Small Collection Perspective: What Made Me Commit to Digitization?

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Co-Director, Michigan Small Herbaria Initiative
Outline

• Why wouldn’t I digitize?
• Michigan Small Herbaria Initiative
• Barriers to digitization that I have encountered (and the types of people who face them)
• How can we remove those barriers?
Why wouldn’t I digitize?

• Wanted to “digitize” herbarium for many years
  – Specify
  – Excel
  – Digital camera

• So what kept me from proceeding?
GVSU Position Announcement

Plant Systematist, Grand Valley State University, MI

The Biology Department at Grand Valley State University is seeking a Plant Systematist for a tenure-track position at the assistant professor level to start in the Fall 2008. A Ph.D. in Botany or Biology with expertise in systematics or fields that use the tools of systematics (such as biogeography, etc.) and excellent communication skills are required; teaching and postdoctoral experience are desired. **Teaching responsibilities** will include undergraduate systematic botany, introductory biology, and other botany offerings such as ethnobotany and organismal and graduate courses. The successful candidate will be expected to **maintain active scholarship; research involving undergraduates** is encouraged. Grand Valley State University is primarily an undergraduate teaching institution whose faculty members are expected to **advise students and participate in the academic governance** of the department, college and university. Apply online at <http://www.gvsu jobs.org/>. Include a cover letter, CV, statements of teaching philosophy and research interests, references, and scanned copies of your transcripts. The online application system will allow you to attach these documents electronically. If you have questions or need assistance, call Human Resources at 616-331-2215. Send three letters of reference to: Chair; Plant Systematist Search Committee; Biology Department; Grand Valley State University; Allendale, MI 49401-9403 <http://gvsu.edu/biology/index.cfm?id=19EC1641-E853-4271-D56BA953F8F5AD21>. Review of applications begins 19 November 2007. Grand Valley State University is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer.
My Position at GVSU

- Teaching
- Maintain active scholarship
  - With undergrads
- Service (advising students, faculty governance)
- No mention of herbarium
- Focus on herbarium curation would not have landed me my current job
  - Herbarium has historically been undervalued
Michigan Small Herbaria Initiative

- Pre-2011
  - Anna Monfils and Rich Rabeler

- 2011
  - Project emerged as MiCOB initiative
  - Two initial goals:
    - Seek funding
    - Recruit participants
Michigan Small Herbaria Initiative

- Funding from the Hanes Trust
  - Mobile imaging unit
  - Server space (CMU)
  - Barcode labels
  - Licensing/assistance through SilverBiology
Michigan Small Herbaria Initiative

- GVSC (6,500 specimens)
- CALVIN (8,000 specimens)
- HCHM (8,900 specimens)
- ALBC (14,000 specimens)
- EMC (25,000 specimens)
- WMU (6,000 specimens)
- HLSD (5,000 specimens)
- AUB (15,000 specimens)
- Seney (400 specimens)
- TOTAL: 88,800
MSHI: Why Has It Worked?

- Funding (Thanks Hanes Trust!!)
- Willing collaborators
- Support from administrators
  - Student labor
  - Herbarium supplies
- Removal of specific barriers led to successful recruitment & implementation
Barriers to Digitization

• It just never occurred to me
• I don’t understand what it is
  – Databasing label info?
  – Imaging specimens?
• I don’t know how to do it
  – Do YOU know what a Darwin Core Archive is??
• I lack time and equipment
• My collection is not worthy of digitization
  – Too small, student collection, etc.
• Digitization will not advance my stature at my home institution
  – Pursuit of tenure, etc.
• I am opposed to digitization as a matter of principle
How Do We Remove Barriers?

Four types of people in the world:
• Want to digitize, have background/resources to do so
• Want to digitize, but have no idea where to begin
  – This was me
• Do not want to digitize
  – Does not contribute to their professional/personal goals
• Do not want to digitize
  – Opposed to it in principle
How Do We Remove Barriers?

Want to digitize, have background/resources to do so

• Actions:
  – No significant action needed
  – May serve to motivate and recruit others
How Do We Remove Barriers?

Want to digitize, but have no idea where to begin

• Actions:
  – Contact them and their peers
    • Individual invitations
  – Meet them where they are at
  – Help find funding
How Do We Remove Barriers?

Do not want to digitize, Doesn’t contribute to goals

• Actions:
  – Initial discussion as part of another organization (i.e. MiCOB)
  – Demonstrate value of digitization
    • increase value of collection, bring in funding, new avenues of research/publication, etc.
  – Provide approaches for convincing administration of value
  – "Ride the train or be left at the station" argument
How Do We Remove Barriers?

Do not want to digitize, fundamentally opposed to digitization

- Actions:
  - Same actions as above, or:
  - Wait patiently for death or retirement
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Action</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Want to digitize, have resources</td>
<td>No significant action needed</td>
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<td></td>
<td>May serve to recruit others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Want to digitize, don't know how</td>
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<td>Help find funding</td>
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<td>Commercial approach (i.e. SilverBiology)</td>
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Factors for Successful Recruitment: Summary

• Plant idea in alternative venue ("bait and switch")

• Convince people of value of digitization

• Address obstacles head-on
  – We sometimes don’t like to admit that we have those obstacles

• Remove specific barriers

• Convince people that the train is about to leave the station
Thank You!