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IMLS PLACE Grant: Press Release Abstract 1

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Abstract

The University of New Hampshire Library and its partner, the UNH Earth Systems Research Center (ESRC) propose a 3-year project to build PLACE (the Position-based Location Archive Coordinate Explorer), a geospatial search interface. Libraries have traditionally relied on textual searching to locate information. The concept of “place” is a powerful means for organizing and communicating information. Through geospatial coordinates embedded in the metadata users will discover types of information impossible to locate by words alone.

Through PLACE, via a click or delineation of a search polygon on a web map, users will zoom to a region and will locate all UNH Library collections whose geographic extents intersect. PLACE will initially provide access to a representative sample of geospatial-ready collections focusing on New Hampshire and the region (topographic maps, air photos, geologic maps and geologic field trip guidebooks). There is no comparable tool for the state. It will be flexible and expandable as geospatial-ready collections grow. Ready access to embedded geospatial information in a flexible visual interface contributes to the development of 21st century skills by library users, such as visual literacy, global literacy, and environmental literacy.

Our specific goals are to (1) provide users with varying interests and degrees of expertise with access to selected digital historical maps and air photos through a geospatial search, display/access and optional download interface, (2) provide geology professors, other professionals, students and interested laypersons with geospatial access to digitized New England Intercollegiate Geological Conference field trip guidebooks, and (3) contribute to open source geospatial search interface and portal development and provide a toolkit for other institutions to implement geospatial collections.

The project will also contribute to two open source communities: Open GeoPortal (OGP) and FEDORA. There are more than 300 institutions using FEDORA, but only one that we know uses a geospatial search interface. Among the OGP members there are a number of FEDORA libraries; yet none of the publicly available OGP collections involve collections managed within FEDORA. UNH has an opportunity to develop methods for integrating FEDORA and OGP that will be of potential value to many institutions. Our collections will also be exposed to wider audiences through other OGP institutions. OGP users, whether or not they use Fedora, will benefit from our development of a gazetteer, creation of time series capabilities, and interface improvements based on usability testing. We will publish a toolkit in which we document our processes, methods, best practices, technical and staffing requirements, and recommended resources to provide a roadmap for other institutions to make geospatial-ready collections accessible, regardless of platform.

Tasks to accomplish our goals include: creating standards compliant metadata for prototype collections and ingesting digital objects into FEDORA, purchasing and configuring a dedicated server for our instance of OGP, and integrating OGP with the FEDORA Solr index to provide a basic level of OGP functionality. We will build new tools not currently available in GeoPortal using Jscript and JQuery. The universal gazetteer tool will involve a common library of polygons, such as country boundaries, which will be available via pull down lists. Time series data is important for assessing changes over time: a cross reference table and a time slider on the interface will make it easier for users to select datasets by time periods. We plan usability studies throughout the project to optimize interface design, and enhancements for providing geospatial access to the unique geological guidebook literature, a feature supported in our needs analysis.

Our success will be judged by the ability of our target user groups of both novices and experts to find and use relevant materials heretofore unavailable or underutilized, by the adoption of the code we contribute to the FEDORA and OGP, and by use of our toolkit.