

Building Collections, Building Services, and Building Sustainability: A Collaborative Model for the HBCU Library Alliance

About

The HBCU Library Alliance and Cornell University Library initiative, "Building Collections, Building Services, and Building Sustainability: A Collaborative Model for the HBCU Library Alliance," is a nationwide, digital image production initiative. Funded through a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and managed by the Cornell University Library, this unique project is one of the first in the nation to build a national framework for digitization of collaborative HBCU Library cultural heritage materials and addresses a full-range of digitization needs of historically black college and university libraries.

Background

In 2003 the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded Cornell University Library (CUL) a planning grant to investigate the development of a collaborative digital librarianship program for the Clark Atlanta University School of Library and Information Studies (CAU SLIS). After the announcement by the CAU Board of Trustees of the plan to close the SLIS by May 2005, and Cornell's decision not to pursue the program with the North Carolina Central School of Library and Information Science, CUL applied the results of the planning grant to lay the foundation for the development of a HBCU Library Alliance initiative. Discussions between the HBCU Library Alliance Board of Directors and Cornell University Library have resulted in the initiative, "Building Collections, Building Services, and Building Sustainability: A Collaborative Model for the HBCU Library Alliance." This project consists of four components: intensive training on digital imaging; the construction of digitized collections at each of the participating institutions; analysis to determine the pros and cons of a common portal of digitized resources; planning on how to address the governance, financial, intellectual property and metadata issues associated with building a shared digital collection. The outcome will be a greater understanding of the issues involved in developing and sustaining a cooperative digital library.

In October 2002, a call for participation by HBCU library directors and deans resulted in a meeting of 100 of the 105 historically black college and university libraries. This unprecedented meeting laid the groundwork for the HBCU Library Alliance. During their first meeting, HBCU library deans and directors explored the role of libraries in supporting the unique educational and research roles of their institutions. By the end of this historic meeting, participants reached consensus that cooperation between HBCUs would significantly strengthen the role of libraries on campus and expand access to information and cultural resources. (HBCU Library Alliance, 2002). With this agenda in mind, participants formed five working-groups whose purpose was to explore top priorities and report their findings.

The need for the "Building Collections, Building Services, Building Sustainability" digitization initiative was identified during the formation of the HBCU Library Alliance. During the Alliance's first meeting, participants in a working group on "Preservation and Digitization of Cultural Materials" noted that HBCUs hold a wide range of cultural materials, including print, images, manuscripts, artifacts, and electronic records, and that there is significant interest among HBCU library leaders in providing access to and preserving the

unique materials held in their institutions. Collaborative efforts in digital collection building would:

- Promote the mission of each university
- Preserve the history and culture of the institution and community
- Provide access to valuable collections held by HBCU libraries and archives
- Promote networking, collaboration, and sharing among HBCUs.

A top priority of the group, therefore, was to seek funding for training and implementation in digital collection building and preservation. (HBCU Library Alliance, "Meeting," 2002). The eventual goal is to link digitized special collections at all HBCUs through a portal designed specifically by its members to advance use of these materials and preserve their cultural integrity. (HBCU Library Alliance, "Call," 2002).

Major Components of the Project

"Building Collections, Building Services, and Building Sustainability" includes the delivery of training to HBCU librarians in digital imaging. In conjunction with the training, the project participants will build individual digital collections as the "real-world" test bed to accompany the training. Other components of the project include:

- Customization and delivery of Cornell's award-winning digital imaging tutorial, entitled Moving Theory into Practice: Digital Imaging Tutorial
- Participants will select HBCU materials consisting of institutional records organized around a common theme, "A Celebration of Historically Black Colleges and Universities"
- Development of a customized Digital Imaging Workshop designed to familiarize HBCU staff with various content types, metadata creation, and the use of digital imaging in a networked environment
- Delivery of digital content on the website of each participating library. The content will be hosted on a CONTENTdm server housed at the Robert W. Woodruff Library of the Atlanta University Center.
- The formation of an Advisory Committee composed of library directors, a historian, and experts who will discuss key concerns related to the dissemination of institutional materials and make policy recommendations to the HBCU Library Alliance Board of Directors; and
- Development of a background report, which will include advice on governance, finance, and planning the development of a collaborative digital library a key advisor and business-planning consultant.

Management Plan

Project management will include encouraging trainees to share their issues pertaining to the actual production of digital images and metadata and their concerns about intellectual property with the dean or director of their library. This will help the project partners better understand what are the issues and potential solutions involved in building digital collections at the institutional level. It will also serve to facilitate the planning of a cooperative digital library.

Several partners will be involved in the overall management and administration of the project. They include the Cornell University Library, the HBCU Library Alliance, an Advisory Committee, the Robert W. Woodruff Library at the Atlanta University Center in Georgia, and the Southeastern Library Network (SOLINET). The Cornell University Library will be responsible for providing overall administrative support for the project. It will also provide training and expert advice on digitization, technical considerations, and intellectual property issues. In addition to providing overall project administration on behalf of the HBCU Library Alliance, the Cornell University Library will design training materials, including the curriculum, in-class activities, and learner assessments and will prepare and deliver the digital imaging workshop. It will also conduct quality control of the digital images and provide consultation and advice on workflow and digitization, including intellectual property issues, metadata creation, and technology choices, throughout the course of the project.

The HBCU Library Alliance Board of Directors will set overall policy for the dissemination of future collaborative digital collections. The HBCU Library Alliance Board of Directors is comprised of nine library directors of HBCU libraries. It will guide the selection process for institutional participants and the project theme. It will also set overall policy for this project and any future collaborative digital projects based upon recommendations by the project partners and the Advisory Committee. Finally, it will determine why it needs a common portal of digitized resources and plan for the future development and sustainability of a collaborative digital library.

An Advisory Committee composed of the directors of the participating HBCUs and experts will discuss key concerns related to the dissemination of institutional materials and make policy recommendations to the HBCU Library Alliance Board of Directors. The Advisory Committee will recommend a policy concerning dissemination of digital images produced by the project participants within and outside the HBCU community. In preparation for phase two, the Committee will provide guidance on governance and the financial sustainability of the planned digital library.

The Project Manager, Ira Revels will be based at Cornell University Library. Ms. Revels is responsible for the overall administration of the "Building Collections" project and will coordinate all project activities with the help of the HBCU Library Alliance Program Officer, Lillian Lewis, and a part-time Administrative Assistant who will be based at the Southeastern Library Network (SOLINET). The Woodruff Library will be responsible for housing and maintaining the CONTENTdm server. It will also host the Advisory Committee meeting. The Database Administrator will be based at the Woodruff Library as well. SOLINET also serves as the fiscal agent for the Alliance.

Conclusion

"Building Collections" opens the door to the treasures of Historically Black Colleges and Universities. It will foster the research and teaching of scholars of African American Studies, the American South, American Democracy, cultural pluralism, and other related disciplines. Scholarly inquiries into the African American experience are a relatively recent phenomenon in the United States, with most African American Studies centers (including Cornell's) having been established since the 1960s. Increasing national and international access to HBCU archives will promote research and scholarship in this neglected but growing area of American Studies.

The partnership between the HBCU Library Alliance, Cornell University Library, ten HBCU institutions, and SOLINET will increase access to information at HBCU libraries while encouraging broader collaboration between HBCU libraries and other organizations. It will promote the visibility of HBCUs, their challenges, and unknown treasures.