Mixed Media

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Digitizing Mixed Media in the Horizons-Upward Bound Collection

By Courtney Richardson, Cranbrook Center for Collections and Research

In 2023, Cranbrook Archives was awarded a two-year grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commissions (NHPRC) to digitize the records of Horizons-Upward Bound (also known as HUB). This grant largely funds my work to build an online collection that facilitates the discovery and use of one of the nation's oldest and largest college access programs. Our goal is to increase the visibility of HUB's important story and, by extension, the experiences of underrepresented youth, primarily African Americans from Detroit, Michigan, and surrounding areas, within the broader US education system.

First class of Horizons-Upward Bound, 1965. Courtesy of Cranbrook Archives.

I've experienced fun and challenging work while digitizing media from the HUB collection such as finding unmarked reels in one space and locating matching audio in another; stitching together oversized newspaper articles that were scanned from a nonoversized flatbed; scanning negatives with no contact sheet or index to reference; and connecting with the originating community to best identify individuals not named in photographs. Aside from introducing HUB's historical materials, this article will highlight the craft and collaborative work archivists perform to digitize materials—especially in small shop settings.

Material and Context

Cranbrook Archives holds 18 boxes (20.4 linear feet) of materials relaying Horizons-Upward Bound's history from its founding in 1965 through the year 2000. This includes papers, publications, news clippings, photos, and films primarily created by the program's administration and students. The HUB Records tell a unique story not

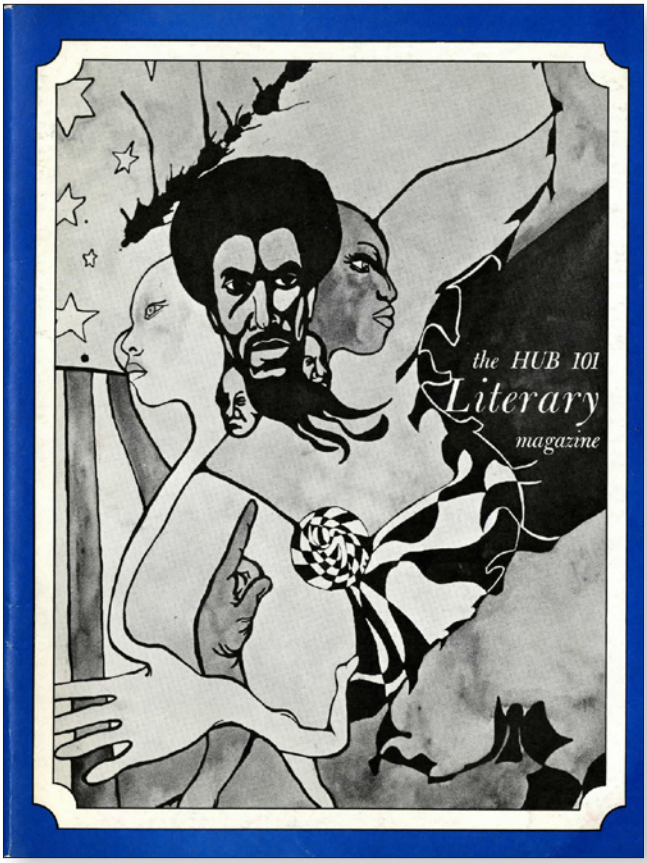
found within or outside of Cranbrook. They document early experiences of poor and largely BIPOC students in a secondary educational program located in a predominantly white and wealthy learning environment. Also, student-made materials such as films, creative writings, and visual arts extend narratives about early college access programs beyond institutional perspectives. Unlike our other online collections, which largely focus on the first half of the twentieth century, the HUB project documents a segment of the Cranbrook community that is still very active with current and past staff, students, and alumni. Working with such records is very exciting for the archives because we can talk about the materials, their context, and their description with the originating community from the beginning of the project and beyond.

Documents and Initial Challenges

An early discussion of the project was determining the order of digitizing the materials. Knowing that the film would be digitized off-site, this narrowed our focus to paper and photographs. Considering the number of materials and our plans to describe them at different levels (e.g., paper at folder-level and photos at item-level), we decided to digitize them separately starting with the largest portion, the paper materials (over 32,600 pages). There were additional benefits to this approach: 1) Having papers digitized first gave me on-hand contextual information for unmarked photographs, and 2) running hundreds of pages through a scanner gave me time to multitask. For instance, I was able to research digitization guidelines and photo-imaging solutions to update our repository's workflow, which I'll share more about later.

During our first year, two HUB student volunteers began digitizing paper materials in-house. They also drafted initial keywords and descriptions. I continued the students' work using feeder and flatbed scanners. Occasionally, I used Photoshop to darken very light text and stitch together oversized articles to increase legibility.

We encountered an early challenge in determining the sensitivity of materials created by and about minors and marginalized groups. To help identify and navigate these concerns, we collaborated with HUB's current administration to form a HUB Advisory Board consisting of a small group of alumni from classes represented in the collection. Through open discussion, board members expressed concerns about materials involving individual correspondence and writings being easily searchable online and naming individuals who may not desire to be identified. To address this, we decided to omit OCR from such materials while still making them viewable



Cover of HUB students' Literary Magazine, *1971. Courtesy of Cranbrook Archives.*

online and discoverable for researchers through online descriptive metadata. We also discussed incorporating a mixed use of redaction approaches resulting in either line-level redaction of individual names, page elimination, or making some items metadata-access only. A take-down policy will also be added to the main page of the online collection to address privacy concerns.

Film

There are five films in the project totaling 57 minutes of footage, including short creative films, a documentary, and a promotional film. Four of these films were actually not a part of our original scope and were only rediscovered midway into the project. It was exciting for us to find three short student films from 1984 along with a documentary, *Together,* created by a HUB advanced film class in 1972. Initially unmarked, we identified the 8mm reels by cross-referencing film festival entry packets and faculty reports in the HUB papers. By viewing the first few frames of each reel along with a little detective work, we identified the unmarked reels to be from HUB.

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Image stills from HUB student films, 1984. Left to right: Farewell My Summer Love, Dormitory of the Dead, *and* The Nightmare. *Courtesy of Cranbrook Archives.*

Heavily influenced by 1980s pop culture, the students produced a rom-com (*Farewell My Summer Love*) and two slasher-thrillers (*Dormitory of the Dead* and *The Nightmare*) that were ahead of their time. At the rise of 1980s mainstream American thrillers like *Friday the 13th* and other teen-targeted movies like *Sixteen Candles,* the film industry was predominantly white. Even horror movies today are just beginning to pivot from stereotypical scripts writing off or ending African American characters' lives at the start of the movie. However, in the HUB Records are multiple examples of African American youth responding to this gap in representation by inserting themselves into the film genre as actors, producers, writers, and engineers at a time when it was highly uncommon.

One of the challenges of digitizing the films involved

HUB student with teacher in botany class, 1995. Courtesy of Cranbrook Archives.

synching the audio that was recorded separately on cassette tapes. As the film was digitized off-site, I used the tool EZ Vinyl Tape Converter to digitize the in-house audio and synched the film and audio using Adobe Premiere Pro. Another challenge with synching the audio to the film was the lack of a voiceover in the videos, making it hard to align the audio over the moving images. Some of the audio tracks and film were not equal in time, which meant some guesstimation had to take place to figure out where the two aligned. This required multiple drafts to ensure the composites synced correctly.

Photography

There are currently 2.5 boxes (2.9 linear feet) of photographs consisting of prints, slides, and negative film created from 1965 to 1997 being digitized. The images are primarily of HUB students, faculty, staff, and extended community featured across class and group photos, academic and extracurricular activities, and during various events such as graduations, award ceremonies, fund-raisers, and symposia.

I am using an Epson flatbed scanner with SilverFast Ai Studio to digitize the images. We took the opportunity to upgrade our software so that we could better meet grant objectives and improve workflows for all future digitization in the archives. I revisited FADGI's digitization guidelines and developed a plan to incorporate the recommendations that best fit our capacity and would work with our team of three archivists, our volunteers, and our other department staff. SilverFast was a costly purchase for us and includes many features beyond our day-to-day needs; however, certain tools made digitizing large batches of images more efficient, higher quality, and aligning with FADGI with a shorter learning curve compared to our previous process.

For example, prescan adjustments are much more extensive in SilverFast that allowed flexibility with previewing, cropping, rotating, level adjustments, and more options for naming batch images. I also used image enhancement tools when I encountered photos of students and staff with darker skin tones to better capture their likenesses—reducing loss in facial detail caused by either worn paper or poorly lit imaging. For the HUB project, the Negafix widget was extremely time efficient for scanning negatives. There is a lot of film in the collection, so being able to easily convert and adjust negatives while prescanning saves a lot of time.

Left: Image exposure adjustment applied with the SilverFast NegaFix tool. Right: Image scanned without additional adjustment. HUB students at Decathlon, July 1979. Courtesy of Cranbrook Archives. Courtesy of Cranbrook Archives.

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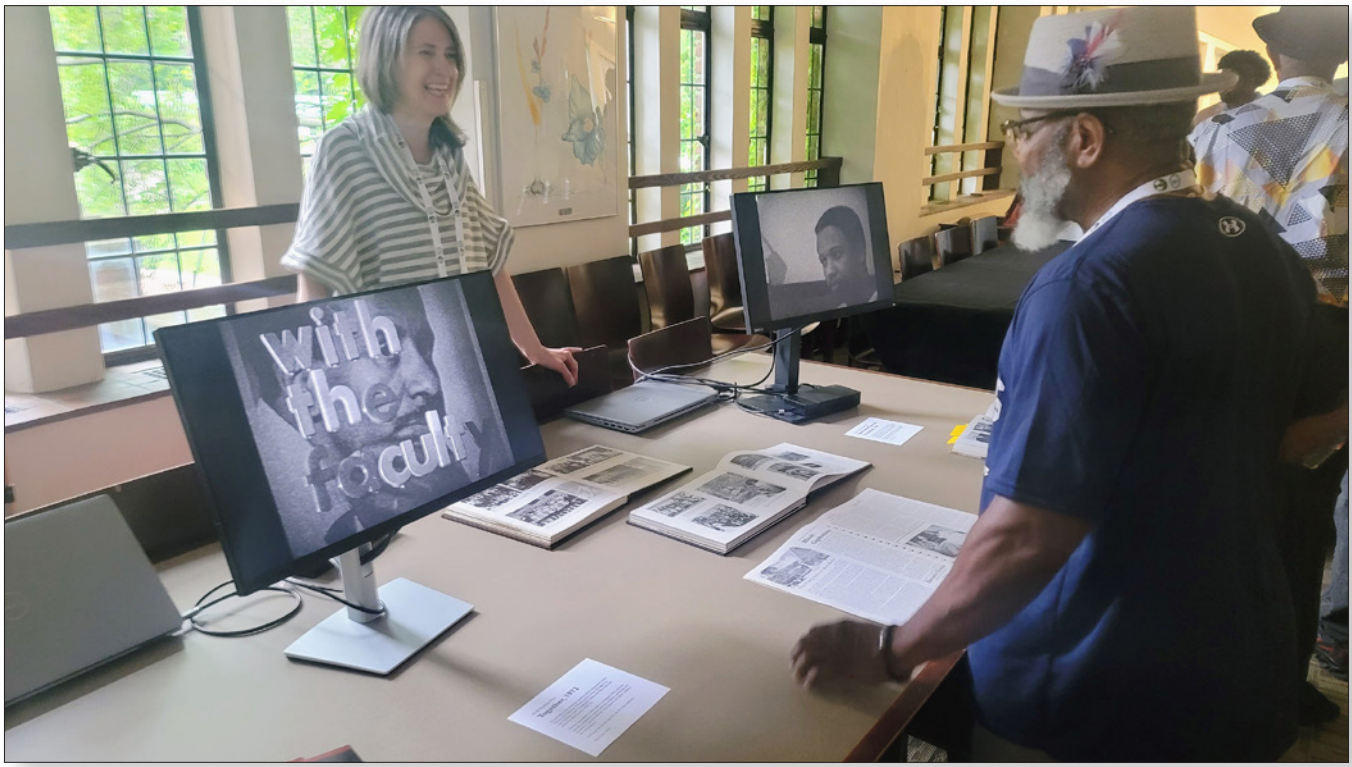

Head archivist, Deborah Rice, screens HUB films for alumni during class reunion, 2024. Courtesy of Cranbrook Archives.

Conclusion

We look forward to continuing our interaction with the HUB community to provide archival materials for ongoing storytelling and historical research. Over the past year, the archives facilitated various outreach activities like film screenings, trivia games, oral and written histories at reunion events, and working with alumni volunteers to help identify unmarked photographs. This year, during HUB's 60th anniversary, we are also developing an online photograph exhibition to help highlight the program's historic accomplishments and ongoing work. As we complete the final year of digitization, we've learned much about our scanning processes but are also grateful to experience our collaborative roles as archivists in building community with those whom the collection represents.