From Real Chal Virtual

Realizing Your Collection

With suspended expectations, interinstitutional digital collaboration has proven a win-win situation.

I n fall 2008, a collaborative partnership was formed between the libraries of two Indiana universities—Marian College's (now Marian University) Mother Theresa Hackelmeier Memorial Library, where author Mandity serves as systems/technology librarian, and the University Library at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), where author Johnson is digital initiatives project coordinator. The digital nature of this collaboration would benefit both institutions and result in making a complex digital collection come to fruition.

Marian University Plans a Digital Experiment

Marian University is a small academic institution in Indianapolis. Though its status as a university is still in its infancy, it has much history as a college since its official founding in 1937. The archives at Hackelmeier Memorial Library contain within its collection

By Jennifer Johnson

lenges to Reality

Through Digital Partnership

a wealth of information representing the growth of the institution, so it has been a priority of the library to find a way to both preserve and promote that content. One source of such content, a faculty-supervised, student-run publication called *The Phoenix* (spanning the years 1937–1981) was designated an ideal object to serve not only as a collection of historical significance but also as a timeline of the institution's development and output. In a time of increased digitization highlighting local content, digitizing *The Phoenix* seemed a logical though ambitious project to undertake.

Hackelmeier Recognizes Its Digital Limitations

As anyone who has undertaken such a project knows, digitization requires numerous resources in planning, staffing, and equipment. The publication of *The Phoenix*

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and Edward Mandity

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spanned a period of 44 years, and with roughly seven issues published per year at four pages an issue, an estimated 308 issues containing more than 1,200 pages would need to be scanned. Even before the digitization process could begin, library staff at Marian realized its inadequacy in both available staffing and equipment needed to undertake the actual digitization. At the time of the decision to digitize, the library was staffed by four full-time degreed librarians who, in addition to their assigned areas of responsibility, possessed other rotating duties that ultimately would hinder the necessity of a consistent and devoted oversight of a digital project such as this.

Hackelmeier Memorial Library also has at its disposal numerous work-study students employed throughout the academic year. However, the library staff decided that its student employees should not be chosen to participate in the project, particularly due to their own inconsistency of schedules and general lack of experience in scanning, metadata creation, and usage of collection management software. Also, spending the time to train and retrain students in each phase would simply take too long. Ultimately, other alternatives were needed for implementation of the project.

Another serious challenge was the lack of available equipment. The biggest obstacle involved obtaining scanning equipment needed for handling the newspaper's issues. *The Phoenix*, an oversized publication with dimensions of 11.75" x 16", proved too large for our standard-sized library scanners with their dimensions of 8.5" by 11.7". Any attempts at partial digitization were considered unprofessional, and the alternative option of purchasing an oversized flatbed scanner, with many models having a minimum price of $10,000, was entirely unfeasible. Furthermore, Hackelmeier Memorial Library belongs to a consortium of small academic libraries (PALNI, the Private Academic Library Network of Indiana) that, while providing member licenses of the digital collection management software CONTENTdm (version 4.3), did not possess when this project began the more current version (version 5). This proved difficult for streamlining the capture of optical character recognition (OCR), an essential functionality when scanning items such as newspapers such as *The Phoenix* as opposed to the timely manual transcription of text. Without access to newer versions of CONTENTdm containing a built-in OCR extension, specifically version 5, and without the proper staffing assistance, the reality of undertaking a digital project of this magnitude soon seemed overwhelming.

In light of Marian's lack of staffing and equipment, only two options remained. Without the resources needed, one option would be to apply for a grant. The State Library of Indiana offers library digitization grants. But while certainly helpful, the award of such a grant would not cover the cost of a suitably oversized scanner or address the lack of devoted staffing and the outsourcing of the digitization on

As a small academic institution, Marian University just did not have the equipment necessary to digitize The Phoenix.

IUPUI supplied the oversized scanner needed to accommodate copies of The Phoenix.

behalf of Hackelmeier Memorial Library. Initiating the project thereby required a final option: asking for interinstitutional assistance by incentive of a digital partnership.

Marian University and IUPUI Enter Into a Partnership

Marian University is only minutes from Indiana University's Indianapolis campus (IUPUI), which contains Indiana University's school of library and information science (SLIS). Asking IUPUI for assistance seemed a logical option to consider. After consultation with IUPUI's Jennifer Johnson, it was decided that IUPUI would undertake the digitization as a special project for its digital library students. Students were introduced to the project details by Marian librarian Edward Mandity. The students were then free to plan and undertake the various stages comprising a typical library digitization project.

Initial exercises included creating a mission statement; identifying project management skills needed; and contemplating copyright and usage statements suitable for the collection. Students were then introduced to the concepts and practice of scanning, in terms of progressing through the steps

Three of the Phoenix *pages digitized by IUPUI students*

for creating a complete collection. Specifically, these steps included utilizing IUPUI's scanning equipment and learning digitization best practices set by Indiana state standards. Students were then tasked with creating a metadata schema that was relevant to both Marian University and a general newspaper collection. The students were encouraged to consult with the Marian University librarian as well as Indiana state metadata standards to make sure varying subjects and relevant fields were adequately met. Finally, students were introduced to CONTENTdm, the popular content management system used by both IUPUI and Marian University. Through this platform, students were tasked to implement their consistent metadata schema and template for batch uploading, thereby applying quality control to the collection through a controlled vocabulary.

The Partnership's Results

Marian gets a digitized collection. In two semesters of work (over the fall 2008 and fall 2009 semesters), 35 students in the S652 Digital Libraries course were able to scan roughly 26 years (1941–1967) of issues from the total 44 years during which *The Phoenix* was published. Having completed approximately 60% of the project with the work of two completely distinct groups of students not only scanning material but also coordinating a consistent metadata scheme is an impressive accomplishment. Given time and guided supervision, the potential for undertaking a large-scale collaborative digitization project is a reasonable way to realize the creation of a digital project needing initial momentum.

IUPUI student reception. One of the most important achievements of the project, in addition to creating a deliv-

erable collection, was to provide digitization students with a real-world experience in a typical digitization project conducted in an academic library setting. In both distinct classes that participated, many if not most of the students were highly receptive to the experience as a whole. Lucy Grogg, a 2009 SLIS graduate, provided encouraging testimony:

Participating in the creation of digital images and metadata for Marian University and their Phoenix newspaper was one of the most valuable and meaningful experiences I had as a student. Through interacting with a real "customer" and actually getting to do the work I was able to internalize the knowledge and information far more effectively than I ever would have through just listening to lectures, reading course material and writing essays. More than that, I was able to be part of a team providing an actual service to a customer while at the same time developing the beginnings of digitization skills. As a result of taking this course I can now when asked in an interview proudly say "I did this" and "it helped [this institution]" as opposed to "I heard/read/wrote about this and then made a PowerPoint about it." With library job searching now being a cutthroat game any student with an interest in the digital library field who is looking to get ahead would be wise to participate in a project of this type.

The benefit of experience earned by the SLIS students, as evidenced in Grogg's comments, served not as a latent achievement but rather as a reward for all involved participants within librarianship.

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What Did We Learn?

Overall, interinstitutional collaboration is a worthwhile option for making cost-prohibitive digital projects able to be realized. The inevitable flexibility of an open-ended timeline and resulting collaborative questions do not negate the positive impact for both institutions participating in the collaboration; indeed, since publishing the collection, *The Phoenix* has already served as a primary resource for researchers at both institutions.

Patience and partnerships. As important as planning is to the whole process of digitization, so too is recognizing the importance of patience with regard to the completion of the project. Given the number of issues to digitize, Hackelmeier Memorial Library was forced to accept an open completion date for the project. Typically, the digital libraries course at IUPUI is scheduled only for the fall semester, meaning that interruptions in the project's workflow would be inevitable. Also, being an introduction to the technical aspects of digitization, it was accepted that the library science students would not rush through the scanning process while learning the various techniques and equipment. Furthermore, the digitization resources held by IUPUI's University Library are continuously utilized for its own time-sensitive and noncollaborative projects, and it was accepted that Marian's priority was lower than that of IUPUI's own work.

Flexibility helps partnerships succeed. Having flexibility in the metadata creation was extremely important as well. Students were encouraged to research the publication and proceeded to question the librarians at Marian regarding the nature of *The Phoenix*. Furthermore, in order to fully grasp the concepts of metadata creation and usage, it was critical to let the students determine the course of description and presentation. With an average class size of 15 students, there seemed ample opportunity for debate and research about the schema, yet one important consideration was the deadline factor. Knowing that the metadata phase of the project was but one aspect of the whole process, students forced to collaborate within a team-based digitization project such as this required a consensus on a realistic and definite time frame. With two separate classes participating in the project, it became accepted that scanning methods and, more importantly, metadata creation were subject to increased flexibility in collection structure and timeline.

Some Questions Remain

This project has brought several collaborative questions regarding ongoing maintenance to the fore. Particularly, housing the collection has provided the participants with a significant issue for consideration. As a way of streamlining the process, IUPUI graciously agreed to perform the digitization and metadata creation as well as temporarily house the collection, unconditionally, until Marian and, specifically, its consortium (PALNI) is able to host it; Marian University currently links to the collection from its webpage. Several other interesting questions have been raised relating to the housing and editing of the collection: Is it not only feasible but acceptable to have both institutions house and even promote the collection on multiple servers? Alternatively, once completed, would or could the collection serve as a digital sandbox, even if publicly viewable, for future SLIS courses to edit in learning about the digitization process? Will editing eventually be necessary for the collection, and who (from which institution) will be the primary editors? Should the digitization be completed before the collection is shared, if agreed that it is a viable option? All questions are valid and will have to be explored more closely as the project's collaboration progresses.

Conclusion

Hackelmeier Memorial Library has benefited greatly from the partnership because one of its important historical and cultural manifestations is now widely available for viewing (though not completely finished). Certainly, IUPUI with its school of library and information science is clearly an integral partner, not only providing a virtual space to house the material (however temporarily) but also a cost-efficient working group for developing the project. Furthermore, its curriculum is enhanced by providing a relevant and hands-on experience that many students lack within their courses. In conclusion, with suspended expectations, interinstitutional digital collaboration has proven a win-win situation that, while necessitating ongoing participation in lieu of increased expenditure, ensures productive and realized outcomes.

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