

Digital Commons as a Tool for Outreach

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SUNY Plattsburgh

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Digital Commons @ SUNY Plattsburgh

Outreach philosophy

From the beginning our Digital Commons has been conceived of as an outreach initiative rather than a systems-side initiative.

Outreach initiative

- Our Digital Commons is based in our Instruction and Reference unit, rather than our systems side
- Marriage of convenience at first
- But outreach became central to our vision

“Roach motel”

- “Data goes in, but it doesn’t come out”
- A key failing of early repositories
- Solution: work with faculty to focus on content they found valuable.



Dorothea Salo, “Innkeeper at the Roach Motel,” *Library Trends* 57, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 98–123.



For example, we decided that we would not start our Digital Commons by digitizing old masters' theses.

Faculty/student research



Instead of archiving previously-published work, we have instead focused on publishing original student and faculty materials. Thus, we wanted to allow Plattsburgh faculty and students to showcase their work in way that simply was not possible on any other college-run service, such as personal or class websites. The goal is to put in materials that people from both inside and outside the college community will want to see. And the best way to do that was to work with individual faculty and their students to identify the work that excited them, and that they wanted to make available.

Our publishing process

Community outreach

- Encourage faculty and students to take part
- Word-of-mouth
- Importance of department liaisons

Roles (in theory)

- **Repository manager**
 - sets up the series
 - trains faculty
 - troubleshoots issues
- **Faculty**
 - uploads documents
 - adds metadata
 - makes edits

In theory, the repository manager and the faculty member have clearly-delineated roles.

The repository manager has responsibility for setting up the series, training the faculty member, and troubleshooting any issues.

Faculty are expected to upload documents, add metadata, and make any necessary edits.

In practice, the repository manager shoulders some of those duties. They step in more often to assist faculty who are less comfortable with technology. And if administering a series means simply uploading two text documents a year it is just as easy for the manager to quickly add the materials. But for more complex series, requiring more frequent maintenance, we insist that the faculty member take at least an equal share in administrative duties.

Shared administration

- Add and train faculty as administrators
- Don't expect faculty to perform all administrative tasks, but do want them to understand the process of digital publishing
- Keep the conversation going between librarian and faculty

The repository manager meets in person with the interested faculty member. Here we listen to the patron and find out what material they want to publish, and if they have a pre-existing idea for how they want to material to appear in the repository. Digital Commons has a number of different "gallery" types appropriate to different collections of work. We often open up a three-way conversation among the repository manager, the faculty member, and bepress's (outstanding) support staff to discuss the best way to publish the material.

The repository manager and library staff might upload some of the materials themselves, but we do not want this to be fully our responsibility. Instead, we add the faculty member as an administrator of their materials. We sit down with the professor for a one- to two-hour session to show them the ins and outs of the Digital Commons interface. During this session we walk the patron through the publishing process. We show them how to upload materials and how to enter metadata for their collection.

The repository manager, to be sure, will still have to troubleshoot issues. The point is not to push the faculty member or student to shoulder all administrative responsibilities, but to actively engage them in the process of digital publishing. By understanding the particular platform on which they publish, they will be better able to communicate their needs back to the repository manager. The instruction session, we have found, serves much the same purpose as a reference interview. Through the process, the librarian comes to better understand the patron's specific needs and can, when necessary, suggest solutions that neither would have considered otherwise.

Digital Commons, we have found, is particularly well-suited for a repository in which responsibility for administration of individual collections is shared by librarian and teaching faculty. It is based on the EduKit publishing platform. Neither librarian nor faculty needs programming knowledge. The interface is web-based and fairly simple. After an initial instruction session, even faculty with limited computer skills have been able to manage their own materials. And they can very quickly see the results online. Digital Commons is particularly strong at search engine optimization. When we post work, we find that it shoots to the top of Google searches within days. Authors are invariably delighted when they Google themselves and see their repository publication near the top of the results.

Examples

Here are some examples of how we've put this outreach philosophy into practice.

Student work: Expeditionary Studies

Expeditionary Studies



During their senior years, students majoring in Expeditionary Studies first plan for and then travel on an adventure expedition. Their plans are the length of a typical senior thesis and include an itinerary, a list of supplies, and a detailed description of their emergency preparations. After the plan is approved by a department committee, the students then follow through on the plan. In recent years, students have kayaked around the Isle of Skye and through the rivers of the Mekong Delta, climbed Devil's Tower in Wyoming, and skied the backcountry of the Sierra Nevadas.

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SENIOR EXPEDITION PROPOSALS

The Senior Expedition is the culminating class of the bachelor's degree in expeditionary studies at SUNY Plattsburgh. It is the second of two capstone courses, requiring students to meet specific expedition guidelines as evidence of having successfully fulfilled the goals of the expeditionary studies curriculum.

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- [PDF](#) [A Circumnavigation of Isla de la Guarda](#), Gary Goldfinger
- [PDF](#) [Climbing Expedition: The Wind River Range and Grand Teton National Park](#), Keith Madia
- [PDF](#) [The Sierra: Discovering the Backcountry](#), Tova L. Soroka

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- [PDF](#) [Threading The Needles of South Dakota and Storming Devils Tower of Wyoming](#), Brandon Commanda
- [PDF](#) [Sea Kayaking North Carolina's Outer Banks](#), Allison Waring and Kari Dahlquist

Senior Expedition Proposals

A Circumnavigation of Isla de la Guarda

[Gary Goldfinger, SUNY Plattsburgh](#)

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Date of Award

Fall 12-15-2012

Degree Type

Thesis

First Advisor

Steve Maynard

Second Advisor

Laurence Soroka

Abstract

The senior expedition is our final capstone of the Expeditionary Studies program at SUNY Plattsburgh. This is basically what we have been training for during our university career. Since being a student here, I have seen many of the senior expedition presentations and even went along on a few of the trips, but I had no idea what I would be doing for my own. Starting out exclusively as a climber, a climbing trip was the obvious choice, but as I continued my education, many other disciplines came to be a part of my regular schedule. In fact, climbing recently has taken a back seat to other sports such as white water kayaking and sea kayaking. In the last couple of years with the extensive traveling I have done, I thought about what my expedition would entail and ideas came around every corner. Many of these ideas were way over my head and I realized that after looking into them more extensively. Someday I would like to complete these more rigorous expedition ideas, but for now, I need to do something in my skills set. First I needed a discipline, and as climbing has slowly been moving out of the spot light, I decided sea kayaking would be a great plan. Climbing has always been a challenge for me to push my limits and I see that in sea kayaking too. Dealing

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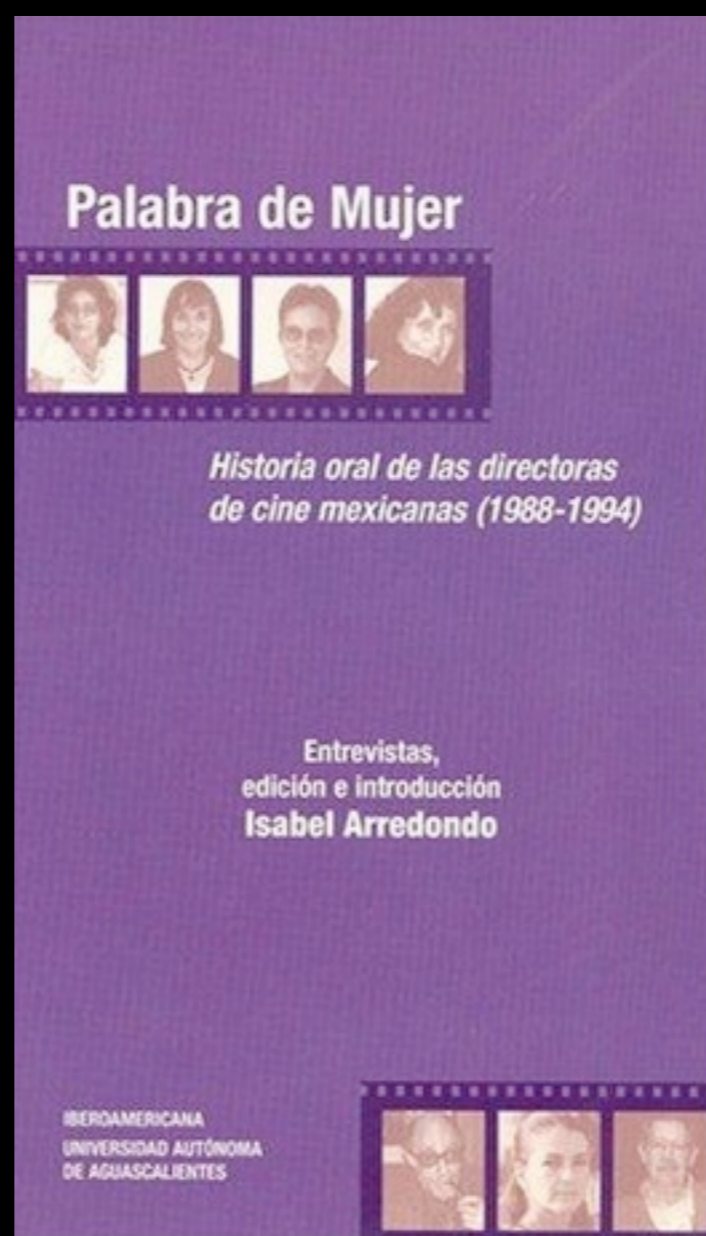
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A Circumnavigation of Isla de la Guarda

Faculty partnerships

Publishing crisis



If the market for monographs is limited, the market for edited primary sources even more so. In the fall of 2012 the library's liaison to the English department alerted the repository manager that a Modern Languages professor, Isabel Arredondo, had been unable to find a publisher for such a book. Arredondo had published a Spanish-language edition of a book of interviews with Mexican women filmmakers. But she was unable to find a press interested in producing an English edition. Arredondo wanted to make these interviews available to the public and to be able to cite them in an upcoming monograph.

Digital solution

The screenshot shows a digital library interface. On the left is a sidebar with search and navigation options. The main content area displays the book's title, author, document type, and publication date. An abstract is provided below. On the right, there are options to download the document and share it on social media. A box indicates the book is included in several digital commons.

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MODERN LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

In Our Own Image: An Oral History of Mexican Women Filmmakers (1988-1994)

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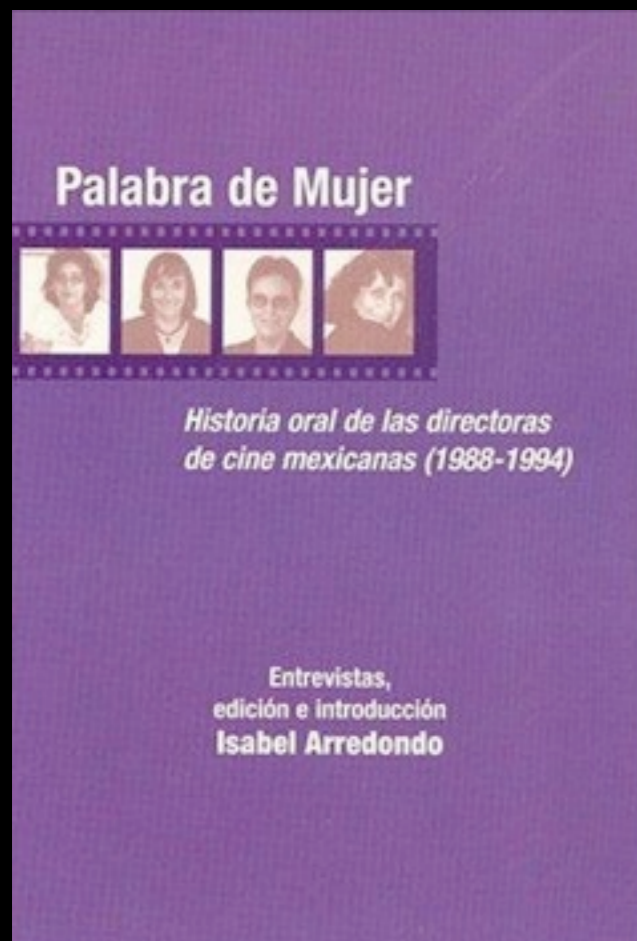
Publication Date
2012

Abstract
In Our Own Image: An Oral History of Mexican Women Filmmakers (1988-1994) is a translation of Isabel Arredondo's *Palabra de Mujer: Historia oral de las directoras de cine mexicanas 1988-1994*. The translation is by Mark Schafer, Jim Heinrich, Elissa Rashkin, and Isabel Arredondo. The book includes an introduction, six interviews with Mexican women filmmakers, an epilogue and a filmography. The goal of the book is to accurately document the entrance of women filmmakers, as a group, into Mexico's film industry at the end of the 1980s into the 1990s. These interviews trace the emergence of a new perspective within Latin American cinema. Beginning in the 1980s, social problems are approached from the perspective of the individual; a person's gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation become the link to the society. The filmmakers, studied in *In Our Own Image* as a group, give a coherent overview of the problems in Latin American society, especially Mexican society, from a gender perspective at this time. The introduction, which includes interviews with key figures of the state film industry in Mexico, describes how films are produced within this industry, the rationale for having a

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MODERN LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

In Our Own Image: An Oral History of Mexican Women Filmmakers (1988-1994)

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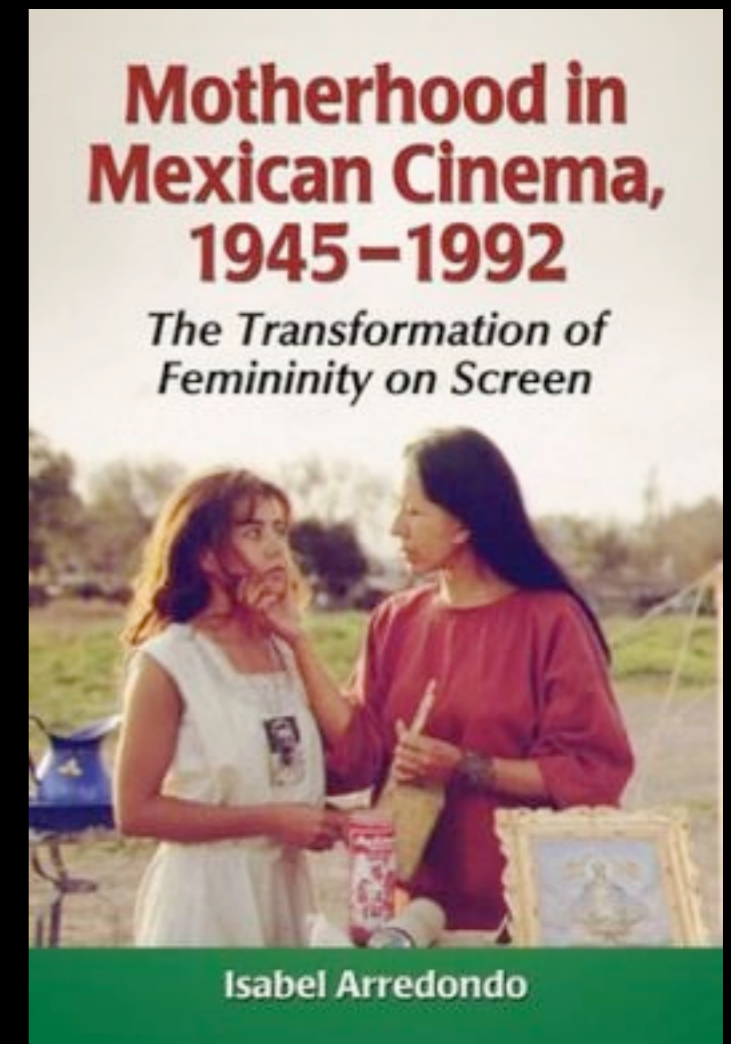
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Managing Editor: **Jessamyn Neuhaus, Ph.D.**, Associate Professor, SUNY Plattsburgh History Department

The Common Good is published by the SUNY Plattsburgh Center for Teaching Excellence and explores the scholarship on teaching and learning from the perspectives of both students and teaching faculty.

Deadline for inaugural issue submissions is **June 1, 2013**. We also invite submissions on the theme of citizenship and civic engagement in the classroom and beyond for the September 2014 issue. Deadline: June 1, 2014.

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The Common Good

Setbacks

Our model of emphasizing outreach and shared responsibility has been quite successful as we come up on the one-year anniversary of opening our Digital Commons. But not all has gone smoothly.

The advisor of a student literary magazine asked us to help the students publish a digital version on our Digital Commons. The repository manager and the library's web design expert worked with two student editors of the magazine to design a site for the digital journal. The editors trained on the platform and practiced on a demo site. But, just before the final site was to go live, the other students on the magazine staff protested that the site did not properly reflect their individuality. The advisor bowed to pressure and abandoned Digital Commons.

In retrospect, the student advisor had not been fully engaged with the planning process, nor had she taken the training workshop. She had left execution to the two bright and dedicated student editors. But when the other students raised concerns, the student editors did not have the power to overrule them, and the advisor did not have the understanding of the platform to explain the benefits.

The Digital Commons site for the student literary magazine still exists; if the next year's students want to use it we will happily work with them. But our failure to make sure that the faculty advisor as well as the student editors was fully engaged with the publishing process led to disappointment for us, a lost opportunity for the students to publish on a professional platform, and a great deal of wasted effort by the student editors.

In conclusion...

Our first year using our Digital Commons as an outreach initiative has, overall, been a success. But the success of each individual publishing project has depended on the rapport formed between the repository manager and the faculty sponsor of the work. When the faculty member has been fully engaged with the publishing process their projects have attracted interest and led to further possibilities. When the professor has taken a hands-off approach the projects have stagnated. It is thus the librarian's responsibility, under an outreach model, to listen to what is said and not said, to take the partner's hopes and fears into account, and to continually find creative solutions to problems expected and unexpected — the same, then, as in any other good conversation with our patrons.

Thank you!