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“Digi Days: Using the Rey Papers to Teach Digitization to Library Science and Archival Students”

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Abstract

Last summer, the University of Southern Mississippi’s Digital Collections, with support from the school’s Library and Information Science Student Association (LISSA), embarked on a new initiative. Called “Digi Day”, the workshop offered current LIS graduate students the opportunity to receive hands-on training and experience in digitization using The Rey Papers, one of the de Grummond Children’s Literature Collection’s most prized collections.

The first “Digi Day” workshop, which took place in June, is just the beginning of what will become a series of similar workshops tentatively planned for Spring and Summer 2015. Digi Day workshops last one full day and involve basic training in digitization techniques, from handling items and running scanners to introductory description and metadata skills. Guest speakers from the local archival community also participate by discussing current projects and emphasizing the importance of gaining digitization experience as early as possible.

Choosing an appropriate collection for Digi Day workshops is no small feat. Organizers must take into account the experience level of volunteers as well as the subject matter and physical condition of the collections. An ideal choice for Digi Day use is a collection that is engaging to digitize and describe, as well as one that is physically appropriate for handling by volunteers with little or no archival experience. This article will report the success of the first “Digi Day” and will cover the selection of materials as well as workshop structure, recruitment, basic training topics and techniques, and volunteer recognition.

Introduction

Last summer, the University of Southern Mississippi's Digital Collections, with support from the school's Library and Information Science Student Association (LISSA), embarked on a new initiative. Called Digi Day, the workshop offered current LIS graduate students the opportunity to receive hands-on training and experience in digitization using The Rey Papers, one of the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection's most prized collections. The workshop was held at the McCain Library and Archives' Digital Lab. Elizabeth La Beaud, the library's Digital Lab Manager and MLIS Candidate, and Emilie Aplin, a



Student participants learn to complete an image production record during Digi Day orientation at McCain Library and Archives on June 21st 2014.

circulation supervisor at Cook Library, MLIS Candidate, and 2013-2014 LISSA President, were the workshop's two coordinators. Workshop participants received basic training in digitization techniques and metadata creation and gained hands-on experience scanning documents and creating image production records. During a Lunch and Learn session, guest speakers from Mississippi Digital Library and the Aquila Digital

Community addressed volunteers and stressed the importance of digitization work and the skills necessary to work in the field.

Due to the success of the pilot workshop, Digi Day is projected to become an ongoing opportunity for LIS students at the University of Southern Mississippi. This article will report the success of the first Digi Day workshop and will cover selection of materials, workshop structure, recruitment, training topics and techniques, volunteer recognition, and plans for similar, future workshops.

Background

Archives, primary source materials, and education have had a long relationship. Some archives routinely integrate archival instruction and the use of primary sources into undergraduate curricula, particularly in the humanities fields.¹ Common to all archival education programs is a solid

¹ Magia G. Krause, "Undergraduates in the Archives: Using an Assessment Rubric to Measure Learning," *American Archivist* 73, no. 2 (2010): 507-534.

grounding in theoretical principles, and many programs also include service-based learning, usually as a practicum or internship, as a requirement for graduation.

The Society of American Archivists (SAA) advocates the linking of theory and practice aspects of archival education, especially when learning the core principles of arrangement and description.² The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), with its own standards for special collections professionals at academic libraries, advises that professionals understand not just the relationship between theory and practice but also “the significance of original artifacts and the nature and value of primary materials for learning” as well as “the use of digital asset management systems and metadata for providing access to digitized primary source materials”.³ Therefore, the union of theory and practice during archival training is essential.

A recent study by Donghee Sinn explored the benefits and drawbacks of hands-on training opportunities in archival education programs.⁴ Sinn, who polled both students and archivists experienced in such training opportunities, found that students valued not only the chance to link theory to practice but also to network and “test the waters”⁵ before actually entering the archival profession. The study also found that professional archivists value their involvement in such programs since they benefited from similar opportunities when they were beginning in the field. They also view these hands-on training opportunities as effective recruitment strategies for future employment.⁶ Both students and archivists agreed, however, that the biggest challenge of such programs is the increased time demand and workload for both groups.⁷

² Society of American Archivists, “Arrangement and Description,” *Guidelines for a Graduate Program in Archives*, accessed September 29, 2014, <http://www2.archivists.org/gpas/curriculum/arrangement-description>.

³ Association of College and Research Libraries, “Competencies for Special Collections Professionals,” *Guidelines and Standards*, accessed September 29, 2014, <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/comp4specollect>.

⁴ Donghee Sinn, “Collaborative Education Between Classroom and Workplace for Archival Arrangement and Description: Aiming for Sustainable Professional Education,” *American Archivist* 76, no. 1 (2013): 237-262.

⁵ Ibid, 247.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Nevertheless, opportunities to meld the theoretical with the practical at the earliest of stages of training is, arguably, of great benefit to archival students, since learning both skill sets at the same time emphasizes not just their interrelatedness but that both are of equal importance for practice.

Planning for Digi Day

Fundamental to the success of any hands-on training experience, whether short- or longer-term, is planning, and Digi Day was no exception. Having never conducted an archival workshop before, the workshop's coordinators started from scratch to create an experience that would be both educational and enjoyable for participants. Primary planning considerations included materials selection, instructional strategies, the structure and mechanics of the workshop itself, workshop advertisement, and recruitment of students.

Since the workshop focused on digitizing collections, selecting appropriate primary materials was the first priority. Coordinators determined that the ideal collection should be in good physical condition and of a subject matter that would be considered widely appealing. At its core, Digi Day is an opportunity for students with little or no archival experience to work with primary documents, thus the coordinators wanted to choose documents that could withstand handling by novices without undue risk of damage. Finding a collection that is both structurally sound and which contains content that appeals to a general audience can be a difficult task. The Rey Papers emerged as the primary candidate, since the collection is in good condition, and the content, which includes handwritten correspondence and illustrations, is a joy for students to explore. After settling on The Rey Papers, the coordinators contacted the curator of the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection, Ellen Ruffin, to obtain proper permission.

After providing full details of the workshop, the coordinators received permission and progressed to the next phase of planning: formalizing the structure of the workshop. Since it was expected that participants would have limited familiarity with the digitization equipment and software, pre-recorded actions were programmed for use during the workshop. Coordinators also created a bound, 29-page handbook for students that contained basic information about metadata best practices and recommended digitization standards, as well as instructions for completing image production records, scanning items, editing digitized images, and creating both master and access copies of final images.

Due to available space and lab equipment, the workshop's coordinators hosted two, five-hour sessions, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, with an hour overlap for lunch. Collection boxes were pulled and vetted ahead of time, and each scanning station was assigned one box of items plus a supply of

production records (containing a predetermined filename, but otherwise blank). At the end of each session participants completed a voluntary feedback survey. Coordinators distributed directions to the McCain Library and Archives in advance of each session so that students would report to their assigned session promptly. Speakers from Mississippi Digital Library and the Aquila Digital Community were secured for the Lunch and Learn session; they also contributed promotional items from their respective organizations for the student participants' "goody bags".

The call for Digi Day student volunteers went out in several forms. Coordinators used existing channels, namely the university's School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) listserv and the LISSA (the LIS student group's) Facebook page. SLIS professors were asked to promote the workshop in their classes several weeks before the event, encouraging interested students to contact Digi Day's coordinators for further details.

Of less interest from an archival perspective, but of no less importance, was planning the Lunch and Learn session. Hungry volunteers are not happy volunteers, so coordinators wanted to ensure an adequate lunch complete with input from the student participants. Participants were contacted prior to the event for lunch and dietary preferences and coordinators ordered the food ahead of time. The School of Library and Information Science's LISSA group agreed to sponsor the lunch by covering the food costs.

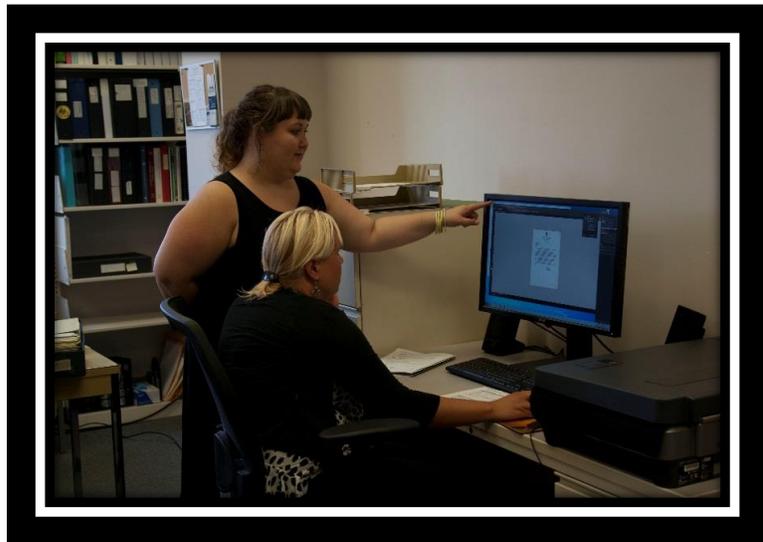
Workshop Implementation

Both the morning and afternoon sessions began with an orientation consisting of background information about H. A. and Margret Rey, as well as basic information about the University of Southern Mississippi's Digital Collections and the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection. Coordinators introduced the workshop handbook, explained Dublin Core metadata standards, and answered questions from students. Participants learned proper techniques for handling archival items, filling out production records, scanning, editing, and saving images.

Following orientation, the student participants used individual scanning stations to put their new knowledge to work. Participants utilized Epson Expression 10000XL and 11000XL scanners and Adobe Photoshop to capture and edit images. Master images were scanned at 600 dpi and saved as TIFF files using the file name pre-assigned to each production record. Student volunteers were responsible for recording all other production record information. Information required on the image production records included collection name and number; box, folder, and item numbers; the date of origin for the original item; and title and description information for each item. Students were also responsible for noting the scanner model, image resolution, and size of the original for each item they digitized, as well as any relevant notes or special comments about an item. After creating the master image for each item, participants generated a 200 dpi access image in JPEG format. Throughout the workshop students asked many questions about digitization and archival practices, and seemed to enjoy learning new skills in a hands-on, applied manner.

Student participants were recognized with a printed Certificate of Participation signed by the Interim Dean of University Libraries, the Assistant to the Dean for Finance and Technology, and the Digital Lab Manager. They also received a goody bag

that included a Curious George t-shirt (featuring an image from The Rey Papers on the front), as well as promotional materials from Mississippi Digital Library and the Aquila Digital Community. Coordinators offered to take a picture of each participant receiving his or her certificate; these images were later emailed to the individual participants for their professional portfolios.



A Digitization Specialist at the University of Southern Mississippi mentors a Digi Day student participant.

At the end of each session, participants completed a survey offering feedback about the workshop. Coordinators asked the student volunteers to indicate how much they felt they learned, the effectiveness of instructions, how they heard about Digi Day, whether they would be interested in participating in future events, and effectiveness of the Lunch and Learn presentations. The survey also included a section for volunteers to indicate ideas for

improvements to future Digi Day workshops and asked them to comment on the use of The Rey Papers and whether they felt the collection was engaging to work with.

Looking to the Future

Courses that teach foundational principles, even if they discuss how such principles are applied in the field, are only a beginning for novice archives professionals. Students need opportunities to apply these principles in real-world situations with more senior colleagues supervising their progress, advising the students and providing feedback as needed. Although most archival education programs require the completion of a practicum to graduate, workshops like Digi Day can complement such service-based learning components by offering additional training in specialized competencies. They can also attract new people to the field if workshop organizers are willing to accept participants from non-LIS programs.

Based on the positive feedback of the pilot workshop, the coordinators plan to offer more Digi Day workshops in the future. The goal is to continue the partnership between the University of Southern Mississippi's Digital Collections and LISSA by offering at least one Digi Day workshop each year. Ideally, there will be enough interest and time for coordinators to offer more than one workshop each year, perhaps one in the spring and one during the summer. The response to Digi Day was quite encouraging, and coordinators were excited to see students so interested in digitization and working with primary source materials. The overwhelming positive response illustrates the continued need for educational opportunities of this nature.