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Lasting Experiences: Taking Galleries from Glass Cases to Online Access Repositories

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Introduction

This chapter outlines the process of creating a permanent online presence from a curated gallery exhibition. Creating an open access version of the exhibition on an institution's repository preserves the experience for the future and extends its engagement to a growing online community of students, interested community members, and others beyond campus. Through the use of video and audio, as well as images and documents, we strive to create an equally engaging experience for those who are unable to attend the original installation in person. The permanent online exhibit thus extends learning opportunities and preserves important scholarly work that would otherwise disappear when the exhibit ends.

Emerging technologies are becoming increasingly popular tools for providing access to research materials in academic and special collections libraries. They are equally useful in outreach efforts that work to engage with students and communities both on and off campus, to highlight hidden collections, and to draw attention to staff and faculty research. In 2007, Western Kentucky University (WKU) made a commitment to create an institutional repository, TopSCHOLAR, to showcase faculty, student, and staff scholarship. Since that time, it has grown from being primarily centered around theses, dissertations, and academic articles, to embracing other forms of scholarship on campus. This project of capturing and fully representing a gallery experience will be used to create a template for future efforts to highlight research, promote our library materials and resources, showcase hidden collections, and create new access points for physical and virtual users both on and off campus. Additionally, we hope that our examination into this process might provide a fruitful discussion on some of the considerations inherent in such a project as they relate to the mission of our library and ALA's Core Values of Librarianship, specifically how to create and preserve access to scholarship, research, and creative activities in free and democratic online environment.

Physical and Digital Exhibitions in Libraries

Library exhibitions serve a wide variety of purposes; they enable librarians and curators to showcase unique or underused materials, they provide context for materials which might not otherwise be apparent from a catalog record, and they attract new users and even potential donors. As Chen, Pickle, and Waldroup note in their article, "Changing and Expanding Libraries: Exhibitions, Institutional Repositories, and the Future of Academia in The Process of Discovery," "by producing exhibitions, special collections staff can produce their own narrative of the value of their collection while also attracting more students and donors to work with and support their mission."[1] As many of us would agree, a well-curated exhibition can be an excellent opportunity to present materials within a framed context that allows library users to explore new research ideas and find a new appreciation for specific items or entire fields of study.

Online exhibitions are also an excellent opportunity to share scholarly activity, showcase library collections, and promote university events with our expanding library communities. Moreover, while physical exhibitions tend to be bound by the constraints of scheduling and physical space limitations, curated collections made available in an online environment have the potential to remain on exhibit indefinitely. As Jessica Lacher-Feldman notes, "online exhibitions allow for our work within the repository to live on beyond the closing date of the exhibition itself and beyond the walls and exhibition cases in our libraries and archives."[2] The

process of curation brings together materials from various sources and locations due to a certain commonality in theme, subject matter, or physical characteristic. In many cases, the exhibition might be the only time that the items will all be viewed together in such a manner. The online exhibition, as an extension of the physical exhibition, is therefore a historical artifact in its own right, whose preservation might be useful to future library users and researchers. As Chen, Pickle, and Waldroup suggest, online exhibits "remain accessible for much longer than a physical show, offering an even higher possible return in terms of their potential audience engagement over time."[3]

Miniature books at WKU

Western Kentucky University's Library Special Collections currently has approximately two hundred miniature books, including machine press books, modern books, cuneiform tablets, and hand press era printed pages. The physical exhibition, Tiny Treasures: Miniature Books, stemmed out of the discovery of dozens of miniatures scattered throughout the stacks of special collections. After the second box of books arrived, it became apparent that an inventory was in order. Once it was clear that there were more than a few miniatures in our collections, the Tiny Treasures exhibition was curated in an effort to draw attention to the newly discovered collection and showcase the wide variety and types of materials that can be found within our library. The exhibition was the perfect opportunity to assemble the collection and see all of these items together in one place. As a result of this project, the miniature books are now permanently stored together and cataloged with the appropriate rare book [DCRM(B)] vocabularies to ensure they are more easily discoverable within the libraries' online catalog.

TopSCHOLAR and the online exhibition

The online exhibition is intended as a means to preserve the record of this collection permanently and provide access to users who might not have otherwise seen it. Our institutional repository, TopSCHOLAR, uses software created and maintained by bepress.[4] WKU libraries have recently begun to capture events on campus that are curated by students, faculty, and staff in addition to the more traditional items found in Institutional Repositories. The Tiny Treasures exhibit was a great opportunity to use our repository to the fullest. Since our goal was to create a permanent presence that closely replicated the in-person experience of the exhibit, we felt it was important to retain as much content and context as an online experience would allow. These goals guided our decisions when we considered the many options available to us using our repository software, bepress. We chose to

present our material on TopSCHOLAR because of Mr. Seguin's familiarity with the platform. The software has great flexibility, customizable options, and provides a user-friendly way for presenting digital images and creating metadata records. Our institutional repository's mission, to promote the intellectual output of the faculty, students, and staff at Western Kentucky University, made this a natural for our project.[5]

We chose to use the series and image gallery types, as they offered the most flexibility and would provide the most pleasant user experience. These two publication types allowed us to create items containing audio, video, image, and text files. Each publication type has built-in metadata fields, as well as the ability to create unlimited customizable fields, a functionality which can be used to best represent an item and to create an accurate, informative database.

In addition to providing all the necessary elements for creating thorough item records and maintaining a coherent narrative for the on-line visitor, we were confident that bepress would preserve our exhibit in accordance with industry standards. Further discussion of our decision-making process can be found below in our discussion of challenges and considerations.

Process, organization, and execution

When creating a permanent exhibition space for Tiny Treasures in our institutional repository, we needed to think about how best to lay out the structure so that it would allow for potential growth and logical navigation. Since it is our intention to create online versions of Special Collections exhibitions going forward, we chose to create a DLSC (Department of Library Special Collections) Exhibits community within our existing Library Special Collections community. The "community" is a structure that can house other publications types and additional communities:

> Libraries (community)
> Library Special Collections (community)
> DLSC Exhibits (community)
>   Tiny Treasures (community)
>   {any future exhibits will follow here}

Within our new Tiny Treasure community, we used two publication types, series and image galleries, to construct out the online gallery. We created image galleries for the content in the curation cases to showcase special curation techniques and to archive posters and printed press information pertaining to the exhibit. We chose the general-purpose publication type called a "series" to house all of the multimedia items documenting the exhibit. These items included a video

of the opening reception talk by Mr. Shankweiler and a virtual tour video created by the library social media coordinator, Crystal Bowling. The content structure within the Tiny Treasures community looked like this:

> Tiny Treasures
>> Exhibition process and methods (image gallery)
>> Gallery cases (community)
>>> Bibles, Hymnals, & Almanacs (image gallery)
>>> Children's Books (image gallery)
>>> Dictionaries & Primers (image gallery)
>> Handbooks, Songbooks, & Other Miscellanies (image gallery)
>>> Literature (image gallery)
>>> Nature Handbooks (image gallery)
>>> Novelties & Promotional Materials (image gallery)
>>> Pre 18th Century Items (image gallery)
>> Opening Reception Talk – (series)
>> Promotional Materials – (image gallery)
>> Video tour – (series)

Beyond the storage and organization that our repository provides, there are other elements we used to improve and expand the user experience. In each gallery, we included a picture of the display case as well as close up images of individual items. This helped to replicate the in-person experience of the exhibit by providing a context for the book within the collection, as well as allowing for each item to stand on its own, with additional detail that may be of interest.

Each item record included one high-resolution image to allow the user to zoom in and see fine details. This item can be downloaded in three different sizes using radial buttons on the main image page: standard, medium, and thumbnail. To help provide access to users with slower internet speed, we set up an additional image field in which we included all images of the item in a low-resolution (400-pixel) format.

The repository's built-in metadata fields that were most useful for us were discipline and description. The discipline field allowed us to choose from more than one thousand unique categories to help classify an item to improve its online discoverability. For each community, series, and gallery, we included descriptive text to help create continuity, as well as context, for the separate pages. Our bepress representative created a variety of customizable metadata fields to help us detail the item and create an accurate, informative database. We used the customize feature to add size (length and width) of item, publication date, and publisher metadata fields. In addition to these descriptive metadata items, we created a Call

Number field that allowed us to include a hyperlink to the item in our library catalog. We hope the structure and content included in the online exhibit will create a satisfying experience and spark new interest in our special collections and the WKU libraries in general. It is our hope that the process outlined above will become the template for all future curated exhibits.

Challenges and Considerations: ALA's Core Values of Librarianship

Access and democracy

As with the undertaking of any new project, there are always challenges and considerations in conceptualizing our desired outcomes. Many of these considerations relate closely to the Core Values of Librarianship as defined by the American Library Association. Inherent within this discussion are questions of access, democracy, preservation, and service as we strive to ensure our efforts are in alignment with our libraries' values and the core values of the American Library Association. By creating the online exhibit, we have extended the reach of the in-person exhibition to all those who have an internet connection. We view sharing these exhibits beyond the in-person traffic of our libraries as an important step in providing a complete university experience for users at our satellite campuses and fruitful learning opportunities for the general public. While we realize there will always be limitations and restrictions to access, it is our goal to limit restrictions at every step possible, a task which includes making new and useful information available through online media and, once it is available online, working to ensure that it remains accessible to as many users as possible.

As librarians, we are charged with the responsibility to ensure that every step is taken to reduce the economic barriers to information access. As the ALA core values dictate, "All information resources that are provided directly or indirectly by the library, regardless of technology, format, or methods of delivery, should be readily, equally, and equitably accessible to all library users."[6] For this reason, it is essential that our services are open and free of fees and restrictions. TopSCHOLAR is an open access repository and is free to students and non-students alike, both on and off campus. As it is the responsibility of all publicly supported libraries to provide "free, equal, and equitable access to information for all people of the community the library serves," economic barriers must be considered when determining how to make your online materials available and selecting an institutional repository platform (Economic Barriers of information access, ALA). Similarly, we wanted to ensure that the materials in our exhibition would be accessible to off-campus users in rural areas with slower or limited internet service. For this reason, we chose

to include low-resolution images for faster download times and transcriptions of all streaming video. While TopSCHOLAR's host, bepress, indicates that it is in compliance with the American Disabilities Act, we wanted to make sure that all users are able to access audio/video materials. With this in mind, the local radio promotion and video presentation both include full transcriptions, which are available for download.

In addition to providing access to online materials, it is also important to ensure access to our services and to create a democratic environment that encourages the free exchange of thoughts and ideas within a positive learning atmosphere. In order to guarantee that questions about a particular item would be answered by the appropriate party and in a timely manner, we included a general Special Collections Library email address rather than the individual address of a specific staff or faculty member. We also wanted to use the TopSCHOLAR platform as a way to promote dialogue and scholarly discourse both in and outside of the classroom for both current and future exhibitions. As Rebecca Jefferson, et al., argue, "the online exhibits and materials are provided as part of scholarly communications for engagement by the public as public scholarship and for engagement by scholars that may lead into other opportunities for research and collaboration."[7] TopSCHOLAR repository works hand in hand with the IntenseDebate comment system to allow for a continued dialogue between the special collection librarians and our patrons.

Preservation

As ALA's Preservation policy states,

> Publishers and distributors of content in digital form must address the usability and longevity of their electronic works. The Association encourages publishers to provide metadata that will facilitate the life cycle management of works in digital formats and to deposit digital works in repositories that provide for the long-term persistence and usability of digital content." (B.8.3 Preservation (Old Number 52.2)

Our software manager, bepress, has taken many steps to assure long-term preservation of items uploaded to TopSCHOLAR and all the other repositories that it manages. Each item is provided a persistent, stable URL, is stored in triplicate, and is backed up offsite by a third party. The item history has complete details of when and by whom it was updated with a field to include information regarding the need for the update. The entire database of TopSCHOLAR is backed up nightly by bepress and monthly by a third-party service. This provides confidence that our

items will be preserved long term. In addition to backing up the content, bepress preserves the original file format of each item uploaded. This allows for emulation or migration in the future to meet the needs of possible new formats.[8]

Finally, no discussion of institutional repositories and online exhibitions is complete without a consideration of copyright and fair use. In the case of the miniature books exhibition, we looked at the four-factor test published by the US Copyright Office and determined that our online gallery was a true instance of fair use. The gallery contains fact-based content that is intended to educate and create new meaning. The individual books are re-contextualized in the larger scheme of tiny books. We have used precisely the number of images necessary to convey the size of the book itself or type size of the text. And finally, we deemed that the presence of these images would have no market effect on the items involved. As is the case with all items in our repository, we respond individually to any query regarding copyright.[9] While the question of fair use is relatively cut and dry in the case of the Tiny Treasures exhibition, it may not necessarily be in exhibitions to come and it is important to know whether the images included fall under fair use or require additional copyright permissions.

Closing Thoughts and Conclusion

It is our goal in using TopSCHOLAR to re-envision physical exhibitions in an online environment, thus creating additional access points and hopefully serving as a valuable information resource for our library users. We are happy to have set up a template for digitizing the gallery experience in Special Collections going forward. So much care, research, and effort go into each exhibition created by the Special Collections staff and librarians that we look forward to a time when all their exhibits will find a home on TopSCHOLAR for all the world to see. Ideally, we would also like for our online exhibits to be up and running in conjunction with their physical counterparts so that TopSCHOLAR galleries can be used for promotional and outreach purposes and to further support research and scholarship both inside and out of the classroom setting. As we are still in the early stages of making current and future exhibitions available via TopSCHOLAR, it is difficult to assess current usage, but as statistics and additional metadata is gathered over time, we hope to be able to further customize this resource to meet the research needs and interests of our growing user base.

Notes

1.   Amy Chen, Sarah Pickle, and Heather Waldroup, "Changing and Expanding Libraries Exhibitions, Institutional Repositories, and the Future of Academia," in *The Process of*

Discovery: The CLIR Postdoctoral Fellowship Program and the Future of the Academy, ed. John C. Maclachlan, Elizabeth A. Waraksa, and Christa Williford, (Washington, D.C.: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2015), 70, https://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub167.

2.   Jessica Lacher-Feldman, "Creating the Curator: Teaching and Learning Exhibition Development for Special Collections Librarians and Archivists," *Exhibitionist* (2014): 57, accessed December 15,2016, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58fa260a725e25c4f30020f3/t/594c41fedb29d695 d0e83599/1498169862115/13+Creating+the+Curator_Feldman+exh+fall+2014-12.pdf

3.   Chen, et al., "Changing and Expanding Libraries Exhibitions," 70.

4.   "bepress Homepage," accessed March 24, 2017, https://www.bepress.com/.

5.   After completion of this chapter, bepress was purchased by the information and analytics company Elsevier. The management of bepress has stated their intent to provide the same services and maintain the same mission under this new ownership.

6.   American Library Association, "Core Values of Librarianship," accessed December 15, 2016, http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/statementspols/corevalues.

7.   Rebecca J. W. Jefferson, Lourdes Santamaría-Wheeler, and Laurie N. Taylor, "Turning Views into Visits: How Online Exhibits Can Encourage Collection Awareness and Usage," in *Imagine, Innovate, Inspire: The Proceedings of the ACRL 2013 Conference, Indianapolis, Indiana, April 10–13, 2103*, 605, http://www.ala.org/acrl/acrl/conferences/2013/papers.

8.   bepress, "Safeguarding Your Content with Digital Commons," accessed January 25, 2017, https://www.bepress.com/reference_guide_dc/safeguarding-content-digital-commons/.

9.   United States Copyright Office, Department of Library of Congress, "More Information on Fair Use," accessed January 25, 2017, https://www.copyright.gov/fair-use/more-info.html.

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Lacher-Feldman, Jessica. "Creating the Curator: Teaching and Learning Exhibition Development for Special Collections Librarians and Archivists." *Exhibitionist* (2014): 54 https://www.name-aam.org/exhibition-fall2014/.

United States Copyright Office, Department of Library of Congress. "More Information on Fair Use." Accessed January 25, 2017. https://www.copyright.gov/fair-use/more-info.html.