

The Making of the Rotunda “Diverse Alums” Digital Exhibit: Automation Using Metadata Filters & Leveraging Research Assistants

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To view the digital exhibit that this paper discusses, visit:
<https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/rotunda-exhibit/>

Abstract

As part of larger efforts university-wide to highlight diversity leading up to the 60th anniversary of desegregation at the University of Georgia, the law school focused on identifying materials including photographs, class directories and news articles related to the school's earliest minority graduates. Unique artifacts donated by family members of some of the graduates including a briefcase and correspondences from one of our earliest African-American alums who went on to become a prominent Civil Rights attorney became part of a display that began to take shape in the summer of 2022. However, due to limited building access during the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were many challenges presented for the project, from marketing and sharing the physical exhibit with the law school community to making the primary source documents from which the exhibit facsimiles were created discoverable online. Together, the two of us worked to set up a more sustainable method for bridging the physical and digital exhibit worlds. We did this through a combination of utilizing the collection tool in Digital Commons, and harnessing the availability of our Research Assistants for identifying relevant documents to this exhibit.

Stakeholders & Institutional Investment

In 2019 student driven initiatives at the University of Georgia School of Law prompted research for identifying diverse graduates from the school. Over the course of late 2019 and early 2020 this research was visualized into a graphical timeline with items pulled together from UGA's earliest yearbooks (Pandora's), the law school's student directories (Phi Alpha Delta class directories), and information gathered from other institutional publications including past issues of the school alumni magazine and journal (The Advocate). The input of various student organizations at the law school was gathered through email chains and one-on-one focused sessions to inform the scope and content of the exhibit. Law student representatives including leaders of the Asian Law Students Association, the Davenport-Benham Black Law Students

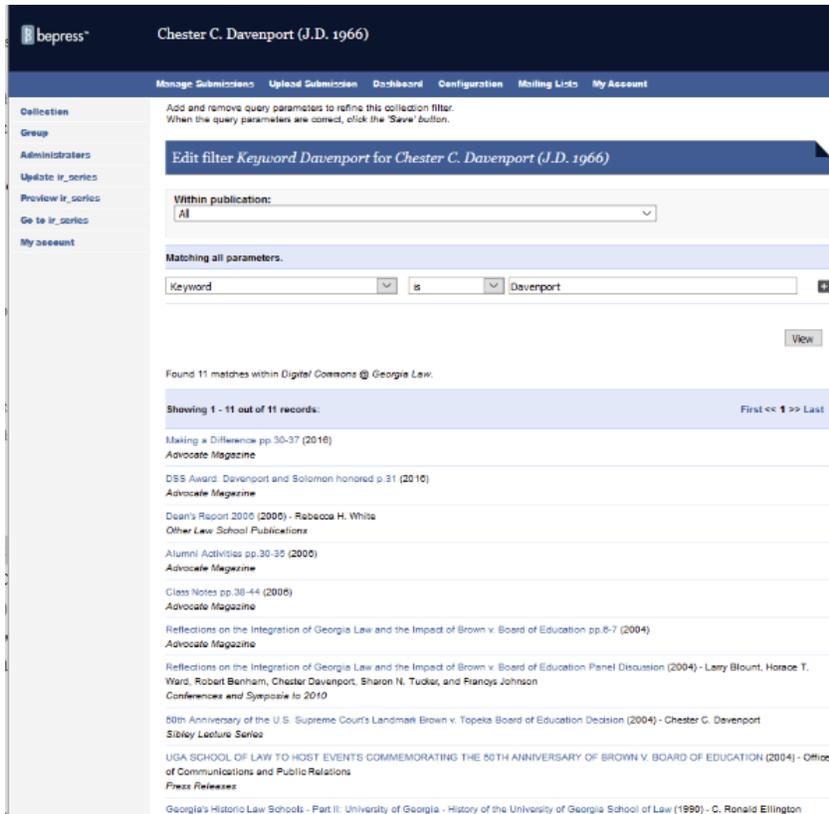
Association, the Hispanic Law Students Association, the OutLaw Association (LGBTQIA law students and allies), the Middle Eastern Law Students Association, and the Women Law Students Association were all consulted and asked for opinions and feedback.

With student organization approval, previously digitized materials were joined with newly scanned photographs to illustrate the diverse history of our school's community. The graphical timeline was printed very large, framed and mounted to canvas as a focal point. Two shadow boxes featuring reproductions of many original items from our library's archives and special collections were assembled and hung in the Rotunda gallery space. Both the canvas and shadow boxes included photographs of the graduate's 3L class photos and student organization photos. The exhibit also included 1974 alumnus Robert E. "Robbie" Robinson's briefcase, gifted to the school on February 28, 2020 following the screening of a short documentary film dedicated to him. The event of the screening not only honored Robinson's contributions to the Savannah, GA community but also highlighted the newly established School of Law Robinson Scholars Program and the inaugural class of Robinson Scholars for Fall 2020. This program benefits underrepresented student populations with ties to Georgia and a passion for public interest law. Robinson's legacy as a community leader and activist, civil rights attorney and influencer in the fight for school desegregation in our state is but one part of our law school's rich history.

From Physical to Digital

Summer of 2020, the physical exhibit began to take shape. Once completed and housed on the 3rd floor Founders Gallery of UGA School of Law's Rotunda in Hirsch Hall, it was a challenge to market the exhibit, and even more so the source documents and supporting items. Since the majority of the items used in the display were already uploaded with metadata records in our institutional repository Digital Commons, a digital version with extended items and information seemed a natural fit to live in the repository. Utilizing the collection tool, we set out to create a new series that would pull together items from across other series in our repository. We developed a landing page and began testing with one individual's last name as a keyword. This keyword was used to create a metadata filter in the collection tool (located in the configuration section of any given series in Digital Commons). Setting up the series took some approval and meetings with our bepress representative initially. After explanations were provided for the scope and nature of the new series, it was relatively easy to add keywords to the metadata of related records.

What is great about using the collection tool in combination with metadata tags is that the new series pulling various items together can reach across series content types. It brings into one location event series content (like lecture programs, video recordings of commencement speakers, etc.), archival images (including photographs from class directories, or portraits from our art gallery collection), and of course document types (articles from journal or magazine submissions, presentation documents, press releases, and more). At first, we added last name keywords to the metadata records for just the items that were already identified and used as part of the physical exhibit.



Here you can see the metadata filter example for the collection of graduate Chester C. Davenport (J.D. 1966), and the list of content that the last name keyword “Davenport” was added to.

The results for his collection items pulled from across different series includes records from:

- Advocate Magazine,
- Communications and Public Relations Press Releases,
- Sibley Lectures,
- Other Conferences & Symposia,
- and Deans Reports.

Next, we worked together to leverage law library Research Assistants as part of the project workflow. Assistants were briefed on the project scope, given the names of the individuals that the project included, and asked to search various parts of the repository to create lists of what else could be added to the digital exhibit series. A spreadsheet was exchanged including links and titles of the newly found documents to be added.

Marketing, Sustainability & Future Potential

Since there was a large investment and interest from the law school administration, it was easy to share this content with the Dean’s Office and the Advancement Office. Advancement reached out to individuals who might be interested, including many of the graduates who are featured in the display or to their family members. Internally, the law library did its part as well to market the exhibit both physically and digitally. Aspects of the exhibit have been incorporated into library displays and helped respond to student requests for specific information during Black History Month about our earliest African-American graduates. QR codes and bit.ly links have been utilized with in-house printed bookmarks that include small photographs of the earliest graduates of each minority group. Newsletter articles and blog posts have also been written at timely moments throughout the past year. The most recent example was for Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month, linking back to our landing page for the series digital exhibit in our

repository. Many members of the law school community who regularly search for specific members of our school's history have also made use of the new digital exhibit as a practical means of quickly locating all items related to certain individuals.

Over time, as new content is added related to these key figures, it is as simple as adding the last name keyword for that record (no matter what its format or what series it is originally in) to appear in the aggregated digital exhibit series. With the process of this initial digital exhibit having been successful for the first of its kind in our repository, we are exploring other ideas for how we can apply this same workflow, series collection set-up, and general approach to other areas of the repository. One idea we are playing with is to aggregate Clinical and Experiential Learning related materials together into a new series using a metadata keyword like "clinics". This concept would pull together scholarship by clinical faculty or program directors in addition to their presentations, news and popular media related to the school's experiential learning courses. The possibilities are endless!