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Innovative User Studies Drive Design of New Services
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One March day in Bobst Library, several members of the library staff set up a table, topped it with iPads and energy bars, and undertook a research project. As expected, the energy bar giveaway was an attraction. Three hours and scores of Cliff bars later, 155 library users had kindly taken a four-question survey in exchange for a portable snack. When the staff had compiled the survey results, they had a better understanding of how users prefer to get call number information in BobCat.

“This kind of survey helps us improve specific aspects of our interfaces,” says Discovery and Digital Access librarian Nadaleen Temaplan-Kluit, chair of the User Interfaces Group (UIG), which focuses on user-centric interface design. While UIG also does traditional usability testing, in this case they experimented with a more agile method that gathers a large set of data around a particular research task in order to determine the most common user behaviors.

In April, Temaplan-Kluit and other UIG members conducted a more extensive test. For this one, they teamed up for the first time with the Pratt Institute School of Information and Library Science in Pratt’s state of the art usability laboratory on 14th Street. A mix of NYU undergraduate and graduate students and faculty, 15 in all, volunteered 30 to 40 minutes of their time to help UIG determine how users go about finding e-books in BobCat and whether certain links were helpful or problematic.

A small group of Pratt MLIS students (candidates for masters degrees in Information and Library Science) and faculty helped administer the tests and analyze the data.

Another research initiative involves the popular Ask a Librarian (AAL) chat service, which allows library users to contact a librarian seven days a week using a “widget”—a chat window—in BobCat. The widget requires no identifying information, such as email address or user name, so users are anonymous. As a result, AAL chat will give us a common language to use among ourselves,” says Pearce. “So instead of speculating about a vague ‘user’ who needs something, we can draw on the experiences and back-ground of John Q. User or Jane R. User, who will be known to all of us. Of course, we’ll give them better names.”

Each person will have a narrative, a story broad enough to represent a wide segment of library users. For instance, one might be a doctoral candidate who is comfortable with technology, prefers to work in Bobst Library rather than at home, and teaches art history. Another might be an undergraduate who has been using the library only to do assigned readings, has decided to pursue a concentration in food studies, and now wants to research the field and its career opportunities.

The library will come to know these synthesized individuals and their research goals so well that interfaces, resources, and services will, in time, be customized to their needs and those of all the library users they represent.

Collard and his VRSS colleagues scrub the transcripts of any identifying information a user might have supplied and focus on the questions asked, which generally pertain to research strategies, finding or accessing materials, and technical problems. Then they code the transcripts for various elements and study them for trends. “We built the coding system on our knowledge of the resources and systems we offer and on the AAL interactions themselves,” he says, “giving us a nuanced, user-centered understanding of the things they need and the things they don’t find intuitive.” The resulting information helps the library improve its search tools and interfaces.

In fact, the AAL transcript analysis will enable the library to develop another new tool in an initiative called the Persona Project. “Personas are hypothetical researchers who represent actual users. We will synthesize them from our observations of how real people are using the library,” says Alexa Pearce, librarian for journalism and communications and VRSS co-convenor. Pearce and Temaplan-Kluit are coding the transcripts for specific behaviors, actions, and motivations, which they will use to construct these personas. “Personas will give us a common language to use among ourselves,” says Pearce. “So instead of speculating about a vague ‘user’ who needs something, we can draw on the experiences and background of John Q. User or Jane R. User, who will be known to all of us. Of course, we’ll give them better names.”

The research commons that opened in 2010 comprising the Bobst Library atrium, installed in 2003 as a safety measure, with aluminum screens that have been custom designed and fabricated not just for safety but also to retain light, air, and views of the atrium. According to Joel Sanders Architects, the firm that designed the screens, they are compatible with the iconic interior designed by Philip Johnson in 1968 and are inspired by decorative grilles used by Johnson and his peers in other atrium environments. They match the color and materials Johnson used in the railings while updating and refreshing the atrium by incorporating contemporary 21st century digital designs.

New spaces for grad students

The Good Word with a Good View

Fales Library has acquired an 1867 copy of the New Testament with an unusual feature: a fore-edge painting of the east side of Washington Square. Fore-edge paintings—miniatures concealed on page edges that reveal themselves when the pages are slightly bent—were popular from the late 19th to the mid 20th century, according to Marvin Taylor, head of the Fales Library.

Bobst Library Research Commons Expansion is Now Underway!

The research commons that opened in 2010 comprising the totally redesigned fourth and fifth floors is expanding. In the current project, the sixth floor is being transformed, as were four and five, with carpeting, acoustical ceilings, new lighting, more natural light, and a variety of comfortable seating.

Graduate students will find a variety of spaces just for them: technology-equipped collaborative studies, a large new reading room, and a subscribable room furnished especially for dissertation writers. Similar rooms on four and five have been very popular.

The renovation of the North Reading Room, with its double height, floor to ceiling windows overlooking Washington Square, will include tables with built-in outlets for keeping laptops powered during long work sessions.

This project will also include some enhancements to the existing research commons, such as enclosure of the 5th floor media viewing area to enable it to be used for instruction with no distraction from the noiser, general use space next to it. With most of the sixth floor cleared from early June until December, books and other materials normally found there will be temporarily relocated to other floors in

Bobst Library. Signage, email, and online guides will ensure that library users know where. The North Reading Room will be first on the renovation schedule, and will open early in the fall 2012 semester. The rest of the floor will reopen in the late fall. Aspector Architecture designed the research commons, including this project.

A second project this summer will replace the plexiglass barriers in the Bobst Library atrium, installed in 2003 as a safety measure, with aluminum screens that have been custom designed and fabricated not just for safety but also to retain light, air, and views of the atrium. According to Joel Sanders Architects, the firm that designed the screens, they are compatible with the iconic interior designed by Philip Johnson in 1968 and are inspired by decorative grilles used by Johnson and his peers in other atrium environments.

For more information: library.nyu.edu/renovation

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Orphans in Space

The 8th Orphan Film Symposium, held April 11-14 at the Museum of the Moving Image in Queens, included a newly digitized film from the Tamiment Library, *A People’s Convention*. The Libraries’ film preservation department, headed by Alice Moscoso, oversaw treatment of the film and digitization so it could be included in a presentation on the 1948 presidential race given by Charles Musser, professor of American studies and film studies at Yale University. Digitization allowed the film a public screening before film-to-film preservation could be performed. At the Symposium, Moscoso, Walter Forsberg (NYU Libraries Research Fellow) and Jonah Volk (New York Public Library media preservation coordinator) introduced Orphans in Space, a double DVD compilation of short archival films. The 15 titles include *The Flatt & Scruggs Grand Ole Opry* from the Library of Congress, *A Trip to the Planets* (192?) from Tamiment Library and *The 8th Orphan Film Symposium*, held April 11-14 at the Museum of the Moving Image in Queens, included a newly digitized film from the Tamiment Library, *A People’s Convention*. The Libraries’ film preservation department, headed by Alice Moscoso, oversaw treatment of the film and digitization so it could be included in a presentation on the 1948 presidential race given by Charles Musser, professor of American studies and film studies at Yale University. Digitization allowed the film a public screening before film-to-film preservation could be performed. At the Symposium, Moscoso, Walter Forsberg (NYU Libraries Research Fellow) and Jonah Volk (New York Public Library media preservation coordinator) introduced Orphans in Space, a double DVD compilation of short archival films. The 15 titles include *The Flatt & Scruggs Grand Ole Opry* from the Library of Congress, *A Trip to the Planets* (192?) from Tamiment Library and *The 8th Orphan Film Symposium*. The archive will support cross-disciplinary research in gender studies, military history, American history, labor history, social work, and sociology. The Libraries and the filmmakers officially opened it in Tamiment Library on April 3rd, with a talk by Ruth Milkman, professor of sociology at the CUNY Graduate Center and professor and academic director of the Joseph F. Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies. Guests of honor Esther Horne and Jerre Kalbas, whose stories are in the archive, were asked what they got out of their “Rosie” experience. “Confidence,” Kalbas replied.

Now Online: The Real Rosie the Riveter Video Oral Histories

During World War II, as many as 16 million women stepped into jobs left vacant by men who went overseas to fight. For many women this was an opportunity for independence, money of their own, and seeing the country. At the peak of wartime employment, women constituted between one-third and one-half of the workers in many basic industries, including shipbuilding and aircraft manufacturing. Nearly 70 years later, 48 of these women tell their own stories in a new archive of video oral histories. The Real Rosie the Riveter, available to all on the Tamiment Library website: http://lib.nyu.edu/rosie/interviews

The “Rosies,” now in their eighties and nineties, were interviewed over the past two years by filmmakers Anne de Mare and Kirsten Kelly, partners in Spargel Productions. Elizabeth Hemmerdinger, who holds an MFA from Tisch School of the Arts, was executive producer, and Michael Nash, head of Tamiment Library, served as chief historian and curator of the project. Each interview is unique, says Hemmerdinger: “We get stories of the Depression, of racial, class, and gender divides, of young women whose expectations for their lives were completely transformed.”

Faux Leather Fix

Conservation staff in the Barbara Goldsmith Preservation and Conservation Department in Bobst Library work on a variety of printed and manuscript materials, including papyrus, antique maps and prints, and books. Recently they invited conservator Sarah Riedell to the lab to demonstrate how to repair small breaks in leather bindings with a new cast-composite technique for making synthetic leather. Using a silicone mold kit, they were able to recreate the precise texture of the damaged leather. When colophons are added to match the binding, the repair is complementary. “This technique will be particularly useful in conservation treatments of 19th century leather binding,” said Laura McCarron, conservation librarian. One of the first items to benefit from the staff’s new expertise was the Fales Library’s two-volume set of Balzac’s *Physiologie du Mariage*, printed in Paris in 1830.

Top left: Sarah Riedell. Top right: Riedell demonstrates for Conservation Librarian Laura McCarron, at left, Conservation Technician Lou Di Giandomenico, at right, and (l to r) Institute of Fine Arts (IFA) conservation students Morgan Adams, Maggie Wesling, Quinn Ferri, and Amy Hughes. Bottom right: McCarron (l) assists IFA conservation student Jessica Pace.

Photos: Mathieu Asselin
Collections Update

Ernie O’Malley

The Archives of Irish America (AIA), based in Tamiment Library, has been given the papers of one of Ireland’s most celebrated republicans, Ernie O’Malley (1897-1957), a major figure in both the fight for Irish independence and the Irish Civil War (1922-23). O’Malley’s heroic early life as a soldier, which included multiple wounds, narrow escapes from execution, imprisonments, and a debilitating 41-day hunger strike, evolved into one as an author and art critic in the United States. His oral histories of more than 450 survivors of the Irish War of Independence are a prized historical resource for scholars. Highlights from the papers, a gift from Ernie’s son, Cormac O’Malley, are on display in Tamiment through June 29. The papers include nearly 30 linear feet of manuscripts, photographs, diaries, poetry, and correspondence, most notably with one of Ireland’s most celebrated republicans, Eamon de Valera. The AIA, a resource of special collection of left politics and social protest movements, of the revered Irish artist Jack B. Yeats. The AIA, a resource of primary research materials in Irish-American studies, is a joint project of Tamiment and Gluckman Ireland House.

Howard Zinn

Tamiment Library has acquired the papers of Howard Zinn (1922-2010), award-winning historian, activist, teacher, and author whose books include the bestselling A People’s History of the United States (1980). The papers total 86 linear feet and include datebooks, correspondence, manuscripts, notebooks, and audio and video documentation of lectures, interviews, and other public events. One of the first researchers to use them is Martin Duberman, author of the upcoming biography, Howard Zinn: A Life on the Left (The New Press, October 2012). Citing Tamiment’s importance as a special collection of left politics and social protest movements, Duberman says, “Since Howard Zinn is among the foremost dissenters in our country’s history, how beautifully fitting, then, that his papers are now among its resources.”

New Faces

Nicole E. Brown, Multidisciplinary Instruction Librarian

Formerly: Coordinator of Instruction and Reference Librarian, Emerson College, Boston, MA; Instruction Librarian, The American University in Cairo

Education: MLIS, Pratt Institute; BA, Psychology and Spanish, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

As part of a team that develops innovative instructional programs and services, I teach undergraduates to find, evaluate, and use information for their academic needs. This spring, for example, I taught workshops for students in courses ranging from Memorials, Memory, and New York City to 20th Century Manifestos and the Aesthetics of Text. I enjoy working with my colleagues to help students and faculty in interdisciplinary programs creatively incorporate our collections into their teaching and learning.

Nina Servizzi, Head of Resource Management

Formerly: Acting Head of Acquisitions, NYU, Quality Control Coordinator, ARTSTOR; Assistant Head, Serial & Electronic Acquisition Services, Columbia University Libraries

Education: MLS, Clarion University of Pennsylvania; MFA, Digital Media, School of Visual Arts, New York; Corso di Specializzazione Beni Culturali Archivistici, Università di Roma; Laurea, Art History, Accademia di Belle Arti, Rome

The Resource Management department is responsible for purchasing the library’s resources, both physical and digital, assessing, acquiring and processing vendor supplied data and tracking fiscal expenditures. We also play a valuable role in the collection development of e-resources and innovations based on the unique challenges presented by this new publishing environment.

East Village Other

Fales Library has acquired the archive of the East Village Other (EVO), an underground newspaper published in New York from 1965 to 1972, and Gothic Blimp Works, an underground comic tabloid published by EVO in 1969. Peter Leggett, an EVO editor, recently told The Local, a New York Times blog about the East Village written by NYU journalism students, that “EVO created a cultural revolution,” and that it turned “everyone who worked there into a writer or an artist or both.”

Exit Art

After 30 years in New York City as a pioneering alternative art space and, later, cultural center with an international reputation for curatorial innovation, Exit Art is closing its doors. The Exit Art board has given its extensive multimedia archive to Fales Library’s Downtown Collection, where it will support NYU’s programs in contemporary art history, performance, dance, and many other disciplines.
Recipe for a Dissertation

The food studies collection in Fales Library, the largest of its kind in the United States, sometimes inspires researchers in disciplines that have nothing to do with food or nutrition. Jane Greenway Carr, who is working on a PhD in English, is a case in point. In 2007, during her first semester of doctoral work, Carr was researching a term paper for a course called “Print Culture in a Diverse America.” A Fales archivist suggested a book that might be of interest—The Suffrage Cook Book (1915), a compendium of recipes from prominent progressive women including Jane Addams, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Carrie Chapman Catt, with letters of support from governors of states in which suffrage for women already had been instituted. “I was immediately captivated by the idea of suffrage cookbooks,” Carr recalls, “and they led me to a broader study of community cookbooks published in support of political activism or social reform causes.”

When the time came to choose a dissertation topic, Carr decided to examine the work of American women editors in the Progressive Era and their efforts to enact reform in such areas as suffrage, racial uplift, and labor. For the first chapter of her dissertation, Editorial Prospects: Female Editorship and Activism in U.S. Print Culture, 1880-1940, Carr went back to The Suffrage Cook Book. “By investigating the women who wrote it and imagining the ones who read or used its recipes, from Pie for a Suffragist’s Doubting Husband to Scripture Cake, I built on my interests in suffrage literature and U.S. women’s print culture,” says Carr. “More importantly, I was able to identify a larger set of questions. What did it mean to be a female editor during the Progressive Era? How did women’s editorial work and literary participation shape the roles women played in political activism and movements for social reform?” The Suffrage Cook Book served Carr well, if not as a practical source of recipes. Bakers of the Pie for a Suffragist’s Doubting Husband are instructed to “mix the crust with tact and velvet gloves.”