PARTNERSHIPS ON CAMPUS:
Roles and Impacts in Developing a New Online Research Resource at Boston College

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Abstract

A partnership at Boston College (BC) between the Libraries and the Institute for Advanced Jesuit Studies resulted in a blossoming of services and resources, made possible via a combination of discipline-focused scholarship and library digital expertise. With a shared mission, the last three years have produced a number of programs and projects that relied upon a relationship of reciprocation, support, and ultimately the strategic directions guiding this Jesuit university.

Introduction

Academic libraries are ever-reliant on scholars’ research needs and preferences to inform resource decisions and services. This can be especially true in emerging digital areas, which frequently find their identities via project partnerships and shared resources. With the founding of the Institute for Advanced Jesuit Studies on campus in 2014, the Libraries at Boston College found an able partner to develop and expand their digital collections, contribute expertise, share resources, and take an active role in current issues relevant to library collections and services such as open access, intellectual property, and digital scholarship. The Portal to Jesuit Studies (jesuitportal.com), an online resource for unified access to full-text Jesuit primary source content and scholarship, represents the culmination of this partnership. The institute developed this portal in response to a particular research need for curated resources in the field of Jesuit studies, while the libraries were able to apply digital and metadata acumen to support a key research community.

As various forms of digital services, projects, and scholarship are integrated into library operations and expertise, a growing body of literature has emerged addressing the potential roles and their relationships to departments and institutions on campus. Activities such as digital library building, metadata development, enabling of open access, and digital preservation have been widely accepted as library services. The roles that libraries take in digital scholarship partnerships, however, can vary tremendously, from providing instruction and support with digital tools and technologies, to provision of technology spaces, to being active collaborators in the research process. This case study provides an account of one partnership between a library and research institute that illustrates a number and variety of library roles and resources, some of which exemplify established digital library services that have been honed over years and others within digital scholarship for which roles are still developing.
The Institute for Advanced Jesuit Studies was established at BC in June 2014 with a mission to deepen understanding and appreciation of the history, spirituality, educational heritage, and pedagogical approach of the Society of Jesus. Staff members at that institute decided in its first year to pursue this mission—in addition to providing courses, workshops, publications, and scholarly symposia—by promoting awareness and ease of access to important resources in the field of Jesuit studies. The decision was made to support open access to the newest related scholarship and to the rich collection of primary sources in the Jesuits’ long and varied history.

Digital Activities: Early Collaborations

The BC Libraries’ commitment to open access and digital libraries began in the 1990s with digital collection building and was formalized in 2002 with its signing of the Budapest Open Access Initiative. Once the Boston Library Consortium (BLC) partnered with Internet Archive’s (IA) Open Content Alliance in 2007, the libraries immediately embarked on digitizing Jesuitica titles in the public domain. Volumes were sent to the BLC IA Scanning Center at Boston Public Library (BPL), a process that has been ongoing ever since. There are currently more than 1,100 unique volumes in the BC Jesuitica Collection scanned and full-text searchable via the Internet Archive. In 2011, the libraries joined HathiTrust, another significant step toward contributing and making available the online corpus of openly-available content, while developing further the internal digital library program. Progress was made to

Institutional Background

Boston College, a Jesuit, Catholic university, is committed to “intellectual excellence, religious commitment... and remaining faithful to its educational and religious heritage.” As such, the University Libraries have since 1997 proactively developed their Jesuitica Collection, which is among the largest, most comprehensive collections of its kind in the Western Hemisphere. Consisting of more than eleven thousand books and manuscripts related to the Society of Jesus, materials span from the founding of the society in 1540 to the present, about half of which were published before the papal suppression of the order in 1773. Early material documents the varied and significant contributions of Jesuits to a wide range of disciplines in the early modern period, including history, science, mathematics, exploration, archaeology, language, philosophy, and theology, and European glimpses of the Americas, Asia, and Africa. Particular items of note include a recently acquired sixteenth-century manuscript and a second edition of the *Spiritual Exercises* (1553) by St. Ignatius of Loyola, the Jesuits’ founder. The portion of the collection dating since the society’s restoration in 1814 includes published material, along with the papers of a number of British Jesuits and the archives of several Jesuit educational organizations. Current collecting policy is directed toward building on the particular strengths of the collection that distinguish it from Jesuitica holdings at other institutions, namely editions of Jesuit foundational texts (e.g., the *Spiritual Exercises*, *Constitutions*, *Ratio studiorum*, and others), biographies of Ignatius and other early Jesuits, and documents relating to the suppression of the society.

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digitally publish original open access serials using Open Journal System, an open source management and publishing system. As part of the libraries’ Open Access Journal Publishing Program, *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* was added as an initial active e-journal, and in 2013 the entire backrun from 1969 was scanned and added.8

In addition to the open access and digitization activities pertaining to published and printed materials, original digital research projects have been of increasing interest to researchers and scholars of Jesuit history at BC. In 2016, an undergraduate advanced study project used French Jesuit missionary grammars from the John J. Burns Library resulting in the website Missionary Linguistics in Colonial Africa.10 Boston College Libraries’ staff provided support throughout, starting with identifying a set of twenty-four mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth century dictionaries/grammars compiled by French Catholic missionaries working in North and Central Africa. The libraries undertook copyright review and conservation, and the volumes were digitized on-site. Project management, technical guidance and instruction, and introduction of relevant standards, methods, and tools to enable the functionality of the resulting website was provided by the newly consolidated Digital Scholarship Team. Through regular consultations, librarians ascertained requirements based on the needs of the content area (linguistics) and offered technical solutions and instruction in text encoding, enabling the student to develop and prepare the metadata. A database of the structured metadata was created, original material was text encoded, a viewer was identified to display scanned originals, and a website was designed with discovery tools and accompanying essays.11

The institute began its own support of free access to digital resources by contracting with Brill Publishers to create the publication company’s first open-access bibliography. The Boston College Jesuit Bibliography began in 2014, with the goal of continuing a previous Jesuit scholarly tradition and collecting the references of every book, book chapter, book review, and article about the Society of Jesus.12 More than one hundred scholars worldwide have volunteered as correspondents for the project, providing the relevant bibliographic data from more than 1,300 publications in twenty-seven languages. As of December 2017, there were nearly sixteen thousand bibliographic records spanning largely from 2006 to the present. The database attracted more than sixteen thousand page views in 2017.
In 2015, the institute also provided the financial support to provide open access to the online contents of Journal of Jesuit Studies. The peer-reviewed quarterly journal, started at Brill Publishers and edited by a staff member at the institute, has since seen monthly downloads increase from 532 in January 2015 to more than four thousand in December 2017. Open access facilitated the journal’s indexing by both SCOPUS and the Web of Science.13

The institute continued its collaboration with Brill by supporting an additional digital project in open access. Jesuit Historiography Online was launched in the summer of 2016 and is scheduled to consist of seventy scholarly essays on geographic areas (such as Jesuits in China, France, and the Spanish Americas) and thematic topics (such as Jesuit engagement with Buddhism, music, and pedagogy). In 2017, the thirty-eight available essays attracted more than thirteen thousand page views.14

In addition to working with Brill, the institute used the expertise in digital projects at BC to develop another stand-alone digital repository. The Jesuit Online Library (jesuionlinelibrary.com or jesuitlibrary.com) was modeled after the libraries’ successful database of historical newspapers and other publications (newspapers.bc.edu). This database allows users to simultaneously search multiple titles and to limit searches by a variety of factors (such as title, author, or year).

The institute sought to use the Jesuit Online Library to provide easy access to important historical titles. Staff identified three prominent titles in American Jesuit history and secured the necessary permissions, which stipulated they be open access, and then worked with the libraries to have any needed backruns scanned. The included titles were:

- **Woodstock Letters** (1872-1969), the publication of record for the Society of Jesus in North America and, later, South America, was published at the Woodstock College seminary in Maryland. *Woodstock* offers often candid assessments of the “current events and historical notes connected with the colleges and missions of the Society of Jesus,” with fulsome biographies and obituaries, institutional histories, correspondence from the Jesuit leadership, and reviews of “Books of Interest to Ours” (i.e., Jesuits).15
- **Jesuit Educational Quarterly (JEQ)** (1938-1970), published by the Jesuit Educational Association, primarily consists of reflections by Jesuit administrators and professors on developments at their schools and secular educational trends. Beyond the valuable data and book reviews, the contents of the *JEQ* reveal a dynamic dialogue as Jesuits responded to external and internal developments and engaged with one another about the methodology, content, and direction of Jesuit education in twentieth-century America.

- Lastly, **Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits** (1969-current), a journal dedicated to Jesuit history and spirituality, is a product of the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality, whose membership consists of American Jesuits appointed from their provinces. *Studies* examines the spiritual doctrine and practice of the Society of Jesus through scholarly essays.

With *Studies* already openly available online, the institute requested that the libraries manage the imaging, processing, and hosting of *Woodstock* and *JEQ*, with the institute funding the external expenses. The libraries’ existing standard workflows for such an endeavor were put into action, starting with identifying and preparing materials, transporting them to BPL for IA scanning, and adding content to IA for access and HathiTrust for preservation. The files were then sent to the libraries’ established supplier, DDD, a fair trade company based in Kenya and Cambodia, for processing. The OCR processing, enabling indexing, was done at the article or chapter level to enable the searchability desired. The Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH) was used to share article-level metadata with interested organizations. Processed files were sent to New Zealand for display in Veridian content management software in the Jesuit Online Library.

At the time of its soft launch in March 2017, the Jesuit Online Library database of the three titles consisted of 67,190 pages across 658 volumes. Additional content was added in the next two months. Included in this expansion were the contents of another eleven titles in Latin, Spanish, French, and English. By May 2017, the database consisted of fourteen titles, 701 volumes, and 98,663 pages, all available in open access and all available for simultaneous searching and individual browsing.15

**The Portal to Jesuit Studies**

While developing these online projects, the institute identified two overriding unmet needs and shortcomings for these and other existing digital services:

1. A curated collection: There was a need for informed direction to the numerous online resources, as well as those available only in print, relating to the history of the Society of Jesus. Potential users, who might include scholars, teachers, students, and the curious public, would benefit from assistance in identifying sources of content and in determining which could be trusted.

2. “One-stop” searching: The user experience would be improved by the development of a mechanism that would integrate the contents of disparate but relevant online resources.

The staff at the institute and the libraries posed these necessities to the Office of the President at BC and received support for what became known internally as the “Jesuit Google” or the “Google to Jesuit studies.” Website development would be outsourced to create an online...
service to aggregate content from trusted sources to allow for, as much as possible, full-text searches of freely available content. Search results would be grouped by source (for clarity), and links would direct users to the original source, even if hosted elsewhere (to respect the autonomy of the individual sources). Further, users could limit searching by a variety of factors: by source, by author across sources, and by date across sources, among others.

With the extensive experience as partners on smaller projects established, the respective roles and responsibilities in this endeavor were straightforward. The institute staff provided the subject expertise and the knowledge of sources and audiences. In addition to supplying existing services, the libraries provided database consultation and technical expertise and assisted in the initial design and functionality by developing a proof-of-concept for the search interface of selected literature, which could then be taken to a full-service supplier for web development work and hosting. For this proof-of-concept search interface, metadata from each of the prioritized content types—digital content from Brill, Veridian, and BC-hosted foundational documents—were obtained from suppliers, processed, and indexed. A basic website and database search using open source software was developed to demonstrate feasibility.

In April 2016, BC issued a request for proposals “to implement a flexible search portal which will return results from multiple sources of [the institute’s] books, journals, abstracts, classroom resources and others.” The request included assistance with software and implementation services such as installing, configuring, and testing. It was designated that the interface should be easy to use for research and scholarship, should be engaging to the casual user, and should include access to relevant non-scholarly online resources, such as announcements, blogs, and news as well as the scanned and born-digital sources and research library. Bids were received during the following month and were reviewed by staff at the institute, the libraries, and the university’s Information Technology Services. BC awarded the contract to Avalon Consulting LLC (based in Texas and Virginia), which after negotiations agreed to develop and host the online service.

The Portal to Jesuit Studies launched in May 2017. It describes itself as a “collaborative resource for research and scholarship.” Its features include full text searching of:

- *Journal of Jesuit Studies* (hosted by Brill);
- Boston College Jesuit Bibliography (hosted by Brill);
- Jesuit Historiography Online (hosted by Brill);
- Jesuit Online Library (hosted by Veridian);
- Essential Documents (hosted by the Portal to Jesuit Studies);
- An initial set of charts with raw data for classroom use and research (hosted by the Portal to Jesuit Studies);

Founded at St. Louis in 1961, Jesuit Sources has published more than one hundred volumes, largely in English translation, to make accessible some of the important texts in Jesuit history, spirituality, and pedagogy (jesuitsources.com).
• Author, title, abstract, and other relevant data for the more than one hundred titles published through Jesuit Sources, the publishing house affiliated with the institute (hosted by jesuitsources.com);
• A blog-like collection of news in the field of Jesuit studies, such as noted book publications, conferences, presentations, art exhibits, and opportunities for fellowships and courses (hosted by the Portal to Jesuit Studies).

Usage and Impacts

Little marketing attended the soft, public release of the portal. The institute placed an advertisement in the Jesuit magazine America in May and used Twitter to announce new additions to the portal. The reasons for limiting the launch’s scope were to test the functionality of the newly public site and to assess the general interest in the service it offered.

From June to December 2017, more than eight thousand unique users conducted nearly twelve thousand sessions on the portal and the Jesuit Online Library. Total page views approached forty thousand. Users came from more than 130 countries, with the list of the top twenty countries reflecting the global reach of the Society of Jesus: the United States, Canada, Italy, the Philippines, Spain, the United Kingdom, India, Portugal, Mexico, France, Brazil, Australia, Colombia, Peru, Argentina, South Korea, Germany, Malta, Belgium, and Ireland.

Two specific cases demonstrate how users have engaged with the open access service. First, to commemorate the feast day of St. Ignatius of Loyola, staff members at the Jesuits’ USA Northeast and Maryland provinces profiled three letters by Ignatius that appeared in the portal’s Essential Documents collection. The profiles were uploaded to the provinces’ websites and announced via social media, doubling traffic to the portal on the day of the announcement. Visits to the portal also surged in a second example of usage, with a five-fold increase in page views that coincided with the start of the 2017 fall semester. The interest came primarily from two history classes at a US-based Jesuit college.

The free and informed services provided by the portal have attracted support and collaboration from within the Society of Jesus and from across academic communities. When the site first became available, Timothy Kesicki, SJ, the president of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States, told the institute that, “the promotion of deep and serious study of the society’s history, spirituality, and pedagogy will magnify its future mission. The Portal to Jesuit Studies will help to promote this important work.” Brill Publishers, like the Jesuit Conference, was a founding collaborator with the portal. Arjan van Dijk, the Dutch publisher’s acquisitions editor, explained to the institute that “Brill is happy to collaborate with the Portal to Jesuit Studies, helping to integrate its sources with others on the Society of Jesus and to share them for maximum impact among scholars and in the classroom.” Lastly, as evidenced by the usage data, the portal has proved useful for classroom use. “As a teacher in a Jesuit high school, a crucial aspect of my role is to provide my students with both historical information on the society and an understanding of Ignatian spirituality,” Georgetown Preparatory’s Bradley Boyle observed to the institute’s staff. “The portal places a wealth of information right at my fingertips. Whether I am looking for a primary text for class or seeking to enrich my own understanding of the latest in scholarly research, the portal will be an invaluable tool in my work.”

Future Developments

The portal has gained new collaborators since its launch. Expanding the contents of the Jesuit Online Library, for example, the institute has collaborated with partners in Lisbon to add a seven-volume Portuguese history of the Jesuits in Portugal’s vast empire between 1540 and 1760. The partners have also helped the process of including Brotéria, a rarely available but important historical publication of Portuguese Jesuits, in the library database. Since 1902, Brotéria has published seven different titles on topics from botany to genetics and zoology to culture, and its total contents may consist of 140,000 pages. By the summer of 2018, the Jesuit Online Library may have as many as forty titles, more than nine hundred volumes, and
more than two hundred thousand pages available in six languages. It will have regional histories of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Spanish, French, German, English, and Portuguese. The institute is collaborating with other global partners to secure permission to add more content (i.e., Jesuit serials and other publications) to the library database starting in the fall of 2018.

Scholars have recognized the potential of the portal’s unique search functionality to make their own digital research projects more visible while securing needed assistance with the hosting and maintenance of their initiatives. As the institute explores ways to allow for a dynamic interaction with individual projects, digital scholarship staff at the libraries have offered consulting and technical guidance on the best ways to collect, analyze, and display data online. A sampling of the forthcoming projects include:

- **Cartas Ignacio**: a project run by institute staff that collects the metadata of the nearly seven thousand letters written by or on behalf of St. Ignatius of Loyola; the digital scholarship staff will assist with the visualization of data trends and geographic relationships;
- **Indipetae**: a project run by the institute and in collaboration with an international scholarly network that examines roughly five thousand letters that Jesuits wrote directly to the Superior General of the Society of Jesus petitioning for missionary assignments from 1814 to 1914; the digital scholarship staff will assist in the exploration of technologies and platforms to visualize data trends and geographical relationships;
- **Triennial Catalogs**: another project run by the institute in collaboration with another group of international scholars that aggregates data extracted from Jesuit catalogs (inventories of individual Jesuits, places of work, etc.); the digital scholarship staff have consulted scholars on compiling data and metadata, and on creating a dynamic interface to discover and illustrate research findings.

The Brill content continues to expand at regular intervals. Issues of the *Journal of Jesuit Studies* appear four times a year, with the contents aggregated as they appear on Brill’s open-access site. Essays are regularly posted for the Jesuit Historiography Online project, and Brill shares the contents of new essays and any revisions to existing essays as they are made available in open access. Similarly, additions and revisions to entries in the Boston College Jesuit Bibliography are included as they are made on a monthly basis.

The institute staff also is developing regular updates to the portal’s internally hosted content. New components are easily added, and their contents aggregated into the existing selection of materials. The staff has responded to requests to upload new content to the Essential Documents. Additional content to the Essential Documents will also showcase at least one selection from each new publication from Jesuit Sources. The Jesuitica Directory expands as the libraries staff adds new volumes in the field of Jesuit studies selected by institute scholars. Established digital library workflows are employed confirming titles’ availability and copyright status, digitizing materials, and coordinating file processing and hosting with external vendors.

The libraries staff will also join with the university’s Information Technology Services to offer user experience assessment of the portal. Of particular interest is feedback on the site’s search functionality, its display, and its relationship with externally hosted content. Libraries staff will also assist in the proof-of-concept of possible additions to the site, such as permitting the addition of user-contributed content to the Essential Documents and news features.

**Conclusion**

The Portal to Jesuit Studies seeks to meet different needs of scholars, teachers, students, and those with a general interest in the Society of Jesus. It is intended to provide informed direction to the source material related to Jesuit history—both scanned historical materials and those born-digital—and to encourage and reveal new scholarship in the field of Jesuit studies, particularly that enabled by digital technologies. It is also intended to have a structure that will encourage collaboration between scholars and institutions.
Kimberly C. Kowal is the Associate University Librarian for Digital Initiatives & Services at Boston College. She has published and presented extensively in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Europe on developing library digital collections and resources via inter-institutional and international partnerships.

Seth Meehan is an associate director of the Institute for Advanced Jesuit Studies, where he supports the director in the growth and promotion of digital materials, publication development, and promoting historical research of the Jesuits and their mission at Boston College. He received his master's and doctorate degrees in history from Boston College. His work has appeared in publications such as the New York Times, the Catholic Historical Review, Archivum Historicum Societatis Jesu, and Boston College Magazine, where he is a contributing editor.

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Catholic Library World