

Pathway to a Program: the South Carolina Digital Library

PASCAL has worked for two years on its digital library initiatives in efforts to bring librarians and archivists from around South Carolina in touch with national and statewide leaders and to create digital collections. PASCAL has been awarded LSTA grants in 2003, 2004, and 2005, hosted a forum in 2004, conducted a statewide survey in 2004, and hosted a CLIR conference in 2005. South Carolina is only beginning to understand its potential in the field of digital cultural heritage.

Now, in September 2005, the South Carolina Digital Library has available: a nineteen-member committee, \$45,000 to fund some activities during 2005-2006, a “reasonably robust” server (suitable for a few small projects), a community of interest formed by forum attendees and respondents to the 2004 survey (public libraries, school libraries, local history organizations, independent scholars...), and a 0.5 FTE program coordinator. There is a flatbed scanner and workstation on order.

In their landmark study of digital libraries (*The Digital Library: a biography*, Digital Library Federation, 2002), Greenstein and Thorin characterized maturing digital libraries as those integrated with the mainstream academic library practically, technically, and organizationally, and requiring “new ways of thinking about how programs are funded and promoted” (17). The recently formed Texas Heritage Digitization Initiative has a mission statement reading, “The Texas Heritage Digitization Initiative promotes collaboration among Texas institutions by establishing common standards, sharing best practices and facilitating cooperative funding to provide online access to cultural heritage resources that benefit learners.” These “mature” undertakings are programs—systems of services, opportunities, and projects that no longer operate exclusively in project mode. In order for the South Carolina Digital Library to survive or succeed, it must become a program: writing policies, providing consulting expertise, lending credibility to funding applications, sustaining collections and activities for the long term, and otherwise leading efforts across the state.

The South Carolina Digital Library should be the coordinating center for the collection, production, organization, dissemination, and preservation of digital cultural heritage materials for the state of South Carolina and actively promote and facilitate collaboration and cooperation to support resources related to South Carolina history, culture, and life.

There are many different ways to fulfill the above proposed mission. Every one of those ways requires a level of sustainability not yet in place. The *NINCH Guide to Good Practice in the Digital Representation & Management of Cultural Heritage Materials* (National Initiative for a Networked Cultural Heritage, 2002) states, “[s]ustainability thus refers to all of the considerations that go into maintaining the institutional context for the creation and maintenance of digital objects and resources, and supporting their long-term viability” (Chapter 11). Sustainability of the South Carolina Digital Library must be provided via funding, standardization, mainstreaming, integration, subject expertise, and promotion so as to provide leadership and coordination assistance for institutional as well as collaborative undertakings. None of these sustainable features is now in place. Greenstein and Thorin write, “[b]ecause it reduces the risk inherent in highly uncertain and technologically dependent activities, external grant funding is a mechanism that is particularly appropriate for the experimental orientation of embryonic digital library programs” (14). Though they are addressing funding, we should apply their idea to each facet of sustainability above. To establish a sustainable South Carolina Digital Library, we will need to move beyond experiments with soft funding, investigational methods, and pilot projects and start getting down to the real business of doing digital libraries.

In pursuit of the suggested mission, the Digital Collections Committee recommends the PASCAL Board:

- Affirm that digital libraries are an undeniable part of the future of academic libraries and that they must be sustained in a non-experimental fashion,
- Work towards funding a permanent staff including a full-time professional program manager and a full-time projects manager,
- Hire a programmer to establish a robust and functional repository and tool set to house digital objects and their associated data and/or purchase an existing such product,
- Establish a steering committee with both institutional (PASCAL members and other interested institutions) and specialty (public services, technology services, technical services) representation and charge that committee to identify a vision for the South Carolina Digital Library, the steps to accomplish that vision, and approaches to the various areas of program sustainability (funding, standardization, mainstreaming, integration, subject expertise, and promotion), and
- Establish working groups organized by specialty (metadata, preservation, selection, promotion, interface, digitization, education) and charge those groups to identify, write, or endorse standards and best practices for all facets of digital library production and maintenance both for collaborative and for institutional projects.

Respectfully submitted for consideration to the PASCAL Board of Directors by the Digital Collections Committee, September 2005.