

# Access to the USC Shoah Foundation Institute's Visual History Archive

## *Overview & Roadmap*

Established in 1994 by Steven Spielberg to collect and preserve the testimonies of survivors and other witnesses of the Holocaust, the USC Shoah Foundation Institute maintains one of the largest video digital libraries in the world: nearly 52,000 video testimonies in 32 languages and from 56 countries. The Institute is part of the College of Letters, Arts & Sciences at the University of Southern California; its mission is to overcome prejudice, intolerance, and bigotry—and the suffering they cause—through the educational use of the Institute's visual history testimonies.

The Institute works within the University and with partners around the world to advance scholarship and research, to provide resources and online tools for educators, and to disseminate the testimonies for educational purposes. In addition to preserving the testimonies in its archive, the Institute is working with partner organizations to help document the stories of survivors and other witnesses of other genocides.

For more information, visit the Institute's website, [www.dornsife.usc.edu/vhi](http://www.dornsife.usc.edu/vhi).

### Archive at a Glance

The testimonies in the Shoah Foundation Institute's Visual History Archive were recorded primarily between 1994 and 1999. While most of those who gave testimony were Jewish survivors, the Foundation also interviewed homosexual survivors, Jehovah's Witness survivors, liberators and liberation witnesses, political prisoners, rescuers and aid providers, Roma and Sinti (Gypsy) survivors, survivors of Eugenics policies, and war crimes trials participants. For a detailed statistical breakdown of the Archive by experience, country of interview, and language, visit the Institute's website at [http://dornsife.usc.edu/vhi/scholarship/archival\\_access/](http://dornsife.usc.edu/vhi/scholarship/archival_access/).

Each testimony discusses the interviewee's prewar, wartime, and postwar life experience, in his or her home country and country of immigration, such that the archive covers a significant part of the history of the 20th century around the world. At the conclusion of the testimony, the interviewee displays and describes photographs, documents, and artifacts pertaining to his or her life story. Finally, the interviewee introduces family members and friends on camera. During some interviews, the interviewee performs literary or musical works or displays original works of art. Approximately 150 interviews feature walking tours, in which a portion of the interview was conducted at sites of former concentration camps, ghettos, mass graves, or in front of prewar family homes.

The average length of a testimony in the Visual History Archive is over two hours. The total combined duration of the nearly 52,000 testimonies is approximately 105,000 hours.

### Access via Internet2

Access to the entire Archive is enabled through Internet2, a private broadband research network in the United States, or equivalent networks for institutions outside the United States. As of December 2010, the entire Visual History Archive is available electronically at 28 institutions in seven countries, including Australia, Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Israel, and the United States. For a complete list of institutions with access to the entire Visual History Archive, visit the Institute's website at <http://dornsife.usc.edu/vhi/testimoniesaroundtheworld/>.

Students, faculty and researchers at participating universities access the archive through a browser-based interface (the Visual History Archive or VHA) that communicates with servers at USC via Internet2. The web servers and database servers exist at USC, along with the main video archive, while a designated video server of at least 1 TB is needed locally at the connecting institution to act as a video “cache” to stream video to the search interface. Testimony videos are in MPEG1 format with an average size of 3 GB and stream at 3mbps. Access to the browser-based interface is limited by IP address ranges at each connecting institution.

Users are able to search more than 50,000 experiential and geographic indexing terms to find relevant video in the archive. The web-based search tool (called the Visual History Archive or VHA) allows users to identify both whole testimonies of relevance as well as specific segments within testimonies that relate to their area of interest. For more details on how research in the archive works, see the Archive User Manual on the Institute’s website at [http://dornsife.usc.edu/vhi/scholarship/archival\\_access/finding/](http://dornsife.usc.edu/vhi/scholarship/archival_access/finding/).

To date, educators have used the archive to incorporate testimonies in over 230 university courses across many disciplines, including anthropology, business, film, history, law, linguistics, sociology, and psychology. A detailed list of courses can be found on the Institute’s website at <http://dornsife.usc.edu/vhi/scholarship/courselists/>.

## Costs

The annual subscription fee to access the Visual History Archive is \$15,000 USD per institution. This fee covers the costs the USC Shoah Foundation Institute incurs in offering this service, maintaining and updating the digital archive, and developing more robust search tools. Each institution needs to consider local costs that may include service and maintenance of the local cache (designated video server) and interfacing with faculty and students for content-related assistance.

## Local Technical Requirements

- Institution must be connected to Internet2 or the equivalent network in the country in which it is located with 100 mbps bandwidth
- Institution must set up a designated video server that should have a Gigabit Ethernet connection as close to the Internet2 peer as possible to minimize local bandwidth issues. The local video server (cache) must be at least 1 TB to store a subset of the digital video files in the Visual History Archive. The average digital size of a testimony is over 3 GB. Our experience has shown that a larger local video cache provides a better user experience since more videos are available for immediate viewing
- User desktops have at least 10 mbps switched connectivity to the cache to play the video
- Institution must have high-speed Internet access
- Institution must set up the Visual History Media System (VHMS) on the cache. For basic cache operation, the following is required:
  - Linux operating system
  - Open SSH with the PSC performance patches installed
  - SAMBA or native Windows SMB (VHA caches only)
  - Perl 5.8.0 or above
- For monitoring and tuning cache performance:
  - iperf
  - the latest Linux kernel

## Preliminary Local Speed Test

Over Internet2 (or equivalent network), there could be a 10% to 80% drop in actual bit-rate between an institution and USC. The Institute requires a 100 mbps connection to Internet2 (or equivalent network) so that a 30 mbps actual bit-rate can be achieved, which would be considered a viable connection to the archive. The Institute has set up a test site to ascertain an institution's actual bit-rate to the archive. This test should be run from a computer which will have the equivalent network connectivity as the institution's designated video cache server. This will most likely be a Gigabit Ethernet connection to a local network.

Please copy and paste this link and hit the "start" button to run the test: <http://vhi-portal.usc.edu/vhispeed/>.

## Process for Connecting (Roadmap)

The main steps in the process of connecting to the Visual History Archive are outlined below. Many steps can overlap and occur concurrently, and do not have to follow the order below strictly.

1. Decision by Institution to connect to the archive is confirmed with the Shoah Foundation Institute (SFI).
2. Institution's technology group should review the technology requirements shown above to assess viability and local technology costs.
3. Institution to determine technology and content support (most often a librarian) point persons for USC Shoah Foundation Institute to contact on an ongoing basis.
4. SFI will provide contact information for relevant USC ITS staff, who will then email more detailed documentation to Institution's technology group on video server configuration; the Visual History Media System (VHMS), which manages video storage and streaming locally, as well as video transfers from USC; and the Visual History Archive (VHA) user interface through which research is conducted.
5. Institution's technology group should perform a preliminary local speed test as indicated above and send the results to USC ITS staff. USC ITS staff can advise on rectifying any initial bandwidth issues between Institution and USC.
6. SFI will send additional documentation to the designated content support person (most often a librarian): VHA application user guide, VHA in Practice guide, graphic identity manual and communications kit, and copyright FAQs.
7. Institution should determine size of local video server [Minimum 1 TB up to Maximum 135 TB]:
  - Size of cache may be determined by Institution's needs (e.g., large enough to hold all videos for interviews conducted in a specific country and/or state, or other criteria);
  - Experience shows that a larger cache improves the user experience since more testimony videos are immediately viewable.
8. A license agreement will need to be put in place between SFI and Institution:
  - SFI to email Institution a standard license agreement for review.
  - Institution will need to provide appropriate contact information to incorporate in license.
  - SFI and Institution will need to agree on a start date for the first year subscription to the archive, which will be incorporated in license.
  - Once Institution approves agreement, 2 original copies must be signed by both parties.

9. SFI will email an invoice to Institution for payment (\$15,000 yearly subscription).
10. Institution's technology group should set up and configure a permanent video server of at least 1 TB per the technical requirements above and documentation and instructions provided by USC ITS staff.
11. Institution's technology group needs to provide USC ITS staff with IP addresses for:
  - the designated video server (cache) at the Institution;
  - the office computers of the library and technology staff who will be administering the testimony videos at Institution through the VHMS application;
  - all computers from which students, staff, faculty, and other authorized users will research the archive through the Visual History Archive (VHA) application. Typically the IP address ranges for the entire university network are included for access to the VHA application, allowing research of the archive campus-wide.
12. A full test of the VHA should be completed:
  - USC will transfer video files to Institution's video cache;
  - Institution should confirm videos play properly in the VHA application and also request one or more videos from within the application to confirm automatic transfers of videos from USC.
13. Institution should create contextual web page(s) for the VHA to help guide students and professors to it and to post useful info for potential users (often within library electronic resource/database pages). Institution should give SFI an opportunity to review web page content on the VHA prior to posting. As an example, the USC Libraries' resource page for the VHA is at <http://libguides.usc.edu/vha>.
14. USC to pre-load a selection of testimony videos onto Institution's local video cache based on Institution's input.
15. License Agreement must be approved and signed by both parties and invoice paid by Institution before public access is provided.
16. USC to provide online training on VHA and VHMS applications, and on content and history of archive. Onsite training can be provided if requested but costs are borne by the Institution.
17. Institution should announce the availability of the VHA—this might include an internal announcement, a public event, or press release. Institution should allow SFI's Associate Director of Public Outreach and Communications an opportunity to review public announcements on the VHA prior to release.

## Contact

For further information please contact Douglas Ballman, Manager of External Relations—Online Archive, at the USC Shoah Foundation Institute either via e-mail at [dougb@usc.edu](mailto:dougb@usc.edu) or by phone at (213) 740-6046.