First, the image must be of sufficient quality to meet users’ needs. Secondly, it must last for as long as users need it. Finally, there must be appropriate bibliographic and quality control. He notes that preservation digitizing is already an accepted practice with audio and video collections and is optimistic about its possibilities for text. Many of his observations still hold true.
With respect to *El Universal*, options are not as plentiful given that microfilm of these earliest editions is not widely available. Commercial vendors do have copies available from recent years. In fact, in summer 2002, the Latin American and Iberian Resources section of the Collection Development Department at UNC purchased microfilm of *El Universal* covering the period of August 1998 – October 2001. The total was 117 reels at a cost of $3000. I have been unable to locate any vendor for microfilm before the 1970s; consultation with the LAIR bibliographer indicates that it is unlikely that there are any. As I mentioned before, El Centro de Documentación de la Fundación Andrés Mata claims to have a copy of every issue “disponible al público en microfilm para su consulta y reproducción”.

Unfortunately, these microfilm copies are available for consultation and limited photocopying only, not for sale.

Upon meeting with Preservation Librarian Andrew Hart, I discovered that filming the newspapers in-house at UNC’s lab would be a possible solution to the problem of locating microfilm. Located in Wilson Library, Imaging and Photographic Services is a unit of Preservation Services whose mission includes offering copying services such as duplication of library books, pamphlets, manuscripts, newspapers, maps, and photographs to university patrons and departments for a modest cost. Contrary to my assumption that filming thirty years of newspapers would be a burdensome project to complete in-house, the unit would actually welcome such a project since the transfer of funds from the budgets of either LAIR or the Acquisitions Department to the Imaging and Photographic Services section of Preservation Services would help to pay operating expenses.
Using the figures from Imaging and Photographic Services of $0.25 per exposure for newspapers and my own measurements of approximately 2,880 pages per year for thirty-five years, the calculated cost of microfilming the entire collection of 100,800 pages at $25,200 \[^{[21]}\]. If an additional $1,700 is added to repair the bindings of the folio volumes, one could theoretically preserve the holdings in original format and migrate the information content to stable microfilm. This results in increased access for a one-time cost of around $27,000 and a minimal recurring cost for storage in a better facility than the Wilson Annex.

Finally, there is another option presented by the Center for Research Libraries (CRL). CRL is a non-profit international consortium of higher education institutions and libraries whose mission is to make scholarly research materials available to users in a cost-effective way. Through cooperative acquisition and loan programs, CRL can maintain a large collection of bulky, unique, rare, and/or expensive research materials. Based in Chicago since 1951, CRL currently holds 3.5 million volumes of rarely-held research materials that are available to member institutions for no charge and no defined loan period \[^{[22]}\].

Both newspapers and Latin American materials are of great importance to CRL. Currently 17% of their loan requests are for newspaper materials and the Latin American Microfilming Project (LAMP) of CRL is constantly seeking to create original microfilm of primary source materials such as political archives and ministerial reports. CRL is able to provide this service because it acts as a depository for member libraries with valuable research collections but limited resources. Libraries can offer materials to CRL and, if they are accepted, the center
will work to maintain preservation and access for all. In the case of newspapers, CRL will accept materials that are not duplicated in its collection and microfilm them provided that: copyright is not infringed, the donor places no restriction upon access or reproductions, and CRL retains the master negative. By donating the papers to CRL, both preservation and access would eventually be assured at practically no cost to UNC other than shipping the materials to Chicago. Because CRL already holds microfilm of *El Universal* from 1951 to the present, a donation of practically all issues from 1911-1945 would be a great addition to its collection and, by extension, to the entire scholarly community. Exact details of donation, including whether or not UNC would also get its own copy of the microfilm and at what cost, would have to be worked out between CRL and UNC. Most likely is that these details would result from consultation with CRL’s Director of International Resources, James Simon, and UNC bibliographer Teresa Chapa.
Conclusion

The process of conducting a collection evaluation of historic newspapers is not easy, but neither is terribly difficult. My research with these materials at UNC-Chapel Hill has produced a methodology that could be of use in other situations both at the university and other institutions. It begins with gathering information about the holdings to determine the extent of materials in question, looking to the mission statement of the institution in order to inform and guide selection policies, consulting the requirements of department faculty, consulting other holdings in all formats, and then integrating this data in order to make a decision to keep or discard. If a decision is made to discard the materials, then the next part is easy. If, on the other hand, a decision is made to keep them, then questions of preservation and access must be addressed. As I’ve shown, there are many factors unique to historic newspapers that require substantial investigation and consideration. While some issues, such as those related to physical and chemical composition, are applicable to all newspapers, others such as information content vs. original artifact and availability of microfilm are not. These are the individual circumstances that must be worked out with respect to specific titles by collection development officers and bibliographers. Below is an outline of the steps in a self-guided evaluation.

Guide to practice in historic newspaper collection evaluation:

1. Determine holdings
2. Look to Mission Statement
3. Consult faculty teaching and research requirements
4. Consult other holdings in all available formats
5. Integrate data and make decision
6. Address preservation issues
7. Address access issues

Although it is unfortunately not possible to preserve all texts forever, it is useful to remember the words of John Milton, “Books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul whose progeny they are; nay they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them.”
Works Cited


