

Report on *Politics, Literary Culture and Theatrical Media in London: A Website for Interdisciplinary Teaching.*

Although this project is taking longer than anticipated to complete, we believe that the results will exceed our original expectations. Our progress has been slowed for two reasons. One is time spent locating suitable images for the site *at the lowest feasible cost*. As we began investigating it became clear that prices institutions charge for reproductions and copyright permissions varied enormously, from a few dollars to several hundred dollars per image. Some of the most obvious and convenient sources, such as the British Library and the Guildhall Library in London, were also among the most expensive. Instead of paying premium prices to these institutions we decided to make an effort to shop around for cheaper providers. Although less convenient, this procedure has allowed us to stretch our grant dollars much further, as indicated in detail below. The second, even more important reason for delays in completing the plan has been the time spent with IT staff on the Boston campus in educating ourselves about the principles of web design and working out the structure and visual lay-out of the site. This collaboration is also resulting in a much better final product. We have now begun actively constructing the site under the guidance of IT staff and we are excited about the way it is turning out.

The team anticipated at the outset that we would have to construct site ourselves, using commercially available software. This assumption was based on the earlier experience of Malcolm Smuts, who constructed a smaller website on the University server for The North American Society for Court Studies in 2003-4. Last September Smuts obtained the services of a graduate work-study student, Sean Connelly, from his department to do the actual work of building the site. This allowed us to save the portion of the grant originally allotted to paying a student assistant for use elsewhere. After seeking advice, we then purchased a copy of Adobe Creative Suite 3 Web Premium at a steep educational discount for \$462. This is a more versatile and powerful package than we had originally planned to obtain and cost somewhat than we had budgeted. But it seemed to fit our needs perfectly and the price was attractive. Connelly spent much of the fall training himself to use this package, especially its web design program, Dreamweaver. He also began locating additional sources of images for the site by searching online and checking the collections of Harvard University.

By early February we felt we had assembled enough material to begin constructing the actual site. We were able to obtain more than a dozen images without charge from a website at the University of Toronto, dedicated to the seventeenth century English engraver Wenceslaus Hollar, which permits free downloading for non-profit educational uses. In addition Smuts had taken several digital photographs of historic London buildings in the summer of 2007. We purchased a high quality image of a map from the Toronto site for \$30,¹ and three color images from the Folger Shakespeare Library for a total of \$65. Although we intended to add substantially to this collection, it provided ample material with which to begin work.

¹ Since the University of Toronto declined to accept a purchase order this image was paid for by a personal credit card and has not yet been charged to the grant, although it will be in due course.

At this point we contacted Jim Wyse at the IT office on the Boston campus to ask for space on the University computer and discovered that he wanted his staff to be actively involved in overseeing our project. An expert in web design, Lisa Link, was assigned to work with us and we had several meetings and email exchanges, extending over a couple of months, as we worked out the site's structure and visual design and several other basic issues. This consultation has without question resulted in a far more attractive and intelligently designed site than the one we would have created if left to our own devices. Lisa Link has been an exceptionally enthusiastic and helpful partner. She created a visual design for the site that we all love and located inexpensive software for managing the maps that are integral to the conception of the entire project. (The software, called Maplib, was developed by an independent programmer, who sold us a license to put it on our own server for \$160. Based on map programs developed by Google, it will allow users of our site to move around the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century maps we will put on our site, zooming in and out to see areas in greater detail. We will also be able to mark features on the maps. When users click on one of our marks a new window will open, providing explanatory text and images). With Jim Wyse's help Lisa then loaded this software onto the University computer, worked out a couple of initial bugs, and adapted it to our needs. IT also informs us that we will have to purchase our own license and forum module for Expression Engine, the software used by the University to manage websites on its mainframe, for an additional \$149. Although unanticipated expenses these seem to us entirely reasonable and affordable.

Lisa and Jim Wyse worked with us to develop a flow chart for the entire site for use in developing a "wireframe". This was a new concept for us, although it is apparently fundamental to web design.² (I have included the flow chart as an additional attachment, meant to serve as an appendix to the report). Lisa also prepared "mock-ups" of web pages that we presented at the University's IT conference in early April, and did a presentation herself based on our site at a technical conference for computer designers. She continues to work with us and has become an indispensable member of the team.

Under Lisa's supervision, we began in May to construct actual webpages on the University's server.³ At this point we are mostly concentrating on basic text, with the intention of adding visual materials later. However a few pages have been created that include maps and images, and one of these, dealing with the neighborhood of Covent Garden, also incorporates links to historical documents that Malcolm Smuts discovered in London archives. This Covent Garden unit is intended as a prototype for the kind of structure we eventually want to create throughout the site.⁴

² The wire frame provides the basic structure of the site, in the form of different pages linked to each other in an orderly way. Initially these pages are either left blank or provided with basic text; images and links are then added later. Professional web designers prefer to create a wireframe before downloading a substantial amount of specific content, instead of working progressively from one page to another, adapting the site structure as they proceed. None of us were aware of this basic principal at the beginning of the project.

³ (These can be viewed by going to: <http://omega.www.umb.edu/~londonweb/index.php>.)

⁴ This can be viewed on the site by going from the home page to the Westminster and West End subpage, then to the Covent Garden page, and then to the highlighted link embedded within the text)

Connelly has meanwhile continued to work on his own computer, converting our flowchart into an actual wireframe. He has now completed this task and mailed in his work. We intend to review it later this week and upload it onto the University computer in the next week to ten days. This will mean that the basic structure of our website is in place and it will only remain for us to fill in the specific content.

This content will involve explanatory text, copies of historical and literary documents, maps and images, and links to other sites. As indicated, the basic explanatory text is now being written and drafts of several pages already exist on the server. Some historical documents and images have also been loaded onto the site, and we are working out protocols for providing consistent labels for our visual materials.

As this work went on we also located and purchased additional images. In March we obtained a topographical engraving of part of London from the British Museum for £50 (about \$100). In this case there was no alternative source for the image. In April we purchased another map from the University of Toronto (\$30), three maps from the Yale Center for British art (total \$24), and three additional images of paintings from the YCBA collection (total \$9). These materials have now arrived and Lisa Link is experimenting with our map software to integrate the maps by allowing users to move from one to another.

During April Malcolm Smuts also contacted members of the staff of the Yale Center for British Art to obtain their advice and arrange a visit to inspect their collection. In May he and Cheryl Nixon and travelled to New Haven for this purpose. They compiled a list of fifty-one items appropriate to the site, including a large number of engravings and a few original drawings of London buildings and street scenes, and other rare items. We have, for example, ordered several scans of a deck of playing cards illustrated with scenes from the "Popish Plot" of 1681 (an alleged assassination plot aimed at King Charles II); reproductions of eighteenth century tradesmen's cards (an early form of advertising), and Hollar's original drawing for an engraving of the neighborhood south of the Thames, in which Shakespeare's Globe and other early theatres were located. It took several weeks for the Center's photographic reproductions department to draw up an invoice but in late June we arranged to purchase the 51 images for a total cost of \$409. We regard this as a remarkable bargain, since many of the items will have to be newly photographed.⁵ Several have not been reproduced since their original publication in the seventeenth- or eighteenth-century. Our site will therefore provide even experts in the field with access to unfamiliar visual materials.

To date we have therefore spent approximately \$669 on images (depending on the exact exchange rate for the British Museum order). We plan to purchase additional items later this summer and in the fall, probably beginning with further maps from Harvard University (\$20 for downloading plus a permissions fee we need to negotiate). But this will be a matter of filling gaps in a rich collection of nearly 100 images (62 we have

⁵ Yale also refused to accept a purchase order, so that these items, along with the additional map from Toronto and the engraving from the British Museum have been purchased with Smuts's credit card. He will soon present receipts for reimbursement from the grant.

purchased and a couple of dozen more we have obtained without charge). We will also eventually obtain a large number of images without charge from a project at the Boston Public Library, in which Cheryl Nixon has been actively involved, dedicated to the early eighteenth century London pamphleteer and novelist, Daniel Defoe. In short we are going to have no trouble assembling a very large and impressive collection of visual material, while staying well within our budget.

In addition to purchasing copies of images we have begun to compile a list of other sites that provide complementary material that we can integrate through strategically placed links. The most important of these are the site of the Old Bailey Project, which has compiled a searchable index of records from hundreds of criminal cases in eighteenth century London; an online edition of John Strype's *Survey of the cities of London and Westminster* (1720) compiled at the University of Sheffield.

The original goal of the website was to facilitate teaching – especially interdisciplinary and team teaching – at the graduate level in disciplines like History and English. We promised to provide a pilot course on the Boston campus taught by Cheryl Nixon and Malcolm Smuts in AY 2008-9, designed to be taught with the website. This course has now been pushed back one semester by Cheryl Nixon's post-tenure sabbatical in the spring of 2009. But Smuts and Nixon the course has been approved by the Graduate Committees of both the History and English and higher administrative offices. In the process of securing approval Smuts and Nixon drew up a draft syllabus. The website is integrated into the course continuously, featuring in the teaching of every session as well as in student assignments.

Several tasks remain. The most important is to continue creating the actual site content by writing the basic text, selecting and uploading the images and providing appropriate links to other sites. Lisa Link is still experimenting with our maps and procedures for uploading pictures but we should be able to begin adding images later in the summer, by which time the additional materials ordered from Yale should have arrived. In the fall term we need to arrange recordings of a select number of ballads with the Five College Early Music Program. By then we anticipate having a functioning site in operation, although we will no doubt continue to add to it over the course of the next academic year – and after, as we begin using our site for teaching. We still have \$4360 of the original grant left. We anticipate that between \$1000 and \$1500 of this will be spent on additional images and perhaps software, if IT finds additional packages that will substantially improve the site. The remaining \$2860 to \$3,360 will go toward recordings of music. We had originally asked for \$4,000 for this purpose, which the grants committee suggested reducing to \$2,000. Because of economies elsewhere we will be able to restore some, but not all of this reduction.

The completed site will provide a scholarly but accessible overview of the political and cultural geography of London in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Thanks in large part to the work of Lisa Link, it will be attractively designed and easy to navigate. It will be larger, more complex and richer than most websites, with a very extensive collection of historical images and documents. It will first be used for its intended purpose of

assisting graduate teaching in a team-taught course on the Boston campus that has already been approved for fall 2009.

A number of colleagues in other universities in the United States and England have been told of our plans and have expressed interest in using the site, once it is developed. We have also contacted two electronic journals that specialize in providing materials for university level teaching -- *History Compass* and *Literature Compass* -- about the possibility of providing an article describing the site, and an embedded link to it, once we have completed our work. The inclusion of considerable original material and an innovative application of map software to historical materials promise, in our view, to attract considerable attention once the site is available. All of this will have been achieved with a budget that is extremely modest in comparison to those of other comparable sites.

Breakdown of funds spent to date:

Software

Adobe Creative Suite 3	\$462
MapLib	\$160
Expression Engine	\$149
Total Software	\$771

Images and Permissions

University of Toronto (two images)	\$ 60
Folger Shakespeare Library (three images)	\$ 65
British Museum (one image)	\$100*
Yale University (57 images)	\$444
Total Images and permissions	\$669*

Total expenditures to date:	\$1440
Funds remaining:	\$4,360

