

Digital Curation, presented by Dan Reboussin. Sept. 17, 2014. Library West 212.
Digital Humanities Library Group (“Developing Librarian” mini grant project).

Digital curation (Lee and Tibbo 2007; JISC 2003) can be defined as “the active management of digital resources over the life-cycle of scholarly and scientific interest.” Curation is cultural caretaking (begins before selection, includes preservation, may extend to deselection). What happens after the grab and scan (or born-digital share)?

Bhatt (2014) adapts Tufte’s (1990) theory of human information with a list of active words describing *social* curation:

Select, edit, single out, structure, highlight, group, pair, merge, harmonize, synthesize, focus, organize, condense, reduce, boil down, choose, categorize, catalog, classify, list, abstract, scan, look into, idealize, isolate, discriminate, distinguish, screen, pigeonhole, pick over, sort, integrate, blend, inspect, filter, lump, skip, smooth, chunk, average, approximate, cluster, aggregate, outline, summarize, itemize, review, dip into, flip through, browse, glance into, leaf through, skim, refine, enumerate, glean, synopsisize, winnow the wheat from the chaff, and separate the sheep from the goats.

What curatorial activities support scholarly access once a trusted repository or cultural heritage collection is online? Merely uploading materials to an open access site doesn’t mean they’ll be easily discoverable online. Effective digital curation supports researchers in discovering relevant collections they weren’t aware of prior to conducting a successful online search (while digital, these actions aren’t unlike analog or live liaison and routine interactions during reference consultation, library instruction, etc.).

Some examples of digital curation activities (all of which extend established library and archival practices). These may enhance access, presentation, context, or support scholarly interpretation:

- Creating a social interface, monitoring usage, observing and supporting user behaviors. Which items get frequent, heavy use? Make them easier to find: “Pave the cowpaths.”
- Enhancing available metadata. Making existing resources available (bibliographic records or archival finding aids) or enhancing traditional library resources with additional detail (see *SobekCM* “Metadata help”).
- Adding useful sub-collection divisions in Sobek/CM to highlight contents.
- Editing landing pages (in *SobekCM*) to build a scholarly context for collections.
- Contributing to appropriate online sites in ways that support discoverability. Might include: the Institutional Repository (including online exhibits), *Wikipedia*, official or private blogs, newsletters... citations on trusted sites.
- Continuing to engage in traditional forms of liaison, facilitation, promotion, outreach, and reference (attending scholarly meetings, presenting, publishing).

Rich content, dense contextual information within a site, and links to the material from other highly ranked sites are key factors in how a site will appear in search results. Best practices include providing public metadata for curated materials and, for manuscripts and archives, collection context (finding aids

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convey a collector’s background, describe the scope, physical extent, contents, arrangement and also point to related works).

There are important social as well as technical aspects to the way sites are indexed by search engines such as Google.

Sobek and UFDC deal with the technical side of this equation (compliant code, support for efficient crawling, digital preservation measures, etc.).

Social support includes “content acumen” and digital curation activities.

Search engines use crawling and indexing to gather metadata and to determine what a web page is about (dynamic results, Page ranking). The site itself influences how *Google* assesses its value: technical features such as compliant code and domains (such as .edu and .org) support legitimacy, value, and relevance (www.wikipedia.org is an excellent example, as it is also among the most visited web sites). See: “Contributing to *Wikipedia*.”

References

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Additional resources

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