

Improving Discovery of Digital Exhibits: Leveraging Digital Commons DCX to Spotlight Collections

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To view the digital exhibit examples in the platform this paper discusses, visit:

<https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/exhibits>

Abstract

This short paper and presentation is an update on the previously presented in July of 2021 titled “Automation Using Metadata Filters & Leveraging Research Assistants” with Savannah Nolan. Since that presentation, UGA Law Library served as a beta tester for Elsevier’s DCX – the Digital Commons exhibit solution. Launched late summer 2021, the exhibits that went live from UGA Law pleasantly surprised librarians who were lucky enough to discover that researchers were already retrieving the new digital exhibit content in their search engine results. This short paper shares the reasons why I have preferred working in DCX to build digital exhibits over my previous method, and why I believe it has improved discovery and user experience with our repository archives and special collections items.

As the previous paper and presentation on the topic of creating digital exhibits by selecting content from across a Digital Commons repository detailed, the process of managing item identification from multiple series and collections to present a curated online exhibit in the existing framework of the repository was tedious. Using research assistants helped a great deal, but the layout and usability of the first iteration of our digital exhibit Milestones in Diversity still had a long way to go. Prior to DCX, site visitors saw this: <https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/rotunda-exhibit/> (right-hand side is below the fold)

The screenshot displays the Digital Commons website interface. On the left, there is a navigation menu with links for Home, About, FAQ, and My Account. Below this is a search bar with the text "Enter search terms" and a "Search" button. There are also links for "Advanced Search", "Notify me via email or RSS", and "Browse" with sub-links for Collections, Disciplines, Authors, Recent Additions, and Activity by Year. A "Links" section includes Law School, Faculty Profiles, Law Library, and Archive-II Georgia Law.

The main content area is titled "Digital Commons A Service of the UGA Law Library" and features a "ROTUNDA EXHIBIT" section. This section includes a description: "There have been many outstanding graduates from the University of Georgia School of Law since the school's founding in 1859. To honor individuals who have broken the barriers of our institution's history, portraits and other items from the library's archives and special collections have been arranged in a physical display on the second and third floors of the Hinch Hall Rotunda. This series serves as a virtual extension of the exhibit at the law school to provide more context for those featured there, and to aid in locating other resources that further illuminate their legacy." Below the text are two small images showing physical displays of portraits and documents.

On the right side of the screenshot, there is a list of digital exhibit items, each with a title, a brief description, and a link to the item. The items listed include:

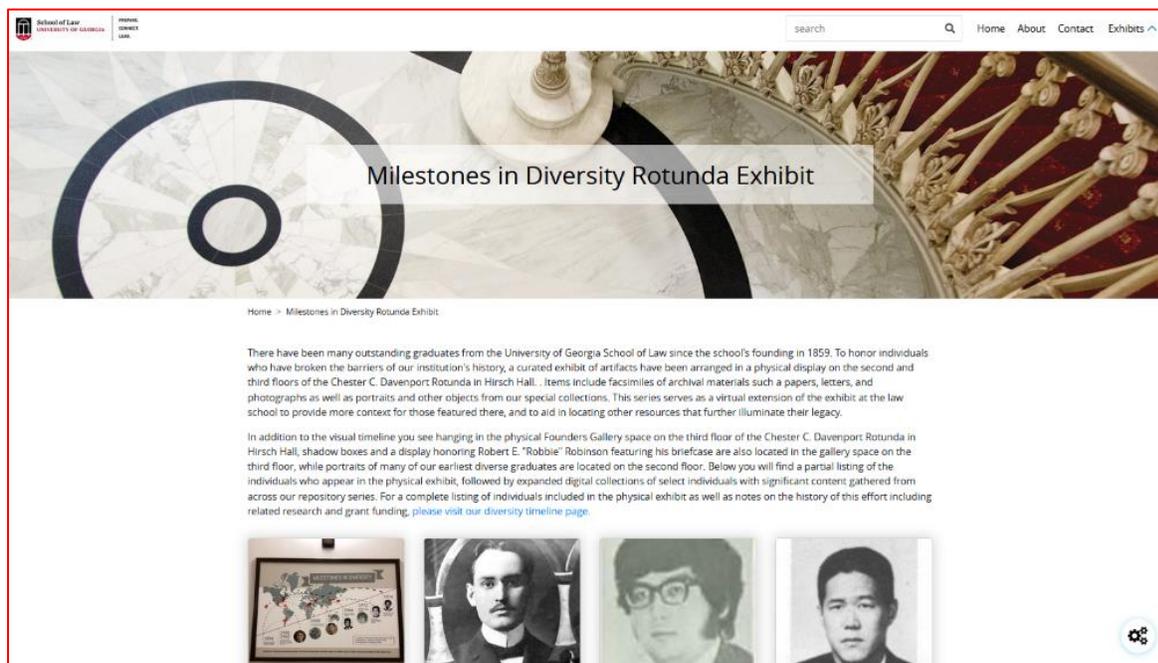
- 1926 - Dorothy Ida "Dot" Levy, 3rd Female Graduate
 - Photograph from Lumpkin Law School Class Composite Negative, 1926
 - Photograph from the *University of Georgia Pandora Yearbook, 1926*
- 1926 - Mathilde Uppson, 4th Female Graduate
 - Photograph from Lumpkin Law School Class Composite Negative, 1926
 - Photograph from the *University of Georgia Pandora Yearbook, 1926*
- 1948 - Michael Gannam, 1st Lebanese Graduate
 - Photograph from the *University of Georgia Pandora Yearbook, 1948*
- 1966 - Chester C. Davenport, 1st African-American Graduate
 - Photograph from the *Student Bar Association Placement Brochure, 1966*
 - Photograph of the Student Editorial Board of the *Georgia State Bar Journal* from the University of Georgia Pandora Yearbook, 1966
- 1971 - Phil Duderwies, Graduate who used a wheelchair
 - Photograph from the *first year class of the Phi Alpha Delta Student Directory, 1968-69*
- 1972 - Theodore C.H. Chao, 1st Chinese-American Graduate
 - Photograph from the *third year class of the Phi Alpha Delta Student Directory, 1971-72*
- 1972 - Arthur K. Goto, 1st Native Hawaiian and Japanese-American Graduate
 - Photograph from the *third year class of the Phi Alpha Delta Student Directory, 1971-72*
- 1974 - Sharon Lynn "Nyota" Tucker, 1st Female African-American Graduate
 - Photograph from the *second year class and of the Law Students Civil Rights Research Council Officers*
 - From the *Phi Alpha Delta Student Directory, 1972-73*
 - Photograph from the *third year class and of the Black American Law Students Association Officers* from the *Phi Alpha Delta Student Directory, 1973-74*
- 1974 - Robert Edward "Robbie" Robinson, Prominent Civil Rights Attorney
 - Photograph from the *second year class of the Phi Alpha Delta Student Directory, 1972-73*

Below the list, there is a section titled "Browse the Rotunda Exhibit Collections:" with links to various collections, including "Chester C. Davenport (J.D. 1966)", "Edith H. House (L.L.B. 1926)", "Robert Benham (J.D. 1970)", "Robert E. Robinson (J.D. 1974)", and "Sharon N. Tucker (J.D. 1974)".

For the end-user, the amount of scrolling was a bit much. Images of the physical exhibit added to the series description was possible, but those images had to be hosted elsewhere since the HTML field for description did not include a WIZYWIG editor or the option to upload photographs to the repository from the configuration section of the site. The structure of the repository naturally being a longer, more vertical page than a preferred horizontal experience was very restrictive for image sizing and text formatting where width of the page content container was concerned. Lastly, the series content aggregated automatically from across the repositories other series and collections (including a variety of item record types) all displays at the very bottom in a plain-hypertext fashion.

Now let's review the DCX version of this exhibit with identical content:

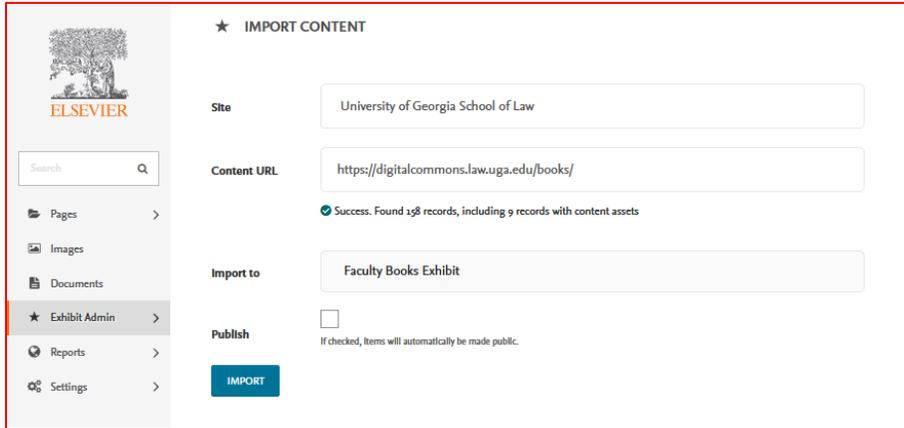
<https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/exhibit/rotunda-exhibit/>



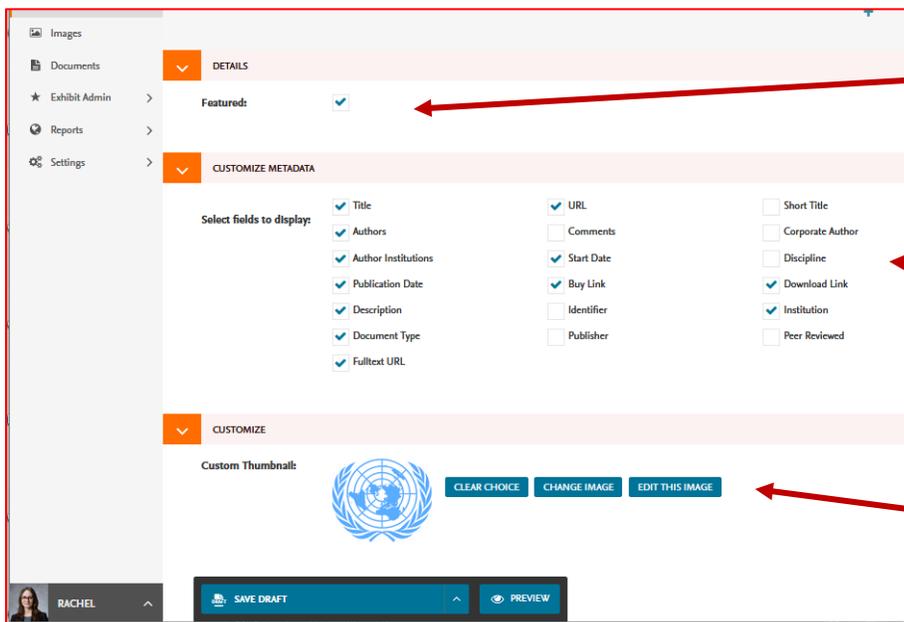
Since I started playing around with DCX as a pilot project mid-2021, my first impression was how much better the look and feel was compared to how we had been handling digital exhibits of content in our IR. Once I got into the weeds and starting working with the exhibit admin area more, I was also struck by how much easier the UX was when creating and designing an exhibit page compared to our standard IR pages.

For starters, the import of items for exhibits from Digital Commons is especially nice! Very quick and easy to use, with a validation check that lets you know if the series or individual records you entered were found, how many and what types of content. If you have a series established in your IR that you want to pull records from, you simply paste in the link to that series landing page. The validation check takes only a second or two to display you how many records it found. You can also choose to feed it into an existing exhibit or create a new one, and decide if you want to publish items immediately or not. After import, you can navigate to an exhibit "page" admin area where you can select which records you want to go-live, remain unpublished, delete if they do not fit the digital exhibit scope, and sort order.

Here is a screen capture of what importing content and the validation looks like in DCX:



Per exhibit you can also customize the metadata fields – choosing to display every single field with content from an IR record, or only select fields (using check boxes). This way for the digital exhibit only selected fields show (title, author, date, type for example) and maybe you hide everything else! All records pulled straight from the IR will still link back to the original item record page, and download stats are recorded in your Digital Commons dashboard as well as DCX exhibit URLs being included under the umbrella of views and other data captured with you bepress site’s unique Google Analytics ID.



Details: Select to be Featured

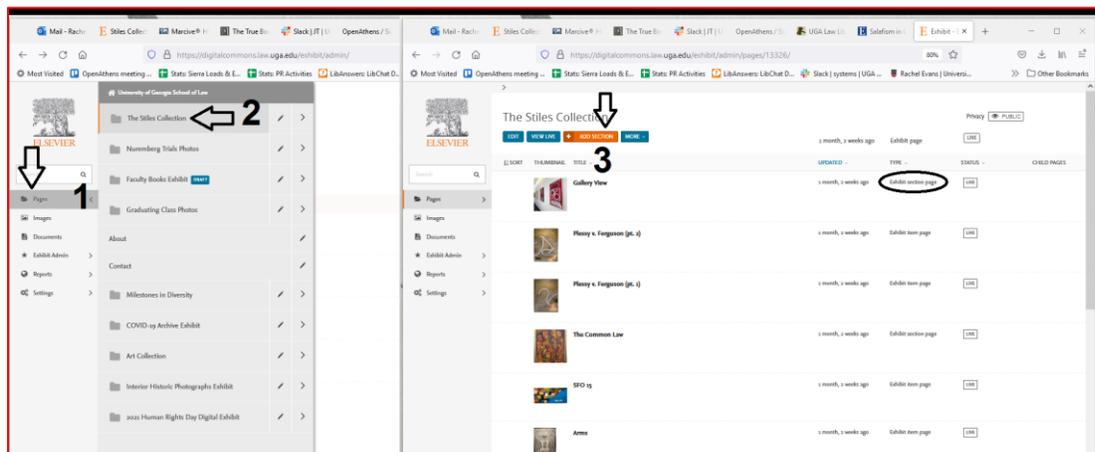
Customize Metadata Fields to Display

Customize Exhibit Thumbnail Image

Our IR is pretty massive, with more series than I can count. As an early adopter of DC we have so much content that wading through the various series can be touch, and marketing series or items we want to highlight is even trickier. I love that in DCX the exhibits can be “featured” at the top to draw attention to them when visitor first enter the DCX site. This puts those exhibits “above the fold” when visitors first load your digital exhibits homepage. To achieve this, check the “featured” box on any DCX exhibit page editor (in the content tab, under the details box).

Lastly, but maybe my favorite thing about DCX, is the ability to add items not in the IR at all. It has been tricky for me from the start of working in Digital Commons to find creative ways to add more media and other content to a series or item page in our IR (like photographs of a physical exhibit space for example). In my ideal world, the physical exhibits and the digital exhibits would compliment one another so well that, no matter which entry point a user started from, they would arrive at the companion piece.

Here is a screenshot with numbered steps for how to create an exhibit “section” page:



We all understand though that not everything/item should have its own item record in the IR (donated postcards or family photos for a first example, photographs of multiple works of art or artifacts arranged in the physical space on display is a second example, and outside resources that our institution may not own the rights to but that may be beneficial and provide context to exhibits like a video for a third example). DCX is really cool in that it allows you to create pages and mix content together – not just from across your repository series – but that isn’t in the IR at all. In this way it mirrors more closely the experience of visiting one of our exhibits in person. A few examples of this to explore include:

- Louis B. Sohn Library on International Relations (exhibit section page): <https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/exhibit/human-rights-exhibit/louis-b-sohn-library-on-international-relations/> This is a portion of our 2021 Human Rights Day Digital Exhibit.
- Exhibit Catalog, 2021 and Gallery View (exhibit section pages): <https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/exhibit/the-stiles-collection/> Both parts of our Stiles Collection Digital Exhibit.
- Horacio S. Beval (exhibit section page): <https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/exhibit/rotunda-exhibit/horacio-beval-1901/> A portion of our Milestones in Diversity Digital Exhibit showcasing the first Puerto Rican graduate from UGA Law School.

For the Stiles Collection exhibit, I was able to upload the catalog PDF and embed the flip-book ISSUU for it to compliment and provide additional context for the IR records of each painting that appear in a gallery – more similar to visiting the exhibit in real life and picking up a physical print copy of the exhibit catalog booklet. I was also able to easily and beautifully incorporate photographs of the physical gallery space, and even a bio photo of the artist. The paragraph editor in DCX that can be applied before, after, or in between exhibit items on any exhibit page, exhibit section page, or item page makes editing and utilizing third party content a joy.

For the final example included now as a part of our Milestones in Diversity Digital Exhibit, I'd like to circle back to when we first launched our DCX exhibits. At the time the re-build of this Rotunda exhibit in DCX was still a work in progress. That did not stop the researcher who, searching Google for more information about this graduate, came across our brand new site and the revised version of this new way of presenting this series of items about our most diverse alums from our repository. Luckily, they found DCX site and explored the content in this way. They reached out to us via our reference desk to ask for more information about the individual and to request a higher resolution image, zoomed in and cropped, on Beval. We had not yet spotlighted Beval as we did not have complete information on him until receiving and fulfilling this request. Now our repository, institutional history, and this digital exhibit have all been improved and benefitted from the additional research that was shared with us! Today, thanks to the improved discovery DCX has brought to this digital exhibit, we can now celebrate Beval not only as the first Puerto Rican to graduate from UGA School of Law, but as the first to graduate from the University: <https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/exhibit/rotunda-exhibit/horacio-beval-1901/>

