Penn State University Libraries:
WolfVision VZ-C6 Ceiling Visualizer

Exterior view of the Pattee and Paterno Libraries at Penn State University, Pennsylvania, USA.   Photo: Nathaniel C. Sheetz

For many institutions of higher learning, studying the past goes hand-in-hand with preserving it for future generations. These special collections departments allow careful study of centuries-old artifacts and manuscripts that provide insight on the world and its peoples throughout the ages. The Preservation, Conservation & Digitization Department of The Pennsylvania State University strives to do just that.

Considered one of the top two public research libraries in the United States, the Penn State University Libraries are comprised of 13 subject libraries, with holdings of over 8 million volumes, covering a wide range of disciplines with strong collections in Pennsylvania-related topics, such as religion, history of the Civil War, mining, nuclear power, agriculture, and many more. A very important part of these libraries is the Eberly Family Spe-cial Collections Library.

The vast Special Coll-ections are home to more than 200,000 printed vo-lumes, 25 million archival records and manuscripts, as well as over 1 milli-on photographs, maps, prints, and audio-visual items. With such a wealth of articles and pieces, the University Libraries nee-

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ded a solution that could accurately display such detailed visual content, while still being portable for multi-room travel. The answer to this challenge was a WolfVision C6 Ceiling Visualizer. Senior Book Conservator William Minter had this to say on its implementation:

"Our use of the WolfVision overhead Visualizer began with a desire to show and share detailed images of book conservation treatments while the work was being done. We learned of the WolfVision VZ-C6 Visualizer which is typically mounted and fixed on the ceiling of a classroom. However, we might show some work in one room, while the next time it could be used in another department. At the same time, we wanted to be able to share this camera with our Libraries' Special Collections department. Therefore, we decided to mount the camera on a cart that could be moved to various locations."

The VZ-C6 is used for instruction during a conservation treatment by Bill Minter, Senior Book Conservator.   Photo: PSU

A close detail on the monitor of a conservation treatment during instruction.   Photo: PSU

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This special solution allowed library workers and curators to transport the cart from room to room, and still show the fine details of many works. "With this lower mounting, the viewing area still permits two-pages of most books to be shown full-screen on a monitor, and has the additional advantage with the camera's zoom feature to obtain extraordinary close-up details of an area approximately the size of a calling card," Minter added.

This special setup has allowed the library and its departments to share and display a variety of new aspects to the materials in the collections. Minter describes one such instance, "During one class in Special Collections, our facsimile of the fabulous BOOK OF KELLS was being shown with its decorative initial letters of interlaced animal figures. By enlarging these letters to the full size of the monitor, everyone was able to see even greater details for enhanced enjoyment."

The patented Synchronized Lightfield of the VZ-C6, allows yet another advantage. "This feature provides another great benefit with books, since we are able to use a "light-sheet", a thin illuminated panel that can be inserted between the pages of a book. This sheet allows us to show the structure of handmade paper, especially the watermark," added Minter.

Faculty and student response has been universally positive. Sandra Stelts, Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts, states that:

"The use of the Wolf-Vision overhead Visualizer has the potential to change the nature of our instructional sessions and to allow us to broaden the selection of rare materials that we physically bring to our classroom. Furthermore, the modification of the stationery camera to a mobile cart allows us to turn any library room into a classroom. The Visualizer also cuts down on the number of people

Rare Books Curator, Sandra Stelts with our facsimile of the BOOK OF KELLS and an illuminated initial letter, Spring semester 2017.   Photo: PSU

who must handle a book or manuscript, and it permits greater efficiency and less wear and tear on our fragile materials.

Of particular value is the ability to zero in on the smallest details of handwriting or visual elements and enlarge them to a degree that can make images more legible on the

monitor than to the naked eye. As an instructor, I love the spontaneous sound of "oohs" and "aahs" as the audience delights in discovering the beauty of a delicate, decorative border of a medieval manuscript, or reads the miniscule marginalia in a 15th-century Bible."

Student Intern Oli-

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The monitor is shown mounted on the cart during a class with Dr. Robin Thomas, Associate Professor of Art History. Photo: PSU

via Kuzio is of the same opinion: "The use of the WolfVision overhead Visualizer during lectures and training sessions greatly enhances the audience's ability to engage with the material being presented.

Since seeing it in use and using it myself during presentations, I've often wished it were being used more frequently and in a greater variety of applications, because of the unique way in which it enables the speaker to share incredible details and up-close demonstrations." The WolfVision VZ-C6 Ceiling Visualizer, along with its mobile installation at Penn State University Libraries, has proven to be a great teaching tool. With added benefits and options for sharing and displaying such precious items, the staff reports that the impact for the students and researchers has been thoroughly enhanced.