

Teaching with Omeka: THATCamp Pedagogy

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Amanda French

Saturday, 10/15, 1:30-2:30pm, room TBA
Vassar College

Lesson Plan

Instructor Preparation:

- Giving access to Omeka accounts -- I'll e-mail people to ask them to set up an Omeka.net account; I also have ten practice Omeka installations set up at <http://dhworkshops.net/omeka01> 02 03 etc. that people can FTP into too. -- Amanda
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Introduction:

1. **Amanda:** First of all, sign up for an free basic plan at at <http://omeka.net>. Feel free to play and practice as we talk.
2. **Amanda:** Who has used Omeka before? (if most have used it before, spend less time on definitions)
3. **Jeff:** Last 20 minutes: Would you rather use the last 20 minutes practicing Omeka OR work shopping Omeka class projects?

Motivation (Jeff, 5 minutes):

- When you want to teach students how to 1) work with primary sources and archival materials in a scholarly way, and 2) become familiar with important digital information concepts such as "database," "metadata," and/or 3) learn web publishing skills and concepts, then Omeka is a very useful tool.
- When NOT to use Omeka(?) --
 - Not ideal for archiving / describing long texts, books, etc. Images of texts, sure; short texts -- maybe a 5-page letter. Note, however, the TEI Display plugin: <http://omeka.org/codex/Plugins/TeiDisplay>
 - Also, even in exhibits, Omeka isn't necessarily the best tool for encouraging long-form interpretive or narrative writing -- WordPress would be better for that see Life and Legacy of Mary Ball Washington — <http://maryballwash.umwblogs.org/>

Definition (Amanda, 10 minutes):

- Omeka is a free, easy to use system for creating a searchable online database of digital archival items such as images, audio, and video files. It allows you to describe the items according to academic archival standards, import and export that descriptive information

from other systems, and to create as many interpretive online exhibits as you like from those items.

- Think of the way a museum works: a large collection, only some of which is publicly displayed and interpreted by plaques and labels written by museum curators. Omeka works like that.
- One of the most powerful aspect of Omeka is that it's extensible and modular -- there are themes and plugins available for use. Themes change the look and feel of Omeka, while plugins change what Omeka is capable of doing. See <http://omeka.org/themes> and <http://omeka.org/plugins>
- Omeka is NOT desktop software that you install on your own machine, it's what's called "server-side software." There are two ways to use Omeka: you can download a free, open-source version of the server-side software at omeka.org, or, if you don't have server space or would just rather not deal with it, you can sign up for free or paid "hosted" versions at <http://omeka.net>.
- Questions?

Examples (30 minutes): Note -- we'll incorporate discussion of pedagogical issues such as group vs. individual projects, intellectual property, pedagogical goals, grading into this part as we look at various examples.

Amanda:

- <http://aphdigital.org/classes/G572033F09/> -- Amanda's class "Creating Digital History" at NYU, Fall 2009 -- individual projects, individually graded
 - Pedagogical goals: Teaching history graduate students digital skills and issues
 - Assignment text and grading criteria: <http://aphdigital.org/classes/G572033F09/digital-archive-assignment-due-1216/>
- <http://www.somonjeau.net/project/> -- sample student project from Amanda's class
- <http://aphdigital.org/GVH/> -- Greenwich Village History; group site done by students in current version of NYU Creating Digital History taught by Dr. Cathy Hajo.

Jeff:

- Pedagogical goals -- Jeff's History 471 at UMW (Spring 2008 and 2010) -- Student-Generated, Online, Creative and Public Projects [Note that Omeka was one of the options available.]
 - Pedagogical
 - Creative approaches
 - Public audience
 - "Uncomfortable but not paralyzed"
 - Digital Natives/Digital Naïfs
 - Cultivate New Literacies (digital, visual, information)
 - Practical
 - Marketability
 - Adapatability
 - Play well with others

- Examples
 - <http://projects.umwhistory.org/cwh/> -- Civil War Fredericksburg -- group project from Jeff's "Adventures in Digital History" course
 - <http://projects.umwhistory.org/jmp/> -- James Monroe's time as Minister to France -- group project from Jeff's "Adventures in Digital History" course
- <http://gslis.simmons.edu/daisie/> -- group project done by a class of LIS students at Simmons College in a "Digital Libraries" course taught by Dr. Candy Schwartz.
- List of Omeka projects (not subdivided by course -- add your own!): http://omeka.org/codex/View_Sites_Powered_by_Omek

(If) Demonstration and exercises, then Amanda (20 minutes):

- Show on an empty test installation how to add and describe an item (could also just let people try it on their own)
- We will circulate and answer individual questions as people do the following exercises:
 - Change the theme
 - Browse through the list of available plugins and see which ones you would want to use: <http://omeka.org/plugins>
 - Add a picture, audio file, or video file as an item to Omeka -- you can use the sample items at <http://dhworkshops.net/omeka-sample-items.zip>

(If) Workshopping assignments, then Jeff (20 minutes):

- Creating Class Omeka Project
 - Sources?
 - Developing Assignments?
 - Grading Omeka projects -- developing a criteria [<http://dh2010.umwblogs.org/2010/04/08/assessment-criteria-for-digital-history-projects/>]
 - Brainstorming workshop participants ideas for their own class projects
- Why you might want to use a tool that you don't fully know how to use
- Common problems and pitfalls in working with students with Omeka
 - Cost
 - Server space / tech support / security

Resources:

- Main Omeka site: <http://omeka.org>
- Hosted Omeka sites: <http://omeka.net>
- Jeff's article on teaching with Omeka: <http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/teaching-with-omeka/26078>
 - Also, revised version with more of Jeff's teaching philosophy is at <http://learningthroughdigitalmedia.net/teaching-and-learning-with-omeka-discomfort-play-and-creating-public-online-digital-collections>

- Dublin Core usage guide: <http://dublincore.org/documents/usageguide/elements.shtml>

Description

Omeka is a simple system used by scholarly archives, libraries, and museums all over the world to manage and describe digital images, audio files, videos, and texts; to put such digital objects online in a searchable database; and to create attractive web exhibits from them. Even people with no web development experience can use it to create a digital archive of images, audio, video, and texts that meets scholarly metadata standards and is delivered on a search engine-optimized website.

In this workshop, we'll teach you how and why to use Omeka in the classroom. We'll give you a basic hands-on introduction to the system so that you can get comfortable with it yourself, look at some examples of pedagogical use of Omeka in humanities courses, and talk about our own experience teaching with Omeka. At the end of the session, we'll workshop some of your own ideas for Omeka-based assignments.