

Who are all these people? A new window into use of archival content in institutional digital repositories

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Abstract: In July 2006, the University of Minnesota Libraries launched a campus-wide institutional repository (IR) intended to serve as the “digital arm” of the University Archives, as well as the more traditional IR purpose as a venue for faculty works. In establishing the Conservancy, we envisioned the “University Digital Conservancy” <http://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/3/> as a holding tank, or a place to safely park the ever-growing volume of mission-critical university content that was no longer distributed in print formats or that could be scanned for our own ease of use. It was our anticipation that the archives staff would be the primary users of the IR, providing campus stakeholders with the traditional, highly mediated access to information. In other words, we envisioned a continuation of the same basic mode of access we have always provided in the Archives, ie, no direct access to the collections, inquiries always mediated through finding aids, conversations with the archivists, and requests for onsite use. With the incorporation in spring 2009 of a hybrid statistics package into our DSpace installation, we began to discover a whole variety of uses and users that surprised us, on a scale that amazed us.

The campus community was bypassing us entirely, getting right to the information in the documents, without our help. Monthly use statistics, along with an accumulating body of anecdotal information, have demonstrated a new area of potential for institutional digital repositories as important components of institutional archives. In this poster we describe our methods for capturing and verifying statistical information, present examples of findings, and suggest some next steps for exploration and application.

About the authors:

Beth Kaplan is Head of University Archives and Co-director of the University Digital Conservancy, a campus-wide program of the University of Minnesota Libraries that extends the Archives' reach to include core institutional content in digital formats. She has worked previously at the Charles Babbage Institute, the MIT Institute Archives, and the audiovisual department of the John F. Kennedy Library. Beth is current chair of SAA's College and University Archives Section. She is a Fellow of the Society of American Archivists.

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