

DIKTUON: *Digital Repositories and Theological Libraries*

by Andrew Keck

Libraries and institutional archives have a significant role in collecting the intellectual output of our institutions. Collecting faculty output often involves purchasing faculty books and subscriptions to particular journals. Some libraries create vertical files or other kinds of dedicated space to collect the published and unpublished works of a faculty member. Theses and dissertations as well as some honors papers are the only types of student work that are systematically collected by the library. A digital repository seeks to collect both faculty and student intellectual output in digital form.

Faculty using a digital repository could have more than a simple curriculum vitae but a digital collection of published and unpublished material that other researchers could actually search, browse, and read. As repositories are normally set up using an open-access model, the audience for faculty scholarship could extend to every person with a connection to the internet. This provides an extraordinary opportunity for various significant scholarly exchanges with scholars that teach in international contexts or have limited library resources.

Likewise, a digital repository provides a greater exposure to student work. Obtaining a dissertation or thesis submitted to another institution can be both difficult and expensive. By having student theses and dissertations in an open digital repository, the bibliographical, research, and intellectual work is then easily available for use by students and researchers at other institutions.

TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

There are several choices for software supporting a digital repository. Among the most popular are DSpace, <http://www.dspace.org/>, Fedora, <http://www.fedora-commons.org/>, and ePrints, <http://www.eprints.org/>. Each of these is free open-source software that requires a minimal web server and relational database. While each of these will run “out of the box,” most institutions will want to make various configurations and customizations based on their particular needs. Special attention will need to be given to how digital items are to be submitted, organized, and displayed.

FORMAT AND METADATA

Digital repositories normally accept work in PDF format and can also directly accept a wide range of multimedia files. As different programs and schools require certain formatting conventions (a cover sheet, citation styles, paper margins), there may be substantial variation among the documents in a digital repository. Those who submit material to a digital repository will also typically need to prepare metadata such as name, titles, abstract, keywords, or key phrases. Depending on the standards for a digital repository and/or the inclusion of certain items (such as dissertations) in the library catalog, the metadata may need to be enhanced by library staff or others.

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Generally, papers in digital repository are web accessible under a Creative Commons license. Students and others must sign a license that allows an institution to distribute these documents on the website and to certify that any previously copyrighted material used is either within “fair use” or with the written permission of the copyright

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owner. The digital repository prominently posts the Creative Commons license accompanied by a copyright statement indicating the author's continuing rights. In cases where submission to a digital repository is required (typically for student work), policies may allow for a delay in "publishing" a work in the digital repository if there are copyright or patent issues that need to be resolved.

APPROVALS AND WORKFLOW

Especially in the case of student work submitted to fulfill a degree requirement, approvals may be significant to the workflow. Most institutions do not want dissertations not yet approved to be publicly posted in a way that makes them appear approved or finished. One possible workflow might involve the student submitting the paper electronically to the digital repository but the paper not appearing publicly until approved by one or more advisors. Workflows can also include an opportunity for library staff or others to correct or enhance metadata.

SUCCESS AND CHALLENGES

While the concept of digital repositories has been widely championed, the reality has been underwhelming at most institutions. The slow growth of digital repositories is largely attributed to a lack of incentives for participation, especially for faculty. The majority of items in most institutional repositories are student work. This can be explained by the heightened incentive of students to deposit their work as part of the degree completion requirements.

Schools with more successful digital repositories have made significant efforts to solicit content, build incentives for faculty to participate, and position the digital repository within already existing workflows for scholarly production. Libraries will need to work with campus decision makers to investigate, establish, and create policies and incentives around digital repositories. Librarians will need to play an active role in discovering, soliciting, and fully describing content.

The promise of digital repositories includes the capturing, organizing, preserving, and exposing of the intellectual output of an institution in a way that may heighten both visibility and access to that content. A sustained effort led by the library will be needed in order to make that promise a reality.

