

**Notes from CRRA Scholars Advisory Committee virtual meeting held
Monday, April 12, 2010 11:00-12:00 EST**

Present: Richard Bautch (St. Edward's), Patrick Carey (Marquette), Kathy Cummings (Notre Dame), Stephen Little (Notre Dame), Tim Meagher, Committee Chair (Catholic University), Jim O'Toole (Boston College), Eric Lease Morgan (Notre Dame), Pat Lawton (CRRA)

Summary: The most significant take-away is that the portal needs to emphasize the rare and unique. Place less emphasis on books, more emphasis on manuscripts. Initiate digitization efforts among members, emphasize collaborative collection building, and enhance the searchability and display of EAD records.

After brief introductions, we looked at the list of new member institutions (St. Kate's, Loyola, and Villanova). Tim suggested we identify an Advisor from each institution.

Eric provided an overview of the portal. The preponderance of books was noted and discussed. The scholars envision the portal as a destination of materials that are not available through shared catalogs, such as Worldcat; emphasize finding aids rather than books. Pat noted that in the initial gathering of portal records, members were asked to err on the side of inclusion rather than exclusion, in an effort to have a set of records with which to work to work out the technical functionality. Now that the technical infrastructure is in place, CRRA has proposed working with members to conduct a member review of records submitted to the portal with close attention to the rare, unique emphasis.

It was noted that scholars interested in Early Modern or Medieval know where the materials are. The modern stuff – manuscript materials, newspapers, or pamphlets, these should be emphasized in the portal.

We looked at a number of slides with exemplars of possible features for the portal, such as full text documents, timelines, maps with links to resources, etc. The following summarizes the discussion of particular features, presented in the order of the discussion.

Map with links to resources. We viewed a map with links to resources at the Alaska's Digital Archives project <http://vilda.alaska.edu/cdm4/pathway.php>. Scholars indicated that portal materials emphasize Catholics in the US and a map showing groups regionally in the US (Pacific NW, New England, etc.) would be helpful.

Educational resources. The First World War Digital Poetry Archive featured a link for educational resources <http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/education/highereducation>. Scholars saw this as a useful feature, as a resource for teaching. American Catholic History was noted as a possible course that might utilize teaching resources such as those in the sample. Classes aimed at the undergraduate or graduate student would be appropriate.

Full text. This gets four stars. Of all the aspects and features for the portal discussed, it was unanimously agreed that collaborative projects to digitize portal collections was very important.

The image itself, the manuscript itself, the item itself is what users want.

Links to relevant resources was identified as a useful feature. For example, the portal may provide a link to the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) <http://www.thearda.com/>.

Collaboration. The portal was cited as an opportunity for collaboration. For example, CRRA could coordinate proposals to build, describe, and digitize collections. Potential funding sources noted included: The Knights of Columbus, NEH digital humanities grants.

Emphasize collections currently held by members, look at what prospective members would bring. For example, Avila and St. John's were suggested for their collections on Women Religious.

Manuscripts, rare stuff. The scholars envision the portal as a destination of materials that are not available through shared catalogs, such as Worldcat. Many of the features discussed were seen as useful, but front and center is the need to focus on rare and unique materials, on information found in manuscript collections. For example, ask members "who has materials on George Higgins?" Alternatively, the portal could emphasize a particular theme on which members might focus. Kathy suggested Women Religious (a portal theme) as a collecting theme. This would dovetail well with the upcoming fall 2011 Women in Religion Exhibit sponsored by Notre Dame.

Searchability.

Members discussed the issue of searching finding aids at various levels (i.e., collection, series, subseries, container levels). It was generally agreed that this would be a very desirable feature.

Searchability was cited as having equal importance to emphasizing manuscripts. Scholars want the ability to search and to bring up all things about the documents in the portal. The scholarly enterprise calls for concise description.