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Using iPads in the Reading Room

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USING iPADS IN THE READING ROOM

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Undergraduate history students follow along on iPads while an archivist provides instruction on resources. *Courtesy of Albertsons Library Special Collections and Archives.*

In 2010, Boise State University began integrating mobile technology into teaching and learning environments on campus. Albertsons Library Special Collections and Archives (ALSCA) at the university soon followed; as an experiment in November 2012, we gave patrons access to four iPads in our reading room. We asked researchers to use them and share their experiences. Although the iPads were available for only six weeks, we quickly realized the benefits of making iPads a permanent addition to our reading room.

Immediate Access

ALSCA has about 7,000 linear feet of manuscript material, available in a reading room with four tables generally limited to one researcher per table. The only public access computer is outside the reading room, but with iPads available, patrons had immediate access to online content. One experienced researcher shared that this was his first time seeing iPads in an archives reading room.

Online content for special collections and archives material includes finding aids through the Northwest Digital Archives (NWDA), photo collections in CONTENTdm, historic university publications in ScholarWorks, and the library catalog and resources. The researchers used the iPads to:

- Look up the author of a book.
- Access photos and the student newspaper for a kinesiology course assignment on the university's history of athletics, recreation, and student activities.
- Reference a finding aid while taking notes on a laptop.
- Find historic university and Boise photographs during a community workshop.
- Demonstrate resources to a history class while students simultaneously did hands-on research.

Photo Op

The iPads not only were used for viewing but also for creating documentation. The iPad's five-megapixel camera provided an excellent alternative to photocopying. We preloaded each device with a photo app and provided researchers with instructions. Copies produced from the iPads were lower quality than scans produced with our flatbed scanners, which actually was an advantage because researchers were unable to produce publication-ready copies of archival material. Nevertheless, the cameras fulfilled the researchers' needs. In one case, a patron took photos of negatives on a light table. Using Photoshop, staff was able to invert the photo and create a low-resolution positive copy for his notes.

One major barrier we encountered was providing the copies to the researchers. We found that the easiest way to transfer the photos to researchers' personal storage was to have researchers email the photos to themselves. This was a tedious task if the patron took many photos, however, and the researchers had to be sure to clear their personal information from the iPad prior to leaving. In the future, we will look into improving the digital photo service by finding easier ways for patrons to transfer images to personal storage or devices. We also would like to find a way to automatically watermark or brand each copy.

Allowing patrons to take photos also created additional tasks for staff members, who had to clear each iPad's data after use. However, we may discover photos that we wish to save for our own use.

Benefits for Staff

We discovered that the iPads also helped staff. ALSCA has a staff of four, and at least one staff member has to remain at the front desk during open times. With the library administration's approval, we used the FaceTime application to allow the staff member working at the desk to "attend" meetings and presentations. This staff member would start a FaceTime session with a colleague who was at the

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meeting. For a small unit with fixed hours of operation, it was helpful to use this tool to create flexibility.

We also used the iPad to take pictures during presentations. The same was done when a group of kindergartners visited to look at the archives' historic maps. For the latter, photos were immediately uploaded to the library's Facebook page and were later added to a blog post about the visit. Having the iPad available meant that no one had to say, "I wish I had a camera."

> "There were [outcomes] we did not predict, such as being able to use [iPads] during a community workshop or using the photo app to turn negatives into positive images."

SAA's "Best Practices for Working with Archives Researchers with Physical Disabilities"[1] suggests providing pencil and paper to hearing-impaired users. An iPad also would facilitate this communication. Additionally, visually impaired users could benefit from the ability to increase the size of text or photos.

Security

A great thing about iPads is their mobility, but that's also their largest security risk. We follow standard security procedures by prohibiting backpacks, coats, purses, and other items in the reading room, but there are a few times every semester when we have up to thirty students in the space. One option we considered was to ask for patrons' IDs before handing over iPads, but that made their availability less obvious to researchers. We liked featuring them on the tables to encourage use (and our interim dean commented on how sharp they looked). After speaking with library IT staff, we considered the option of securing them to the table with a cord that allowed for

mobility on the table itself. We have since decided against that option, as it would inhibit patrons and staff from taking full advantage of the iPad's mobility.

Plans for the Future

Our goal is to have iPads permanently available in our reading room. We plan to institute practices and policies to accommodate this technology, including:

- Create permanent icons for the library homepage, special collections website, NWDA, ScholarWorks, and CONTENTdm.
- Develop online forms for patron registration, photocopy and scan requests, book requests, and digital camera use policy.
- Permanently install apps for scanning, taking photographs, light enhancement, and magnifying view.
- Develop procedures for charging and updating (i.e., app or iOs updates).
- Possibly install an app to print to a network printer.

Further, we are working to develop a better process for adding and updating apps. Our library IT staff has an iTunes account and regularly updates and reimages iPads used for circulation and instruction. We could

participate in these regular updates, but we may have additional apps for our researchers that would be lost through reimaging to general library standards. We could maintain our own updates and use personal accounts to download free apps, but that poses a security issue. After continued discussion with library IT staff, we are experimenting with having a separate image designated for our iPads only with web links and certain free apps to benefit our patrons.

The Mobile Way

When the idea to have iPads in the reading room was first suggested, we were enthusiastic. Certain aspects, such as researchers having easy access to finding aids, were expected. However, there were other uses we did not predict, such as being able to use them during a community workshop or using the photo app to turn negatives into positive images.

Overall, we were very pleased with how much the iPads proved to be an asset to ALSCA. We look forward to the day when we have iPads permanently in the reading room and are exploring more ways in which they can enhance the research experience. ■

[1] *http://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/BestPract-Disabilities_Researchers_0.pdf*, accessed December 20, 2012.

ALSCA iPads and additional iPads from the library set up for an undergraduate history class. *Courtesy of Albertsons Library Special Collections and Archives.*