Capitalizing on (un)limited Potential: Building Digital Collections with a Student Workforce

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Digitization is complicated regardless of budget.
ACRL 2010 Top Ten Trends in Academic Libraries (related to digital collections)

- Digitization of unique library collections will increase and require a larger share of resources
- Libraries will evolve with budget challenges
- Explosive growth of mobile devices and applications will drive new services
- Increased collaboration will expand the role of the library
- Technology will continue to change services and required skills
June 2011: 6 collections published, 3 in the works, 100% due to student contributions!
2005-2007: Kinesiology student requests overwhelm archives department

2007: Purchased CONTENTdm license, began mounting athletic photographs online without publicizing website

2008: Archivist hired to build digital collections approximately 25% of [my] time


2011: Currently have 6 collections online with 2 more waiting on web page completion → all thanks to our student workforce!
Student Demographics

- Paid student workers
  - Regular pay vs. work-study
- Volunteers
  - Institutional policies
- Internships for credit (undergraduate)
  - 1 credit = 50 hours/semester; academic requirements
- Internships for credit (graduate)
Student outcomes from building digital collections

- Students receive pay or academic credit for their work and potentially a recommendation.
- Increase their technical skills.
- Receive recognition/credit for their work online.
- Experience working with unique archival or cultural collections/have a tangible project they can point to on their resume.
A new model for digital collection development?

- Patron-driven acquisitions (PDA)
- Digitization on Demand (DOD)
- Demand-driven acquisitions (DDA)

Student-driven digital collections

Identify and choose digitization projects using students as a collection development tool (their abilities drive selection criteria) vs. typical criteria such as preservation, scope, audience, access, value, copyright, budgets, etc.
Albertsons Library Digital Collections
(number of items)
Total items = 2,259

Historic Boise State

* Robert Limbert*

Nell Shipman

Doc Roach

Len Jordan

* Frank Church*

Bethine Church

Western Writers Series

Peter Beemer*

* not yet published; red font = internship projects
Types of duties performed by student workers and interns

* not yet published; red font = internship projects
Be prepared before students or departments knock on your door.

- Select projects with an appropriate scope and adaptability
- Let the student choose and truly “own” a project – helps with turnover and interest level
- How much physical space, tools, and resources will this project take?
- How many students can work simultaneously? How many students can staff realistically manage?
Dynamic documents are very effective project management tools.

Allows for real-time collaboration, sharing and transferring of information without worrying about version control. Preferably offered as a suite and for free (Google Docs).

- Centralized website for project materials
- Training documents
- Time/task tracking for students and staff
- Mergeable calendars
Google Docs are good for training documents.
Google Docs are good for managing tasks/quality control of student work.
Dynamic documents are helpful for managing calendars.

- Mergeable calendars
- Split calendars by tasks, people, meetings
- Layer calendars to provide visual meaning
Prepare educational components ahead of time, then reuse.

- Interns usually require background readings, articles or tutorials related to their particular collection and with digital collections in general
- Identify appropriate readings for homework or to read during their shift and spread out over the semester
- Create a physical binder or add links to website

Senator Frank Church project
Student: [Redacted]
Related readings

Week 1:
*Fighting the Odds: The Life of Senator Frank Church* by Lorcy Ashby and Rod Gramer
- Check out circulating book from library: Call number E840.B.049; A84 1994
- Read Erin’s personal copy

For September 6: read pages 1-25
For September 8: read pages 26-38
For September 12: read chapter 2
For September 24: read chapter 4
Plan extra time into the digitization project – problems will arise.

- Copyright: difficult for students to grasp
- Metadata: visual literacy and entering information is typically most confusing task for students

Copyright chasing brought value to collection

Weak titles found in metadata
Plan extra time into digitization projects around technology.

- Technology issues around permissions, software, etc.
- Don’t assume students have more technical experience due to their age
- Allow for mistakes, misunderstandings, and time for students to ask questions

“When I began using the scanner it took me a day or two to become familiar but I quickly got the hang of thing…Never once did she get upset with me when I did something wrong, she simply corrected me and showed me how to do it again.”
Plan extra time into digitization projects for additional learning opportunities.

- Related projects - involve students in reference questions that arise related to their collections, contribute to blog posts, Facebook, Twitter, etc. - it will help them see the bigger picture
Overall lessons learned from building digital collections using a student workforce

- No matter the quality of the student, staff will always need to budget additional time to complete projects.
- Use tools such as Google Docs to manage projects, training documents, calendars, and track student progress.
- Plan extra time into digital projects for problems, around technology, and related opportunities that arise.
- Student contributions keep digital projects moving forward.
- It gets easier every time.
And remember, provide students with a positive learning experience!

“I will take away the knowledge of how useful the archives department can be with helping research, or writing a paper.”

“I am excited to pursue a degree in library science, all thanks to my digital internship with Special Collections!”

“Supervisors are the key to internship success...they can make the difference between a good internship experience and a poor one.”
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