Applying Archival Science to Digital Curation: Advocacy for the Archivist’s Role

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INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, archivists, librarians, and technologists are focusing attention and resources on digital curation. Examples include curation of datasets, establishment of institutional repositories, and providing virtual work spaces for researchers to collaborate and archive their scholarly output.

Information professionals rely on models such as OAIS and emerging standards such as ISO 16363 for design, audit, and certification of trustworthy digital repositories. Archivists have valuable knowledge, skills and abilities to contribute to digital curation efforts but they must justify their involvement in these activities in ways that non-archivists can understand in order to be included.

METHODS

Using the functional entities of the OAIS reference model, and the ISO16363 standard, functions were identified for digital curation. Using the 10 Basic Characteristics of Digital Preservation Repositories as a framework, archival functions for analog holdings were mapped to functions for digital curation, listing sample techniques and guiding documents in each category to discern commonalities.

RESULTS

The functions necessary for digital curation for trusted digital repositories are very similar to traditional archives functions informed by archival theory and practice (see Fig. 2). For both traditional analog materials and digital materials, it is critical to have an infrastructure that includes guiding documents such as mission statements, collecting policies and use policies, as well as adequate staffing and other resources to ensure sustainability. New techniques components in expanding archival functions into digital curation are identified in the chart in orange. Mapping traditional archival functions to functions for digital curation illustrates the ways archivists’ existing knowledge, skills, and abilities can be used to justify or inform new processes needed in digital curation.

CONCLUSIONS

Archivists have led digital preservation efforts since the 1990s, but their efforts are not always recognized outside the archives profession. Using common terminology, and understanding how digital curation functions expand upon traditional archival functions, archivists can communicate with confidence the role they play and the value they bring to digital curation activities and creation of trustworthy digital repositories. The need for institutions to demonstrate trustworthiness offers opportunities for archivists to communicate specific ways they can contribute to meeting the ISO 16363 standard for digital repositories.

Based on the functional mapping results, archivists are particularly well-suited to creation of policies and procedures relating to appraisal, accessioning, and preservation, including security and emergency plans, all critical components of trustworthy repositories.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVES

Archivists are sometimes forgotten in an institution’s digital curation efforts, or added after the initial planning stages. If archivists allow their exclusion from stewardship of unique digital materials, future archival collections and their researchers will suffer.

Archivists need successful communication strategies to convince stakeholders of the expertise they bring to digital curation. Terms used by archivists to describe their skills may not be understood by librarians and technologists. Mapping traditional archival functions to terms describing digital curation functions will enable communication efforts across disciplines.

LITERATURE CITED


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