EPIGRAPHY AT BROWN AND ACROSS THE U.S.
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SUMMARY
Two projects:
1. The U.S. Epigraphy project gathers and disseminates data on ancient inscriptions located in the United States.
2. The catalog of inscriptions at Brown includes information on all inscriptions on Brown’s campus, regardless of language, and makes that information available for public access.

INTRODUCTION
My research encompasses two related projects. The first, the U.S. Epigraphy Project (USEP), is a long-term project run by Professor John Bodel of the Classics Department. The project aims to catalog and distribute data on the Greek and Latin inscriptions in the United States, whether they are housed in museums, universities, or private collections. It is a work in the digital humanities: the inscriptions, as well as their specific bibliographic information, descriptions, and photographs, appear on a website, allowing scholars around the world to locate and study them for free. Right now, the collection includes over 2,500 inscriptions across the U.S. Though ancient, Classics is a dynamic rather than a static field; new work in the digital humanities, like the USEP, is a perfect example of how mutual benefits flourish through the intersection of modern technology and ancient texts and artifacts.

The second project I am working on is one of my own design. In collaboration with Professor Bodel, I am applying the skills I’ve gained working on USEP to my immediate community at Brown. There are numerous inscriptions on Brown’s campus—in languages including Latin, Greek, Chinese, and French, in addition to English—but no public catalog or listing of them exists. My goal is to locate and map all of the inscriptions on campus—dedications, memorials, mottoes—and create an interactive database that makes them accessible to members of the Brown community.

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GOALS
The goal of both of these projects is to make it easy for anyone interested to locate information on epigraphy—either on campus or throughout the U.S. While it is ideal to view an inscription in person, this is often not feasible, especially for researchers working remotely on a large body of material, or families living far away from Brown. The USEP hopes, with the help of a new, easy-to-navigate website, to make information on Greek and Latin inscriptions available and accessible to anyone, providing the best alternative to seeing the inscription in person. The catalog of Brown inscriptions attempts to make it easy for visitors, alumni, or other community members to locate a commemorative plaque in their name, or find out a little more about that curious bench next to Sayles Hall.

METHOD
To begin my project, I had to define what an inscription was. Does it only count if it’s actually carved into stone? That would discount a number of memorial plaques. I decided to include any block of text that was independent (not a label attached to a portrait) and not solely informational (no shuttle stop signs). To create a catalog of inscriptions at Brown, I am on a constant scavenger hunt around campus, armed with a Nikon d40, a tape measure, and the Find Gps Coordinates app on my iPhone. Once I have photographed an inscription and taken down its data and information, I enter it into an Excel sheet and edit the photos using Photoshop.

In terms of the USEP, all the steps of finding inscriptions have been completed for me. This leaves me to the last task of encoding the information for web use. To create the infrastructure of the websites, I use EpiDoc, a version of XML that was developed specifically for websites involving ancient inscriptions. I can enter my collection of metadata—including an inscription’s exact location, its material, its purpose, its condition, etc.—into a searchable format. This allows users to look for that terracotta ash urn in the Hearst Museum in Berkeley, or search the epitaph of Rufacius Faustus in the Speed Art Museum in Louisville.

WHAT’S NEXT
For the USEP, with our new website up and running, it will be time once again to return to the search: reaching out to curators and private collectors to find newly published inscriptions to add to the collection. For the Brown catalog, the next phase will be about conceptualizing a user-friendly design and map component that will expand as Brown continues to grow.