HathiTrust User Support Annual Report

A look at the year 2023

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HathiTrust User Support Overview

The HathiTrust User Support (HTUS) team has existed since 2011, when it was created out of a need to address a growing volume of user requests and feedback. The users mentioned in this report refer to both users that are associated with member libraries and users that are not associated with member libraries, unless otherwise noted.

The HTUS team is composed of members that contribute staff time and energy to this effort without any compensation from HathiTrust. Activities of the group are overseen by the HathiTrust User Support Specialist. To date, there have been 109 individuals from HathiTrust member institutions who have served on the team, representing 70 different institutions. Many members stay on the team for longer than the initial one year term commitment.

The HTUS team is composed of three subgroups. The General Support subgroup triages tickets and sends initial responses. Sometimes, they assign tickets to the other HTUS subgroups or to other HathiTrust staff. The Bibliographic Corrections Group (BCG) handles all tickets that require a cataloging correction. The BCG investigates reported problems and communicates with contributing institutions to try to get corrected records back into HathiTrust. The BCG was created in September 2013 as a result of the transition in management of bibliographic records in HathiTrust from University of Michigan to the California Digital Library. The Digital Objects Quality Corrections (DOQC) handles all tickets that require a correction to the digital scans of the books in the collection. The DOQC team investigates reported problems and communicates with digitization vendors and contributing institutions to try to get corrected scans back into HathiTrust.

HTUS team members handle an average of 5,300 user requests each year. Each HTUS team member is assigned a particular day to work on support tickets, but their work can extend beyond their day on the schedule for tickets that require follow up. Each ticket can generate multiple emails back and forth, and can involve communications with the original patron as well as other individuals at member libraries or Google. The HTUS team collectively handles between 350-500 tickets per month on average.

2023 Activity

Highlights

In July 2023, HathiTrust launched a [new website](#), new branding and a [new Help Center](#). Internally, this required quite a bit of training for HathiTrust User Support. HTUS learned [how to use the new Help Center](#) as well as how to help our users find their way around it. They also acclimated to the change in appearance of our support tickets which originated from the new website contact form.

During Summer 2023, we also migrated our HTUS documentation from a Google site and several Google documents and spreadsheets to a more centralized location in Confluence. This made our documentation easier to access for HTUS team members, since they could use their existing Atlassian login credentials instead of a separate set of Google login credentials to access it. Having the documentation largely in one place also made it easier to update for the new website launch.

Lastly, the BCG and DOQC subgroups both spent quite a bit of time working through the backlog of tickets. Support tickets end up in the backlog when a team member leaves and still has outstanding tickets.
- By the end of 2023, all 68 tickets that had been in the BCG backlog were reassigned to existing BCG team members. Of those, 45 of them have been resolved and the rest are currently being addressed.
- Similarly, by the end of 2023, 449 out of the 792 tickets that had been in the DOQC backlog were reassigned to existing DOQC team members. Of those, 370 tickets are now resolved and 79 of them are currently being addressed.

Trends and Statistics

The following numbers capture the year 2023. We received 4,157 new requests during this time period, split out across 11 different categories of requests. The most common category by far was "Access and Use," which covers copyright questions, reading, downloading and printing materials, and reusing HathiTrust content in other exhibits and publications. Two other common categories were general questions about HathiTrust, and questions about the website, such as troubleshooting login issues. Lastly, tickets in which the user reported a quality issue with either the catalog record or digital scans of a book were also fairly common.

General Support Tickets

The most common subcategories of tickets for the General Support group were questions about permissions agreements from copyright holders, reports of a content quality problem, requests from users who would like to receive a PDF of a particular book, questions related to Collection Administration Access (CAA) or the Accessible Text Request Service (ATRS), as well as reports of a problem using our website, a problem logging in, or a feature that they would like to see on our website.

UC Davis Licensing Dissertations Project

The reason why permissions agreements encompass so many of the total General Support tickets is largely due to a project that the University of California - Davis is working on, which involves reaching out to their alumni who have written dissertations in the past to see if they would be willing to send HathiTrust a permissions agreement that would open their dissertation to be viewed according to the terms of a Creative Commons license.

The work of evaluating and opening these works was led by Kristina Hall, HathiTrust's Copyright Review Program Manager. Kristina then hired a student assistant as a result of this project, who contributed 6-8 hours/week for part of the year.

Lessons Learned from the project

This project is a great example of a project that has been fruitful because it is member-led. It also highlights the impacts of offering a higher level of service for a member initiated project. We are limited in our support capacity in HathiTrust User Support and among HathiTrust staff, and have to consider that in our overall service scope -- both in terms of one-off projects with members and in future service development. However, there is opportunity for our capacity to grow with the right opportunities and the right amount of interest in maintaining and/or expanding member support on the HTUS team.

Bibliographic Corrections Tickets

The BCG was able to correct 51 tickets and was unable to correct 72 tickets during this time period, with 157 tickets still being unresolved at the end of 2023. HathiTrust does not have a process to correct its own records; instead it relies on the institution(s) that contributed a particular record to make corrections and then resubmit them through Zephir. Some BCG tickets were associated with contributing institutions that were actively making and submitting catalog corrections for at least part of this time period, while other contributing institutions had indicated to us that they are not currently responding to requests for record corrections, whether due to having more pressing priorities, lack of capacity to make corrections, or lack of a proper workflow or training for their staff.

The institutions that were able to correct records during this time period are listed below, with both University of Michigan and University of California correcting over twice as many as any others. This is due to the fact that both institutions have contributed more volumes than any other institution to date, and they both have pretty extensive resources to correct and resubmit records to HathiTrust. Other institutions that have submitted corrections include:
- Indiana University
- New York Public Library
- The Ohio State University
- Penn State University
- University of Illinois
- University of Virginia
- University of Wisconsin

The BCG tracks which kind of problem(s) were reported in each ticket. The most common type of errors reported during this time period were requests in which the book content had been matched up with the wrong catalog record. This can happen for a variety of reasons, one of which is that the wrong OCLC number had been applied.

The next most common type of errors reported during this time period were requests in which there is a problem with the date or the volume numbers in the enum/chron fields (at the item record level). For example, the volume number might say v.14 instead of v.15, or might be missing altogether. If there is no date present in the enum/chron fields, this can also have an impact on whether individual volumes will be automatically opened based on when they enter the public domain.

The most difficult requests to fix were requests in which the wrong OCLC number has been added to the record, often resulting in incorrect clustering during record loading processes. How this manifests is an item being attached to a record for a completely different item because the OCLC number in the first item matches the OCLC number for a different primary record. For example, a volume of historical baseball statistics from 1962, otherwise properly cataloged, being found on a record for a volume of Creative and Inspirational Gardening Practices from 1956, where the only thing that links the two items is that the record for each item contains the same OCLC number in, probably, the 035 MARC field. A mix-up like this is usually attributed to local edits prior to submission, or to a cataloging error by another institution further upstream.

Digital Objects Quality Corrections Group

The DOQC group was able to correct 354 tickets and was unable to correct 400 tickets during this time period, with 580 tickets still being unresolved at the end of 2023. HathiTrust does not have a process to correct its own digital scans; instead it relies on the institution(s) that contributed them to make corrections and then resubmit them through vendors like Google or the Internet Archive, or to submit them directly to HathiTrust through local workflows. Some DOQC tickets were associated with contributing institutions that were actively making and submitting content corrections for at least part of this time period, while other contributing institutions had indicated to us that they are not currently responding to requests for content corrections, whether due to having more pressing priorities, lack of capacity to make corrections, or lack of a proper workflow or training for their institution.

The DOQC group only contacts contributing institutions after a certain point in their workflow, after exhausting all possible remediation options with the digitization vendor (Google in most cases). Although DOQC members have notified 25 institutions of problems with their volumes, only 11 institutions have been able to successfully address those errors. This is partially due to the difficulty of fixing volumes that have been scanned by an external vendor.

The institutions that were able to correct at least some records during this time period are listed below, with University of Michigan correcting over twice as many as any others. This is due to the fact that University of Michigan has contributed more volumes than any other institution to date, and it has extensive resources and robust workflows to correct and resubmit digital scans to HathiTrust. Other institutions that have submitted corrections include:
- Columbia University
- Cornell University
- Harvard University
- Keio University

- The Ohio State University
- University of California: Berkeley
- University of California: Los Angeles
- University of California: Northern Regional Library Facility
- University of California: San Diego
- University of Minnesota

The DOQC group tracks which kind of problem(s) were reported in each ticket. The most common type of quality problem reported during this time period was books that contain missing pages. This can be caused either by the scanning process or by missing pages in the original print volume, and aside from the book missing potentially important information for the user, it can be problematic if the title or copyright page is missing, making it difficult to do a manual copyright review on the book if it is ever needed.

Issues that had the most successful fixes are books with missing pages, blurry text, cropped pages, and duplicate pages. If pages are poorly cropped or the text is blurry, part of the page may be missing or unreadable. Fortunately, vendors can usually fix these problems digitally without needing to consult the physical book.

Issues with unscanned foldout pages (such as maps or charts) were also very common, since they historically had not been scanned along with the books until more recent years. They were also among the most challenging to fix, since the physical book (in many cases) had to be sent to the vendor a second time before they could be remediated. However, there have also been an increasing number of successful fixes due to the excellent work of the teams at the University of Michigan, the University of California and elsewhere in rescanning and resubmitting these foldouts locally.

Team Feedback

In June 2023, HTUS team members responded to a survey sent out by the HTUS chair. The goals of the survey included learning about:
- Team member satisfaction,
- Gaps in knowledge,
- Additional training needs following the Jira migration,
- Commitments for next year.

Team members indicated high satisfaction rates overall, with about 85% of responses indicating that they are "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with their experience.

The survey also revealed some areas of improvement and opportunities for follow up, including the following:

- About 45% of team members indicated that they are struggling with understanding some HathiTrust policies and procedures.

- Regarding workload, two team members indicated a desire to receive and work on more tickets, and one team member indicated a desire to receive and work on fewer tickets.

In addition, the free-text questions provided additional information about gaps in knowledge, and some suggestions for ways to improve HTUS operations.

Thanks to HTUS Members

Many thanks to our current team members, including those who have recently left the team and those who are joining it this year. Our team continues to function because of your contributions!

Several members of the User Support team ended their time serving with us in 2023:

Aaron Sandoval, Wesleyan University (General Support)
Amanda Levine, The Ohio State University (General Support)
Hillary Arieux, Virginia Commonwealth University (Digital Object Quality Corrections)
Jackson Huang, University of Michigan (Digital Object Quality Corrections)
Lisa Nachreiner, University of Wisconsin-Madison (Bibliographic Corrections)
Norman Howe, University of Manitoba (General Support)
Sandy Schiefer, University of Missouri (General Support)
Terri Artemchik, Loyola University Chicago (General Support)

Several people also joined the User Support team in 2023:
Bob Persing, University of Pennsylvania (Digital Object Quality Corrections)
Corrina Taccone, McMaster University (General Support)
Elizabeth Rapp, University of Virginia (General Support)
Ines Perkovic, McMaster University (General Support)
Jay Shorten, University of Oklahoma (Bibliographic Corrections)
Jenny Bodenhamer, Oklahoma State University (Bibliographic Corrections)
Karen Pavao, McMaster University (Digital Object Quality Corrections)
Mi Yoon, McMaster University (Digital Object Quality Corrections)
Rong (Veronica) Fu, University of Virginia (Bibliographic Corrections)
Samantha Kreklau, University of Michigan (General Support)
Shannon Willis, Texas State University (Digital Object Quality Corrections)
Spruill Harder, Harvard University (General Support)

Continuing team members:
Antoinette Yost, University of Delaware (General Support)
Brandon Katzir, Oklahoma State University (Bibliographic Corrections)
Brianna Gormly, Columbia University (Digital Object Quality Corrections)
Chad Deets, Arizona State University Library (Bibliographic Corrections)
Chad Pearson, Texas A&M University (General Support)

Colleen Fedewa, Case Western Reserve University (Bibliographic Corrections)
Craig Keeney, University of South Carolina (Bibliographic Corrections)
Earline Antosch, The Ohio State University (Bibliographic Corrections)
Elizabeth Miraglia, University of California, San Diego (Bibliographic Corrections)
Fred Rascoe, Georgia Institute of Technology (General Support)
Katie Compton, McMaster University (General Support)
Kevin O'Brien, University of Illinois Chicago (General Support)
Leigh Billings, University of Michigan (Bibliographic Corrections)
Lynn Bostwick, University of Texas - Austin (Co-Chair of Digital Object Quality Corrections)
M. Constance Fleischer, University of Chicago (General Support)
Maggie Halterman-Dess, University of Iowa (General Support)
Ngoc-My Guidarelli, Virginia Commonwealth University (Bibliographic Corrections)
Nicholas Wolf, New York University (Digital Object Quality Corrections)
Paul Fogel, University of California (Digital Object Quality Corrections)
Rebecca Culbertson, University of California, San Diego (Bibliographic Corrections)
Sarah Cairns, McMaster University (Co-Chair of Digital Object Quality Corrections)
Seth Huber, University of Missouri-Columbia (Bibliographic Corrections)
Tamara Ozdemir, McMaster University (Bibliographic Corrections)

Comments of appreciation from our users

Occasionally, our users take the time to express appreciation for the HathiTrust applications, the collection, and the work of our staff and member-driven teams and initiatives. Here are some comments from 2023:

Regarding HathiTrust website and applications

"I wanted to write and say THANK YOU. I really enjoy your site and I wanted to tell you."

"Thank you so much for the work you do to make HathiTrust available and reliable… I also wanted to take the opportunity to thank you for the hard work in updating the HathiTrust interface. It's distinctive and informative; I was impressed with the changes and how attractive the whole site looks."

"HathiTrust friends, congratulations on the new design rollout. It's a monumental achievement and I appreciate all the hard work that went into it."

"I truly appreciate the work everyone at the HathiTrust does, including you and [HTUS]. I love being able to read old magazines on a very reliable website, and I know a lot of work must go into making sure that everything runs as smoothly as it does."

"A brilliant website, nicely set out. I really appreciate that the various formats are available to download. Hooray!!"

"I just wanted to say thank you for bringing the page rotation button out where it is more visible. I often use pages that need to be rotated and it's so handy to have it out in the open rather than under the page number box. Many thanks!!!!"

Regarding the HathiTrust collection

"Thank you so much!! This book has been a veritable "Rosetta Stone" for me! Yes I mean that; and you wonderful people are not charging me one penny for it! It`s not easy to find this book in a library... You as well are "Democratizing Wisdom and Knowledge." Thank you for being on the Frontiers of free, beneficial Higher Education for ALL!!"

"Hathitrust is a fantastic resource! I am an independent researcher, and I use it a lot. Thank you for making such a complete collection of historical books available to the general public for free."

"Great site! I am really thankful for the resource HathiTrust provides for scholars like myself and other interested in the records!"

"I use your wonderful pages for my research on Abraham Lincoln books written for children… Thank you for your pages of great info!"

"I am so very pleased that these out of publication… parish registers are free to download from your library."

"I would like to say a huge "thank you" for the wonderful HATHITRUST resource. It has helped me enormously with my family history research."

"Wonderful service! I use it for background and context for my genealogy. It is priceless. Thank you so very much. As many I live far from the family "stomping grounds" and sources there, digital library services are an incredible help."

"I am so thrilled about the data sources your library contains. I am doing research on my family name… [and] I get many exciting returns."

"I would like to thank you for the wonderful job that you do in preserving all these historical works. I am a History student from Brazil and I just finished my final thesis... Your repository was a tremendous help and I really couldn't have done it without it. Thank you."

Regarding the Copyright Review Program

"THANK YOU [for opening these documents]! I do appreciate and love HathiTrust!"

"I am very grateful to you and your colleague [for] checking this [book] out and reviewing so we can access! Extremely valuable for our project. A real gem!"

Regarding the work of our contributing institutions in contributing to and improving the quality of the collection

"I also truly appreciate ALL the libraries that do any work to scan and upload material… HathiTrust is a collective treasure."

"I must stop and take a moment to send this note of thanks and appreciation to the U of Illinois-Urbana Champaign, because they always come through with the best quality scans! Thank you, you always come through and provide stellar work!!"