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Insights into the Cultivation and Sustainability of Academic Library Digitization Programs: Success Factors and Challenge Threats

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Insights into the Cultivation and Sustainability of Academic Library Digitization Programs: Success Factors and Challenge Threats

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Abstract

Many academic libraries have invested time and resources into the creation of library digitization programs, and at this point in time there is a growing need to evaluate the impact and success of these efforts. What factors determine whether institutions achieve goals and experience long-term success or face challenges in staffing, funding, and strategic vision? This poster presents the results of a comprehensive survey administered to ARL (Association of Research Libraries) Library digitization managers to help provide a cross section of the current state of a diverse group of programs. Presented along with the survey results, the authors delve deep into the process undertaken at the UNLV Libraries to develop a strategic vision and decision-making structure to revitalize the library’s digitization unit and create increased buy-in from staff and partners. Such work entailed two reorganizations, various workshops presented to library staff, drafting of a comprehensive digitization white paper, and establishing an administrative structure to review and prioritize digitization project proposals. These two methods of investigation are presented side-by-side to reflect patterns and point to several factors that contribute to success and sustainability of digitization efforts in academic libraries.

Research Objective

Methodology: This poster presents a dual approach of case study and research survey to investigate the complex factors in sustaining long-term academic library digitization programs.

Instrument: Conducted in a Summer 2008, 26 question survey administered to all ARL libraries (response rate ~ 33%), combined with analysis of one library’s efforts to revitalize their digitization program revealing several factors determining the success of digitization programs; including support from administration, development of staff skills, funding, and strategic planning.

Limitations: Identifying proper contacts to send survey, use of an online survey that was targeted only to ARL libraries (small sample), response rate/incomplete responses.

Identified Trends: Surveyed institutions reported:

- Support staff training occurs frequently or occasionally: 100%
- Strong areas of local staff expertise: 88% metadata creation; 85% scan / processing
- Buy-in for collaborative digitization efforts rated “excellent” or “good”: 81%
- Have management position dedicated to digitization: 79%
- Have system other than a university IR for digitization publishing: 73%
- Have documentation (mission statements, procedures): 68%
- Digitization program referenced in strategic plan: 63%
- Have a committee for prioritizing projects: 54%

Findings: Major Challenges and Solutions

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Solutions/Strategies</th>
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<tr>
<td>Staffing, especially technical expertise</td>
<td>Digitization in strategic plan</td>
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<td>Funding</td>
<td>Developing faculty collaborations</td>
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<td>Lack of decision-making structures</td>
<td>Strong infrastructure to build trust</td>
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<td>Managing workload</td>
<td>Supporting open access</td>
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<td>Maintaining support of library staff</td>
<td>Staying service-oriented</td>
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<td>Promotion and publicity</td>
<td>Selecting terms of high interest, unique collections</td>
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<td>Lack of equipment/IT support</td>
<td>Aggressive grant-writing</td>
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<td>Administration support/vision</td>
<td>Remaining flexible and learning as program developed</td>
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<td>Prioritization</td>
<td>Building support among staff and administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hosting IR / OJS along with digitization program</td>
<td>Individual dedicated staff, project champions</td>
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<td>Physical space</td>
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In Their Own Words:

- “Faculty collaboration on projects is the biggest factor for success of a digital library project.”
- “Selecting items based on highlighting parts of a collection. Fragmented workflow and communication, very little visibility internally and in community.”
- “I don’t know that we have achieved a high research interest.”
- “Spending time developing our infrastructure, adopting/creating standards and procedures; trying to remain flexible; support from library administration and staff for the digital library.”

The UNLV Case Study

Background: With a spirit of innovation and experimentation, projects were developed on small scale with limited staff involvement; usually based on highlighting parts of a collection. Fragmented workflow and communication, very little visibility internally and in community.

Challenges:

- Entry-level, especially technical expertise
- Funding
- Lack of decision-making structures
- Managing workload
- Maintaining support of library staff
- Promotion and publicity
- Lack of equipment/IT support
- Administration support/vision
- Prioritization
- Hosting IR / OJS along with digitization program
- Physical space

Solutions:

- Digitization in strategic plan
- Developing faculty collaborations
- Strong infrastructure to build trust
- Supporting open access
- Staying service-oriented
- Selecting terms of high interest, unique collections
- Aggressive grant-writing
- Remaining flexible and learning as program developed
- Building support among staff and administration
- Individual dedicated staff, project champions

Future Research

Evaluating Success: How do we assess the impact and success of digitization projects beyond web site hits?

Institutional Repositories and Open Access Publishing: How are digital library programs incorporating other related activities like solicitation and management of institutional repository content and open access publishing platforms into their programs?

Building Collaborations: How are different digitization programs building strategic partnerships (and statewide digital initiatives) while continuing to address local priorities?

Integrating Digitized Materials into Curriculum: As more digital content is created and made accessible, how does the library promote the use and integration of digital content in the curriculum (both in higher ed., and in secondary and K-12 education)?

In Their Own Words:

- “The biggest challenges were staffing and funding.”
- “Maintaining the support of the library staff for the digital library and project proposal and planning procedures; publicity; publishing cataloging and digitizing materials; promoting the overall program in order to solicit projects.”

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