Why digitize the Mason Johnson Theatre Collection?
The Texas Wesleyan archive thought the Mason Johnson Theatre Collection would be a great first digitization project. Wesleyan is known for its fantastic theatre program, and the collection is comprised of various forms of artistic media, including photographs, documents, artworks, audio, and video.

First Steps
At a last minute rush, the Digitization and Special Collections departments at West Library considered applying for a TexTreasures grant for the 2016 fiscal year. However, with only a couple of months before the deadline, the application was postponed for the 2017 FY. With more careful planning and an additional Special Collections staff member to more thoroughly process the collection, the team decided to revamp its application for the 2017 FY. During this application period, we ran into several obstacles that may prohibit the accessibility of our digitized materials within the collection.

Obstacle #1: Copyright
The team did not consider issues of copyright and licensing until later in the application process. Almost all the work was copyrighted, and it was unclear whether we owned the rights to these items. We had anticipated owning copyright with more ease. Texas Wesleyan College purchased licensing of the Broadway musicals for 2-3 years of performances, and Mason Johnson recorded the rehearsals and shows himself. The audio and video belonged to Mason Johnson, but the dialogues and music belonged to the original authors of the plays. A licensing contract stating that we are allowed to distribute audio and video of these performances online for educational purposes will be needed if we are to allow members of the non-Wesleyan community to view these media files. Such an agreement is likely cost prohibitive.

Obstacle #2: Provenance
Provenance once again took its head as another concern as we proceeded with our grant application. When the archive was young and managed by former staff, administrative records were not well kept. The archive had no gift or accession documentation for the collection, and had to make some phone calls and emails to find out who donated the collection, when it was donated, and if they had the right to give it to us in the first place.

Obstacle #3: Budget
Our team had decided to apply for a TexTreasures Basic grant, which allocates up to $7,500 of funds. Early estimates of our digitization costs did not come close to this threshold, but as we delved deeper into the project, we were moving very close to the $7,500 mark and wished we had decided to apply for the TexTreasures Original. This extra funding may have helped purchase licenses for some materials.

Solutions
Obstacle #1: The library has purchased more literature on copyright in libraries and education centers to educate the staff and as a reference tool. A few staff members have completed the Copyright for Education Coursera and one staff member is currently completing the Legally Using Images tutorial by CopyrightLaws.com.

Obstacle #2: The Special Collections Assistant is in the process of developing finding aids for the theatre collection. Since a full-time University Archivist has been in place, there is now more comprehensive protocol for administrative documentation.

Obstacle #3: We decided that the best plan of action, given our financial situation, would be to have the audio digitized with the condition that it is only available to on-campus users. This will allow us to avoid costly licensing fees. 17 U.S.C §108(b)

We anticipate applying for funding for future fiscal years in an effort to make the Mason Johnson Theatre Collection available to off-campus users, as well.

Lessons Learned
The library has planned to utilize the lessons learned during this fiscal year’s application process to improve our planning for the 2017/2018 fiscal year.

The members of the committee have developed protocol and strategies to effectively plan future grants and digitization projects. We have used examples from other academic libraries to tailor best practices and checklists to our specific needs.

What’s Next?
We are testing our new knowledge on the Rescuing Texas History Mini Grant through the Portal to Texas History. We hope to digitize scrapbooks and newspapers. This will give us the opportunity to further refine our skills and best practices. We were recommended to receive funding from TSAC to digitize the Mason Johnson Theatre Collection for 2016/2017 FY!