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CASE STUDIES

Evaluating the University of North Texas' Digital Collections and Institutional Repository: An Exploratory Assessment of Stakeholder Perceptions and Use

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ABSTRACT

The University of North Texas (UNT) Libraries conducted a study on the value of the UNT Digital Library, including its UNT Scholarly Works institutional repository, to investigate the value of the UNT Libraries' digital repositories as perceived by UNT faculty, staff, and graduate students. This evaluation of the impact of the UNT Libraries' interventions begins a longitudinal view of the overall impact of these digital repositories in order to inform decisions and provide baseline measurements against which future assessment results can be compared. Findings include that an increase in awareness of the UNT Libraries' digital repositories is statistically associated with a greater likelihood of multiple types of use and contributions back to digital repositories. Also, graduate students are, as a whole, more likely to be aware of and use the UNT Libraries' digital repositories than faculty or staff.

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INTRODUCTION

Academic libraries are increasingly required to demonstrate their value to institutional stakeholders and their impact on institutional missions (ACRL (Association of College and Research Libraries), 2010; Bankier & Smith, 2010; Tenopir, 2013). The scope and content of the scholarly resources within academic libraries' digital repositories directly relate to satisfying these requirements (Fox, 2011). Rapid expansion in web-based technology over the last three decades has led to growth in digital library services and collections. Much of the early research on digital library evaluation focused on system infrastructure and user access (Fuhr et al., 2007). Research concerning the value of digital repositories often concerns repository development, either within a country or at a university, and the challenges of gaining stakeholders' commitment to contribute their scholarly outputs to their institutional repositories (IRs). These remain important issues, but equally so are measures of effectiveness and overall value.

The University of North Texas (UNT) has been on the forefront of mass-digitization and repositories since the creation of the Digital Library Division in 2004. As one of only three universities to serve as an affiliated archive of the National Archives and Records Administration in the United States, and with over 2.5 million newspaper pages

digitized, the UNT Digital Library ranks among the top 25 world repositories (Top Institutional, 2014). Ideas for a statewide portal of Texas history and information began in the early 2000s. Grants for establishing the infrastructure and ingesting content helped The Portal to Texas History grow to become one of the most visited sites in the university's web presence. In 2010, UNT began its institutional repository, called UNT Scholarly Works, in response to the institution's newly created Open Access Policy (UNT (University of North Texas) Open Access Policy, 2012).

Although many statistical indicators are measured internally, such as webpage hits, item downloads, and number of contributing partners, there has been only one formal assessment as to the use of UNT digital collections to date. That study focused specifically on The Portal to Texas History, and found that the collection has a cultural and economic impact on its users, allowing them to access freely-available historical materials for research and personal use (Belden & Murray, 2012).

The objective of the present study is to investigate the value of the UNT Libraries' digital repositories as perceived by UNT faculty, staff, and graduate students. Research questions include:

1. Is there a relationship between the perceived value of the UNT Digital Library or UNT Scholarly Works and an awareness of these resources by UNT faculty, staff, and graduate students?
2. Is there a relationship between the perceived value of the UNT Digital Library or UNT Scholarly Works and contributions to these resources by UNT faculty, staff, and graduate students?
3. Is there a relationship between the perceived value of the UNT Digital Library or UNT Scholarly Works and the use of these resources in coursework or scholarship by UNT researchers?

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4. Are there differences between the perceived value of, or contributions to, the UNT Digital Library or UNT Scholarly Works and the respondent's university positions, department, age groups, gender?

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Because of the abstract nature of many terms in the research questions, the authors provide these operational definitions and measurement techniques.

Value of the UNT Libraries' digital repositories includes faculty, staff, and graduate students' attitudes towards the repositories and their use of the resources in the repositories, expressed as a Likert scale agreement or disagreement with a battery of questions.

Awareness includes the degree of familiarity with specific digital repositories and collections (e.g., UNT Digital Library, UNT Scholarly Works repository) and recognition of the resources (collections) contained within the UNT Libraries' digital repositories.

Contributions to UNT Libraries' digital repositories are scholarly products produced by faculty, staff, and graduate students, measured by the cumulative number of items (i.e., papers, presentations, posters, images, and other item types) submitted for inclusion in the UNT Scholarly Works repository.

Use is reflected in scaled responses regarding the number of citations to resources in the UNT Digital Library and its UNT Scholarly Works repository. Additionally, "use" includes the likelihood that faculty, staff, and graduate students will contribute to the UNT Scholarly Works repository, and the likelihood that faculty will incorporate UNT Digital Library resources in their coursework.

Scholarly Outputs include the number of publications, presentations, performances, and patents in the previous two years by type, including journal articles, books, book chapters, book reviews, edited books or anthologies, and presentations at professional conferences.

Interest is the expected future contribution of scholarly outputs to the UNT Libraries' digital repositories by faculty, staff, and graduate students, expressed in a series of Likert-scaled questions and free-form answers about the respondents' interest in contributing to the UNT Scholarly Works repository collection.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Demonstrable value to the institutional stakeholders and evidence of impact upon the institutional mission are increasingly being required by academic libraries (ACRL (Association of College and Research Libraries), 2010; Bankier & Smith, 2010; Tenopir, 2013). Within the academic libraries' digital repository, the scope and content of scholarly resources directly relate to satisfying these requirements (Bankier & Smith, 2010; Fox, 2011; Kim, 2007). While Markey, Reih, St. Jean, Yakel, and Xingxing (2009) emphasized content recruitment as a critical component to the fundamental premise of institutional repositories (IRs), they also noted that external success factors of an IR include a direct relationship between the institutional and/or library goals and successful use of IR content by users. Research surrounding the value of digital repositories often concerns measurement of repository development, the challenges of gaining stakeholders' commitment to contribute to their scholarly outputs to IRs, copyright and preservation issues, and IR promotion and marketing (Covey, 2011; Creaser, 2010; Cullen & Chawner, 2011).

Cullen and Chawner (2010) conducted an initial investigation of repository users and repositories in New Zealand and discovered that users were more interested in externally developed, discipline-specific repositories than in repositories housed at their own institutions. In fact, the authors find that institutions struggle to gain their own researchers' commitment to contribute their scholarly outputs to repositories. A subsequent study conducted by Cullen and Chawner (2011) revealed that ongoing barriers to depositing in IRs include faculty and IR staff workload, challenges of IR use, lack of awareness, and concerns of data confidentiality. Barriers such as these contributed to the ongoing

low rates of IR deposits, yet were perceived as offering unique opportunities for IR managers to reposition themselves as valuable resource centers for scholarly communication. IR managers during the repositioning process were encouraged to also seek alternate content types for inclusion in the IR, strengthen metadata, and review the IR technical infrastructure to more robustly support existing IR content.

Tripathi and Jeevan (2011) found similar results in India, where institutional repositories faced a huge problem with low quantities of scholarly submissions from researchers. An investigation of Malaysian repositories supports this finding, but suggests that when librarians take an active role in repository collection development and marketing, the number of submissions improves (Kamraninia & Abrizah, 2010). An institutional survey administered by Creaser (2010) to academic institutions located in the UK assessed the impact of open access and self-archiving on IRs' scholarly communication outputs from the research process. Findings indicated that although over half of the responding institutions had mandates in place for deposits to the IR, over half of the researchers participating in the survey did not know the position of their institution on self-archiving and were also unaware of institutional support for self-archiving to the IR. Conversely in Croatia, while the number of repositories is relatively low, there is great interest and awareness of institutional open access repositories and their benefits among librarians (Grgic & Barbaric, 2011).

At the University of Maryland (UMD), Owen (2011) researched the development of the IR and the changes in scope that proved invaluable in the IR development process. The UMD IR was intended as a means to collect faculty-published articles; however, when faced with faculty reluctance to contribute articles, IR scope was expanded to house gray literature as well as graduate and undergraduate research. This facilitated IR population, in addition to addressing the needs of the wider UMD community in a more comprehensive manner. Nneka Eke (2011) investigated the challenges with scholarly content digitization and populating the institutional repository at the University of Nigeria. There was a great deal of interest at their university, but findings revealed that financial constraints and legal issues were the greatest hindrances to populating their institutional repository.

Research at Carnegie Mellon (Covey, 2011) focused on motivators for self-archiving in IRs as the need for ongoing IR deposits is necessary for the IR to be perceived as valuable by its users. Findings noted included factors such as IR awareness, alignment of deposits with existing workflows, and provision of value-added services as being important motivators for self-archiving. Covey indicated that faculty still prefer to self-archive on websites over archiving in the IR. Barriers to the self-archiving process included issues of copyright and publisher policies, and the perception that discoverability and/or access was not a concern within certain disciplines (Covey, 2011). Three groups were identified that remain unrealized potential depositors to the IR: those who already archive either on a personal website or a discipline specific IR, those who remain uninterested in self-archiving in any form, and those who as of yet have an unclear understanding of the legality and copyright issues surrounding self-archiving. Similarly, a study of Texas A&M University faculty (Yang & Li, 2015) found a lack of awareness of the IR and the deposit process, concerns about copyright and publisher policies, and a perception of lower quality and less prestigious items in the IR to be barriers in IR participation.

Dubinsky (2014) conducted a mixed method study of IRs utilizing the Digital Commons platform hosted by the Berkeley Electronic Press to determine the "disciplinary scope of faculty content and to measure the growth rate of IR content" (p. 1). Although the study found that the IR growth rate was increasing, the rate of increase was inconsistent across IRs. It was also noted that discipline-specific contributions to the IR were heavily focused in the Sciences as compared to those made from the Humanities or Social Sciences. IR administrators engaged faculty to procure and mediate IR deposits from faculty while IR administrators also promoted ongoing active engagement to market the "existence, purpose, and benefit" of the IR (p. 18) which are still perceived as

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