

## Abstract

The Our Americas Archive Partnership (OAAP), led by Rice University in partnership with the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (MITH) at the University of Maryland, will develop an innovative approach to helping users search, browse, analyze and share content from distributed online collections. Currently, researchers have difficulty finding and organizing relevant electronic resources, given the multiple systems in which they reside and the heterogeneous vocabularies used to describe them. Further complexities arise when issues such as finding relevant materials in a different language and searching with domain-specific vocabularies are considered. By conforming to best practices in library and information science while incorporating recent Web 2.0 technologies, OAAP will address these important issues. Two significant online collections of materials in English and Spanish supporting the interdisciplinary field of American Studies, The Early Americas Digital Archive (EADA) <<http://www.mith2.umd.edu/eada/>> and a new digital archive of materials to be developed at Rice, will provide an initial corpus for developing and testing our tools. The project will span three years, with the majority of the development completed by the end of year two, allowing the third year to focus on test, assessment, and modifications based on feedback.

The tools for this project will extend the functionality of the software created by the UIUC OAI Metadata Harvesting Project to gather metadata from both library cataloging records and the headers of TEI-XML documents into a universal RDF format that allows flexible searching and data manipulation across collections. They will make use of Web 2.0 technologies to provide an interface for social tagging, tag clouds, and geographic visualization. Scholars will be able to further augment metadata descriptors by adding social tags using vocabularies that are more specific to their research domains, as well as browse the collections based on geographic regions and date ranges. The team will leverage current open source developments in these technologies, providing enhancements and integration to create an interface for resource discovery that will allow scholars to find more relevant and diverse materials to support their research needs.

The two multilingual archives that we will initially federate illustrate the complex politics and histories that characterize the American hemisphere: University of Maryland's EADA contains texts written in or about the Americas from 1492 to 1820, and the new archive at Rice consists of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century documents from both Latin and North America. Rice will digitize its collection, resulting in approximately 25,000 scanned pages that will be managed through its DSpace repository. Qualified Dublin Core metadata will be created for these items and used as the basis for providing RDF that will be used by the Web 2.0 tools described above. The content includes articles, books, broadsides, constitutions, declarations, manifestoes, correspondences, essays, log books, government documents, pamphlets, and photographs. The texts are in English, Spanish, Portuguese and French; 1800 pages from manuscripts will be transcribed and 80 Spanish documents will be translated into English. There are currently limited source materials in Spanish online and most lack English interfaces or translations, thereby limiting their use by U.S. scholars. These resources will facilitate current critical work in inter-Americas and hemispheric studies, spurring new possibilities and directions for comparativist approaches to the Americas.

During the final year of the project we will assess its success in providing a scalable and effective environment for enhanced discovery of diverse resources. Once we have developed a scalable infrastructure containing these two founding collections, we will test its viability by incorporating other relevant repositories in additional languages to confirm that the OAAP provides a useful, extensible environment. A baseline of current approaches used by American studies scholars for discovering resources will be developed early in the project and used as a basis for gathering feedback from users during the third year. By bringing together material that encourages cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary analysis, we hope to demonstrate that the OAAP can play a significant role in reshaping the ways that scholars work, think, and are trained as Americanists.