The Connected Scholar
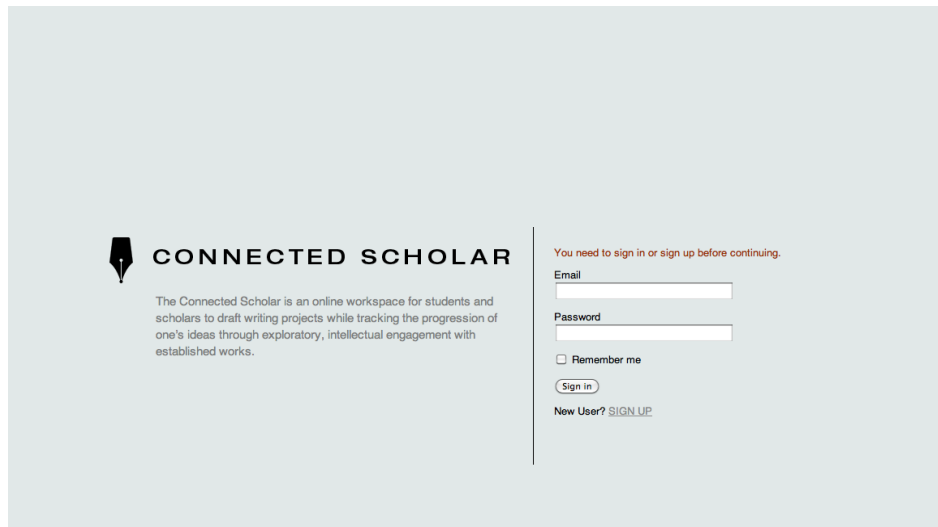
Building Ideas, Communicating, and Exploring Sources
within an Online Culture of Attribution

Library Lab Proposal Report
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Project summary

The Connected Scholar is an online workspace for students and scholars to compose writing projects while tracking the progression of one's ideas through exploratory, intellectual engagement with established works. This space integrates student writing with resource discovery and management while guiding students to develop the practice of proper source attribution.

The Connected Scholar has potential for wide application across schools and disciplines. As a result, stakeholders across the University have expressed interest and support for its potential to address demonstrated needs including attention to attribution and academic integrity, increasing and facilitating use of underutilized library resources, and integration of student support services. Finally, the tool has potential for several other purposes such as a data source for the LibraryCloud and ShelfLife projects.

Accomplishments

The prototype contains several features, developed by Sebastian Diaz, Dan Collis-Puro, Joe Kutner, Jeremy Mcanally and Matt Smith. They include:

- A complete and functional **online collaborative writing space** that tracks revisions and includes popular word processing features.

  The collaborative writing space is based on the open-source application Etherpad, includes full options for editing your doc including fonts, styles, formatting lists, block-quotes, strikethroughs, and color-coded text per author.

  A writing space feature automatically creates a read-only link to a document that includes a QR tag, document export to HTML, plain text and Wordle, and a link for embedding the document into a Webpage.
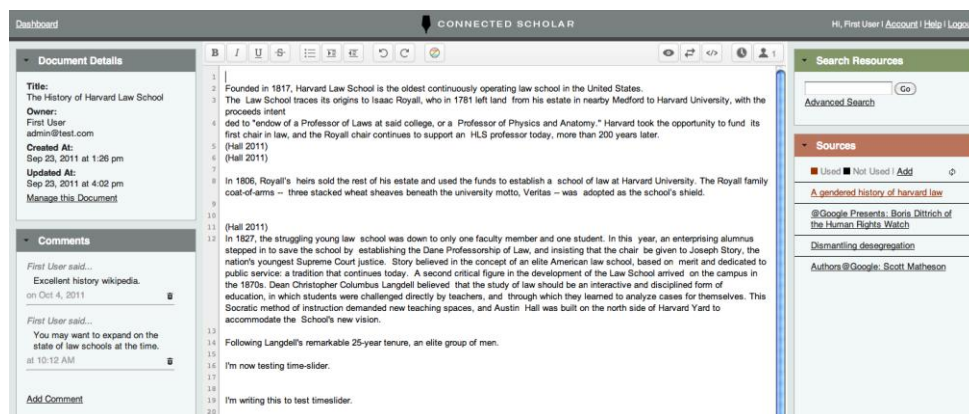
- A sleek **Timeline slider** is integrated, in alignment with the concept behind the Connected Scholar.

  With the click of the Clock icon from the toolbar, the latest version appears and you can slide a cursor back through a timeline and view the document progress. Each version is numbered and you can see the writing evolve, or devolve, according to the speed with which you are moving the slider.

  This feature invites the writer to easily see the progress and evolution of one's work, a unique feature to this writing space. *It is helpful for both instructors and students to evaluate progress through the writing process, encouraging the recognition of one's own contributions and interpretation of existing work, as well as reflective writing practice.*
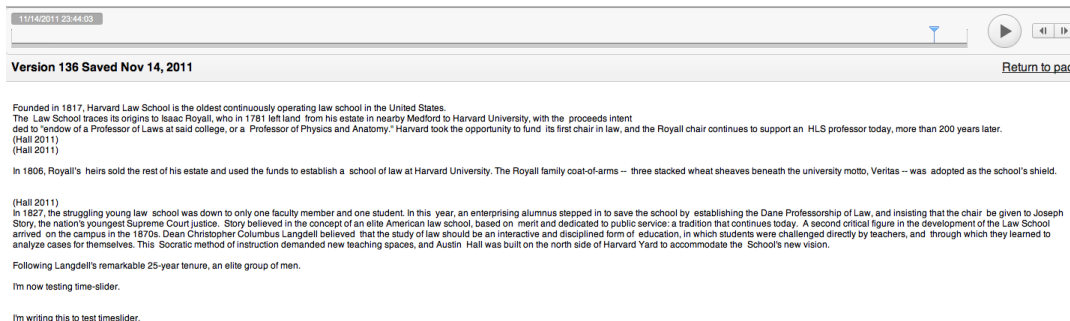

- The **collaborative tools** include:
  Color-coded text by contributor visible throughout the space, and it can be turned on and off.

  A chat box for real-time dialogue between the student, instructor, or librarian.

  A comment box, listing comments chronologically with easy delete and add link. This is particularly helpful for the learning process among instructional staff and peers.

- **Integration with library sources**
  Integration, through a search box, with Library Cloud meta-data to collect, reference, and track Hollis sources within the work through automated citing.
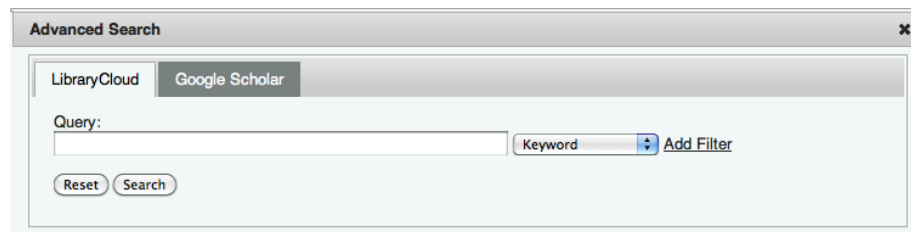
A sidebar listing the sources added from Hollis and integration with Google Scholar to collect, integrate and track sources.
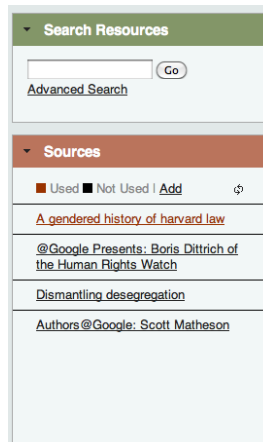
- **A clean, elegant and appropriate visual design.**
  A clean, modern and simple design was created by design professional Shun Liang. He was mindful of the fact that instructors, students and professional staff will use the application on a voluntary basis. They will make a deliberate choice to leave their favorite word processor to write in this new online environment. Students and faculty easily turn away from unappealing design interfaces. Particular focus was paid toward creating an inviting, classic yet modern space with warm colors that would encourage users to experiment with and stay within this space.

Challenges
Challenges with the prototype are as follows:
- Integrating the citations from Google Scholar and the Harvard Library e-resources to list on the Sources sidebar.
- When copying text from a source and pasting it in the writing space, the citation information must accompany it and be listed in the Sources sidebar.
- Integrating the Blue Book for law school users in the citation format.
- Working through the minor bugs and issues within the application.

Budget
Total development hours: 731.47
Total development cost (including salary, benefits, overheard, and administration): $73,147.00

Next steps
Our next step is to collect feedback from students, faculty and colleagues from our list of collaborators. After collecting the data from them, we plan to apply for additional funding to address the challenges listed herein as well as suggestions from the students, faculty and peers who test the Connected Scholar prototype.

Publicity and presentations
Publicity and presentations of the Prototype were not yet conducted with the exception of the Library Lab Showcase on October 27.