How We Can Use What We Already Know to Learn More: An Ontology for Linking Curriculum to Cultural Heritage

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Abstract: Every university abounds with metadata about its course offerings and library holdings, and most are increasing their descriptions of archival and museum collections. Matching cultural heritage artifacts with the curriculum in a university is essential to enhance the value of both the artifacts and the curriculum. Yet associating curriculum with cultural heritage resources is often ad hoc, best achieved through individual connections. Can we augment our traditional outreach with a new discovery paradigm that links collections to curriculum? This session presents an ontological framework to conceptualize matching data, information, and knowledge about the two domains– a Cultural Heritage and Curriculum Crosswalk. The ontology helps to comprehensively visualize the problem, articulate its complexity in detail, and specify the requirements for addressing the same. The ontology can be used to develop software to facilitate systematic matching. The software could allow faculty and students to search on a course title and find relevant collections. Students interested in a particular collection could search for related courses. Repository administrators wanting to demonstrate the utility of their holdings to a specific college, could use the crosswalk. The Crosswalk could also be used by development professionals to show donors how collections are marketed to patrons. This matching will enhance the value of the cultural heritage artifacts for a curriculum, and of the curriculum to drive the utilization of the artifacts. The success of such a software solution is dependent upon how well the database design incorporates the concepts and relationships of the ontology. Separately, the ontology can be used to map the state-of-the-research on, and practice of, matching two domains and to determine the gaps within and between them. Such a gap analysis will help develop a roadmap for research, practice, and the translation of research to practice and vice-versa.

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