What do Digital Curators Do and What do They Need to Know?

ARL Libraries Perspective

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Digital Curation

Actions needed to add value to and maintain digital assets over time for current and future generations of users.  ~Neil Beagrie

It is irresponsible to create and store digital objects and not to curate them digitally ...Digital curation needs to be embedded in institutional strategies.  ~Paul Ayris
Digital Trends

• Move to e-publishing
• Increase in content creators and purveyors
• New content types
• Users shift to e-access
• Research library response
ARLs Move to E-Content

• Licensed not owned
• Digitization on a mass scale
• Institutional repositories
New Responsibilities for Standard Functions

- Collection development has to worry as much about usability as content
- Preservation has to move from institution-specific efforts to collaborative ones
- Public services has to worry as much about external resources and consumers as internal ones
- Technical services has to consider metadata standards, persistent IDs, rights negotiations, interoperability, and life beyond MARC
New Roles/Responsibilities

- Intellectual property
- Scholarly communication
- Production and Consulting Services
- Business modeling
- Outreach
- Technical infrastructure
- Knowledge management
- E-science
Intellectual Property

- Increasing importance—positions at BYU, Columbia, Cornell, Duke, UNC, Purdue, MIT, UCSD, Texas, and Indiana
- Typically lawyers
- Responsibilities: public awareness, teaching, legislative monitoring, compliance monitoring, support to authors, managing clearance, registrations, permissions, licenses, contracts, and protecting fair use
Scholarly Communication

• Administrative structure
  – Separate entity (PSU)
  – With CD (Alberta, ASU, Berkeley, BC, Cornell, Georgetown, Harvard, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, NCSU, Texas, UC campuses)
  – With IP/Academic Technology (Duke, Columbia)
  – With Special Collections (VT)

• Unclear borders: e-resources, digitization, outreach, publishing, IRs
What Do They Need to Know?

- Good communication and interpersonal skills
- IT and management equally important
- Leadership potential and managerial skills most important

*Training Gaps Analysis, Librarians and Library Technicians, Cultural Human Resources Council, Canada*
Desired Skill Sets in New Hires—common themes

- Not technology centric
- Subject expertise
- Familiarity with scholarly process by discipline
- User and service orientation
- Lifecycle and ramifications
- Context
- Collaboration, communication, continuous learning
Senior library administrator

Certification program defining minimum set of expertise

Knowledge of appropriate standards and procedures

Maintaining currency of both technical and subject-related knowledge (requires collaboration)

Writing skills and documentation abilities

Service orientation, understanding user needs, value of information
Collection Development

Selection and appraisal techniques as they apply to digital materials

Technical capability of data preservation

Legal and IP issues

Economic and business issues

Metadata issues

Collaboration, cooperation, outreach
Publishing/scholarly communication

- Understanding and managing lifecycle of content
- Implications for moving upstream
- Curating performance/authoring process not just the product
- Codifying methodologies and protocols to apply downstream to personalized libraries
- Curation and preservation of relationships between disparate objects
Public Services (1)

Understand research practices of various clientele
Understand complexity of digital information
Appreciate nuanced uses for different purposes
Familiarity with complexity of research university and producers of digital information
Work collaboratively with creators to ensure secondary use
Leverage technology to maximize access to digital resources
Apply usability criteria to curated resources
Assess impact of digital resources on teaching, learning, research
Public Services (2)

- Outreach and networking skills
- Knowledge of and responsiveness to changing user behavior and skill sets
- Communication skills
- Technical competency and knowledge currency
- Organizational skills
- Business knowledge
- Team player
Technical Services

Understand how best to exploit access to digital content

Be part of the international dialog

Collaboration is key—demonstrated skill in working with diverse body of professionals within and beyond the institution

Avoid pigeon-hole solutions that serve immediate needs of subset of all users but not scalable over time
IT Administration (1)

Basic grounding in computer science
Flexibility to learn new tools
Interest in subject matter
Analytical bent
Good communication skills, including technical clarity and understandable language
Penchant for organization (not just categorization)
Strong sense of public service
IT Administration(2)

- Understanding of users and disciplines
- Familiarity with genre/subject
- Records management or data archiving
- Understanding of policy aspects
- Fiscal management and analysis
- Digital library standards and technologies
- Ability to work with scholars and technologists
- Collaboration and communication
Physical Sciences Librarian

Understanding of digital rights landscape, published material and data sets

Knowledge of research cultures in various disciplines

Knowledge of technological developments that affect dissemination, storage, curation, and use

Focus on data (standards, metadata, quality, evaluation)
Life Sciences Librarian

Knowledge of resources in a field
Knowledge of scholarly habits
Combination of public services, bibliographer, cataloger, and IT skills by domain
Awareness of computational developments
Continual learning mode
Communication, service and team orientation
Technical skills
Business School Librarian

Ability to create/work with subject taxonomies
Metadata skills
Knowledge of relevant standards and create best practices
Familiarity with information life cycle and its evolution
Appreciation for data diversity by discipline
Collaborative
Copyright
Embrace technology, business models for assessment
Be a library advocate, teacher, team player, skillful negotiator, data analyzer
Special Collections

Understanding of artifact characteristics and relation to digitization

Appreciate for scholars’ use of originals vs digital surrogates

Conservation considerations

Metadata for copy specific items

Digital preservation vs digital access
Planning and Organizational Research

Understand institution’s expectations and translate them into job responsibilities

Assess value of disparate information, bring order and priority to it and translate into actionable strategies

Know how to benchmark, set performance goals

Communicate outcomes and link to institutional priorities

Network and collaborate

Take risks and course correct
How can ARLs accommodate digital curation?

• Build a professional staff of experts from a range of domains who share common set of values
• Create porous structure
• Understand the costs of doing business
• Incorporate job flexibility
• Provide training/interaction opportunities
• Foment and reward collaboration
Conclusions

• Research libraries aren’t information technology organizations

• Technology skills are necessary but insufficient

• Digital curation is as much about curation as it is about things digital
Look to travel agents: from booking clerks to consultants

1. Build reliable brand to increase customer loyalty
2. Embrace vertical integration and strategic alliances to increase market share
3. Reduce operating costs to increase productivity
4. Improve quality of service and personnel to provide better and professional consulting service
5. Identify and serve niche markets
6. Pay equal attention to internet and traditional distribution channels

“Our age of anxiety is in great part the result of trying to do today’s job with yesterday’s tools.”

Marshall McLuhan