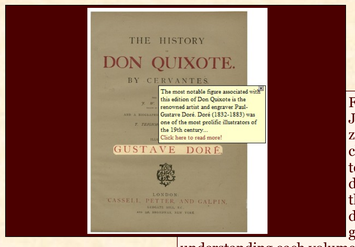
Digitizing Don Quixote

Department of Special Collections & Archives
Queens College—Flushing, New York
By Justin Mancini and Christine Parker

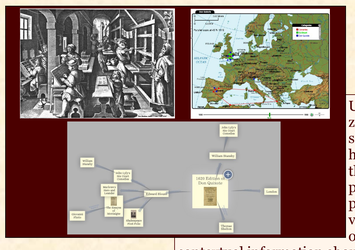
The Problem

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 disadvantages: 1. the command search vocabulary needed to search within special collections are often difficult to use and not well-known by users, 2. the discovery of many unique materials is hindered by the way results ranking algorithms are designed to focus on more "popular" entries, 3. 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.



Features such as Javascript tooltips and a zoom interface were included to encourage users to actively engage with digitized pages. Links to the wiki finding aid and detailed metadata offer greater opportunities for understanding each volume within its greater historical and collection level context.

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

Contextualization

Searchability

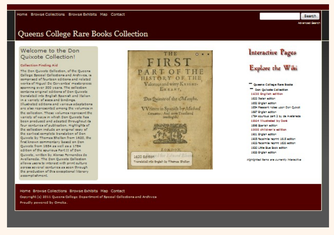
Interactivity

Outreach

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.

We designed several **interactive** features on the site to encourage users to actively explore the digitized images throughout the site. For **outreach**, a print history exhibit was created aiming to broaden the scope of users by illustrating the extensive opportunities offered by the content and materiality of rare books.



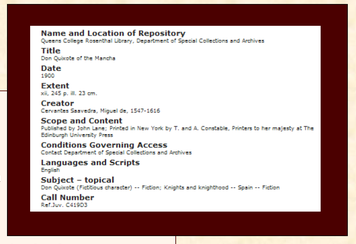
Context was used to provide a broad framework within which each volume can be understood as a part of the collection as a whole. This includes an online finding aid. Metadata for the entire collection was also created so that users can both browse and **search** for what they need.

Have a Smartphone?

Scan to visit the site!

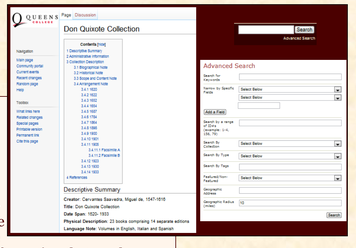
http://qcarchives.com/books

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

Dublin Core, the metadata standard used by Omeka, is easily adapted to represent DACS fields and enables both basic and advanced searching on the site. The wiki finding aid is closed to outside editing and allows for the inclusion of contextual information that can be easily linked to various points throughout the site.



Metadata & Wiki

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the generous support and resources of Queens College and the Department of Special Collections and Archives. We would like to thank the following individuals who contributed to this project: Dr. Ben Alexander—head of Special Collections; Johnathan Thayer—supervising archivist; the entire support and development team at Omeka—with special thanks to John Flatness.