TEACHING WITH DIGITAL COLLECTIONS IN THE SMALL COLLEGE CURRICULUM

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THE PROJECT

What does it take to implement a digital asset management system that not only improves access to collections, but also allows faculty to integrate digital materials into their teaching?

Reed College received grants from the Keck and Booth Ferris Foundations to acquire a digital content management system, hire staff, and obtain content to support teaching with images. The immediate goal of the 3-year project is to support teaching with images in the arts and humanities. Our long-term goal is to create a system that will support teaching with digital collections in all media across the curriculum.

From its inception, this project has been a collaboration between Reed's IT department, the library, and the art department's visual resources collection staff. It has taken the skills and knowledge that all three departments bring to this project to acquire content, build image collections and metadata structures, and extend system capabilities to provide a digital image system that meets our faculty's teaching needs.

TEACHING THE HUMANITIES

A major challenge for the project has been supporting the need for images in teaching Humanities 110, an intensive year-long course in which first-year students study texts of western civilization from Homer's *Iliad* to *The Confessions of St. Augustine*.

This course, one of the few large lectures at Reed, is team-taught by faculty from classics, art history, history, literature, philosophy, and political science. Some faculty are strongly oriented toward teaching with visual images; while for others, teaching with images is relatively unfamiliar.

A survey of faculty needs about teaching with images, and a focus group of classics and humanities faculty, indicated that the Humanities 110 faculty need:

- Copious high-quality images for teaching.
- Reliable searching and retrieval of images.
- A browseable "garden path" to images related to course content.
- Flexible tools for viewing images in class.
- Access for students outside of class.

SYSTEM & CONTENT

CONTENTdm was selected as the system for our digital collections because it provides:

- Good tools for managing metadata and manipulating collections and subcollections.
- Web interfaces for users, as opposed to a separate client.
- The ability to customize interfaces and collections.
- Support for all types of digital materials, such as texts, video, and audio files.
- A robust academic user community.

To date, there are about 75,000 images in the collections, which we have built from the following sources:

- Saskia and Archivision collections of licensed art & architecture images from Scholars Resource.
- Digital images contributed by Reed's faculty.
- Copystand images created on demand for current courses.

About 7,200 of those images are cataloged as part of the Classics Image Database.

METADATA FOR TEACHING

A critical piece of the IT-library collaboration is the coordination of the record-level metadata and the construction of interfaces based on that metadata to help our students and faculty access images effectively. We used these strategies to provide the metadata needed for teaching Hum 110:

- Created subcollection and course-related metadata to identify images for the Classics Image Database, for Hum topics, Hum geography, and specific Hum lectures.
- Scrubbed existing metadata about image creators, titles, geographic locations, and artistic medium to conform with art image standards, such as the Visual Resources Association's VRA Core metadata standard and the Getty's Art and Architecture Thesaurus (AAT).
- Worked with Classics faculty to create a list of classics terms customized to teaching at Reed.
- Employed selected students to apply metadata standards to image records and to create descriptive abstracts about the significance of specific images within the course's context.

INTERFACES

CONTENTdm's "out-of-the-box" interface provides a number of useful tools for finding and viewing images, including:

- Searching, browsing, and cross-linked metadata terms.
- A clickable grid of thumbnail images.
- A viewer with zoom and pan capabilities for JPEG 2000 images.
- A "My Favorites" tool for selecting and saving images.
- A Slideshow feature for organizing and viewing images singly or side-by-side.

CONTENTdm provides the following opportunities for customization:

- Modified PHP templates for viewers.
- Custom Queries & Results (CQR) to create subcollections and interactive web interfaces.
- Published API for developing custom PHP interfaces.
- SQL on the side for saving user-generated information.

FACULTY & STUDENT FEEDBACK

Below are a few of the responses to a survey of Hum 110 faculty conducted at the end of the Fall 2007 semester:

"I think it is fantastic – far and away the best visual material we have ever had."

"I feel confident about my actual ability to use the system . . . I've also found that its ease of use has encouraged me to just browse the slides more . . . In short, quite happy with the system."

"Excellent, easy access for showing students images in class, for which I'm very grateful."

In student focus groups in January 2008, we heard these comments:

"The zoom feature is really helpful for viewing details in class . . . it's also nice when there are multiple shots of something in the database, like the Primaporta, so you can see all the different angles."

"The lecture image sets in CONTENTdm were linked from the online course syllabus. I liked how handy it was to access the images outside of class."

NEXT CHALLENGES FOR DIGITAL ASSETS MANAGEMENT

As we enter the final year of the project, we will seek to address a new set of user needs:

- Providing images for teaching means that the collection is constantly growing and changing with the needs of our curriculum. Acquiring and cataloging new content promises to be an ongoing endeavor.
- Faculty and students, especially in the arts, would like to see a "light box" style interface for sorting and browsing images.
- Many users would like to see a display that allows large, screen-filling images and side-by-side comparisons that can be advanced independently, and that has the ability to hide or show metadata and tools as desired.

MORE INFORMATION

For more details about the project, visit our web site:
http://web.reed.edu/digital_asset_mgmt/index.html

Sample Study Guide: "Reading Greek Vases"