Access to Archival Content in an Institutional Repository
Evaluating the Digital Arm of the University of Minnesota Archives

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Background
This year marks the 5th anniversary of the University of Minnesota’s institutional repository, the University Digital Conservancy (UDC). Since January 2008, the IR has recorded 1.6 million downloads; 1 million of which have come from University Archives related content.

Problem
The online description of archival materials does not equal discoverability of their content. This has a two-fold effect: 1. Searchers do not distinguish between discovery and delivery in their web searches and find it discordant to experience this disconnect in the library environment.2 2. Born-digital content creators do not associate the Archives with accessing content online and thus tend to retain information locally creating “little archives everywhere.”3

Approaches
First, the University Archives developed an in-house, low-cost, rapid capture program to digitize University publications on a mass scale to populate the IR.4 This digitized content consists of nearly 1 million pages of full-text searchable publications, reports, planning documents, minutes, press releases, newsletters, and more from the past 150 years. This rapid scanning effort represents a recovery of information and further commitment to its on-going preservation and use.

Second, the Archives identified on-campus partners who could add their born-digital institutional records directly to the IR. This distributed model serves as a means to capture born-digital records at the point of creation. Many of these born-digital records are paired with their analog predecessors converted to digital format through the rapid capture process, providing seamless access to digitized and born-digital content in one place.

Outcomes
These actions have increased our functionality in managing and providing access to digital content, shifted procedures and management toward the IR including reference, acquisitions, & processing, and made the Archives a sought-out partner on-campus that provides solutions and efficiency with which we capture historically significant born-digital information that is otherwise difficult to acquire.

These demonstrated outcomes should prompt archivists to consider the rising expectations of online access to the content of archival materials finding that both external audiences and internal partners expect discovery and delivery to coincide.

References