How Gemini fits into the workflow

It is clear that BHL Staff require a means to facilitate and monitor user feedback and that no existing tools fulfilled the unique requirements of this particular digital library project. In questioning why Gemini succeeds in the hands of BHL Staff where other tools do not, one must consider the specialized needs of the Biodiversity Heritage Library and its patrons. What aspects of Gemini lend themselves to the unique demands of administering this digital library? How does Gemini enable the BHL Staff to foster user relationships?

With the earliest digital library projects, researchers already voiced concerns over the tendency for digital library plans to “remove social exchange and interaction, focusing narrowly on the technical mechanisms of information access.”[[1]](#footnote-1) While increased user interaction is a key reason for adopting Gemini, the challenges of operating BHL transcend issues related to patron contact. There are obstacles that affect the inner workings of any library, namely the ability of librarians and associated staff to work together and execute core library functions such as reference and collection development. Through the use of this customized version of Gemini, the Biodiversity Heritage Library not only encourages interaction between staff and users, but between geographically dispersed staff members as well. If, as O’Reilly and Battelle state, “Web 2.0 is all about harnessing collective intelligence,” then one must recognize that terms such as “social” and “interactive” must apply to staff relationships with one another as well as to users.[[2]](#footnote-2) In adapting Gemini, the BHL staff created a hub for staff and patron activity, a tool that fosters a sense of place. If a digital library is indeed a space that conceptually resembles the brick-and-mortar library, then it is also much more than a collection of texts, accessible via the Web.[[3]](#footnote-3) Gemini is the reference desk, the technical services office, the acquisitions department, the meeting space, and the round table for the Biodiversity Heritage Library.

It is important to remember that the Biodiversity Heritage Library is not just an online repository of digital texts, but also a mass scanning project. Rather than ingesting already-scanned material, BHL started with a push among member libraries to scan everything in their respective collections according to subject. The resulting corpus of taxonomic literature formed the building blocks of BHL, which launched in May 2007 with 3,240volumes of scanned material. As with any new library, BHL needed to stock its shelves as fast as possible. Subject-based scanning assignments neared completion just as new members joined the BHL consortium; having missed initial scanning opportunities, it was unclear how these institutions could contribute material from their collections. As Biodiversity Heritage Library collection development evolved from a mass digitization model to something new, Gemini presented a platform for users to submit scanning requests, and for members new and old to contribute to targeted scanning efforts.

As already discussed **(Grace?)**, Gemini provides users simple means by which to communicate problems and desires to BHL Staff. Typical user feedback includes: suggestions of titles for scanning and requests to fill in gaps in multivolume series or serials holdings. Gaps often exist due to incomplete holdings of a title by the scanning institution or conservation issues that prevent safe scanning of particular items. Whether gaps are discovered by staff through the course of bibliographic maintenance or noted by users, all targeted scanning workflow passes through Gemini. BHL Staff work together to resolve difficult requests and assign responsibility for fulfillment.

The simple Gemini interface encourages users to provide feedback **(Numbers?)**, and a popular form of feedback is requests for scanning particular titles and adding them to BHL collections. While moderators must read requests and determine the appropriateness and feasibility of each appeal, the link between the BHL feedback mechanism and Gemini allows a close relationship between BHL staff and the active user group. As an experiment in user-driven collection development (a successful concept in at least one large academic library),[[4]](#footnote-4) BHL has a unique opportunity to expand the collection in according to the documented needs of users.

In addition to filling gaps and addressing user requests, common Gemini issues include bibliographic questions, journal title changes, and various reference queries. These issues are generated by BHL staff as well as by users, and Gemini is the space where BHL staff can “meet” to discuss the complexities that arise in the day-to-day operation of any library. BHL staff use Gemini’s wiki-like comment feature to assign scanning responsibility and discuss appropriate actions and responses to user feedback. The persistent nature of these comments (as opposed to strings of emails messages with many recipients) encourages collaboration and thoughtful communication. There are BHL staff in four different time zones and the commenting structure allows all parties to participate, while gleaning insight from the comments left by colleagues during the problem-solving process. While email is easy to delete, comments and assignments persist in Gemini until resolution. Staff are incentivized to participate and assist in resolving issues to which they are assigned. Distribution of expectations and integrated responsibility resembles a physical workplace.

As the engine that drives staff functions and user interaction, Gemini is an integral part of BHL success. In a society with increasingly technology-savvy citizens, use of and satisfaction with online library services is in decline.[[5]](#footnote-5) In the OCLC report *Perceptions of Libraries, 2010*, survey responders of all ages resoundingly declared that increased customer service, such as more staff and extended hours, should be among libraries’ top priorities.[[6]](#footnote-6) The Biodiversity Heritage Library is not a brick-and mortar structure, but stakeholders understand that free, 24-7 online access does not negate the need or desire for more traditional, in- person library services.

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1. Ackerman [1] [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. O’Reilly and Battelle 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Miksa <http://www.csdl.tamu.edu/DL94/paper/miksa.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Reynolds [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Perceptions of Libraries, 2010* p.30 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. p.62, 68, 70, 76, 82, 88 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)