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ILS655  Assignment-Digital Library Project Review Paper 01
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**WIRTZ LABOR DIGITAL LIBRARY**

**1.  Project Background**

**Wirtz Digital Library site:**  http://www.dol.gov/oasam/library/digital/main.htm

**Wirtz  Labor Library site:**  http://www.dol.gov/oasam/library/index.htm

**Contact info:**  library@dol.gov

**U.S. Department of Labor site:**  http://www.dol.gov/

About the Wirtz Labor Digital Library

The Wirtz Digital Library is an online extension of the Wirtz Labor Library.  Both are
government run and funded libraries, and part of the U.S. Department of Labor.  The Wirtz
Digital Library contains materials, collections and archives that relate to the history of labor. The
Wirtz Labor Library serves the general public and the Department of Labor.  The Wirtz Digital
Library serves anyone who has access to the Internet.

The Wirtz Labor (physical) Library is a special library dedicated to information on the
labor movement and labor issues.  In an article describing the history of the library and the
development and launch of the Wirtz Digital Library, Jean Bowers, then Library Director, shares
her thoughts and experiences about taking on a digitization project of this size.  She begins by
noting the Department of Labor's mission: "To foster, promote and develop the welfare of the
working people, to improve their working conditions, and to advance their opportunities for

profitable employment." The Wirtz Labor Library, as part of its mission, also supports this long-standing belief in labor and laborers, and has one of the most comprehensive collections on this specialized topic. (Bowers, 2008)

The Wirtz Digital Library's website outlines the library's purpose as being to "provide education and research materials relating to the history of labor to users with access to the World Wide Web." Its' goal being to make materials accessible to any library users with Web access.

The Wirtz (physical) Labor Library holds about 140,000 items and in 2008 served an average of 500 weekly visiting library patrons. While the Wirtz Library is part of the DOL and exists to support that agency, it also supports students, research and anyone in the general public looking for information specific to labor-related information.

The Wirtz Digital Library in that same year served about 2,000 users each week. A huge initial challenge in starting the library was considering technology needs on a small budget and deciding on staff positions. To create the digital library she wanted, she moved away from "traditional librarians" and sought people with not only traditional library skills, but also those with technological skills and an ability to "think outside the box." Her initial staff included "a digital imaging technician, a systems technician, a cataloger, a reference library and a project manager."

In January 2008, the Wirtz Digital Library opened to the virtual public. At the time, the collection included public materials that did not have copyright protections and digital special collections and historic materials. Its opening made these materials available to a public that would not have had access to them before. Digitizing certain items in the collection also allowed old and damaged items to be preserved and protected. (Bowers, 2008)

In the library community, the Wirtz Labor Library has been recognized and given distinction.  In 2009, the library received a John Sessions Memorial Award given by the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA), a division of ALA that works within reference, specialized reference, collection development, readers advisory and resource sharing.  In part, RUSA praised the library for its dedication to the labor movement, for preserving special collections, and especially for the library's commitment to providing access to more users through their digital collection.  (ALA, 2009)

## 2. Organization of Resources

Collections at the Wirtz Digital Library include U.S. Department of Labor publications, trade union and labor history materials, labor leaders' biographies, statistical abstracts and other materials related to labor. In addition to gaining access to the digital archive, users can easily navigate through the Department of Labor site to access information, resources and other research materials via a menu bar.  Options include an online catalog, the Department of Labor Web Archive, Journal Holdings, a Law Library, Electronic Bibliographies and Special Collections held by the Wirtz Labor Library.

## 3. Service Features

With Internet access, anyone can benefit from the materials and information contained in the Wirtz Digital Library.  The library is free to all users.  Users have the option of searching the digital archive via two options: SEARCH or BROWSE.

The BROWSE function opens to a screen of folders where subjects are organized in alphabetical order. The screen shows for example folders named "Economic Systems, Events, Feder Security Agency (FSA), Industry, International Labor, Statistics and more. Within each folder, subjects are broken down into more specific subtopics, for instance, "International Labor" opens to a folder showing three subcategories—"Countries, Organizations, Unions." The subcategories open to more folders. "Countries" opens to a full list of countries. Within this category, I selected "Honduras" and found a document providing foreign labor information on Honduras from 1959.

BROWSE function page:

http://libraryimages.dol.gov/awweb/main.jsp?nn=All%20Documents&nt=browse3&nr=yes

Honduras Labor Information accessed using the BROWSE function:

http://libraryimages.dol.gov/awweb/main.jsp?flag=browse&smd=2&awdid=1

Using the BROWSE function allows users to easily scan the information in the collection, similar to browsing through the stack of a physical collection in a library. Users can get a good general sense of what kinds of materials the digital collection encompasses and can see examples of the terminology used to organize the data.

The SEARCH function page: http://libraryimages.dol.gov/awweb/main.jsp

The SEARCH function allows users to use keywords to search through the library's digital collection too see if what they need is available. There are two levels of search, basic and advanced. A user wanting to only search for one basic term can plug a term into a small box on the left side of the screen. Users needing a more advanced level of search can choose "advanced

search" which allows for narrowing down the keyword into specific fields such as title, publication date, publisher and other distinct facts.

Using the SEARCH function by entering "Honduras," did not produce the document obtained document by using the BROWSE feature.  Users might find that a combination of both access tools is the best approach depending on what kind of specific documents they may need and how much information users have on a topic to perform a search.

Users can also access the Wirtz Labor Library Online Catalog via the website.  Although all the materials contained in the physical collection can not possibly be available online, this catalog allows users to scan the collection to see if any useful materials exist.

Wirtz Labor Library Online Catalog: http://www.dol.gov/oasam/library/catalog.htm

## 4. Technologies

Basic technological requirements for using the Wirtz Digital Library is access to the Internet.  To access and view materials, users must have access to a computer with Internet capabilities.  To view or print materials, users would also need Adobe Acrobat Reader.

The U.S. Department of Labor also uses several plug-ins and Microsoft software products.  A detailed list with links is provided off the main page of the digital library.

http://www.dol.gov/dol/aboutdol/plug-ins.htm

## 5. Comments

As a user of many varied online reference sources, I was impressed with the Wirtz Labor Digital Library. Materials were easy to find and access. The site was easy to navigate using clear, plain language and providing easy-to-understand and easy-to-find instructions for users. The technology required to access the digital library was minimal. The library's website even provided information on how users might obtain the required Adobe software free of charge. The collection encompassed a wide range materials related to one special topic: labor and the labor movement.

Digital library initiatives can be especially beneficial to special libraries which often house historically important information or specialized materials on one specialized topic. Digitizing a library's collection materials allows for access and also allows library to preserve materials that might otherwise be harmed. (Balas,2002) The Wirtz Labor Library is able to reach many more users with its digital holdings than with its physical library because a digital library does not have geographical constraints. Information can be accessed from where ever, whenever it is needed, by whomever wants it from anywhere in the world.

I believe in the future that more special libraries will move toward digitizing special collections in the way the Wirtz Labor Library has been able to. Future special digital libraries will be able to provide access to specific topics and documents that might otherwise be filed away in a paper-based physical collection.

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