The High-Impact Digital Library

Innovative Approaches for Outreach and Instruction

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Introduction

PROFESSIONALS IN THE GALLERY, LIBRARY, ARCHIVES, AND MUSEUM (GLAM) communities often have roles and job functions that are effectively split between public engagement and stewardship of physical and digital collections. While much has been written in the literature about people with public service roles who engage in teaching and outreach, individuals who work in digital libraries in a GLAM context have historically been understudied. In order to explore and highlight the efforts of people who work with digital libraries, the authors discuss the results of a survey, feature case studies, share success stories, and provide advice and reflection from people in the field.

The survey was intended to discover how digital library practitioners at various types of cultural institutions promote their unique resources, beyond simply placing the content in an online repository for users to discover.

Digital library terminology like "accessible," "discoverable," and "searchable" nearly always assume passive collections waiting to be found by motivated information seekers. Rarely do we envision collection managers initiating outreach with those most likely to benefit from the collections. However, outreach and instruction efforts by digital library practitioners can result in much broader awareness—among scholars and academic colleagues, students, and the general public—of the rich materials held in their institutions' collections. The authors' use of the term *outreach* in this book is deliberately expansive, as digital libraries may be promoted in ways that are not limited to traditional classroom instruction. Types of outreach may include social

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media promotion, integration of digital collections into teaching and instruction activities, and partnerships with external campus units or community organizations.

This book begins with background information on outreach and instruction efforts by digital library practitioners. A literature review in chapter 1 is followed by details of the survey and interviews in chapter 2. Instruction is explored in chapter 3, with a deliberately broad focus that includes drop-in class sessions, course-integrated instruction, training, and ways digital library practitioners can contribute to the open educational resources (OER) and open pedagogy movements. In chapter 4, the concept of outreach is discussed through case studies ranging from programs and strategies developed by solo librarians, to exploring the outreach infrastructure offered by larger statewide collaboratives. Chapter 5 provides details about digital humanities and digital scholarship programs developed at the University of Utah by many of the authors through cross-departmental collaboration. The COVID-19 pandemic prompted many institutions to explore community engagement with rapid response collecting, and this topic is addressed in chapter 6. Chapter 7 includes final thoughts from the authors and several interviewees on future directions for outreach and instruction for digital libraries. An annotated bibliography of select digital library projects is included to encourage further exploration. The book closes with the text of the survey, in appendix B.

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Literature Review

CONNECTING LIBRARY RESOURCES WITH USERS IS CORE TO THE MISSION of libraries, whether in the form of book talks, reference interactions, exhibits, instruction, or community outreach. The shift to remote work and education during the COVID-19 pandemic placed increased importance on the availability of online resources. For many librarians who work with digital library repositories, the bulk of their job duties may now focus on the technical aspects of making digital resources available, with less emphasis on the type of traditional outreach activities that can be possible with face-to-face interaction. While there are certainly outstanding examples of outreach and instruction with digital projects, the volume of literature available that focuses specifically on workers in information technology (IT) doesn't begin to approach the volume of material on outreach in a more general or public services context. For the purposes of this book, a broad view of outreach and instruction for digital projects and digital scholarship has been taken, and different methodologies and structures available to digital library workers will be examined. Some of these outreach approaches will be fairly traditional, such as teaching and developing faculty partnerships. Other outreach approaches can more directly align with the skill sets of people who work in IT, such as providing technical training and leveraging infrastructure to support both internal and external partners. Some libraries may have the benefit of dedicated marketing staff, whereas other libraries may have a single person taking on the combined roles of an institutional repository manager, digitization

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supervisor, and metadata librarian. No matter what the institution's size and nature, an outreach program can help connect materials with users.

Keeran summarizes issues in attempting to find resources in this area, stating: "Little has been published on library instruction and digital primary source research, possibly because this falls between the responsibilities of archivists and instruction librarians. Incorporating such materials into a one-shot course can be challenging in terms of time, but also rewarding for, with the wealth of both commercial and freely available institutional digital archives, relevant sources can be found across the disciplines" (Keeran 2023). In this book, broad themes of instruction with primary sources will be explored through a survey of people in the profession, and different types of outreach will be examined: how people engage with teaching, outreach programs and projects, digital scholarship, and rapid response collecting.

TEACHING WITH PRIMARY SOURCES: CURRICULUM AND PRIMARY SOURCE SETS

A report completed by Ithaka S+R researchers on teaching with primary sources highlighted the potential for building partnerships with teachers. This report states:

> Teaching with primary sources is one of the most collaborative classroom endeavors. Throughout their discovery, course design, and in-class practices, instructors described the importance of working with librarians, archivists, and museum staff, and many noted the value of these enduring relationships, some decades long. Effective collaboration can take on many forms, and especially when it comes to teaching with primary sources, was heavily dependent upon the role primary sources were made to play in the class. (Tanaka et al. 2021)

Librarians and staff who work primarily in digital libraries may first take a "train the trainer" approach, where they develop documentation and training materials, and engage in outreach to instruction librarians, liaison librarians, public services librarians, faculty, and K–12 teachers to incorporate digital library resources into their own teaching or reference transactions.

The Digital Public Library of America engaged in a study in 2014 to examine online educational resources and digitized collections. The findings from that

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study conclude that while educational projects for digital libraries are often not well-resourced, they do have value. Cultural heritage organizations usually develop lesson plans and curate digitized primary sources with teachers as the intended audience (Abbott and Cohen 2015).

One of the most robust and long-running examples of this approach can be found in the Library of Congress's Teaching with Primary Sources Partnerships program. The Library of Congress has also been offering grants to teachers developing lesson plans with primary sources since 2006, and the program's website (loc.gov/programs/teachers) contains both lesson plans and curated primary source sets that invite students to get started with their own historical research. Regional examples of a similar approach can be seen in the Minnesota Digital Library's Primary Source Sets and in the Florida Memory Classroom site. Developing lesson plans and educational materials for teachers and faculty can involve a significant investment of time and expertise, which might not be available to digital library staff who may lack a background in curriculum development or not have the bandwidth to devote to the curation needed to develop primary source sets. Many cultural heritage institutions partner with educators to produce these materials. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill offers fellowships for library and information science students who are interested in teaching with primary sources, providing a unique opportunity for graduate students to get additional training in pedagogy that could help them create curriculums further on in their careers.

COMMUNITY-BASED PROJECTS

Engaging in work directly with community groups can bring valuable perspectives and more diverse materials into digital libraries, but it is important to approach community projects from a standpoint of genuine partnership, as opposed to extraction. Often the best place for a community-centric project is for it to remain situated in the community that developed it in the first place. While larger institutions might have greater resources, they might not have the close connections to the community that this work would require.

The Gi-gikinomaage-min: We Are All Teachers project provides a compelling example of building community through representation, painstaking planning, and developing structures like an advisory board—in this case, in a project to document the urban Native American experience in Grand Rapids,

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Michigan. This community-centric project with a focus on oral histories also prompted additional dialogue about preservation for previous oral history projects that were not originally designed with the community at the forefront (Shell-Weiss, Benefiel, and McKee 2017). The ETH Library (at the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule in Zürich) showcases methods for going beyond digitization in engaging with crowdsourcing work to improve geo-referencing for maps and increasing identification for image archives. An article on the ETH Library notes that devoting resources to community management and communication is the key to success in these areas (Gasser 2017).

Librarians at East Carolina University recounted a community outreach project that involved partnering with residents to share materials and memories of the Downtown neighborhood in Greenville, North Carolina, which was targeted for redevelopment, displacing the original African American residents. Taking a team-based approach, two librarians were matched with former residents who were able to share the stories behind their family photographs at community scanning events. In developing the descriptive metadata for the items, the vocabulary of the community members who were contributing to the project was used at the forefront of the descriptions (Dragon, Vinogradov, and White 2021).

Developing intentional partnerships can be mutually beneficial. Jackson State University Library has developed digital collections through campus partnerships preserving historic university photos, establishing workflows for electronic theses and dissertations, supporting student research symposia, and creating digital galleries for the Department of Art and Design. Latham comments on these efforts:

> In conceptualizing these collaborative collections, it may seem that the benefit is primarily to the campus units, rather than the library, which takes on the bulk of the workload. Such a view subverts not only a primary tenet of librarianship (*aliis inserviendo consumor*—"Consumed in the service of others"), but it also overlooks libraries' mandate for collection development and the creation and maintenance of resources that support the university's mission. Academic libraries have within their remit the duty to build and preserve collections of valuable resources, and this is especially true when it comes to unique institutional and/or special collections materials.

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> If it is necessary to be mercenary, libraries can also think of the significant amount of work involved in building and maintaining these collaborative collections in terms of enlightened self-interest. Institutional buy-in protects the library. (Latham 2022)

OUTREACH THROUGH INFRASTRUCTURE

Many states have had long-standing digitization programs that seek to provide services and expertise to cultural heritage institutions and libraries that would not otherwise have the resources to embark on digitization. Early examples of these statewide efforts include the Digital Library of Georgia, the Mountain West Digital Library, and the Minnesota Digital Library.

Statewide digitization programs have used their hosting services and expertise to extend services to partners that might not initially have the in-house expertise or skills to get started with digitization. Reflecting on the subgrant process for the Digital Library of Georgia (DLG), Evans et al. state:

> Through the multiyear growth of this partnership, the law library has not only been able to take advantage of digitization and metadata services, but it has also benefited from the DLG's experience. With the help of the DLG, the law library has learned how to improve in-house digitization, solidify its digital preservation plan, and expand its online resources from fewer than 30 to more than 4,000 items. (Evans, Mastrovita, and Willoughby 2023)

Shared resources can also support technical experimentation that results in new avenues of outreach. In summarizing efforts to increase the visibility of the Toledo Lucas County Public Library's collections through Ohio Memory and Wikimedia, Byrd-McDevitt and Dewees conclude: "Making locally digitized resources available through DPLA, copying them over to Wikimedia Commons, and then embedding those images into Wikipedia articles is an excellent opportunity to meet users where they already are—online" (Byrd-McDevitt and Dewees 2022).

Florida Gulf Coast University established its Digital Library and Special Collections in 2012. As part of the university library's mission, reaching out to community organizations and developing partnerships was envisioned as

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a central service and a way to build collections. Reflecting on the importance of communication and dialogue about the benefits of digital preservation, VandeBurgt and Rivera state:

> Clearly communicating the main points of the project, as well as how digitization, digital preservation, and access to their collections through a repository fits strategically within the organization's current priorities, is critical. In addition, communication that continually addresses how the digitization project serves the individual organization and its users is the cornerstone to a successful preservation outreach project. (VandeBurgt and Rivera 2016)

Multi-institutional digital library collaborations can contribute valuable expertise, and shared infrastructure can be used as a structure to engage with innovation through grants. The Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Library Alliance was formed in 2001 and has received external grants and developed partnerships to deliver training and provide a central platform for HBCU digital library collections. A recent focus group study by the Council on Library and Information Resources supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation found that increased funding, staffing, space, and capacity for digitization were common needs expressed by HBCU institutions. One suggestion in the report was the possibility of additional collaborative work to develop trusted repositories, which could involve creating digitization centers that support multiple institutions, as well as developing collaborative action plans for materials at risk of degradation (Freeman 2022).

DIGITAL EXHIBITS

Digital exhibits are a frequent focus of outreach for digital library workers, as providing an accompanying narrative for primary source materials can help researchers engage with common themes and materials that benefit from additional context. Choi and Hastings engaged in a study of digital exhibits at Association of Research Library (ARL) member institutions. They found digital exhibits at a majority of the libraries studied, with major themes as follows: "The most common theme was history (n = 45, 30.6% of exhibits), followed by equity, diversity, and inclusion (n = 28, 19.0%), and notable people (n = 23, 15.6%), defined as exhibits featuring biographical information and

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material about people other than faculty and alumni of the institution" (Choi and Hastings 2024).

The Edmonton Public Library in Alberta, Canada, engaged in a systematic study of digital exhibits and digital displays as a service by conducting focus groups with a variety of community organizations. The study concluded that productive relationships are key to success, stating:

> Content partnership models are suitable to public library workflows when planning for a digital exhibits service. Clearly identifying and communicating the infrastructure available for such partnerships is key. For example, working with community partners will require outlining the technology "stack" such as what tools, platforms or technologies are used to collect, organize, and display content for exhibits. However, more important than technical components of digital exhibits services in such partnerships is the ongoing process of relationship management. Continuing to engage with community partners in order to understand their changing needs, priorities, and relationships is an activity crucial to digital exhibits. (Zvyagintseva 2018)

In a case study from McGill University involving different methods of integrating Scalar into library instruction sessions, the author found that encouraging students to use this tool for an assignment as opposed to a research paper resulted in opportunities to engage in critical thinking and digital scholarship around multimedia materials (Isuster 2020). In examining the initial use of Omeka at Indiana University, Hardesty summarizes local issues with digital collections being split between different types of repositories and presentation layers; this necessitated the adoption of Omeka to provide a way of bringing together information on the same topic across multiple service platforms for their War of 1812 exhibit (Hardesty 2014). Indiana State University's Special Collections created a platform called STATE-IT to assist with outreach from Special Collections to the university community, with a particular focus on student organizations.

> In order to make the Archives more accessible to students and easier to donate materials to the collection, the Special Collections department created STATE-IT. They began by redesigning the Omeka site to be a collection of past and present stories, images, videos, and recordings donated by students, faculty, staff, and alumni of this university. The site gained features,

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> including a new and updated look, as well as newly added digital exhibits, oral histories, and digitized university holdings. (Siddell 2018)

The use of digital exhibits and digital exhibits software is wide-ranging, with a variety of purposes and applications. Additional use cases will be discussed in more detail throughout this volume.

SOCIAL MEDIA

By far, some of the best-known social media outreach initiatives from GLAM communities are hashtag parties like #ColorOurCollections and #ArchivesHashtagParty. An analysis of these efforts points to the importance of collaboration between institutions:

> The similar social media strategies of the New York Academy of Medicine Library (2016) and the National Archives (2017) may be a reason that both #ColorOurCollections and #ArchivesHashtagParty are such popular and recurring collaborative campaigns. Both not only highlight their own collections during the campaigns but attempt to minimize barriers of entry to maximize participation from other institutions. They have each subsequently collaborated with similar institutions on other social media campaigns. For digital libraries interested in creating a social media strategy, the goals of engaging users, promoting interaction with materials, and building relationships with other institutions are a good place to start. They are the driving force behind these two campaigns and have proven to be successful. (Goedert 2021)

When using social media for outreach, it is good to have exposure on multiple platforms due to the changing nature of social media web services. For example, in February 2023 Twitter (now X) announced changes to its application programming interface (API), making services that depend on it difficult and unpredictable. Still, plenty of digital collections outreach work has been done on Twitter over many years. While it might no longer be possible to rely on free API services to build bots to promote digital collections, some people have developed applications to post items from digital collections. Meredith Hale examines the reasons why bots might have less engagement with users, due to the nature of the communication being one-sided. She concludes: "for those that want to foster an active conversation through Twitter, a bot that simply

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posts materials may not meet your needs" (Hale 2020). In a general study of social media use by ARL members' special collections departments through a return on investment framework, Griffin and Taylor found that departments "achieve moderate success when using social media to publicize institutional holdings, events, and activities." They noted that the social media presence of special collections departments was less effective in engaging directly with individuals on those platforms (Griffin and Taylor 2013).

Baggett and Gibbs experimented with uploading images from digital collections to specialized sites like Historypin and Pinterest. They found that there was increased user engagement with images on these platforms, despite some challenges that made it difficult to compare analytics directly between the platforms. They concluded that these image-based platforms can increase the discoverability of digital collections (Baggett and Gibbs 2014). Depending on the bandwidth an institution has, it may make the most sense to engage with one main social media community as opposed to trying to cover multiple channels. The Othmer Library of Chemical History found success through its outreach on Tumblr:

> Through its engagement on Tumblr, the library has reached an external audience numbering more than 13,000 followers, an achievement regularly quantified in the receipt of additional reference questions, a stronger rapport with fellow library and archival institutions, and a marked increase in traffic to the library's online catalogue. (Kativa and Orzechowski 2016)

By 2023 libraries were facing an increasingly fragmented social media landscape, with more instances of government organizations banning the use of social media platforms like TikTok. As Twitter rebrands to X, and no clear alternative is identified between platforms like Substack Notes, Spoutible, Bluesky, and Meta's Threads, the best option for library social media investment may be whichever platform library staff have the time and inclination to pursue.

DIGITAL HUMANITIES AND DIGITAL SCHOLARSHIP

Library engagement with digital humanities and digital scholarship provides tremendous opportunities for outreach and collaboration. Green and Courtney advise: "If libraries and content providers are to provide digital collections for

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digital humanities research, continuous dialogue with humanities scholars on their research practices and needs is critical to enabling humanities datasets that are powerful enough for the new types of analyses being done today" (Green and Courtney 2015). A milestone project in this area is the Kansas City Public Library's efforts to produce "Civil War on the Western Border" in 2013, a large-scale digital history project with the help of LSTA funding and partnerships with many historical societies and regional archives. The site features essays, lesson plans, primary source materials, and encyclopedia articles that provide a unique and award-winning approach to public history.

Partnerships between librarians and faculty in the area of digital humanities can sometimes highlight tensions in roles, with issues centering on libraries and librarians serving as support as opposed to true collaborators in digital humanities projects. Keener highlights a concept expressed by a study participant:

> Notably, another librarian participant was most aligned with the faculty enthusiasm for the maturity of digital humanities support in libraries, but he specifically brought up not seeing that support as a service vs. collaboration dichotomy: his institution models it as a spectrum of collection-instruction-consultation-collaboration, rather than reducing DH support infrastructure to service provider or partner. (Keener 2015)

In the early stages of establishing a digital scholarship center at the University of Notre Dame Libraries, workshops provided an opportunity to promote library services and connect with attendees about their digital scholarship projects (Bergstrom and Papson 2016). Long-standing issues with a "one-shot" approach to library instruction are also present in digital scholarship collaborations. Powell and Kong examine the benefits and challenges of librarians engaging in summer intensive workshops in geographic information systems (GIS) at two institutions and conclude that this method of instruction can provide valuable opportunities to build relationships and engage in focused consultations with researchers (Powell and Kong 2017). Digital scholarship faculty can also offer ideas for the pedagogical use of emerging technology. At Binghamton University Libraries, participants in a digital humanities research institute suggested possible methods of incorporating virtual reality technology to complement their existing coursework and research interests (Huber et al. 2020).

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In a review of classic digital humanities projects developed by the New York Public Library, Raymond Pun notes that these projects can result in valuable teaching collaborations with universities. He notes that the students

> learned how to read different types of texts and ephemerals; they supported the Library's project by expanding the content in these menus through transcriptions and gained more insight throughout the process. This was a type of "research lab" where students shared information and research anecdotes with one another. Some were surprised at the cost of a cup of coffee in 1911 and discovered new stories about their communities, such as the arrival of Japan's sushi in New York or the rise of French restaurants. (Pun 2015)

Digital scholarship projects provide opportunities for libraries to engage with audiences and develop new collaborative relationships. At the University of Southern Mississippi, a group of faculty gathered together to examine the relationship between digital humanities and archives, and developed a framework that aims to be more accessible:

> We believed that providing local points of access and engagement with archival materials would allow teachers, students, and local citizens to experience the joys and demands of archival practice, allowing them to notice and describe historical patterns, build and reveal relationships among different objects, construct cultural narratives around historical records, and visualize archival data for the foundation of future projects. Implicit in our endeavors was a desire to conceptualize digital humanities less as a domain than as an underlying set of archival practices, applications, and techniques. Starting with the archives, we believed, would allow us to open the black box of digital humanities and foreground the increasingly collaborative and material practices of knowledge work in the 21st century. (Brannock, Carey, and Inman 2018)

DIGITAL LIBRARY INSTRUCTION

The pandemic also prompted libraries to rethink the way they were presenting primary sources, which resulted in an increased need to promote digitized materials. At the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), the Teaching

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and Functioning Learning Team partnered with the Digital Library Program to develop tutorials to teach students how to navigate the digital library as a collection of primary sources. The materials are designed as open educational resources:

> This accessibility allows course instructors to easily incorporate the Digital Library into their courses and provides an opportunity for library instructors to scaffold their own primary source and database instruction. Following the library's goal of supporting open materials, our tutorials are OER that anyone is welcome to use or update, and they highlight the open materials that are already available through our Digital Library. (Johnson, Abumeeiz, and McAulay 2021)

At the University of Illinois at Chicago, a partnership with one faculty member led to a variety of benefits for students, faculty, and librarians:

> The first collaborative project was to train selected students to transcribe letters and diaries from the Sierra Leone collection. Those students then used the material they had transcribed to write research papers. This project benefited the library by making the transcribed material more useful to researchers, and the students were able to chart new research territory for themselves. (Harris and Weller 2012)

CONCLUSION

While the concept of digital libraries and outreach has been relatively understudied compared to outreach in public services, many examples show the benefits of looking outward and going beyond making primary resources available online. By building partnerships with the community, providing training opportunities, developing collaborative relationships with educators, and reaching out through social media, digital library workers can better reach the users of their unique collections. This chapter has provided an overview of digital library outreach and instruction efforts that have been documented across many different libraries. While it is not a comprehensive bibliography of all projects that have been discussed in the literature, this literature review has provided a sampling of efforts in preparation for the rest of this book.

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The chapters that follow feature more in-depth engagement with aspects of outreach and include case studies and examples that can help digital libraries become more connected with library users.

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