

A Digital Library of the Middle East Workshop
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Digital Libraries and the Link to Teaching and Learning

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Higher education institutions build digital libraries for many purposes, but their chief objectives are to make resources available for research, for teaching and learning, or for both aspects of the higher education institutional mission. To some degree, digital libraries can also help fulfill the service (outreach and community relations) mission of universities.

Typically, the focus of library digitization projects is to get content with attached metadata up on a website. The project's goals can be met by attaining numerical targets and quality standards in an efficient manner. Assessing the use of the collections is an aspect that is often considered a peripheral part of the project or a topic for later study, which may or may not take place.

However, many well-established digital library projects have found that devoting resources to digitization without understanding user communities results in under utilization of collections. In particular, they have discovered that specifically addressing the needs of educators will yield more widespread use of the digital resources that the projects have developed. While digital libraries serve all kinds of users who seek new knowledge for personal growth, career advancement, or entertainment, they can also be very useful in formal education settings, from elementary education through higher education. Teachers particularly value websites that make clear connections between available materials and specific course topics or educational practices, and that offer practical guides, curricular materials, learning objects, and activities that can be adapted or adopted for their classes. These materials can be used during class sessions or as supplemental materials outside of class.

One of the United States' earliest large-scale digitization projects, the Library of Congress's American Memory Project <<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/index.html>>, was one of the first institutions to address the need for specialized, supporting resources to encourage educators to use digitized historical resources through its "learning pages" feature. The American Memory website now provides many resources for teachers and students, making connections between the digital library content available through the library and the curriculum. For example, the website provides lesson plans that incorporate digital content by theme, topic, discipline,

or era. Teachers can adopt or adapt these plans for their local needs. Lesson plans are available for elementary, secondary, and higher education levels.

The widely acclaimed Valley of the Shadow Project at the University of Virginia, which documents two communities during the American Civil War, includes a guide to the project and resource pages for teachers < <http://valley.vcdh.virginia.edu/usingvalley/>>. The teacher resource pages include specific references to national standards as well as suggestions for specific assignments on various topics.

Some digital library projects go beyond digitization and preparation of curricular guides to include faculty training. A number of projects associated with the U.S. National Science Digital Library (NSDL) have included workshop programs. In addition, a project involving several liberal arts colleges in the US has developed summer faculty workshops for teachers interested in incorporating digitized materials about the Middle East into their courses. The Al-Musharaka collaborative < <http://www2.nitle.org/initiatives/almusharaka.htm>> is an initiative to create English language online resources on Arab culture and civilization and to encourage collaborative activities such as course development and delivery among colleges. In addition, the creators encourage the development of an intellectual community of faculty with shared interests, who often do not have counterparts at their home institution.

Developers of digital libraries can assist faculty in understanding how digital content can be used to enhance teaching and learning. In one survey of California higher education institutions, faculty stated that they “used digital resources to improve their students’ learning, to integrate primary source materials into their teaching, or to include materials or teaching methods that would otherwise be unavailable.”ⁱ It is important that faculty understand that the purpose for using digital content in curricula is not to “use technology” but to enrich the teaching and learning process. Workshops can assist faculty in developing mechanisms for integration of digital content into their teaching.

Some digital library projects, such as those developed in the Vassar College Media Cloisters < <http://mediacloisters.vassar.edu/>> include specially trained student assistants who work closely with faculty and information professionals to develop digital collections that have a direct relationship to the curriculum. The program also offers faculty workshops.

In addition, some digital library projects include creation of tools that are particularly intended for teaching and learning. At University of Virginia, faculty and technologists have developed the “Digital Object Collector Tool” < <http://www.lib.virginia.edu/digital/resndev/repository.html>> with which faculty can collect images and create slide shows or use on web pages. The tool includes capabilities for such techniques as zooming, panning, and rotating images.ⁱⁱ The study of California faculty also reinforces the high priority faculty

place on a mechanism by which they can compile digital resources in a personal collection.ⁱⁱⁱ

Many museum websites are incorporating interactive features as a means of engaging users, particularly younger audiences. Digital libraries can adopt some of their practices, such as using polling mechanisms, inviting visitors to submit information, etc. One digital library project that already involves students in contributing materials is the Library of Congress's American Memory website, which invites students and others to submit materials to the website in specific categories, including interviews with immigrants to the US or family recipes.

As the Digital Library of the Middle East is conceptualized, consideration should be given to incorporating teaching and learning goals as an integral part of the library's mission. As grant programs are developed, they should address the categories of users, including students, who could benefit from the digitization projects and encourage innovative proposals that incorporate resources related to teaching and learning as well as the primary digitized content. It would be especially useful to encourage projects that actively engage students, for example in the digitization process itself, in helping to create interactive activities, and in developing innovative teaching tools. Incorporating digital resources into the curriculum and encouraging student involvement can assist us in developing a new generation of users and creators of quality digital resources.

ⁱ Diane Harley, *et. al.* "Understanding the Use of Digital Resources in Humanities and Social Science (H/SS) Undergraduate Education. Center for Studies in Higher Education, UC Berkeley, 2005. <<http://digitalresourcestudy.berkeley.edu/>

ⁱⁱ Harvey Blustain and Donald Spicer. *Digital Humanities at the Crossroads: The University of Virginia.* EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research, 2005. <<http://www.educause.edu/LibraryDetailPage/666?ID=ECS0506>>

ⁱⁱⁱ Diane Harley, *et. al.* "Understanding the Use of Digital Resources in Humanities and Social Science (H/SS) Undergraduate Education. Center for Studies in Higher Education, UC Berkeley, 2005. <<http://digitalresourcestudy.berkeley.edu/>