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Access to Moving Image Collections  
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Access Comparison: The Paley Center for Media and AMNH

With every collection comes an institution, and with an institution comes the question about access. Evaluating the access policies for different institutions requires the consideration of multiple elements, mainly the institutions' facilities, the virtual access to the collection, and the physical access to the collection. The facilities that house and share moving image collections are essential in the search for knowledge and information, they reveal the control held over the collection's physical access. When looking at the virtual access available, comparing the amount of metadata information provided by the finding tools is important to understand a collection and the media within. For this assessment of access and presentation of information I chose The Paley Center for Media and the American Museum of Natural History. I chose these two collections specifically because of their distinct collections and access policies.

Founded by William S. Paley in 1975, The Paley Center for Media began as an organization dedicated to collecting, interpreting, and preserving media programming. The Paley Center now stands with a growing collection of over 150,000 television shows, advertisements, and radio broadcasts, as well as recorded events hosted at The Paley Centers in Los Angeles and New York City. As the website states, the Paley Center "leads the discussion about the cultural, creative, and social significance of television, radio, and emerging platforms for the professional community and media-interested public." The entire media collection along with an assortment of media related artifacts is available for public enjoyment for just the cost of general admission, \$10 or less.

The Paley Center for Media in New York City is comprised of four levels that house multiple screening rooms, theaters, galleries, and a library with 42 computers for individual and shared viewing of the collection. The theaters and screening rooms are utilized for special events as well as for everyday public screenings. Each of the galleries houses and displays various media related artwork, photography, and artifacts. On the library computers viewers have the ability to search the entire catalog, or view select media from assigned groupings including: collection highlights, special collections, and the curator's blog. The wide variety of media content spans decades of entertainment, documentary, news, advertising, and radio programming, allowing patrons to view anything from the series premiere of *Sesame Street* to coverage of Apollo 11, to world news footage from 9/11.

My visit to The Paley Center was amazing. I chose to surpass the public viewings in the theater and instead view items from the collection on the library computers; each patron is allotted an hour and a half of viewing time. All the staff members I interacted with were pleasant and welcoming. After I paid admission at the front desk, I was happily told all about The Paley Center. The man I met upon entering the library greeted me with a cheerful hello and a thorough, yet brief, instruction on how to use the computers to access the collection. My viewing time was spent casually viewing bits of old episodes of *Doctor Who*, more recent news broadcasts from 9/11, and even a few Coca-Cola commercials. The collection highlights offered provided me with viewing options that I had not thought of on my own, but would have gladly watched had I had more time.

Searching the catalog reveals metadata detailing a summary of the item, awards, credits, color or b&W, audio, genre, network, running time, and even a sidebar offering scene selection for easy browsing. A catalog search reveals all of the media content held within the collection

pertaining to the search value, however not all the items in the collection are available to watch. Some can only be viewed on their analog format, and therefore must be viewed on special equipment. In order to view one of these items from the collection, a request should be made in advanced so as to ascertain if viewing the media selection will possible. An appointment must also be made ahead of time in order to utilize the Edward John Nobles Scholars Room; a separate fee of \$15 is also required.

The Paley Center for Media website, like the center, is easily accessed and explored. Displaying a vibrant rotating banner featuring video clips, and listing below many other popular videos and upcoming events, the site draws visitors in. Clicking on “The Collection” tab brings users to the finding aid that searches The Paley Center’s entire collection, providing the same metadata found at the institution facility. Other links allow patrons to explore upcoming events and media showings, as well as current media news and perspectives. This site offers up the same information available onsite (minus the viewing capabilities) and much more, bringing the public in on all things related to The Paley Center, creating one large media community.

The second institution I evaluated was The Moving Image Collection at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) began in 1908, 39 years after the museum was founded. The Moving Image Collection is comprised of over 291 titles, the majority of which are films of Museum sponsored travel expeditions, television shows, interviews, lectures, and other Museum-related recordings. A significant amount of these films are from museum-sponsored expeditions made in the 1920’s and 1930’s.

The AMNH website at [www.amnh.org](http://www.amnh.org), greets visitors with a vibrant blue banner and images from some of the current museum exhibits. After searching for several minutes I found that the Moving Image Collection page can be navigated to by highlighting the ‘Our Research’

tab at the top of the screen then clicking on the ‘Research Library’ link, and then finally by selecting the ‘Moving Image Collection’ link under the ‘Special Collections’ heading. The collection pages prove to be fairly simple to navigate with clearly marked links and easily understood tabs, unlike the main page which is a bit more tricky to navigate as the main focus is to draw visitors to the museum and not the research center.

The Moving Image Collection page reveal that there are three tools available to search the AMNH collection: The Film List, the Library’s Catalog, and *The Catalog of the American Museum of Natural History Film Archives*, although this has been out of print since 1987. The newest films that have been added to the collection are noted under ‘Recent Additions to the Collection.’ From the ‘Moving Image Collection’ main page the two search tools still in active use are accessible, simply clicking on the tool’s title brings visitors to the more extensive finding aid.

The Film List provides a basic overview of the objects in the collection. The list provides a simple summary of the media content and a link to its online catalog file. I found The Film List to be helpful when quickly browsing the collection for anything of interest, or for a quick reference. On the other hand the Library Catalog offers a more in depth look at the media. Featuring a browse option that allows only patrons to search only within the specific format: “Films, Videos, Slides,” the catalog is fast and simple to navigate. The catalog record lists the files by number and also provides the collection of which they are a part. Only films with the listed location of Special Collections are part of the Moving Image Collection. Other metadata included in the record includes a summary of the film, title, format, credits, notes, subject key terms, and the author.

Access to the collection itself is by appointment only and requires a Formal Application to research the Archival Collections to be sent to the Special Collections Department. The application requires basic information along with a resume or CV, and a description of the project. The web site asks that you do this in advanced because it may take several weeks for them to respond. I submitted an application and sent an individual e-mail to the Special Collections e-mail about viewing a film a few weeks ago and I have yet to hear back from them. There is nowhere on the site that discusses the viewing facilities, leading it to be inferred that the collection is housed in a facility that supplies stations or rooms in which different formats of media can be viewed. The website does state that Museum staff may borrow DVDs and VHS tapes from the collection, and that patrons may be able to borrow some of the films via inter-library loans from local public or university libraries. Unfortunately this collection, is under emphasized on AMNH's website and I wonder how many researchers even know that it is there to access? A specialized collection such as this may be known throughout a historical research community and therefore geared toward their access, but it should also be promoted to researches outside that set community.

Both The Paley Center and AMNH are geared toward educating their patrons and encouraging the exploration of the media content. AMNH is a more scholarly and research based collection, attempting to only service serious researchers and scholars. Whilst The Paley Center for Media is a collection based openly in encouraging patrons to come and enjoy the collection they have to offer and the events they celebrate the medium with. Encouraging the sharing of metadata information for the media they house and allowing access is important so that researchers and the general public alike may acknowledge their collection and embrace the knowledge it has to offer.

## **Bibliography**

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The Paley Center for Media. (2012). Retrieved from The Paley Center for Media: <http://www.paleycenter.org/>