

The same but different: Collaborating on user interface expectations for a campus art museum, library, and archives

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Digital Collections Librarian
University of Notre Dame

Abigail Shelton
Outreach Specialist
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Abby

Hi everyone! Thanks for attending our presentation. I'm Abby Shelton on the right and up until last week I was an Outreach Specialist at the Snite Museum of Art at the University of Dame. I'll be presenting with my colleague Mikala Narlock, whose photograph is on the left side of the screen, the Digital Collections Librarian in the Hesburgh Libraries at ND.



The same but different:

Collaborating on UI expectations for a campus art museum, library, and archives

Mikala Narlock & Abby Shelton
Designing 4 Digital Conference
February 22, 2021

Abby

Today we're going to be talking about a collaborative digital collections platform that the university has been developing over the past 2.5 years for digitized materials from the campus library and art museum. We want to talk about some of the user engagement we did for this project, the user interface compromises we made, and the ways we navigated the differing expectations from our institutional partners.



Overview

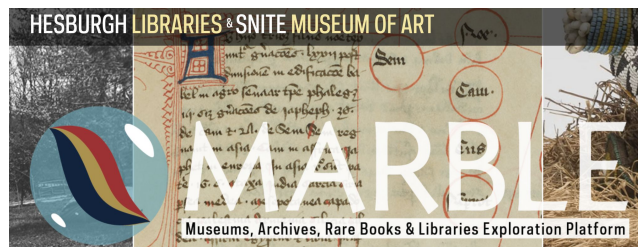
- Context of project
- Partnering institutions
- Infrastructure of collaboration
- UX activities
- UI compromises
- Q&A

Abby

So in our roughly 25 minute presentation we'll cover the context of the project, the particular needs of our partnering institutions, how we structured our collaboration and user experience activities, and finally the user interface decisions we made as a result of our internal and external outreach.

MARBLE Project

- Unified digital collections space for digitized cultural heritage materials from Hesburgh Libraries and the Snite Museum of Art
- 3-year grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation



Abby

The Marble project is a three year grant-funded initiative supported by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to build a unified digital collections access space for materials from the art museum and library. We are 2.5 years into the grant and getting ready to launch a public beta version of the site in April 2021 with a final launch in the late summer of 2021, in advance of the start of the fall semester. The digital collections ecosystem that we've developed is based on a harvest model where metadata and images are harvested from existing source systems-like ArchivesSpace, Aleph, EmbARK, file storage-, undergo several common transformations-for instance the data into JSON files and the images into IIIF-compliant manifests-and then are displayed together in a unified front end and search index. Following a university-wide mandate, we have developed this infrastructure in AWS and this has provided our developers with a great opportunity to build their skills creating in this environment.

The basic idea behind this project was that cultural heritage organizations should collaborate where they can because of they steward similar types of collections-and often community members use these collections together- and the ways they can help one another overcome common challenges. But among those common causes lie some differences that we had to settle in the process of managing this project. To give you a sense for this-we're now going to briefly talk about the campus partners that participated in Marble.

Snite Museum of Art

Snite Museum

So now I'm going briefly talk about one of the campus partners, where I used to work-the Snite Museum of Art.



Snite Museum of Art

- 29,000 objects
- Strengths: 19th century French art, photography, Meso-American collection, prints and drawings
- Metadata: EmbARK
- Images: Google Drive

Snite Museum

The Snite is a mid-sized academic art museum with a broad and encyclopedic collection. We have no FTE staff dedicated to technology or digital work so collaborating with the library was a way for the Museum to get its collection online without having to pay one of its vendors. We use EmbARK, which is a fairly antiquated collections management system, to keep our metadata and we store (cue gasp) our access image files in Google Drive.

The chief needs for the museum are to get our collections online since there's currently no way for our users to know what we have. But-there are some pretty big caveats that come along with this desire to put more of the collection online. One is that many at the Museum-especially collections Curators-feel very strongly about the accuracy and particularity of collections data. So we had to build in a pretty intense workflow whereby museum information had to be reviewed at several levels before heading out to the web. And in terms of the site design, our Museum colleagues came to the table with pretty strong design sensibilities that were especially informed by other Museum websites (ie. the Met, AIC, etc) as well as the way that Museums design exhibitions. Meaning our colleagues preferred lots of white space, modern font treatments, the prioritization of "tombstone" metadata on individual pages.

Hesburgh Libraries- Rare Books & Special Collections (RBSC) And University Archives

Mikala



Hesburgh Libraries

- University records
- Special manuscript collections
- Rare and unique volumes
- Collection strengths
 - Catholicism, Italian and Irish culture, Sports History
- Descriptive information stored in:
 - ArchivesSpace
 - Aleph (ILS)
 - Databases (local and online)
- Images stored in local network-attached storage

Mikala--

In Hesburgh Libraries, we have numerous custodial departments; for the purposes of Marble, the two identified in the grant are the Rare Books and Special Collections Department and the University archives. contains a wide variety of materials: with more than 132,000 volumes ranging from mini-books to massive tomes, and more than 6,000 linear feet of ephemera, archival collections, and other materials. RBSC supports patron engagement through instruction sessions, class visits, physical exhibits, and digital projects, including a blog. Have been actively digitizing since the late 1990s (some of HL's earliest digital sites and databases are from RBSC).

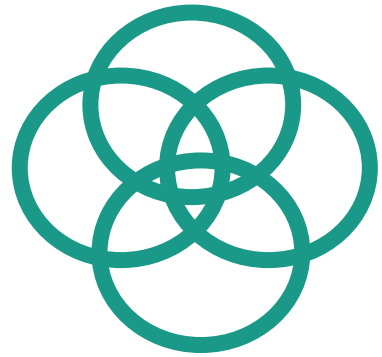
Digitization has happened on a mostly ad hoc basis, as digital exhibits, sites, and collections were made accessible based on whatever technology was accessible at the time: legacy html sites; FMP databases; home-grown digital exhibit; home-grown IR; Internet archive, hathi trust, dpla-- all were options. One of RBSC's biggest need was having one place to put things where they could be discoverable alongside others.

The Road to Compromise and Collaboration

Mikala

Infrastructure for collaboration

- Crossover teams
- User experience testing
- Communication schedule



Mikala

In order to set the project up for success, we established several different teams with overlapping participation. We had a content selection team, helping to identify items with the most overlap between collection holdings; a workflow team to articulate the paths for loading content into the Marble site, including prepending the workflow for digitization efforts; a metadata team to lead efforts in ensuring the nuances of each custodial departments' metadata would not appear jarring to the user (cross-institutional discovery) This was complemented by our phenomenal technical team, tasked with developing the site. There were many areas of crossover between these teams: tech representatives served on all but the content team, metadata members were also on the workflow team, and the two product owners often attended meetings to keep a pulse on the team's progress, and were able to provide input on user needs expectations when needed.

User experience testing-- made sure to recruit from Snite students, library students, and reach as many different users as possible (which abby will talk about in more detail)

Communication schedule-- open forums, lots of listening sessions, lots of presentations to specific units; emails constantly;



Community engagement

- Discovery conversations
- Traditional user testing sessions
- Flash UX
- Group feedback sessions
- Remote user testing sessions
- Virtual testing module (using LibWizard)
- Quick, targeted outreach

Abby-

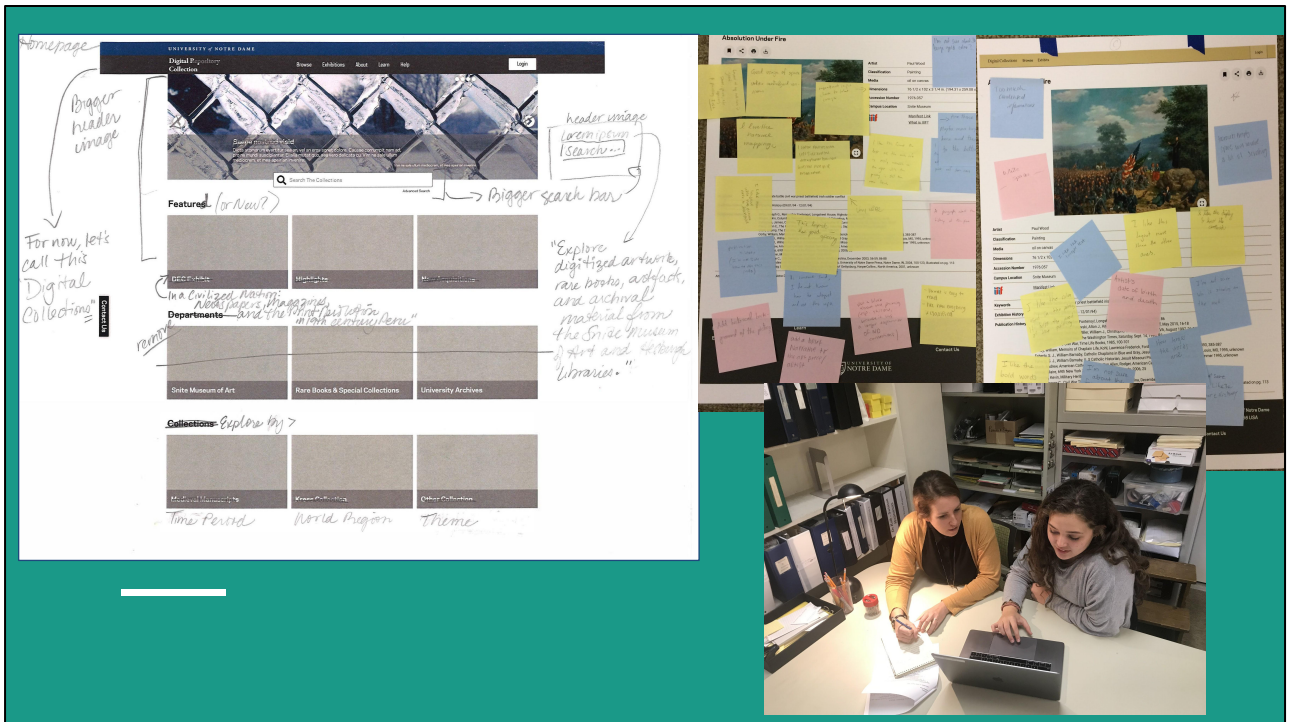
Although we were working under a grant and institutional mandate, our starting premise was “what does our community need?” The focus first was on functionality and then as we started to build, we “pivoted” or evolved to work out how the design of the site would meet those functional needs. And this was really helpful for bringing the teams together-though they were from different departments, everyone could get behind demonstrated user needs.

The flashy bits of our community engagement looked like offering donuts (pre Covid) to students in the library lobby in exchange for their observations on the site or presenting to student or faculty groups on campus. The majority of our community engagement has looked like sitting in faculty offices, staff cubicles, campus coffee shops with graduate students and listening to what they have to say about using collections online.

In the first year of the project, the PO (that’s me) sat down with around 40 faculty members from a variety of campus departments, and a similar number of students and staff about what they want or need from digitized collections.

And to some extent, their answers weren’t all that surprising. The major request from faculty was finding images to include in lecture notes and PPTs. The majority request

from students was finding materials for class assignments-either to include images in a presentation, paper, or other assignment, or finding images from things they'd seen during a class visit and were being asked to engage in a deeper investigation of for a project.

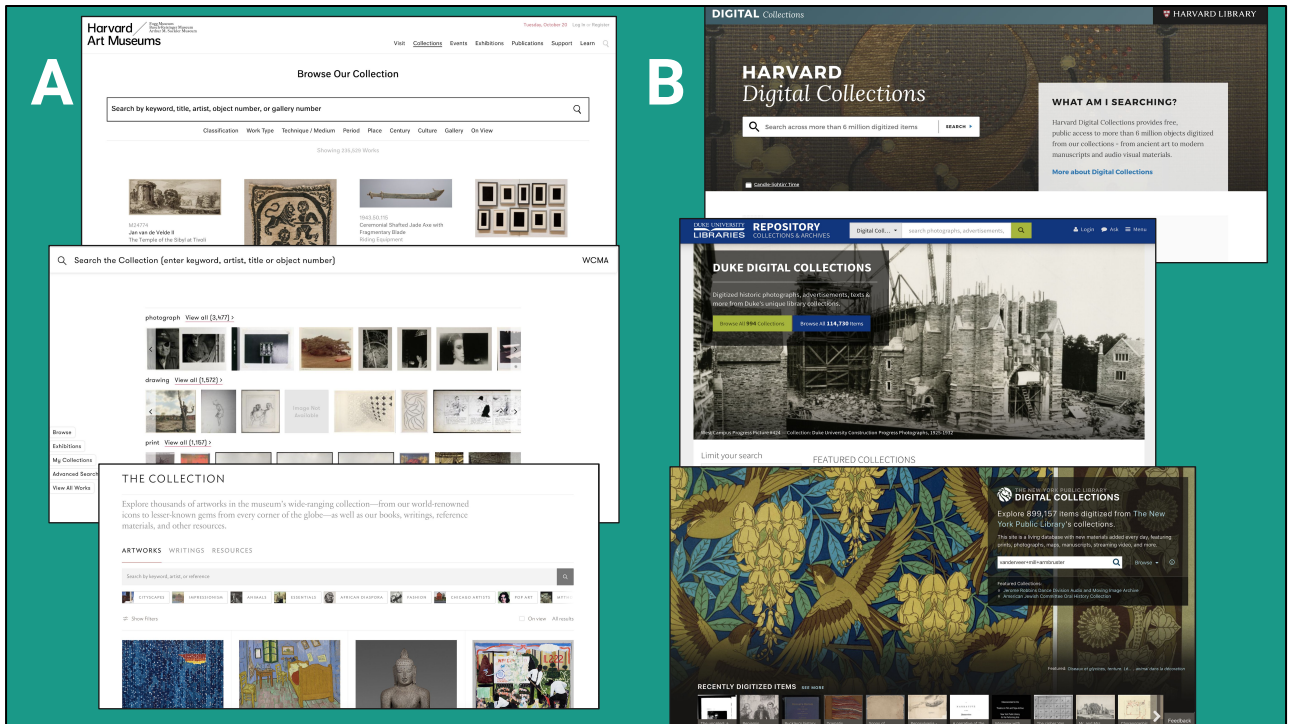


Abby-

So we took the information we'd gleaned from those initial discovery conversations and we went through a series of not unfamiliar steps:

Began prototyping and getting feedback as early as the mockups stage, built an Alpha and went through several rounds of testing, and built towards a Beta over the last year. We've gone through a testing cycle each semester-sometimes multiple times with different groups-ie. library and museum colleagues in one, students/faculty in another.

We pivoted to completely online testing in April 2020 and have completed two semester of virtual testing since the pandemic began. We used virtual testing sessions-both over Zoom and using LibWizard (a tutorial builder) with both students and our Library and Museum colleagues.



Abby-

Once we started building the site, we began to run into some very different expectations for UI design, and to some extent site functionality, between our museum and library partners. On this slide you'll see an example of what I mean.

You might notice that the user interfaces on the left side or column A use a lot of white space around objects that highlight the images in their entirety. You might not notice this immediately but the majority of the UI examples on the left allow the user to directly access the collection, unmediated by extra clicks. So when a user enters a search term into the search box, the results will re-arrange below to meet the entered terms. In effect, the entire collection is shown on the homepage.

On the right side or column B, you'll notice that large item close-ups are used to frame the search bar and important header functions and that there is less white space visible. You probably can't see this in the slide, but on these homepages, below the general search function, there are curated and suggested ways for the viewer to access the collection. This looks like "recently added items," and "browse categories," and "featured collections."

What I haven't told you yet is that on the left are a grouping of representative museum UIs and on the right are a representative grouping of library UIs for digital collections.

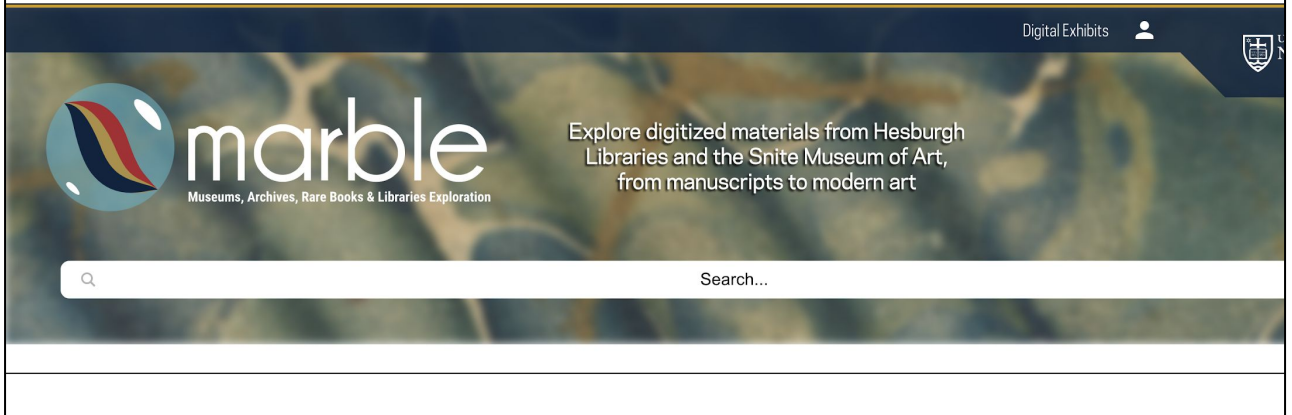
Design preferences vs. usability challenges

Now while some libraries and museums diverge from these design conventions, the point I want to make is there are slightly different preferences and expectations when it comes to library and museum professionals for what makes a good online collections experience-both in terms of visual design and functionality. One of the things we had to untangle in the process of designing this site was navigating design preferences vs. usability challenges. I think the visual experience of the website was really important to many of our colleagues for several reasons:

1. Much of the materials that are in the site or will be are really visually interesting (paintings, prints, posters, illuminated manuscripts, maps etc) and I think our colleagues wanted to make sure that the visual quality of those images stood out.
2. Working with the art museum meant that we were working with a large group of people who are trained in visual design and think a lot about that field of study/what looks “right” to them. So this was definitely a challenge that we had to mediate in our work on this project and we hope we struck the right balance between addressing design conventions/expectations and resolving usability challenges.

Now sometimes the lines blur somewhat on what is a design preference versus something that actually impedes the user experience of site but our frequent question to our colleagues was often: does X actually hinder your ability to do Y?

Compromise



Mikala-

What we've come to then, and we're still tweaking and improving things as we go, is hopefully a useful compromise between serving the needs of our faculty, students, staff while at the same time responding to the needs and expectations of library and museum colleagues.

We'll discuss the home page and object pages as sites of collaboration and compromise; don't have time to discuss other pages more details, including portfolio pages, search results pages.

So this is the site of our first compromise-- the home page! As you can see from this screen shot, our header image is, indeed, a closeup of a library item, with a prominent search bar. This falls more in line with other library digital collections sites.

Browse By



Date



Work Type

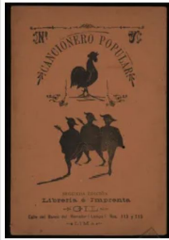


Campus Location



All Items

Recent Additions



Cancionero popular.
19--?



Nova Virginiae tabula.
Ogilby, John
1671



I am telling you : on June 28th I expect you to enlist in the army of war savers to back up my army of fighters
Flagg, James Montgomery, artist

FEEDBACK

Mikala

But, if you scroll down the home page just a bit, you see this! The first thing you probably notice is the white space-- as with many art museums, this white space gives the site a modern look and feel, and allows users to see objects in their entirety.

This also allows users to jump right into holdings with unmediated access to recent additions to the site-- users can click on any of these items and be taken right to the item level pages Abby will discuss in more detail momentarily.

On this page, we also provide mediated access by suggestion browse by categories near the top of the screen. Users are invited to jump into browse categories like date, format, and campus location. One other thing we are experimenting with that I unfortunately can't share a sample of at the moment, is landing pages. These pages, which are not necessary collection level pages, are envisioned to highlight formats, themes, and collections by providing some explanatory or curatorial text without being as mediated as say a digital exhibit. This work is stemming in part from a goal to increase Search engine optimization, to correctly direct users who might enter the site through google, but also user expectations: they want the option to both jump into items via unmediated access as well as read a little bit about the items. This is also something that we think will resonate with museum colleagues, who have strong interests in educational experience for users as well as the traditional gallery and exhibition labels that walk users through content. We're really excited by the opportunities of this feature, so we hope to share more about it in the coming months.

But for now, I'll turn it over to Abby to discuss collection and item pages in more detail.

Irish Broadside Ballads

Collection consists of 100 broadsides, most measuring 10 x 11.5 cm. Broadside covers printed on both sides and is a type of broadside ballad. Some are of varying, often to several pages. Most of the broadsides were printed in Dublin by P. Sheridan, probably between 1800 and 1876.

Date
1700-1800

General/Physical Characteristics
Music/Materials

Dimensions
2.7 cm x 11.5 cm

Language
English

Identifier
001.001

Campus Location
Rare Books & Special Collections, Houghton Library, University of Notre Dame



Condition/Ownership Access
There are no access restrictions on this collection.

Condition/Ownership Use
Copyright notice for collection materials in public domain. Reproduction of materials protected by U.S. Copyright Law Title 17, U.S.C. is hereby authorized. No use requires the written permission of the copyright owner. Works not in the public domain cannot be commercially reproduced without permission of the copyright owner. Responsibility for any use rests exclusively with the user.

Subject
Broadside Ballads

Use to Find Out
[View this collection in the digital archive](#)

Contact Us
Our collection information is a work in progress and may be updated as new research findings emerge. If you have a contact or any other contact, please contact Rare Books & Special Collections, Houghton Library, University of Notre Dame. [Contact Us](#)

Cup and Saucer

Creator
[Meissen Porcelain Manufactory \(German, active 1710 - present\)](#)
[Style of Johann \(Johann\) Stiller \(German, 1701 - 1749\)](#)

Date
after 1731

Classification
[Ceramics](#)

Medium
hard-paste porcelain

Dimensions
1.78 x 4.58 x 4.58 in. (4.78 x 11.75 x 10.48 cm)

Credit Line
Marten Family Fund

Related Location
Europe, Prussia



Accession Number
1995.033.003

Campus Location
Smith Museum of Art

Access
Galleries, Virginia A. Marten Gallery of 18th-Century Art

Copyright Status
Public domain

Subject
[Ceramics](#)

Abby

As we began to design our object pages-we came up against a few challenges presented by the different expectations of each stewarding department. For instance-the museum and library steward objects that have different relationships to one another-the library needed a user interface to for archival collections where objects are presented together on one page and in context of a collection.

Whereas the art museum-needed parts/whole connections where the parts of an object (like the tea cup and saucer) which represent two different records are connected but not described as a collection and connected in a more horizontal fashion (you could get to the parts and whole without having to go back to a collection level page).

Untitled from Jamaica Botanical

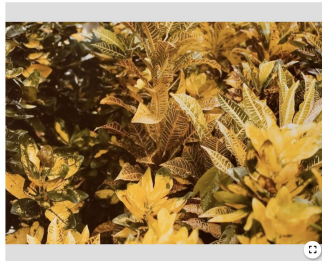
William Eggleston (American, b. 1939)

1978

Smith Museum of Art

When Eggleston visited Jamaica in 1978, he was compelled by the fauna of the place. This is a photograph from his Jamaica Botanical series, an edited portfolio of 20 chromogenic prints, produced and published by the artist. Apart from one contextual image of a parrot, the photographs present tropical vegetation from varied distance and perspectives, as if seen on a walk through a garden. Individually the images are like casual snapshots, but together they convey the environment and the interrelationship of elements. Most of them are similar in their diagonal compositions. Eggleston would seem to have taken this photograph standing over a croton plant, aiming his camera down; another image in the series represents the vivid brush from the side, before a deep landscape. Here, passages of color and tone plot strong diagonal forms from upper left to lower right. Eggleston focused on the middle ground, so that the nearest projecting leaves and the background foliage blur slightly. The colored edges of the croton leaves, and the patterns of yellow and red around their central veins, delineate a dynamic, abstract design of line and hue. The effect is like an agitated pot of colored spaghetti, swirling as it boils. Its visual impact is similar to gestural painting, with calligraphic lines and scumbled passages. Color is a key, integral component of the design.

from *Action, A History of Photography at the University of Notre Dame: Twentieth-Century Picture Dams*, 2018

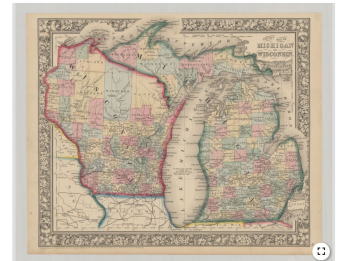


County map of Michigan and Wisconsin

Gamble, W. H. (William H.)

1864 or 1865

Rare Books & Special Collections, Hesburgh Libraries, University of Notre Dame



Abby

We also found that we needed to balance the different metadata available for each of the partners with the needs of our users.

For instance-we know that most of our students will come to this site through Google or another search index rather than necessarily searching within in the site itself. In order to better accomplish this, we've included as we can descriptive text on our items to help Google make sense of the site for more casual users. But in doing so, we needed to balance the metadata and images on the page to prioritize what our users really cared about to help them make quick decisions about the relevance of a particular item with metadata that might serve a more advanced purpose. So we took inspiration from exhibition labels from the museum and moved the core metadata (title, creator, date, date, and campus location) up top w/accompanying description and moved the rest of the metadata to the mid-section of the page.

Creator	Flagg, James Montgomery, artist	Campus Location Rare Books & Special Collections, Hesburgh Libraries, University of Notre Dame
Collection	Rosemarie and Leighton Longhi Poster Collection	
Date	between 1917 and 1918	
Publisher	American Lithographic Co., New York (N.Y.)	
Material Type	Two-dimensional nonprojected graphic	
Genre/Physical Characteristic	1 poster	
Dimensions	91 x 65 cm	
Language	English	
Copyright Status	No Copyright - United States	
Immediate Source of Acquisition	Gifted by Rosemarie and Leighton Longhi in 2018 in honor of Leighton's father Edward J. Longhi, ND '39, Hearst All-American football player (1938) and College All-Star (1939)	
Subject	World War, 1914-1918 -- Economic aspects -- United States World War, 1914-1918 -- Finance -- United States Uncle Sam (Symbolic character) Savings stamps	

Abby

As I mentioned we moved the bulk of our metadata down the page to the mid-section. This includes things like keywords, copyright information, and physical information about the object. We anticipate that the core metadata at the top of the page would allow all users—novice and expert—to quickly assess whether the object on the page was relevant to their search queries or interests. We know that our more advanced users will invest more time in exploring these pages and would therefore be more likely to scroll deeper to find what they're looking for in the mid-section of the page.

In responding to our users' desire to browse the site internally once they landed on a page, we hyperlinked metadata when we could as you see in the teal color on this slide. This also allowed us to avoid creating dead-end pages that offered users no further paths further into the site.

Related Items

46 results found in 31ms

Relevance ▼



Remember me? I was at Bataan : buy war bonds

Brook, Alexander, lithographer
1943.

Part of: Rosemarie and Leighton Longhi Poster



Fight or buy bonds : third liberty loan

Christy, Howard Chandler, artist
1917.

Part of: Rosemarie and Leighton Longhi Poster
Collection



Remember Belgium : buy bonds : fourth liberty loan

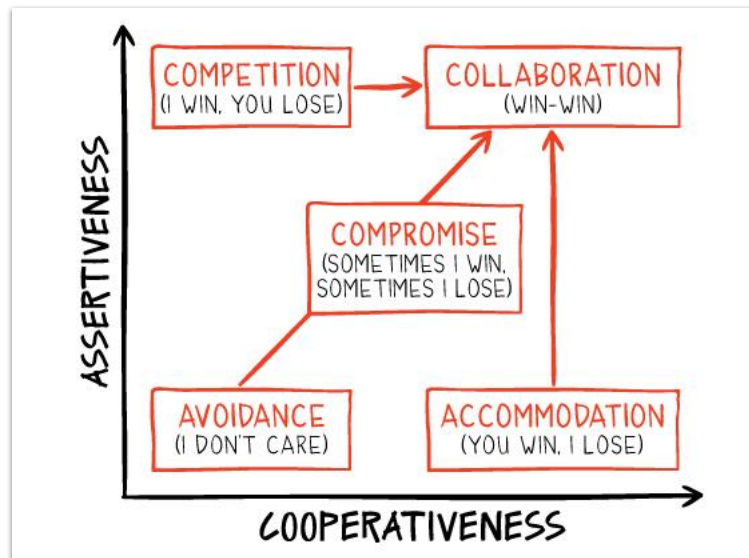
Young, Ellsworth
[1918]

Part of: Rosemarie and Leighton Longhi Poster

FEEDBACK

Abby

And further expanding our users' ability to browse deeper into the site, we built a related items feature. This feature drew its inspiration from our users desire to "organically browse" as well as the digital shelf features that libraries have often built for their catalogs to suggest items for users. It also facilitates browsing across the partner collections-we're really excited to see that this feature is already pulling in library items onto museum pages and vice versa. Excited to see how this grows!



Source: <https://collectivenext.com/blog/compromise-and-collaboration-poor-bedfellows/>

Mikala

As we've said, throughout this project, we've really been trying to balance needs from across campus: external users and internal advocates often have phenomenal ideas on how we could improve the service, but it sometimes would come at the expense of others' requests. Sometimes, it is impossible to avoid a compromise: an incredibly pressing need from one user or a critical 'must have' feature for internal colleagues was sometimes more important than a "nice to have" feature from another.

However, as much as possible, and especially as we wrap up this grant project and look to future joint venture, we try and build collaboratively: instead of identifying the must versus nice to have needs and prioritizing that way, we are approaching this from the need, or the problem we're trying to solve. In that way, we can think collaboratively about how we might solve the problem in a ways that are grounded not in libraries, archives, or museums, but instead all of them. Of course there will still be times when a critical need from institution might bring us to compromise, but when possible, we're trying to extend beyond our custodial departments and norms to find a collaborative and GLAM-orous space.



Contact us

**Or, check us out at:
marble.nd.edu**

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Abby Shelton, Librarian (Digital Collections Specialist),
abshelton@loc.gov

Mikala

Site is not yet released in public beta, but if you're curious and want to follow our progress, you can visit the site at the link above.