

Visualizing Archival Collections Online: A Study of Available Tools

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Abstract: As the popularity of digital presences for archival collections grows, online exhibits of archival material are becoming more complex and engaging. This poster presents my ongoing research into the availability and appropriateness of visualization tools for archival collections. My research questions include: What archival collection-specific visualization tools exist? Are they open source? Free? What object metadata is required to use the tools? What currently existing data visualization tools (popular in data science and news outlets) can be used for archival collections? Are they open source? Free? How well do they work with archival items/collections? What issues are present? How easily can these tools be modified to best fit archives purposes? What attributes would an ideal archival collection visualization tool have?

The research methods being employed include literature reviews, analysis of tools currently used by archives, libraries, and museums, and a survey of digital archivists. This poster session presents the early stages of this work, and is meant as a platform to engage with professionals undertaking collection visualization projects. A print and digital version of the survey will be available onsite, and note cards will be available for attendees to add general information about their practices and tools, issues they have encountered, and any other comments.

The primary end goal is to provide a free resource for archivists that will give an overview of the visualization tools being used in the field. A free report will be publicized listing available tools with pros, cons, resources required, and additional workload estimates. A secondary goal is to help inform web developers of the specific needs archives have when approaching content visualization.

About the author:

Alexandra Dolan-Mescal serves as the Special Collections Librarian at Queens College, where she received her MLS in 2013. Previously, she was the Digital Archivist for Civil Rights Collections at the school. She is also the Lab Manager for the independent Experiential Learning Lab for Digital Humanities in Archives, a loosely-organized group that works with students interested in using digital humanities tools and concepts to explore archival collections.