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Instantiation: Academia's Pop-Up Museum

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Introduction

The *Document Academy (DOCAM) 2014 Instantiation* exhibit was an experimental project conceived of by Kiersten F. Latham, the director of the Kent State University School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) MuseLab, and brought into existence by Corina Iannaggi, with the help of Mandy Tomasik, both SLIS graduate students. In this article, the conception of the *Instantiation* and the process followed to create the exhibit is described in detail in order to document our approach to completing this undertaking, which in turn can be used as a model for others interested in crafting a similar project.

While in the process of creating the *Instantiation* exhibit, it became evident that there were similarities between our project and the growing trend in the museum profession known as the “Pop-Up Museum,” with both having a central focus on creating meaningful conversation and inclusion of the visitor in the exhibition process. Overall, DOCAM 2014 participants responded positively to the *Instantiation*, suggesting that this collaborative form of exhibition could be a great activity for other academic conferences and provide participants with an alternative way of sharing their research.

The paper is structured into three parts. The first section highlights the “assignment” given to participants, the second provides an overview of the installation process, and the third looks at the *Instantiation* in the context of the Pop-Up Museum trend. In order to simplify the telling of this process, the rest of this article is written from the personal perspective of one of the authors (Iannaggi).

The Assignment

With the request for proposals for DOCAM 2014, applicants were asked to submit—in addition to their abstract—an *Instantiation* exhibit document. The scenario was described in the request for proposals as follows:

“All presentations will be represented as part of the DOCAM’14 MuseLab *Instantiation*. Describe the document you will be submitting for exhibit including material, dimensions, title, 20-25 word description (this will be the label for the exhibit), and a short explanation about how it relates to your presentation (not for exhibit). A photograph of the document would be tremendously useful,” (see also Figure 1).

Figure 1. The request for *Instantiation* documents in the original request for conference paper proposals.

DOCAM'14 Instantiation: *NEW This Year!*

This year, the DOCAM'14 Committee will be designing and arranging a three dimensional space to showcase documents representing all accepted proposals (20 min and Burst) for the annual conference. Representative documents will be sent in by authors and can be of any possible form, assuming it can be exhibited within given parameters. Instructions for participation will be included with proposal acceptance letters. The MuseLab, where the Instantiation will be held, is a creative and collaborative space for thinking, doing, and learning about museal things. It is located in the School of Library and Information Science at Kent State University, the conference venue. For more on the MuseLab visit <http://www.kent.edu/slis/about/locations/muselab.cfm>

A fair number of presenters sent in their initial *Instantiation* information with the first request. As the conference dates grew closer, a second request for *Instantiation* document information was sent out to conference presenters. This time, we used a form for participants to fill out (see figure 2).

Figure 2. Form sent out to Instantiation participants.

The Document Academy Instantiation @ the MuseLab

August 7-9, 2014

Your paper or burst session has been accepted to this year's Document Academy. During the proposal phase, we asked you to provide information about a document that you will bring or send for inclusion in our first ever exhibit for the Document Academy. The idea behind this is for you to provide a document (2D, 3D, copy, original, whatever you'd like) to represent your presentation. Along with this, we ask you to write the label for your document. We will then put it all together into a single short-lived exhibit that will be up only during the conference. Below is the information I need from you about your document. Please turn this in no later than July 1, 2014. If you do not wish to participate, please also let me know by this date.

Your name, position & location:

What is your document (short description):

How big is it?

Will you be bringing it or sending it? If you are bringing it, when will you arrive?

Please write a label using the following format:

Document

Short Description (date, materials, whatever you choose)

"Paper Title" by Your Name

25 word explanation/reasoning/interpretation of your document and how/why it relates to your paper.

*Please attach a photo of your document.

The goal of the "assignment" was to create a temporary exhibit highlighting the research of those presenting as well as to provide a three dimensional interpretation of the conference and an alternate way to express the content of each presentation. We felt that this made sense in the context of document studies and in the traditions of the Document Academy.

The Process

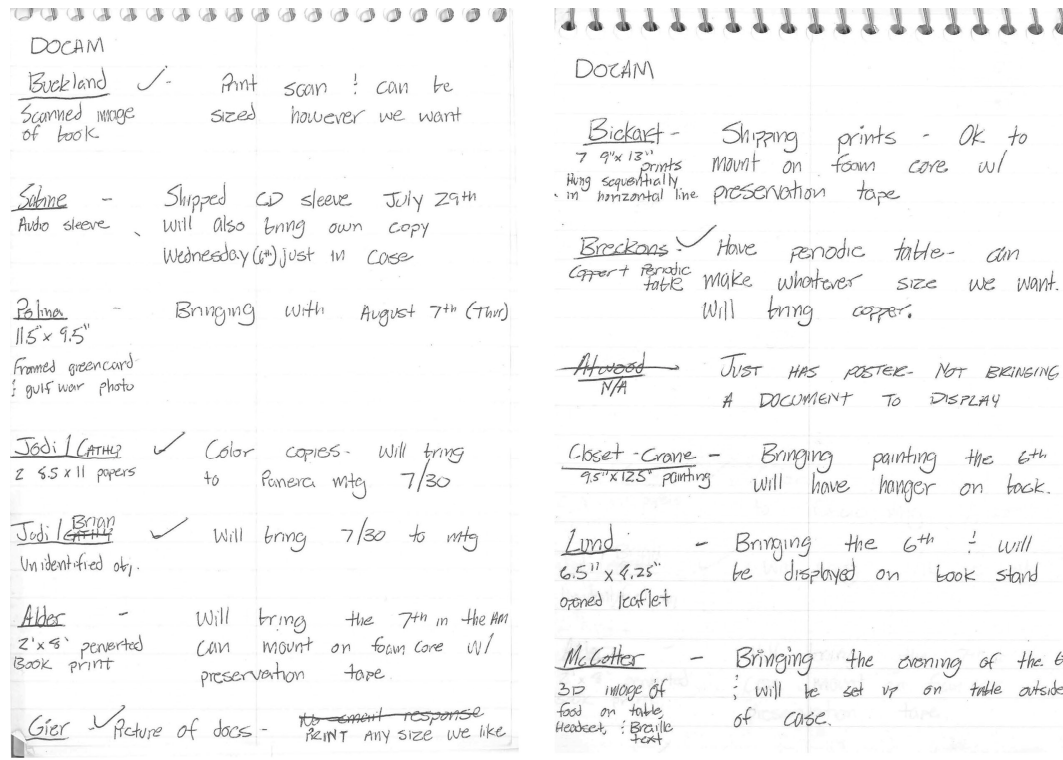
The initial planning of the *Instantiation* began one year prior to my involvement with the project. For the purposes of this article, I will recount the process of creating the *Instantiation* at the start of my involvement in the project, from gathering up the documents, to planning the space, installation, and last minute changes.

The *Instantiation* preparation and installation took six days and 40 (wo)man-hours to complete. After all presenter information was compiled, the DOCAM exhibit sub-committee (Latham, Iannaggi, and Tomasik) held two pre-installation meetings in order to create a basic strategy for how to organize and plan for incoming documents. I was designated the coordinator of the exhibit and became the person in charge of getting each participant's document information, planning out the exhibit space, and installing the documents as they arrived.

Gathering up the Documents

Once we received confirmation of who was participating in the *Instantiation*, the crucial elements of this step included finding out the size and shape of each document in order to plan the exhibit space and to figure out when (and how) the documents would be arriving. Many participants were able to email scanned copies of their document, while others shipped or brought their document with them for the conference. Keeping records of how and when we were receiving each document was critical to the planning process and helped tremendously when it came time to plan for the installation. Initially, we used an Excel spreadsheet to organize the event but it became unnecessarily complex, and I decided to keep track by hand instead (see Figure 3). I communicated with participants by email to plan their arrival time and therefore when to expect to "fill their space" in the exhibit.

Figure 3: A basic record keeping system to help plan out the installation



Planning the space

Once a list of all the documents was complete, I began to plan the space using SketchUp, a free open source program made available by Google. The program allows designers to input the dimensions of the space and add three-dimensional objects (pedestals, mounts, lighting, artifacts, etc.) to create a “sketch” of the exhibit. Online tutorials are offered free of charge, and these became an essential tool when I first began to use the software. The template for the “wall gallery” (a 27’ long x 8’ tall x 18” deep glass-fronted space) was created previously for another exhibit, but even with that, the creation of the *Instantiation* SketchUp design took approximately three and a half hours to complete. Figure 4 shows the SketchUp file created for the exhibit and Figure 5 shows the completed *Instantiation* exhibit for comparison.

Figure 4: SketchUp file of the *Instantiation* exhibit

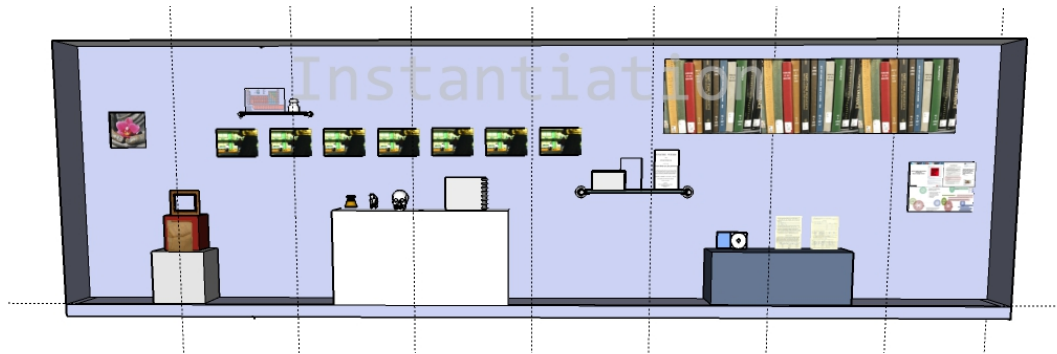


Figure 5: Completed *Instantiation* exhibit

* Not pictured: Melody McCotter's "Transmediation of Irving Penn's *Italian Still Life (B)*"



SketchUp has proven to be a useful program for MuseLab activities, especially for those (like myself) who are not comfortable with drawing. I used SketchUp to design two exhibits before the *Instantiation* and have found it to be the most helpful tool in the exhibition design process. The designs created in SketchUp allow me to provide the director of the MuseLab and other exhibit team members, with a vivid idea of what I envision for the space, making it easier to discuss and review specific elements. It also allowed me to plan the space without the presence of the actual documents. The documents came at different times and so I needed to have a good idea of their dimensions ahead of time in order to decide where to place them in the exhibit when they arrived.

Installation

The installation took the bulk of process time—approximately 26 (wo)man-hours over the course of four days—and was completed with the help of the MuseLab director (Latham), Mandy Tomasik, and graduate student volunteer, Michelle Italia Walker. The first step was formatting and printing the document labels. Next, all photocopied and scanned documents were printed and spray-mounted. It was beneficial to complete these tasks first, because it allowed more time when it came to the installation of documents arriving closer to the conference date. Once a document was received and ready for installation, it was placed in the case. It became evident that installing the documents as soon as possible was the best way to approach this exhibit. Instead of completing the majority of an installation all at once, this “install as you go” approach was much more efficient and less stressful, especially when it came to last minute additions and tweaking.

Last minute changes

In our original plan, the *Instantiation* was only supposed to last as long as the three-day DOCAM 2014 conference and participants would be able to take their documents home with them at the end. As we (Latham and Iannaggi) began to see the unique and interesting document submissions, we thought it would be best to keep the *Instantiation* up for a longer period of time for others to see (after the conference) as well. These documents now became in-loans (a museum term for documents temporarily placed into the care of the museum for exhibition purposes), and therefore we had to ask each participant if they were willing to let us keep their document longer and if so, would they agree to fill out a loan form. Luckily, we received permission from everyone to keep their document for an extended time period, and loan forms were filled out at the participants’ convenience throughout the three-day conference.

In addition, we had one participant whose document had multisensory elements not suited for a closed in, glass-fronted case. It became apparent that accommodation would need to be made for this unique contribution, and we found it best to create a space for the installation outside of the case. A table was set out next to the wall gallery allowing the participant to set up her documents and labels once she arrived. The experimental nature of the *Instantiation* made it possible for the accommodation to take place with relative ease. The *Instantiation* was never meant to be a clean finished exhibit with strict parameters, but rather was about creating a three dimensional representation of the DOCAM 2014 presentations dependent upon the documents themselves.

Instantiation in the Context of the Pop-Up Museum Trend

Meaningful conversation

During the installation process, it became apparent that our *Instantiation* project was similar to a recent trend known as the *Pop-Up Museum*. The Pop-Up Museum, developed by Michelle DelCarlo in 2011, attempted to engage people in meaningful conversations by inviting them to create a temporary exhibit with their own objects based on a given theme (DelCarlo, 2011). The objects provided a way for participants to share their personal stories and develop relationships with others, which in turn, provided the building blocks for creating a strong community of thoughtful and engaged members (DelCarlo, 2012). While there are some differences between DelCarlo's Pop-Up Museum and the *Instantiation* (i.e. The Pop-Up Museum concept lasts between 1-2 hours and visitors are asked to make hand written labels at the event), the intended outcome—meaningful conversation based on objects/documents brought in by the participants—is the same.

It was not until after the *Instantiation* was complete that I came across DelCarlo's thesis and blog which highlighted in great detail her journey creating the Pop-Up Museum. DelCarlo went on to create a Pop-Up Museum tool kit that provided guidance for those who wished to build their own Pop-Up Museum. Unbeknownst to the exhibit sub-committee and myself, many of the steps provided in the tool kit were the same as those followed when creating the *Instantiation*. For example, DelCarlo notes the importance of creating a comfortable and welcoming space by stating, "...the setting define[s] the ability to have conversations," (2011). Her research suggests that formal educational spaces are not the proper environment for encouraging informal conversation, so it is important for those interested in creating a conversational space to keep this in mind when hosting a Pop-Up event. Latham had this concept of conversational space in mind when designing the overall layout of the DOCAM conference and placement of the *Instantiation*. The final design, with the food, drinks, and conversations tables in front of the exhibit along with comfortable seating (see Figure 6), was chosen specifically to encourage meaningful conversation revolving around the *Instantiation*.

Figure 6: Food, drinks, and comfortable seating were pivotal to creating a conversational space



She anticipated conference participants coming back and forth, from presentations to breaks— sitting, standing, eating, talking—all in front of the *Instantiation*, allowing multiple opportunities for conversation around the exhibit.

Feedback

Delcarlo (2012) collected data from Pop-Up participants via interviews and surveys asking questions related to their experience. In addition, she used participant observation methods during the events to assess the level of conversations taking place. Unlike DelCarlo, I originally had no intention of conducting formal research on the ability of the *Instantiation* to create meaningful

conversation amongst the participants. While I was able to make some general observations and received positive feedback from several people, I did not get a chance to ask each person individually (during the conference) about their experience with the *Instantiation*. Guided by Delcarlo's experience, I sent out an email to all DOCAM 2014 presenters after the conference (whether they had a document in the *Instantiation* or not) and asked them to answer two follow-up questions about their *Instantiation* experience:

1. Did the *Instantiation* provide a meaningful connection to the DOCAM presentations?
2. Did you engage in conversation with others specifically about the exhibit? If so, please explain what was discussed.

I received nine responses, with all respondents indicating that there was a meaningful connection between the DOCAM presentations and the exhibit. Many made comments about how the exhibition provided a way to get a "sneak peak" of what was to come in the presentations, which led to conversations about how they thought the documents related to each person's talk. For example,

When I engaged in conversations about the exhibit before the presentations started on the first day, it was with other viewers and there was curiosity, surprise, and mutual wondering and questioning each other about the connections between displayed documents and the coming talks... There was also an object displayed (related to psychology experimentation I think) and it was not obvious what its use had been so we wondered about it trying to understand how it functioned. Other comments were about the beauty of some of the objects displayed or their quirkiness.

Others mentioned that they enjoyed seeing the documents first, before listening to the corresponding talk, then revisiting the documents afterwards, as this respondent relayed: "Personally, I liked seeing the exhibit, then listening to the talks, then revisiting the exhibit. It provided, for me, quite lovely before and after provocations." The majority of respondents reported that they engaged in conversation related to the *Instantiation*, and stated that it was a great conversation starter, "We spoke about the underlying concepts driving the works and how they relate to our talks. This helped break the ice for further conversations during the conference." One person went on to describe a conversation they had that would have most likely not occurred if it weren't for the *Instantiation*:

I discussed with Michael Buckland about document and archive research, after I had shown him the copy of the Lapp Fund document, which was on

display at the exhibition. I probably would not have had that discussion had it not been for the exhibition.

After reviewing the DOCAM participant's responses with those of DelCarlo's Pop-Up Museum responses, there were similar takeaways from both projects. The participants mentioned that both exhibits (centering around the objects/documents) were great conversation starters, and they engaged them in conversation that they would not have had otherwise. Participants enjoyed talking and answering questions about their objects/documents and acknowledged that many of their conversations were initiated based on their own object/document. In fact, one respondent felt that the making of her exhibit installation was an integral part of her conference presentation, "Creating the instantiation actually helped me to conceptualize my research and presentation."

Another interesting aspect was how visitors who did not contribute to the *Instantiation* reacted to the exhibit. Of the nine people who responded to the follow-up questions, one person did respond who did not contribute a document:

I can't say I really spoke to anyone about the exhibit (other than "ooh, how cool!" in passing), but I can tell you that I greatly enjoyed the visual connection of the displays to presentations, particularly Melody McCotter's and Melissa Adler's displays, and how they connected to their talks. Additionally, Barbara Bickart's images on display were very tangible and emotionally grabbing, and certainly gave one a sense of what was to come in her keynote speech [the last day of the conference] and portrayed through her "When" series (which was no less emotionally grabbing).

DelCarlo's research expressed the need for further research on this topic in order to discover if this kind of participant had a meaningful experience as well. While further research should be conducted on this area of interest, it appears that those who do not directly participate in the exhibit can still make meaningful connections between the documents and the presentations.

Final Thoughts

Based on feedback and general comments from participants, it seems as though this Pop-Up-like exhibit—the *Instantiation*—can be considered a success. The *Instantiation* provided another outlet for participants to represent their research and engage in informal conversation related to the documents on display. Furthermore, the exhibit provided a way for participants to make their own connections with what was exhibited and what was heard in presentations. These

connections seemed to spark many conversations amongst the DOCAM 2014 participants—it was the physical connections that were mentioned.

In the spirit of the holistic conception of documents by the Document Academy founders, it was our goal to bring alternate forms of creating and expressing information through this exhibit. By outlining our processes and realizations during this project, we hope the *Instantiation* exhibit process highlighted in this article can be used as a model for other conferences interested in exploring the capacity of three dimensional objects to create meaningful conversations based on academic research.

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