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Library Lab Proposal
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Social Tagging for Archival Collections
**(This proposal is different from the draft because it contains some statistical information about the collections
in question, and it offers some ideas on how the tagging and comments might display. The additions are in
red).**
Background and Idea for Project
The Andover-Harvard Theological Library at Harvard Divinity School is the official repository for the records of the
Unitarian Universalist Association. In this capacity, the Library has the records of the Unitarian and Universalist
Service Committees (now the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee.) During and after World War II, this
Committee aided hundreds of displaced persons in Europe. They established food and clothing distribution centers,
hospitals, and homes for children. They also aided hundreds of people in their efforts to leave war-torn Europe and
establish new lives for themselves in the United States. In a project funded by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial
Museum, the records of this Committee were digitized and deposited into the Digital Repository Service (DRS) at
Harvard. About 238,000 documents and 3,100 photographs from these collections are now available through
Harvard's OASIS website via links to the PDS system. A list of the collections can also be viewed on this Harvard
Divinity School website: http://www.hds.harvard.edu/library/collections/digital/service_committee.html

We would like to explore the use of social tagging in order to make the information in these collections more easily
discoverable. If it proves to be useful, this project might act as a prototype for the use of social tagging in other
archival collections at Harvard University.

Problem to be addressed and possible solution
Over the years, the records of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee have received a great deal of use by
researchers and scholars. Now they are digitized, they are available on a much wider scale. A recent WebTrends
Analytics report revealed that from December, 2008 until September 30, 2011 the Holocaust Rescue and Relief:
Digitized Records of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee site received 4,968 visits. The average time
viewed was 3:36 minutes. This seems to indicate that there is an audience that would potentially be interested in
tagging these collections. As mentioned, these collections are also available through the OASIS site. The OIS office
does not provide information about the use of individual finding aids in OASIS, but statistics about the use of
OASIS as a whole are available. The direct link to the most recent stats is
http://zellner.harvard.edu/reports/ldireport.php - scroll down to OASIS. The stats of interest are sessions, searches,
and browse. These graphs indicate that OASIS is a well-used site.

The problem we would like to address is the fact that these collections contain information on a wide variety of
subjects that are not easily discoverable.

For example, collection bMS 16036, which is entitled "Director, Child and Youth Projects. Records, 1947-1961"
(http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:DIV.LIB:div16036) has a folder in bMS 16036/3 (1) entitled: **Displaced persons. -M-.**
The correspondence in this folder is arranged according to the name of the correspondent, and this folder contains
correspondence filed under the name of Sarah McCombs. In her correspondence, Ms. McCombs discusses a
displaced person named Andor Nemeth, who she is trying to help. There are fourteen documents pertaining to him
and his family (sequence 5-18) in this folder, but this would not be known unless someone happened to find it while
paging through the folder. Examples like this abound throughout the collections.

For another example, a social worker named Marianne Welter worked with the Unitarian Service Committee for a
number of years, and she has been a topic of research for several people. Her name appears in folder titles when it is
known that a folder contains information about her. But not every instance of her name is discoverable through
folder titles.

The same is true for information concerning the Service Committee's efforts to assist refugees from the Spanish
Civil War. The Service Committee established a hospital in France for these refugees, as well as clothing and food

distribution centers. Folders that are known to contain information about the Spanish Civil War are noted, but not all of the information about the Spanish Civil War appears on folder titles.

If there was a tagging mechanism in place, information like this could be discovered more easily. For instance, if a person interested in the Service Committee's work with Spanish refugees was able to tag letters and reports in the finding aids that are not otherwise identified as dealing with this topic, this would be helpful to that particular researcher as well as being a great boon to other people who might be interested in this topic.

As mentioned, about 3,100 photographs were digitized, and they are available through a search in VIA (try searching "Unitarian service"). Many of these photographs lack information about people, places, and things. It would be helpful if the photographs could be tagged as well as the documents.

It is worth noting that the problem described in this proposal is a very common one in archival collections, at Harvard and elsewhere. Most finding aids do not give comprehensive information about the contents of the collections. And unlike the Service Committee records, most of the contents of archival collections at Harvard have not been digitized. Therefore, it would be most helpful if this project could explore the use of social tagging with whatever level of description is available on a finding aid, be it a box level description, a folder level description, an item level description, or a completely digitized finding aid, like the Service Committee records. We would hope that people would be able to enter annotations, comments, and connections which would display right on each finding aid. For an example, see this page from a site called fold3: http://www.fold3.com/image/#13198559 This example shows a single item in a collection. We would hope that this kind of tagging could also be done on finding aids for collections that have not been fully digitized as well.

We have spoken about this proposal to other archivists at Harvard, including Susan von Salis (Fogg Art Museum); Ellen Shea (Schlesinger Library); and Barbara Meloni (Harvard University Archives). They are all very interested in it, and would find the use of social tagging helpful to faculty, students, outside researchers and archivists. They are all particularly interested in using social tagging at different levels of description (box, folder, item, digitized item).

Examples of social tagging in special collections:
Social tagging is being used in several other endeavors, so this is part of a growing trend:
Trove
- Trove is the Australian site that has digitized newspapers and is dependent upon the public to proof the scanned content and suggest corrections. Here's a link to the main Trove website. Note that it includes a portion called Diaries, Letters and Archives that can be tagged: http://trove.nla.gov.au/?q
- Here's a link to their page on how users can participate, including how they can tag pages (tags can be public or private), leave comments, participate in user forums. http://trove.nla.gov.au/general/help-on-participating-in-trove

Flickr Commons
- Allows for tagging and comments of images only http://www.flickr.com/commons

MTagger at MLibrary at University of Michigan
- Here's a link to the page that describes how tagging can be used to create a collection and identify pages in MLibrary: http://www.lib.umich.edu/mtagger/tags/faq
- The tagging help page includes info about tagging best practices: http://www.lib.umich.edu/mtagger/tags/help
- Here's a link to MTagger usability reports : http://www.lib.umich.edu/usability-library/usability-library-mtagger-reports

Fold3
- http://www.footnotelibrary.com/ - Fold3 – see http://www.fold3.com/tour.php (see #5) - use http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:footnote to get this through Harvard.

How this project will be evaluated
If a method of tagging could be put in place, we would do our best to promote it at Harvard and among interested researchers. We could evaluate it after six months to see if people are using it, and how they are using it. We could determine the benefits of the project by evaluating people's tags and comments, to see if these methods are fostering useful research.

Budget and Resources Necessary: Not known