

Creating a repository with unique pieces of history

CONTENTdm helps a Michigan university quickly compile its digital collections for easier access and sharing



Situation

What do a Civil War diary, an interview and an incunabulum (a book printed before 1501) have in common?

They're all part of the special collections at Grand Valley State University Libraries.

"We have bits and pieces of all kinds of things that researchers might not easily locate if they weren't in an online collection," says University Archivist, Nancy Richard. Digitizing and cataloging them "would be a way to highlight these hidden items."

Richard had previously worked on digitization projects so she understood the value of unique collections.

"Administrators are looking at unique materials as the future of libraries, so the opportunity to digitize arose."

However, getting them online with limited resources would be a significant hurdle. Although Richard received help from other staff and students, she did not have staff or IT support specifically dedicated to this extensive project.

Solution

Richard discovered that CONTENTdm Digital Collection Management Software was one of few solutions that could provide the support she needed. "CONTENTdm was tried and successful at other institutions and there were people I could talk to."

She selected the CONTENTdm hosted option so that OCLC would install and manage the server software. **The project was made easier by using online help screens and calling on OCLC associates for assistance.** Richard also used the fully customizable CONTENTdm Web templates

AT A GLANCE

- Grand Valley State University, Allendale, Michigan
- Serving more than 25,000 students, faculty and staff at five campuses
- Digital collections include rare photographs, correspondence, diaries, interviews and publications from the holdings of the Libraries' Special Collections and University Archives, and other University entities
- View Grand Valley State's digital collections at: www.gvsu.edu/library/digitalcollections

"CONTENTdm's hosted option offered the support we needed ... it was tried and successful at other institutions."

to get the collections organized online. This high level of support helped Richard get a collection online in just one month, despite the resource limitations.

She also made use of existing digital collections and collaborating with other university groups. "The collections already existed here and there, such as a collection of Civil War diaries that were transcribed. PDFs of some editions of the university publications were available," explains Richard.

"I also collaborated with the University Art Gallery. They had over 50 paintings digitized and Special Collections had the artist's personal papers and photographs. And we worked with the History Department to enter hundreds of interviews with local veterans. **I was able to populate the database pretty quickly because I was adding whole collections into CONTENTdm.**"

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Results

Today, the digital collections serve both University archives and special collections. They include rare materials and are worldwide in scope, with particular focus on the Civil War; Michigan in the novel; regional literature, history and culture; and book and printing arts. They span time from the 1477 incunabulum through a recent oral histories collection.

“Our collections’ metadata is in WorldCat, so it’s very easy to search. **It’s given people outside the library a whole different appreciation of what resources the library has. It’s a lot of things—it’s not just books,**” says Richard.

Future plans include adding streaming media, such as audio and video related to the collections and oral history interviews. The library also recently agreed to start digitizing the student newspapers for online access.