Through the Windows and the Walls: Guided Tours and Case Studies in the Canterbury Cathedral Project

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Howard, Miranda, "Through the Windows and the Walls: Guided Tours and Case Studies in the Canterbury Cathedral Project" (2005). University Libraries Faculty & Staff Publications. 5.
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Session 8
Beyond the Slide Show: New Tools for Teaching and Learning with Images

Organizer: Virginia M.G. Hall, Johns Hopkins University
Moderator: Elisa Lanzi, Smith College

Abstract

With the expanded use of digital images and the development of new technologies, tools are being conceived for use in research and instruction which allow us to expand the pedagogical impact of images beyond the digital slide show and online image review. A number of institutions have put together image-rich projects, tools, and resources which utilize technology to improve the critical thinking of students, increase the effectiveness of teaching, and enable the close examination of specific subjects and/or fields of study. Often the development of these projects, tools, and resources requires the knowledge and expertise of visual resources curators working collaboratively with faculty and technology staff. This session will demonstrate new ways in which images are being used in academic settings. The format will be show and tell with panelists presenting projects from their institutions, and discussing the issues that led to the conception of the project, as well as the aspects of collaboration and funding models.

Introduction

We all remember when our job meant providing slides to professors to illustrate their lectures. Building collections required copy stand photography or purchasing slides from vendors. We cataloged slides and helped faculty locate specific images. Curators and paraprofessionals in one office could do this. The advent of computers and multimedia software has allowed faculty and visual resources librarians to expand their skills and functions within the educational community. As a profession we had made the leap from the slide show to image intensive Web pages.

When my university administration called for increased use of technology in the teaching and learning process, I joined forces with three scholars to go beyond the slide show and into the world of multimedia, interactive instruction Web sites, and teaching modules. This required teamwork with other departments, acquiring images in more complex ways, and new methods of image management for an all-digital collection.

The Project

The Virtual Cathedral project at Western Michigan University endeavors to imitate the experience of visiting a Gothic cathedral. The two churches we selected are Canterbury Cathedral and the monastery at Saint-Denis. The site is designed as a teaching aid for undergraduate courses in medieval studies as the majority of students at Western Michigan University have not actually been inside a Gothic cathedral. The project is Web-based so that faculty can use the site in class and create assignments to be carried out away from the classroom. Realizing that the Web and computer graphic technology offered advantages in teaching, this project not only serves student needs, but provides a scholarly outlet for faculty needs as well.

The Web site contains the following features: guided tours, an interactive “explore on your own,” case studies, and bibliographies. Guided tours and case studies allow the scholars invested in this project to highlight a specific feature of the cathedral (e.g., case studies on the typology windows and the wall paintings). This presentation focuses on a guided tour and case studies.

The Team

Paul Szarmach, director of the Medieval Institute and professor of English, and Robert Berkhofer, assistant professor of History, shaped this project on paper in 2002. They asked me as the Visual Resources Librarian to partner with them.
The first permutations of the site appeared in fall 2003. By 2004 Elizabeth Teviotdale, assistant director of the Medieval Institute, joined the team as the art history scholar who would focus on case studies for the site. Over the three-year period we have had an undergraduate assistant and a graduate assistant helping with the management and cataloging of the images. Between faculty senate Teaching and Learning with Technology grants and matching funds from the history department and library, our initial budget was fifty thousand dollars. What I am showing you today is what we have been able to accomplish with this budget. We are in the process of applying for larger outside grants to complete the project.

A great deal of sweat equity has gone into this project so far. The project purchased images of the cathedrals from vendors, a digital camera, trips for each of use to visit and photograph the cathedral, and the services of two multimedia specialists from the Office of Information Technology. As far as the computer, software, and servers are concerned, we piggybacked on the library’s computer equipment.

As visual resources librarian, my role was to locate and purchase images from vendors; keep track of licensing agreements; and to manage, archive, and catalog all images. I also made arrangements with the Dean of Canterbury and the architect at Saint-Denis to photograph the structures and negotiated use agreements for these photographs. To date we have two thousand usable images for Canterbury alone and about 980 for Saint-Denis. Images used in case studies are gathered from a number of sources. It was my job to obtain digital images and use rights for architectural features, manuscript illuminations, and engravings from various sources including libraries, archives, professional photographers, and the cathedral enterprises. Images are currently managed using Portfolio software.

Special Features
For this demonstration, I would like to focus on the guided tours and case studies connected with the project. Guided tours and case studies are created by the scholars to address specific teaching needs in their courses. The first guided tour is a general tour of the basic Gothic cathedral. This was created by Robert Berkhofer to introduce his undergraduate students in Medieval History to the layout and function of a Gothic cathedral. It demonstrates particular features of the Gothic cathedral that are basic, like the west entrance, the nave, the choir, transepts, and chevet. It is designed for the beginning student. Our graduate assistant, Jill Bogart, provided images and text was written by Bob Berkhofer. Mike Van Putten, a multimedia specialist, carried out programming for the interface and multimedia.

Topics for future guided tours are Thomas Beckett and the Canterbury Tales for literature courses. Upper level undergraduate students and graduate students use the case studies for their assignments. The case study for the typology windows is designed to inform students of the iconographic program that underlies the stained glass windows in Canterbury cathedral. Most of the students, even if they are aware of the iconography, are not sure of the actual function of the stained glass and how it is laid out in a cathedral. Liz Teviotdale created this case study.

Liz is working closely with Mike Van Putten to create the final interfaces for the case studies. This PowerPoint presentation will give you an idea of how Liz begins working with the media specialist. For the final version we have scanned images from 6 x 7 transparencies that we rented from Sonia Holliday in England, the photographer who photographed the cathedral for the current official cathedral guides.

The second case study centering on the original wall paintings in Canterbury Cathedral engaged Liz and a graduate student in what can be viewed as a very contemporary teaching/learning relationship. This case study was conceived of and designed by Jill Bogart, a master's degree candidate in Medieval Studies, under the direction of Liz Teviotdale, as an independent study. Jill did the research, located images, and constructed the content. As visual resources librarian, I procured archival digital images and use rights for the images from archives, manuscript collections, and Cathedral Enterprises. Liz in turn worked with our multimedia specialist to create the interface. Canterbury, like other medieval churches, was once heavily decorated with wall paintings depicting scenes from the lives of Christ and of the early saints. Today, some of the remnants of the wall paintings can still be located in Canterbury Cathedral. This case study explores the creation, meaning, and decorative qualities of the original wall paintings and at the same time introduces the student to the artistic agenda and artisans involved in the wall paintings. It will be used in Dr. Teviotdale's upcoming class on Canterbury Cathedral for one of the summer sessions at WMU. The case studies provide a venue for graduate students to do an in-depth research project, see it realized as a multimedia Web site, and observe its use in the teaching process.

Another feature of the Web site is the bibliographies that are included. To date, there is a general bibliography I created and a bibliography specific to the wall painting case study created by Jill. This is another outlet for student research.

Conclusion
Certainly, the basic visual and textual content of this Web project could have been taught using traditional teaching methods with the professor lecturing and using slides. However, with today's students being adept with computers, visually attuned, and more interested in individual learning, using the new technologies to the fullest extent enhances the teaching and learning experience for both the students and the professor. By having graduate students creating tours and case studies, they have the opportunity to combine research and teaching into a multimedia presentation.