

Zeega

March 2012 Update

Alpha 0.5

We released the Alpha 0.5 version of Zeega to a limited set of users inside and outside the University on February 6th. This new version is the outcome of the rebuilding we began with Library Lab funding last summer and realizes our vision of providing robust tools for users to build and share media collections. This version is being used by undergraduates and graduate students in courses from VES to Romance Language and Literature to the GSD. It was also presented by Ann Whiteside and Jesse Shapins at the Association of Architecture School Librarians on March 2nd during the panel “Digital Collaborations within and beyond the design academy: The Library transformed.”

Wild Swans

In addition to these uses in courses and public presentations, the Zeega Alpha has been used by Harvard American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.) to create a multimedia community memoir for spring show Wild Swans. Brendan Shea, outreach and education associate at the A.R.T., interviewed people across greater Boston and then cut these clips into brief segments that he uploaded to YouTube. He then used Zeega to combine this audio material with images, videos and sounds from across the web, effectively treating the Internet like an extended library. He writes, “Zeega turns the Internet into a limitless source of storytelling materials—illustrations, scores, video design, etc. Flickr and YouTube contain, essentially, millions of lenses looking at the same thing.... One of the best parts of Zeega is that, when you add media to the platform, it automatically cites the source and provides a link to the original image or video. An individual can curate a project like this, but the creative authorship is truly communal, when you think about it.” Read more in [Brendan’s guest post for the British Council](#), a co-sponsor of the initiative.

Open-sourcing on Github

On February 17th, we made public [Zeega’s Github repository](#). During an informal event with guests from the Berkman Center, the Library Innovation Lab, PRX, Frontline, the Academic Technology Group and others, James and Filipe lead a presentation of Zeega’s technical architecture and the model for contributing new plugins as layers. In the lead up to this presentation and since, the code has undergone a major re-factoring and a new version 0.6 of the alpha will be pushed live later this month. The presentation can be downloaded [here](#).

Environment Built

Since last summer, we have been working to develop a multimedia publishing series that uses Zeega to create new narratives out of archival material held in Harvard’s

libraries. metaLAB Fellow Jeanne Haffner will be series editor of “Environment Built,” which aims to provide an innovative place for discussion of contemporary environmental concerns, from a shortage of energy to the use of natural remedies for the effects of global warming on cities to environmental justice on a global scale. With increasing access to visual and other representational tools used in the practices that build our environment, our contributions seek to cast a new light on the problem of representation in the making. The series asks questions such as: How do visual techniques shape expert knowledge of environmental problems, and how are they employed in the practice of urban governance? In what ways do simple shifts in research methodologies lead to major revisions of our conception of the “environment”? How do digitalizations of “natural” places modify our understanding and experience of concrete spaces? As the world continues to deal with major environmental challenges, examining the genesis, reuse, and future transformations of the environment could not be more relevant.

The series will premiere in May with an event hosted at the Arnold Arboretum, an appropriate location as one of the first pieces is about the Olmsted’s Emerald Necklace, drawing on images from the Olmsted archive and Loeb Library’s collection of lantern slides documenting the changing American landscape.

Digital Archive of Japan’s 2011 Disasters

Since last March we have been working with the Reischauer Institute for Japanese Studies to build Zeega out as the technical foundation of the [Digital Archive of Japan’s 2011 Disasters](#). The project dramatically pushes Zeega’s capabilities for searching and filtering multiple media types through multiple views. Currently, the site networks over 890,000 items from multiple repositories across the web, including images, Tweets, videos, audio files, archived websites, documents, PDFs and user-submitted testimonials. Users can browse this material through a list view, as well as a “time and place” view that conjoins a time slider with a clickable map. Technically, to support this, we have begun integrating a SOLR database layer into Zeega, as well as configured our own installation of GeoServer to dynamically render points on the map. A new release in July will enable users to also register to curate their own collections from the broader archive, and these collections will then also become a part of the archive itself. The project was recently [presented here at Harvard](#), as well as to the National Diet Library in Japan and at the Association for Asian Studies conference in Toronto.

January 2012 Note

Many people visiting this page are probably wondering what happened to the name extraMUROS. We loved the name, too, but over the course of working on extraMUROS last year, we mistakenly made the descriptions of extraMUROS and Zeega appear synonymous. So, in the interest of clarity, we have recently decided to only refer to the project going forward under the name Zeega. And this makes sense, as extraMUROS was initially conceived as a project to expand a working prototype of Zeega for the library community, to further develop integrated tools for collection-building, multimedia editing, and cross-platform publishing. The core

goals and features initially envisaged under the rubric of extraMUR0S will certainly continue to be carried out as Zeega is developed for use in libraries, archives and other collection-driven contexts.

January 2012 Update

In September, we submitted a proposal for additional funding to continue Zeega's development to support the Harvard Library. The review committee approved this proposal with the caveat that they would like to see results of some usability testing and more thorough documentation of the coming year's development initiatives.

Towards this end, we held a usability working session w/ Steve Chapman (HLS), Melissa Dollman (Schlesinger) and Paul Cote (GSD) on December 15th, 2011. Although it was very daunting to turn the tool over to them without any presentation, the feedback was tremendously valuable. We've compiled our observations of their behavior and notes from our general conversation [here](#).

Jesse and Alix were joined in the session by Lindsey Wagner, Zeega's new Director of Product + Projects. She has a background in UX design/usability, so it was great to have her. Since the session, she's wireframed a series of UX updates to address some of the most crucial issues. You can see PDFs for design changes to the [bookmarklet, collections interface](#) and [item browser](#). These are now being developed into code. We anticipate having a new stable version (that we're calling Alpha 0.5) w/ these updates done by the first week of February.

In general, we've made tremendous progress on planning and documentation. We now have consolidated the technical description of the application into less than a page, as well as written an application glossary and technology inventory. You can read this here: [Zeega Overview](#).

We've also put together a [road map of initiatives/features for the coming 6 months](#), with other initiatives lined up for the summer/fall (rollover each initiative to see more detailed notes). This is coupled with subtabs that document all existing features, as well as show features in development, in queue and under consideration.

Also, 19 students in the Fall 2011 Gen Ed. course "Re-Inventing Boston" used the ultra-early version we started building this summer (w/ our initial Library Lab funding) to create final projects using Zeega. They did this with only one brief introduction to the tool by Jesse and very modest email support. The faculty and TFs were thrilled, and are planning future integrations of the tool in their classes. During JTerm, we are planning to share brief surveys w/ students and faculty to get documentation of their feedback. Here are two project highlights which draw on library collections, which can be viewed using Chrome:

[Home Sweet House: Dorchester](#), by Molly Ryan

['With all Deliberate Speed over Time': The Story of the Quincy School](#), by Anne La

We've also made a lot of progress on the [Digital Archive of Japan's 2011 Disasters site](#), which is running entirely on Zeega and helping to develop the tool with feedback specifically from the library, archive and digital researcher communities (Professor Andrew Gordon, Director of the Reischauer Institute for Japanese Studies, was a part of our Year 2 Library Lab grant). The project includes custom discovery tools to display results in list, map/time and tag views. The same data is then accessible within the core Zeega collections and projects editor. In this context, we've also begun sharing [our API documentation](#) with open-source development partners and giving them access to follow the project on Github. This project is a strong illustration of the concept of a Zeega site, an overarching implementation of Zeega that includes custom identity, interface and tools. We anticipate releasing a prototype of this around March 11th, 2012, marking one year since the earthquake, tsunami and their aftermath.

Lastly, we are cooking up plans for "Unlocking HOLLIS," a Harvard Library-specific implementation of Zeega to be introduced this Spring. The basic idea is that HOLLIS includes an extraordinary and ever-growing trove of images, from early photographs and scientific illustrations to prints and paintings to digitized rare books, manuscripts, and maps. The HOLLIS catalog includes hundreds of thousands of unrestricted images—pictures free to use at Harvard and beyond. But the HOLLIS interface doesn't easily offer a way to search exclusively unrestricted images. Thus for many users, HOLLIS isn't a window, but a door—and the door is locked.

Using Zeega, we will develop an easy means for users anywhere to unlock HOLLIS to find, collect, and manipulate unrestricted images and other media at Harvard; to curate collections of such images; and even to associate those images with media from other sources such as Flickr, YouTube, and the Internet Archive, to create rich, immersive storytelling experiences. We call this project Unlocking HOLLIS for its potential to open the door to the trove of open-access media in Harvard's libraries—and to let those images go out in the world to help teach, produce knowledge, and tell stories.