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Digital Preservation and the Small Academic Library

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This inclusive definition of “preservation” raises another critical question: just how do institutions define preservation? While this question was not specifically asked in the survey, the range of responses is a good reminder that the use of this word can itself be problematic, masking a variety of activities, without making explicit exactly in which activities an institution is engaged. Beyond the need for technical standards, there is the need for a standard vocabulary as well, for describing the range of activities that can constitute “preservation.” Until the precise terms are clearly identified and named, libraries and the preservation initiatives that hope to serve them risk misunderstanding the range of available options and making informed decisions about which of the current options would best suit them.

There appears to be room here for greater transparency in terms of which activities different preservation alternatives offer, which types of libraries collections they are best suited to, and how the different initiatives define preservation in the first place.

Conclusions
While most of the academic library community believes that digital preservation of e-journals is important, there is still significant confusion about just how urgent it is. Many libraries seem to be taking a wait-and-see approach, with some institutions relying on the actions of others in the near term. These data raise several questions for individual libraries and for the community:

• Who is responsible for ensuring the digital preservation of e-journals? Can e-journal preservation be sustained with only the support of a part of this community?
• For those who are waiting to see, what measures would they find the most compelling? In the meantime, is there a risk that libraries could wait until there are no viable options?
• How can library directors best address the challenges of e-journal preservation in the face of many other competing priorities?

In the months ahead, library directors and preservation initiatives may need to find ways to come together to address these issues directly, in order to ensure that the community has long-term solutions on which it can rely.

Endnotes
resources to allow the university to be certified by professional associations. Although the materials are not unique, the individual titles have more weight than general materials because they support researchers who are doing more thorough and exacting research.

• Finally we acquire materials in support of advanced degrees in subject fields that the university has defined as its core areas of expertise. While some of these materials may be older, they still provide historic context for the discipline. Every title in support of these subjects is unique and special; each is irreplaceable. Many organizational libraries have these same basic, intermediate and advanced collection levels although specific subject areas are defined differently according to the mission and identity of the organization. For example, we understand that the discipline of Expressive Arts Therapies is far more important at Lesley University than at other schools and that Mathemetics is far more important at other schools than at Lesley University. For us, all Expressive Arts Therapies material is critically important.

To support the physical preservation of these materials that we define as part of our core areas of expertise and that support programs that are certified or monitored by outside organizations, we have tried to create an environment that is controlled for temperature, light and humidity. We also bind journal issues for durability. Because we don’t physically segregate our collections by category of importance to the university’s mission, we are preserving all of our acquisitions, not just the mission critical materials. In this way, we feel that we have some control over the continued availability of these materials for our patrons over time.

But how can we create a preservation environment in the digital realm? In order to preserve our digital materials, we would have to “capture” them since we don’t have actual possession of this content. This means gathering text files, graphics files, audio and video files, possibly data files. And it means putting the pieces back together to form a coherent replication of the original digital work. It would also entail finding a way to keep the materials readable in appropriate configurations no matter how formats or software packages or hardware platforms change over time. It sounds like a rather daunting task that would take time and money and staff and technical expertise and hardware and software. Or we could choose to outsource the preservation and archiving of digital materials.

To meet our needs in this area, the Lesley University Library looked for an archiving service that was wholly focused on archiving born digital materials, that was actively applying and participating in the development of industry-wide digital preservation standards, that could be monitored or certified in some way, that had a demonstrable track record for meeting expectations and that required no technology commitment from us since we do not control our own technology services. And the outsourcing solutions needed to be affordable now and for the foreseeable future.

Portico met our needs as an outsourcing service. The organization is associated with JSTOR and has background, growing expertise and a proven track record. Portico staff members have participated in the development of industry standards and have designed the ingestion, manipulation, storage and future migration of content according to these standards and industry best practices. Portico has also participated in the development of auditing and certification procedures for archives. Finally, Portico requires no technological solution on the library’s side.

All that’s left then is to determine if Portico is an affordable solution. In FY2007, Lesley University became one of the Portico Archive Founders. Aside from this honor, this has netted the university a 10% savings for each year of the next five years. We have assumed that over time, the archive would grow to include more titles, and the more titles covered by the archive, the more titles from the Lesley University collection will be covered. In December 2006, when Lesley University joined the program, Portico had committed to archiving approximately 5,300 journals. As of this writing, there are over 7,600 journals in this category. In our first year of membership, the archive was committed to preserving 23% of the titles in the Lesley University Library collection. This worked out to $18.71 per title per year for the service of preserving and archiving titles in the collection. In FY2008, Portico was committed to preserving 24.6% of the titles in the Lesley University Library collection. The cost per title per year fell to $17.64. This is only slightly higher than the cost per title per year for binding, which is only one of our preservation expenses in the print environment. Portico does, truly, offer us an affordable solution for a significant portion of our digital archiving needs.

Until recently, the solution Portico offered us applied only to journals in digital formats. In June 2008, Portico announced that it would begin archiving eBooks also. As our library acquires more eBook packages and individually purchased titles, this new initiative is a welcome addition to the archiving effort. One concern we still have regarding the archiving of digital materials is that many of publishers of more esoteric titles in our core areas of expertise are smaller operations and may not have the technical or financial ability to join an archiving initiative like Portico. We would encourage Portico to find a way to reach out to these publishers whose digital content may be more at risk than content from larger and more robust publishing organizations. This concern aside, we believe that we have made a sound financial decision in selecting our preservation and archiving choice for materials in the Lesley University Library digital collection.