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"Institutional" Repositories, Redefined: Reflecting Institutional Commitments to Community Engagement

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Description, Abstract, or Artist's Statement

True to their name, institutional repositories collect, preserve, and provide open access to the scholarly and creative work generated at a specific institution -- typically, a college or university. But is this focus on capturing and curating the work of institutional members -- faculty, staff, and students -- too narrow? What about institutional partnerships with the local community? By limiting the scope of the IR to the university, are we missing an important opportunity to further institutional goals, to create bridges between the institution and its surrounding neighborhoods, to foster collaboration and to cultivate goodwill? When we reimagine the collection development strategies of our repositories, broadening them to include artifacts borne from institutional collaboration with the local community, we have the ability to showcase the unique ways that our universities and local public populations are working together. This essay will explore why the academic library might expand the reach of the IR beyond its own campus, the benefits and challenges of doing so, and will highlight examples of IRs that feature institutional affiliation with the public.

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Abstract: *True to their name, institutional repositories collect, preserve, and provide open access to the scholarly and creative work generated at a specific institution -- typically, a college or university. But is this focus on capturing and curating the work of institutional members -- faculty, staff, and students -- too narrow? What about institutional partnerships with the local community? By limiting the scope of the IR to the university, are we missing an important opportunity to further institutional goals, to create bridges between the institution and its surrounding neighborhoods, to foster collaboration and to cultivate goodwill? When we reimagine the collection development strategies of our repositories, broadening them to include artifacts borne from institutional collaboration with the local community, we have the ability to showcase the unique ways that our universities and local public populations are working together. This essay will explore why the academic library might expand the reach of the IR beyond its own campus, the benefits and challenges of doing so, and will highlight examples of IRs that feature institutional affiliation with the public.*

There are countless examples of higher ed institutions partnering with their local cities and communities, but the following three cases have something unique in common. Can you guess what it is?

In 2016, the James E. Brooks Library of Central Washington University (CWU) engaged its university community and members of the local public in a poetry project that featured a bilingual (Chinese and English) poetry reading in the library. The project sought to bring awareness to the ways in which the Chinese community in the university's town (Ellensburg) and home state (Washington) have been persecuted and excluded from historical accounts, as well as to recognize and celebrate the Chinese language, culture, and contributions of Chinese immigrants to the development of Ellensburg and the Pacific Northwest. Both the planning and delivery of the program included wide representation from both the university (students, international students, faculty, librarians, visiting scholars) and the local public (Hogan, 2018).

Albertsons Library at Boise State University planned and hosted a month-long juried art exhibit in 2015 as a way to engage the Boise community's flourishing arts scene and celebrate the library's 50th anniversary. Approximately half of the 27 artists chosen by blind review for the exhibit represented the university community; the other half came from the local community. At its conclusion, viewers and artists alike expressed positive experiences with the exhibit and its collaboration between the university and the Boise public (Sherman, Watson & Hervochon, 2017).

At my own institution, the San Diego Lowrider Archival Project (https://digital.sandiego.edu/lowriders/) is a collaboration between Copley Library at the University of San Diego (USD); a faculty member in Ethnic Studies who researches lowriding;

the director of community engagement at a local non-profit and himself a founding member and former president of a lowrider car club; and the city's lowrider community, particularly the Logan Heights neighborhood. The project documents the history of lowriding in San Diego and the surrounding borderlands from its inception in the mid-twentieth century to the present day by preserving and showcasing materials such as photographs, car club documents (e.g., official records and meeting minutes), dance posters, memorabilia, lowrider art, etc. These artifacts reflect defining qualities of the lowrider movement -- creativity, independence, cultural pride, resistance, activism, community service, collectivism, tradition and ritual, and cultural continuity -- and until now, they have mostly been part of individuals' personal collections without a central point of access. Seeking to engage and inspire key constituents and community members -- current and future lowriders, educators and elders, regional car club members, students and employees at USD, and the public -- the project goes beyond preserving a historical legacy. It aims to impact present-day participants by encouraging relationship formation and bridge-building across diverse groups (Makula, Laughtin-Dunker, & Mann, 2018).

Here's the commonality: each of these three examples of university outreach to the local community utilize the institutional repository (IR). The Brooks library archived the audio recording of the poetry reading in its IR, *ScholarWorks@CWU* (https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/lib_poetry2016/1/). Albertsons Library curated the artists' works in an online IR gallery, with metadata descriptors to enhance discoverability and viewers' understanding of the pieces (http://scholarworks.boisestate.edu/anniversary_exhibition/). And at the University of San Diego, the Lowrider Archival Project is a signature collection (https://digital.sandiego.edu/lowriders/) in *Digital USD*, the school's IR, featuring 334 images across 36 car clubs. At this writing, the collection has generated over 400 downloads and 4,500 metadata page hits.

College and university collaboration with the outside public community is nothing new, but featuring that collaboration in the institutional repository *is*, at least as evidenced by the dearth of examples in the library literature. Why? Yes, it's true that by their very name, IRs are intended to capture the intellectual and creative output of their parent institution. As the Coalition for Networked Information (CNI) decreed in its 2017 executive roundtable report, "the priority for IRs is to capture all types of content *produced by the institutional community*" (emphasis mine) (p. 5). But this has proved problematic. Numerous articles and essays highlight the challenges of obtaining content from members of the institution, and therefore "institutional repositories remain an underutilised resource in many universities" (Narayan & Luca, 2017, para. 7). Difficulties harvesting internal content are likely due to a variety of factors: limited faculty time and buy-in, ineffective marketing, competition from subject repositories and/or academic social networking sites, confusion interpreting publishers' copyright policies or lack of access to preprints, poorly designed or unfriendly user interfaces, etc.

In the midst of these challenges, is it time for a paradigm shift? Do we need to look at the IR with fresh eyes, to redefine what it is and how it should operate?

Perhaps IRs need to become more flexible, more adaptable to their unique institutional contexts, to derive their purpose not from the library community, but from their parent institution. After all, while the IR may be managed by library faculty or staff, it is a university-wide endeavor. Its vitality and relevancy hinges on the participation of constituents across campus. On a practical level, in an era of ubiquitous budget cuts and the need for services and activities to prove their worth, tying the purpose and value of the IR to the priorities of the institution simply makes smart business sense. If the IR makes explicit the ways in which it can help fulfill the institution's strategic plan, the greater the likelihood that it will be recognized, supported, and embraced as an integral component of the university.

Take the University of San Diego, for example. My institution places a high value on community engagement. Our strategic plan, *Envisioning 2024* (https://www.sandiego.edu/envisioning-2024/overview/), proclaims: "to be a great international university we must first be an anchor institution for our local community . . . We have an obligation to elevate our engagement across our campus and into our San Diego communities." This institutional focus on the local community has meant that our IR needed to evolve from a university-centric operation to a broader, more expansive one, aligning itself with external entities. Rather than restricting content to university-produced material, *Digital USD* needed to welcome items borne from partnerships with the outside community. The library's Scholarly Communication Committee incorporated this institutional emphasis on community engagement into a new mission statement for the IR:

Digital USD publishes, preserves, and provides open online access to the scholarship, creative work, original data sets, and archival material produced by or affiliated with the University of San Diego community. By curating and sharing these historical and current intellectual activities, Digital USD showcases and connects the unique contributions of the university's faculty, staff, and students to an audience worldwide, fueling new research, discoveries, and knowledge. Digital USD supports Envisioning 2024: The Strategic Plan for the University of San Diego, with special attention to the following pathways:

- *Anchor Institution: Digital USD is an institution-wide, collaborative endeavor, featuring a wide range of projects across campus, as well as partnerships with the local community and outside organizations*

- *Engaged Scholarship: Digital USD shares the academic excellence of the university with the entire world, promoting the discovery, integration, and formation of new knowledge*

- *Access and Inclusion: Digital USD promotes free, open, unrestricted access to and discovery of its materials, and seeks to include a diversity of voices and perspectives*

- ***Practice Changemaking:*** *Digital USD celebrates changemaking by showcasing endeavors characterized by active citizenship, positive social change, innovation, and community engagement*

This mission statement signaled a new conception of the IR. No longer was it defined primarily as a platform, a system, or a service. Instead, now it was understood as a bridge between the University of San Diego and the outside world, an instrument helping to build and nurture institutional-community relationships, foster collaboration, and cultivate goodwill. This broader scope meant more opportunities for content and more opportunities to engage new affiliates. As a result, *Digital USD* began to expand.

Over the past few years, our IR has become host not only to the lowrider project mentioned previously, but also to the Nonprofit Institute's reports and best practice library (https://digital.sandiego.edu/npi/), a wealth of materials by and about local and state community organizations. (Fun fact: the most-often downloaded item in the entire IR is the "Sample Advisory Board Invitation Letter/Email" in the Governance collection by the Nonprofit Institute: https://digital.sandiego.edu/npi-bpl-governance/14/). *Digital USD* was also used to showcase videotaped oral history conversations between undergraduate students in a Business Ethics course and local social entrepreneurs (https://digital.sandiego.edu/phil332/), a project supported by the university's Changemaker Hub, itself an outgrowth of the *Envisioning 2024* plan.

USD is certainly not alone in its emphasis on community engagement. A 2019 research report conducted by the Thriving Cities Lab at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia surveyed 100 urban universities and discovered that 74% articulate a commitment to public service in their mission statements and 94% commit to community engagement in their strategic plan (Yates & Accardi, p. 14). According to Dr. Joshua Yates, one of the report's authors, "Over the past three decades, urban university-community partnerships have moved from dispersed and provisional ad hoc relationships to intentional and systematic institutional commitments" (as cited in Jones, 2019, para. 4).

If your own institution is turning its attention toward the local community, you may be thinking about how to pivot the IR outward, beyond the campus and into the surrounding neighborhood, community, and city. Based on my experiences reimagining *Digital USD*, here are a few suggestions to get started:

1. *Look for existing relationships between the institution and the public, such as:*

- Partnerships between faculty members and community organizations, both research and teaching projects
- Offices or institutes on campus that work with community populations
- Courses that involve interactions with community participants
- Connections between the university and local public schools and/or public libraries

- Events, such as a lecture series, that brings together university members and community attendees

2. *Meet with the university representatives of these projects to exchange information*

Learn more about the project: when it started, what exactly it does, what kinds of content it produces, etc. Demonstrate the IR and highlight its key capabilities. Listen to their needs, concerns, and questions. Discuss whether or not the project is appropriate for a permanent, open access platform, including the importance of community participants' informed consent. (If a project involves private, sensitive information, the IR is not a good choice.) Discuss how you will communicate the IR and its role to the community participants, how you will obtain their permission and encourage their active involvement.

3. *If the IR is deemed an appropriate venue, develop a method for intake and curation of materials and metadata*

There are many questions to consider at the implementation stage. How will you obtain and ingest the material into the IR? Who will lead this process? Who will supply the metadata? (And what metadata should you capture?) Will there be a mechanism for participants to report errors or request changes? What happens when new materials are created after the initial ingest, or when existing ones are updated?

4. *Share!*

It's crucial to get the word out, both to members of the institution and members of the community. Think about how you can celebrate new collections in interesting ways. At USD, we selected ten images from the lowrider project and created postcards from them, which we distributed at the annual Chicano Park Day festival and at a special lowrider event at the Logan Heights public library branch. They've been a big hit and have helped bring awareness to the collection in *Digital USD*.

Maybe your IR is flourishing, and you have more content than you can ever possibly hope to ingest. Maybe your institution has priorities other than partnerships with the public. Maybe you are consumed by a technical project, such as a migration to a new platform. In these cases, it's probably not the right time to reimagine your IR. On the other hand, if you are looking for new ways to grow your IR, to expand its scope and its impact, and if your institution is doing creative, innovative things beyond its campus: this is your chance! Conditions are ripe to consider how to increase the relevancy of the IR with materials created by university-community partnerships. Are you doing this already, or about to embark on the journey? Let me know; I want to hear about it! amakula@sandiego.edu

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