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Cory K. Lampert
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, cory.lampert@unlv.edu

Jason Vaughan
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, jason.vaughan@unlv.edu

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

Cory Lampert
Digitization Projects Librarian
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
cory.lampert@unlv.edu

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Jason Vaughan
Director, Library Technologies
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
jason.vaughan@unlv.edu

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.

Findings: Major Challenges and Solutions

Challenges:

• Staffing, 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/Strategies

• Digitization in strategic plan
• Developing faculty collaborations
• Strong infrastructure to build trust
• Supporting open access
• Staying service-oriented
• Selecting items 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

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:

• Digitization White Paper (2006)
• Professional Development Event (2006)
• Digitized questions for staff and stakeholders
• Digitalization in strategic plan

Solutions/Strategies:

• Developed prioritization and proposal decision-making body.

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 released 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?)

For more information: cory.lampert@unlv.edu
jason.vaughan@unlv.edu
http://digital.library.unlv.edu

In Their Own Words:

"Facility collaboration on projects is the biggest factor for success of a digital library project.

"Selecting items based on high research interest"

"Spending time developing our infrastructure, adapting and creating standards and procedures; trying to remain flexible; support from administration, and planning procedures; trying to restructure the staff for the digital library"

"The biggest challenges are staffing and funding."

"Maintaining the support of the library staff for the digital library and project proposals and planning procedures; publicizing; publishing the results of the projects.

"The biggest challenge is managing workflow and keeping things moving forward while continuing to build support for the project."

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: 73%
• Have documentation (mission statements, procedures): 68%
• Digitization program referenced in strategic plan: 63%
• Have a committee for prioritizing projects: 54%