

# DIGITAL LETTERS

*A Newsletter of the UCSD Libraries Digital Library Program*

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July 2002

Issue Number One

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## Letter From the Editor

Welcome to the first issue of *Digital Letters*. This newsletter is intended to report on the progress of the ongoing Digital Library Program here at UCSD. *Digital Letters* will cover the people, the projects, the ideas, and the technologies that make up our digital library.

This newsletter is the product of conversations between Anna Gold and myself in late 2001 about how difficult it is to keep up with all the different digital library projects that are going on at the UCSD Libraries. It seemed to me that even if I felt knowledgeable about certain areas—usually projects that directly involved me—there were always many other projects that I had heard something about but didn't really understand. Anna had been given the task of coming up with a communication strategy for the Digital Library Program Working Group, and she felt that a newsletter aimed at the UCSD Libraries community could help us all in better understanding our Digital Library Program.

Accordingly, *Digital Letters* assumes that you, the reader, are an intelligent, well-informed member of the UCSD Libraries community who wants to learn more about our emerging Digital Library Program. In writing *Digital Letters*, I am hoping to expand my own understanding of where we are heading, and to share that understanding throughout the Libraries.

*Digital Letters* operates with the endorsement of the Digital Libraries Program Working Group, but it isn't supposed to be the official word of that committee or any

other. *Digital Letters* is written and edited entirely by me, Steve Lawson, with some oversight from Anna Gold and Dawn Talbot.

## What's with the dead trees?

If the subject at hand is digital technology, why present it in a paper newsletter? Good question. Firstly, I didn't want to add to the avalanche of email that buries us all each day. I frankly didn't know if a website would attract enough readers. But a paper newsletter is something that can be posted on a bulletin board, or sit on your desk until you're ready to read it. You can read on the bus, or outside on a coffee break. You can scribble notes on it if you find it interesting, or wad it up into a ball if it irritates you. *Digital Letters* will be archived online at <http://gort.ucsd.edu/dlpwg/>, but its main format will be paper.

*Digital Letters* also has a sister publication online called *diglet* (short for "digital letters," of course). Where *Digital Letters* is designed to cover what's going on at UCSD Libraries, *diglet* is a weblog (or web page that "logs" interesting sites) where I'll seek out web sites and publications on digital libraries and digital librarianship in a wider context. I'll link to pages I find interesting and give a short description or opinion about what you'll find there. The plan is to have new postings to *diglet* at least once a week, and, I hope, more often than that. You'll find *diglet* at <http://library.ucsd.edu/~splawson/diglet/>

Thanks for reading *Digital Letters*. Please send comments or criticism to [splawson@ucsd.edu](mailto:splawson@ucsd.edu).

— Steve Lawson

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## The Digital Library Program Working Group: An Interview with Dawn Talbot

If *Digital Letters* is to cover the Digital Library Program at UCSD, I thought the first person to talk to should be Dawn Talbot, chair of the Digital Library Program Working Group (DLPWG). Recently, I sat down with Dawn in her office at the Center for Magnetic Recording Research to talk about the Working Group, as well as where we are and where we are going with the UCSD Digital Library Program.

(Continued on page 2)

Also in this issue: "Buzzword Bingo" (see page 3)

(Continued from page 1)

## “Dill-Pwig?”

I began by asking Dawn one of my toughest questions: what the heck kind of acronym is “DLPWG?” And do you say “D-L-P-W-G” or “Dill-Pwig?”

Dawn laughed and admitted that she can't pronounce the acronym either. “When we came up with DLPWG, I wanted the idea of a ‘working group’ in the name because I felt that this group was intended to roll up its sleeves and get something done,” Dawn said. “We're not just an advisory group. We need to be developing guidelines and really getting down to the procedural level of how we are going to bring the digital library at UCSD into a robust, scale-able, well-managed entity.”

The Working Group supersedes DLIT, the Digital Library Innovation Team. DLIT was a large group that Brian Schottlaender formed in February 2000 to brainstorm ideas for a UCSD digital library. Dawn says that the DLPWG's mission is to take those early brainstorming ideas and move forward in implementing a program for digital initiatives that will be fully integrated into the Libraries. Dawn noted that “it has always been important to Brian that we make sure the digital library is fully integrated into the UCSD Libraries, that we not form a ‘shadow organization’ and we ensure that the digital and traditional collections and services are developed in consort.”

In addition to holding regular Working Group meetings, the DLPWG also holds monthly “project review” meetings where UCSD Libraries staff working on digital projects can present their ideas and their progress to the DLPWG for evaluation and feedback. So far, the reviews have covered projects in Digital Media Reserves, Government Documents, e-books, e-reserves and more.

To guide library staff who bring projects up for review, the DLPWG has devised a checklist of areas for each group to address. The checklist is designed to help staff organize their thoughts and highlight areas such as budget implications, metadata creation, and standards compliance. The checklist approach isn't meant to signal that the DLPWG is taking a cookie-cutter approach to the projects they review. “The more I learn about digital projects, the more I realize that they are individual,” Dawn said. “While there are similarities across projects there are also special needs, so we have to look at projects on a case-by-case-basis.”

Dawn believes that project reviews work best when the project under discussion has yet to get too far along, and can still benefit from the Working Group's questions and insights. “An important role for the DLPWG project review is saying ‘that's interesting, have you thought about

## The Digital Library Program Working Group (DLPWG)

**Chair:** Dawn Talbot

**Membership:** Linda Barnhart, Ken Calkins, Elizabeth Cowell, Chris Fryman, Anna Gold, Geri Ingram, Kari Lucas, Gabriela Montoya, Jenny Reisinger, Brad Westbrook

**From the charge:** “Develop a coordinated, interoperable, sustainable, and integrated Digital Library Program to support the teaching, research, and service needs of the UCSD community.”

**Website:** <http://gort.ucsd.edu/dlpwg/>

this?” Dawn said. Certain groups may want to have multiple reviews in order to get feedback at different stages of the project. “It's a dialogue, not a thumbs-up, thumbs-down session.” The working group is not responsible for approving individual projects; that's done through the New Initiatives call at budget time and Cabinet ultimately is responsible for decisions regarding all resource allocations.

The reviews can benefit DLPWG as well as the team who brings a particular project up for review. Dawn hopes that the continuing dialogue will help build a body of knowledge within DLPWG that will make the Working Group a better-informed, more responsive committee, enabling them to be of even more help to the next group who comes for review.

While reviewing and managing projects is an important part of the DLPWG's work, Dawn said that when the group was writing its own charge, she wanted to make sure that it encompassed more than just managing separate projects. “I wanted to make sure that we had a programmatic approach,” Dawn said, “an approach that would move us away from starting afresh with each new project and move us toward a more integrated digital library.” To that end, the project review sessions are designed to examine each project on its own merits, while at the same time ensuring they meet the programmatic goals of the Digital Library Program and the goals of the UCSD Libraries.

*“A digital object in itself is just a bucket of bits, so you have to have tools to make it useful. This is why digital collections present so many new and exciting challenges.”*

## UCSD Digital Library Now

At the UCSD Libraries, we already have a number of digital projects and services that have been around for a while: Roger, the Libraries' website, and our licensed ejournals and databases all come to mind. Dawn says that the DLPWG isn't too concerned with these more mature digital components of our library, as there are already well-established groups that are responsible for them.

DLPWG is taking an active interest in some existing projects, primarily those where the Libraries are digitizing our own content. In programs such as Electronic Re-

serves, the Digital Audio Reserves Project (DARP), and the Digital Image Reserves Project (DIRP), in addition to digitizing content, the Libraries are developing the interface layer that will make the digital content usable. "We shouldn't equate the Digital Program with locally-created digital material," Dawn said. "But we've managed our licensed materials so well the library doesn't need yet another group helping to figure out what to do with that."

Considering all these licensed materials and local projects that are currently available to UCSD Libraries users,

*(Continued on page 4)*

# BUZZWORD BINGO

As if the library field didn't already utilize enough buzzwords and acronyms, the digital library field is responsible for bringing us a great many more jargon terms, neologisms, and abbreviations. To help you keep up, *Digital Letters* will make "Buzzword Bingo" a regular feature. Many thanks to the members of DLPWG, especially Brad Westbrook, who helped with these definitions.

Here's this issue's sample (made up) sentence:

"If the library is ever going to get beyond a bunch of *siloed* collections of *digital objects* and achieve a truly *interoperable* digital library, we're going to need to adopt better *metadata* standards."

*silo*: Digital library collections have often come into being as discrete projects, or groups of projects, each standing alone like a silo full of grain (or intercontinental ballistic missiles). When collections are "siloed," it can be inefficient to try and search across multiple silos. Since I've mostly heard people talk about "getting beyond" silos in the context of seeking greater interoperability (see below), I originally thought silos were Bad Things. I have since learned that they are necessary, and can be useful for researchers who prefer to restrict their searching to a particular collection or group of collections. Perhaps an analogy can be made with the proposed US Cabinet Department of Homeland Security: the FBI and CIA are likely to remain in their current "silos," but the government hopes that they will communicate and "interoperate" better.

*digital object*: Here's a definition that will be used on the Online Archive of California's website: "Digital objects are entities in which a content file and its corresponding metadata are united, physically and/or logically, through the use of a digital wrapper." What's a "digital wrapper?" According to Brad Westbrook it is "a bit of code that serves to unify or 'encapsulate' the digital content file and its metadata into a single object." In other words, a digital object is not just the "content," like a digital image, but also the associated metadata and the wrapper that ties the content and the metadata together. What's metadata? Glad you asked...

*metadata*: You can think of "metadata" as a fancy word for

"cataloging." In the same way that a library catalog card would describe a book (or a microfilm, or a cuneiform tablet, or whatever), metadata describes electronic content. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) web page on Metadata Resources (<http://www.ifla.org/II/metadata.htm>) defines metadata as "any data used to aid the identification, description and location of networked electronic resources. Many different metadata formats exist, some quite simple in their description, others quite complex and rich." Many of those metadata formats go beyond descriptive metadata and incorporate structural metadata (describing the organization of a resource) or administrative metadata (describing how, when, where an object was created, and information about the file type, etc.).

*interoperable*: "Able to operate in conjunction," says the Oxford English Dictionary. More specifically in the digital library context, collections or libraries can be said to be interoperable when multiple collections can be searched and results retrieved from one interface, in the way that we can search collections at all UC Libraries using Melvyl. Just as standards like MARC format for cataloging and Z39.50 for information retrieval allow library catalogs to "interoperate," digital libraries are seeking out appropriate standards to allow us to search across digital collections and libraries.

What terms or acronyms would you like to see defined in future Buzzword Bingos? Email them (with definitions, if you've got 'em) to Steve Lawson [splawson@ucsd.edu](mailto:splawson@ucsd.edu) ■

(Continued from page 3)

I wondered if we already had a “digital library” in place. Dawn says we aren’t quite there yet.

“We’re groping toward a digital library,” she said. While the Libraries have many of the components in place, such as large collections of digital objects (mostly licensed content), we are still missing a crucial piece: integration.

“What makes a digital library is the associated services and interface on top of the digital objects,” Dawn said. Users often don’t care about all our separate projects, each its own “bucket” of information. A student researching a term paper, for example, is likely to want a range of materials, digital or printed, on a given topic, and not care overly about which particular project supplies the information.

## UCSD Digital Library Later

Looking to the future of the Digital Library Project at UCSD, Dawn spoke first about what the Libraries’ collections are and how they will likely grow in the next few years. The major collection areas she identified are licensed or purchased content, digitized versions of locally-owned materials, and “born digital” content. Dawn says the major area of growth will still be in the area of licensed or purchased content, while we’ll be looking at “modest growth” in digitization (with the exception of the slide project, where we will be receiving 12,500 digitized images a month for the time of the project). This is partly due to budget constraints, but, as Dawn says, it also “may not be appropriate to go out and digitize content just because the technology exists for us to do that.”

So what *should* we expect to see digitized in the near future? “You can imagine that we’ll be looking at areas where we have particular strengths, unique materials, materials that might be in danger where we would want to use a digital surrogate, grant funded projects that serve our organizational goals,” Dawn said. “But potential projects would have to support the research and instruction mission of the University. So that will be an area for DLPWG in the next several months, trying to come up with priorities for developing our permanent digital collection in collaboration with relevant library groups.” When it comes to managing UCSD intellectual assets, such as working papers, preprints, or other output of UCSD academic departments, Dawn anticipates that the Libraries will be looking into that area over the next year or two, and she noted the emergent CDL eScholarship Digital Repositories as a good beginning. We should expect projects to be driven by faculty needs rather than by any mandate from the Libraries or University Administration.

Then we talked about managing all of these digital collections. “We can think of digital assets management in several blocks,” Dawn said. “You’ve got the creation of the digital files across a range of formats; creation of the associated metadata; storage of those digital objects; you’ve got discovery, or locating digital objects using some kind of search tool; and you’ve got presentation tools. A digital

object in itself is just a bucket of bits, so you have to have tools to make it useful. This is why digital collections present so many new and exciting challenges.”

To address storage first, Dawn said that the DLPWG is “working closely with the Administrative Team to improve the Libraries’ IT infrastructure such that we will have scaleable and robust storage for our emerging digital collections. It is a high priority for DLPWG to work closely with Luc Declerck, AUL for Technology and Technical Services, to create standard procedures for moving digital objects as they are created to safe storage.” Dawn admitted to being “increasingly uncomfortable with our current approach” where storage is addressed one project at a time and the Libraries don’t have a well-articulated policy in place.

When it comes to “discovery,” or ways for users to find digital materials, the long-term goal is to “have our digital collections managed and integrated in such a way that we can search across our collections at the item level.” Right now our collections are in “silos,” or kept in separate databases that can’t all be searched at once. To get beyond the siloed, project approach, the Libraries will need a database that contains the metadata for each digital object. Roger isn’t an ideal tool for this given that it is a proprietary design that excludes us from making changes in how we manipulate and display records. When it comes to digital collections, Dawn said, “I honestly think that the online catalog as we know it today will not provide the integrated approach we need for managing the increasingly diverse content we must manage.”

I asked Dawn if she then envisioned a higher-level tool that would search the online catalog and this hypothetical digital collections metadata database and return consolidated search results for the end user. She pointed toward the developing Scholars Portal which is intended to provide one interface to search the catalog, abstracting and indexing databases, databases like Sage, and, ideally, whatever database or catalog is developed for digital collections. Whatever the outcome of the Scholars Portal initiative, Dawn noted that “our emerging digital library infrastructure will position us well so that whatever comes down the road in the next couple of years, we can easily participate in it.”

As for digital object file creation, metadata creation and presentation tools, right now the Libraries are using a variety of products. We will continue to use several tools at any one time, depending on the particular format and application needs.

While perfect solutions may still be elusive, much of what we need to do now is position ourselves to take advantage of future developments in technology and standards. “I imagine,” Dawn said, “that if we have this discussion again in a year’s time a lot of these issues will be much more clearly articulated and at least partly resolved. DLPWG’s action plans are taking shape and the direction for the Digital Library Program is coming into focus.” ■

**In the next issue of *Digital Letters*: Scholars Portal**