

Where Creativity Meets Technology

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Published in:
New Review of Academic Librarianship

DOI:
[10.1080/13614533.2015.1031257](https://doi.org/10.1080/13614533.2015.1031257)

Published: 04/05/2015

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
WONG, R. S. H. (2015). Where Creativity Meets Technology: A Library-led, Multi-disciplinary Online Showcase for Artworks, Creative Writings, and Movies Displayed with 3D and HTML5 Technology. *New Review of Academic Librarianship*, 21(2), 206-215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13614533.2015.1031257>

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Where Creativity Meets Technology:
A Library-led, Multi-disciplinary Online Showcase for Artworks, Creative
Writings, and Movies Displayed with 3D and HTML5 Technology

"This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in **New Review of Academic Librarianship** on 07 Apr 2015, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/13614533.2015.1031257> ."

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ABSTRACT

This article introduces the Hong Kong Baptist University's Heritage project (<http://heritage.lib.hkbu.edu.hk/>), a multi-disciplinary online showcase for curriculum-related creative outputs that were produced by faculty and students of the university. Initiated and led by the University Library, this project was a collaborative effort with six academic departments, synthesizing technology and creativity and bringing great benefits to the institution. The article introduces the project and discusses three major challenges, namely technology, staff motivation, and librarian stereotype. It also presents statistics to show how this project enhanced teaching and learning, encouraged inter-departmental collaboration, enhanced library visibility, contributed to institutional reputation, among other benefits.

KEYWORDS

Inter-departmental collaboration; multi-disciplinary platform; online showcase for capstone projects; 3D and HTML 5 technology, staff motivation, librarian stereotype, library visibility, institutional reputation, teaching and learning enhancement

INTRODUCTION

Every academic library strives to enhance its value by advancing the mission of its parent institution, and, more importantly, by providing evidence that it has achieved this goal. In a report published in 2010, the Association of College and Research Libraries made valuable recommendations for immediate "Next Steps" for libraries to demonstrate their value. Some of the recommendations were:

- Demonstrating and developing library impact on student learning (117-119)
- Demonstrating and improving library support for faculty teaching (134-136)
- Recording library contributions to overall institutional reputation and prestige (137-139)
- Enhancing library contribution to student job success (109-113)
- Continuing to investigate library impact on faculty grant proposals and funding (132-133)

When taking these steps for enhancing library value, it is important for librarians to exercise their creative minds and explore opportunities proactively. Today's technology as a vehicle provides a feasibility for librarians to transform their creative ideas into important projects that could bring great benefits to the institution. This article will introduce the HKBU Heritage project (<http://heritage.lib.hkbu.edu.hk/>), a synthesis between technology and creativity, which was initiated and led by HKBU Library.

This article is divided into three main parts. The first part provides a brief background of the

project. This part serves as a follow-up to the author's earlier book chapter that discusses HKBUtube, the predecessor of HKBU Heritage (Wong, pp. 373-402). The second part discusses three major challenges of the project, namely technology, staff motivation, and librarian stereotype. The third part presents statistics to show how this project enhanced student learning experience, contributed to faculty teaching, achieved learning outcomes, and contributed to the overall institutional reputation. The article concludes with some examples of how this project encouraged further inter-departmental collaboration and led to greater opportunities for digital scholarship and data management.

BACKGROUND

Hong Kong Baptist University is a medium-sized public higher institution that positions itself as a broad-based and creativity-inspiring education provider. The university offers associate, undergraduate, master's, and doctorate programs in a variety of areas including arts, business, Chinese medicine, communication, social sciences, science, and visual arts. In the past decade, an increasing number of programs have been developed with the aim of nurturing creative professionals to meet the needs of the fast-growing creative industries in the region. These academic departments often require their faculty and students to produce creative works as part of their teaching or learning activities. These creative outputs are valuable assets to the departments and the university. See Table 1.

Table 1: Academic Departments Connected to Creativity and Their Creative Outputs

Academic Departments	Faculty / Student Creative Outputs
Academy of Film (AF)	Movies Animations (since 2014/15) Advertising materials (since 2014/15)
Academy of Visual Arts (AVA)	Artworks
Department of Communication Studies (COMS)	Animations (before 2014/15) Advertising materials (before 2014/15)
Department of Humanities and Creative Writings (HMW)	Creative writings
Department of Journalism (JOUR)	Video documentaries
Department of Music (MUS)	Live music performances

Unfortunately, due to limited resources and a lack of relevant experience, it was difficult for individual academic departments to archive the accumulated faculty and student projects in a systematic manner and share these projects with current students and outside entities. The Library perceived this gap as an opportunity to get involved in the core business of the university—student

learning, faculty teaching, learning outcomes, capstone projects, and the overall institutional reputation—and generated an idea of developing a centralized online showcase for the university's outstanding creative outputs.

After spending a whole year in efforts to recruit early adopters, the Library started the project with its first collaborator from AF back in 2009. The beta site garnered some attention and paved the way for more collaborative opportunities; COMS, MUS, and JOUR joined the project in the following two years. Up to that point, the platform was still focusing on video streaming service, and it was developed under the bigger website "HKBUtube." AVA and HMW participated in the project in 2012 and 2014 respectively. Their participation expanded the scope of the platform that was then renamed to "HKBU Heritage."

At the moment of writing, a total of 892 creative outputs are made available for viewing on HKBU Heritage. Most creative outputs were final year projects of students that went through a rigorous selection process within the departments. This category of outputs usually came in once a year in large batches. Some outputs were assignments of individual courses, and they were recommended by course teachers. A few of them were produced by faculty members. These latter two categories of outputs were received bit by bit throughout the whole academic year.

Art objects are presented as interactive 3-D rotational images; art installation designs are presented as interactive panorama images; poems and fictional pieces are displayed in a flip book format; videos are streamed with HTML5 technology. To offer the best possible user experience, this site also provides a mobile version that is compatible with all materials in the PC version, including 3D images, flip books, and videos. The site automatically detects user devices and directs users to the appropriate version.

CHALLENGES

Technology

Instead of relying on image or video hosting services on the market, HKBU Library chose to develop its own system. Without a doubt, the use of an external image or video hosting service would have saved lots of time and manpower in the initial stages of programming development. Nevertheless, a hosting solution that provides a satisfactory level of technical flexibility could be very expensive. For example, the current in-house developed system is able to stream high-density videos with no restriction on video bandwidth and bitrate, display 3D rotational images and 3D panorama images, and integrate with a flip book format. This system also provides language switching between English and Traditional Chinese, full-text search, facet browsing, MLA and APA citation information at item level that is program-generated, item recommendations based on a pre-set algorithm, and special features written by invited faculty members, among other features. Having this system developed in-house without having to hire additional staff should be the most cost-effective way, especially when the system is expected to take regular upgrades in terms of functionality and format

compatibility.

As the author and the support team did not come to the project with any formal training in website design and database development (the staff issue will be discussed in more detail in the next section), every team member was encouraged to become a self-learner. As personal interest in a subject is an essential driver of self-learning, each team member was matched with a particular area of learning of their own choosing, including database development, website layout design, 3D technologies, etc. They gathered knowledge through reading technical books, online forums, and blogs; drew inspiration from different kinds of commercial and educational websites; and actively shared questions, knowledge, and ideas amongst themselves. More importantly, an encouraging and non-critical work environment was created within office, so that all of them could feel free to share and practice what they had learned.

Staff Motivation

When the Heritage idea was starting to take shape in 2009, the author was supervising the Multimedia Services Section, which was primarily assigned to manage audio-visual collections, audio-visual facilities, and a computer lab. The section was a comparatively small unit, with only one professional staff, three support staff, and a number of part-time counter helpers. Although one support staff received formal IT training, no section member had practical experience in developing database websites, iOS applications, video streaming technology, product photography, 3D rotating image technology, or e-book platform technology—some of the features of HKBU Heritage. Even worse, the author as a supervisor did not have any experience of inter-departmental project management and grant application. Nevertheless, this project offered a valuable opportunity for the whole section to learn and grow as a team.

There is a vast amount of professional and research literature sharing useful ways to motivate employees, so this article only highlights the three most important ways that the author has learnt from her daily interactions with staff. Being an ally and a companion of employees is of the utmost importance to successful staff motivation. It is essential for a supervisor to enjoy and show a real enthusiasm for the work, develop curiosity to learn new things, work hard and learn hard but not just giving orders, and allow employees to know him/her as a real person. The earlier self-learning example has illustrated this point.

It is also important for the supervisor to become a convincing leader who sets and gives clear direction, provides employees purpose to complete the tasks and helps them see their work is important, and builds an inspiring and meaningful vision that provides a realistic and attractive goal for the team. The purpose and vision of this particular project were both short-term and long-term, and they connected to job satisfaction, the overall success of the library, and the contribution to the academia.

Providing intangible and tangible support is the last important aspect of employee motivation. Showing appreciation, expressing empathy, listening to comments, giving feedback, and creating a

positive work environment are common but important intangible support that all supervisors should give. Hiring of additional staff (the section doubled in size in six years), job promotion (three staff benefited), and part-time course subsidy (one staff benefited) were some of the tangible support that the author had fought for the team.

Changing the Stereotype of Librarians

Pagowsky and Rigby recently edited an interesting book "The Librarian Stereotype: Deconstructing Perceptions and Presentations of Information Work" that was published by the Association of College and Research Libraries in 2014. This book discusses how librarians are perceived within and outside the field and provides inspirational actions to further enhance the positive impact of librarians. Pagowsky and Rigby state that "this is a recurring problem with all of the librarian stereotypes: they show internally within the field and externally to the public that librarians either 'are' or 'are supposed to be' a certain way" (23). Librarians may create or reinforce a stereotype, though unintentionally, by strictly defining their functions and responsibilities in terms of the subjects taught in library schools, including collection management, access service, cataloguing, and information literacy.

The Heritage project was not supported by the library management in its early stages, as it was perceived as irrelevant to the responsibilities and overall success of the library. To prove the value of this project, the author applied for external grants to start up the project and sustain its ongoing development. The process was risky but rewarding. This project was eventually brought to the library-level when the library had a new director, who understood and emphasized the value of faculty-library collaboration. The multimedia section also undertook substantial organizational reform so as to be able to provide long-term support for the new library direction of digital scholarship.

Pagowsky and Rigby also argue that sometimes "it is not so much the stereotype, but rather users not fully understanding what librarians [can] do that creates barriers to public use and detriment to librarians' status" (5). Most faculty members would not expect librarians to directly get involved in their teaching and research. As mentioned before, the author spent a whole year to recruit from among faculty any willing and early adopters. During that period, all her emails about the idea were simply ignored and her phone calls were treated with indifference. The change of faculty perception was effected after they saw the beta site. It seems that persistence, determination, and risk-taking help in breaking down barriers of librarian stereotype.

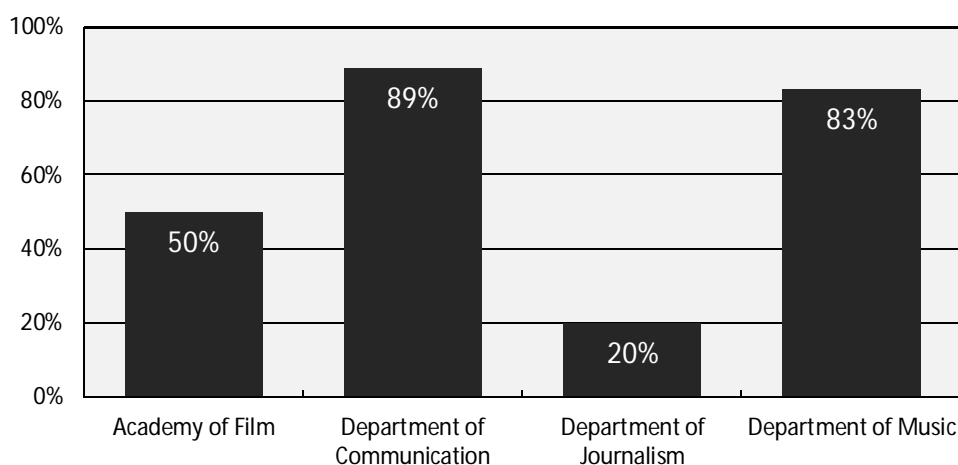
BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT

Enhancing Student Learning Experience

This project made a valuable contribution to teaching and learning on campus. Student creative works possess intrinsic educational value and can be re-used as a valuable teaching and learning

resource. Between 2009 and 2012, an online student survey was sent to all AF, COMS, JOUR, and MUS students who were enrolled in the production stream. The main purpose of this student survey was to assess the impact of the platform on learning experience. A total of 54 percent of surveyed students responded. Chart 2 shows the response rate of each of these departments.

Chart 2: Response Rate of the Student Survey



The results showed that 82 percent of student respondents found the platform helpful to their learning. The top five learning impacts that they identified were:

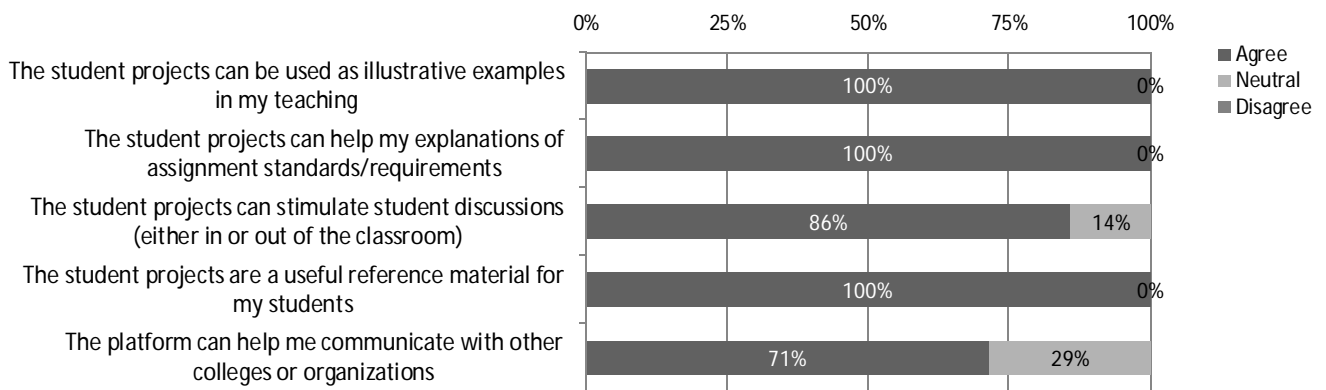
- Motivating them to produce high-quality work (68%)
- Better understanding of the assignment expectations and standards (52%)
- Having higher motivation for learning and/or doing assignments (41%)
- Better understanding of what the teachers had taught them (31%) and
- Being able to put new knowledge into practice (30%)

Overall, 92 percent of student respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that this showcase was a valuable service that the Library and corresponding departments should continue to provide.

Contributing to Faculty Teaching

In 2012, a faculty survey was administered to evaluate the impact of this platform on their teaching. 78 percent of teachers responded. The survey first listed five possible uses of the platform and asked the respondents to rate each use according to a 5-level rating system: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. All faculty respondents agreed and confirmed the usefulness of the platform as illustrative examples, reference materials, and a tool to explain assignment standards and requirements. 86 percent and 71 percent agreed the use as a stimulation of student discussions and inter-institutional communication. 14 percent and 29 percent were uncertain about these two possible uses, but no respondents indicated disagreement. Please see Chart 3.

Chart 3: Faculty Perceived Usage of the Platform



Achieving Learning Outcomes

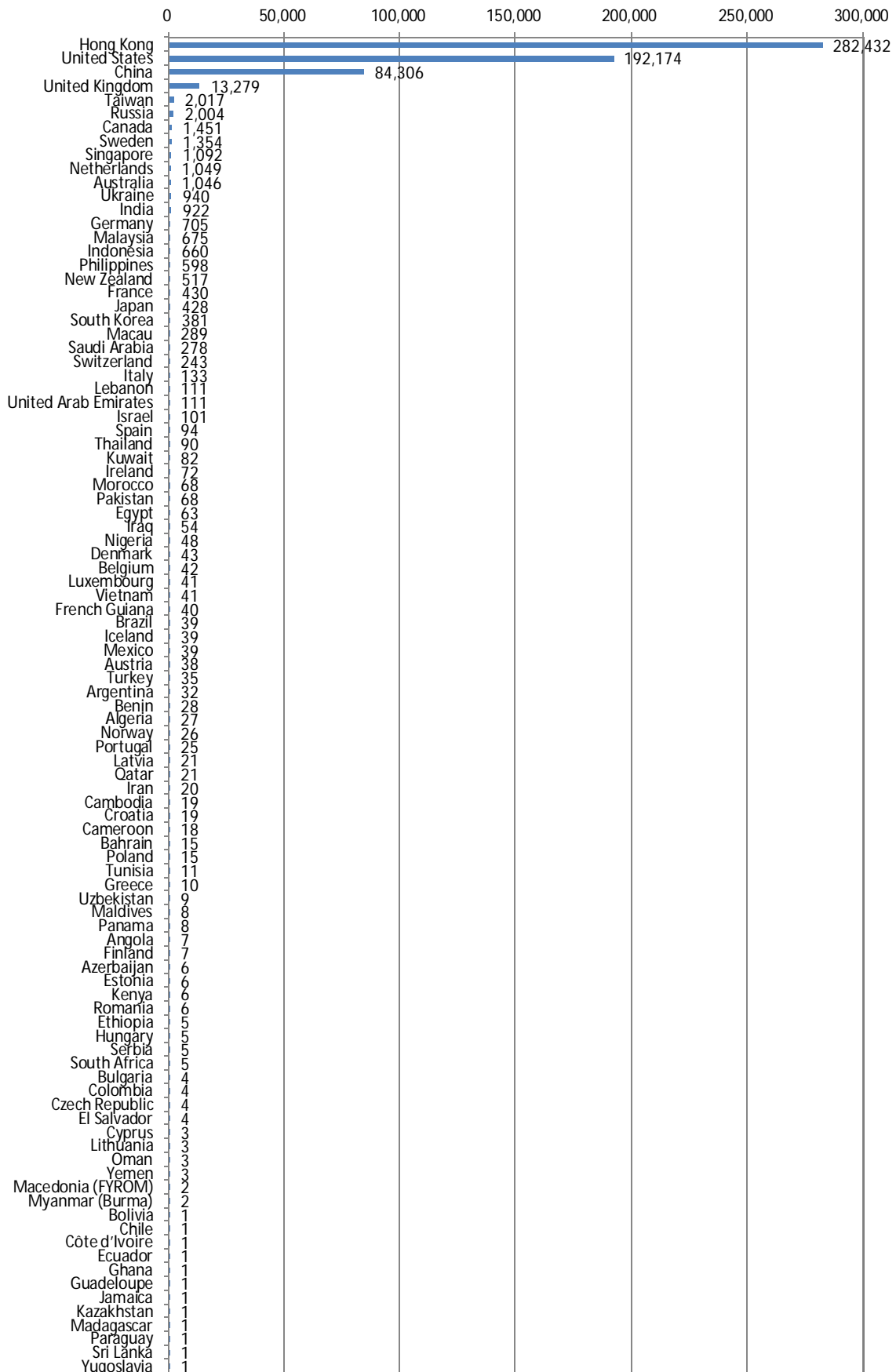
Also in 2012, a COMS and a JOUR faculty member helped organize a series of pre- and post-assessments for their classes. One of the learning outcomes of these classes was to understand the six most important criteria for a good animation or a good video documentary. Students were asked to define these criteria and to record them before and after using the platform. The faculty then marked both sets of answer sheets based on the model answers, with a maximum score of six points. The results showed that the average score rose from 1.26 to 2.47 for COMS students, representing an increase of 129 percent, and from 1.08 to 1.73 for JOUR students, or an increase of 60 percent.

These figures were then used to stimulate student discussion and draw student attention to the model answers prepared by the faculty members. The participating faculty members indicated that these assessments were sound proof of the project’s success in achieving this learning outcome.

Contributing to Institutional Reputation

This project contributed to the overall success of the University by providing a centralized, online showcase accessible both locally and internationally. While most materials displayed on the platform are student capstone projects, which are final year projects that conclude the cumulative knowledge and experience gained by students throughout the course of their study, HKBU Heritage is able to generate a positive impact on the university’s image. As of the time of writing, the site received views on 591,196 pages, with visitors from 97 countries and regions around the world. Hong Kong accounts for the most views (48 percent), followed by the United States (33 percent), China (14 percent), and the United Kingdom (2 percent). Refer to Chart 4 for a full table of country distribution. 12 percent of pages were viewed from on campus; the remaining 88 percent originated from off campus.

Chart 4: Geographic Distribution of Platform Visitors



Strengthening the Library's Value within Its Parent Institution

Through initiating and managing a successful multi-departmental project, the immediate benefit of the HKBU Heritage project was to enhance the Library's visibility, and thus better position itself within its parent institution. This platform generated much discussion and use within the communities of the participating departments. The project was also reported in local newspapers, university publications, and departmental reports. From time to time, the Library also received telephone enquiries from commercial firms or non-governmental agencies interested in recruitment for the contact information of individual student producers.

CONCLUSION

The HKBU Heritage project continues to attract interest in inter-departmental collaboration on digital initiatives. Last year, the Library decided to fully engage in the new direction of digital scholarship (or digital humanities) and data management, riding the wave of the momentum that was first gathered through the Heritage project. The new projects include a data curation project in collaboration with the Department of History, three digital humanities projects in collaboration with the Academy of Film and the Department of Religion and Philosophy, and a corpus research website in collaboration with the Language Centre. It is expected that more collaborative opportunities will arise in the coming years.

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