The Problem

Rare books, like archival materials, are valuable resources which can offer users unique opportunities for research and exploration. Unfortunately, the most common method used today to provide access to rare books, the library OPAC, comes with the following disadvantage: 1. The controlled search vocabulary needed to search within special collections are often difficult to use and not well known by users, so, the discovery of many unique materials is hindered by the way results ranking algorithms are designed to focus on more “popular” entries. 2. the catalog fails to provide contextual information for rare books which would enhance the value of interacting with them. As a result, rare books are often underutilized as both research and educational materials. This is the current case for the Don Quixote Collection at Queens College, which is comprised of fourteen editions and related works of Miguel De Cervantes’ masterpiece spanning over 300 years.

Meaningful Access to Rare Book Collections: A Digital Prototype in Omeka

Using the free, open-source content management software Omeka, we have created an online access tool for rare books that allows users to explore the Don Quixote Collection of Queens College in new ways.

Interactive Title Pages

Using interactive visualizations to illuminate a single edition, this exhibit offers a glimpse into the world of 17th-century printing. The people, places, and methods involved in the production of this volume provide contextual information about the edition as well as insight into the world in which it was created.

Print History Exhibit

Context was used to provide a broad framework within which each volume can be understood as a part of the collection as a whole. This includes an online finding aid. Metadata for the entire collection was also created so that users can both browse and search for what they need.

Archival Description

We chose DACS as our descriptive standard for its emphasis on archival context and its flexibility when used in conjunction with metadata standards. These attributes make it ideal for description at the item, series, and collection levels.

Interactive Title Pages

Features such as hover text and a menu interface were included to encourage users to actively engage with the content. The adoption of the wiki finding aid and detailed evaluations offer greater opportunities for historical and collection level context.

Metadata & Wiki

We chose DACS as our descriptive standard for its emphasis on archival context and its flexibility when used in conjunction with metadata standards. These attributes make it ideal for description at the item, series, and collection levels.

Archival Description

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http://qcarchives.com/books