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Digital Preservation and the Small Academic Library

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Figure 4

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

1. Donald J. Waters, editor. “Urgent Action Needed to Preserve Scholarly Electronic Journals,” October 15, 2005. Available at: <http://www.diglib.org/pubs/waters051015.htm>.

Digital Preservation and the Small Academic Library

by Marilyn Geller (Collection Management Librarian, Lesley University Library) <mgeller@lesley.edu>

Why would a small academic library spend precious funds from its collection development budget for **Portico** membership? Are we being good stewards of our budget? And do our patrons really see any benefit from it? Does the university? In the library world, we have lived with the reality of serials cancellations, escalating material prices, and budget dollars stretched taut for several years now, and it is these dramatic financial circumstances that convince us that our participation in an e-journal preservation solution (in our particular case, **Portico**) is, indeed, a valuable use of our money for the library, for our patrons, and for the larger organization we support.

Lesley University is a small liberal arts school with undergraduate and graduate programs in education, applied arts, counseling psychology, expressive arts therapies and environmental studies. Many of our programs are aimed

at training professionals and are, therefore, either certified or monitored by the appropriate professional associations. Our FTE is between four and five thousand students, most of whom attend Lesley University sponsored classes in venues other than our home campus in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The library supports on-campus, off-campus, online and hybrid (combination) learning environments. Among the three major collections, the general library, the arts library and the teaching resource center, we have approximately 100,000 print monographs and between four and five hundred

print journal subscriptions in addition to over 60 databases and electronic resource collections. Like other libraries, we are moving towards the acquisition of more electronic resources every year. In some cases, we are converting our physical holdings to digital holdings by switching from print to electronic subscriptions.

The materials we choose to acquire for our patrons fall into one of three broad categories:

- We acquire materials to support general educational needs. These materials are usually basic information resources brought into the collection to round it out and make certain that we have foundation materials across all of the disciplines. We assume that as the subject areas in this general category develop, these materials will be superseded, and indeed be replaced within our collection, by more current information resources. These materials are interchangeable with similar titles; they provide a fundamental understanding of a subject area but are not unique.
- We also acquire materials to support degree programs. The materials in this category are more than basic; they provide our patrons with more in depth research. They also support professional certification or create a collection of adequate

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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 Mathematics is far more important at other schools than at **Lesley University**. For us, all Expressive Arts Therapies materials are 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

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Marilyn Geller

BORN AND LIVED: Born in New Jersey, lived in New Jersey, West Virginia and Massachusetts.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: In my adult life, I've always been a librarian except for a brief flirtation with graduate work in anthropology.

FAMILY: Husband, one daughter, one son-in-law, and two sons.

FAVORITE BOOKS: There are too many to pick from, and I'm not done reading yet.

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: Clichés, especially "think outside the box" and "perfect storm."

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: I hope libraries will continue to be the one thing you can count on in an information blizzard. 🐾

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 support 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 the 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 Library** 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. 🐾

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and I spent a delightful afternoon with **Leslie Abrams** and her talented and heading-to-college-son **Nick** in San Diego a few months ago. Turns out, **Nick** and I are big horse-racing

fans and we commiserated on the loss of the **Triple Crown** by **Big Brown** in the **Belmont Stakes**. Anyway, getting back to business, **Leslie** way back when was **Head of Reference** at the **College of Charleston** and she is now in charge of the **Art & Architecture Library** at **UCSD**.

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