shutting it down
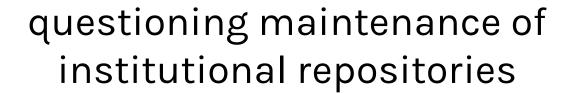
questioning maintenance of institutional repositories

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Overview

- Repositories & the intellectual work of libraries
- Invisible work of maintaining repositories
- Institutional repositories in libraries and why to turn them off
- Library values and faculty research practice
- Attention and repair in IR maintenance work
- Curating knowledge and surfacing value

Repositories & the intellectual work of libraries

- Experience with collaborative work on Fedora and Islandora has shown me that designing and maintaining digital repositories requires expertise that crosses boundaries of librarianship and technology, and when done well, allows libraries to have a modicum of control over the fates of digital objects.

- Hosting an institutional repository requires expertise in data curation and organization of information, both of which are essential in libraries.

- Repository work also engages those with experience specific to software development and system administration.

Invisible work of maintaining repositories

- Despite the high level of intellectual engagement and disciplinary expertise needed in delivering a digital repository and curating digital knowledge, the work is often largely unseen by other departments in the library, and by the college as a whole.

- The invisibility of the work in designing and maintaining these systems obscures the value repositories hold for libraries and institutions in maintaining and curating digital forms of knowledge.

- A better shared understanding of how information organization and software development work together is needed, so the technology doesn't feel magical and the library organization and curation work becomes more deeply embedded in the code.

IRs in libraries and why to turn them off

- The question of turning off an IR should consider staff resources and ongoing budget for institutions planning for and managing digital projects, often digital projects are conceived in ways that fail to consider the commitment of resources for stewarding digital content and systems.

- In part this failure to account for resources up front comes from and the invisibility of digital work compared with physical library materials.

- Repository work needs to be seen not just as picking the right technology, but as a holistic approach to organization of information.

Library values and faculty research practice

- At Amherst the question of turning off the repository system is worthwhile because of low submission rates and the need to best utilize limited staff and budget resources most effectively.

- We are not unusual in having both a faculty-supported open access mandate, while also having faculty not using the institutional repository.

- Across institutions we need to investigate faculty skepticism of the value of open access in comparison to other traditional modes of scholarship, and we need to do more to build systems and standards that better meet our faculty needs so they can understand the value.

Attention and repair in IR maintenance work

- Bethany Nowviskie in her talk/post "On Capacity and Care", talks about an **ethic of care informing capacity building** in digital work, which is much needed in the repository space on all levels. She cites two scholars worth further reading:

- Joan Tronto's discussion of **attention** in an ethic of care speaks to the need to surface the maintenance work of IRs to make it visible and determine real capacity.

- Steven Jackson's discussion of repair and broken world thinking speaks to the need to counter the 'frequent obscurity and ephemerality' of maintenance work in technology and consider how we might extend a **moral/ethical relationship to the realm of things**, specifically technology, and our digital materials.

Curating knowledge and surfacing value

- Seeing repositories as core functionality of libraries and not as bespoke projects is essential to making visible the ongoing maintenance work and honoring the knowledge stewarded by these technologies.

- It is critical to have repository systems that meet needs for curating knowledge, represent our values at the code level, and persist over time through ongoing maintenance and resource support.

- We need to capture the data curation activities that embody the work of institutional repository maintenance, which will help institutions make better decisions about the value placed on maintaining repositories and resources required, and thus have a thoughtful approach to knowing when it makes sense to shut them down.

Thank you!

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Image credit: Quilt Pattern, 290 Postal

Beauchamp, Virginia, "Watercolor painting of a quilt pattern featuring various color rectangles arranged horizontally; based on a quilt belonging to Mrs. White," Quilt Patterns of Onondaga County, 1919-1923, Onondaga County Public Library, Local History and Genealogy Department