

BEST OF THE LITERATURE

Brad Vogus, Column Editor

Column description. *Best of the Literature* keeps librarians, administrators, and staff informed about recent, relevant, and practical scholarship in the field. Each column focuses on a specific theme and highlights significant resources published in recent years. Columns begin with a brief introduction to the topic and include annotated references from selected works. Readers are invited to suggest themes, topics, or resources to the editor.

Title: Institutional repositories and student work in digital humanities

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Keywords: academic libraries, institutional repository, digital projects

Abstract:

Institutional repositories (IR) preserve the scholarly work of the university's students and researchers. How are IR and scholars working together to preserve digital scholarly work? The following articles examine how digital scholarly work is utilizing IR in academic libraries. Overall, the authors encourage more institutional support and rally IR administrators and librarians to find opportunities to advocate for the maintenance and accessibility of preserved digital projects, such as career development and storytelling. Additionally, adjusting workflows and scholarly expectations in order to find a middle ground and connect with students expresses intentionality and can provide a better context when preserving digital projects.

Introduction:

Institutional repositories (IR) in academic libraries preserve scholarly papers, such as master's or doctoral theses and dissertations, as well as undergraduate honors theses, for research purposes. As technology advances, more students are going beyond the written work and creating digital projects integrating objects of varying formats. What kind of digital projects have been preserved on IR?

The following articles, published in the last five years, examine how digital projects have been preserved and made accessible by IR at academic libraries, including web publishing projects, art galleries, student films, and academic games. Engagement with IR was a common theme in the first four articles, and was described as submissions and user access. Submissions occurred through departmental collaborations and degree program requirements, and promoted digital rights literacy, metadata literacy, and career development. When IR was made accessible to users, engagement was positive, but left more to be desired of the interface for the medium being shared. As more digital projects are being created, submission workflows in legacy IR may not be able to accommodate them, so the authors in the third article recommended finding

a middle ground. The authors demonstrate this by prototyping guidelines for submitting front matter that equate to traditional requirements of scholarly work, while also serving as a map to components of the digital project that may be located elsewhere. The last article describes digital projects that are popular to produce, but difficult to preserve and maintain without institutional support or a clear understanding of their role in research. They indicate opportunities for improvement of IR support.

Articles:

Sadow, S. & Becher, M. (2023). Capstone innovation: Supporting art history students' digital projects at American University. *VRA Bulletin*, 50(2), Article 3.

<https://online.vraweb.org/index.php/vrab/article/view/237>

The authors document the University Library at American University and its activities, from production to preservation, with the digital capstone initiative in collaboration with the Art History Program.

They compare two web publishing platforms that the library provides instructional support for: the proprietary EdSpace by WordPress, which offers out-of-the-box design templates and an intuitive user interface, and the open source Omeka S, which offers flexibility but requires library maintenance and more effort to learn. For digital project authors, the crucial difference is their storage methods. EdSpace cannot be hosted and maintained on the institution's servers, so projects are accessible on private WordPress servers for 3 years. The authors document how EdSpace projects undergo an additional archival workflow using Archive-It to preserve a local copy of the project with working links and complex digital objects. Omeka S, on the other hand, can be installed on the institutional repository (IR), and projects built on it can be preserved for as long as the IR exists.

The authors note that the preservation of digital projects provides an opportunity for an institutional repository to not only support students in their careers but also impact information, archival, and digital literacy in future humanities workers.

Watson, E. J. & Dworak, E. (2022). Impact of an institutional repository on viewers' experiences of a student art exhibition. *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication*, 10(1), Article eP12910. <http://doi.org/10.31274/jlsc.12910>

The authors compare the viewing of student art exhibitions in-person and online using an institutional repository (IR) as an additional factor to consider enhancing repositories to accommodate and encourage the deposit of creative works.

The research included a post-exhibition survey where respondents answered questions about the amount of works they saw, whether they read the artist's statements and found them beneficial, the amount of time they spent at the exhibition and the average amount of time they spent looking at each work, and what they liked most about the exhibition. While the results indicated that the in-person experience is preferred, they found that online participants read the artists' statements more than in-person participants. Online participants also appreciated having the resource available to refer to later on.

Suggested improvements to the IR gallery included features to allow more viewer engagement, such as a comment system, to accommodate video and audio that may be part of a student's artwork, and to make the interface more intuitive for viewers to understand that they can inspect artwork with zoom features. The authors find that preservation and access in the IR provide greater exposure to students and the ability for future students to view their predecessors' artwork.

Shirazi, R. & Zweibel, S. (2020). Documenting digital projects: Instituting guidelines for digital dissertations and theses in the humanities. *College & Research Libraries*, 81(7), 1123–1142. <http://doi.org/10.5860/crl.81.7.1123>

With the growing number of multimodal or born-digital projects in the humanities, institutional repositories (IR) are challenged to provide findability, access, and context to projects with complex digital objects. The authors of the paper created a prototype of guidelines, mapping them to functions of an existing writing style of front matter sections for research papers, theses, and dissertations.

To create the prototype, the authors analyzed and coded the digital objects contained in each multimodal digital deposit, which included code, data, images, text-bearing objects, sound, and tools. With this in mind, they examined the functions of the Turabian style of front matter, used in many traditional theses and dissertations, and proposed new submission guidelines that would serve digital projects. For digital projects, the "Table of Contents" is a "Digital Manifest," the "Editorial Method" is a "Note on Technical Specifications," the "List of Abbreviations" is a "List of Variables," and the "Glossary" is a "Glossary of Functions."

The authors provided a thorough background discussion that includes the increasing number of humanities students producing born-digital projects to enhance their career options outside of academic institutions, and the responsibility and policies that IR administrators adhere to in approving degree requirements and preserving scholarly contributions. With this article, they contributed a way to bridge the needs of students and the capabilities of legacy processes until a better one becomes available.

Lyon, D. & Sloggett, R. (2023). Narrating the preservation of a film school archive - Re-configuring the hero's journey across the nexus of conservation and film production. *Archival Science*, 23(4), 527–544. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-023-09418-6>

If you are curious about how to use narrative framework theory to talk about preservation of creative works and technology, this article will not disappoint. The authors map storytelling elements that emphasize the transmission of ideas across time and place to win over stakeholders and effectively make decisions for the Victorian College of Arts (VCA) Film Archives.

The authors employ historical narratives to give readers a look at the VCA Film Archive's identity and ties with famous alumni. A contemporary narrative is utilized to bring us to modern-day born-digital student films that were inaccessible due to the institution's outdated copyright and distribution policies. From there, the authors constructed a narrative where the archive is the hero and the inaction by the institution responsible for it is the villain. The authors then take

readers on a side quest to understand the abundant and continual production of films, as expected by a film school in the practice of filmmaking, and the multitude of meanings and their contribution to the social and cultural present and future. We are then given a look into the protagonist's six-year challenge of producing an archive with an uninterested institution. The protagonist had to turn to applying for funds, leading them to identify what was critical: an archive that could accommodate the workflows of professional standards necessary for retrieval, identification, provenance, and other legalities, as well as the ability to engage with an audience. In the end, they were able to achieve a partially institutionally supported archive that is continually maintained, updated, and coupled with an education and outreach program.

The authors provide an epilogue that brings readers back to reality because there is no such thing as a self-sustaining hero in the Hollywood construct. This reality calls for vision and new narratives to support sustainable preservation practice.

Chen, M. & Morrell, E. (2025). Exploring the purpose and development of academic games: An analysis of games reported at the Foundations of Digital Games Conference (2007-2024). *Proceedings of the 20th International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games*, Article 39, 1–10. <http://doi.org/10.1145/3723498.3723823>

This article is an analysis of academic game development, a creative medium that students are increasingly given technological access to produce, to identify emerging trends and their role in research. The authors distinguish academic games from others by their intentions being beyond 'fun' and published for research purposes.

The authors thematically analyzed a corpus of 1437 articles in academic game development written for the Foundations of Digital Games Conference. These included post-mortems, used as sources of study of design and development processes, and student projects, used as sources to study factors that lead to successful games. The research looked at what development platforms were used, development cycles where iteration, challenges, and design decisions took place, and most importantly, the game's purpose, as a reminder of its academic intentions. From this data, the authors presented seven categories of purpose for which games are developed, and also shared their findings on how games are utilized, shared, and preserved.

In terms of preservation, the authors found that preserved academic games were prone to link-rot and that there is a lack of a consistent record of games presented at conferences. The popular Adobe Flash game Prom Week archived its development materials on a university server accessible only to affiliates, and a playable version is only available on the non-profit Flashpoint Archive. The most stable records are recorded in text, such as design documents and post-mortem reflections, but without a playable artifact, the researchers categorize them as works of game design fiction.

The authors focus on the role of academic games by presenting the research opportunities taken and, in the process, bring to light issues of academic game development preservation. They suggest making exceptions to preserve student projects that include a lesser academic style of writing in available project documentation, such as post-mortems and game design documents, but most importantly, a playable product. The authors provide valuable insight for

institutional repository (IR) administrators to understand the current landscape of academic game preservation and how it can move this popular field of research forward.

Notes on contributor:

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