

# Amplifying Student Voices in the Library: Co-Created Digital Interactive Exhibitions for Archival Outreach

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## Engaging Students as Curators

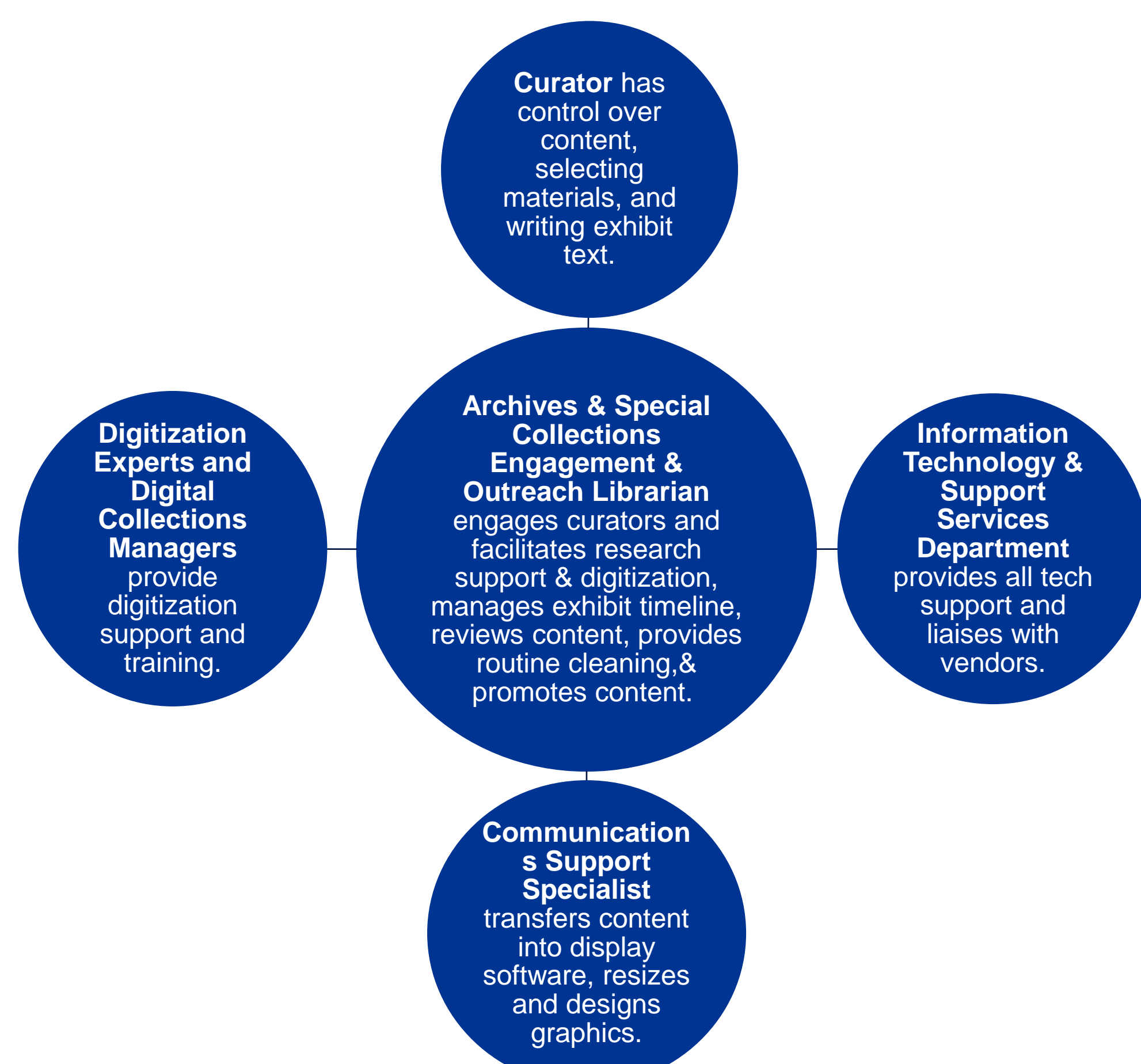
*Having the opportunity to design an exhibit [...] allowed the student serving as curator to practice the semester's skills. Seeing community members engage with their work made them realize that classroom skills and archival work can create impacts beyond one term's assignment, and that they can help folks explore objects from the past in the context of the present.*

(Dr. Jess FitzPatrick, instructor for the first student-led Digital Interactive Wall exhibit as part of the "Projects in Digital Composition" course, Fall 2020)

The University of Pittsburgh Library System's (ULS) Hillman Library values student creation and curation. Centering student voices in exhibit craft provides opportunities for experiential learning and public scholarly communication. It also fosters learning and critical conversations among visitors to the library. Over the past three years, I have facilitated student-led curation and programming of the Digital Interactive Media Wall located in our Archives & Special Collections Gallery. This poster details the processes I have developed for collaborating with a variety of faculty and students across the University of Pittsburgh.

I started by conducting outreach to teaching faculty who had already visited Archives & Special Collections with their students in past semesters, encouraging them to explore integrating curation and exhibition into their curriculum. I also met with students working on faculty-directed independent research projects about exhibit curation as a way of showcasing their work in conversation with library resources- including Honors College Creative Arts Fellows.

I created tools for communicating expectations and evaluating student collaborations, including an exhibit request form for faculty and students. Because exhibits take a significant amount of time and effort, it is important that all collaborators understand one another's goals and the capabilities of the exhibit technology, as well as the labor that goes into producing a final product.



## Facilitating Student Curation

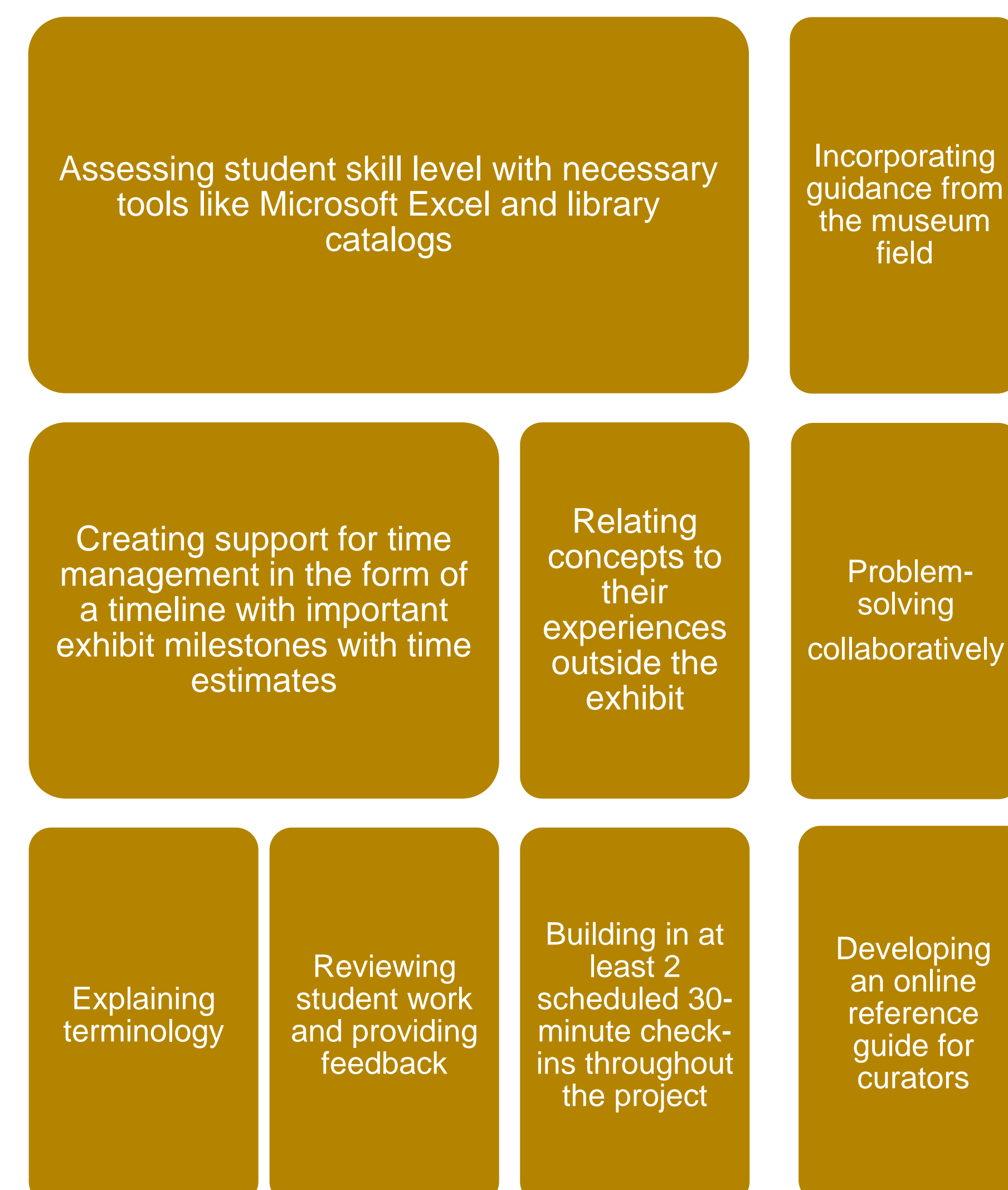
*When I got to the process of interacting with older scores in the Theodore Finney Music Library, it completely opened my eyes to how much care is required for the little details of research [and curation] (descriptions, placement, media, the works!).*

(Chloe Wiess, "Undergraduate student curator of Get with the Program Get with the Program: A Guide to Musical Analysis and Storytelling, including Archival Comparisons")

My experience has taught me that successful facilitation of student-exhibits includes developing the students' literacy of the exhibition tool while helping them hone their primary source literacy skills.

The Digital Interactive Wall's custom features and audience requires students to present information differently than they are accustomed to doing in a research paper. Custom Digital Interactive Wall features include map and timeline-based templates for organizing content, character limits, and an attract sequence that features research questions. The wall is visited by students, staff, faculty, contractors, Pittsburgh community members and campus visitors, all of whom have different experiences and knowledge of exhibit topics. This modal shift can be especially overwhelming for students who are learning how to conduct primary source research for the first time.

I meet student curators where they're at, building skills through hands-on mentorship and regular instructional check-ins:



## Amplifying Student Voices

*I always wanted to develop a digital and multimedia exhibit as an alternative way of communicating my research, and with this technology and the orientation of Megan and Justin I was able to do it.*

(María Ceclia Llorens, PhD student curator of "Borges and Gomez de la Serna in Buenos Aires: Avant Garde Explorations about Literature and Tradition (1921-1951)")



(Above, left) María Ceclia Llorens gives a curator talk for her exhibit in April 2022. (Above, right) Llorens highlights Jorge Luis Borges & Ramón Gómez de la Serna collections in Pitt's Archives & Special Collections in place, using an historic map of Buenos Aires, Argentina as a backdrop. Llorens incorporates video and sound recordings to more fully explore the two writers' connections and cultural context.



(Above) Photograph of "Remixing the Archive: Students use Archives & Special Collections @ Pitt to Create Visual Arguments," curated by David Mash (Pitt undergraduate student in Computer Science and Music) on behalf of Dr. Jessica FitzPatrick's Projects in Digital Composition course.

In this exhibit, students used University of Pittsburgh Library System & other local archives to express their thoughts on gender roles, pollution, and politics by incorporating rare materials into digital collages. One student's piece here creatively explored themes of lesbian and queer invisibility by "remixing" illustrations of paired feminine figures throughout time with the poem "We Are Lesbians" from 1970 publication *Lavender Vision*, held by the University of Pittsburgh Library System.

## Evolving Our Practices

I have learned that collaborating with students on digital interactive exhibits increases overall student exposure to archival and rare materials, prompting a rise in research visits by students, faculty, staff, and community members. Other students see their peers' work and become interested in using primary sources in their own projects or assignments. The connections made by students in these exhibits has inspired faculty to dedicate class sessions to visiting the gallery. I have also seen a growing interest in incorporating curation alongside primary source research skill building during instruction sessions.

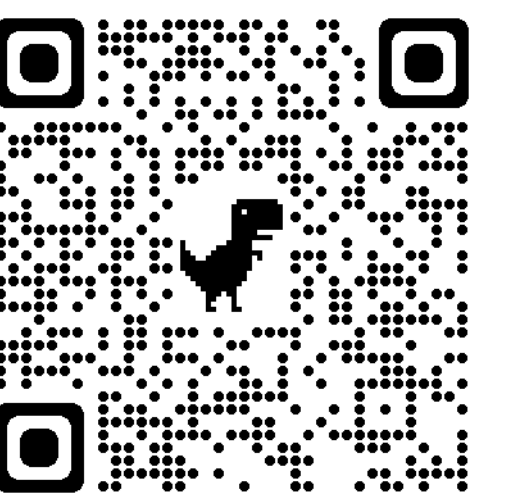
### Future Goals

- Increase **access** to a wider range of students.
- Co-develop Digital Interactive Wall exhibit **assignments** with faculty.
- Explore methods of student exhibit **documentation**, including LibGuides and our institutional D-Scholarship repository.
- Develop general **assessment** tools for exhibits and self-assessment tools for student curators.

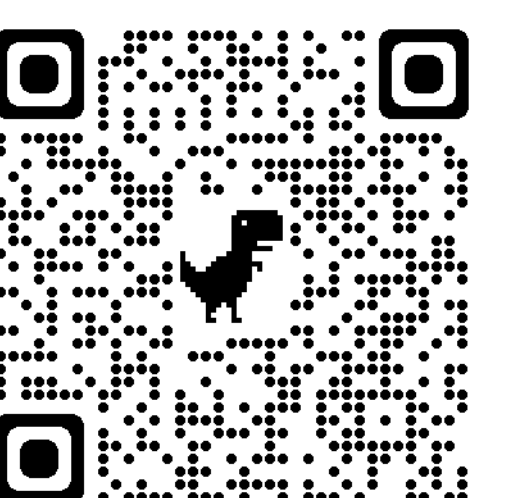
## References and Resources

"Rare Collections Explorer, Hillman Library at University of Pittsburgh." Potion Design. <https://www.potiondesign.com/project/hillman-library/> (Accessed February 2023).

Massanelli, Megan. "Digital Interactive Wall Exhibits." *Resources for Curators of Archives & Special Collections Gallery Exhibits*. University of Pittsburgh Library System, 2021. <https://pitt.libguides.com/resourcesforcurators/digitalinteractivewall>



Massanelli, Megan. *Archives & Special Collections Exhibits*. University of Pittsburgh Library System, 2022. <https://pitt.libguides.com/asc-exhibits>. This resource includes our Preliminary Exhibit Request Form and documentation of current and past exhibits.



## Acknowledgements and Contact

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