Digitization in the Real World
Lessons Learned from Small and Medium-Sized Digitization Projects

Edited by
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Metropolitan New York Library Council
Pratt Institute: A Historical Snapshot of Campus and Area

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Abstract
The chapter discusses the planning and procedures for two digitization grants received from METRO in 2005 and 2006 by the Pratt Institute Libraries. Despite the creation of a timeline, unexpected issues necessitated adjustments. Selection of materials was more labor intensive and time consuming than expected. Our collection consisted of different formats, which required managing significant differences in metadata content and interpretation. OAI-compiancy was problematic with our image management software. Also, we had modified the Dublin Core fields, which created compatibility issues with OAI gateways. In 2006, we planned for potential pitfalls based on our previous experiences, but still encountered delays and problems, such as color management. In 2008 we mounted our images on Flickr and saw a marked increase in use.

Keywords: Archives, Best practices, Bookplate, Color correction, Compiancy, Digitization, Historical images, Image management software, Imaging, Intellectual control, Metadata Template, Negative, Pratt Institute, Preservation, Project management, Selection criteria, Selection guidelines, Special collections.
Introduction

In 2004, when we applied for the METRO grant for digitization, the library at Pratt Institute’s Brooklyn campus had a Visual Resources Center that, since 1997, had been digitizing its collection of over 160,000 slides for teaching and research purposes. We had staff and student workers with training and experience in digitization, as well as dedicated space, equipment, and technical support. Our digitized images were available online, so we had some acquaintance with the issues surrounding online collections.

For us, therefore, it was not so much a question of beginning a digitization initiative as it was beginning a new phase in our already-existing digitization program. Our hardware was no longer state of the art. The evolution of metadata schemas and best practices, such as *Western States Digital Imaging Best Practices* (later revised by the Bibliographic Center for Research as *BCR’s CDP Digital Imaging Best Practices*) (Bibliographic Center for Research [BCR], 2008), meant that our own protocols were inconsistent if not out of date: they worked for us, but they were not truly in step with the most current professional standards. We envisioned a METRO grant as an opportunity to update and tighten our practices, and believed that the resulting increase in efficiency would generate momentum to expand our digitization program in order to better meet the increasing expectations of our users.

Determining the Team and the Project

When we applied for the grant, we began to assemble the team. For project manager our Director of Libraries selected our Visual Resources Curator, who had managed Pratt’s digitization program for over a year and had a background in photography, metadata, and technology. As the Institute’s archivist, I had devoted considerable effort to researching, organizing, and preserving the archives’ large image collection, and was therefore asked to serve as the selector and conservator of the materials to be digitized.

Throughout the course of the project, both the project manager and I took several of the digitization training courses offered by
METRO, including Digital Imaging, Digital Project Infrastructure, Preserving Digital Materials, Metadata for Digital Collections, Introduction to XML, Basic Copyright Issues, and Using Adobe Photoshop for Image Quality Control. These classes provided us with a firm foundation in various aspects of digitization that enabled the project to proceed more efficiently.

For our scanning technician we selected a graduate student from the School of Information and Library Science who possessed considerable knowledge of imaging, metadata, and Web content management issues, and who had prepared, scanned, retouched, and cataloged many images in the Visual Resources Center. We also began to draft a job description for a project cataloger.

In determining the experience and training needs of the project team, we adhered to the guidelines of the North Carolina Exploring Cultural Heritage Online (ECHO) initiative and addressed four principal issues: conservation, digitization/encoding, metadata/cataloging, and technical development/support (NC ECHO, 2007). We also planned to use a graduate student from Pratt’s Communications Design Department to develop the Website for this project. As with our scanning technician, we involved both our School of Information and Library Science and our School of Art and Design in a truly collaborative effort, which gave weight to our assertion that digitization was relevant to the entire Institute, not just the Libraries.

As the image curator, I was faced with the problem of what to select from the archives and Special Collections for digitization, given the embarrassment of riches at the Institute and METRO’s limit of five hundred images per institution. As Janet Gertz (2007) has stated, “In selecting well, institutions of all sizes and types concentrate on the parts of their collections that are best suited to digitization, make the most effective use of the technology, and meet their clients’ needs. . . . Good selection decisions come through carefully assessing the physical nature and content of the original materials, the intellectual property rights connected with them, and the requirements for a technically sound, well-described, and cost-effective product that serves both users’ need for access to the content and the institution’s
need to preserve the materials” (Introduction, paras. 1 and 2). I therefore decided to make an eclectic selection from several collections rather than focusing on one format or theme.

I based my broad criteria on subject matter and quality of image. My goal was to illustrate the breadth and diversity of the collections while emphasizing various facets of the Institute as an academic institution, a presence in the local community, and an important influence in the fields of art, architecture, fashion, design, and education. Our archival image collection existed in a variety of formats, including photographs, slides, and negatives, and focused primarily on such aspects as the architecture and grounds of the campus and the Clinton Hill section of Brooklyn in which it is located; student work in art, architecture, fashion, and design; and campus life and activities. I selected a number of historical photographs of Pratt’s buildings, some of which date from the nineteenth century and are well known for their architectural features.

The campus, a twenty-five-acre oasis in the historic district of Clinton Hill in northern Brooklyn, was also represented, in part because early images of the campus afford views of surrounding Brooklyn streets and include long-demolished buildings and structures. There were also photographs of classes in session and students at work dating from the early decades of Pratt’s history.

These were significant from the standpoint of the history of education. They depicted the state-of-the-art studios and equipment used for classes in such fields as drawing, woodworking, engineering, and physical education. Also important from a socioeconomic standpoint was the presence of women and minorities in many of these photographs, demonstrating the Institute’s progressive outlook in an era when racial and gender discrimination were the norm in the United States. I included images of the founder and his family, as well as some of the mansions they built, as comprising an important part of Brooklyn’s history. Finally, I chose examples of student work, such as architectural models and drawings, designs for clothing and interior decoration, sculpture, prints, and posters, which illustrated the outstanding body of work produced by Pratt students during its
existence. Many of the examples in this category came from negatives dating from the 1950s through 1970s, and all gave evidence of the creativity fostered by the Institute’s faculty.

From Special Collections I selected prints of hand-colored stenciled fashion plates from *La Gazette du Bon Ton*, considered the most influential French fashion magazine of the early twentieth century, as well as representatives of Pratt’s collection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century bookplates. The fashion plates could serve as resources for fashion students and designers, while the bookplates were outstanding examples of period book art and typography.

We were gratified to receive a one-year grant from METRO to digitize this selection. We first created a timeline incorporating all the major activities, which allowed us to track our progress and, at the mid-point, enabled us to make the adjustments necessary to complete it in time (Figure PRAT-1).

Imaging took place on an iMacG5 (20-inch, 1.8 GHz, 1 GB RAM, 250 GB hard drive), an Epson Expression 10000XL scanner, and Adobe Photoshop Creative Suite software, all made possible through the METRO grant. The raw and enhanced TIFF files were saved to Gold Mitsui CD-Rs and a 1.6 TB LaCie external hard drive (the LaCie drive not only allowed secondary storage and backup but at times became a shared drive for the various computers used for this project). The resolution had to be determined by the format: the photographs, bookplates, and fashion plates were scanned at 600 dpi, whereas the negatives were scanned at 1,200 dpi.

Once we received the grant, and while the initial scanning was taking place, the project manager, scanning technician, and I formed a search committee to recruit a digital archive cataloger. This person’s ability to capture the descriptive and technical metadata would be a crucial element in the success of this project, so we insisted that candidates possess experience and knowledge of MARC21, AACR2, Library of Congress Subject Headings, Dublin Core, and emerging descriptive metadata standards.
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**Figure PRAT-1. Schedule for the 2005 Grant.**
We also expected knowledge of authority control in the online environment, as well as experience using bibliographic utilities and assigning metadata to digitized materials for Web-based display and searching. During the interviews, in addition to asking the usual questions, we gave the candidates several images and asked for on-the-spot descriptions; this was an effective means (with considerably varied results) of determining the candidates’ observation powers and the kind of descriptive information they would be likely to provide. The search committee’s diligence was rewarded with a candidate who produced outstanding work.

Descriptive metadata was to follow the Dublin Core elements of title, creator, subject, description, date digital, date original, format, digitization specifications, resource identifier, rights management, contributing institution, publisher, contributor, type, source, language, relation, and coverage. Technical metadata was to include resolution, size in Kilobytes, height and width in pixels, bit depth, and color space. Library of Congress Subject Headings, as well as LC’s Thesaurus for Graphic Materials, were to provide the controlled vocabulary for cataloging content.

Challenges

Scheduling

Despite our careful planning, we encountered a variety of challenges, several of which affected our schedule and required adjustments. Perhaps the greatest problem was maintaining a consistent workflow. All the team members except for the cataloger took on the project in addition to their usual responsibilities, which impeded the conducting of regular meetings and delayed weekly or monthly goals. Because we were spread rather thin at times, it was difficult to maintain good communication within the group. We all recognized how quickly we would lose control if the team were disjointed, so we made special efforts to touch base regularly and keep each other informed through e-mail exchanges and periodic meetings. Thus, when the project director left before the project was completed, it was relatively easy for me to step in and take her place.
Selection and Scanning

Because we did not focus on a specific theme or collection, I needed to employ multiple criteria in my selection process, including artistic quality, historical significance, and research or special-interest potential, to assemble a collection both unique and engaging on various levels. I tried to operate within the parameters set forth in several resources on this issue (Gertz, 2007; Hazen, Horrell & Merrill-Oldham, 1998; Southeastern NY Library Resources Council [SENYLRC], 2004), but even so, freedom of choice made it difficult to adhere to the maximum number of images mandated by METRO without omitting something I thought especially interesting, and in fact I had to pare down the number of selections several times. This was more labor intensive and took up more time than anticipated, and thus a certain amount of haste was required given the time frame. Even so, I was late in delivering the final selection. For future projects, we knew we would have to begin the selection process sooner and allow more time for its completion. Of course, focusing on one theme or collection would also ease the problem.

Another important reason for the delay was the fact that only the negatives had pre-existing unique identification numbers. The bookplates, fashion plates, and most of the photographs had no identifiers at all. We had to devise a system for these at the time of selection. The simple act of numbering all these images, especially for those in fragile condition, was extraordinarily laborious and time consuming, even with the aid of student workers, yet it would have been disastrous not to have done it. Given the time constraints for this project we had no choice but to plow ahead, but, based on this experience, I can certainly endorse the view that, whenever possible, one should avoid digitizing materials lacking a minimal level of intellectual control.

The project’s wide range of materials also made the development of a systemized workflow and management of the digital results difficult. The scanning process required a tremendous amount of patience, especially with the negatives, for which the time needed to correct the images was considerably longer than for the prints and
plates. The negatives, being film, showed dust and scratches much more prominently than the other formats, especially at the high resolutions we were using. Our Epson scanner had no Digital Image Correction and Enhancement (ICE) functionality for filtering, and we chose not to use the dust-removal feature native to the Epson scanner because we feared it was insufficiently robust. That meant depending on the tedious and time-consuming process of editing out dust and scratches by hand via Photoshop’s clone stamp tool. In retrospect, it might have been better for us to use Epson’s dust-removal feature—sophisticated or not—for the sake of saving much-needed time.

The bookplates in particular presented problems regarding accuracy of tone and color reproduction. Following the National Archives and Records Administration’s recommendations in Guidelines for Digitizing Archival Materials for Electronic Access (Puglia, Reed & Rhodes, 2004), we included a Kodak Q-13 gray scale target with each scan, which improved the accuracy and consistency of color and tone reproduction. We also used ICC color profiles, converting the ColorSync Workflow profile (standard for Epson scanners) to the Adobe RGB 1998 workspace for post-processing in Adobe Photoshop. We were not entirely satisfied with the results, and realized that color management software would have been useful for profiling and calibrating our scanners and monitors. In addition, the presence of several large windows in the Visual Resources Center meant that lighting was highly variable and rendered difficult the comparison of the originals against the digitized images to check quality and accuracy for color, brightness, and tone. The process was less consistent and more subjective than we would have preferred, but that was a drawback of being housed in a building constructed in 1896 with windows intended to provide as much natural illumination as possible.

Another obstacle was the condition of many of the items, especially the photographs, some of which dated from the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and suffered from cracks, brittle paper, peeling emulsions, and other damage. They were housed in archival polyethylene or Melinex sleeves for protection, which meant the scanning technician had to remove and replace the images from the
sleeves carefully to avoid inflicting further damage. The technician, after scanning, made attempts in Photoshop to minimize some of the visual imperfections that appeared in the scans because of the condition of the originals. This was a time-consuming process. However, this project was as much about preservation as it was access and outreach. Several images were chosen precisely because they would not last much longer.

One positive result of these problems was the creation of standards for imaging workflow and various file-management issues such as naming conventions and folder hierarchy systems. In one way, the scanning issues we had to confront were beneficial (albeit annoying), because they provided us with a solid foundation of practical experience working with a variety of formats that would allow us in future projects to anticipate potential problems and enable us to construct schedules that would accommodate them. They also gave us a greater understanding of the logistics involved in the deceptively simple and clear-cut process of “digitization,” which increasingly has become, for the uninitiated, a buzzword for quick-and-dirty reproduction and document delivery.

**Metadata**

The nature of our project also contributed challenges for metadata creation. The diverse nature of the items required the cataloger to quickly gain expertise in cataloging bookplates, fashion plates, and historical photographs and negatives. Research performed in one subject area did not usually apply to another; for instance, knowledge of the history of Pratt Institute, necessary for the prints and negatives, had no bearing on the fashion plates and bookplates. As Pratt’s archivist, I was the main source of information for questions about the historical images, but researching the bookplates and fashion plates was a bit more complicated. The cataloger had to consult resources at Columbia University to obtain background information on the bookplates, their creators, and the historical techniques used to create them.

The cataloger had to use a slightly different approach for each type of material. The format differences across collections were a
given, but the interpretation of the creator, description, and subject fields often varied as well. For example, the description field for a fashion plate with printed text in French required a different format and style than that for a photograph of an architectural drawing. In hindsight, it would have been more efficient and cost-effective had we focused on the metadata for one type of material at a time.

As they did with color reproduction, the bookplates proved especially problematic. Many of the artists were identified by only a monogram or other symbol, and a large number were undated, but the cataloger simply lacked the time to research and identify each plate more thoroughly. The techniques used to produce the plates (such as etching or engraving) might also have been determined for many of the plates had there been additional time or cataloging resources, though the cataloger was able to do this for some of the plates. There were issues at the quality-control stage as well. For example, we initially entered the bookplate owners’ names in the format Firstname Lastname. When we realized that this produced idiosyncratic sorting in our image presentation software, however, we changed the order to Lastname, Firstname—a relatively small change in the metadata template that proved time consuming because it had to be implemented in each individual record.

We also had to modify the Dublin Core metadata template in order to provide more effective descriptions of the bookplates’ unique elements. For instance, the person for whom a bookplate was made is as important as the artist who created it, and the motto, when there is one, becomes a major means of identification. We had to accommodate these features by creating the elements Owner and Motto, and we changed the Creator field to Artist because we felt many people might misinterpret Creator to refer to the printer of the physical object rather than the artist who designed the plate. Additional modifications were also made (Figure PRAT-2).
Although many of the grant recipients for METRO’s 2005 initiative used CONTENTdm as their image management and presentation software, Pratt had made a decision, prior to and independent of the grant, to purchase Luna Insight software, which was used by the Getty Museum and other important art institutions. The reasons for this had to do with numerous organizational and storage features deemed necessary for the needs of our faculty and students: unlike some institutions, Pratt’s primary and overarching digitization concerns had to focus on the continuing research and pedagogical needs of art, design, and architecture programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. This decision was not without
consequences when it came to creating access to our METRO collection.

To begin with, implementation of Luna Insight into the browser environment was a slow, difficult process; a significant learning curve was required to resolve issues surrounding Insight’s interface and layout, which was new to everyone. Our greatest difficulty, however, was making the collections OAI-harvestable. Our systems librarian joined us at this point to provide assistance, and he discovered that Luna Insight’s databases were not fully compliant because they were unable to allow selective harvesting based on a specific date stamp—that is, they could harvest repository files that were static but not dynamic. Even achieving this level of compliance was frustrating and time consuming because OAI harvesting was naturally not Luna’s responsibility (in fact, Luna’s support staff told us that Pratt was its first client utilizing OAI harvesting for Insight collections). Therefore, it became our sole responsibility to generate the files, intermediate them with a gateway, and register them with a harvester, although no member of the team had done this before.

With some difficulty we were able to generate static repository files with the Luna Insight software, after which we had the collections registered and intermediated through the Los Alamos National Laboratory’s (LANL) open-source experimental OAI Static Repository Gateway software (Srepod). This was not an easy process because our inexperience with OAI gateway software resulted in a steep learning curve. Once we had gained sufficient mastery of the software, however, we chose to register our collections with OAIster, though here, too, we encountered difficulty, because our attempts were met with persistent error messages. Eventually we had to contact a member of the OAIster team at the University of Michigan, who was able to assure us that our collection had been registered successfully.

What made the OAI harvesting process so challenging was the fact that it comprised three distinct steps and was supported by three independent systems: Luna Insight, Srepod, and OAIster. Luna was unable to help us with Srepod and OAIster, Srepod was unable to help us with OAIster, and OAIster was unable to help us with Srepod, yet
the three steps of the process had to mesh with one another in order to achieve success. Moreover, as open-source systems, Srepod and OAIster understandably could not provide extensive personalized technical support.

We also encountered compatibility issues because, as mentioned above, we modified the Dublin Core template when cataloging the bookplates. During the harvesting process, we discovered that OAI gateways and harvesters require strict compliance of metadata with the simple Dublin Core schema (i.e., the basic fifteen fields). We were able to solve this problem by retaining our specialized, bookplate-specific fields while adding the standard fields we had previously excluded. We thus ended up with two metadata templates—the specialized fields and the standard Dublin Core fields—in the same record, with duplicated values in some of the fields (for example, the values in our specialized Artist field were duplicated exactly in the Dublin Core Creator field). In our Luna Insight presentation, only the specialized fields were displayed; when we harvested for OAI, only the Dublin Core fields were harvested.

Perhaps no other problems encountered during this project were as perplexing and complicated as those surrounding OAI compliancy. Confronting these issues provided us with a greater understanding and appreciation of the complexity of the process, but it also brought home the fact that, without considerable personalized technical support, it was difficult to fulfill an important requirement of the grant initiative. We also understood that it would be unfair to expect any system to be able to provide that level of guidance. It was very much a learning experience, and our systems librarian documented each step of the process, from the generation of the static repository files with the Luna Insight software to the final registration of the collection with OAIster.

2006 and Beyond

As we approached the completion of the 2005 project, our director urged us to apply for another grant in 2006 to maintain our momentum. This time, we focused on only one theme. One advantage
of our previous metadata research was the discovery that our bookplate collection included work by several important American bookplate artists, and we also recognized the general research value of bookplates for librarians, antiquarian booksellers, and genealogists, as well as their beauty, creativity, and technical achievements. Therefore, we decided to digitize the remaining 1,100 plates in our ex libris collection, anticipating that the digital dissemination of the plates would serve not only the Pratt community but also the increasing number of individuals and organizations, both national and international, dedicated to the study of ex libris. When METRO awarded us our second grant, we were delighted with the opportunity to digitize an entire collection—and one, moreover, that had lain hidden in Special Collections since the late 1970s. For almost three decades no one had known about or been able to access these bookplates; now, anyone with Internet access would be able to.

Although several individuals on the 2005 team had left, a few remained and, with me as project manager, formed the nucleus of the 2006 group. Despite the personnel changes, however, this project proceeded more smoothly than the previous one, partly because we applied the lessons learned from the 2005 project and partly because we were dealing with only one collection (for which we had already worked out metadata issues) and therefore did not have to cope with multiple formats and approaches. Despite our allowing more time to import the images and metadata, we once again found it necessary to readjust our timeline because it was not easy to calculate accurately the amount of time necessary to digitize, enhance, and catalog the plates, even though we knew in advance how many there were. Also, we initially thought we could jump start the cataloging by initiating metadata creation before scanning, but we soon were forced to reverse the order, because the cataloger needed to zoom in on many images to determine certain details for the metadata (for instance, whether the plates were etchings or engravings). In addition, some of the scanning problems described for 2005 had not been completely corrected at the time we began the 2006 project, and so it required additional time to resolve them finally. Fortunately, thanks to the cushion we had built
into our original timeline, the schedule modifications did not affect the completion of the project (Figure PRAT-3).

Once our online collections went live, we publicized them throughout the Institute and held an open house to provide instruction and hands-on demonstrations.
We also notified various American and international organizations dedicated to the study of bookplates, such as the International Federation of Ex Libris Societies (FISAE), because we anticipated (correctly) that our collection would attract considerable long-distance interest, and hoped that scholars more knowledgeable than we would contact us with additions and corrections to our metadata. Several sites posted our announcement, and we were especially pleased to hear from the Australian Bookplate Society, which noticed that Australia was not represented in our collection and actually offered us a donation to fill that gap!

In 2008 the Pratt Institute Libraries chose to become a participating institution in ARTstor, which meant, for us, discontinuing Luna Insight. Our art, design, and architecture images would be hosted as a local collection through ARTstor, but that was not an appropriate repository for those from Special Collections and the archives because of their unique and (in the case of the photographs and negatives) proprietary nature. The limitations on our financial resources meant that whatever image management software we selected would have to be open source, but time constraints prevented us from thoroughly examining the variety of available systems, so our Visual Resources Curator suggested we post them on Flickr. This turned out to be an excellent idea, because we very quickly saw a marked increase in visitors, some of whom supplied information that, for our bookplates, allowed us to expand or correct our cataloging, which was precisely what we had been hoping for. The collection logged over 300,000 views in the first nine months on Flickr, and not a single image has been viewed less than nineteen times! Clearly our presence on Flickr allowed individuals to discover us serendipitously in a way not possible when they were required to navigate our Website.

I noticed, too, that staff from the Institute’s administrative branches, such as the Public Relations and Communications Office and the Office of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving, more frequently browsed the collections before making requests for historical images, with the result that they knew exactly what they wanted and were even able to provide us with source and identifier
numbers. This has increased the efficiency of our workflow and document-delivery capability enormously.

The only drawback with Flickr is its inability to support OAI-compliancy. We are hoping to acquire an open-source image management system that will correct this. Meanwhile, we continue to digitize archival images as needed, and have even begun digitizing important historical publications frequently used by researchers, which we are planning to post on the Archives page of the Libraries’ Website. There is no question but that we have experienced a sea change in our digitization efforts as a result of our two grants, and our story vividly illustrates not only the old maxim that success breeds success, but also that long-term impetus can be generated from a single opportunity.

Acknowledgments: The success of our projects was achieved only because of the dedication and expertise of the members of the project teams, whose members included Amanda Schriber, Brian Cross, Lorraine Smith, Vernon Bigman, Stephen Klein, and Michael Nolasco. I am particularly grateful to Lorraine Smith, until recently the Visual Resources Curator at the Pratt Institute Libraries, who was our image cataloger for the 2005 project and supervised the digitization process in 2006 as Acting Visual Resources Curator. She was responsible for coping with many of the technical issues described above and reviewed this chapter to make sure my explanations were accurate.

References


