Metababble: A Clash of Metadata Cultures

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ABSTRACT
A tension exists between making digitized resources available to users quickly and providing detailed, item-level metadata and semantic markup that make those resources more discoverable. The Our Americas Archive Partnership (OAAP) project, funded by IMLS in the fall of 2007, is facing these challenges as the project progresses. This poster presents a summary of our approach and future thoughts about descriptive approaches for digital resources.

Categories and Subject Descriptors
H.3.6 [Digital Libraries]: collections, standards, user issues

General Terms
Documentation, Human Factors, Standardization.

Keywords
Metadata, TEI, social tagging, digital library, minimal processing

1. INTRODUCTION
OAAP, a partnership of Rice University and the University of Maryland’s Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (MITH) has targeted Americas scholars as the users for an integrated digital archive we’re developing. For the Rice collection, decisions were made to follow best practices for digitization projects, including item level descriptions, semantic text markup, social tagging and high quality image capture. Implementing all of this for OAAP has led to a hybrid approach for describing the archival materials. The main standards used are: DACS for the general descriptive elements, AACR2 rules for controlled vocabulary terms, qualified Dublin core for the format of metadata, OAI for harvesting, and modified TEI P5 markup for text encoding. Additionally, the integrated archive will provide a list of social tags developed by the Americas scholars that can be used to further annotate the resources. These well-intentioned uses of best practices and standards have surfaced conflicts in their implementation which the team has had to address. As the project progresses, the time and energy spent identifying conflicts and their resolution brings into question the overall benefit of an in-depth item level description approach, especially since the OAAP project strives to provide community tools with low barriers for participation.

2. Resolution of metadata conflicts
As we move into year two of a three-year grant period, we are mindful of the need to make progress that insures we achieve our stated content development goals for the project. Initial user assessments have indicated that discovery is the key feature users desire most. Therefore the team has elected to focus on descriptive elements that directly address this need when determining appropriate detail level refinements to the metadata. In addition, any such refinement should be applicable across all items in the collection and must be implemented within the OAAP framework. For example: our qualified Dublin core scheme will provide place names at the item level per resource but will not then encode individual occurrences of various historical place names within the body of the text itself. The assignment of geographical terms per resource will be used to create a visual map of the collections in the OAAP toolset.

3. Vision of minimum barrier to participate
We are designing the archive with a view to new relevant digital collections that exist in other archives joining OAAP with as low a barrier as possible to participate. This, we believe, will be a requirement that new collections provide a minimal set of Dublin core metadata fields that can be harvested. As minimal processing approaches1 in archiving practice take hold, however, we are mindful of the greater value of making the digital content visible to scholars over the need for detailed item level description. We are considering how this can be applied as we move beyond the current grant funding with OAAP and how low a barrier we can develop to be more inclusive of the resources the Americas scholars need to support their research.

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http://ahc.uwyo.edu/documents/faculty/greene/papers/Greene-
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