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Grateful Dead Archive Online

<http://www.gdao.org> Accessed 31 December 2012.

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Community building and scholarly rigor are the core strengths of the Grateful Dead Archive Online (GDAO), created by the University of California Santa Cruz. GDAO characterizes itself as a socially constructed network that combines a physical archival collection with content submitted by the global Grateful Dead community. GDAO successfully addresses the needs of both of its audiences: fans and scholars through the kinds of content it offers and furthers the vision of the UCSC Special Collection's Department: "to support teaching, learning and research."

Through display decisions, GDAO serves as a model as it successfully balances its two primary audiences: fans and scholars. Employing a similar concept to John Voss' archival content communities, GDAO links content nodes throughout the site, and provides ways for its two user groups to access the content. Fans can click on "Shows" to find a particular concert, use the search bar to narrow the results. The display encourages fans to reconstruct and remember their own histories with the band and American music culture, thereby fostering their global community.

Scholars can analyze trends and the band's impact by studying the site more holistically and enter through one of five content types. By clicking on "Fan Art," a researcher can select from an A-Z list, as well as from an image slider of decorated envelopes that fans sent to the band as part of their request for concert tickets. Through the use of facets, shown to the right of the content, the user can easily navigate to related content including other user submissions, concert programs from the "Shows" section of the site, or click on the concert date to find related items, or continue searching by subject headings. Each item has a button, "Show Details," that connects users to additional information about the item.

In addition to an innovative display, GDAO offers a compelling model of transparency for an online archive. The "About Page" includes GDAO's copyright statement and specifies three copyright categories: expressed permission by the content's owner, public domain, or fair use as part of a non-commercial, educational site. Additionally, all user-submitted content must have an accompanying copyright statement. This copyright documentation reassures fans that GDAO treats all content the same, whether submitted by the public or uploaded from the Grateful Dead Archive. Scholars can feel confident when using this site as an archival resource because the items included adhere to current copyright best practices.

GDAO embodies Voss's notion of "archivist as DJ" through its appeal for user submissions, which contribute to the preservation of the band's history. The contribution form includes a copyright statement and description fields, helping to ensure that items uploaded to the site, whether added by UCSC or the public have consistent metadata. The academic community's needs are also met, as each item has a citation statement attached to it, further promoting the use of these archival materials in scholarly works. The contribution feature is at the crux of GDAO's mission to serve as a community archive.

Beginning with soliciting public contributions, GDAO emulates the principle of shared authority by connecting users to content on other sites. In addition to the 45,000 items originally uploaded to GDAO, the site pulls in data from the Internet Archive, allowing users to listen to concert recordings. The site also links to finding aid data that describes the physical collection stored at UCSC and provides access to David Dodd's "The Annotated Grateful Dead lyrics" website. Users can share content through Twitter, Facebook, and Google+, and tag individual items. The result of these links and tools is a powerful user experience that enables both fans and scholars to reconstruct and interact with a twentieth century cultural icon.

Building on their use of social media, GDAO might consider offering a YouTube video to grow their community and guide new users through the site. This video could be narrated by both a fan and scholar to present users with different perspectives around the site's perceived value. Or the site's creators might offer monthly chat sessions or forum events that encourage members of the community to gather together using the GDAO as a community space. New scholars or students using the site could use the community space and forum events to share their research and draw attention to specific items and content available through the site. By adding a "Scholars Corner" to the site's homepage, researchers would have the opportunity to offer a different kind of contribution than archival content. In turn, fans could learn how the site and the band impact cultural studies.

GDAO offers practitioners innovative ideas and solutions for creating an online community. Users do not merely browse content as outsiders, but are encouraged and given multiple opportunities to contribute to the archive. The careful consideration of copyright standards, citation practices and consistent metadata offer scholars a site that opens up a new world of archival content. By sharing authority with other archives, and website, GDAO removes barriers to fans and researchers, who want access to all kinds of resources. As users expect more digital content to be available and to enjoy more opportunities to participate online, archivists can look to the Grateful Dead Archive Online as one model for creating a global community.