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Institute for Museum and Library Services Grant Will Help Build PLACE

Tuesday, November 05, 2013

The UNH Library and its partner, the Earth Systems Research Center of the Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans, and Space, have been awarded a grant in the amount of \$474,156 from the Institute for Museum and Library Services, National Leadership Grants for Libraries Program (grant award number: LG-05-13-0350-13) to build PLACE, the position-based location archive coordinate explorer. PLACE will be a geospatial search interface, available to the general public through the UNH library website, that will use embedded geospatial coordinates to enable easier discovery of information that can be difficult to locate through text-based searching.

The PLACE project represents the next step in the UNH Library's long-standing goal of providing maps, atlases, air photos and guidebooks online while providing an opportunity to collaborate with new partners and contribute the resulting work to the library community.

The concept of place is a powerful means for organizing and communicating information. Since earliest times people have defined themselves in part by place: "I live near the bend in the river." Traditional access to library collections relies on text-based searching to locate information. Digital cartography and geographic information system (GIS) technologies such as Google Earth and ArcGIS are driving a growing need for geospatially referenced data.

Geospatial-ready collections contain real world coordinates and other geographic data embedded in their descriptive information (metadata). This geospatial information has the potential of unlocking hidden information by simply outlining an area of interest on a base map. Ready access to embedded geospatial information in a flexible visual interface will enable library users to develop important skills such as visual, global and environmental literacy.

The UNH Library PLACE system will be based on the Open GeoPortal technologies, a collaboratively developed open source web application for the discovery and delivery of digital map collections via a map interface. Open GeoPortal allows users to easily search, browse, and query geospatial-ready collections through the use of geospatial search tools based on coordinates as well as geospatial metadata.

The PLACE project will build new tools not currently available in geoportal, including a new geospatial gazetteer tool for improved searching, new time series capabilities to easily assess changes over time, and usability driven interface improvements to the Open GeoPortal. In addition, the project will develop code to enable the Open GeoPortal to interoperate with Fedora (the software platform used for the library's digital collections). This functionality will provide other Fedora libraries with collections containing geospatial or geographic content a mechanism for making those collections searchable in Open GeoPortal for the first time. All PLACE modifications to Open GeoPortal will be shared with the geoportal community and may be incorporated into future releases of the technology.

The PLACE project represents the next step in the UNH Library's long-standing goal of providing maps, atlases, air photos and guidebooks online while providing an opportunity to collaborate with new partners and contribute the resulting work to the library community. The PLACE project will build on the library's existing digital collections. In the 1990s the UNH Library was a pioneer in scanning historic USGS topographic maps and has continued to develop its digital library capabilities since that time. (<http://www.library.unh.edu/digital/>)

Whether you are a citizen looking for air photos of your grandfather's farm, a professor hoping to take a class to study geologic features in a new area, or a student needing access to historic maps for a class project, PLACE can help.

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