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Session/Meeting Name: The City Experience- The Fenway- Defying Domains: Collectively Documenting Art Library Resources by Collaboration, Innovation, Cooperation and Transformation
Date, Time: April 26, 2010, 10:30 am – 4 pm

Moderators: Susan Chute
Recorder:

The Fenway Libraries Online (FLO) Image Sharing Initiative

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Fenway Libraries Online (FLO)

Fenway Libraries Online (FLO) is a consortium of ten colleges, universities, and museums located in Boston and Cambridge, MA. These institutions include the Art Institute of Boston at Lesley University, Emmanuel College, Emerson College, Massachusetts College of Art and Design (MassArt), Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, the Museum of Fine Arts, the New England Conservatory, University of Massachusetts--Boston, Wentworth Institute of Technology, and Wheelock College. The FLO libraries share a catalog of over 900,000 books and resources among these members ("Fenway Libraries Online - About FLO," n.d.).

The FLO Image Group: establishing goals

The FLO Image Sharing Group formed late in 2008 with the intent to investigate the feasibility of sharing image resources, expertise, and collections. The group's formation was inspired in-part by a 2007 Educause article titled Finding a New Angle of Repose: sharing Visual Arts Images for Educational Use by Gretchen Wagner, ARTstor's General Counsel (Wagner, 2007). The article encourages institutions to become more proactive in sharing image resources by broadening their interpretation of Fair Use. Founding members of the FLO Image Group included visual resource professionals from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Wentworth Institute, the Art Institute of Boston (AIB), and the Massachusetts College of Art and Design.

An initial environmental scan of each participating FLO institution's imaging tools, resources, user populations, and goals revealed the group's diverse collections and software choices, but also a general interest in streamlining image production and cataloging through a shared collection. In addition, the group looked to Wagner's article to help them grapple with the limitations of sharing, but also the potential protection that a large non-profit organization, such as ARTstor, may be able to provide these smaller schools. The group also considered institutions that were already overcoming copyright limitations and sharing images between campuses. One example of this is the Digital Content Library, a shared
collection between the College of Design and the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota. Another example can be found at Tri-Colleges (Bryn Mawr, Haverford, and Swarthmore) where image collections are shared between campuses via the ARTstor hosting program. In both examples, sharing occurred between institutions that also shared curricula. The FLO institutions share library resources, but very limited curricular resources, making copyright a major concern for the group. The possibility of sharing resources through ARTstor's hosting program was discussed, but realizing the diversity of cataloging and workflow practices between institutions, the FLO Image Group decided to focus its attention on sharing their intellectual resources and streamlining workflow.

Sharing: determining scope and developing buy-in

As an initial step towards plans for future shared image resources, the group decided to first focus on sharing image metadata. Because image cataloging tools/templates within the FLO institutions range from IRIS (Image Resource Information System) to ARTstor hosting to CCO templates in Excel documents, the group's first challenge was to agree on a platform that could be shared. With institutions embedded in long-standing workflows and procedures, this type of decision can be difficult to make across multiple institutions. At the time of this discussion, MassArt was considering a move from Excel to IRIS, which is the cataloging database that AIB had been using since the Fall of 2007. With this common ground, MassArt and AIB were the only two institutions within the FLO Image group that began the discussion of sharing metadata. The group hoped that by sharing metadata, they could create a solid foundation for future image sharing initiatives. For those members who chose not to participate in sharing metadata, the group continued to function as a place to discuss collaboration and share intellectual resources that enhance collection services (e.g., instruction and staff training).

MassArt and AIB Shared Catalog: successes and challenges

Spring 2009 saw the launch of an IRIS cataloging database (hosted and supported by the FLO consortium), which shares MassArt and AIB image metadata. Each institution uses separate logins to access the IRIS database, which restricts privileges to each other's collections. One of the most obvious benefits to sharing is that it lightens the workload for each collection. For example, an image of daVinci's Mona Lisa could be cataloged once by MassArt and then searched and used by AIB at a later date. Sharing metadata also gives catalogers the ability to compare workflow and standards. This often results in streamlining and improving outdated or inefficient cataloging workflows or "habits." Streamlining and improving cataloging practices individually has also shed light on differences between the collaborating institutions' methods. While these cataloging/workflow differences can be stressful and time consuming to resolve, the final results of these conversations typically lead to productive results. A final challenge related to sharing is determining how much information to share between the collections and how much access to provide to each other's data. While allowing members of another institution to access and manipulate your data can be daunting, the early stages of this collaboration have revealed that developing trusts between institutions and sharing more information will result in rich and robust records for the user. As these collections move forward with shared catalogs, they hope to improve the collaboration by increasing access to each other's data. Although the group's initial intent to share image files between campuses has not yet be realized, ideally, sharing a cataloging tool will serve as a model for the FLO Image Group as they continue to discuss opportunities to share images.
References
