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ILS655 Assignment-Digital Library Project Review Paper 01 (Villanova University Digital Library)
February 6, 2011

One: Project Background

I choose to look at the Digital Library at Villanova University.   The digital library at

Villanova University (http://digital.library.villanova.edu/) was funded by a grant from the

National Science Foundation, initially awarded in September 15, 2008, with further

funding in August 25, 2009. Total grant monies awarded to date are $1,172,222. The

grant will expire August 31, 2011 (Estimated).

This continuing grant is overseen by Program Manager, Herbert H. Richtol, of the

National Science Foundation's Division of Undergraduate Education. Investigators

under this NSF grant are Lillian Cassel   (Principal Investigator) and Christine

Stephenson (Co-Principal Investigator) both of Villanova University, Villanova, PA.

According to the website, Villanova University's Digital Library initiative assembles,

presents, and preserves digital collections that support the teaching and research of the

campus and the global community of scholars. Cassel and Christine at the Villanova

library works with faculty, staff and regional partners to select and develop resources

that enhance access for a wide range of disciplines and audiences

Two: Organizations of resources.

The Digital Library at Villanova University opens every time to the Catholica Collection.

See picture 1. Villanova is a Catholic university and the Catholica collection is the

crown jewel of their digital collection.   The collection includes many highly focused

items such as the History of the Catholic Church in Paterson, N.J., and a sermon preached in the Church of St. Augustine, in Philadelphia, on the 31st of May, 1829.   For those researching specific Catholic historical facts, the collection is rich with artifacts. What I find interesting is that the original artifacts have been scanned and are stored in the database. So the researcher can see the original papers, illustrations and in some cases later notations on the original pieces.

All entries in this digital library are scanned books.   Virtually all of the books are somehow related to Catholicism or the lives of prominent people who were Catholic. No items were "born digital"; they are all old books, manuscripts and art works related to the Catholic faith.

There are currently a total of 223 collections in the library and a total of 9130 records.
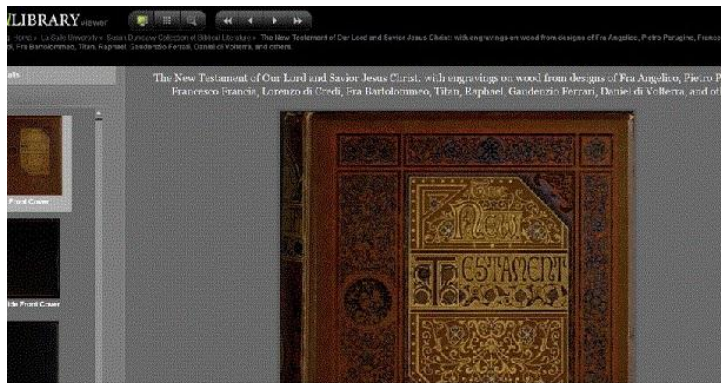
Picture 1. Catholica Collection Icon marks the front door of the Villanova Digital Library.

Three: Service Features,

Navigating the database takes a little while to get used to. Then it becomes quite intuitive.   Once a user identifies a collection and an artifact, navigating within the book is very easy. There are familiar arrow and double arrow buttons that we know from our iPods and DVD players, and they work the same way. In picture 2. Below, note the familiar navigation arrows.

Picture 2. Note the easy to use navigation buttons across the top.
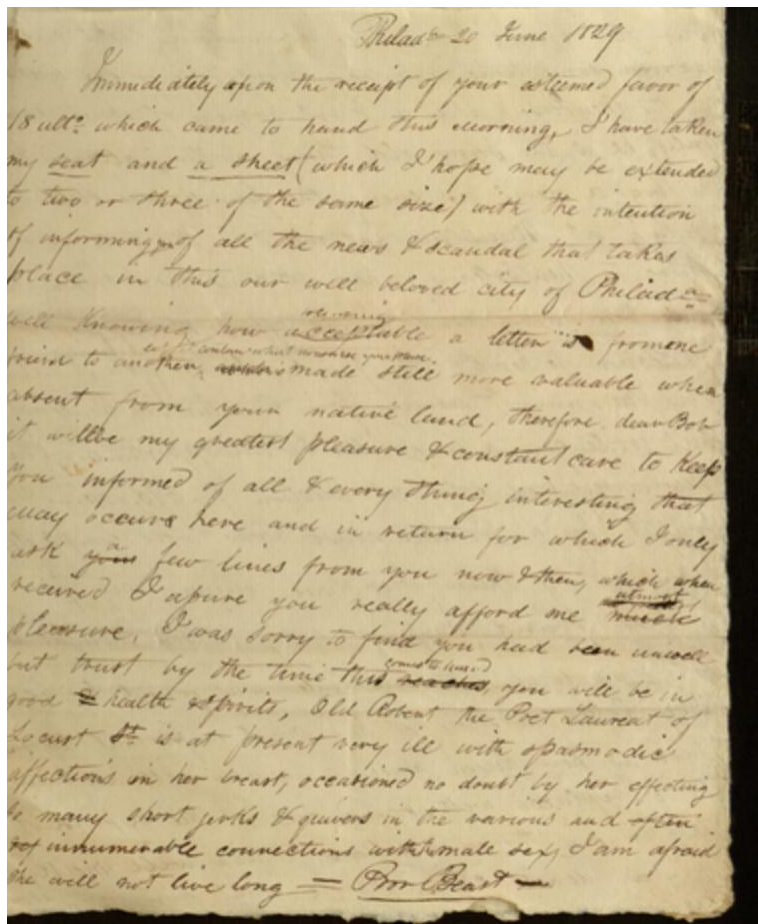

Using the search engine for this digital library produced some interesting results.   Not all documents are available to the public. For example a report entitled "Sex Differences in Reported Health" is restricted to users accessing the digital database from on Villanova University campus.   However many amazing artifacts are available to viewers anywhere in the world. For example a hand written letter form Barry Hayes, written in 1829, is easily accessed.   See picture 3 and visit the following link to the sourced document.

http://digital.library.villanova.edu/files/IndependenceSeaportMuseum/BarryHayes/SeriesXIPatrickBarryHayes/00008/00000.jpg

What would have been an ordeal to gain access to archival material like this is readily available at the Villanova Digital Library.

Picture 3. Instant access to a letter almost 200 years old.

Three types of viewing are supported; thumbnail, normal and zoom modes are all easily used. This allows a user to look at several pages of a work at a time, or one particular page and then to zoom in and look at small portions of a page in very high resolution.

Digital Library projects that seem impossible to complete alone can often be accomplished with the help of a partner. At Villanova, they work to establish and utilize best practices for digitization and resource description, and actively work with individual

and institutional partners to digitize cultural heritage materials using these best practices. Current partnerships include: American Catholic Historical Society, Independence Seaport Museum and La Salle University.

Four: Technologies

The Digital software is built upon a native XML Database known as eXist that offers a data warehouse of the XML content. Following the Library of Congress standard XML schema called METS, the system is able to record all of the meta data as well as the original and digital provenance in one single file that can be shared through many formats. This seems to be a good approach; but I am new to all of this too. The collections can be viewed, according to the website, through formats such as RSS, OAI and RDF. These formats allow more avenues to share content.

The XML platform us used to create an environment called Ensemble. Ensemble creates a distributed portal providing access to the broad range of existing educational resources while preserving the collections and their associated curation processes. The Villanova Digital Library claims that Ensemble encourages contribution, use, reuse, review and evaluation of educational materials at multiple levels of granularity.

Five: Comments, suggestions

While this has been my first excursion into a digital library like this one, I have to say that I was very impressed. The National Science Foundation was wise to fund such an effort and it appears to be producing access to some very important and valuable collections.

The user interface is easy enough to master and becomes intuitive after working with it a while. The three types of viewing -- thumbnail, normal and zoom are all easy to use. There are no impediments to copying images and storing them on your own system.

What I found the most interesting and fun about using the Villanova Digital Library is the contrast of using a modern "high tech" system to look at ancient illuminated manuscripts and priceless old religious artifacts. The mix of using the new computer system and seeing ancient texts was a new experience that I believe will inspire students and scholars to study these materials.

References:

M. Goncalves, B. Moreira, E. Fox and L. Watson, (2004) "What is a Good Digital Library?" – A Quality Model for Digital Libraries, Department of Computer Science, Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil
http://what.csc.villanova.edu/~cassel/9010DL/F07/qualityIPMWversion2.pdf

NSF web site about the Digital Libraries and the grant to Villanova University (2008)

http://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/afSearch.do?SearchType=afSearch&page=4&QueryText=&PIFirstName=&PILastName=&PIInstitution=villanova&PIState=&PIZip=&PICountry=&ProgOrganization=&ProgOfficer=&ProgEleCode=&BooleanElement=false&ProgRefCode=&BooleanRef=false&ProgProgram=&ProgFoaCode=&OriginalAwardDateOperator=&OriginalAwardDateFrom=&OriginalAwardDateTo=&StartDateOperator=&StartDateFrom=&StartDateTo=&ExpDateOperator=&ExpDateFrom=&ExpDateTo=&AwardNumberOperator=&AwardNumberFrom=&AwardNumberTo=&AwardAmount=&AwardInstrument=&Restriction=2&Search=Search#results

Villanova University Digital Library,   http://digital.library.villanova.edu/