This Goodly Land: Creating an Online Reference Source

Abstract

Introduction

This paper describes the creation of the online literary map *This Goodly Land: Alabama's Literary Landscape*, from January 2005 through June 2011.

Description of Project

The literary map was designed and created at Auburn University by a small paid staff assisted by volunteers from around the state. Funding was a combination of grant support from state arts organizations and grant and in-kind support from the university. In its fullest form, the project consisted of 168 author profiles, nine audio podcasts, one streaming video, 23 lesson plans created for the site and links to 19 external lesson plans, a calendar-based reading list, and an interactive feature "This Day in Alabama Literary History." Page views showed that use of the resource paralleled the academic year but increased from one year to the next.

Next Steps

Factors in the project's success included support from Auburn University, state funding agencies, and stakeholder organizations, a modular design (core content first, features later), a dedicated project manager, and effective use of volunteers. Additional recommendations for those planning similar projects include: 1) a descriptive project name; 2) target audience research; 3) granular user tracking; 4) online promotion; and 5) a sustainability plan updated annually.

Keywords

Digital resources; online resources; literary maps

This Goodly Land: Creating an Online Reference Source

Introduction

This paper describes the creation of the online resource *This Goodly Land: Alabama's Literary Landscape* (*TGL*), a literary map of Alabama, during its tenure at Auburn University, January 2005 through June 2011. In its fullest form, the project consisted of 168 author profiles (accessed via an interactive map, county list, or author list), nine audio podcasts, one streaming video, 23 lesson plans created for the site and links to 19 external lesson plans, a calendar-based reading list, and an interactive feature "This Day in Alabama Literary History." Currently, a modified version of *TGL* is available from the University of Alabama Libraries.

Literature Review

A. What is a literary map?

A literary map is a reference guide that links literature to geography, usually within the boundaries of a city, state, or country (Bogart, 2006; Pennsylvania Center for the Book, 2006; South Carolina Center for the Book, n.d.; ThinkTV Network and Greater Dayton Public Television, 2004). They are frequently created for use in the classroom (Arizona English Teachers Association, 2007; Averill and Washburn University, 2000; Fuson, 1970; Kinkead, 1994).

For advanced students and/or scholars, such a guide can suggest geographical and/or cultural influences on specific authors or groups of authors. For students at all educational levels, it provides:

- Ideas and materials for local history projects
- Local authors for regional studies projects

- Role models for students

There are non-teaching uses for these guides, as well (Stiebel, 2004). When distributed to audiences outside the classroom, they can be used to:

- Celebrate local history and culture

- Promote books by local authors

- Promote local tourism

Prior to the mid-1990s, reference guides that connected literature and geography were confined to print documents. In addition to maps (Fuson, 1970; Baggett, 2004; Kinkead, 1994), these included book lists (Kaser, 2006) and biographical dictionaries with regional themes (Flora, 2006; Moses, 2003).

The print format creates limitations, however. Once an item has been printed, changes in content or design can only be made in the next edition, if one is even produced. Maps in print format also have space limitations. There is seldom room for more than the names of authors and/or books. If a locality has many authors, some may have to be displayed in other (less relevant) areas of the map or excluded altogether.

In most cases, the advantages and limitations for online literary maps fall into the "two sides of the same coin" category. The fact that online maps can be changed at any time creates the expectation that they will be continually updated. Additional information (beyond author names and localities) can be included, but creating this extra material requires time and resources. Savings in printing and distribution costs are offset by technology costs.

B. Why tie literature to geography?

Associating a writer with a locality implies a connection between that place and the works produced. In this context, "place" includes both the natural environment—geography, climate—and the human environment—politics, economics, history, culture. Eudora Welty (1978) asserted that it was "both natural and sensible that the place where we have our roots should become the setting … of our fiction." In her view, place and feelings could not be separated, and their combination created an authentic point of view unique to each writer.

Stephen Gray (1986) proposed a three-phase model describing the relationship between place and literature. In Gray's first phase, writers created verbal safaris which described exotic locations for the entertainment of an audience safe at home. In his second phase, writers began to see themselves as belonging to the new land rather than to the mother country. His third phase occurred when the new land had developed its own literary culture, and its writers were producing literature for the local audience.

In the development of Southern literature (that is, literature of the Southeastern United States), the definition of "mother country" must be expanded to include the Northern and Eastern United States as well as Great Britain. John E. Bassett (1997) detailed the emergence of a Southern literary identity and described periods analogous to the second and third phases in Stephen Gray's model.

Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr., (2000) contrasted so-called "classic" (Northern) American literature which depicted an individual leaving home and its familial/cultural restrictions with Southern literature which was more likely to show the individual remaining in place while trying to achieve fulfillment as a member of his or her family and community. Richard Gray (2002) discussed "Southern self-fashioning" but pointed out that there had always been a multitude of

self-defined (or group-defined) "Souths," depending on race/ethnicity, economics, geography, time period, etc.

C. How is an online reference work different from a collection of digitized analog materials?

Several types of digital projects have counterparts in the analog realm. These differ largely in presentation style and in the relationship between the digitized (analog) materials and the original materials (if any) created solely for the project.

The first type is most similar to a library or archival collection and consists of a group of digitized analog materials accompanied by descriptive metadata. The materials may be supplemented with additional content created for the collection (transcripts of handwritten or audio documents, etc.). Viewers can browse these materials, and some type of search is usually available (though not always full-text searching). An example of this type of project is *American Memory* (Library of Congress, 2000).

Another type is most similar to a museum exhibit and also consists of a group of digitized analog materials. There may be descriptive metadata and/or supplemental content as in the first type of project. There are usually interpretive and/or background essays written by curators or scholars. Interactive materials may be used to demonstrate relevant concepts. Viewers are guided through the materials following specific pathways. The digital exhibit may accompany a "real life" museum exhibit or exist on its own. An example of this type is *Laura Jernegan: Girl on a Whaleship* (Martha's Vineyard Museum, 2010).

Yet another type is most similar to a reference work such as an encyclopedia, atlas, dictionary, etc., and consists primarily of original content created specifically for the project.

Frequently, the original content is supplemented with digitized analog content, such as historic photographs and maps. An example of this type is *The Encyclopedia of Alabama* (Auburn University and Alabama Humanities Foundation, 2010).

D. What are users of online resources looking for?

Researchers from the project Log Analysis of Internet Resources in the Arts and Humanities (LAIRAH) studied digital humanities projects to look for common factors contributing to project longevity (Warwick, Galina, Terras, Huntington, and Pappa, 2008). They found six such factors:

- Dissemination of knowledge about the project

- User testing and/or feedback

- Project documentation

- Institutional support

- Workers with both subject expertise and technical skills

- Resources for maintenance and updating

LAIRAH researchers also found that users of digital humanities projects formed their opinions on the usefulness of these projects based on four factors (Warwick, Terras, Huntington, and Pappa, 2008). These factors were:

- Project name that made the content clearly identifiable

- Short, readily accessed, description of the project and its content

- Easy-to-use interface

- Quality content, coupled with a way for users to judge the quality for themselves

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art researchers surveyed users of museum Web sites (Mitroff and Alcorn, 2007). They found that users wanted a design that made it easy for them to find information they needed and content that helped them understand the art being presented. They also found that users had a wider variety of backgrounds than they had expected and that interactivity (blogs, wikis, etc.) was less important to users than they had expected.

Wu and Chen surveyed Taiwanese elementary school teachers about their Internet use (Wu and Chen, 2008). They found that teachers searched the Internet for instruction materials created by other teachers, for up-to-date information on their subjects, and for source materials to supplement their textbooks. They also found that teachers seldom uploaded their own instruction materials, citing lack of time.

Description of Project

The mission of the Alabama Center for the Book includes the promotion of reading, books, and authors (especially Alabama writers) and the highlighting of Alabama's literary culture and heritage. During its tenure at the Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts & Humanities at Auburn University, the Center's projects included the Alabama Book Festival and the award-winning "Get Caught Reading" poster series featuring Alabama celebrities. *TGL* was designed to share Alabama's literary heritage with residents, schoolchildren, visitors, and readers and scholars of Southern literature.

A. Core Content

The core content of *TGL* was its profiles of Alabama authors. Each profile provided information about the author's life and work and pointed to sources of further information. *TGL*

had 60 author profiles at the time of public launch in January 2007. By December 2009, the total number of author profiles had reached 168.

Each author profile also contained a list of "Alabama connections": specific locations in the state with significance to the author's life and work. This geographical information was also used to tie the author's profile to all appropriate counties on the interactive Alabama map. This meant that it wasn't necessary to decide which county would "claim" the author.

1. Author Selection

The *TGL* Selection Committee chose the authors to be profiled. Committee members included scholars specializing in Southern literature and representatives of the public library system in Alabama. The authors chosen for the project included novelists, poets, short story writers, essayists, dramatists, memoirists, satirists, nature writers, and children's book writers from the late eighteenth century through the early twenty-first century.

The Committee created an author selection policy to guide its decisions (Selection Committee, 2005). Excerpts from this policy follow:

"Alabama authors" [consist of] persons born in the state as well as those who later resided within its borders for a significant, influential period [but] this project will not … necessarily be limited to persons who have breathed some specified amount of actual Alabama oxygen. …

A place on the map will be given to authors who have (a) written … in traditional literary genres (certainly including … children's literature and non-fiction prose, such as autobiography); (b) produced works with intellectual, aesthetic, or entertainment value worthy of note; and (c) had

more than limited local exposure and gained more than solely regional attention or reputation.

2. Author Research

Author research was performed by local project staff and volunteers from the Network of Alabama Academic Libraries. Project staff filled in information gaps and fact-checked items such as names, dates, education, residences, employment, and awards.

Online information sources used for research and fact-checking included scholarly databases, popular databases such as the Social Security Death Index and the Internet Movie Database, literary awards Web sites, and author Web sites and blogs. Print sources included biographical dictionaries and encyclopedias, scholarly journals, biographies and autobiographies, dissertations and theses, articles and obituaries in local magazines and newspapers, and local archival repositories. In a few cases, authors or their relatives were contacted directly for information.

3. Creating Author Profiles

To maximize consistency in style and substance, the project manager wrote all author profiles. An even-handed tone was attempted, and literary interpretation was avoided to the extent possible. To this end, the biographical portion of each profile was limited to two paragraphs and the "interests and themes" portion to three sentences. Users seeking literary interpretation were provided with a list of reference works.

Selection Committee members checked all profiles for accuracy, completeness, and tone. Revised versions were reviewed by project staff for spelling, grammar, and adherence to the "house style." Profiles were reviewed again by the project manager just prior to data entry.

4. Author Images

Author images were obtained from many sources: public domain books and magazines, authors and their agents, book publishers, local arts organizations, and archival repositories. In most cases, authors, agents, publishers, and arts organizations promptly supplied images at no charge. Repositories required forms to be filled out and indicated their fee structure. As cash was in short supply, a fee waiver was always requested and usually granted.

To comply with copyright law, online images were used only under certain circumstances:

- The image was a publicity photo posted by an author or publisher, and permission was explicitly given on the Web site for its use.

- The owner of the Web site where the image was found explicitly stated that s/he owned the rights to the image and gave permission for its use.

- The image was owned by the Library of Congress, and its item record indicated that it was in the public domain.

B. Technology and Design

1. Site Structure

The basic site structure for *TGL* consisted of a home page linking to pages containing an interactive map, a list of counties, and a list of authors. Individual county pages linked from the map and the county list pages, and individual author profiles linked from the county pages and the author list page (see Figure 1). Dynamic Web pages were used for the author profiles and the individual county lists. These pulled author and book information from a relational database. Static html pages were used for the remaining portions of the Web site.

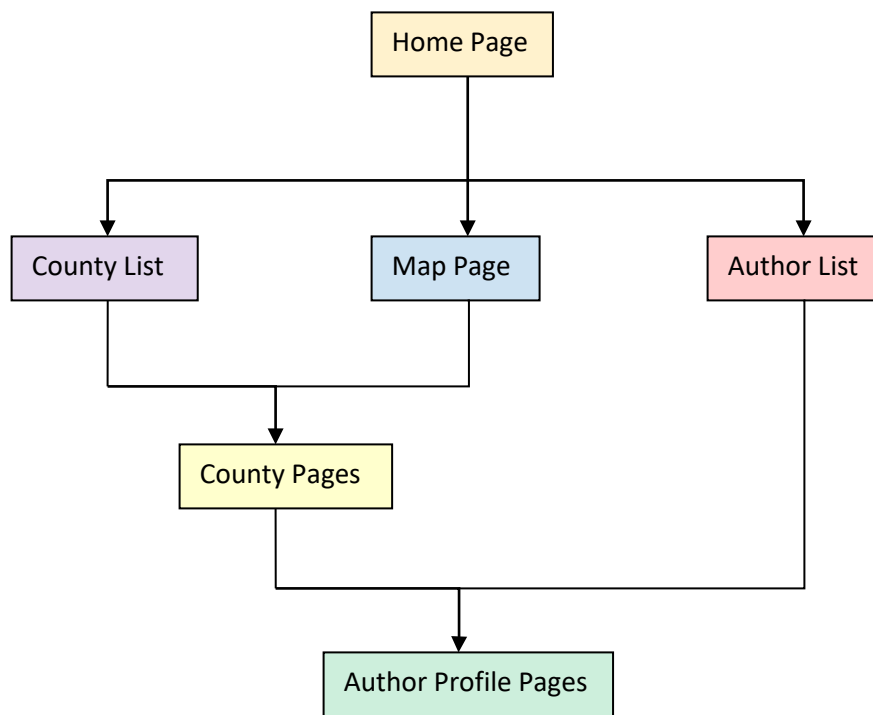[Figure 1. Block diagram of Web site design for *TGL*.]

Figure 1. Block Diagram of Web site design for *This Goodly Land*.

2. Map

The interactive map was created from an image map of the state of Alabama, in which each of the 67 counties was represented by a polygon (see Figure 2). The cartographer chose five colors that suggested a faded schoolroom map and distributed them such that no adjacent counties had the same color. Each county polygon was linked to a dynamic Web page which listed all authors connected to that county. The Web designer fine-tuned the map size that it would fit on a user's computer screen without scrolling and adjusted the font size and positioning of the county names so they would be clearly legible.

[Figure 2. Alabama image map used for *TGL*.]

3. Page Design

All Web pages, dynamic and static, were constructed using a template which presented the main content in the right three-quarters of the screen and a list of links in the remaining screen space. The same left-side links were present for all pages in the Web site. This allowed users to go directly to any major section of the Web site without using the "back" button.

The link texts were kept short so that the entire list would be visible without scrolling. To make it easier for users to find the information they sought, the Web designer added "tool tips" to the Web page template. When a mouse pointer hovered over a link, a small text box would explain what would be found on that page.

4. Logo

The *TGL* logo was placed in the upper left corner of the screen and influenced the Web site color scheme. Although the page background was white and most text was black, the color used for borders and for the left-side links was coordinated with the logo. In January 2007
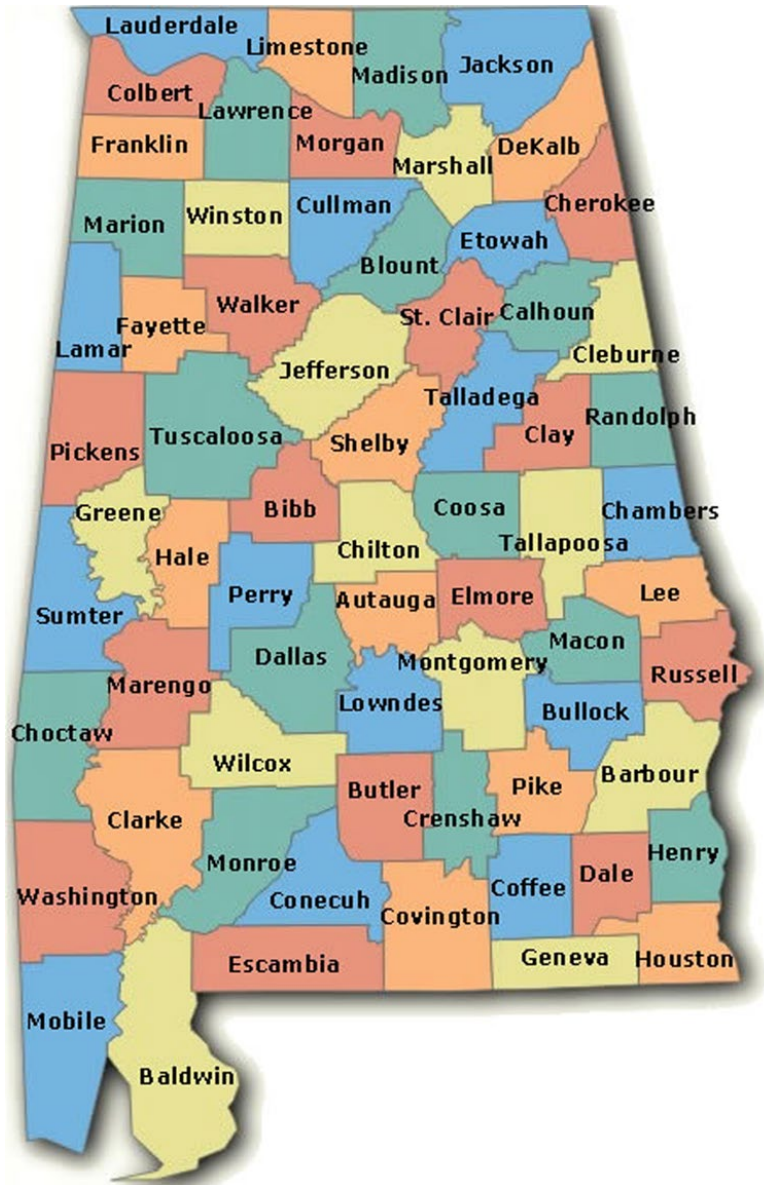
Figure 2. Alabama image map used for *This Goodly Land*.

(public launch), these aspects of the page design were brown to match the predominant color in the logo (see Figure 3).

[Figure 3. *TGL* logo, January 2007.]

In the spring semester of 2008, a group of Auburn University graduate students selected *TGL* as a project for their marketing class. They commissioned a graphic design student to create a new project logo (see Figure 4). This logo was adopted in July 2008, and the color used for borders and left-side links was changed to green (see Figure 5).

[Figure 4. *TGL* logo, July 2008.]

[Figure 5. Screen shot of *TGL* home page, with July 2008 logo.]

5. Search

To provide a search function for the site, *Google Custom Search* technology (Google, 2008) was considered, but there was no money to pay for an advertising-free version. The search technology used by Auburn University for its own Web site was available without charge to University-sponsored projects. The Web designer linked to this and customized the appearance of the search results page so that it would look like part of the *TGL* site.

In 2010, the University discontinued the use of this search technology. By this time, the Web site was no longer being maintained, and this broken technology was not removed or replaced. The lack of a working search box had no identifiable effect on the number of users, however. Author page views were 22 percent higher in 2010 than in 2009. Apparently, users were finding their desired authors using the other tools provided or were coming to individual author profile pages via an external search engine.

6. Suggestion Form

Figure 3. *This Goodly Land* logo, January 2007.

Figure 4. *This Goodly Land* logo, July 2008.

From Sand Mountain to Bayou La Batre, Alabama's literary heritage is as rich as its geography. *This Goodly Land* is a dynamic portal through which the world can explore Alabama's diverse literary landscape. Join us on this tour of Alabama's literary abundance, past and present.

Go To Map

July 03: On this day in Alabama literary history:

- In 1927, Alabama journalist and editor Grover C. Hall, Sr., publishes the first of his Pulitzer Prize-winning editorials against the Ku Klux Klan.
- In 1795, Alabama author and theatrical manager Noah Ludlow is born in New York, N.Y.

Select Another Day and Month

Find out what was happening on a date you choose:

Select a Month
- January
- February
- March
- April
- May

Select a Day
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Show Event

(Sidebar navigation)

this **goodly** land
Alabama's Literary Landscape

Home
Literary Map
County List
Author List

Search

Our Blog
Multimedia
What Makes an Alabama Writer?
Where Are You From? (video)
A Year of Alabama Books
Make a Suggestion
Authors for Younger Readers
Resources for Teachers and Librarians
Student Writing Resources
Alabama Center for the Book
Related Organizations
About This Project

Find us on Facebook

Figure 5. Screen shot of *This Goodly Land* home page, with July 2008 logo.

To allow users to suggest additional authors and provide other feedback, the Web designer created a "suggestion box" Web form. Suggestions were automatically e-mailed to both the Web designer (to address technical problems) and the project manager (to address content issues).

For the first two and a half years, suggestions averaged about one or two per month. Most of these concerned authors who had already been selected for inclusion but whose profiles had not yet been uploaded. A few were self-promotions by aspiring or recently-published authors. Some suggestions were obviously spam.

In October 2009, the *TGL* site became the target of a "mail-bombing" attack. After more than 500 suspicious-looking emails were received each day for several days, the Web form was disconnected. It was reconnected after a week but disconnected again when the mail-bombing resumed. There were no further attempts to reconnect it.

7. Use Tracking

The most obvious method of assessing the impact of a digital resource is to measure its use. The use of *Google Analytics* (Google, 2006) for *TGL* was investigated but there were problems getting the code to work properly. After several unsuccessful attempts, *Google Analytics* was abandoned and the Web designer created a customized tracking code to use instead.

Values for daily page views were recorded in a spreadsheet. Although larger chunks of time (week, month, semester) could be measured, daily numbers allowed the evaluation of the impact of single events. To facilitate that, comments such as "ACETA presentation," "server down," "school mailing," etc., were added to the spreadsheet.

Figures 6 and 7 show the number of views for author pages and the home page over a period of approximately five years. The graphs show that, while viewership fluctuated, it increased each academic year and frequently declined slightly during summer breaks.

[Figure 6. *TGL* page views, 9-1-2006 through 12-31-2008.]

[Figure 7. *TGL* page views, 1-1-2009 through 6-10-2011.]

There were two issues related to page view tracking. The first involved the interactive feature located on the home page,"This Day in Alabama Literary History". Every time a viewer used the pull-down menus to select a new day-month combination, the feature's code generated a new version of the home page. The page tracking code considered each "new" home page a separate and unique page visit and increased the number of home page views accordingly.

There did not seem to be any way to correct for this or to separate out the page views that resulted solely from using this feature. A notation was made on the spreadsheet and the numbers were evaluated. There did not appear to be any lasting effect.

The second tracking issue was related to the Web-indexing software robots known as bots, spiders, crawlers, etc. A visit by one of these counted as a unique page view for each *TGL* page indexed. It was not possible to distinguish between page views from actual site users and those resulting from the robots.

It would have been possible to deny access by installing robots.txt code in the Web pages. However, this would mean that the site would not be indexed by search engines such as *Google* (Google, 1999). Indexing was important for the site, so it was accepted that, on any given day, some of the page views would come from robots rather than from actual users.
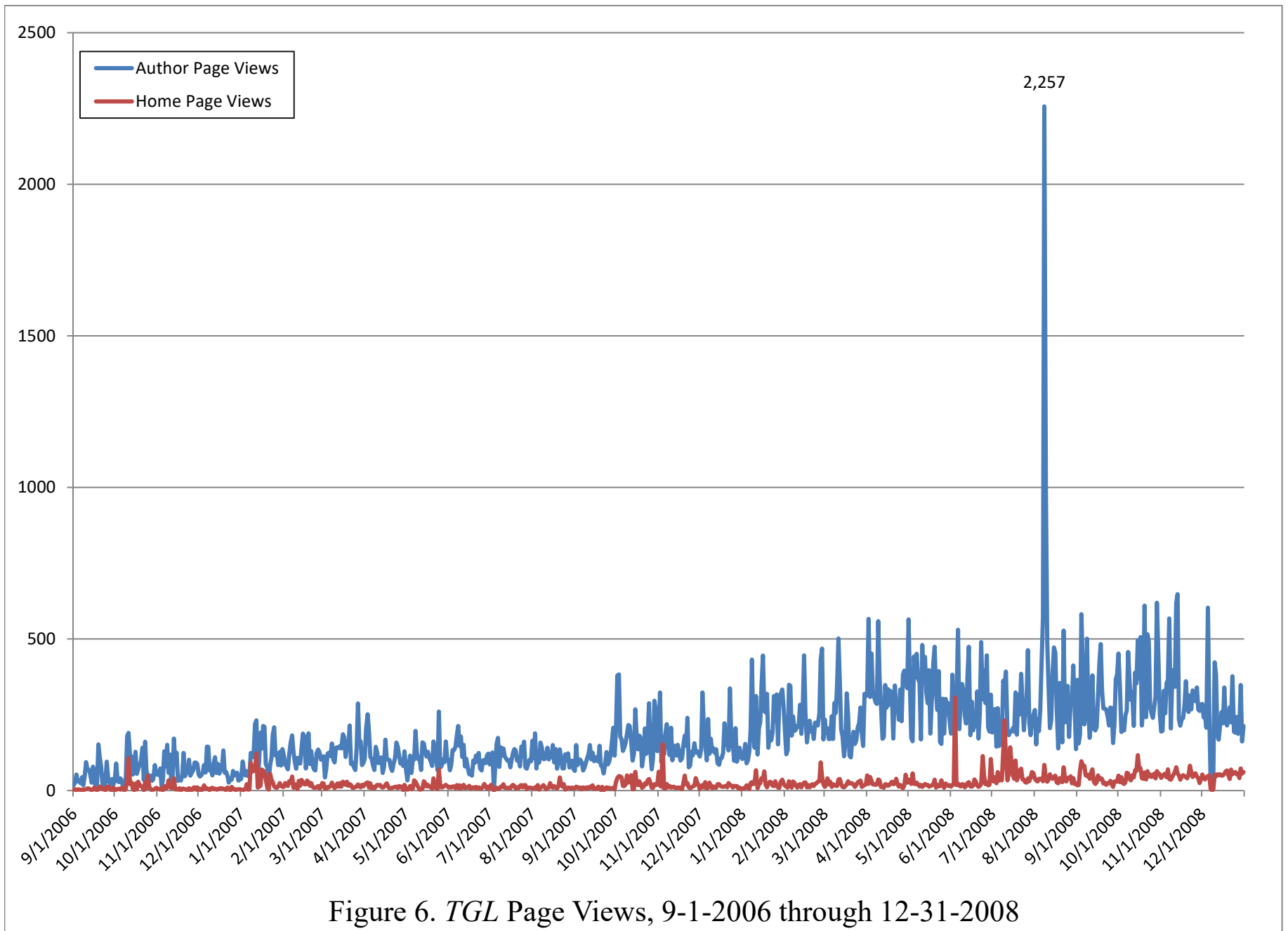

C. **Features**
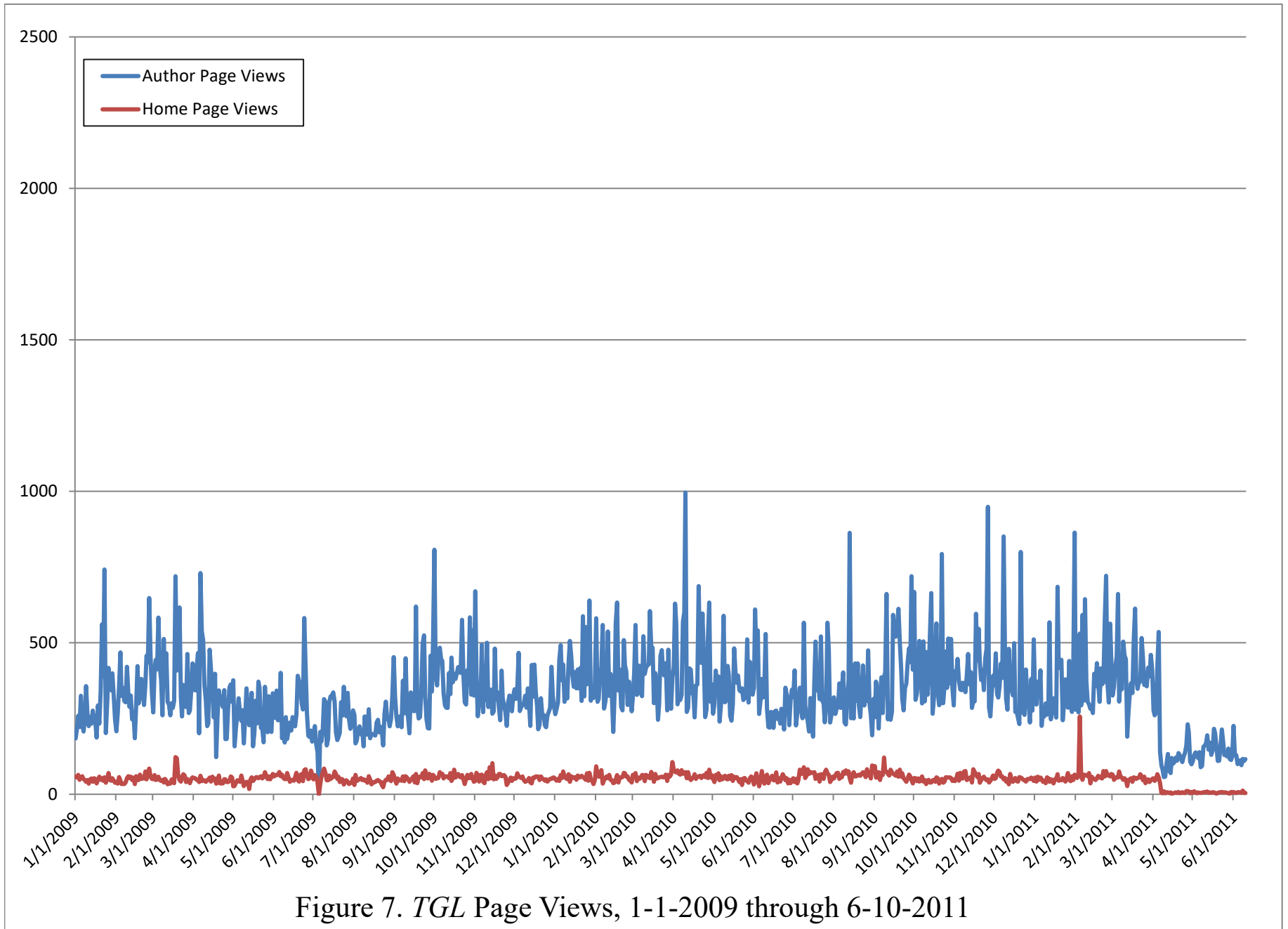
Figure 6. *TGL* Page Views, 9-1-2006 through 12-31-2008

Figure 7. *TGL* Page Views, 1-1-2009 through 6-10-2011

1. Essay

Any project such as this one invites the question, "How do you decide who's an 'Alabama author'?" In October 2006, *Portico,* a Birmingham lifestyle magazine, contained an editorial that addressed the same issues the Selection Committee had discussed when they created the author selection policy. Upon request, the magazine's editor created an essay for *TGL* entitled "Literary Alabama: Is There Such a Thing As an 'Alabama Writer'?"

2. This Day in Alabama Literary History

"This Day in Alabama Literary History" was created to provide time-based context for the profiled authors and their work. It was based on a database of events in Alabama literary history and tied to the days and months of the calendar year. Initially, these consisted of birth and death dates of Alabama authors (including those who had not been profiled on the site).

With too many unfilled dates, the database was expanded to include other events: publication dates of classic Alabama books, literary prize award dates, inaugural dates for Alabama literary conferences and festivals, release dates for movies made from Alabama books or with screenplays by Alabama writers, broadcast dates for television shows, and opening dates for plays. Eventually, over 85 percent of the dates in the calendar year had at least one associated event.

The Web designer created code to automatically create an events list every time the home page was accessed. This code checked the user's computer for the date, fetched events from the database that matched that day-month combination, and displayed these as a bulleted list (see Figure 5). Viewers could also use pull-down menus to select any day-month combination and see what happened on that date. The Web designer also created an RSS feed to send event listings to a feed-reader such as *My Yahoo!* (Yahoo!, 2007) or *Google Reader* (Google Reader, 2007).

3. "Where Are You From?" Video

In January 2008, a local poet/author agreed to appear in a video about the relationship between "place" and literature. For the video, he adapted an essay he had written on the subject and recited one of his poems.

The video was created in the Web designer's office, using *Visual Communicator* software (Adobe, Visual Communicator, 2011), a Web cam, a lapel mike, and a homemade "green screen" backdrop. Digital images of a vintage Alabama road map and Library of Congress photos were substituted for the green screen during the editing process. The completed video was uploaded to a university server, and a link to it was placed on the *TGL* Web site.

4. Audio Podcasts

A series of interviews with scholars was recorded as a way to place *TGL* authors into a wider literary context. Audio recordings seemed more suitable for this purpose than video for several reasons:

- Recording and editing audio is less complicated.

- Audio recording equipment is less expensive.

- Audio files are smaller, with faster download times, especially for users with slow Internet connections.

- Audio files can be transferred to portable listening devices for the convenience of the user.

The Selection Committee approved the list of interview topics in December 2008. Nine recordings were made between February 2009 and October 2009. Seven were scholar interviews on these topics: autobiography and memoir, crime fiction, the Harlem Renaissance, the historical

novel, nineteenth century women writers, Old Southwest humor, and travel writing. There were also two readings from nineteenth century Alabama books.

The scholars approved the interview questions in advance of the recording sessions. They also approved the accompanying reading lists prepared by project staff. All scholars and readers signed release forms allowing the recordings to be made and published online.

All recordings were made in the audio studio of the Auburn University Libraries' Media and Digital Resources Laboratory, using a Zoom H4 portable digital recorder and two external cardioid microphones equipped with pop filters. Recordings were made in WAV format, in stereo (two channel) mode, with a 16-bit bandwidth and a 44.1 kHz sampling rate. Recorded material was edited using Audacity, PC Version 1.2.6 (Sourceforge.net, 2012), and the final version was converted to mp3 format for online use.

A transcript was created for each recording. Transcripts make the intellectual content of audio materials accessible to hearing-impaired users. They also make these materials searchable within a browser and facilitate indexing by search engines such as Google.

Audio recordings in mp3 format and supplemental text materials in pdf format were uploaded to the Auburn University site at *iTunes U* (Apple, 2011). The same audio and text materials were also posted on the Multimedia page of the *TGL* Web site. The Web designer used the *Spry* (Adobe, Spry, 2011) collapsible panel widget code to minimize scrolling and still have each audio and all its accompanying materials conveniently located.

Under each program entry, there was a "more information" bar. When users clicked on that bar, a panel expanded downward. This panel contained links to the program's mp3 file and to pdf files of the program's transcript, reading list, and other supplemental materials. When users clicked on the bar once again, the panel folded back up.

D. Teacher Materials

1. Teacher Guide

A guide for K-12 teachers was created by studying the Alabama educational standards for reading and literature and noting places where *TGL* could be used. Grade 4 (Alabama studies) and grades 10 and 11 (American literature) were especially relevant. This guide was provided in pdf format on the teacher resources page.

2. Brochure

A brochure for teachers was also created, called "Using *This Goodly Land*: Alabama's Literary Landscape in the Classroom." Using a question-and-answer format, the brochure provided information about *TGL* content, how to locate author profiles, and resources for teachers and students. The brochure was designed by a local graphic artist and the text was written by project staff. Printed brochures were mailed to Alabama teachers and school library media specialists in the fall of 2007 and distributed at conferences and festivals. A pdf version was posted on the Web site.

3. Lesson Plans

For additional ways to make *TGL* useful in the classroom, state and national Web sites were searched for classroom-ready and grade-appropriate lesson plans (ALEX, 2011; McRel, 2011; Thinkfinity, 2010). A selection of 19 plans were found which related to reading and literature and could be adapted for use with *TGL*. Links to these were placed on the teacher resources page. Another 23 lesson plans were created by Auburn University College of Education students specifically for *TGL* and added to the Web site.

E. Promotion

1. Presentations

In January 2007 and January 2008, presentations on *TGL* were made to audiences of K-12 teachers and library media specialists via a video-cast and Web-cast program sponsored by the Alabama State Department of Education. Despite technical difficulties with the 2007 presentation, home page views increased 64 percent that day vs. the previous day. In 2008, two presentations were made on a single day, and there was a 139 percent increase in home page views and a 121 percent increase in author page views that day.

In February 2007, a presentation was made at the annual conference of the Association of College English Teachers of Alabama. In April 2007, a poster presentation was made at the annual conference of the Alabama Library Association. Although these audiences seemed interested in the project, the presentations had no impact on page views.

A presentation in October 2007 at the Alabama Reading Association annual conference also had no effect on page views and lacked even an interested audience. This failure probably resulted from a mismatch between the topic and the interests of the potential audience. This organization is primarily involved in literacy (the ability to read), not in literature (reading materials).

2. Author Bookmarks

A graphic artist was hired to create a set of three bookmarks featuring the Alabama authors Harper Lee, William March, and Angela Johnson. Each included a picture of the author, the author's Alabama connections, a short bibliography, and the *TGL* logo and Web address. The cost to produce these was relatively low: the artist's fee and printing charges at a local copy shop.

The bookmarks were mailed to teachers and school library media specialists in the fall of 2007 and distributed at literary conferences and festivals. A printable (pdf) version was also provided on the *TGL* teacher resources page. Adult comments were favorable, although children seemed unimpressed.

3. A Year of Alabama Books

A Year of Alabama Books was a reading list tied to the calendar year. Books were suggested for each month, based on holidays and seasonal activities. There were two separate lists: one for adults and older teens and one for younger teens and children. The adults' list had two suggestions per month. The children's list had one suggestion per month for children and one for teens.

The lists contained a mixture of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. All of the books were by Alabama authors, although not all of the authors were profiled on *TGL*. The lists were limited to books which were either currently in print or widely available at public libraries so that readers could find the books easily.

The standard bookmark size (2 inches x 8 inches) was too small for book titles and author names to be legible, so a rack card (4 inches x 9 inches) was used. Both reading lists appeared on the same card: the adults' list on one side and the children's list on the other. The cards also included the *TGL* logo and Web address.

The printed cards were mailed to Alabama teachers and school library media specialists in October 2008 and distributed at the 2008 National Book Festival and the 2009 Alabama Book Festival. A section of the *TGL* Web site was used to explain the holiday/seasonal connections for the selected books and provide alternatives to the books listed on the rack card. A pdf version of the printed card was also provided on the site.

4. Temporary Tattoos

In 2008, the new logo inspired thoughts about non-print promotional materials. T-shirts and tote bags (traditional ways of making a brand visible) would require a significant cash outlay. However, temporary tattoos would be inexpensive and easy to distribute at public events.

Small (2-inch square) temporary tattoos of the new logo were purchased and were distributed at festivals and conferences. This size was too small for the project URL to be legible, so it was omitted from the design. In retrospect, a larger size tattoo (at least 4-inches square) that included the URL might have been preferable.

Adult reactions were mixed, even among K-12 teachers and school library media specialists. Tattoos were a good way to reach children and young adults, however, who took them eagerly and came back for more.

5. Print and Electronic Promotions

The Center for the Book's parent organization issued a press release about the *TGL* project in May 2007. Following this, a few articles about the Web site appeared in Alabama newspapers. No effect on viewer numbers could be observed.

The press release was also placed in Auburn University's electronic newsletter, the *AU Daily*. This was more effective. Page views for the home page increased over 250 percent on the day the release appeared. They returned to a normal level the following day.

In 2008, the Network of Alabama Academic Libraries made an announcement in its listserv about some new *TGL* features. This resulted in a 37 percent increase in home page views and 73 percent increase in author page views. Both returned to normal levels the following week.

Each fall, printed *TGL* promotional materials were added to the package which the Center sent to Alabama K-12 teachers and media specialists. These materials included teacher

brochures, bookmarks, and rack cards. No significant impact of these mailings on *TGL* page views was observed.

6. Social Networking Promotions

a. Blog

A *TGL* blog was created to call attention to new materials on the Web site such as new author profiles and new features. It was also used to publicize local activities of literary interest and to point to other Web materials related to Alabama authors. The *Blogger* service (Google, 2003) was chosen because it was free and easy to use.

The *TGL* blog launched in July 2008. Several entries were added each month through December 2009. Blog activity ceased at that time due to the anticipated transfer of the project to another institution.

Blogs offer several methods of access. Search engines index and link to individual blog entries. A user can also bookmark a blog and visit it via the bookmark. Usually, however, the most convenient way of accessing blog content is to subscribe and have updates sent directly to the user as they are published.

The free *Feedburner* (Google, 2007) syndication service was used to offer subscriptions via e-mail and/or RSS feeds to common readers such as *My Yahoo!* (Yahoo!, 2007), *Google Reader* (Google Reader, 2007), and *BlogLines Reader* (Bloglines, 2011). The number of subscriptions never exceeded 35, however.

Blogs usually allow user interaction via comments. There were concerns about abusive or offensive language, and it was decided to allow moderated comments only. However, during the 18 months the blog was active (65 blog entries), there were only four non-spam user comments (none were abusive). This probably reflected the low readership, but it may also have indicated a

lack of desire on the part of users for interactivity (Mitroff and Alcorn, 2007; Oguz and Holt, 2011).

b. *MySpace*

The marketing graduate students who provided the new logo in 2008 also introduced the idea of creating a community of *TGL* users with social networking software. The students focused their attention on *MySpace* (MySpace, 2011). At that time, *Facebook* (Facebook, 2011) membership was restricted, and the students' goal was to reach a wider audience. The students designed a *MySpace* page using the new logo and a green background to match. They also created an animation using author photos from the *TGL* Web site.

The month immediately after the *MySpace* page was posted (April 2008), *TGL* author page views increased by 44 percent over the preceding month. Traffic stayed at this same level in May before tapering off in June. This was especially notable, as traffic was usually lower in May than in April. However, only three *MySpace* users "friended" *TGL*. None seemed to be in the target demographic: teenagers.

The page was redesigned in May 2009, adopting the new *MySpace* format. The photo animation was retained but a more subdued background color was substituted. At this time, feeds from the *TGL* blog and *Twitter* account were added, and a video player for online author interviews was embedded into the page. No impact from the page redesign (in *MySpace* traffic or Web page views) was observed. No further changes were made after May 2009.

c. *Facebook*

While the marketing students were working on the *MySpace* page, project staff created a *Facebook* Fan Page. The students had been concerned about *Facebook*'s policy of restricting membership to college students, but the Center hoped to make *TGL* more visible to precisely this

group. In the event, by the time the *Facebook* Page was ready, this membership restriction had been removed.

In its original design, the *Facebook* Page included information about *TGL*, a link to a separate Photos page, a Wall where Friends could leave messages, and some third-party applications. Applications were selected that might appeal to a user interested in literature: literary podcasts, videos of author interviews, etc. An RSS feed-reader was added so that *TGL* blog posts could be read directly from the *Facebook* Page.

TGL's Fan Page went public in August 2008. Site traffic increased that month, but it wasn't possible to tell if this was a result of the Page. In Alabama, the fall semester starts in mid-August, and site traffic always increased at the start of the school year.

A link to the *Facebook* Page was placed on the blog site and in the page template of the *TGL* Web site. *Facebook* users made Friend requests at a rate of about one or two per week, and the Page plateaued out at around 90 Friends. Most of these were Alabamians in the arts and library communities. Few appeared to be in the target demographic: college students.

Less than a year after the creation of the Page, changes in *Facebook* design moved photographs and applications away from the landing page to separate tab sections. This made them harder to find, especially for infrequent users. Additionally, some third-party applications were incompatible with the new design and had to be replaced or discontinued altogether. In anticipation of the project's transfer to another institution, Page maintenance was discontinued in December 2009.

d. *Twitter*

A *Twitter* feed was created for *TGL* and linked to both the Web site and the blog in May 2009 (Twitter, 2011). It was difficult to find the right use for the microblogging service,

however. The 140-character limit made it hard to both describe and link to a new author page or feature. Additions to the Web site happened at a comparatively slow pace, so the immediacy of the *Twitter* feed was not necessary or useful. The last *Twitter* update was made in December 2009.

F. Funding

Funding for *TGL* was pieced together from multiple sources. Because the Alabama Center for the Book was at that time a program of Auburn University's College of Liberal Arts (CLA), the project had access to many CLA resources: office space, computers and software, information technology (IT) services, library resources, local administrative support, work-study students, etc.

Money for the salaries of project employees and for the purchase of other materials and services was in short supply, however. Five one-year grants (in amounts ranging from $4,500 to $10,000) were obtained from two state sources: the Alabama State Council on the Arts and the Alabama "Support the Arts" License Tag fund. These were supplemented by funding from Auburn University Outreach and by small one-time grants from the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress and the Alabama Council of Teachers of English.

G. Sustainability

1. Preservation

It is important to protect the components of a digital resource (digital files, database structure, Web coding, etc.) from losses due to disaster (natural or man-made), equipment failure, and/or malicious attack. CLA policy ensured that the server housing the *TGL* files was

backed up on a weekly basis. When the server was attacked by hackers and *TGL* files were corrupted, the Web designer and the CLA system administrator were able to restore the Web site using the most recent back-up. Similar restorations were performed after server malfunctions.

2. Maintenance

Even when a digital resource is "complete," it still requires ongoing attention. New information makes current articles obsolete. Links stop working as outside resources move or shut down. Internal files malfunction, as their underlying software is replaced with newer versions and incompatibilities emerge. New technologies evolve that provide better ways to do things.

For three years following public launch, author profiles were updated as new information became available. The Web site was also spot-checked to assure that new users would be able to find the information they needed. The Web designer periodically tested the database for file corruption and informed the project manager when software became available that would enhance the site's usability. During this time, new author profiles and new features were also added.

Maintenance of the Web site ceased in January 2010, due to the expected transfer of *TGL* to another organization. Neither the intellectual content nor the database and Web code were updated after that date, although the site remained online until June 2011.

3. Resources

Funding agencies expect organizations to provide their own funds for ongoing projects and are unhappy when a resource is shut down after the grant money runs out. Resource creators may overlook this because they think that the value of their projects will be obvious to their organizations and that internal funding will be forthcoming.

The funding model used for the creation and expansion of *TGL* was not sustainable. The economic downturn that began in the fall of 2008 affected programs on campus and around the state. Grant and university funds allocated earlier in 2008 allowed the project to continue through the fall of 2009, but no additional funds were provided.

4. Succession

A succession plan for a digital resource should identify an organization willing and able to take over that resource if the parent organization is unable to continue it. This can be a complicated process, as it involves organizational politics, funding and staffing issues, and copyright and/or other legal issues.

A good succession plan also covers what happens if another organization cannot take over the resource. Will it remain online, without updating or maintenance, until it is no longer functional? Can the material be made available offline as a stand-alone resource in a library or archival repository? Will it simply be shut down?

In 2009, negotiations began for the transfer of the Alabama Center for the Book and its programs (including *TGL*) to the University of Alabama Libraries (UAL). That fall, *TGL*'s project manager accepted a position with Auburn University Libraries, and its Web designer was assigned to other CLA projects. Copies of the *TGL* database and Web files were transferred to UAL in June 2010.

UAL personnel reconfigured the Web site using Drupal (Drupal, 2011) and created a new project logo. This new *TGL* was launched in October 2010. Its information content was the same as the core of the Auburn version (author profiles, map, author and county lists). Some supplementary materials, including the audio and video materials, were omitted, however.

After the file transfer, the Auburn version of the *TGL* Web site continued to operate (with no updating or other amendments) from CLA servers until June 2011. Auburn personnel were not aware of the UAL version's launch in October 2010, and both versions were online simultaneously for over five months before this was discovered. This discovery was prompted by the impending expiration of the registration for the project's Web alias "alabamaliterarymap.org," which had not been transferred to UAL with the project files.

After registration expired in April 2011, the Auburn version of *TGL* continued to be accessible at its un-aliased Web address until mid-June 2011. However page views dropped dramatically, probably as the result of users having bookmarked the site using the now unavailable "alabamaliterarymap.org." In the two weeks following this expiration, author page views were 25 percent of their value for the previous two weeks.

Next Steps:

A. What worked well?

1. The project stayed on course and delivered its product.

TGL was launched two years after the first planning meeting. In the following three years, the Web site was expanded and improved. This was facilitated by a modular design in which core content was created first and features added later. Another major strength was the extensive planning process. As problems arose, alternatives could be re-examined to select the most viable.

2. The project maximized its resources.

TGL made efficient use of limited cash funding. CLA facilities and personnel were used wherever possible. Volunteers were used for some work, and the project manager sometimes

worked pro bono during periods between grant funding. Committee members volunteered their time and were not even reimbursed for their travel to meetings.

The arrangement for the design and construction of the Web site (project files residing on a CLA server; CLA Web designer working with the *TGL* project manager) worked well. The project manager's status as a contract worker was largely an advantage. On the one hand, this reinforced the perception of the project as finite rather than on-going. On the other hand, it meant that there were no other duties or assignments to divert time and attention.

3. Volunteers made important contributions.

The librarian volunteers who researched the first two author groups were highly motivated and did an excellent job. A few went far beyond expectations and directly contacted authors and/or authors' relatives as part of their research. The marketing graduate students who selected *TGL* for their class project on promotions provided a new logo and introduced the idea of social networking as a promotion tool. Selection Committee members who were unable to travel to attend meetings lent the prestige of their names to the project or participated in other capacities.

4. The final project was of good quality.

Selection Committee members (scholars and experts in Alabama literature) praised the intellectual content of *TGL* as being of high quality. State organizations such as the Alabama Library Association, the Alabama State Department of Education, and the Alabama Reading Association endorsed the project and linked to it from their Web sites.

5. Viewers found the project and used it.

Site use increased over time, even without active promotion. Page views, although fluctuating within a given year, increased from one year to the next (see Figures 6 and 7). Author

page views increased 132 percent from 2007 to 2008, 7.5 percent from 2008 to 2009, and 22 percent from 2009 to 2010. It is interesting that the highest number of author page views occurred in 2010, a year when the site was not being actively promoted, managed, or maintained.

B. What could have been done better?

1. More specific project name and description

The first part of the project name, "This Goodly Land," came from a verse of Alabama's state song ("Alabama" by Julia S. Tutweiler). The second part, "Alabama's Literary Landscape," was meant to suggest the connection between Alabama's literature and its geography. In retrospect, this name was problematic, as it did not make an obvious connection to project content.

LAIRAH researchers pointed out how important a project's name was to its usage patterns (Warwick, Terras, et al., 2008). Their research found that projects whose names gave a good indication of what they contained were more likely to be used than those whose names obscured their content. A print volume with a confusing name will be shelved by libraries and bookstores with related works, helping readers to find it despite that handicap. A Web project does not have this shelving advantage. If its title does not attract users quickly, they will move on to other projects whose titles give a better indication of their contents.

LAIRAH researchers also pointed out the importance of prominently displaying information describing a project's content either on its home page or the "about" page (Warwick, Terras, et al., 2008). Users who could quickly see what was in a Web resource were more likely to use it. This was especially important for projects with obscure names.

TGL fell short in this respect, also. Neither the home page nor the "About This Project" page stated explicitly what types of content could be found on the Web site. Some explanation was eventually provided by the addition of "tool tips" for the left-side links. However, without adequate content description, it is possible that many potential users didn't spend enough time on the home page to notice the tool tips and make use of them.

2. More audience research and audience targeting

TGL evolved over time into primarily a reference tool for K-12 students and teachers. Initially, however, there were several other target audiences: Alabama readers, scholars of Southern literature, literary tourists, and new residents of the state. The failure to focus on a single target audience probably did not diminish the quality or quantity of author profiles presented. However, it may have affected their presentation and the nature of features added to the site.

Coomes and Liew found that library Web sites aimed at children were frequently developed without any input from children or educators (Coomes and Liew, 2007). In most cases, only Web designers and librarians had any input on a site's content or design. *TGL* was also developed with little or no input from K-12 students and teachers. User research involving interviews and/or focus groups might have resulted in an improved product.

Although daily page views for some parts of the project were monitored, more specific data (location of user, etc.) might have helped better determine the impact of the site. In retrospect, we could have tried harder to make Google Analytics work for the site. A "heatmap" software application such as Crazy Egg (used to track user clicks on specific Web pages) might also have been helpful for studying user behavior (Crazy Egg, 2011).

3. Better dissemination of information about the site

There was no initial plan for promoting *TGL*. It was assumed that the methods used to promote other Center projects would work equally well for this one. This was a mistake. None of the print-based promotional methods (press releases, handouts at festivals, teacher mailings) showed any significant effect on daily page views.

Web resources are more effectively promoted by electronic means than by analog means. Electronic promotions allow users to go to the resource immediately. Analog methods frequently involve a delay between the time users see (or hear) the promotion and their first opportunity to examine the Web resource. During that delay, users may lose interest in the resource or forget about it altogether.

Some stakeholder organizations linked to *TGL* from their Web sites. Others put articles on *TGL* in their electronic newsletters. We were not able to verify the effectiveness of these promotional efforts, however, as we did not know the dates on which these events occurred.

The highest number of author page views for a single day (2,257) was observed in August 2008 on the Friday before the start of the K-12 fall semester (see Figure 6). Page views were higher than normal for the two days preceding and the two days following, as well. This was not the result of materials sent to teachers (the Center's fall mailing occurred a month later). It is possible that a teacher organization or the Alabama State Department of Education linked to *TGL* from its Web site or mentioned it in a listserv or blog posting. However, this cannot be verified.

For most of the project's lifetime, the project manager was the only person developing and implementing promotion ideas. The experience with the Auburn University marketing graduate students made it clear, however, that an experienced promotions staffer would have been helpful.

4. Better sustainability planning

Many regarded this project as finite, and no resources were allocated for long-term maintenance and updating. After the project manager left for another position, there was no one actively managing the Web site. Inevitably, deterioration set in: author profiles were not updated, broken links were not replaced with working ones, and the search function failed and was not fixed or replaced.

Sustainability planning should include funding for hardware and software updates. It should also include the transfer of responsibility from contract employees to permanent staffers once the project moves into the maintenance stage.

It would have been a good idea at the beginning of this project to create a formal succession plan. However, what is feasible at the start of a project may not remain feasible five years later. A succession plan should be revisited every year and changed as circumstances indicate. It is also a good idea to have a "Plan B" successor, in case the originally-designated organization cannot take over the project.

Final Conclusions

During its tenure at Auburn University, *TGL* was recognized as a valuable educational resource by stakeholder organizations and by scholars and experts in Alabama literature. Usage patterns showed that, by 2010, this online resource was finding an audience despite a lack of promotion.

An important factor in the project's success was the support received from Auburn University, state funding agencies, and stakeholder organizations. Other factors included a

modular design (core content first, features later), a dedicated project manager, and effective use of volunteers. Additional recommendations for those planning similar projects include:

- A descriptive project name

- Research about the target audience, its information needs, and the processes it uses to fill them

- User tracking that is as granular as possible

- Online promotion that is extensive and ongoing

- A sustainability plan that is created early in the planning process and updated annually

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