



Archives and History Office Program Review Committee

2002 Report

The SLAC Archives and History Office (AHO) Advisory Committee members possessed broad expertise in archiving and record management. The members have had experience at a variety of institutions including universities, national laboratories and scientific societies. This is the third review of the SLAC Archives program; it is expected that this will be repeated at suitable intervals.

The Members of the Archives Review Committee were:

- R. Joseph Anderson, AIP, Center for the History of Physics
- Professor Richard Blankenbecler, SLAC, Chair
- Asst. Professor Aaron Roodman, SLAC
- Jerry Jobe, SLAC, Business Services Division
- David Gaynon, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Records and Archives Management
- Margaret Kimball, Stanford University, Archives
- Peter Westwick, PhD, California Institute of Technology, Division Of the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Charge to the Committee:

The SLAC Archives and History Office Advisory Committee is a standing committee charged with advising the Associate Director of the Research Division of SLAC on the goals, policies, and activities of the SLAC Archives and History Program. While the Advisory Committee's emphasis may change over time, its initial effort will include the following areas:

- Review the current archives and history program and assess how well it is fulfilling its mission and meeting DOE requirements.
- Evaluate SLAC's critical archival needs and recommend changes.
- Evaluate SLAC's longer-term (8-10 year) needs and strategy.
- Review and comment on the Office's mission, goals, policies, and activities.
- Prepare a report on these points and any other subject which may arise during the Committee's deliberations.

The SLAC AHO is part of the Technical Information Services (TIS) organization. The mission of TIS is to support and enhance research and scholarly communication and it reports to the Associate Director of Research. TIS includes the Archives Office, the HEP Databases, the Library, Technical Publications, and the SLAC Web Information Manager. The TIS Director, Pat Kreitz, is SLAC's (DOE-mandated) Scientific and Technical Information Officer, responsible for ensuring the prudent management and maximum accessibility of SLAC's scientific, intellectual and historical information.

The SLAC Archives Review Committee met for 1 and 1/2 days on 7/26/02 and 7/27/02. Jean Deken, the Head Archivist at SLAC spoke to the committee on the archival program, its operations and operating procedures during the first day. These presentations well

represented the achievements of the AHO. They covered the ongoing effort and were well planned, thorough, clearly presented, and extensive.

An executive session followed in which possible issues to be included in the report were discussed. A brief tour of the SLAC accelerator was given to interested committee members.

The second day started with Jean Deken responding to a request to discuss the needs of the AHO for the immediate future. An executive session followed in which the issues for the committee report were formulated and discussed. A draft of the report was written by the committee.

Overall Appraisal

The committee praised the effort to preserve and make available the scientific history of SLAC. The committee was unanimously complimentary of the program and the laboratory for its support of this program. SLAC continues to be a leader and an example of how other labs should archive their history. Overall, the SLAC effort is a very strong program.

This biennial review process can offer the opportunity to refine the program and to assist in establishing a clear sense of priorities, which the SLAC management and the archive staff can share.

In the opinion of the committee, the SLAC archive program is first rate. With limited resources and a broad charge, the archive staff has managed to mount an effort that has not only been responsive to the needs of the Laboratory but has established a position of leadership in the archival community and particularly within the DOE.

The Archive and History Office (AHO) is to be commended for the excellent job they have done in defending their mission, integrating their work with other efforts in Technical Information Services (TIS), and, with limited resources, making a significant impact on a long-standing problem in a very short time.

Jean Deken is particularly to be commended for her accomplishments and effectiveness as head of the archive effort. She has accomplished a great deal with limited and diminishing resources. Both Jean Deken and Pat Kreitz are to be congratulated for their efforts in defining the path and the goals of the archive effort.

The early discussion and agreement on the procedures to be used to archive a series of major experiments such as BABAR, NLC, and GLAST is worthy of special praise. The revitalization of the BABAR effort following its change of leadership is encouraging for this total effort.

It appears that the level of resources provided by the Lab to Archival efforts cannot be increased. It is more important than ever that there be a clear understanding of the core functions and priorities within these functions of the AHO. It was a clear consensus among the committee that the time and effort spent by the Archivist on various tasks was in proper response to both her responsibilities and to the demands of the SLAC program.

A recent example of the necessary flexibility required is the role of the archivist in preparing for the 40th Anniversary Celebration of SLAC. Very soon, the long range planning for the 50th Anniversary must be started. The committee endorses these efforts as an important function of the AHO.

The committee is pleased to see that over the past few years the AHO has matured into a program that is serving the needs of the SLAC community as well as preserving the history of the important scientific work performed at SLAC.

Priorities

The mission of the SLAC AHO is defined as providing SLAC with a reliable, accessible, and dynamic institutional memory that captures its scientific history while meeting DOE/NARA contract requirements.

The core work of an archivist falls into four areas: Finding and Appraising, Organizing, Assisting Users, and Providing Intellectual Capital. The committee feels that the Archive staff's time should be more or less equally divided amongst these four activities.

Recommendations:

The recommendations of the Committee can be summarized into four main topics that will be discussed in detail in turn:

- Storage Space for the collection
- Backlog and Accessioning
- Electronic Records
- Communications Office Interactions

Storage: The SLAC management together with the Archivist must develop a long-range storage strategy to meet the needs of the SLAC Archive for the next ten years. This effort should define minimum storage requirements and identify possible solutions that will meet the archive needs (based on the recognition that the archives space requirements will grow over time).

The Committee has identified the following possible solutions for Consideration. This list, however, is not definitive. The Archivist is encouraged to explore any other reasonable solutions.

Possible solutions:

1. Onsite storage
2. Partner with Stanford
3. Off-site commercial
4. Leverage with Federal Records Center

This strategy needs to address cost, practicality, impact on archive operations, and accessibility. That is, the ability of archives to meet the needs of its users in a timely fashion.

Backlog and Accession: The AHO has a current backlog of 4000 feet of material. Given the pressures of storage space and perhaps more importantly the need to be able to assess collections strengths and weaknesses, the Committee recommends that the AHO prepare a plan to review the backlog and accession appropriate materials. Materials accessioned should then be prioritized for processing.

At the current rate of processing, the AHO is capable of dealing with the amount of records presently received each year. In order to deal with the backlog, a different strategy (that may involve additional staffing for a period of time) may be required. Processing of records to a level acceptable to offsite storage locations appropriate for archival collections (be this Federal Records Center or other site) should be a priority.

The plan to deal with the backlog should include alternative plans that would accomplish the review in the short term (2-3 years), mid-term (4-6 years), and long-term (8-10 years) and what the costs (both financial and intellectual) and benefits of each of those plans would be.

A review of the backlog will allow the AHO to assess the overall collection and should facilitate preparation of a long-term collection development plan. The review also should provide guidance as to the level of processing that can/should be applied to the records in terms of processing rates and what is then needed to accomplish that processing.

In light of this recommendation to address the issue of the backlog, the Committee recommends that the percentage of time allocated to the find and appraise function of the AHO be raised to 30% with a reduction of the Assist function to 20%.

Electronic Records: The Babar experiment has taken data for over two years and has achieved its initial goal of observing CP violation. As such it is clearly a DOE Level I experiment demanding permanent archiving of some of its records. In addition, Babar maintains the vast majority of its records in electronic format. The combination of a current experiment with electronic records presents an opportunity for the AHO to develop a plan for electronic archiving that collects records as they are created. It also presents a challenge, given that there are currently no storage media standards or any well-developed tools for electronic archiving.

The AHO review in 2000 recommended that the AHO commit to archiving Babar records while the experiment is underway, and it also recommended that a protocol be developed to identify and preserve electronic records from both Babar and GLAST. Given the other accomplishments of the AHO in the last two years, it is not surprising that these issues have not been fully addressed. However, these issues continue to be important and for this reason the committee recommends the following:

1. That Babar's electronic records serve as a test case for the archiving of electronic records for other future experiments such as GLAST and the NLC.
2. That Babar's internal storage and backup of electronic records be investigated. For example, how and for how long is the Babar web-site saved?
3. That steps are taken to ensure that Babar's electronic records are not lost.
4. That a protocol is developed to do the zeroth order archiving of Babar's electronic records, i.e. the electronic equivalent of collecting boxes of documents that are not accessioned. We suggest that this protocol be developed in cooperation with the Babar web-master and hypernews manager.
5. We urge the AHO to participate as a tester of useful electronic archiving tools or standards as these become available.

The Committee understands that additional help, in the form of allocation to this project of some of SLAC's existing resources, will be required for the AHO to succeed in implementing the recommendations above. For example, a time commitment from the Babar and GLAST webmasters or other IT staff for technical support, in addition to AHO staff time, is a basic requirement for making a good start and developing a realistic plan of action for handling the electronic records of these experiments.

Communications Office Interactions: The new Communications Office creates a new customer for the AHO and also possible opportunities. The new office will likely draw on the collections to perform its functions, which could increase the assistance effort, at least until Communications staff develops familiarity with SLAC history and the archival collections. It is important to define the relation between the two offices for division of labor.

The Communications Office and its head Neil Calder can contribute leadership and perhaps resources to several projects.

First, the 50th anniversary celebrations: The AHO should not be responsible, with current resources, for the planning and the implementing of historical projects associated with the anniversary. The AHO can best serve the anniversary through its core mission of collecting and preserving the historical documents and photos and developing intellectual capital and artifacts.

AHO should, however, be involved in discussions with the Communications Office over plans for the 50th, which may range in ambition from a small pamphlet or exhibit, to a more extensive historical website, or history monograph. The last option would require several years of lead time; the AHO and Communications Office may want to consult other labs with experience in such publications.

Preparations for the 50th may provide opportunity for a limited set of oral histories, focused on a handful of key SLAC veterans. Care will be needed to decide who should conduct these interviews and how to prepare for them.

Finally, the Communications Office may also help or even to take the lead in the preservation of historical artifacts, a task that our committee has previously listed as an important function.