UC SANTA BARBARA

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Digital Data Ambassadors

The modern library has gone way beyond card catalogs and neatly shelved books. Today's repositories of knowledge also are charged with curating and housing information online, and in myriad formats.

With a grant from the Institute of Museum & Library Services (IMLS) the library at UC Santa Barbara is at the forefront of developing best practices for finding, storing and organizing digital data.

The $100,000 National Leadership Grant will support "Always Already Computational: Library Collection as Data," a multi-institution project that will explore strategies in library collections related to computationally driven research and teaching.

Thomas Padilla, UCSB Library's humanities data curator, who was instrumental in securing the IMLS grant, is a key member of the research group investigating how modern libraries can nurture and grow digital collections. Joining Padilla in this effort are Laurie Allen of the University of Pennsylvania, Stewart Varner of the University of Pennsylvania, Sarah Potvin of Texas A&M University and Elizabeth Russey Roke of Emory University.

"I am so excited to work with the project team and the wider cultural heritage community to move forward collections as data practice," Padilla said. "The whole team is deeply invested in figuring out ways we can approach development of digital collections that make them more readily amenable to computational use."

To kick off the project, UCSB will host a meeting of librarians, archivists and museum professionals to explore how the digital space can best serve libraries, and vice versa. Eventually, Padilla and his group plan to create a framework to support library collections as data, identify methods for making library collections more discoverable and provide guidance for future technical development.

“Following our initial forum, we’ll continue the conversation across a range of disciplinary and professional communities,” Padilla explained. “Along the way, we aim to develop guidance for institutions large and small interested exposing new facets of use across their collections.”

“This work on digital collections is an example of the leadership role research university libraries play in advancing the creation and discovery of knowledge,” said Denise Stephens, UCSB’s university librarian. “It promises to have important implications for how the UCSB Library, and libraries in general, support and enable research in the years to come.”

The project, one of only 15 selected by the IMLS from among 85 applications, aims to further the institute’s mission, shared by UCSB Library, to inspire institutions to advance innovation, lifelong learning and cultural and civic engagement.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.