Cleaning out the Roach Motel: Transforming the Neglected IR into a Five-Star Scholarship Resort

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Session Type

- Presentation

Abstract

In 2008, Dorothea Salo published the memorable article, *Innkeeper at the Roach Motel,* in which she writes that libraries have consistently understaffed and undervalued repositories, hoping faculty will deposit their work without any incentive. When faculty refuse, libraries have thrown "open the repository to any sort of content in order to justify its existence" (Salo, 2008). Nearly ten years later, and this article still rings painfully true. How does an established repository correct the course, especially when the topic of deleting items and creating tombstones is so taboo? Elisabeth Shook, Scholarly Communications Librarian at Vanderbilt University, will discuss measures she's taken to transform the roach motel IR into a clean resort for quality scholarship produced at VU, thus enabling the Vanderbilt Libraries to continue to advocate for sustainable open access.

Conference Themes

● Community - reaching out to new audiences, developing a community, governance
● Content - research data, digital preservation, persistent urls, archiving
● Teams/People - staff and knowledge within the community, contingency planning, training and development, and succession planning
● Challenges of sustainability - funding, local, technical, community

Keywords

Institutional Repository Cleanup, Sustainable Open Access, Best Practices for Institutional Repositories

Audience

All institutional repository managers will find this presentation of interest.

Background

The consensus in academia is that academic publishing is costly, cumbersome, and quite frankly, broken. Several academic institutions are cancelling their Big Deal contracts due to budget constraints, and many disciplines are turning to alternative methods of disseminating high quality research to the public without the high price tag and lag times between writing and publication. Institutional repositories have often been viewed as the saviors of the academic publishing problem, however, buy-in from faculty and campus administrators is oftentimes less than stellar. How can repository administrators continue to build sustainable open access platforms that are marketable to campus stakeholders? This presentation addresses why IRs have not quite become the default for sustainable open access, but how they can do so in the future by creating a shiny product which faculty will want to take part in.

Content

In 2008, Dorothea Salo published the memorable article, *Innkeeper at the Roach Motel,* in which she writes that libraries have consistently understaffed and undervalued repositories, hoping faculty will deposit their work without any incentive to do so. When faculty refuse, libraries have thrown "open the repository to any sort of content in order to justify its existence" (Salo, 2008). Nearly ten years later, and this article still rings painfully true. How does an established repository correct the course? This presentation will discuss measures the repository manager has taken to transform the roach motel IR into a clean resort for quality scholarship produced at VU, thus enabling the Vanderbilt University Libraries to continue to advocate for sustainable open access.

Academic libraries often suffer from the "if we build it, they will come" syndrome, and open institutional repositories are an unfortunate, shining example of this. Institutional repositories started springing up shortly after the 2002 Budapest Open Access Initiative calling for the academic publishing industry to awaken to the power of the newly connected world and make research available for free. According to the Directory of Open Access Repositories (OpenDOAR), as of January 8, 2018, there are 3,464 repositories worldwide. IRs are viewed as an important component of several higher education campuses and other entities worldwide, but continue to have a very poor/non-existent reputation at some institutions, Vanderbilt included.

Vanderbilt University's institutional repository, DiscoverArchive, was founded in 2005. After undergoing several modifications in library leadership, iterations in design, IR managers, and changes in technology, the product I inherited as the newly hired IR manager was an open repository full of work that Dorothea would no-doubt lovingly call "roaches." The workflow of the repository before my arrival was outdated, and though devised with the intention of building an open database of Vanderbilt research, allowed enough ambiguity for those on campus to use it as an asset management software. Collections only for library staff, outdated special collections finding aides, and a collection of work used *by* (not authored by) a faculty member are a few of the more egregious examples of items not necessarily within the purview of an institutional repository.

The inclusion of these items in DiscoverArchive resulted in not only a lackluster open database to which nobody wanted to contribute, but also a large amount of confusion and lack of clarity regarding what

materials should be collected in the IR. This was especially problematic when those confused were the subject and department liaisons who are familiar with the academic output of the faculty, staff, and students with who they regularly interact. Liaison input is vital to the success of institutional repositories. As the manager, I am one person in a library system of over 160 staff. Liaisons are the most effective way of spreading the message of open access and the benefits of including work in the institutional repository.

My approach to cleaning out the "Roach Motel" and creating a cleaner, more marketable, and ultimately more sustainable repository was three-fold. First, I determined all noticeable problems in DiscoverArchive, whether they be technology glitches as is common in locally-hosted open-source software, or collections that did not match the mission of the institutional repository. Second, I reassessed workflows and devised a training plan for liaison librarians to begin actively recruiting and ingesting material in DiscoverArchive. And third, I took advantage of every opportunity to market the IR and open access to the Vanderbilt campus. These steps continue to produce a cleaner and more sustainable platform for open research.

My first step when becoming the new repository manager for VU's DiscoverArchive was a full-scale assessment of the problems as I become more familiar with the system. Vanderbilt's instance of DSpace is locally-hosted by our wonderful library IT team, however, the IR suffered from being without leadership for nearly a year after enduring several changes in leadership, and as we know, only squeaky wheels get the grease. I documented, and continue to document all problems I encountered on the technology side of the repository and submitted them to the IT team.

I also worked diligently to understand what was in the repository, why it was there, and decide if it was worth cleaning out. The IR has never had a collection development policy, and admittedly, I'm hesitant to implement one due to the fact that I want to be flexible when deciding to add materials. I don't want to give an excuse to anyone evaluating materials for inclusion in the IR to say "No." Eventually, however, decisions to include nearly *anything* were made by repository managers, and the result truly was a roach motel of materials that were seeing very low use and creating a less than ideal platform for showcasing Vanderbilt's research. The taboo subject of refusing materials, deleting items, destroying permanent URLs, and creating tombstones in the repository always fosters a feeling of hesitancy when deciding to curate materials, however, there were a few select collections that were not getting use and creating the epitome of a roach motel, scaring away any potential guests.

I then focused my efforts on devising a more sustainable workflow. Catalogers were recruited to check each item and assign Library of Congress Subject Headings as they were ingested. Not only were the catalogers overworked, but they felt as if this piece of their job was unnecessary to the discoverability and search-ability of the repository. Because of this, items would often not be posted for months after ingestion due to waiting on a cataloger's expertise. While I find assigning LCSH valuable, I also know that repositories are relying more and more on natural language processing and full-text searching capabilities. LCSH were only necessary for the records to be added to our discovery layer. Due to this, most catalogers, with a few exemptions, have been released from IR duty.

Another piece of creating a sustainable workflow was to move from the self-submission model, which Salo and IR managers frequently identify as problematic, to the mediated deposit model. I devised a workflow with the director of our science library to begin training science and engineering liaisons on

adding research to the repository. This training included copyright and publisher rights checking, writing simple Dublin Core metadata, OCRing items, and batch uploading using the Simple Archival Format Packager.

Finally, the last major piece of creating a marketable and sustainable institutional repository was to advertise the benefits of IRs and open access publishing at every opportunity. Whenever I explained the repository and its capabilities, especially in the form of a data repository with the ability to register for DOIs and commitment to long-term preservation by the Library, researchers were very excited about the resources we offered to the campus and slightly confused when they had not heard about the great services the VU Libraries offered. Unfortunately, this is a common complaint I hear from other campuses. Most people agree the open institutional repository and its capabilities are valuable to the changing academic publishing landscape, but without effective marketing, the message is lost.

These steps, though effective in creating a better product, are never complete. Progress means reassessing the process often and pivoting if something fails. To the best of my knowledge, no repository manager has found the magic bullet for participation and use, nor what exactly a successful open institutional repository looks like. These efforts, however, continue to move Vanderbilt's institutional repository, DiscoverArchive, toward a more sustainable future by exterminating the roaches and creating a more welcoming product.

Conclusion

Presentation participants will feel empowered to:

1. Determine the situation in their institutional repositories and take control of problem areas
2. Assess workflows that have been unsuccessful in the population of the IR
3. Rejuvenate marketing of the IR and open access on their campus
4. Clean out the Roach Motel

Repository System

● Not Applicable

References

OpenDOAR Chart - Proportion of Repositories by Continent - Worldwide. (n.d.). Retrieved January 8, 2018, from http://www.opendoar.org/.

Salo, D. (2008). Innkeeper at the Roach Motel. *Library Trends*, *57* (2), 98-123.