Institute of Museum and Library Services Library and Museum Collaboration Grant Application (excerpts)

Music of Social Change:

Library-Museum Collaboration through Open Archives Metadata

URL to this document: metascholar.org/about/mosc/MOSC.pdf

Summary: The MetaScholar Initiative of the Emory University Libraries, in collaboration with the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, the Atlanta History Center, and the Georgia Music Hall of Fame, seeks to use the Open Archives Initiative (OAI) protocol to develop a new model for library-museum collaborations that broaden access to resources for learning communities.

Introduction: The Open Archives Initiative (OAI) is rapidly becoming the de facto standard for the dissemination of research metadata concerning digital library collections (see http://www.openarchives.org). While librarians and archivists in research libraries often use this protocol for collaborative purposes, museum curators, who work with similar archival collections, have been largely absent from conversations and projects concerning the use of the OAI protocol for sharing metadata. This project seeks to explore the OAI protocol's feasibility as a mechanism for fostering collaboration between libraries and museums. Emory and its partners will model such collaboration by creating a specific subject-based digital collection containing metadata from libraries and museums concerning music and musicians associated with social change movements such as the civil rights struggle. Scholars engaged in research on the relationship between music and social movements will provide intellectual organization and contextualization for the metadata collaboratively accumulated from participating institutions during this project. This work will build on expertise and systems developed in an existing scholarly portal project, *AmericanSouth.Org*, which has accumulated metadata concerning the culture and history of the South.

Project Activities: Through this project, museum directors, curators, catalogers, scholars, and technologists will collaboratively produce a model for the use of the OAI protocol to provide services to learning communities. The project team will then implement and assess this model through actual collaborative metadata dissemination systems and the execution of the following activities: 1) cataloging materials at partner sites, providing OAI-compliant XML records; 2) developing and installing software for partnering libraries and museums that will enable metadata concerning relevant collections to be distributed on demand; 3) aggregating the metadata from participating libraries and museums to create a centrally searchable database of records; and 4) developing a body of scholarly material providing context for understanding primary resources concerning the music of the freedom struggle.

Project Outcomes: The *Music of Social Change* project will result in several outcomes that will collectively provide a new model for collaboration between libraries and museums, as well as create a body of information useful to several learning communities.

Outcome 1: Improved Collaboration between Libraries and Museums. Libraries and museums will be able to collaborate in several new ways by using the OAI Protocol. Museum databases will be able to interoperate with library catalogs by automated aggregation of records from disparate archives to create virtual online collections. Archivists, curators, and librarians will have freely available software to support the construction of subject-specific virtual collections. The project will provide the tools and training required by locally maintained databases and centrally maintained shared systems.

Outcome 2: Shared Cataloging Services. Small museum archives will gain access to cooperative cataloging services that can assist with the retrospective conversion of records that currently are held in non-machine readable formats. The OAI protocol will facilitate these cooperative cataloging services, allowing larger institutions to share staff time and expertise with smaller institutions.

Outcome 3: Enhanced Access to Collections for Learning Communities. Through this new collaborative model, groups of researchers and independent learners will gain systematic online access to often overlooked but substantial archival materials housed by museums, as well as related archival materials held by research libraries. Metadata describing collections will be contextualized by authoritative context and online content provided by scholars researching the collections under consideration.

NATIONAL IMPACT

Current Issues Facing Libraries and Museums: Libraries and museums seeking to collaborate in providing services to learning communities have a new, broadly applicable tool in the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH). The Open Archives protocol (see http://www.openarchives.org) is now the de facto international standard for disseminating metadata concerning digital library collections, and it is being deployed in many regional and national infrastructures. [Lynch, 2001][*] However, many museums and libraries do not yet have OAI capabilities in their local systems because the protocol is still relatively new. Nor has there been any systematic exploration of the possibilities that this protocol offers for collaboration between libraries and museums. The project described in this proposal would explore both of these areas through focused collaborative efforts between the Emory University Libraries and three independent museums to enhance interoperability, integration, and seamless access to digital library and museum resources.

Background: Emory University became interested in this issue through its work with the MetaScholar Initiative. Based at Emory, the MetaScholar Initiative is a collaboration among academic research libraries and archives that have worked to develop and evaluate online learning communities built on top of new forms of OAI metadata systems (see Appendix B for an overview of the MetaScholar Initiative). Meta Scholar Initiative partners have expressed interest in exploring how museum collections could contribute to the development of resources for learning communities. Two MetaScholar partners are museums: the Center for the Study of Southern Culture and the Atlanta History Center. Officials of these two institutions have shared and highlighted the museum perspective and the special needs of museums with the other members of the consortium. Museums are key repositories of research materials, but have significantly different operational priorities and practices than libraries. Yet, there are clear benefits to collaboration between museums and libraries. Museums infrequently participate in the development of union catalogs of holdings typical of library consortia. Consequently, valuable museum research collections of realia are not made visible by such means to researchers who would benefit from knowledge of such items. Libraries do not have the expertise of museums in preparing exhibits that contextualize topics, which can inform efforts to contextualize online representations and metadata. For all these reasons, a project was proposed within the MetaScholar Initiative to more closely investigate several issues and potential benefits specific to collaborative interactions between libraries and museums. This project builds upon relationships and experience of the MetaScholar Initiative, but will enable investigative activities that would not otherwise occur.

Potential Changes Resulting from this Project: This project could dramatically change the way in which museums and libraries reach and serve scholars and independent learners. Access to resources will be increased through use of the OAI protocol to feed cross-institutional union catalogs and automatically build discovery systems. The usefulness of these resources will be enhanced by the collaborative strategies for contextualization by scholars, curators, and catalogers proposed in this project. Scholars and lifelong learners are often interested in specialized topics to be found in scattered small museums and repositories. Collaboration through the OAI protocol will enable these distributed institutions to rapidly and conveniently coordinate records and framing information for such specialized learning communities. This project will enable small museums and library archives to mobilize their efforts toward cooperative objectives through proven interoperable technologies.

DESIGN

Audience: The audience for the proposed project is two-fold. First, the project offers small-to-medium-sized museums a model through which to collaborate with libraries to improve access to and contextualize specialized research materials. In so doing, the project will enable museums and libraries to increase the reach of their special collections and archives and more effectively meet the needs of diverse communities of learners in the 21st century. Second, the research resource created through the pilot application project, Music of Social Change, will meet the research needs of scholars in a range of fields related to civil rights and society, as well as the needs of lifelong learners interested in music and its relevance to culture, politics, and civic life.

Needs Assessment: The OAI protocol has fostered successful collaborations between libraries, but aside from some initial work in the MetaScholar Initiative there have been no focused efforts to apply this new standard to collaborative efforts between libraries and museums. This initial work took the form of planning meetings and focus groups that have analyzed ways that the OAI protocol can benefit learning communities. A recurrent topic emerging from these discussions is the over-representation of the library perspective and under-representation of museums and museum research collections in national efforts to utilize the OAI protocol. As a result, the Initiative has identified a great need for a project to explicitly investigate and model how the OAI can facilitate collaborations between libraries and museums

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[*] For all references, see Appendix A: Bibliography.

seeking to provide cooperative services to learning communities. The MetaScholar Initiative is uniquely suited to undertake this project, given existing relationships among libraries, museums, and researchers.

Museum Perspectives: Museums must act in multiple roles that libraries most often do not. The demands associated with creating popular public exhibits sometimes compete with more scholarly services that museums wish to provide. As museums come under increasing pressure to remain commercially viable, collaborative alliances and strategies such as the OAI-based model proposed in this project can assist museums in cooperatively working with consortia for the benefit of learning communities, and extending the benefits of work done in one consortia to other groups. A concrete example in this project is the possibility that using the OAI protocol may allow work done for online learning communities in the MetaScholar Initiative to benefit communities served by the national Music Museum Alliance (see below). Some museums have affiliated research groups that act in scholarly contexts, such as the case of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture. For this kind of institution, the OAI protocol may be able to simultaneously benefit both practical research activities that come into play for scholars and inventory considerations that come into play for curatorial staff.

Selection of Topical Focus: The most successful metadata discovery services have targeted the needs of learning communities focused on particular research interests. Thus, the project team identified a practical, coherent, and timely research focus for the collaborative efforts undertaken through this project. The subject domain needed to be sufficiently narrow to target specific collections, yet sufficiently broad that it would be of interest to a reasonably large number of interdisciplinary scholars. By selecting music and musicians associated with social change movements, the project team sought to meet these two requirements.

Subject Domain Research Context: Noted scholars and activists Guy and Candie Carawan refer to the civil rights movement as perhaps "the greatest singing movement this country has experienced." [Carawan, 1990] During the mid-1950s and 1960s, the act of singing fostered, united, and sustained the geographically diverse social movement culture affiliated with the civil rights movement. Recordings of the songs also helped those affiliated with the struggle for freedom to circulate their social and political messages to an audience that extended beyond the movement culture. To date, books and compilation CDs of music have served as the most prominent sources of information concerning the power of music within the civil rights movement. As part of an existing scholarly portal, AmericanSouth.Org, the project will provide a comprehensive on-line vehicle for the dissemination of information concerning these songs, their singers, and their role in the civil rights movement cultures. Within this portal, the project will link archival materials from library and museum databases and web resources from a variety of existing historical and recording-label sites, and then provide these disparate resources with a scholarly context through the development of study guides and articles. The project team expects the resulting portal to become an asset in classrooms, scholarly research, and searches by lifelong learners for information concerning this vital aspect of the freedom struggle. This project will therefore produce not only a model for successful collaboration between libraries and museums, but also a resource of value to learning communities.