

▼ Assignment or Reading Log on Web sites :

For this week, I have given you a file called exhibitions.pdf. It lists websites that have been cited for excellence from the book *_Building Digital Archives, Descriptions, and Displays* by Frederick Stielow, 2003. It is there if you want to use it to avoid much searching. You will have to type the addresses in the browser bar because it is a pdf without links, but it should give you short cuts to finding good sites. You don't have to use these sites though. You also have been given the article "Creating the Web Site and Display Options" on e-reserves from the same book. Your assignment for the week is to read that article (please also read the other articles like Schellenberg in Cyberspace, but not required for this assignment). And using the article as a loose guide only, annotate the effectiveness of two cites of your choice. Please evaluate more than their front page. I would expect you to look at online displays, but also contact information and finding aids.

I wanted to explain what I look for in a research site or in pretty much any web site: user point of view here. I look for information of course, but I want that information to be complete. By 'complete', I mean that if I spend time searching through massive finding aids to 'find' my topic, I expect to find the information about the topic and the image associated with it. I get pretty frustrated by broken links, missing images, paltry information or no images at all. Put it this way: if there is a great description about some 18th century gothic novel, I will expect to be able to read it online not just see the cover; if there is any finding aid info at all about photographs, I will expect to be able to link directly to them. If archives/museums are trying to share, then the posting 'complete' information is more helpful to this researcher/user. Beyond 'complete' is the ability to further analyze the materials by zooming in. It is hard enough to read on a computer screen, let alone view detail in a 2" x 3" image. Having much larger views allows greater accessibility in my book. This viewpoint may be shared by many or it may not be. I do feel that archives may want to look into expanding the virtual reading room over the actual one when it comes to funding. Listed below are some of the sites I checked out and some notes about what I thought was effective or not effective. If anyone has the current listing of award winning exhibition sites, I would love to know what they are. Enjoy.

<http://www.asia.si.edu/exhibitions/online/loveYearning/base.html>

Haft Awrang (Seven Thrones):A Royal Persian Manuscript by Jami, Art of the Islamic World, Freer and Sackler Galleries. Excellent use of design, audio, and visibility of objects. Allows for zoom inspection of images. Brief descriptions explain images and audio adds historical facts concerning production of the manuscript. No finding aid or search ability, but categories are easily navigated. Background music is nice. Overall effective for visibility, but researchers may want more direct translation of text. Once in the site, navigation out is missing.

<http://www.pem.org/yinyutang/>

Yin Yu Tang, a late Qing dynasty merchant's house, was originally located in southeastern China. Re-erected at the Peabody Essex Museum. Awesome site, very easy to navigate, nice design, and very informative. Site is missing search function and formal finding aid-but navigation makes up for this. FAQ page is helpful and information about who worked on the project and website are extensive. Flash animations are used effectively. I came away from this site with the feeling that I had just learned quite a bit about Chinese history.

<http://www.lib.virginia.edu/small/exhibits/gothic/open.html>

Sublime Anxiety-The Gothic Family and The Outsider, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia. Navigation issue between exhibit and home archive is present. Once on the site it is easy to go from one section to another, but not as easy to bounce around quickly. There is no search function but there is lots of great info. The info is more teaser than anything and needs more scanned images of complete works-not just title page. Zoom feature is pretty useless, should be more like Freer and Sackler. No finding aid other than categories. Site allows for feedback. It has a nice curator's statement about collection, but no discussion about how the exhibit was put together. The entrance page is pretty creative, but the overall site is a bit dated.

<http://www.lib.virginia.edu/small/exhibits/popup/>

Pop: Pop Goes the Page: Movable and Mechanical Books from the Brenda Forman Collection, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia. No finding aid or search engine, uses basic categories and navigation is clunky. There are however really neat interactive 3D views of pop-up books with histories-wish there were more books in 3D part. I would like to see more inside book images to see how the pop-up has changed throughout history. Site allows for feedback and discusses how the exhibit was put together on the back end.

<http://www.valdosta.edu/library/find/arch/folklife/index.html>

South Georgia Folk Life Collection, Archives and Special Collections, Valdosta State University. Of all the sites I checked out beyond the first page, I must say that this one comes closest to what an 'ideal' site should strive towards. I am not using this site for brownie points nor do I wish to anger the wonderful VSU archivist (D.D.) by using it as part of this reading log. This site has many of the traditional searching methods incorporated and maintains a 'less flashy' and 'more researchy' appeal. It is the only one with a defined finding aid and search function. In comparing it to the sites of the University of Virginia, there is a huge difference in the technology used and in the exhibit presentation. There are some areas that I feel may be reworked or added to. When searching for an image I was able to find the inventory listing, but in an image search having the text info without the image is not as effective. To be able to view the image while reading the textual information would be helpful. The only other item seems to be some of the navigation. There are some links that open up new windows and some don't. I saw this with the finding aid, when you first click it the page opens within the site, but when you click an item a new window opens up. This new window does not go 'back' and the original web site sits behind it. I must close this finding aid page to get back to the main page. So a little confusing, but otherwise harmless. Another thing I would suggest is design consistency. The main page design is the best and shows the exhibit tags (on the left) nice and large against the main green background, it also works on a few other pages but then all the tags get really small and the background behind them changes to the lighter grey. I am not sure why this has happened, but it does take away from the original design. Lastly, on the contact page, I would suggest adding a direct link where it says 'for information about the collection and

this site contact: VSU... The "VSU..." in bold should be a direct email link since users of this online collection are more likely to email than call or visit first.

<http://www.library.gatech.edu/archives/habs/index.htm>

Photographs of the Historical American Buildings Survey Georgia. This is a very small exhibit site that I wanted to share based on how the linking systems is kept hidden as part of the artifact. There is a brief history of the project, extensive sources, and the images themselves. The table of contents is the interesting part of this exhibit. I wish there was more history about each building and why it is considered historic. Note how the site is actually photographs of the scrapbook and that the entire thing is very interactive. (I found this site by browsing the DLG.)

In regards to the readings I found the Stielow & Frederick chapter to be as I mentioned earlier "a little dated". I feel this way based on the main link being inactive. Once I found the correct link I was able to evaluate web sites more effectively. The information presented in the guidelines does make some sense, but may make more sense once I learn about how to make a web site with html. For the most the guidelines echo those for good web sites in general: NAVIGATION, NAVIGATION, and then good content. I did like how they laid out an 'archival' web site and I found it very helpful to know more about the required elements, but I have no idea what 'strata' means. I did find a term that interests me greatly, that of 'online exhibits' and 'web exhibit design'; I found the link to MCN very valuable and I plan on reviewing it in more depth later on. Overall, I would love to see an updated version of this article if able.

The Bearman/Hedstrom article brought up 3 thoughts:

The movie "Brazil"

"Interesting but not why I am interested in archives, no record management for me."

Student loan payoff through working in Archives is a great idea.

The Henry article was a great contrast to the Bearman/Hedstrom article, but it made me wonder why we have not read any of Schellenberg's work in this class. I reviewed all the articles we have read and could not find one by him. I wrote down the information from the footnote and would like to know if they are worth investigation?

The Gilliland-Swetland article brought up a great point about a need to document the human record of the digital age, but also seemed to saddle up to Bearman/Hedstrom, regurgitating their ideas in a more pleasant manor. It was interesting to inspect this article based on the findings of the Henry article.

Denise A. Wallace, April 10, 2008