Sixteen Million Pages and Counting: Laurie Gemmill on the LYRASIS Mass Digitization Collaborative

An Interview with Cy Dillon

*A*t least ten Virginia libraries are already among the 166 participants in the LYRASIS Mass Digitization Collaborative, a project that leverages grant support to maximize the volume of materials libraries can afford to digitize and offer as open-access resources. For many participants, this was a first experience with digitization, and, in most cases, it has gone well enough that it will lead to more digitization of high-demand materials. Laurie Gemmill, mass digitization program manager for LYRASIS, has agreed to give our readers an inside look at her work and the project as a whole.

VL Would you briefly describe the origins of the LYRASIS Mass Digitization Collaborative?

LG As a nonprofit membership organization, LYRASIS constantly works to serve member library needs. For a long time the libraries' digitization needs were met with existing programs and services such as digitization classes and consulting. Over time, however, the members asked for more direct and extensive assistance. They wanted to be able to do projects quickly, ramp up production, and make materials widely accessible at a low cost. The LYRASIS Mass Digitization Collaborative was established to assist members with these digitization needs. Its

"It's a huge help to have the yearbooks and catalogs accessible."

development was the first component of the LYRASIS collaborative digital collection strategy. The initial focus was on mass digitization of text with the goal of converting approximately twenty million pages into digital format.

VL What is the current status of the project?

LG We are very pleased with the progress, having commitments and projects in progress for nearly sixteen million pages. Members have given us positive feedback in terms of getting projects completed quickly and easily, decreasing their workload while increasing access to users.

For the University of Maryland in College Park (UMCP), specifically, joining the collaborative was a "perfect opportunity for us to finally get a large volume of university materials digitized," according to Jennie Levine Knies, UMCP's manager of digital collections. Digitizing the yearbook has been very successful in terms of outreach to alumni, and having digital copies of the course catalogs has greatly reduced the workload for the library. "It's a huge help to have the yearbooks and catalogs accessible."

While the initial grant was originally scheduled to end in 2011, the Sloan Foundation has graciously allowed us to continue this phase until all funds are expended. Libraries are still welcome to participate, and we continue to seek opportunities to keep subsidized pricing for members. The program will continue beyond this initial funding, although pricing will depend on future grant funding.

VL How did you come to be involved?

LG I joined LYRASIS in June 2008. At that point, the grant had already been awarded, so it was my role to take those overall ideas and formulate plans, develop workflows, and execute them. Given the strong interest in the program, we conducted a series of mini-pilots with institutions throughout our region during which we tested all elements of the project, including selection, transportation, billing, and handling. The members provided excellent feedback, which enabled LYRASIS to refine procedures. We then opened the project to all members in October 2008.

VL Are there other aspects to your role as mass digitization program manager, or do you concentrate primarily on this project?

LG I was originally hired at LYRASIS as the digital services program manager. Over time, interest in the Mass Digitization Collaborative program intensified. In an effort to respond to member needs and the increasing popularity of the program, LYRASIS changed my position to the mass digitization program manager so I could better focus on the growing interest. While I am still involved with digitization consulting and classes, the coordination and growth of the collaborative program is my main priority.

VL Approximately how many libraries and other organizations have participated so far?

LG We currently have 166 participating institutions. We are especially pleased to be working with such a diverse group of institutions. We have participants from all over our region, including small, medium, and large academic, public, and special libraries, with a varying range of digitization experience. The list is growing all the time, and is

available to view at http://www. lyrasis.org/Products-and-Services/ Digital-Services/Mass-Digitization-Collaborative/Participants.aspx. You can also see the digitized content online at http://www.archive. org/details/lyrasis.

VL Has collaborating with the Internet Archive gone well for LYRASIS?

LG Collaboration is so important, especially for the long-term success of digitization efforts. By coming together with the Internet Archive and other partners

---

LYRASIS members have sought opportunities for more affordable digitization of their unique holdings....

---

and members, LYRASIS has been able to accomplish much more for the libraries than might have been possible for them as individual institutions.

VL Who are your other partners in the collaborative?

LG We are pleased to have partnered with Creekside Digital to perform the microfilm digitization (both newspaper and books on microfilm). We recently expanded the collaborative, and now Creekside is able to digitize microfiche as well. Our newest partner is Digital Conversion Solutions (DCS), a division of the HF Group, and we work with them to help libraries digitize their archival materials.

VL Last June you began to digitize more than books, magazines, and newspapers. What sorts of materials are now eligible for inclusion?

LG Previously, the Mass Digitization Collaborative offered LYRASIS members the opportunity to digitize books, serials, and microfilmed newspapers for a low fee. Based on input from our Digital & Preservation Services Advisory Group, we expanded the collaborative to offer new and different formats. The newly formed partnership with Digital Conversion Solutions enables LYRASIS to offer digitization of archival materials for members. Since the formation of the Mass Digitization Collaborative, LYRASIS members have sought opportunities for more affordable digitization of their unique holdings, including manuscripts, archives, photographs, maps, and large-format materials. Our new partnership with DCS allows members to carefully and affordably digitize these unique holdings.

Based on positive feedback from members, LYRASIS has also expanded our partnership with Creekside Digital, specialists in document and microfilm digitization, to offer preservation-quality microfiche scanning services to members. As a result of the expansion in formats, some of the new services will not be eligible for Alfred P. Sloan Foundation grant-subsidized pricing. We have been able to negotiate very favorable terms with expert service providers for content that falls outside of our Sloan Foundation grant. The expansion of the content scope will allow members more options for digitization, and members will have exclusive control over how they make their content available.

VL Is there a particular collection that you remember as being especially unusual or interesting?

LG The participating libraries have chosen wonderful materials to digitize. Collections include city directories, agricultural publications, government documents,

and local histories. Many colleges and universities have chosen to focus on institutional records such as yearbooks, catalogs, theses/dissertations, literary magazines, and student newspapers. Each provides a historical view into the institution itself and a fascinating perspective on the way issues and topics are represented differently over time.

VL Is there a logistical problem or set of problems that you remember as being particularly challenging?

LG Some of the early metadata issues were somewhat challenging. The participating institutions in the LYRASIS Mass Digitization Collaborative need to provide descriptive metadata for their materials. During our initial mini-pilots, Internet Archive required MARC records, so we needed to work with each library to set up a Z39.50 connection to the library catalog to retrieve appropriate records. At times, this was problematic. Some libraries wanted to digitize uncataloged materials or had records they wanted to update. The actual Z39.50 setup involves engineers and technical staff and could be cumbersome and time-consuming. In addition, the serial record that was brought over for an item such as a yearbook or course catalog did not provide the item-level detail such as date or volume that is important for effective retrieval. Following the pilots, Internet Archive modified its procedures and now allows sharing of Dublin Core metadata via "wonderfetch" (a spreadsheet with underlying formulas). This allows much more flexibility. The Z39.50 connections can still be established for larger projects, but sharing metadata via

wonderfetch is much more flexible and easier to implement for many projects.

VL The Sloan Foundation has been instrumental in funding your work. Are there other sources of financial support that have played important roles?

LG The Mass Digitization Collaborative is funded by the LYRASIS membership and supported in part through a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Founda-

---

"Having it available online makes it that much easier for … children to discover how geeky — or cool — their parents or grandparents were back in the day."

---

tion. The member libraries play an integral role in supporting the program.

VL Do you know if LYRASIS plans further efforts in digitizing and preservation?

LG LYRASIS believes that digitization of collections, collections' preservation, and digital preservation remain important to our members. To that end, we plan to continue with our Mass Digitization Collaborative effort, including seeking further funding sources that would allow us to continue to offer the best price available to members who would like to participate. We also see a role in helping our members understand

and become involved with the new Digital Public Library of America (http://dp.la) effort. Finally, we continue to offer preservation and digital preservation educational opportunities, information and referral, and consulting.

VL Looking back on your work so far, what has been your most satisfying accomplishment?

LG I enjoy working with LYRASIS member libraries on their various projects. It is gratifying to contribute to the projects and help our members realize success in terms of program expansion, jump-starting programs, or learning from initial forays into digitization. It is especially rewarding when I hear from libraries about the positive feedback they receive from users who are so pleased to have ready access to these fascinating materials. A Virginia example is available on the College of William & Mary website at http://www.wm.edu/news/stories/2010/swem-library-completes-digitization-of-first-96-years-of-colleges-year-book-123.php. "The *Colonial Echo* means a great deal to members of the William & Mary community, especially to our alumni and their descendants. Having it available online makes it that much easier for alums to remember their happy college days or for children to discover how geeky — or cool — their parents or grandparents were back in the day. The online version also is a boon for present-day students or scholars seeking to learn what William & Mary was like in the past," says Beatriz Hardy, the Marian and Alan McLeod Director of the Special Collections Research Center. **VL**