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Digitization is in the Details: Using Data from Patron Research Patterns to Enhance Accessibility

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DIGITIZATION IS IN THE DETAILS: USING DATA FROM PATRON RESEARCH PATTERNS TO ENHANCE ACCESSIBILITY

April Karlene Anderson, University Archivist
Dr. JoAnn Rayfield Archives at Illinois State University

Overview

This poster will address the question of choosing materials for digitization and lay out research parameters that will help provide better data points to aid in making more informed choices for digitization candidates.

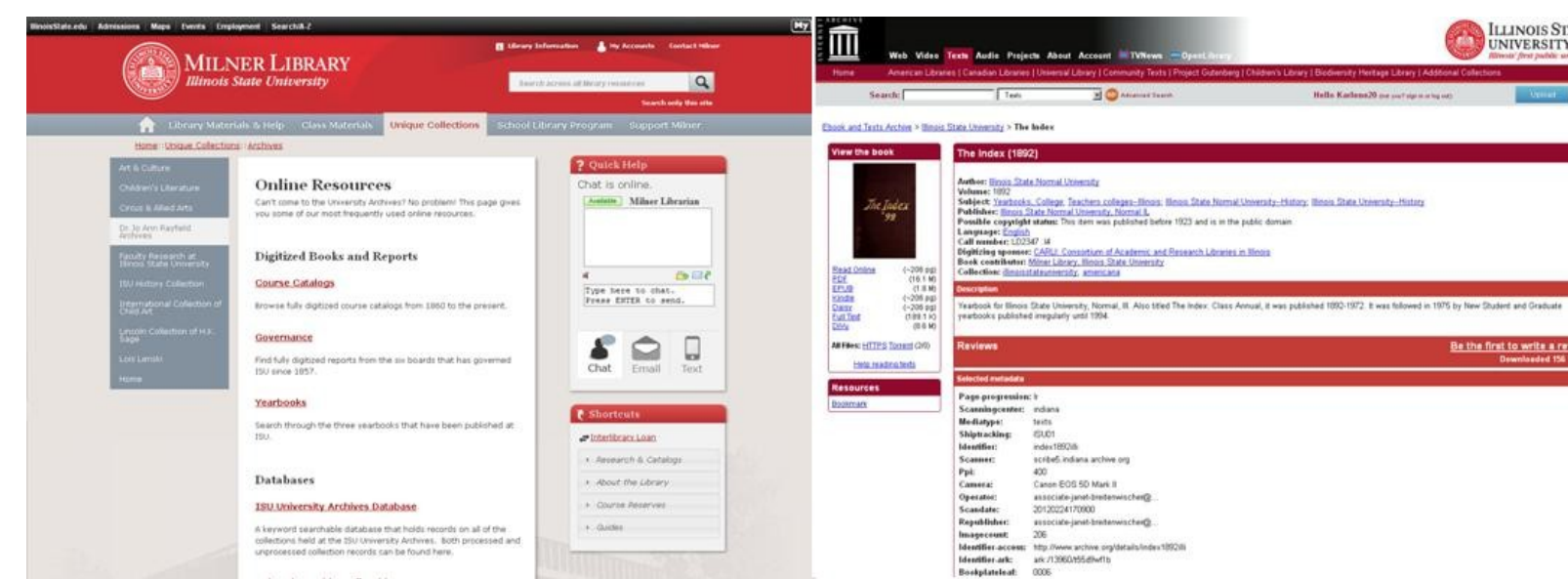


Image 1: All yearbooks, catalogs, and governance can now be found on the Internet Archive through the ISU University Archives website.

Background

In 2011/12, Illinois State University's Milner Library was awarded a grant through CARLI to digitize its yearbook, catalog, and governance collections. Qualifying materials had to meet specific guidelines such as size and condition and must be uploaded to the Internet Archive. As of Spring 2013, all of these materials were accessible via a portal page on the ISU University Archives website linking to their permanent home at the Internet Archives. These materials have proven to be extremely popular with ISU University Archives patrons, totaling 37,808 downloads for 461 digital items in the past 23 months.¹ As funding is extremely limited, the ISU University Archives will be gathering data to determine what collections to digitize next that will satisfy both the department and library administrative needs but the needs of the patron and the local community.

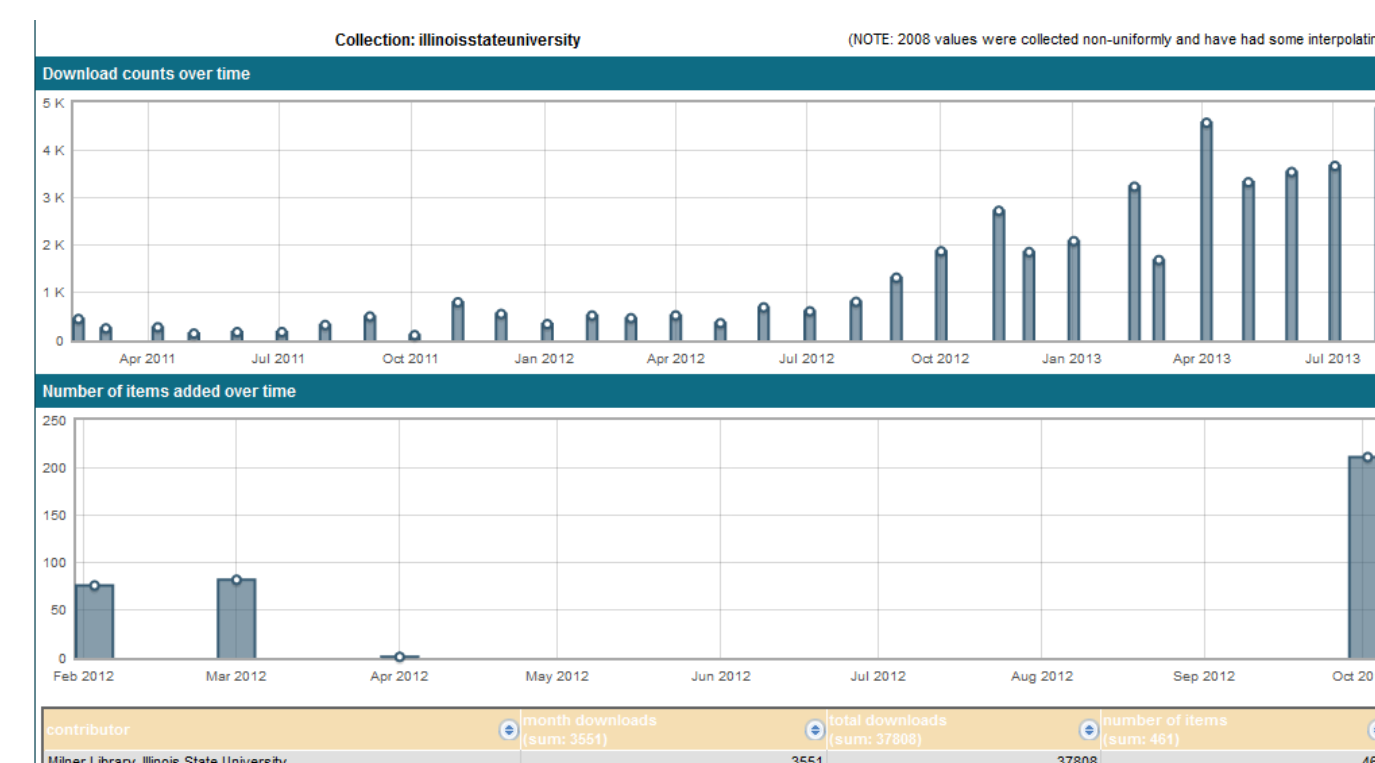


Image 2: Use statistics for ISU University Archives materials held at the Internet Archive. Digitized materials for the ISU University Archives have been extremely popular with patrons. Since materials were first added in April 2011, 461 items have been downloaded 37,808 times. According to Internet Archive staff, download counts include page hits. However, we cannot see the terms our patrons search for in each item.

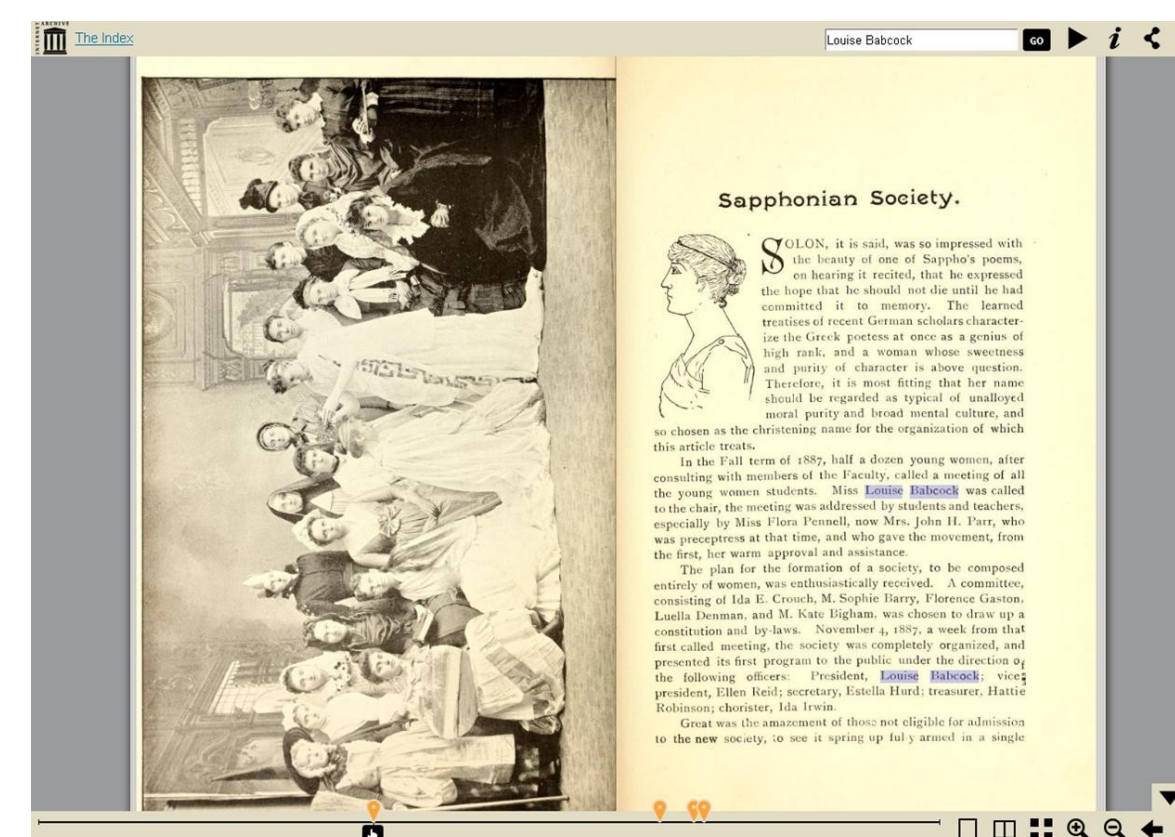


Image 3: A page from the first ISU yearbook showing the keyword search feature in the Internet Archive.

Methods

The ISU University Archives will collect patron research and material access data in the Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 terms. Data will be gathered from patron registration forms, analytics data from the department's websites, and patron contact. Patron contact is defined as the pre and post interview portions of the research visit where staff gathers information to help assist patron access to materials. Staff will anonymously record the requested materials along with the specific data points patrons are researching. Examples can include scores from specific sporting events, detailed student/faculty/staff demographics for particular events/years, course syllabi written by an individual professor. Once the research is complete, staff will re-interview the patron to determine if they were satisfied with the information that was found.

Keyword Searching: Great for Patrons, Hard for Us to Track

As part of the 2011/12 CARLI grant, all of our digitized materials were to be included in the Internet Archive. While we can host our materials on our own servers, it is currently more economical for us to link to their home at the Internet Archive. Patrons love the keyword search feature and use it often for genealogical research. However, we cannot track these searchers. Should we want better data, we will need to eventually host these materials on our own servers.

Specifics

Human Subject Research Policies

As per university human subject research policies, Archives staff cannot gather data where "human subjects can be identified, directly, or through identifiers linked to the subjects".² Information gathered from patron registration forms and the patron interview process will be collected anonymously. These policies are currently under review and our collection methods during our research period could change.

Online Patrons

We will not be able to chat with our online patrons the same way we can with our in-house patrons. An anonymous survey will be created and placed on our website, asking online researchers to fill out the form after their visit. This form will need to go through university review before we can post it online and likely our content will be changed to meet university standards.

Data

As the results are gathered, they will be entered into searchable database. The database will be segmented into record groups similar to how current ISU University Archives collections are arranged. Data will be stored with the record group from which it was collected. At the end of the collection period, data will analyzed to determine the following:

1. What kind of data points have we collected? Are they demographic, statistical, biographical, administrative, etc?
2. Are there any groups of data that stand out? What have researchers primarily asked for the most?
3. How have they accessed this data? Did they gather their information from our online sources or from our paper based collections?
4. Did our patrons get their questions answered? Did they get the information they were expecting either less or more?

Results

We hope that the specific data points we gather will help us make better choices for digitization candidates in the future. While we believe certain collections made available online would be useful to patrons, without hard data we simply cannot be sure. By gathering this data, we not only are spending our limited funds more responsibly – we are digitizing materials that we know our patrons want rather than what we think our patrons want.

Work Cited:

1. <http://indexer.us.archive.org/services/collection-downloads.php?date=2013-06-02&mediatype=texts&collection=illinoisstateuniversity>
2. http://rsp.illinoisstate.edu/research/human_subjects/IRBLevelsofReview.shtml