

Creating Topical Exhibits in Digital Commons
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This presentation is based on the creation of William & Mary's digital exhibit [Black History at W&M Law](#). The project developed from my membership on the Law School Equity and Inclusion Exhibits Committee. The committee was charged with creating physical and digital exhibits to highlight and celebrate equity and inclusion at the law school. We met in January this year to create our first exhibit.

We started with the idea of creating a [physical exhibit](#) with a digital version or component. The latter was extremely important during the pandemic since few students actually visited the law school building. After some discussion, we decided to highlight and celebrate the "firsts" in Black history at WMLS.

Multiple committee members searched through our repository collections and other sources to identify appropriate material. With the images and articles identified, we next had to determine the formats for the physical and digital exhibits. We wanted the digital version to reflect and expand upon the physical one. We considered a webpage, but we didn't have anyone on the committee who would be able to create it quickly and we had some pressure to try to put something together before the end of Black History Month. I lobbied for housing the exhibit in the scholarship repository. This would ensure that the library would maintain control of archiving the exhibit and would hopefully set a precedent for the home of future exhibits.

At first, I wasn't sure what format we should use in the repository. We had something of a template in a scrapbook that we'd digitized from our special collections. When we added it to the repository in 2018, we created both a book gallery and an image gallery (See <https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/sbtscrapbook/> and <https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/sbtimages/>). I was hoping for something more integrated. After talking to other library staff members, I decided to see what I could develop with just a book gallery.

To design the exhibit within the repository, we needed to build an appropriate structure that was flexible enough for us to expand and house potential future exhibits. We had already decided to develop "[Equity & Inclusion at William & Mary Law School](#)" as a community within our [Archives and Law School History](#) community so we could explore this aspect of our history. When we put in that request, we also asked bepress to create "[Exhibits](#)" as a sub-community of Equity & Inclusion. Within Exhibits, we set up the book gallery "[Black History at W&M Law](#)."

In the Book Gallery Configuration, we chose to use a logo and suppress the book gallery title since the logo features the exhibit title. A student on the committee used separate image software to create the physical exhibit poster. She reconfigured it horizontally to create the digital logo.

We chose to organize the book gallery by "year, title, author" and make it chronological (rather than reverse chronological) to simulate the timeline we were creating for the physical exhibit. The year became part of the "title" of each image, but I chose to retain the repository's standards for entering articles. When we add articles to other parts of the repository, we take the

article title from the publication. So an article published in the newspaper as “W&M Law Situation is ‘Tense’” would also have this title in the repository.

Some committee members were concerned that users wouldn’t understand that they might be downloading only an image, so we chose to change “Download Full Text” to “Download” (in “Publication Options” on the “Book Gallery Configuration” page). I also turned on “Enable PDF view on item information pages” to help alleviate this potential problem. This setting also allows visitors to read the articles without downloading them while still maintaining download counts.

For each entry in the exhibit, I created both a .jpg and a .pdf file. If the entry was only an image, I converted the image to a pdf in an attempt to create a more uniform download. For the articles, I created a .jpg of the first page of the article to use as the cover image. All .jpg files were loaded as cover images and the .pdfs were loaded as the actual files.

One challenging aspect of creating the digital version was representing the physical book display which accompanied the tangible exhibit. I decided against creating an entry for each book that would feature the book covers. I thought interfiling the books by their publication date among WMLS images and articles would be confusing. Also, visitors to the site might be really unhappy to learn that the books weren’t full text. Instead, I created an entry for the book list and used the description field to put a bibliography of the books listed alphabetically by title. Luckily, the field didn’t have a character limit and the list with links to records in the W&M catalog looks really nice at the end of the exhibit.

It took a few weeks of spending intermittent time adding the images and articles to finish the exhibit. As I learned how to do different things or learned what did or didn’t work, I ended up editing almost every entry at least once. Committee member comments also meant I needed to change some of the entries to adhere to group decisions. All of the work and edits paid off. I’m proud of what we created and the digital exhibit was definitely a hit with the committee and the Law School administration.

A few notes:

1. I intentionally duplicated some material already in the repository to include it in the exhibit in the desired format.
2. We included a disclaimer for some of the language (in the article titles) which might be considered outdated or insensitive.
3. I tried to standardize the quality of the images, but some were photographs from a digital camera while others were derived from .pdf images of old scanned newspapers and yearbooks.
4. We decided against adding images of the physical exhibit to the digital version. Instead we included a link to the [Flickr album](#) with pictures of the physical display.
5. The structure of the exhibit allows us to add new or newly-discovered items as needed.