Researchers studying cultures around the world often capture their research data as moving images. Video has the power to collect raw data and capture research and social contexts in ways that print cannot. As technology links the world through broad and instant communication, collaborative research is more feasible and more necessary. However, when that research exists as moving images, the mechanisms and opportunities for sharing can be difficult to manage. IU has been involved for a decade in a project to preserve the video research of scholars and to store it in a way that is useful and accessible to scholars and teachers.

Ruth Stone and her University of Michigan colleague Lester Monts conducted extensive research in Liberia for three decades, much of it captured on videotape. Twelve years ago, they wondered what would become of that video record. Typically, it would sit on a shelf somewhere to be found only by scholars aggressively searching for it. Although the production quality of the material was not equal to what might appear on television or in the cinema, the research value was high. Together they devised a plan that would allow such work to be of service for a long time as a web-based archive. The project would collect video research materials from scholars all over the world. The recordings would be well organized and documented, and available to others. The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation liked the idea and provided the funding necessary to make the archive a reality.

The result is the EVIA Digital Archive Project. Researchers apply to participate. If the quality of their research passes a peer review, they are invited to use software developed by the project to annotate each recording, noting content at several levels of specificity and indexing by time. The annotations are peer reviewed and made available online with the recordings. Users around the world then have long-term access to high-quality moving images, all with a detailed road map.

The value to researchers is obvious, but the archive’s uses do not end there. Stone sees the potential for important classroom use. “An instructor teaching a course with a segment on drums, for example, can find high-quality video images from around the world to show students,” said Stone. The instructor would find 744 video clips of drums, to be exact (according to a quick search of the collection). A similar search for “dance” produces more than 1,000 results.

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Lester Monts, University of Michigan, Professor of Music (Ethnomusicology); Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs EVIA Digital Archive Project: http://www.eviada.org/