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HathiTrust Emergency Temporary Access Service: Reaping The Rewards Of Long-term Collaboration

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Keywords

HathiTrust, Collaboration, Emergency Temporary Access Service, Mass Digitization, Fair Use, Collective Collection, Interdependence

Cover Page Footnote

From the Field

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Introduction

In spring 2020, profound disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic to the higher education landscape required creative responses by academic libraries to continue providing important services to their communities. The HathiTrust Emergency Temporary Access Service (https://www.hathitrust.org/ETAS-Description) is one such response, expanding member access to digitized versions of print collections in the HathiTrust Digital Library for the duration of the emergency. A history of established collaboration among the member libraries of HathiTrust created the pre-conditions needed

for a rapid response, with deployment of the new service within five weeks of the earliest library closures.

The HathiTrust Collaborative

HathiTrust (https://www.hathitrust.org) was founded in 2008 as a not-for-profit collaborative of academic and research libraries, following the groundbreaking efforts of the Big Ten Academic Alliance (formerly known as the Committee on Institutional Cooperation) and the University of California system in creating a shared digital repository. The resulting HathiTrust Digital Li-

brary (https://www.hathitrust.org/digital_library) preserves and provides online access to the digitized book collections of HathiTrust member institutions, many of whom have worked with Google, Microsoft, and Internet Archive on mass digitization projects and have managed in-house digitization initiatives. The collection is the largest set of digitized books managed by libraries under the aims of scholarly, not corporate, interests.

HathiTrust offers online reading access to the fullest extent allowable by U.S. copyright law, which, under ordinary conditions, does not include reading access to works still held in copyright. Typically, items in the public domain or licensed via Creative Commons are shared in full view for all users, while items held in copyright are searchable and available for non-consumptive research only. Members have the opportunity to provide enhanced reading access to certain users under special circumstances, e.g., full text access to in-copyright materials for users with print disabilities.

HathiTrust membership has grown steadily to over 200 academic and research libraries in seven countries, managing a corpus of over 17.4 million digital volumes contributed by 60 institutions. Of these, 6.8 million public domain and Creative Commons-licensed volumes are ordinarily available for viewing by any U.S. user (4.5 million volumes available worldwide), leaving 10.7 million copyrighted and copyright-undetermined volumes unavailable for reading access by users, regardless of member affiliation.

Origins of the Emergency Temporary Access Service

In early March 2020, as the onset of the COVID-19 emergency threatened the normal delivery of library services in the U.S. and elsewhere, HathiTrust's board and staff began examining possible legal routes to expand HathiTrust Digital

Library access on an emergency basis. The University of Washington, a member institution, announced it was moving to online instruction on March 6, and it became clear that students and faculty at many HathiTrust member institutions would soon have little or no access to print collections and would need to rely on electronic copies of library resources.

Later that day, HathiTrust began work to create a new emergency service and develop a legal framework for specific additional access to copyrighted materials, to complement the existing access to public domain works. Executive director Mike Furlough worked with colleagues at the University of Michigan, HathiTrust's administrative host, including associate general counsel Jack Bernard, University Librarian James Hilton, and other HathiTrust and U-M staff to craft a legal framework and service policy for the new emergency provision. Member library closures began a week later, starting with MIT Libraries on March 13. Our host library at U-M closed on March 20.

As envisioned, the emergency service would rely on fair use provisions in copyright law to provide temporary access to digitized titles in HathiTrust that correspond to physical titles held by a member library, for the duration of an emergency that prevents physical access to the library's collection. Dubbed the Emergency Temporary Access Service (https://www.hathitrust.org/ETAS-Description), or ETAS, the additional access was intended to enable member libraries to continue significant support for the teaching, learning, and research mission of their institutions during COVID-19 or other disruptions. ETAS leverages existing structures and data already in use at HathiTrust to provide temporary access only to eligible users and only for eligible materials.

With solid support from HathiTrust's host institution, HathiTrust staff devised a plan for implementation. Plans quickly emerged, and on

March 19 we began communicating about the outlines of the new service to members, who were eager to provide this broader access to their users. The policy, service implementation, and member communication details were developed simultaneously over several weeks.

On March 31, 2020, HathiTrust launched ETAS. This rapid response was made possible by our history of collaborative action, including structured governance, collective action on rights and access issues, distributed staffing structure, use of collaboration tools, a culture of member engagement, and, above all, by the creation over many years of a substantial, shared digitized corpus.

Building on Collaborative Success

Member Collaboration

The collaborative structure of HathiTrust positioned us well to rapidly develop an emergency service. We exist to solve problems that member institutions may find difficult to solve independently, and our governance structure (https://www.hathitrust.org/governance) and membership model (https://www.hathitrust.org/how-to-join) were intentionally crafted to facilitate collaborative work. Institutions do not become members simply by paying an annual fee (https://www.hathitrust.org/Cost). Print holdings (https://www.hathitrust.org/print_holdings) and authentication (https://www.hathitrust.org/shibboleth), both essential elements of the emergency service, are also required for membership. We collect print holdings data to support services, and we assess fees based in part on the value our members receive from these services. We also require members to release certain attributes to us through their authentication identity provider, allowing us to differentiate among user types upon login. Members complete these steps when they join HathiTrust, so the underlying structure and data

we needed were already in place when we began developing ETAS.

While contributing content to the shared collection is encouraged, it is not required. Since we rely on the expertise of our members, there are many other ways we ask members to participate. Our approach is cooperative from the top down, with a representative Board of Governors (https://www.hathitrust.org/board_of_governors) and member libraries committing staff time to serve on our Program Steering Committee (https://www.hathitrust.org/psc), working groups and task forces (https://www.hathitrust.org/working_groups), user support team (https://www.hathitrust.org/wg_user-support_charge), and copyright review program (https://www.hathitrust.org/copyright-review). This high level of engagement of HathiTrust members strengthens the organization and encourages ongoing collaboration.

Building on its core structure and services, HathiTrust collaboratively created a series of additional services, including collaborative provision of U.S. federal documents, coordination of shared print retention commitments, and computational data research services through the HathiTrust Research Center. In 2018, we published our strategic directions (https://www.hathitrust.org/charting-hathitrusts-strategic-directions), citing our vision: "HathiTrust will be a vital catalyst for emerging forms of research, teaching, and learning that engage the scholarly and cultural record." Creating ETAS is another step in living this vision to support our members and their educational mission.

Shared and Distributed Staffing

HathiTrust drew on several other collaborative structures when planning, developing, and supporting ETAS. First, HathiTrust is supported by twelve full-time staff, most of whom work from our host institution, the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Three staff members were hired

with the expectation that they would work remotely, and a fourth recently transitioned to a fully remote role as well.

In addition, the infrastructure of HathiTrust is distributed across several of the founding members: University of Michigan hosts core staff and services; Indiana University maintains a mirror site and teams with University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to host the HathiTrust Research Center; and California Digital Library at the University of California manages our bibliographic metadata. Because our staffing is distributed across multiple locations and time zones, we have invested in and make regular use of collaborative tools for communication (Zoom, Slack), project management (JIRA), software development (GitHub), documentation (Confluence, Google Sites) and user support (JIRA Service Desk). Our existing familiarity and comfort with these tools meant that the learning curve for us was low, once our operations went fully remote in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We successfully planned, developed, and launched ETAS in less than four weeks after starting the work, using these same tools, and in collaboration with our already close colleagues at the University of Michigan.

Member Engagement

After we announced the plans for the service to members on March 19, we delivered a series of webinars that introduced the details of the service. The questions our members asked during these sessions helped us devise an activation workflow and draft public-facing documentation prior to launch. Their input also informed a subsequent series of "virtual support office hours" focused on the full implementation of the service, including more specific ETAS-related topics related to access, discovery, and reporting.

These preparations made it possible to quickly address the significant number of activation requests we received from members immediately after launching the service. During the first five days after launch, seven HathiTrust staff processed requests and activated ETAS for 118 members. Two weeks after launch, 147 members were actively using the service. To date, 187 member institutions have been activated with the service at some point during the COVID-19 emergency.

Seven HathiTrust members agreed to serve as beta testers for the service prior to launch, providing valuable feedback on both the application workflow and the service itself. Because our membership model encourages deep engagement with HathiTrust, we knew we could count on our member libraries to collaborate with us during the development phase to make ETAS a success.

In preparation for launching ETAS and anticipating an increase in user inquiries, HathiTrust staff also prepared detailed instructions for use by our User Support team. This additional documentation (including ticket management procedures) was easily incorporated into the existing user support knowledgebase on Google Sites, and we began logging support requests in JIRA Service Desk using our standard workflow.

New Collaboration Mechanisms

Planning, developing, and launching ETAS during a global health pandemic required several new approaches to collaboration in addition to the existing practices and norms outlined above. First, the stress and uncertainty surrounding the pandemic influenced all of us, in different ways and to different degrees. In response, HathiTrust central staff created a #Resilience channel on Slack as a dedicated space for checking in with colleagues as well as sharing and receiving support for pandemic-related concerns. We also instituted regular social times during normal

working hours, where staff could log into Zoom for social time with colleagues. These mechanisms are still in place today, nearly seven months after we first shifted to remote work, and staff continue to rely on them for maintaining a sense of community in spite of the physical isolation necessitated by the pandemic.

In order to expedite the work of planning, building, and launching the new service, we created a temporary organizational structure focused solely on ETAS. HathiTrust central staff and many of our Library IT colleagues at the University of Michigan quickly formed a set of small teams, each with a set of narrowly scoped, ETAS-related responsibilities. We also instituted daily, agile-style standup meetings to coordinate across the teams. These lasted no more than 30 minutes and had a strictly enforced agenda: each participant had two minutes to describe what they were working on, where they were struggling, and where they needed help. These brief check-ins kept our staff focused on the work that was most pressing each day, and helped HathiTrust leadership make adjustments where needed.

Challenges

Even with all of the above structures and norms in place, we encountered a number of challenges on the road to launching ETAS. For example, adjusting to the demands of the daily standup meetings took practice; we got better at it over time. In addition, developing and managing service expectations required significant internal planning and external communication. Despite our best efforts, we know that some end users remain confused about the scope of the service, and we continue to field requests from our members for faster turnaround for content and print holdings data updates that underlie ETAS access. It is also worth repeating that HathiTrust staff and colleagues felt the impact of the pan-

demic just like everyone else; the support structures we created were effective in certain contexts but could not mitigate all effects.

We are also aware that the service provides greater benefit to those members with larger print collections. In addition, ETAS benefits HathiTrust members solely; non-members retain access to the millions of public domain items in our collection, but have no exceptional reading access to their in-copyright holdings. Budgetary or technical constraints place HathiTrust membership out of reach for many institutions, leaving a significant number of libraries unable to provide access services to their patrons via ETAS.

The popularity of the service has led to a large increase in the number of inquiries about membership. Since we launched the service and through September 2020, we have received membership inquiries from 125 institutions and onboarded 29 new members. For comparison, we handled inquiries from 61 institutions and onboarded 11 new members in all of 2019. While this improves the diversity of our community (https://www.hathitrust.org/community), it does present challenges for our small staff. There is only one person responding to membership inquiries, and only one person dedicated to member engagement. Processing prospective members' holdings data and setting up authentication for so many institutions has also strained our technical staff.

Conclusion

Provision of ETAS is one outcome of a long period of collaborative work — over 15 years of work on mass digitization, infrastructure development, service planning, organizational development, and other activities involved in creating and sustaining the initiative. Roger Schonfeld, director of the Libraries, Scholarly Communication, and Museums Program at Ithaka S+R, reminded us shortly after the ETAS launch of the

"intangible value" of "just-in-case digital preservation investments" made by libraries:

The ability to simply "turn on" digital access to such a high share of the print collection on a temporary basis is an absolutely amazing benefit to Hathi members…. While Hathi's current value to researchers is unquestionable, I want to celebrate the investment that its members have made over the past decade long before pandemic emergency access was necessary. The partnership of research libraries that came together to create and sustain HathiTrust saw the importance of controlling a digital copy of the books that were digitized by Google. Yes, they foresaw and fulfilled a variety of resulting opportunities—computational access to the corpus for research, modernizing how government documents are managed, digital access for those with print disabilities. But, most of the investment was, at its heart, to enable the libraries to control the digital files and preserve them independently of Google.[1]

The substantial experience of working together towards common solutions for providing greater access to human knowledge laid the foundation for rapid deployment of the HathiTrust Emergency Temporary Access Service.

The trust built by years of collaboration on common preservation and access challenges, along with the skills developed in governance and engagement in shaping services, helped us quickly create additional access for members to the collective digital corpus they had built together. Also key were the history of strong legal and policy support from the host institution, the University of Michigan, and an investment by all members in large-scale collective solutions, allowing libraries in the collaborative to meet an important need for broader access during a critical period for higher education.

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[1] Schonfeld, Roger C. (2020). "Research Library Digitization Has Found Its Moment: Long-term Investments Pay Off and Provide Lessons for the Future," Ithaka S+R blog, April 21, 2020, https://sr.ithaka.org/blog/research-library-digitization-has-found-its-moment/.