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# Going in Reverse to Go Forward: Institutional Repositories and The New York Public Library

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The Research Libraries of the New York Public Library is one of the most significant public information centers in the world. Since the opening in 1911 of its flagship building at Fifth Avenue and 42<sup>nd</sup> Street in the heart of Manhattan, the Library has aimed to serve people from all walks of life and on a global scale.

Prior to 9/11, if an immigrant from Benin arrived at the Library directly after landing at the JFK airport, that individual could walk into the public library and request the latest issue of *Jeune Afrique* (West Africa's equivalent to *Newsweek* or *Time Magazine*) with no question as to his origin or affiliation. This unusual concept worked until the Twin Towers came under attack. Today, that same person, armed simply with a passport or some valid form of identification, could gain access to one of the richest collections in the world.

The New York Public Library is not only a service institution; it is also an institution that collects for the historical record. James Wood Henderson, one of the Library's former directors, introduced the Library's Book Selection Policy in 1971, stating, "The ideal research library would be a complete record of man's ideas, emotions and actions. In practice a research library must preserve the essential records of each generation... The choice of material should not be affected by what the librarian or the contemporary public regards as good or important. Standards of taste and value change with time. A great research library must record life as it passes, its evil, vulgarity and triviality, as well as its more agreeable aspects." (Henderson, 1973).

Paul LeClerc, President of the NYPL, echoes Henderson's words by commenting, "Libraries are the memories of humankind, irreplaceable repositories of documents of human thought and action. The New York Public Library is such a memory bank par excellence ... " (Dain, 2000).

The storage capacity available through digitizing information now allows large and small libraries alike, the ability to store their essential records, thereby documenting humankind's history.

The catalyst in the development of institutional repositories is the Open Archives Initiative (OAI: <http://www.openarchives.org>), which has provided the impetus for the creation of free information in a web-based environment using standard OAI software. (Tenopir, 2004). The use of OAI standards is beginning to take hold on campuses across the nation and the globe, and the effect on scholarly, as well as general communication, will be profound.

In framing the development issues for IRs, SPARC (Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition) recommends that librarians actively participate. In its position paper, *The Case for Institutional Repositories*, SPARC asserts that “establishing an institutional repository programme indicates that a library seeks to move beyond its custodial role to contribute actively to the evolution of scholarly communication. For libraries with an organisational imperative to invest in the future, institutional repositories offer a compelling response. In the long-term, organizing and maintaining digital content should remain the responsibility of the library.” (Caldwell, 2004)

The Library’s critical role in producing metadata under the OAI Protocol for Metadata Harvesting ensures the long-term viability of researchers gaining access to materials housed in an IR. The ability of an institution to harvest and maintain a repository of articles, dissertations, theses and a range of other intellectual products including music and video produced under the auspices of a particular institution gives that institution the output of its intellectual property. It will allow each institution to act as a publisher and distributor of information.

Ann Wolpert of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology proposes in her PowerPoint presentation that to support a new model, new tools are required. “We must share innovation and information, assure affordability and access, build ‘the record’ in new formats, and preserve the record in new formats.” (Wolpert, 2004).

It is generally understood that there are five areas for development of an institutional repository: article preprints and postprints, theses and dissertations; management of digital collections; preservation of digital materials; housing of teaching materials; and electronic publishing of journals and books. (Cervone, 2004)

How will the New York Public Library and, in turn, other public libraries utilize Institutional Repositories?

The New York Public Library is a large and complex institution that is generally organized into two entities: the Research Libraries and the Branch Libraries (where materials are circulated). The Research Libraries consist of four centers housing vast collections of scholarly and general materials: The Humanities and Social Sciences Library, The Science Industry and Business Library, The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and The Library for the Performing Arts.

The mission of the Research Libraries is to serve the information needs of scholars, especially those that are independent and unaffiliated. The Branch Libraries provide circulating materials and a myriad of information services to meet the needs of their community constituents; the Branch Libraries maintain five Central Libraries that provide more in-depth services, especially for high school students and college undergraduates.

The New York Public Library is a privately managed, non-profit corporation governed by a self-perpetuating Board of Trustees. (Dain, 2000). The Trustees appoint the President of the Library who reports to them. There is a Director of the Research Libraries as well as a Director of the Branch Libraries. The Board of Trustees, the President, the two Directors, and a Vice President for Finance are responsible for charting the future direction of the New York Public Library.

Libraries can play a critical role in the development of Institutional Repositories. While the NYPL does not fit neatly into the models of a traditional IR, there are ways the NYPL could contribute. The New York Public Library should take advantage of digital space to foster scholarship, develop a culture of automating in-house web-based products including portions of the Library's digital program, and digitize the extensive records of the Library in a deep archive.

Open access software has acted as a catalyst to the development of the Institutional Repository concept. The MIT experience has influenced many academic libraries to embrace this software development. Where do public libraries fit into this picture? The NYPL does not have a faculty, a student body, a controlled population, or a source of dissertations, theses, papers, prep-prints, courseware, syllabi, etc.

The NYPL does have records of great historical value including: annual reports, memoranda and handwritten notes of the New York Public Library and its antecedent libraries dating back into the mid-nineteenth century. Some of these documents include the papers of former directors including John Shaw Billings (in sixty cartons); construction documents including blueprints and drawings for NYPL buildings such as those for the Central Building as well as some of the Carnegie libraries; papers, brochures, descriptive materials for many neighborhood libraries in Manhattan, Staten Island and the Bronx; original audio and video recordings including public programs and oral histories in many formats; and official publications of the Library and 500,000 digital images.

One of the most significant aspects of the Institutional Repository model is the ability to capture the essential records of each generation without regard for popularity or current use. The NYPL, for most of its history, was not user driven. In fact, for most of its history, the Library staff presumed that "current use does not constitute value." The criteria used for adding an item or items to the collection were whether the material had long-term reference value. The digital archive concept allows the Library the opportunity to reconsider the "current use" criterion

as we deliberate over the use of an IR in digital space (Dspace). As an example of how the public library might use the IR as a digital archive, let us consider a recent event.

On May 11, 2004, *The New York Times* published a story titled: "My Back Pages, a Vivid History." Largely culled from the archives of the NYPL, two reporters spent several days poring over paper records of the Seward Park Branch, located on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The Seward Park Branch is rich in ethnic New York history. The observations of librarians over the years in this particular branch make for compelling readings in social history.

The NYPL has internal records dating back to the early part of the twentieth century. These records come in the form of annual reports and needs assessments that provide insight to the political, social and economic conditions of a particular period. A cursory review of these records includes some of the persistent issues that face any library dealing with members of the public.

The challenges to the establishment of Institutional Repositories at the NYPL are funding, opaque terminology, need for director-level decisions, maintenance and migration of data, lack of standards, rights issues, access issues, and preserving confidentiality.

The funding issue, aside from the hardware required to run an IR, includes the development of staff to create and maintain the archive. Quality individuals are needed in areas of digital creation and preservation to control administrative costs. Maintenance and migration of data will occur over time, so planning and implementation issues will need the cooperation of various units within the Library. The development of standards, especially with regard to metadata, is essential to the creation of reasonable access points for researchers. Curatorial staff as well IT and preservation staff will need to cooperate to ensure success of the IR.

The advocates for Institutional Repositories must revise the language used to describe this type of archival effort. Too often, advocates work with groups that do not understand the fundamental issues tied to the development of an Institutional Repository. While the IR model is built as a way to enhance scholarly communication, there are other significant aspects to the model where public libraries can take advantage.

A key element to the development of the IR is the support at the director's level, especially for the decision-making process. The IR, being a record of the institution, includes not only the traditional places where information is produced, namely the library units that produce bibliographies, finding aids, teaching tools, etc., but also the documents that govern the library, the processes by which the library conducts its business, governance matters as well as the public records of the corporation.

The issue of access needs to be addressed by a cross-section of individuals to ensure that records have various levels of clearance. This involves matters of security and confidentiality.

Another issue that is cause for concern is the range of digital rights and permission matters. The complex nature of how a digital item will be used such as educational or commercial purposes creates the need for individuals to possess the skill set to administer a department handling copying, rights and permissions.

In order for the Institutional Repositories to work effectively simple mechanisms to implementation are a requirement. There is a growing discussion to establish realistic standards for creating metadata so material with Dspace potential can be made easily accessible. Libraries also need to think long-term to develop life-cycle management systems for maintenance and migration of data. We must develop advocacy efforts to fund pilot projects so we can determine some of the outcomes as we employ IR models.

Finally, we need to address the xenophobia regarding a radical new model to deliver information. The only way we can achieve success whether it be in the area of Institutional Repositories or any other future endeavor, we must cooperate with each other. We must give something of ourselves to achieve the synergy that Institutional Repositories offer.

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