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Developing Digital Scholarship: Emerging Practices in Academic Libraries


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In the digital realm, the growth of the Internet and technology optimally increases access to digital scholarship, shares research outputs, and expands research community in academia. In recent years, digital scholarship has played an important role in publishing and providing access to scholarship and supporting knowledge creation and dissemination. Academic libraries have been at the forefront of this movement while addressing the opportunities and challenges associated with digital scholarship. Many have developed a collaborative environment for faculty, researchers, and students and have engaged with them to create and support their digital scholarship. At the same time, this expanding digital environment has caused a dramatic change in how digital scholarship is created and how scholarly communication affects the librarian’s expertise. This book, Developing Digital Scholarship, is written for professionals confronting questions related to emerging digital scholarship and scholarly communication practices, such as “What is digital scholarship?” and “How do we develop new skills and expertise to support digital scholarship and scholarly communication?” Prospective readers include librarians and information professionals involved in digital scholarship, scholarly communication practices, and new digital services as well as those with new roles supporting digital scholarship in academic libraries, such as digital scholarship coordinators, digital initiatives librarians, scholarly communications librarians, and digital humanities librarians.

Developing Digital Scholarship addresses current issues drawn from the field of emerging digital scholarship initiatives with insight from experienced information professionals in academia. The contributors’ chapters are arranged into four thematic sections: a review of the landscape (chapters 1 and 2), the agile librarian (chapters 3 to 5), digital spaces and services (chapters 6 and 7), and communications and social networking (chapters 8 and 9).

Chapter 1 explores the nature of digital scholarship by first tackling the question, “What is scholarship?” The author, Lindsey Martin, examines how technologies have transformed digital scholarship and scholarly communication while also creating uncertainties about emerging new role and expertise in academia. Chapter 2 presents the results of a small-scale survey and case studies that address future digital scholarship needs, which include the emerging fields of
digital humanities and research data. This chapter captivates readers’ curiosity by demonstrating how emerging technologies and systems can enrich digital scholarship and what expertise and new skills digital services and systems associated with digital scholarship will demand from library professionals.

To accomplish their scholarly works, faculty, researchers, and students increasingly rely on digital tools and also data sets, such as data visualization, digital humanities tools, and geographical information systems or other geo-location data representation. In a rapidly changing technological environment, libraries are challenged with assisting these stakeholders in the creation and dissemination of their scholarly works. In the new digital age, flexibility is required on the part of the librarian or digital specialist. The chapters contained in section 2 focus on the changing roles of library professional in the emerging digital environment (thereby reflecting the section title, “The Agile Librarian”). Case studies and survey results presented in chapters 3 to 5 prove that library professionals and staff recognize changing needs and ensure that they have a set of core competencies and skills to meet those needs in the emerging new digital environment. Given the collaborative nature of digital scholarship, faculty, researchers, and students will explore various approaches to their successful digital scholarship across the world.

Chapters 6 and 7 address a distributed set of collaborative work spaces and services that support digital scholarship. One of the aims of digital scholarship initiative would be to meet the needs of faculty, researchers, and students working in a collaborative environment through the exchange of ideas, tools and projects. The case study provided in chapter 6 illustrates the importance of a collaborative approach to digital scholarship, one that brings together librarians and scholars across the campus. Libraries supporting digital scholarship can expand in order to bring technology, resources, and services together to meet a dynamic new digital work environment. Chapter 7 examines the development of new roles and services, such as scholarly communication initiatives, research data services, digitization, curation and preservation activities, and consultancy and training. As research and scholarship move into the digital, libraries must evolve these roles and services and appreciate how faculty, researchers, and students can create and disseminate their research outputs. As chapter 7 discusses, implementing services in a scalable and sustainable way by addressing staffing or organizational change in support of digital scholarship poses a significant challenge to libraries.

User engagement is a key factor in identifying which services should support digital scholarship. Chapter 8 refers to social networking sites (SNS), such as Facebook and Twitter, as a communication tool to engage with users and discusses user engagement using SNS. The inclusion of social media tools in digital is increasing the focus on what faculty, researchers, and students do—and need—regarding their research, teaching, and learning activities and what librarians can do for the support of their scholarship. This chapter explores user engagement within a new digital environment that encourages exploration of
user-centered initiatives through SNS. Improving this user engagement can deliver potential library services to support digital scholarly activities and enrich the networking between libraries and contributors. Services that support digital scholarship are committed to the values of open-access publishing, including open educational resources and open networking. Chapter 9 explores the changing nature of digital scholarship in this open environment and the evolving role of librarians involved in outreach activities by using new technologies to build collaboration. Digital scholarship is often collaborative work, and contributors can create digital scholarship that increases the visibility and impact of their research. One of the arguments highlighted in this chapter suggests that scholarly communication initiatives, or outreach activities, can shape scholarly reputations and impact digital scholarship.

In conclusion, Allison Mackenzie and Lindsey Martin emphasize how librarians engaged in the support of digital scholarship can succeed in the unpredictable changing world, noting that “stability, flexibility and stretch provide a successful base to build on” (175). With radical changes in the digital age, library professionals are facing new challenges caused by unprecedented factors around information and communication and access of information in a new way. Developing Digital Scholarship provides valuable guidance for all library professionals who are coping with these problems in the changing digital environment and the expectations to satisfy digital scholarship demand. As the introduction indicates, “There is no one way to run or structure a library. The days when there was a single model for an academic library, if there ever existed, are gone. The idea that the academic library is a store house of books and materials gone. The notion that a library can serve off to the side of the mission of the university is gone. What is needed today is a commitment by university administration and librarians to reinvent the whole concept of academic libraries” (xix).