

Visual History Archive

Providing online access to universities and institutions around the globe.



Visual History Archive

Introduction



USC Shoah Foundation – The Institute for Visual History and Education is dedicated to making audio-visual interviews with survivors and other witnesses of the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity a compelling voice for education and action. With a current collection of nearly 52,000 eyewitness testimonies, the Institute’s Visual History Archive preserves history as told by the people

who lived it. Each testimony is a unique source of insight and knowledge offering powerful stories from history that demand to be explored and shared. In this way we will be able to see their faces and hear their voices, allowing them to teach, and inspire action against intolerance.

Initially a repository of Holocaust testimony, the Visual History Archive has expanded to include testimonies from the 1937 Nanjing Massacre in China¹ and the 1994 Rwandan Tutsi Genocide². In addition, an initial 60 of 377 testimonies from survivors and witnesses of the Armenian Film Foundation’s Armenian Genocide collection were integrated into the Visual History Archive in April 2015. Each collection adds context for the others, providing multiple pathways to learn from the eyewitnesses of history across time, locations, cultures and sociopolitical circumstances.

The archive is digitized, fully searchable, and hyperlinked to the minute, allowing students, professors, researchers, and others to retrieve whole testimonies and segments within testimonies that relate to their area of interest through a set of 62,882 indexing terms, 1.79 million names, and 682,923 images. Currently, the archive is available to the public in its entirety at 51 institutions in 13 countries.

¹Conducted through a partnership with the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall.

²Accomplished in collaboration with Aegis Trust and the Kigali Genocide Memorial, with additional support provided by IBUKA.

Testimonies in Research

“From the viewpoint of historians, the most important benefit of using testimonies is that they bring into history events that would otherwise remain completely unknown, since they are missing from conventional documentation found in archives—most of which was written by perpetrators and organizers of genocide. Testimonies can save events from oblivion, but they can also provide very different perspectives of events known through conventional documentation.”

—Omer Bartov,
John P. Birkelund Distinguished Professor of European History and Professor of History and Professor of German Studies,
Brown University

Number of Testimonies by Experience

Holocaust/World War II era, 1939–1945

Jewish Survivors	49,029
Rescuers and Aid Providers (Holocaust)	1,133
Roma and Sinti Survivors.....	407
Liberators and Liberation Witnesses	363
Political Prisoners	262
Jehovah's Witness Survivors	83

*Rwandan Tutsi Genocide, 1994**

Tutsi Survivors	57
Rescuers & Aid Providers (Rwandan Tutsi Genocide).....	7

*Nanjing Massacre, 1937***

Nanjing Massacre Survivors	12
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War Crimes Trials Participants.....	62
Miscellaneous (WWII).....	32
Survivors of Eugenics Policies.....	13
Non-Jewish Forced Laborers	11
Homosexual Survivors.....	6

Armenian Genocide, 1915–1923

Armenian Survivors	49
Descendants (Armenian Genocide).....	5
Miscellaneous (Armenian Genocide)	4
Foreign Witness (Armenian Genocide).....	1
Rescuers and Aid Providers (Armenian Genocide).....	1

Number of Testimonies Collected in Each Country

Argentina.....	728	Finland.....	1	Poland.....	1,379
Armenia	1	France	1,652	Portugal	2
Australia	2,479	Georgia.....	6	Romania.....	147
Austria	187	Germany	669	Russia	675
Belarus.....	246	Greece.....	303	Rwanda	52
Belgium	204	Hungary	789	Serbia and Montenegro	346
Bolivia	23	Ireland.....	4	Slovakia	656
Bosnia and Herzegovina	55	Israel.....	8,457	Slovenia.....	11
Brazil.....	564	Italy	418	South Africa	250
Bulgaria	628	Japan.....	1	Spain	7
Canada	2,819	Kazakhstan.....	6	Sweden	325
Chile	65	Latvia.....	79	Switzerland.....	69
China.....	12	Lithuania.....	137	Ukraine	3,427
Colombia	15	Macedonia	9	United Kingdom	867
Costa Rica	19	Mexico	111	United States.....	19,836
Croatia	327	Moldova	284	Uruguay	122
Czech Republic.....	563	The Netherlands	1,044	Uzbekistan	25
Denmark.....	94	New Zealand	53	Venezuela.....	227
Ecuador	9	Norway.....	34	Zimbabwe	8
Estonia	9	Peru	2		

Number of Testimonies by Language

Armenian.....	12	Hebrew.....	6,276	Romani	24
Bulgarian	624	Hungarian	1,340	Romanian	129
Chinese.....	12	Italian	433	Russian	7,084
Croatian.....	393	Japanese.....	1	Serbian	384
Czech	560	Kinyarwanda	54	Sign.....	5
Danish.....	67	Ladino.....	9	Slovak.....	560
Dutch.....	1,076	Latvian.....	1	Slovenian.....	6
English.....	24,765	Lithuanian	46	Spanish.....	1,346
Flemish	5	Macedonian.....	9	Swedish.....	264
French.....	1,862	Norwegian	34	Ukrainian	304
German	923	Polish.....	1,510	Yiddish.....	554
Greek.....	305	Portuguese	560		

Courses Using the VHA

Visual History Archive Undergraduate and Graduate Courses

Given the broad scope and diverse content of the USC Shoah Foundation's archive, the testimonies have the potential to support research and pedagogy in many disciplines. More than 480 undergraduate and graduate courses in over 25 academic disciplines have utilized testimony from the archive so far. As access to the archive increases, so does the variety of courses that take advantage of this deep resource.

Pictured below is a word cloud of academic disciplines weighted by the number of courses taught using the archive in each discipline.



PHOTO BY MARK BERNDT

Course Disciplines



Visual History Archive

Selected Courses

Courses Using the VHA

Title	Department	University
Animation, Simulation, and Performance	Culture, Art, & Technology	University of California, San Diego
Autobiographical Memory and Memory Disorders	Psychology	Freie Universität, Berlin
Body, Mind, and Healing: Introduction to Medical Anthropology	Anthropology	University of Southern California
Communicating Illness, Grief, and Loss	Communication	University of South Florida
Gendered Memories of War and Political Violence	Gender Studies	Central European University
History of the Holocaust	Jewish Studies	University of Minnesota
Italy and Germany: Similarities and Differences	Political Science	Freie Universität Berlin
Jewish Folklore	Folklore	University of Pennsylvania
The Literature of the Holocaust	Freshman Forum	Syracuse University
Media and Memory: Representing the Holocaust	Modern Culture & Media	Brown University
Natural Language Processing Applications	Applied Linguistics	Charles University in Prague
Nazism and Stalinism in Comparative Perspective	History	University of California, San Diego
Representations of the Holocaust	Cinema-Television	University of Southern California
Social Memory	Sociology and Social Anthropology	Central European University
Voices of the Holocaust	Communications Studies	U. of North Carolina at Greensboro

Student Engagement

PHOTO BY MARK BERNDT



“No matter how our civilization advances, there are certain values that define us as individuals and as a society...The content of the Visual History Archive is priceless material to teach those core values to our students.”

—C.L. Max Nikias,
President,
University of Southern California

Course title: *French IV: Paris as Seen by Writers, Filmmakers, and Photographers*
Professor: *Colin Keaveney, French and Italian*
Institution: *University of Southern California*



PHOTO BY KIM FOX

Professor Keaveney speaking at a conference at USC in March 2010.

Overview: Professor Keaveney's upper-level French course explores themes of love, loss, collective and personal memory, and modernity through readings of French literary texts, theoretical readings, films, poems, and songs. One of the texts used in the class is the French novel *Dora Bruder*, which tells the story of a young girl who was sent to Auschwitz. The book combines different aspects of memory, loss, life, chronology, and French history, and reconstructs what the girl's life may have been like, even though very little is known about her.

Pedagogical Use of the VHA: Students are asked to actively imagine Dora Bruder's experience with the aid of contemporary documents, such as birth certificates, police reports, etc., and are also assigned French-language segments from the VHA based upon topical relevance. Students then have the responsibility to make connections between the segments in the VHA and the text. This involves recounting victim testimonies while putting them in the context of the assigned text. Professor Keaveney uses an example from the text that refers to a particular police report describing the arrest of Louise Jacobson, who was then deported and killed at Auschwitz. The VHA interview with her sister Nadia Kaluski-Jacobson allows students to compare the dry, official account from the text with a personal true story of loss and bereavement.

Observations

Professor Keaveney contends that "the VHA can provide factual and emotionally powerful information to allow students to better understand those who experienced the German occupation of France in the 1940s." The content within the VHA is rich in historical knowledge, which gives students more substance, meaning, and depth to the French literature explored in the course. It also enhances the class discussions for more compelling and productive dialogue. This same methodological approach can be incorporated in other language and literature courses, such as Russian, German, Italian, Spanish, and others.

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Course Case Study

Teaching with Testimony

Course title: *Animation, Simulation, and Performance*

Professor: *Emily Roxworthy, Theatre and Dance*

Institution: *University of California, San Diego*

Overview: Professor Roxworthy's course *Animation, Simulation, and Performance* focuses on graphic representations of war, such as comic books, animated films, and video games about World War II and the global war on terror. Students learn how to analyze still and moving images of wartime atrocities, particularly in terms of the impact that different representational media have on the communicative power of these images.

Pedagogical Use of the VHA: In their first analytical-essay assignment, students compare the first volume of Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel *Maus* (which documents his parents' experiences at Auschwitz) with Holocaust testimony from the Visual History Archive. They are asked how the comic book medium and the medium of filmed testimony make different demands upon their audiences, particularly along the lines of empathy and participation. While students apply theoretical concepts from key media theorists such as McLuhan and Sontag, the most important work is accomplished through students analyzing how a narrative travels from one medium to another and how this adaptation alters the audience's experience of war representation.



PHOTO BY AMBER MIRAFENTES

Professor Roxworthy addressing students and Holocaust survivors at a workshop at UCSD in March 2011.

Observations

Professor Roxworthy's first-year students found the VHA testimony both moving and informative: "Despite the fact that their generation was practically raised on graphic novels and the comics medium, surprisingly, in their papers, the majority of these students decided that the VHA interviews provoked more empathy and participation than Spiegelman's *Maus* did. Even when they decided that both were participatory and empathy-generating, they generally concluded that the survivor testimony recorded in the VHA more effectively engaged its audience in a mode of participation that activated spectators," she says.

Selected Dissertations

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Ph.D. Research

Title	Author	Department/University
"Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel" (2011)	Jessica R. Anderson Hughes	History Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
"At War's End: Allied Forces at Bergen-Belsen" (2012)	Mark Celinscak	Graduate Program in Humanities York University
"Jewish 'Shtetls' in Postwar Germany: An Analysis of Interactions among Jewish Displaced Persons, Germans, and Americans between 1945 and 1957 in Bavaria" (2013)	Kierra Crago-Schneider	History University of California, Los Angeles
"Women of Birkenau" (2010)	Sarah M. Cushman	History Clark University
"Designing a Griotte for the Global Village: Increasing the Evidentiary Value of Oral Histories for use in Digital Libraries." (2011)	Rhonda Thayer Dunn	Computer Science Texas A&M University
"We were Called Greenies: Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Canada" (2012)	Adara Goldberg	History Clark University
"Is Brotherhood Powerful? Male Mutual Assistance in the Slave Labor Camp of Markstaedt" (2010)	Shawn Gumbleton	History The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
"Information Seeking in Context: Teachers' Content Selection during Lesson Planning using the Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive of Holocaust Survivor Testimonies" (2011)	Kathryn Ann Newton Lawley	Information Studies University of Maryland, College Park
"'What Happened After': Meaning-Making in the Lives of Holocaust Survivors." (2011)	Patrick J. Meade	Applied Psychology New York University
"Disintegration, Social Breakdown, and Political Mass Violence in Subcarpathian Rus'" (2013)	Raz Segal	History Clark University
"Compass, Square and Swastika: Freemasonry in the Third Reich" (2011)	Christopher Campbell Thomas	History Texas A&M University
"Genocide Genres: Reading Atocity Testimonies" (2013)	Katherine Wilson	English University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Sample Abstract

**Dissertation Abstract: "At War's End: Allied Forces at Bergen-Belsen"*

In his dissertation Mark Celinscak examines the surrender and relief of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in northwest Germany at the end of World War II. While it is well known that Bergen-Belsen was surrendered to the British Army in April 1945, hundreds of Canadians also assisted and encountered the camp through informal visits and authorized tours. The remarkable Canadian efforts at this camp have not been properly acknowledged, studied or documented. Accordingly, this dissertation reveals the considerable Canadian involvement during the surrender and relief of Bergen-Belsen. In addition, it surveys the personal narratives of both British and Canadian military personnel as they responded to the situation at the camp.

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Scholarly Books and Articles

Selected Publications

Title

Author

<i>The Fantastic Laboratory of Dr. Weigl: How Two Brave Scientists Battled Typhus and Sabotaged the Nazis.</i> New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014	Allen Arthur
"Wartime Lies and Other Testimonies: Jewish-Christian Relations in Buczacz, 1939–1944." <i>East European Politics and Societies</i> 25.3 (2011): 486-511	Omer Bartov
<i>The Death of the Shtetl.</i> New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009	Yehuda Bauer
<i>Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp.</i> New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Incorporated, 2010	Christopher R. Browning
"Using Online Video Oral Histories to Engage Students in Authentic Research." <i>Oral History Review</i> 41.2 (2014): 341-350	Jill Goodman Could and Gail Gradowski
"Remembering the Singing of Silenced Voices: Brundibár and Problems of Pedagogy." <i>Philosophy of Music Education Review</i> 21.2 (2013): 156-177.	Teryl L. Dobbs
<i>A Small Town Near Auschwitz.</i> Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.	Mary Fulbrook
"Genocide memory, Digital Cultures, and the Aesthetization of Violence." <i>Memory Studies</i> 7.4 (2014): 403-408	Wulf Kansteiner
<i>The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945: Volume II.</i> Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012	Geoffrey P. Megargee and Martin Dean
<i>Erzählräume nach Auschwitz. Literarische und videographierte Zeugnisse von Überlebenden der Shoah.</i> Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2013.	Andree Michaelis
<i>Strangers in the Wild Place: Refugees, Americans, and a German Town, 1945-1952.</i> Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013	Adam R. Seipp
"Between Life and Death: Why Some Soviet Jews Decided to Leave and Others to Stay in 1941." <i>Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History</i> 15.3 (2014): 477-504	Anna Shternshis
"Regarding the Recording: The Viewer of Video Testimony, the Complexity of Copresence and the Possibility of Tertiary Witnessing." <i>History & Memory</i> 25.1 (2013): 111-144.	Caroline Wake
"Who Killed Lida's Jewish Intelligentsia? A Case Study of Wehrmacht Involvement in the Holocaust's 'First Hour'." <i>Holocaust and Genocide Studies</i> 27.1 (2013): 1-29.	David W. Wildermuth

Sample Abstract

*Book Abstract: *The Death of the Shtetl*

In this book, Yehuda Bauer describes the destruction of small Jewish townships, the shtetls, in what was the eastern part of Poland by the Nazis in 1941-1942. Bauer brings together all available documents, testimonies, and scholarship, including previously unpublished material from the Yad Vashem archives, pertaining to nine representative shtetls. In line with his belief that "history is the story of real people in real situations," Bauer tells moving stories about what happened to individual Jews and their communities.

Search Application

Visual History Archive User Interface (vha.usc.edu/)

Without creating an effective means to search the 109,729 hours of videotaped testimonies, the full educational potential of the archive could not be realized. To enable students, faculty and researchers at participating institutions to find the people, places, events, and experiences described in the testimonies, the USC Shoah Foundation developed the Visual History Archive, a web-based software application, that provides access to the digitized and fully cataloged and indexed interviews. The main search screen in the Visual History Archive is pictured above.

The screenshot shows the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive search interface. At the top is a navigation bar with links: About Us, Search, Search History, Projects, Terms Of Use, Help, and Contact. A 'VHA Demo | Logout' link is also present. The main header features the 'USC Shoah Foundation' logo and 'Visual History Archive' text. On the left, a 'Collections' list includes: All (selected), European Holocaust, 1939-1945 (51,401), Armenian Genocide, 1915-1923 (60), Nanjing Massacre, 1937 (12), and Rwandan Tutsi Genocide, 1994 (49). The central search area has a text input field for 'Enter indexing term, names, numbers or interview codes', a 'Search' button, and radio buttons for 'All Words' (selected), 'Any Words', and 'Exact Phrase'. Below this, it says 'Testimonies: 0'. Further down, there are four advanced search options: 'Experience Groups' (Find testimonies using biographical and interview information), 'Index' (Find segments of testimonies by searching or browsing indexing terms in the USC Shoah Foundation Thesaurus), 'People' (Find testimonies of interviewees by name, or find a testimony that refers to a specific person by name), and 'Places' (Find segments of testimonies about geographic locations by browsing, searching, or zooming in on a Google Map). Each option has a 'Search' button.

The Visual History Archive allows users to conduct searches using an extensive controlled vocabulary of 62,882 geographic and experiential indexing terms, 1.79 million names of people mentioned in the testimonies or recorded in pre-interview questionnaires, and biographical information for each interviewee, including city and country of birth; religious identity; places of incarceration (e.g., camps and ghettos); hiding, flight, or resistance details; etc.

Quick Fact

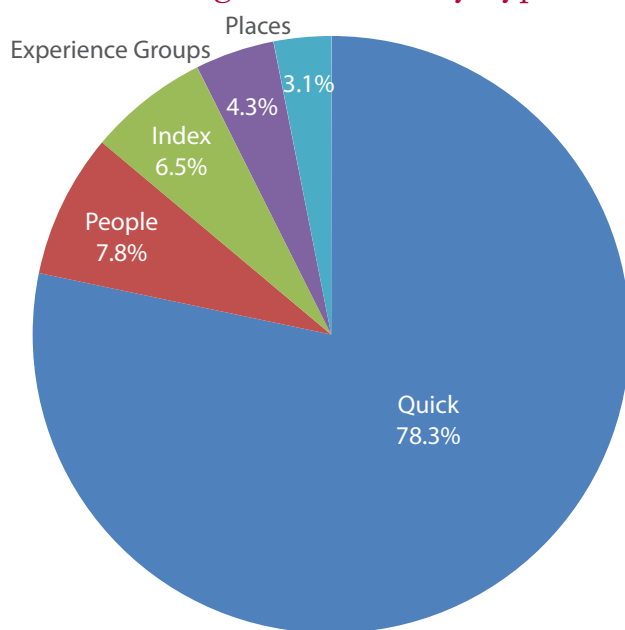
Similar to the index of a book, the USC Shoah Foundation's indexing terms point directly to digital time codes (one-minute segments), instead of pages, within the testimonies where specific people, places, events, and experiences are discussed.

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Search Facts

VHA Searches

Percentage of Searches by Type



The Visual History Archive interface allows users to navigate through the archive using 5 different search methods: Quick Search, Experience Groups Search, Index Search, People Search, and Places Search. Each method facilitates research of the testimonies' cataloguing and indexing data in different ways. This page highlights select search statistics for 2014.

Indexing Terms Search—Top 20 Indexing Terms Searched

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Auschwitz II-Birkenau (Poland : Death Camp) | 11. Warsaw (Poland : Ghetto) |
| 2. school anitsematism | 12. cannibalism |
| 3. camp liberation | 13. November Pogrom (Nov 9-10, 1938) |
| 4. Auschwitz (Poland : Concentration Camp)(generic) | 14. future message |
| 5. forced labor | 15. sexual assaults |
| 6. Theresienstadt (Czechoslovakia : Ghetto) | 16. camp sexual assaults |
| 7. Holocaust faith issues | 17. Auschwitz I (Poland : Concentration Camp) |
| 8. survivor guilt | 18. hiding |
| 9. Prague (Czechoslovakia) | 19. Ravensbrück (Germany : Concentration Camp) |
| 10. liberation | 20. body part processing |

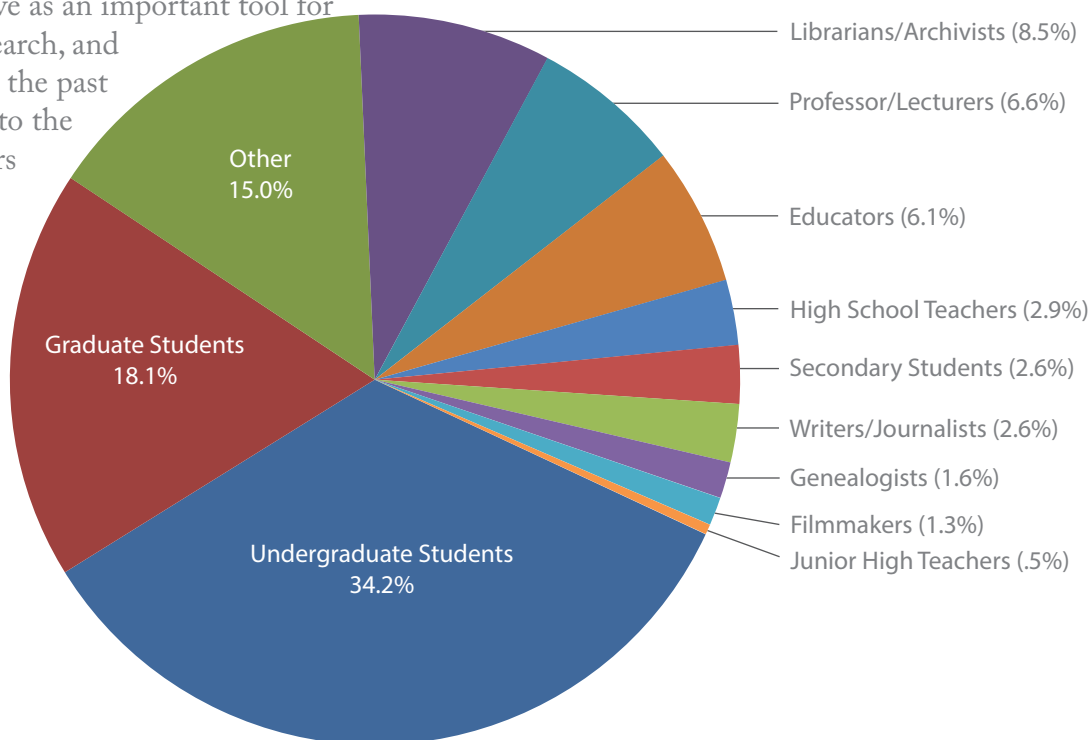
Quick Facts

- 8.2 million segment and testimony search results were saved by researchers in their Visual History Archive projects since 2002.
- 734,000 views of testimonies were made by Visual History Archive researchers in the last five years.
- 502,000 searches were conducted by Visual History Archive researchers in the last two years.

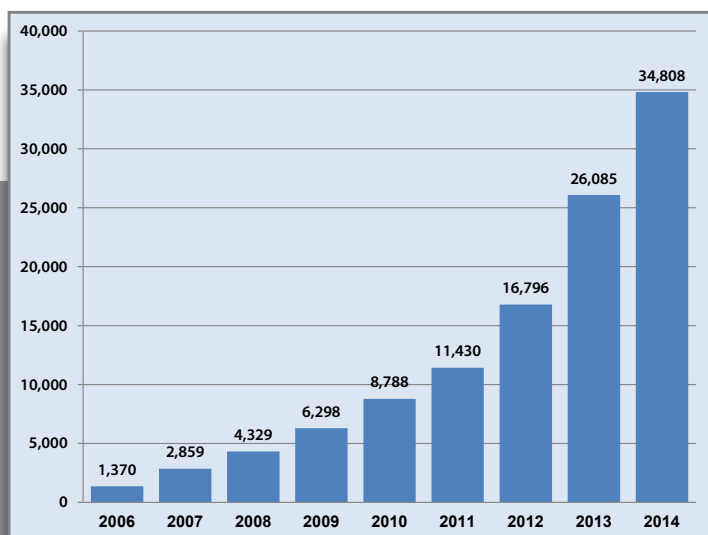
Breakdown of Users

Visual History Archive Usage Statistics

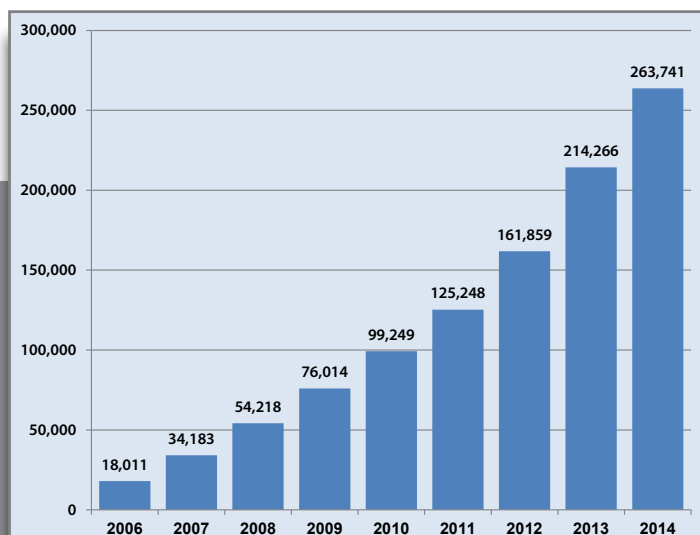
University students represent the largest group of people using the Visual History Archive but many others access the archive as an important tool for teaching, scholarly research, and personal interest. Over the past several years, as access to the archive has grown, users and usage has quickly increased.



Cumulative Number of VHA Users
2006 – 2014



Cumulative Number of Logins
2006 – 2014



Our Mission

To overcome prejudice, intolerance, and bigotry—and the suffering they cause—through the educational use of the USC Shoah Foundation's visual history testimonies

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